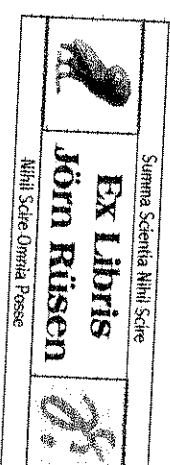


STUDIES IN METAHISTORY

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CONTENTS

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Sources

Introduction by Pieter Duvenage

PRINCIPLES

Chapter 1:	Historical narration: foundation, types, reason	3
Chapter 2:	What is theory in history?	15
Chapter 3:	Interests and objectivity in historical studies	49

FUNCTIONS

Chapter 4:	The development of narrative competence in historical learning: an ontogenetical hypothesis concerning moral consciousness	63
Chapter 5:	Experience, interpretation, orientation: three dimensions of historical learning	85

TRENDS

Chapter 6:	Theory of history in historical lectures: the German tradition of <i>Historik</i> 1750-1900	97
Chapter 7:	Rhetoric and aesthetics of history: Leopold von Ranke	129
Chapter 8:	Jacob Burckhardt: political standpoint and historical insight on the border of postmodernism	147
Chapter 9:	Paradigm shift and theoretical reflection in West German historical studies	161
Chapter 10:	The development of history didactics in West Germany: towards a new self-awareness of historical studies	187
Chapter 11:	New directions in historical studies	203
Chapter 12:	Historical enlightenment in the light of post-modernism: history in the age of the "new unintelligibility"	221

Historical enlightenment in the light of postmodernism: history in the age of the "new unintelligibility"

El sueño de la razón produce monstruos (Goya).

Postmodernism as a challenge to historiography

No matter how in specific terms you define the phenomenon known as "postmodernism", currently so intriguing to intellectuals,¹ it presents a challenge to historians and their craft. The prefix "post" indicates the presence of a pervasive discontent with those patterns of cultural interpretation which categorize current social and cultural relations as "modern". The essential features of "modernism" have become questionable, and the constant talk about the emergent phenomenon of "postmodernism" signals the necessity for new historical perspectives.

This imperative need is rooted in experiences with current social and cultural realities which call into radical question those previously valid points of reference for interpreting world and self which the term "modernity" has come to designate. In this context, the concept of "progress" operates as a fundamental notion of modern historical consciousness,² making it possible to interpret the historical matrix of modern societies as a positive development, and which provides a basis for societal activity. The future, viewed from this historical perspective, beckons with its bright promise of unparalleled levels of life quality as a product of the domination of nature, affluence, democratic political participation and cultural enlightenment.

In the meantime, however, experience with the consequences of modernization has tempered its perception, placing it in a different and dubious light. Its dark underside is ominous: the domination and concomitant exploitation of nature by science and technology threaten to destroy the basic preconditions for human survival. As a result of rationalization and disenchantment, the sources of cultural meaning functioning to reconcile humankind with the conditions of life are being drained and depleted.

These were potentialities of meaning which - in the name of Enlightenment - once held out to man the promise of a free and gratifying relationship to his own self in a humanized life-world. Now, that promise of Enlightenment to create the basis for a self-determined existence in society by the free use of the forces of human reason - unencumbered by superstition, despotism, feudal inequality and economic backwardness - not only appears as a historical pledge gone unredempted, but as a prospect transformed into its very opposite. Human reason, untrammelled from the traditionalist restraints limiting its application, has fashioned new mechanisms of domination, engendered new social inequalities, new economic dependencies. It has ultimately also led to a new encounter in experience with various forms of meaninglessness. The grand project of Enlightenment is now declared a failure: "Civilization's supreme meaning (*Sinn*) mutated into its supreme insanity (*Wahnsinn*)".³

Modernity as a threatening derangement: this experience unhinges the modes of historical interpretation by which our form of cultural life attempts to explicate itself, relating to the past in a way which makes the future meaningful while orienting present action to a temporal frame.

Once there is no longer any basic consensus in advanced industrial societies about modernity as a key concept for cultural self-interpretation, then history apparently also forfeits a portion of its instrumental importance. History's function as a means for these societies to create a self-image via memory, and to blueprint their future as a stimulus to action is impaired. In the wake of the loss of cultural prestige which modernity has undergone, history itself threatens to lose all meaning. Instead other options appear for satisfying the need in human life-praxis for meaningful orientation in time. Mythical or quasi-mythical thinking is one such option.

One symptom of this lapsing of historical images which could serve as a guide to action within the framework of cultural orientation for current social praxis is the renewed popularity currently being enjoyed by the concept of the *post-histoire*.⁴ The notion of post-histoire is closely associated with the continuous talk and debate about postmodernism. Post-histoire posits a radical rupture: not only are there no viable historical perspectives for the current context of societal reality. Rather, a category like *history* can no longer provide any orientation whatsoever. In terms of time progression, one's own life-praxis appears incompatible with the various conceptions of *historical sequence* which makes histories meaningful.

The concept of the post-histoire is an expression of postmodern thought. It carries to an ultimate extreme the temporal categorization of the present era as postmodern. