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## The Future of the German Past. Transatlantic Reflections for the 1990s [1989]

*Michael Geyer & Konrad H. Jarausch* \*

**Abstract:** »Die Zukunft der deutschen Vergangenheit. Transatlantische Überlegungen für die neunziger Jahre«. The comparative reluctance of German historians to engage the postmodern challenge suggested the need for a reflection on what post-structuralist impulses might have to offer for analyzing the Central European past. In the United States the criticism voiced by Geoff Eley and David Blackbourn had already undercut the hegemony of the *Sonderweg* paradigm, promoted by the “societal historians” of the Bielefeld school which was slow to respond to feminist and everyday history approaches. Michael Geyer and I therefore set out to initiate a discussion about the deconstruction of “grand narratives” about the German past, in order to create more interpretative space for stories that did not fit into the model of “historical social science.” In the American intellectual climate this objectivist and modernist outlook seemed no longer persuasive enough, since various minorities promoted views that emphasized the constructivist character of historical understanding. Our joint programmatic essay therefore tried to open space for recovering a greater plurality of experiences.

**Keywords:** postmodernism, *Sonderweg* paradigm, master narrative, historical social science, plurality of German histories.

Although it seems ages ago, it was only in October 1989 that a group of historians, who teach at North American universities, gathered for a conference on postmodern challenges to German History. The symposium was meant to reflect on the changing tempers of the Germans and their (re)appropriations of the German past and on the temperament of those who make German history their living on this side of the Atlantic. What appeared to be a good idea back then, proves to be an even better one after the events of November 1989. German history is being remade and, with it, interpreters as well as their interpretations on both sides of the Atlantic. The call for the conference was a testament to the fact that tremors of this impending earthquake could be felt for some time, although none of the conference participants had any particular foresight into the unfolding events. Already then it seemed that the past had begun to change much faster than historians could remake the written record. History had come unstuck from all sorts of framing devices that historians had devised in order to nail it down.

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Customarily, such labors on the German past have indicated contemporary fissures. Polish and Czechoslovak emigré manifestos on Central Europe as the cultural heartland, the rebirth of the concept of civil society against the totalitarianism in the East and the materialism of the West, the rapid succession of conflicts in West Germany ever since the mid- to late 1970s over which historical clothes the (West-)Germans should wear and the simultaneous return of most unlikely historical heroes, like Frederick the Great, initially as legitimacy props and increasingly as wedges against an inefficient despotism – all this will surely figure as indications of the things to come in future studies of the events of 1989/90. The cultural wars over the reappropriation of the German past throughout the eighties have already begun to feature prominently in the histories of the remaking of Germany.<sup>1</sup> They might even vindicate a strong, albeit contested sense during the symposium that such historiographic efforts mold “masks” for the present – symbolic enactments of the past in order to shape an inchoate, even incomprehensible, contemporary reality. Much of the debate during the conference centered on the issue of representation and the constitution of meaning. These discussions were inspired less by the current fashion of “doing” representation than by the recognition that the ongoing German search for *Sinnstiftung* points to significant limitations of the way we had written histories before.

The present changes make such rethinking of the German past all the more urgent, because a growing distance between the United States and Europe renders the place of historians in their respective (academic) cultures more dissimilar than ever in the postwar years. The symposium’s consensus that there is no unified and autonomous German past beyond the imagination of its makers and consumers may raise the specter of historicism and relativism in the hearts of some of our more Fordist colleagues who have come to loathe what they consider a carnival of multiplicities.<sup>2</sup> Instead, they desire theory-“machines,” to pick up on the dissection of this syndrome by Deleuze and Guattari,<sup>3</sup> as a panacea to the German problem. But the symposium’s consensus was not restorative. It was not a plea for an indulgent multiplicity, the melange of historical styles that dis/graced American architecture during the Reagan

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<sup>1</sup> Wolfgang Benz, ed., *Die Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Frankfurt, 1989) esp. vol. 3: *Gesellschaft* and vol. 4: *Kultur*. Dennis L. Bark and David R. Gress, *A History of West Germany*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass. and Oxford, 1989).

<sup>2</sup> Charles S. Maier, *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust, and German Identity* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1988), 168-72. To be sure, Maier leaves the issue undecided. Behind the mask of the carnevalesque lurks Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. H. Iswolsky (Cambridge, 1968), and the rediscovery of alterity.

<sup>3</sup> Especially Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. B. Masumi (Minneapolis, 1987). On the (very different) German turns against hyperrealist theories see Willem van Reijen, ed., *Die unvollendete Vernunft: Moderne vs. Postmoderne* (Frankfurt, 1982).

decade and has become a new reality of the history profession as well. The consensus in favor of multiplicity emerged at its most surprising and stimulating moments, as carnivals truly should be. It came about in the uses of “simple forms of narration”<sup>4</sup> to capture the multiple experiences of subjects and objects of history and in an evident distance to old and new monumental histories with their quest for a totality of sources and synthetic homogenization of the plot-line. It became transparent in a conversational, interacting, and remarkably sociable history as a practice of weaving together many strands of historical knowledge and narrative. It appeared in the transgression of boundaries that indicate the powers and the limits of mastery – be it that this mastery appears as the historical costumes of a novel breed of Lancelot historians<sup>5</sup> from Germany, who have their “*conditio Germaniae*”<sup>6</sup> weighing down on them, or be it as the effort by modernists to propagate their constructivist vision of a well-ordered science state.<sup>7</sup>

Sponsored by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), the symposium on “German Histories: Challenges in Theory, Practice, Technique” was intended as a historiographic complement to literary and political reflections on the study of the Germans and the Germanies in the United States. Like the literary scholars and the political scientists had done before them, the historians’ task was to reflect on the current state of German studies in American historiography. In view of shifting predilections within European historiography and more fundamental challenges to the general discipline of History, it seemed worth exploring if and with what consequences German historiography could take up the gauntlet and make a postmodern turn and if a rethinking of the Germanness and History-ness of that particular past might bring German historiography any closer to non-historical studies of Germany and the Germans. That it would also have to bring German historians closer to (central) European studies was an important subtext. It was an intellectual exercise. Now that the Germans have begun to practice their own postmodern politics and are forming their own new imaginary of their past and present,<sup>8</sup> intellectual and

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<sup>4</sup> André Jolles, *Einfache Formen: Legende, Sage, Mythe, Rätsel, Spruch, Kasus, Memorabile, Märchen, Witz*, 2d ed. (Halle, 1956).

<sup>5</sup> During a memorable lecture on film and memory Anton Kaes (see n. 53) showed a film clip from Monty Python’s “Holy Grail” in which Lancelot is lost in the fog of a medieval forest only to end up on a modern English street. Lancelot is frisked by two policemen who find a character dressed up in medieval clothes highly suspicious. Is this the fate of the Rankian historians’ search for veracity, asked Kaes.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Stürmer, “Mitten in Europa: Versuchung und Verdammnis der Deutschen,” *Dissonanzen des Fortschritts: Essays über Geschichte und Politik in Deutschland* (Munich and Zurich, 1986), 314, in which the (cultural) *conditio* becomes the (geographic) *site* and vice versa.

<sup>7</sup> Jürgen Kocka, *Geschichte und Aufklärung* (Göttingen, 1989).

<sup>8</sup> See generally Maier, *Unmasterable Past*, passim. Reinhard Merkel, “Wahnbild Nation,” *Die Zeit* (16 March 1990), 18, is a gloss on recent publications. Our use of the “imaginary”

practical currents will have to merge in a (re)consideration of the German condition and of the identities of Europe. This is the challenge for the next decade.

## II

German history in the United States was propelled into the foreground by the immediate and burning concern with the German problem half a century ago. Postwar historians in the United States converted this interest into powerful images and narratives. They shaped in crucial respects the postwar imagination of Germany and the Germans. In particular, they countered the strong national biases in British, French, and German postwar histories of Germany and surpassed them in developing academic strategies for a redemption of the German past by locating the source of “deviance” in the “premodernity” or “anti-modernity” of its elite rather than in national character.<sup>9</sup> This intellectual initiative was nothing less than the academic equivalent to the transatlantic pacification of Europe after World War II. Its crucial intervention consisted in replacing competing national histories in Europe by an implicit or explicit narrative of “Western” development. Nonetheless, postwar German History in the United States has been a distinctly univocal and national History. As such it found an important place within the discipline and gained a general academic and, occasionally, even popular audience.<sup>10</sup>

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(*l'imaginaire social*) reflects the oeuvres of Cornelius Castoriadis and Claude Lefort who both emphasize the creative/constructive core of the social historical world. See the brief summary in John B. Thompson, *Studies in the Theory of Ideology* (Berkeley, 1984), 16-41. The most powerful recent statement on this issue is Istvan Meszaros, *The Power of Ideology* (New York, 1989). The most successful historiographic rendition of the social imaginary is Paul Veyne, *Writing History: Essay on Epistemology*, trans. M. Moore-Rivulucrici (Middletown, Conn., 1984).

<sup>9</sup> A. J. P. Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War* (London, 1961), and his *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848-1918* (Oxford, 1954), are good examples of this older national historiography. The debate on the Taylor thesis shows how this paradigmatic view is replaced. See William Roger Louis, ed., *The Origins of the Second World War: A. J. P. Taylor and His Critics* (New York, 1972). The most popular alternative text was Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of Germanic Ideology* (Berkeley, 1961). The rediscovery of “national character” since the late 1970s is a German preoccupation. See among the “makers” of such imaginaries Werner Weidenfeld, ed., *Die Identität der Deutschen* (Munich, 1983), and among the dissectors Axel Drews, Ute Gerhard, and Jürgen Link, “Moderne Kollektivsymbolik: Eine diskurstheoretische orientierte Einführung mit Auswahlbibliographie,” *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur* (1985), Sonderheft 1, 256-374. By far the most successful analysis of this syndrome is the special issue of the *South Atlantic Quarterly* 87 (1988), no. 3: “Postmodernism and Japan.”

<sup>10</sup> Fritz Stern, “German History in America, 1884-1984,” *Central European History* 19 (1986): 131-63, and the basic assessment by Leonard Krieger, “European History in America,” *History*, ed. John Higham (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1965), 233-313.

Wartime and postwar German history in the United States was not ordinary, run-of-the-mill history writing. Beyond the intellectual powers of the individual historians the emerging History of Germany helped to constitute a transatlantic, Western understanding of the European and the American past.<sup>11</sup> Russia and eastern Europe being excluded from the charmed circle of the West, the central European story shrank to a German one, while Eastern Europe atrophied into ethnic or area studies. Several aspects of this drama fascinated intellectuals in particular. By rejecting parliamentary democracy, Germany became the “other” among advanced nations, challenging self-evident expectations of liberalism and progress. Due to its efficient military and industrial organization, Prussia-Germany twice involved Americans in World Wars, imperiling but ultimately validating Western superiority. Finally, in perpetrating the Holocaust, NS Germany turned into the ultimate negator of the twentieth century which lacked even Stalinism’s “progressive” aims, reinforcing with its crimes against humanity the importance of moral codes for civilized behavior.<sup>12</sup>

At every point in time and from every vantage point the problematic of “progress” as the validating norm for a unilinear modern History of the West was reinforced. The emerging imaginary screened and rearranged the expectations of a wartime American audience and it yoked Germany and America together in what proved to be a remarkably sturdy construction. Such transatlantic history, centered in the United States, fit the more universalist interpretations of industrial societies and their mis/development very nicely and, thus, also gained interdisciplinary valence. It helped to depoliticize American historiography on Germany, which distinguished it sharply from the initially acclamatory and later critical national histories of the German counterpart.<sup>13</sup> It always also contained an implicitly comparative perspective, thereby subtly bolstering the American way of life which became the measure for Western progress. Every critique of the German past thus said something about the virtues of the United States as well as about potential dangers of political excess for industrial society.

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<sup>11</sup> Volker Berghahn, “Deutschlandbilder 1945-1965: Angloamerikanische Historiker und moderne deutsche Geschichte.” *Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg 1945-1965*, ed. Ernst Schulin (Munich, 1989), 239-72.

<sup>12</sup> Michael Geyer, “Deutsche – Europäer – Weltbürger: Eine Überlegung zum Aufstieg und Fall des Modernismus in der Historiographie,” *Deutschland und Europa in der Neuzeit: Festschrift für K.O. Freiherr von Aretin*, ed. R. Melville et al. (Stuttgart, 1988), 27-47; and the introduction of Konrad H. Jarausch and Larry Eugene Jones to *In Search of a Liberal Germany: Studies in the History of German Liberalism* (Oxford, 1990).

<sup>13</sup> Winfried Schulze, *Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft nach 1945* (Munich, 1989); Hans-Ulrich Wehler, “Historiography in Germany Today,” *Observations on “The Spiritual Situation of the Age,”* ed. Jürgen Habermas, trans. A. Buchwalter (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1987), 221-59. Bernd Faulenbach, ed., *Geschichtswissenschaft in Deutschland* (Munich, 1974); Wolfgang J. Mommsen, “Gegenwärtige Tendenzen in der Geschichtsschreibung der Bundesrepublik,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 7 (1981): 149-88.

Central European specialists live off the extraordinarily powerful position of postwar German History in American academe to this very day, even if that prominence has been the object of a long series of challenges. Among these are changing public and scholarly preoccupations with other areas of the globe or shifting methodologies which emerged within specific national contexts like “British” social history or, more recently, “French” cultural history. They have largely dissipated German History’s explanatory power, but never quite succeeded in dislodging it from its place in the American organization of historical knowledge. The field continues to flourish, by all accounts. Some even speak of a “golden age.” For the eighties, however, the quality of gold is always worth further scrutiny.

We need not recall the entire history of German historiography in the United States in order to make sense of these changes. While there were always many kinds of histories present, the American masternarrative of the German past was initially dominated by an idealist perspective. This was not, for the most part, intellectual history, but it was *the* unified History of the idea of the German nation state as it unfolded in various states of objectification through the course of the modern age. This idealist history showed a marked preference for some approaches (interpretation as *verstehendes Beschreiben*) and for some objects of study (ideas/phenomena) over others (analysis and social structures respectively).<sup>14</sup> However, even when methodology began to shift toward social history, the underlying pattern of explanation/interpretation and the thematic core of monographs remained unchallenged. According to Leonard Krieger, idealist and materialist history alike maintain(ed) “time’s reasons”<sup>15</sup> by adhering to a notion of empty time and the representational quality of historical texts/sources.<sup>16</sup> They both cling to nineteenth-century notions of realism, refuting turn-of-the-century fears of relativism. Moreover, they agree in their assessment of the development of modern/industrial society and the place of Germany in that process. As a result, clashes over German History did not challenge the framing of the American imaginary, but were contained within it. Political, intellectual, or social history merely became alternate strategies for explaining German deviance from presumed Western norms.

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<sup>14</sup> Jörn Rüsen, *Grundzüge einer Historik*, 3 vols. (Göttingen, 1983-89); Reinhart Koselleck, *Hermeneutik und Historik* (Heidelberg, 1987).

<sup>15</sup> Leonard Krieger, *Ranke: The Meaning of History* (Chicago and London, 1977), and his *Time’s Reasons: Philosophies of History Old and New* (Chicago and London, 1989). From within Germany, it looks as if the two were radically opposed. See Wolfgang Weber, “The Long Reign and the Final Fall of the German Conception of History: A Historical-Sociological View.” *Central European History* 21 (1988): 379-95.

<sup>16</sup> Jürgen Kocka and Thomas Nipperdey, *Theorie und Erzählung in der Geschichte* (Munich, 1979); Reinhart Koselleck, Heinrich Lutz, and Jörn Rüsen, eds., *Formen der Geschichtsschreibung* (Munich, 1982).

The difference from German historiography in Germany becomes readily apparent when one compares the roles which social history plays in Germany and in the United States. In West Germany, *Historische Sozialwissenschaft* gained a distinct framing quality, epitomized, for example, in Wehler's (school-)masterly contributions and Habermas's constitutional metanarrative.<sup>17</sup> *Gesellschaftsgeschichte* strove to establish its own, distinct metahistorical agenda. It could not help it, because every other approach had the same transcendental aspirations, working backwards to define a metahistorical ground and forward to capture an intellectual public.<sup>18</sup> It was set, not against idealist history (with which it agreed in its basic outlook more than its practitioners were likely to admit), but against orthodox Marxist and traditional national History as a conscious effort to create a progressive imaginary. In spite of valiant efforts, the Bielefeld school neither gained complete dominance in social history nor became the single new voice for German historiography. The partial failure of *Gesellschaftsgeschichte* points to an enduring feature of German culture, the peculiar multiplication of imaginaries which makes the German academic and intellectual situation so volatile and explosive. Debates over imaginaries are culture wars, be they fought out between states like the FRG and GDR or between states of mind like the Fischer school and the Ritter school.

Although it looks like any other social history, the place of *Gesellschaftsgeschichte* in the organization of historical knowledge and its role in the formation of cultural capital differ from other countries. Its comparative bent notwithstanding, German *Gesellschaftsgeschichte* has become every bit as univocal and as national as others.<sup>19</sup> It claims to be more western, more liberal, and more pluralist than its competitors. But it has developed its own national pedi-

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<sup>17</sup> Compare Hans-Ulrich Wehler's old with his new magnum opus: *Bismarck und der Imperialismus* (Cologne and Berlin, 1969) and his recent *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, vols. 1 and 2 (Munich, 1987). See also Jürgen Habermas, *Kleine politische Schriften, I-IV* (Frankfurt, 1981), *Die neue Unübersichtlichkeit: Kleine politische Schriften V* (Frankfurt, 1985), with discussions on politics and modernity, culminating in "Geschichtsbewusstsein und posttraditionelle Identität: Die Westorientierung der Bundesrepublik," *Eine Art Schadensabwicklung: Kleine politische Schriften VI* (Frankfurt, 1987).

<sup>18</sup> Contrast Klaus Hildebrand, "Geschichte oder 'Gesellschaftsgeschichte'? Die Notwendigkeit einer politischen Geschichtsschreibung von den internationalen Beziehungen," *Historische Zeitschrift* 223 (1976): 328-75, with Wolfgang J. Mommsen, *Geschichtswissenschaft jenseits des Historismus* (Düsseldorf, 1971). A polemical record of the academic wars informing this division is Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Entsorgung der deutschen Vergangenheit? Ein polemischer Essay zum "Historikerstreit"* (Munich, 1988).

<sup>19</sup> See the outline of a discipline by Jürgen Kocka, *Sozialgeschichte: Begriff, Entwicklung, Probleme*. 2nd ed. (Göttingen, 1986), and the germanocentrism of comparative history in idem, ed., *Bürgertum im 19. Jahrhundert: Deutschland im europäischen Vergleich* (Munich, 1988) – a project which could take its intellectual premises from Fritz Stem, *A German-American Century: Complementarity, Conflict, Collaboration*, a speech delivered on the occasion of the German-American day, October 6, 1988 (New York, 1988).



gree, a rational, enlightenment tradition,<sup>20</sup> and has begun to conquer the *longue durée* of modern Germany in massive efforts at synthesizing and homogenizing German history-writing. In its aspiration to supplant alternative master-narratives it has begun to marginalize some fields of study and some new approaches. For instance, *Gesellschaftsgeschichte* has shown a declining interest in traditional areas of social history which have become the main body of social history in the United States. The quick abortion of psychologically sensitive history required its reintroduction via American-French cultural history outside of historiography.<sup>21</sup> The blockage of partisan labor history in Germany between the 1960s and the 1980s pushed History Workshop influences and studies of popular culture into a transformed *Volkskunde*.<sup>22</sup> The deep distrust of gender history and of every-day histories of experience/consciousness exemplifies most clearly the elective distance which set a hegemonic social history against the most active, albeit subaltern, voices in the field.<sup>23</sup> Such History does

<sup>20</sup> Jörn Rüsen et al., *Die Zukunft der Aufklärung* (Frankfurt, 1988), and his earlier "Geschichte als Aufklärung? Oder das Dilemma des historischen Denkens zwischen Herrschaft und Emanzipation," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 7 (1981): 189-218. Most recently, Georg G. Iggers, "Rationality and History" (Buffalo, 1990, MS).

<sup>21</sup> One can follow this trend both in journals like *Freibeuter* with its strong Italo-French leanings (including the Italo-French undercurrents of Americanism) and in the delayed reception of historians like Dominick LaCapra, *Geschichte und Kritik* (Frankfurt, 1987) or *Geschichte Denken: Neubestimmung und Perspektiven moderner europäischer Geistesgeschichte* (Frankfurt, 1988). The German focus is still on *mentalité*. See Volker Sellin, "Mentalität und Mentalitätsgeschichte," *Historische Zeitschrift* 241 (1985): 556-98. The subjectivist notion of consciousness hovers on the margins of literary-historical analysis. See Peter Schöttler, "Sozialgeschichte, 'Erfahrungsansatz' und Sprachanalyse," *Kulturrevolution* 11 (1986): 56-60.

<sup>22</sup> Lutz Niethammer, ed., "*Die Menschen machen ihre Geschichte nicht aus freien Stücken, aber sie machen sie selbst*": *Einladung zu einer Geschichte des Volkes in Nordrhein-Westfalen* (Berlin, 1988); and especially the three-volume series on the Ruhrgebiet: "*Die Jahre weiss man nicht, wo man die heute hinsetzen soll*": *Faschismus-Erfahrungen im Ruhrgebiet* (Bonn and Berlin, 1983); "*Hinterher merkt man, dass es richtig war, dass es schiefgegangen ist*": *Nachkriegserfahrungen im Ruhrgebiet* (Berlin and Bonn, 1983); (together with A. von Plato), "*Wir kriegen jetzt andere Zeiten*": *Auf der Suche nach der Erfahrung des Volkes in nachfaschistischen Ländern* (Bonn and Berlin, 1985); F. J. Brüggemeier, *Leute vor Ort: Ruhrbergleute und Ruhrbergbau 1889-1914* (Munich, 1983). For the contrasting strategies of scientification see Jürgen Kocka, "Klassen oder Kultur: Durchbrüche oder Sackgassen in der Arbeitergeschichte," *Merkur* 36 (1982): 955-65; Klaus Tenfelde, *Sozialgeschichte der Bergarbeiterschaft an der Ruhr im 19. Jahrhundert* (Bonn, 1977). Compare further the *Volkskunde* approach of Wolfgang Kaschuba and Carola Lipp, *Dörfliches Überleben: Zur Geschichte der materiellen und sozialen Reproduktion ländlicher Gesellschaft im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Tübingen, 1982), with Josef Mooser, *Ländliche Klassengesellschaft 1780-1848: Bauern und Unterschichten, Landwirtschaft und Gewerbe im östlichen Westfalen* (Göttingen, 1984).

<sup>23</sup> Rather than fastening on Hans-Ulrich Wehler's legendary footnote on *Frauengeschichte* in his *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte* (Munich, 1987), I: 553, it is worth pointing to the rift between Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family, and Nazi Politics* (New York, 1987), and Gisela Bock, "Die Frauen und der Nationalsozialismus: Bemerkun-

not tolerate unzoned and unbounded spheres of experience; it recoils from excessive, self-willed articulations of resistance that reinscribe the subjective nature of historical objects;<sup>24</sup> and it rejects the appropriations of the past by non-professionals.

In the United States, social history never gained the same framing power, even if some historians may have aspired to it.<sup>25</sup> It only sought to provide more compelling answers to the established questions about the German catastrophe. Ironically, this more modest approach had profound, if quite unexpected, consequences. German social history in the United States expanded quickly and borrowed freely from other disciplines. It developed a certain penchant for scholarly adventure and exploration. As Jarausch and Johnson indicate below, there was and is a certain frontier spirit among social historians who ventured forth from the safe havens of established scholarship and look back at it with disdain. Social history gained a roaming capacity which has kept it at an uneasy distance not just to mainstream historiography, but also to historical sociology.<sup>26</sup> It is in this capacity that some of the social historians came, almost unwittingly, to the point of breaking with established scholarship. They unblocked the framing control over the objects of study and approaches in German history and thoroughly opened up the status order of scholarly pursuits by uncoupling their work initially from the teleology of 1933 and, increasingly, from the idea of “progress” as *the* American way.

Inspired by social movements as well as intellectual departures of British and French scholars, American social history has turned to those experiences and approaches which German social historians have tended to neglect. It has

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gen zu einem Buch von Claudia Koonz,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 15 (1989): 563-79, which reflects the distance between two academic cultures.

<sup>24</sup> This is not necessarily the agenda of every-day history, but it is surely the aim of Alf Lüdtke, *Alltagsgeschichte: Zur Rekonstruktion historischer Erfahrungen und Lebensweisen* (Frankfurt and New York, 1986). The “classic” German text on this issue is quite unrelated to *Alltagsgeschichte*. It is Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt, *Geschichte und Eigensinn: Geschichtliche Organisation der Arbeitsvermögen; Deutschland als Produktionsöffentlichkeit; Gewalt des Zusammenhanges* (Frankfurt, 1981).

<sup>25</sup> The most formidable example of an integral approach is Charles S. Maier, *Recasting Bourgeois Europe: Stabilization in France, Germany, and Italy in the Decade after World War I* (Princeton, 1975). See also Gerald Feldman and Heinrich A. Winkler, ed., *Organisierter Kapitalismus: Voraussetzungen und Anfänge* (Göttingen, 1974). In his contribution to this volume Feldman already indicates his turn to a historiographic hyperrealism which becomes overwhelming in his *Iron and Steel in the German Inflation* (Princeton, 1975). It is a most telling exercise to compare the latter with his *Army, Industry, and Labor in Germany 1914-1918* (Princeton, 1966) as one of the foremost examples of a postwar American historical narrative. Note especially the economy of documentation and the paradigmatic quality of the narration in the earlier work.

<sup>26</sup> Konrad Jarausch, “German Social History – American Style,” *Journal of Social History* 19 (1985): 349-59, and his introduction to *German Professions, 1800-1950*, ed. Geoffrey Cocks and Konrad Jarausch (New York and Oxford, 1990), 9-24.

emphasized the “difference” and the antagonist quality of its histories to the hegemonic national History. It has begun to rethink the notion of *mentalité* to encompass the inner voice, the consciousness of people. It has also come to pursue the study of subordinate groups in their own right as “subalterns.” It has been open to methodological experiments, ranging from the refinement of quantitative approaches to a heightened awareness of anthropological concerns with cultures of alterity and the contextuality or historicity of theory. The discussion on interdisciplinary approaches like German Studies or the turn to culture among recent Ph.D. students are indicative of the youngest generation of scholars turning to a historical exploration of representation – not as a new kind of “culturalism,” but as explorations into the nexus of power/knowledge/language. Gender history has become the most provocative and comprehensive articulation of this general orientation. It has dislodged the question of Germanness in favor of all-encompassing queries concerning the articulation of difference in the German past. It has forged, on this basis, a new transatlantic link between contemporary American concerns and European pasts.

Social history was well on its way to developing multivocal histories of the German and European past, shedding in this process its behaviorist skin. Yet, as different as this history became from *Gesellschaftsgeschichte* in its increasing rejection of unilinearity and homogeneity, it did not quite live up to its promises. While its a-political thrust has been repeatedly criticized, its main problem and its undoing was not a neglect of power, but its inability to cope with questions of consciousness and cultural causation. While encouraging experimentation, its diffuseness also rendered it difficult to construct new patterns of meaning.

For some time, it appeared as if a group of British scholars would be able to extend their contestatory version of social history into an alternative History of Germany.<sup>27</sup> The British-German *Sonderweg* controversy in the late 1970s served as the main launching pad for this endeavor. All the pieces were in place for a rethinking of the German past. British history from below, exemplified by the History Workshop movement, provided a solid methodological foundation.<sup>28</sup> Comparative social history added the tools to upset the claims for German exceptionalism at least the way they were advanced in the past.<sup>29</sup> Lastly, a notion of popular culture and of ideology, borrowed from Gramsci, provided the means for reintegrating social and political histories into a long history of

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<sup>27</sup> Richard J. Evans, ed., *Society and Politics in Wilhelmine Germany* (London and New York, 1978); David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth Century Germany* (New York and London, 1984).

<sup>28</sup> Richard J. Evans, *Rethinking German History: Nineteenth-Century Germany and the Origins of the Third Reich* (London and Winchester, Mass., 1987).

<sup>29</sup> Geoff Eley, *From Unification to Nazism: Reinterpreting the German Past* (Boston and London, 1986).

contestations over the identity of the German nation.<sup>30</sup> The reasons for the ultimate lack of success of this intervention were again beyond the quality of individual contributions. The depletion of British academia was perhaps the most important factor (although it profited the United States), but the resolute German defense of a Weberian *Gesellschaftsgeschichte* also figured prominently. A likely third cause was the Eurocentrism of the debate which, after all, was but the last installment of a century-old dispute between Great Britain and Germany.<sup>31</sup> Though this revisionism had some residual appeal in Europe, even its potentially controversial “normalization” of the German experience met with a strange silence in the United States.

The upshot of the Eley-Blackbourn-Wehler debate on this side of the Atlantic consisted in debunking the postwar imaginary without replacing it by another one. Despite some rather nasty professional affairs *à la mode allemande*,<sup>32</sup> German historians in the United States treated the *Sonderweg* controversy much as American industry used deregulation. After the exceptionalism of German History was removed, almost anything became possible. Heterogeneity gave way to a random multiplication of histories. At the same time, “single-issue” histories were overshadowed by a new celebratory style in which the (German) past and even historiographic controversies were shown off exhibition-style.<sup>33</sup> This history-on-a-pedestal made the past and its historians into artifacts of the 1980s. The decade saw both a multiplication and an aestheticization of the past which neutralized heterogeneous and subaltern histories.

Despite a residual and subterranean adherence to a transatlantic narrative, German history in the eighties thereby became the very expression of what its intellectuals valiantly tried to fend off. In embracing a new “frameless-ness” German history has gone, in its own way, “postmodernist” and, apparently

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<sup>30</sup> David Blackbourn, *Populists and Patricians: Essays in Modern German History* (London and Boston, 1987).

<sup>31</sup> Paul Kennedy, *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism, 1860-1914* (London and Boston, 1980); Bernd Faulenbach, *Ideologie des deutschen Weges: Die deutsche Geschichte in der Historiographie zwischen Kaiserreich und Nationalsozialismus* (Munich, 1980).

<sup>32</sup> “Debate: David Abraham’s *The Collapse of the Weimar Republic*,” *Central European History* 17 (1984): 159-293.

<sup>33</sup> Fritz Stern, *Dreams and Delusions: The Drama of German History* (New York, 1987), and Gordon Craig, *The Germans* (New York, 1982). For Germany the same issue appears as a revival of museums and historical exhibitions. See Hartmut Boockmann, *Geschichte im Museum* (Munich, 1987); Alfred Frei, “Der neue Museumsboom – Kultur für alle,” *Neue Politische Literatur* 32 (1986): 385-97; W. Zacharias, ed., *Zeitphänomen Musealisierung: Das Verschwinden der Gegenwart und die Konstruktion der Erinnerung* (Essen, 1990). As alternative interpretation: Hermann Lübke, “Der Fortschritt und das Museum,” *Dilthey Jahrbuch für Philosophie und Geschichte der Geisteswissenschaften* I (1983): 39-56 against the background of his analysis of contemporary culture *Zeit-Verhältnisse: Zur Kulturgeschichte des Fortschritts* (Graz and Vienna, 1983).

happily, indulges in its newfound liberties.<sup>34</sup> Although German historians are not exactly known for thinking out strategies of postmodernism, they collectively practice a postmodern style with panache or a certain furor, as may be the preference. This turn to a postmodern style in history has acted as a strong solvent. German historiography in the United States has given up a univocal national History so that these days the detractors of the discipline are the last ones to hold most firmly to it. At the same time, German historians in Germany have shifted into political overdrive in the *Historikerstreit*, involving academic and public struggles over a recentralized and, indeed, reunified national History as well as a relentless war over German identity. During the second half of the 1980s, German and American histories of Germany have developed in quite radically different, even opposite directions.

### III

For a long time German historians in the United States ignored the intellectual challenges that stemmed from a series of interventions which are summarily called “postmodern.” Reluctant to embrace any new strategies, they missed the transformation of the German cultural scene, as opposed to that of the academic historians, which had become one of the hotbeds of post-French, post-modern thought.<sup>35</sup> Beyond a simplistic traditionalism, both practical and moral issues may explain their hesitancy to some point. Would the conscious deconstruction of the/any national masternarrative not also signal the end of the privileged position of German history in American academia? How should one

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<sup>34</sup> We have no desire to complicate an already complicated debate (summarized in Andreas Huyssen, “Mapping the Postmodern,” *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* [Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1986], 179-221), but it seems appropriate to think of the historicist multiplication effects and the “universal abandon” of postmodernism (Andrew Ross, ed., *Universal Abandon: The Politics of Postmodernism* [Minneapolis, 1988]) as only one trend in the process of the reorganization of cultural capital. The other is very much a discussion with *our* ancients, partly because their agenda has become visible again, partly because this discussion helps formulating the difference of the present. The problem with this strategy consists in the dual challenge of (a) going back critically to the European sources for knowledge and (b) critically assessing the American organization of European cultural capital in the 1930s and 1940s. The fatal flaw of the postmodernist debate consists in its unwillingness to deal with the American configuration of cultural capital. The result is an evasive historicism.

<sup>35</sup> On the German-French intellectual debate see among others Gerhard Raulet, *Gehemmte Zukunft: Zur gegenwärtigen Krise der Emanzipation* (Darmstadt and Neuwied, 1986), and especially Wolfgang Welsch, *Unsere Postmoderne Moderne* (Weinheim, 1987); Andreas Huyssen, “Postmoderne – eine amerikanische Internationale?” *Postmoderne: Zeichen eines kulturellen Wandels*, ed. Andreas Huyssen and Klaus R. Scherpe (Reinbek, 1986); and Wolfgang Welsch, “Vielheit oder Einheit? Zum gegenwärtigen Spektrum der philosophischen Diskussion um die ‘Postmoderne’: Französische, italienische, amerikanische, deutsche Aspekte,” *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* 94 (1987): 14-142.

teach undergraduates, if an endless past with its many stories spilled over into History? Was the concern with performance and will/decisionism not an ominous return to interwar neo-conservatism and, beyond that, to a romanticism which had been identified as one of the main sources of German disasters? Was it not utterly frivolous to presume that the same story could be told in many ways in the face of efforts to elide the Holocaust?<sup>36</sup> These and similar reservations dovetailed with those of the profession at large – underscoring the tight link between the postwar academic profession and the interpretation of the German past.

However, traditional historians have unwittingly managed to undercut postwar conventions even further in defending disciplinary terrain. The rush to prove history right against new waves of “relativism” and “narrativism” has led many scholars to reiterate one or the other truth claim of nineteenth-century historians or social scientists.<sup>37</sup> In order to cope with present challenges, they seem to repeat past stages of historiography and philosophy of history as *simulacrum*.<sup>38</sup> The consequence is the purest form of historicism possible, the indiscriminate borrowing of past styles, ideas, and images. The historians’ debates resemble parades with historical motifs – one float exhibits Ranke and his neo-Rankeans, the other Droysen among his neo’s, and yet another Weber and his Weberites. “Classic modernism” and its concern with relativism concludes the procession in Germany, while Dewey and “Free Speech” usually perform the same function in the United States. This is what Derrida called “citationality,”<sup>39</sup> the cloning of history and its historians. Such excessive recourse to earlier theory in the name of veracity cannot but destroy the last remnants of belief in historical truth claims. Traditional historians deflected the French intellectual challenges of the seventies only to end up in the postmodern style of the eighties which they defended as American pluralism and pragmatism. Living and thinking in a *faux* past (instead of thinking the past in the present) has not

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<sup>36</sup> The Holocaust as test for any and all postmodern strategies is discussed by Saul Friedlander, “Some Reflections on the Historicization of National Socialism,” *Reworking the Past: Hitler, the Holocaust, and the Historians’ Debate*, ed. Peter Baldwin (Boston, 1980), 88-101, and Dan Diner, “Between Aporia and Apology: On the Limits of Historicizing National Socialism,” *ibid.*, 135-44.

<sup>37</sup> Georg Iggers, “The ‘Methodenstreit’ in International Perspective: The Reorientation of Historical Studies at the Turn of the Nineteenth to the Twentieth Century,” *Storia della Storiografia* 6 (1984): 21-32, contains a very condensed summary of the arguments that reappear, enriched with a heavy dose of American pragmatism, in David Hollinger, “The Return of the Prodigal: The Persistence of Historical Knowing,” *American Historical Review* 94 (1989): 610-21.

<sup>38</sup> On the simulacrum see Gilles Deleuze, “Plato and the Simulacrum,” *October* 27 (1983): 45-56, and the ever provocative Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations* (New York, 1983).

<sup>39</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The Postcard from Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. A. Bass (Chicago and London, 1987).

helped to meet the postmodern challenge to the intellectual foundations of historical work.

Postmodern thought is most commonly associated with the critique of narratives and tropes.<sup>40</sup> It allows historians both to distinguish their discipline from other forms of knowledge about the past (like literature, sociology, mythology) and to draw together vast quantities of traces of the past in a single narrative or hypothesis. The “incredulity toward metanarratives”<sup>41</sup> appears counter-historical at first sight, but it is the starting point for an analysis of the current historiographic condition in which historical knowledge is “dispersed in the clouds of narrative language elements,” and consists of an unconnected “local determinism,”<sup>42</sup> to borrow from the much broader argument of Lyotard’s “postmodern condition.” The “localism” of German historiography is readily apparent. The days of “grand history” or of “grand theory” are gone. There is no longer quite the same “will to allegory”<sup>43</sup> that has characterized German historiography throughout most of the modern period. Two articulations of this kind of writing stood out. We remember faintly those nationalist histories in which Bismarck made and was Germany, in which a subjectified Germany was the hero or villain, or in which collectives like the bourgeoisie, the proletariat, or the Junkers moved the world. The “analytic” equivalent of these dramas is, perhaps, somewhat more vivid in our memory. It was a History in which impersonal “forces” ran the show, be it the old national character, be it industry or society, or, the high point of modernism, some abstract kind of contradiction or ambivalence which did it all.<sup>44</sup>

It is common to welcome the disappearance of such explanations as the “end of ideology.”<sup>45</sup> However, more careful scrutiny indicates that the clusters of “grand theory/metanarratives/ideology” have simply gone underground. Though metanarratives were not much talked about during the eighties, they retained their disciplining power all the same in an unreflected way. A novel

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<sup>40</sup> For the American critique see Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore and London, 1973), and his *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore and London, 1978). Among the newer interpretations see John E. Toews, “Intellectual History after the Linguistic Turn,” *American Historical Review* 92 (1987): 879-907; Robert F. Berkhofer, “The Challenge of Poetics to (Normal) Historical Practice,” *Poetics Today* 9 (1988): 435-52; Linda Orr, “The Revenge of Literature: A History of History,” *New Literary History* 18, 1986): 1-22.

<sup>41</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. G. Bennington and B. Massumi (Minneapolis, 1984), XXIV.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Paul Smith, “The Will to Allegory in Postmodernism,” *Dalhousie Review* 62 (1982): 17-25.

<sup>44</sup> Following Leonard Krieger, *Time’s Reasons*, we put two traditions together as expressions of a singular (modernist) conjuncture, which, in Germany, are professionally and politically hostile.

<sup>45</sup> On posthistoire and its tradition see the reflections by Lutz Niethammer, “Afterthoughts on Posthistoire,” *History and Memory* 7 (1989): 25-54.

kind of relentlessly chronicling histories<sup>46</sup> that unload masses of source materials in a condensed and synthesized form on a tiny topic are one expression of this forgetfulness. These local studies depend entirely on a prearranged understanding of what is important. They are lost once these arrangements collapse, and defensively protest the veracity of their findings in order to imply the plausibility of their submerged assumptions. On the other end of the spectrum, we find an increasing penchant for eclectic narratives. Grand theory and history are present as echoes of once explicit arguments in Nipperdey's artful rumination as well as Fritz Stern's clever interpretations and H.-U. Wehler's relentless analyses.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, historians, who once prided themselves on their grand design, have become allusive and elusive in their pursuits of the German past. Instead of unfolding powerful narratives of deviance they resort to a petty moralism, and instead of presenting grand explanations they engage in mass-production history-writing in which even the most obstreperous facts are processed into History. In this light, German historiography in the eighties appears to be simultaneously underreflected in the wake of the collapse of grand histories of all kinds and yet overdetermined by submerged knowledge structures.

It is one thing to deconstruct such epistemes<sup>48</sup> in a critique of metanarratives. It is another matter to move beyond them. The symposium took first steps in this direction by looking at the problem of alterity. It presented a forum for exploring the history of gender (I. Hull) as an "internal other" and the history of Austria (J. Boyer) as an "external other." Both show the effects of marginalization as well as the radical impact of a recovery and revaluation of subordinate histories on German History. These alternative perspectives raise the question whether it makes sense to treat Germany as an autonomous entity, as if it still were that "subject" of national History that once presented itself allegorically (M. Geyer). These are not oppositional histories of a traditional kind. Instead of suggesting another national story, they provide material for multiple stories and subordinate histories. They replace, in their interaction, the coherence and integralism of national History. In contrast to the traditional concern with "relativism" which worries about autonomous subjects and discrete ideologies floating indiscriminately through the past, the new challenge is to find ways of presenting and making sense of the interacting multiplicity of stories.

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<sup>46</sup> Henry A. Turner, Jr., *German Big Business and the Rise of Hitler* (New York, 1985).

<sup>47</sup> Thomas Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte, 1800-1866* (Munich, 1986); Stern, *Dreams and Delusions*; Wehler, *Gesellschaftsgeschichte*.

<sup>48</sup> On this Foucaultian strategy see Hayden White, "Foucault Decoded: Notes From Underground," *Tropics of Discourse*, 230-60; Paul Veyne, "Foucault révolutionne l'histoire," in his *Comment on écrit l'histoire* (Paris, 1979); Allan Megill, "The Reception of Foucault by Historians," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 48 (1987): 117-41; Jan Goldstein, "Foucault among the Sociologists: The 'Disciplines' and the History of Professions," *History and Theory* 19 (1984): 170-92.



For none of these subordinate histories is autonomous, a locale all for itself or a past in its own right. Instead of being left to their own devices, they are interacting, contradictory, and contesting histories. As discrete historical subjects they form a far richer and grander universe than the one national History into which they were and are folded.<sup>49</sup>

Studying alternative pasts shifts historiographic labors from establishing referentiality (between present text, sources, past reality) to intertextuality in the broadest sense. As it stands, affirmative and anti-stories are partly de-coupled but still relate to grand narratives. Histories of Austria or Histories of women have yet to become gender histories or histories of central Europe, which break the straight opposition of identity-alterity. We need a historiography that explores strategies or processes that link local sites of knowledge and experience and thereby interweave heterogeneity in full recognition of the powers of integration. Such histories are particularly apt to present not only the volatility of the German national past but also of its repeatedly changing place in (central) Europe. They are, moreover, capable of linking national histories to gendering processes and other forms of constituting alterity. Such efforts at refocusing the national story make it possible to wonder anew about the powers of nation-ness as a historical construct in its own right that managed to colonize, integrate, homogenize – so much so that “German,” “Czech,” or “Austrian” could become field-defining designations. At stake is not one or the other aspect of an uncanny national character or national urges, but the emergence and submergence of heterogeneity in a whole region. In any case, the sheer abandon of exploring the many “clouds” of the past, which characterized the eighties, is coming to an end. Will it be replaced by a univocal History which repeats the nineteenth century and its historians as melodrama or a set of regional histories that engage multiple pasts in a heterogeneous present?

A deconstruction of metanarratives is difficult to conceive without a consideration of the ways in which historians approach past events. This encompasses reflections on both the presentation of events or experiences in the past and their representation by historians in the present. Strategies which question this nexus are commonly referred to as the “linguistic turn.”<sup>50</sup> The basic issues of

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<sup>49</sup> With a strong psychohistorical bias, Fred Weinstein, *History and Theory after the Fall: An Essay on Interpretation* (Chicago and London, 1990), is one of the first to discuss the problematic of historical heterogeneity beyond relativism and historicism. See also the brief and informative philosophical discussion by Christopher Norris, *The Contest of Faculties: Philosophy and Theory after Deconstruction* (London and New York, 1985), and N. Katherine Hayles, *Chaos Bound: Orderly Disorder in Contemporary Literature and Science* (Ithaca and London, 1990). A concrete application is Richard Terdieman, *Discourse/Counter-Discourse: The Theory and Practice of Symbolic Resistance in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca and London, 1985).

<sup>50</sup> Among the most recent American discussions see Hans Kellner, *Language and Historical Representation: Getting the Story Crooked* (Madison, Wis., 1989). About German-French approaches, Peter Schöttler, “Sozialgeschichtliches Paradigma und historische Diskursana-

the re/presentation of the past have long been central to defining the place of history in the organization of knowledge and, more pragmatically, in determining what historians actually do. As a result there is a tremendous store of arguments which is now being mobilized against real and alleged detractors who doubt the scholarly quality of history as a discipline. Such facile repetitions of past arguments create a rather false impression of the actual problems. In spite of an impressive number of defenses of referentiality and narrativity in the present, referentiality has become a matter of bewilderment and narrativity a source of puzzlement. Was not the cream of German historians utterly helpless, when facing an avalanche of emotional responses to a lowly TV soap opera on the Holocaust which moved people more than any historical monograph had done?<sup>51</sup> This instant dramatized what all academics know: narrativity matters. The meaning of referentiality is also familiar. The abundance of sources dating back to the Third Reich and the utter scarcity of information on central turning points of the Third Reich has led more than one historian to take the Hitler diaries seriously.<sup>52</sup> By the same token, oral historians have to untangle strands of equally valid “realities” in the consciousness of interviewees in order to uncover popular consciousness in the Third Reich which, in any event, was mediated by a whole battery of image machines.<sup>53</sup> The “linguistic turn” is anything but esoteric. It shapes the daily practice of every historian.

The linguistic turn reflects the unmaking of old ground rules that linked a homogeneous past reality and its univocal articulation to a present narrative in an unequivocal and realist fashion. This predicament is commonly referred to as a “crisis of signification.”<sup>54</sup> Such losses of referentiality are frightening and

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lyse,” *Diskurstheorie und Literaturwissenschaft*, ed. Jürgen Fohrmann and Harro Müller (Frankfurt, 1988): 159-99 is informative.

<sup>51</sup> Peter Märthesheimer and Ivo Frenzel, eds., *Im Kreuzfeuer, der Fernsehfilm “Holocaust”: Eine Nation ist betroffen* (Frankfurt, 1979) Yizhak Ahren et al., *Das Lehrstück “Holocaust”*: Zur Wirkungspsychologie eines Medienereignisses (Opladen, 1982); Friedrich Knilli and Siegfried Zielinski, eds., *Holocaust zur Unterhaltung: Anatomie eines internationalen Bestsellers* (Berlin, 1982).

<sup>52</sup> Richard Hugo, *The Hitler Diaries* (New York, 1983).

<sup>53</sup> See Anton Kaes, *From Hitler to Heimat: The Return of History as Film* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989).

<sup>54</sup> An interpretation of this crisis is presented in Frederic Jameson, “The Politics of Theory: Ideological Positions in the Postmodern Debate,” in his *The Ideologies of Theory: Essays 1971-1986*, vol. 2: *Syntax of History* (Minneapolis, 1988), 103-13, as well as his two essays on “Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,” *New Left Review* 146 (1984): 52-92, and “Marxism and Postmodernism,” *New Left Review* 176 (1989): 31-45; see also the summary of Douglas Kellner, ed., *Postmodernism/Jameson/Critique* (Washington, D. C., 1989). Last but not least, the catalogues of two exhibitions discuss history: *The Art of Memory: The Loss of History* (The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, 1985) and *A Brokerage of Desire* (Otis Art Institute of Parsons School of Design, Los Angeles, 1986), the latter with a plea for “ruinism.” A German echo is H. Böhringer, “Die Ruine in der Posthistoire,” in his *Begriffsfelder: Von der Philosophie zur Kunst* (Berlin, 1985): 23-37.

make understandable the urge to hold on to and insist on realism in history which conflates text and reality. This common reaction also explains the nature of German historiography a little better. German History has not only given little credit to the country's proverbial poets and thinkers, but it has also been stunningly negligent in considering "texts" and their meaning as historical artifacts. Yet we are told, second- and third-hand, that German thought ever since the eighteenth century was deeply concerned, even obsessed with problems of signification. German historiography, in other words, has desisted from reflecting on its own and its subjects' condition which had experienced, time and again, the collapse of language in the face of "reality."<sup>55</sup> The origin of German history and its continuous fascination with linguistic realism appear, in this light, as efforts to neutralize an unmasterable and unspeakable present – the rapid succession of political ruptures in which one regime of signification followed the other. The present situation only reminds us of this condition. After having barely mastered a language for the past that seemed to encompass it all, even seasoned historians are slipping into mythical oratory in order to find words for the current reality. To say that they "make" reality in finding words for an uninterrupted past, would only reveal the secret of the profession.<sup>56</sup>

The presentations of T. Childers, P. Jelavich, and R. Koshar indicate possible departures which are also returns to a forgotten German past. Their suggestions for linguistically aware histories point to several directions. Pragmatically, the linguistic turn involves hunting down and exploring traces of the past which have not fit the canon of archival scholarship. Certain kinds of histories, like gender history, are only made possible as a result of non-canonical source work. Methodologically, the linguistic turn undoes the conflation of signifier (trace, text, artifact, image, commodity) and signified ("reality"). It questions referentiality in order to recover the discrete powers of signification as socially and historically constituted. With proper reflection on the problematic nature of referentiality and contextuality, highlighted by deconstruction,<sup>57</sup> the linguistic turn leads to an exploration of the historicity of signification. The difficulties of this move and its prerequisite, a very careful deconstruction of meanings that

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<sup>55</sup> Werner Weidenfeld, ed., *Geschichtsbewusstsein der Deutschen* (Cologne, 1987).

<sup>56</sup> Hans-Robert Jauss, "Der Gebrauch der Fiktion in Formen der Anschauung und Darstellung der Geschichte," *Formen der Geschichtsschreibung*, 415-51. Typically, a history of realism in German historiography is missing. On rupture and history see Ernst Schulz, *Traditionskritik und Rekonstruktionsversuch: Studien zur Entwicklung von Geschichtswissenschaft und historischem Denken* (Göttingen, 1979).

<sup>57</sup> Much of the argument during the symposium centered on the issue of the limits of deconstruction that denies referentiality. See as critical introduction Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice* (London, 1982), and the exchange "Jacques Derrida's 'Paul de Man's War,'" *Critical Inquiry* 15 (1989). See also Tony Bennett, "Texts in History: The Determinations of Reading and Their Texts," *Post-Structuralism and the Question of History*, ed. Derek Attridge et al. (Cambridge and New York, 1987).

often will be the main and only purpose of studies, are readily evident from the everyday experience of a source-oriented historian. Texts do not necessarily mean what they are saying. Whole archives contain “non-records” or silences due to the nature of the collection.<sup>58</sup> This has traditionally been a methodological problem. But it has become a thematic focus of major importance – not the least in the face of a fragmented past with its many regimes of signification.<sup>59</sup> A linguistically aware history explores how individuals and groups come to construe meaning, why they make a certain sense of reality rather than another, and into what kinds of archives or collections their traces are gathered.

Greater linguistic sensitivity may also help us in overcoming a basic impasse in the narration of the German story characterized by the insistence on either a (neo-)authentic or a (neo-)derivative reality. Despite old controversies on this matter, the power of creating, imposing, and resisting meaning has been oddly beyond the grasp of German historians, including *Begriffsgeschichte*, in their struggles over truer truths and more real realities.<sup>60</sup> The result is a skewed history that reduces and tames the past to a single system of reference (*Sinn*). Histories of Germany without historians as watchdogs over realism in representation will be very different histories, indeed. Scholars following Jelavich, Childers, and Koshar will discover a Germany in which performances of identity ruled supreme, wars over imaginaries divided the people, while obscenely political and fanatical dreams could move people to crimes which spoken and written language kept them from recognizing. It is also a history in which dis-

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<sup>58</sup> Particularly contemporary historians would do well to reconsider the issue of archives and their use, because these archives no longer fit nineteenth-century notions of collectors and collections. In imitating nineteenth-century practices and methodologies twentieth-century historians have lost their methodological ground long before the on-going information revolution has radically severed the link between originality-preservation-collection. If the central concern of a now past contemporary history has been a scarcity of information within an abundance of data (which is the modernist syndrome). Today’s contemporary history faces the issue of recoding information (and thus annihilating the notion of originality) and of creating virtual pasts (and thus collapsing the distance between past and present). As a useful introduction see Mark Poster, *The Mode of Information: Poststructuralism and Social Context* (Chicago and London, 1990).

<sup>59</sup> Lutz Niethammer, ed., *Lebenserfahrung und kollektives Gedächtnis: Die Praxis der “Oral History”* (Frankfurt, 1980).

<sup>60</sup> The current debate on the geopolitical place of Germany in the authentic center of Europe (M. Stürmer) vs. the derivation of this “place in the middle” from (false) consciousness (H.-U. Wehler) is reflected in the essay by Hans-Dietrich Schultz, “Deutschlands ‘natürliche’ Grenzen: ‘Mittellage’ und ‘Mitteleuropa in der Diskussion der Geographen seit dem Beginn des 19. Jahrhunderts,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 15 (1989): 248-81. On the history of *Begriffsgeschichte* see Otto G. Oexle, “Sozialgeschichte – Begriffsgeschichte – Wissenschaftsgeschichte: Anmerkungen zum Werk Otto Brunners,” *Vierteljahrshfte für Sozial und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 71 (1984): 303-41, Reinhart Koselleck, “Begriffsgeschichte und Sozialgeschichte,” *Soziologie und Sozialgeschichte: Aspekte und Probleme* (Cologne, 1972), 116-31, and Reinhart Koselleck, ed., *Historische Semantik und Begriffsgeschichte* (Stuttgart, 1978).

cipline is enacted in operatic flurries and in which obedience is elaborately choreographed, as students of Wagner or of the military will know. It is not least a history in which historians establish an unequivocal and timeless “reality” of the past in huge archives of knowledge which get lost time and again in the ruptures of yet another present. Taking words, texts, archives seriously and exploring/deconstructing their references and their elisions – these and similar interventions ascertain not just the linkages between knowledge and power but also identify institutions (like history, museums, preservation) and strategies (like realism) that maintained them – and those who break or broke them.<sup>61</sup> Such approaches reveal the ways and means of constructing “reality” as a powerful contested force in its own right.

A third related change involves the evolution of social history into a more broadly based history of culture and/or experience. This reorientation of an initially behaviorist subdiscipline derives from a growing recognition of the numbing power of blanket references to society as causal category and from the poverty of social reductionism. Following the lead of some older mavericks like E. P. Thompson and Eric Hobsbawm, social historians have begun to emphasize the consciousness of social groups as non-derivative factor.<sup>62</sup> At the same time intellectual historians have increasingly begun to overcome the high/low culture divide to engage in a more broadly conceived analysis of popular culture.<sup>63</sup> Even some hard-core quantitative historians have not just moved to more sophisticated techniques, but to new levels of documentation and argumentation.<sup>64</sup> Overall, the growing concern with a thick description of everyday life has led to a shift from sociology to anthropology as the more appropriate referential discipline<sup>65</sup> – and from explanation to interpretation as the main

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<sup>61</sup> For the German-French (para)academic discourse see the journal *Geschichtswerkstatt* (in history) and *KultuRRevolution* (in litcrit). See also the useful bibliography in Manfred Geier and Harold Woetzel, eds., *Das Subjekt des Diskurses* (Berlin, 1983). The Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies has been a guiding light for Great Britain and the United States.

<sup>62</sup> E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York, 1966), his *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* (New York, 1978); Eric Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movements in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (New York, 1963), and his *Worlds of Labour: Further Studies in the History of Labour* (London, 1984). For the History Workshop movement see Raphael Samuel, ed., *People's History and Socialist Theory* (London, 1981).

<sup>63</sup> Andrew Ross, *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture* (New York and London, 1989). A good example is Wolfgang Kaschuba, “Volkskultur und Arbeiterkultur als symbolische Ordnung: Einige volkskundliche Anmerkungen zur Debatte von Alltags- und Kulturgeschichte,” in *Alltagsgeschichte* (n. 24), 191-223.

<sup>64</sup> Eric A. Johnson, “Quantitative German History in the United States and the United Kingdom,” *Central European History* 21 (1988): 396-420, and Konrad H. Jarausch and Kenneth Hardy, *Quantitative Methods for Historians: A Guide to Research, Data, and Statistics* (Chapel Hill, 1991), 199-208.

<sup>65</sup> Hans Medick, “‘Missionare im Ruderboot?’ Ethnologische Erkenntnisweisen als Herausforderung an die Sozialgeschichte,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 10 (1984): 295-319, or

methodological strategy. It has also prompted an appropriation of anthropology's thematic focus on symbolic forms, rituals, and, if more hesitantly, performances.<sup>66</sup>

This recasting of social history has raised a host of methodological problems like the appropriate level of documentation, issues of representativeness, the reliability of oral records, and so on. But this expansive history is breaking apart the idealist/materialist mold of transatlantic history. The new culturalism is, no doubt, the most quickly expanding approach to the German past. This trend has also become something of a scourge in that it pops up everywhere and achieves nothing at all beyond changing labels. In lieu of old reductionist formulas we find new clichés that replace class with ritual, interest with symbolic forms, and social formation with representation. Thinking representation has so quickly turned into one or the other kind of study of phenomena, images, or symbols as discrete artifacts/fetishes/commodities that neither the act of "presentation" nor the iterative and mimetic process of the "re-"presentation are further considered.

Postmodern histories of culture, understood more properly and more responsibly, radically question the "object" nature of the historians' past. This challenge has taken different forms. Coming from a series of microhistorical inquiries, cultural historians have dissolved the difference between subjective consciousness and objective existence in that they make experience into the central problematic of historical study.<sup>67</sup> The resulting multiplication of inner and outer worlds – of witches and millers as much as of subalterns and free-corps soldiers – has cracked the hard surface of materialist and idealist objectifications of social groups and resulted in a dazzling array of worlds and counterworlds that is not unlike the magic realism of some contemporary historical novels. Developing from a critique of totalist concepts ("society") cultural histories have also begun to challenge the notion of an *objective*, transpersonal

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Bernard S. Cohen, *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays* (New Dehli, 1987). A less glamorous aspect of every-day history is the revival of *Landesgeschichte* as *Regionalgeschichte*. See Gert Zang, *Die unaufhaltsame Annäherung an das Einzelne: Reflexionen über den theoretischen und praktischen Nutzen der Regional- und Alltagsgeschichte* (Konstanz, 1985).

<sup>66</sup> The tantalizing remarks by Frank Trommler, "Über die Lesbarkeit der deutschen Kultur," *Germanistik in den USA: Neue Entwicklungen und Methoden* (Opladen, 1989), 222-59. Re-thinking Walter Benjamin and writing on historical performance is Michael Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing* (Chicago and London, 1987). A different, practical aspect of performative history is discussed in Alfred Frei and Ernst Baier, *Geschichte spielen: Ein Handbuch für historische Stadtspiele* (Pöfing, 1990).

<sup>67</sup> Dominick LaCapra, *History and Criticism* (Ithaca and London, 1985); Carlo Ginzburg, *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*, trans. J. and A. Tedeschi (Baltimore, 1989). But see also the unbound subjectivism of Hans Peter Duerr, ed., *Der Wissenschaftler und das Irrationale*, 2 vols. (Frankfurt, 1981) and his *Dreamtime: Concerning the Boundary between Wilderness and Civilization*, trans. F. Goodman (Oxford and New York, 1985).

boundedness of society or social groups.<sup>68</sup> Rather than working with collective subjects as *explanans*, they study the formation of collectivities as *explanandum*. The old question of “societalization” (*Vergesellschaftung*), recovered as a problem of agency and of the “politics” of constituting “popular cultures” (Gramsci), is at the heart of this enterprise.

The German scene of cultural history is, perhaps, most closely associated with another development, which is summarized under the label of *Alltagsgeschichte*. As outlined by D. Crew, this every-day history has thoroughly collapsed the distance between the past and present in its recovery of memory which makes the past an active force in the present. Mobilizing memory as a public act of self- or group-assertion and popularizing control over knowledge that has become professionalized and specialized have become responses to the recognition that the past, though alien, has a presence as memory.<sup>69</sup> It is less well understood as a struggle over the privatization of the past in which the History Workshop movement runs up against efforts of commercializing (and servicing) memory. This only points to the fact that every-day historians could also profit from a more careful assessment of the present beyond historicist debates.<sup>70</sup>

Three clusters of exploration have emerged from the intellectual ferment of the last two decades: making the objects of history into subjects of their past in the dissolution of grand theory in favor of dis/empowering stories and their potential grounds; understanding heterogeneous, subjective worlds, set free through deconstruction, as agents in the constitution of the “social”; and elucidating the uncanny reality of the past in the present in the return to histories of consciousness and memory with the help of a reconsideration of the valence of words and the powers of media for past and contemporary perception. These departures date the peculiar knowledge that has shaped the historians’ enterprise and make it part of a vanishing past. In particular, they have challenged a postwar transatlantic imaginary that appeared to be eroding long before the

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<sup>68</sup> Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Toward a Radical Democratic Politics*, trans. W. Moore and P. Cammad (London, 1985).

<sup>69</sup> For responses see Alfred Frei, “Erinnern – Bedenken – Lernen: Über den Versuch das Unbeschreibliche zu beschreiben,” *Erinnern, Bedenken, Lernen*, ed. A. Frei and J. Runge (Sigmaringen, 1990), and his “Geschichtswerkstätten als Zukunftswerkstätten: Ein Plädoyer für aufklärerische Geschichtsarbeit,” *Die andere Geschichte*, ed. Gerhard Paul and Bernhard Schossig (Cologne, 1986), 258-80 on the one hand, and Hermann Lübke, *Geschichtsbegriff und Geschichtsinteresse: Analytik und Pragmatik der Historie* (Basel, 1977), on the other.

<sup>70</sup> It is intriguing to see how historians are fixated on the “high-cultural” film, while they neglect TV. However, more history “happens” on TV than anywhere else, notwithstanding the pretensions of the *American Historical Review*! See Helmut Dotterweich, “Fernsehen und Geschichte: Die Bedeutung des Erzählerischen – auch das unterhaltende Fernsehspiel kann Historie vermitteln,” *Die Zeit* (11 January 1985), 14. On film see Rolf Aurich, “Film in der deutschen Geschichtswissenschaft,” *Geschichtswerkstatt* 17 (1989): 54-66.

events of 1989. More radical approaches have tried to go beyond History as “modern” discipline and have begun to explore the grounds on which historical consciousness arose in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.<sup>71</sup> Both interventions insist that this is not willful, but a response to radically changing conditions in the present. All this hung in a balance throughout the eighties. Historians have had particular difficulty in joining the arguments which linked the critique of modern(ist) modes of knowledge to an emergent new (information/postindustrial) society. They have resisted translating them into their own terrain, even after an emergent memory industry (TV, film) has begun to take over much of the historians’ domain. Many scholars have been reluctant to confront this wholesale reorganization of cultural capital. Odd as it may be for academics, the current recasting of Europe apparently leads them more easily to reconsider their assumptions and approaches. The political rupture realigns, as so often before, the social order in central Europe and reorganizes the transatlantic economy of signs (and undoubtedly will create a new cast of realist historians). This political break-up of a transatlantic imaginary continues what postmodern thought has started some time ago, although not necessarily with the intended result.

#### IV

As after every major upheaval of the twentieth century, the process of rethinking German history is beginning once again. The current reconsideration is shaped by the dual challenge and potential clash of an intellectual reorientation, prompted by postmodernism, and a political reformulation, inspired by German unification. The former impulse suggests a more reflective and a multiple approach to the German past. As indicated above, the end of grand theory, the linguistic turn, and the revival of interests in culture have just begun to open up German historiography to a variety of distinctive, yet interwoven narrations of the central European past. Together, they suggest a self-conscious multiculturalism and a de-hegemonialization of perspective. The redemptive quality of these histories lies in the insistence on the multiplicity of worlds and the strength of self-will (*Eigensinn*) which has resisted anew the effort to homogenize people into a society with a univocal and unilinear past. The latter process might imply a restoration of a national masternarrative. A simplistic reading of the current political changes creates the danger that this door will be slammed by a precipitous return to a national masterplot, somewhat reduced in size and chastened in spirit, but still recognizably related to the familiar *klein-deutsch* story. Instead of ending in the defeat and partition of 1945, the drama

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<sup>71</sup> Among others Sande Cohen, *Historical Culture: On the Recoding of an Academic Discipline* (Berkeley, 1986).



has just received a fresh and perhaps happier ending, a new *terminus ad quem*, which might suggest interpreting the prior disasters as purgatories on the road to a model Germany – a redemption of the Germans by themselves as a prerequisite for healing the division of Europe. Both visions leave behind the post-war imaginary. But they raise the question more pressingly how intellectual and political trajectories of reconstituting the past relate to one another.

Since external unification has barely been completed, while internal unity will take years to come, its full impact upon the writing of history remains indistinct. First indications are that, in West Germany, the traditionalists appear overjoyed that their preservation and elaboration of a nineteenth-century Prussian-German narrative has apparently been validated along with their anti-Communist politics. Their critics of the Bielefeld school seem intent on safeguarding a “modernist” Weberian understanding of the past as a guarantee for a post-nationalist, European constitutionalism. For the radical every-day historians, encouraged by the initial basis democracy but doubtful about the goal and speed of unification, this fall-back into national rhetoric appears dispiriting, since it might forbode a new disciplining of dissent.<sup>72</sup> At the same time, some older GDR scholars seem defensive about their Marxist achievements and others scramble unseemly to adopt Western rhetoric. Some younger historians, inspired by the civic movement, are ready, on the other hand, to throw off the Communist shackles and to explore new approaches. One can only hope that, together with their alternative colleagues in the West, they will eventually engage in a historical reflection and a critical preservation of what have become the newest archives and the ruins of an already forgotten and repressed past. In many ways, the Stalinist GDR appears already more remote than Bismarck’s Germany.<sup>73</sup>

In the United States, the “Eastern European” upheaval is likely to resuscitate politically oriented studies, which have been in decline for several decades. Such efforts are motivated by expectations for a return to a nineteenth-century multipolarity of powers in Europe and a new triumph of German *Machtpolitik*,<sup>74</sup> This also appears to be a strong sense in France and Great Britain. Simul-

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<sup>72</sup> For some sample reactions see Helmut Diwald, *Deutschland einig Vaterland* (Frankfurt, 1990); Thomas Nipperdey, “Die Deutschen wollen und dürfen eine Nation sein,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 13 July 1990; Lothar Gall, “Bismarck – Preussen, Deutschland und Europa,” in the catalogue of the exhibition with the same name (Berlin 1990), 25ff.; Wolfgang J. Mommsen, “Die Idee der deutschen Nation in Geschichte und Gegenwart,” *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte* (Spring 1990).

<sup>73</sup> For GDR responses see Clement von Wroblewsky, “Die Lüge zur Weltordnung gemacht,” *Temps modernes* (Spring 1990); Winfried Schulze, “Die zweigeteilte Geschichte,” *Die Zeit*, 7 Sept. 1990; and Konrad H. Jarausch, “The Failure of East German Anti-Fascism: Some Ironies of History as Politics,” *German Studies Review*, 1991.

<sup>74</sup> John Mearsheimer, “Why We Will Soon Miss the Cold War,” *The Atlantic Monthly* (Aug. 1990), 35-50. See also Timothy Garton Ash, *The Magic Lantern: The Revolution of '89*

taneously and often indiscriminately, there has been much thoughtless gloating over the victory of capitalism (if that is what it was), coupled with a somewhat saner appreciation of the victory of parliamentary democracy. As much as “parliamentarism” in central and eastern Europe is celebrated, the darker sides of popular sovereignty are also evoked, giving way to a very old distrust of these European “natives.” Old fears of east European nationalism and of German aspirations have resurfaced, recalling the world wars, interwar “ethnic conflicts,” and the Holocaust. The first response to the present rupture then seems to have been a hardening of ideological and historiographical fronts, with socialism seemingly in full retreat. But as at every such juncture the reevaluation of the German and central European past is bound to continue for a long time.<sup>75</sup>

A more careful look at the peaceful revolution in the GDR and the unification with the FRG suggests that the German problem needs to be mapped out anew. As part of a broader central and eastern European transformation, recent events do not really fit the pattern that the transatlantic imaginary had led historians to expect. In spite of all sorts of rash commentary, neither Huns or Junkers nor their evil stand-ins populate Germany, and even the skinheads, racist and chauvinist brutes that they are, have to be made into Nazis by analogy. The old German problem has been successfully exorcized and, with it, the high drama of the West which is so hard to let go for veteran commentators. But there is a German problem, although it appears in a new light. Elements of a reconsideration are readily evident. The peaceful revolution in East Germany, based on non-violent civic movements against the SED dictatorship and its oppressive symbol of the Wall, requires explanations not contained in the conventional tale of blood and iron. Suddenly, 1871 appears in a very different light, even if unification evokes that analogy. If the Prussian coup appears more necessary than ever to German traditionalists, it does the opposite for German liberals – and it might remind American historians of the peculiar historicity that linked national sovereignty to Statebuilding; for the two are moving apart in the present conjuncture.<sup>76</sup> The simultaneous turn away from a socialist renewal within the GDR to unification (*die Wende in der Wende*), largely prompted by popular desires, combined democratic and national aspirations in an unprecedented development. True enough, there are nineteenth-century analogies or twentieth-century parallels, but the notable absence of violence and chauvinist hysteria require fresh answers. It appears that unity and liberty can

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*Witnessed in Warsaw, Budapest, Berlin, and Prague* (New York, 1990), and Ralf Dahrendorf, *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe* (New York, 1990).

<sup>75</sup> Jürgen Kocka, “Revolution und Nation 1989: Zur historischen Einordnung der gegenwärtigen Ereignisse,” *Tel Aviver Jahrbuch für deutsche Geschichte* 19 (1990): 479-99. In spite of constant references to the historicity of the changes, historians have been surprisingly reluctant to comment on the upheaval in the GDR.

<sup>76</sup> Michael Geyer, “On Sovereignty as a German Problem” (Chicago, March 1990, MS).

be reconciled after all, but it may just as well be the case that the social signification of “unity” and “liberty” have radically changed over time. If both were once linked to notions of property, they now appear to be linked to notions of, even entitlements to, consumption. Last but not least, the “American” way of life undoubtedly exerted some media pull on GDR citizens, but United States policies have remained in the background compared to the impact of Soviet perestroika, eroding the assumption of a German redemption in a revived Atlanticism. What kind of redemptive stories lie beyond national or transatlantic History? Have there been other stories that historians never quite took into consideration? Though with sufficient effort almost anything can be made to fit, recent central European upheavals have broken the transatlantic frame, with all the set-piece answers and comforting familiarities. Long settled questions about “revolution” or “nation” have suddenly been posed anew, requiring not just some slight retouching, but a more fundamental rethinking of the German past.<sup>77</sup>

In this situation, postmodern thought can make the difference. The ceaseless contests over identity and hegemony in that pivotal region, a seam of European affairs that always ruptured during a general reorganization of the continent, can only be grasped if they are approached not in preconceived national terms but in a more open-ended fashion as the iterative constitution of nation-ness. The debunking of grand theories and masternarratives offers the intellectual space which is necessary to treat nationality as a construct with changing frontiers, governmental systems, ideological allegiances, and social fabrics. The interweaving of heterogeneous worlds allows historians to counteract the subordination of difference through the affirmative realism of past historiography. The linguistic turn is more essential than ever in decoding the construction of meaning and counter-meanings, of official fabrication of information and its potential subversive effects. Indeed, central and eastern Europe have been every-day laboratories for deconstruction, as the old Stalinist truths crumble with even older (socialist, Catholic, nationalist, but also liberal) ones that were the spiritual source for resistance in the first place. During the heady autumn of 1989, the very language of repression crumbled when the Honecker-Krenz slogans lost credibility and a new civic vocabulary of resistance and participation sprang upon the scene only to be abandoned in the onslaught of Western image machines. Finally, cultural analysis is essential in uncovering the internal erosion of party confidence, the growth of an oppositional subculture, as well as the surprising eruption of a previously latent anti-Communism of a silent majority. Not just prompted by economic difficulties, this triple revolution of consciousness preceded the breathtaking change of regimes. It was

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<sup>77</sup> Konrad H. Jarausch, “Old Fears and New Hopes: Historical Reflections on German (Re-)unification” (Chapel Hill, April 1990, MS). For a first English-language summary see Elizabeth Pond, *After the Wall: U.S. Policy toward Germany* (New York, 1990).

fuelled by the search for societal bonds, not mediated by the state, and for a language of collectivity, not based on multiple layers of fabrications that have, simultaneously, exposed the very need for and the very frailty of social relations. In making sense and giving historical depth to political expressions of the German situation, the seemingly contradictory political and intellectual impulses of postmodern thought and political transformation go hand in hand.<sup>78</sup>

The search for new explanations and interpretations will pull German and American scholars apart inadvertently. German historians of Germany are remaking their past through creating a fresh present, be it national or European. They are in the midst of an exhilarating and occasionally frightening process which American scholars, contrary to the postwar years, can only observe, but neither direct nor duplicate. Even if the current efforts at unity, democracy, and peace are a greater success than earlier German attempts, as is to be hoped, they are going to be German and not American triumphs like those after World War II. Though some U.S. commentators are beginning to claim part of the credit, transatlantic influences have played at best an indirect, facilitating role. To be forthright: as much as there is no German Havel, the latter is no Jefferson but a Czechoslovak patriot. Even hesitant American scholars will recognize in the face of the European reorganization of Europe that Foucault had a point to make when he linked knowledge to power rather than truth; for power rests in Germany and that will continue to be the German problem. It is to be seen what new truth will come with it.

At the same time, the United States is also remade, and not just in the reorganization of the Atlantic world and the America-centered postwar imaginary. Within academe, North American scholars, working in polyhistory departments, will gravitate increasingly to multiple narratives, comparative or otherwise, and will prove more sensitive to issues of subordination and alterity, if only to teach an extremely diverse student body. They are also much more affected by the collapse of high cultural pretensions and canonic certainties, exemplified in the advance of visual forms of representation and the privatization of the past, which will lead them, willy-nilly, to experiment with postmodern forms of presentation. Cultural capital, being heavily guarded by the state in Germany, is much more open to radical reorganization in the United States. As a result, history as a discipline and German histories in particular face a realignment – if they do not want to become “ethnic” histories which are protected by German *Kulturpolitik*. Last but not least, the multiethnic context of the United States may lead to a fuller appreciation of the multiculturalism in the European past and present. The latter still sounds somewhat strange to

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<sup>78</sup> Volker Gransow and Konrad H. Jarausch, eds., *Die deutsche Vereinigung: Dokumente Bürgerbewegung, Annäherung und Beitritt* (Cologne, 1991). Although there has been a tremendous amount of journalistic commentary on the recent events, the conceptual implications of the revolution of 1989 have been entirely neglected so far.

central European ears, even if the influx of guestworkers, asylum seekers, and ethnic remigrants to Germany makes it increasingly appropriate there as well and even if the realities of an integrated, yet diverse Europe require more than the contrived acknowledgement of “otherness.”<sup>79</sup>

The dual political and intellectual transformation of Europe and the United States will reshape the understanding of the German and European past in the next decade on both sides of the Atlantic. If American historians of central Europe draw upon their cross-national perspective, explore the possibilities of multiculturalism, and engage in a careful examination of the constitution of cultures, they will be able to make sense of the longstanding contestations over transnational power-configurations, national sovereignty, and social hegemony which have shaped Europe in the modern period. In keeping alive the memory of the disasters which central European ruptures engendered, they may not just help to prevent a narrow renationalization of the German past, but also warn against the dangers of political paranoia in the face of the present conditions in the United States and Europe. In this capacity, they will continue to have a distinct and distinguished voice.

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<sup>79</sup> Claus Leggewie, “Heimat Babylon: Über die Zukunft eines schönen Traumes: Politische Immigranten, Arbeitsuchende aus allen Erdteilen, offene Grenzen innerhalb des Kontinents: Europa ist auf dem Weg zu einer ‘multikulturellen’ Gesellschaft: Doch wie realistisch ist die Utopie von der bunten Völkergemeinschaft,” *Die Zeit* 32 (31 July 1987). See also Paul Bocklet, ed., *Aussiedler, Gastarbeiter, Asylanten: Zu viele Fremde im Land?* (Düsseldorf, 1990).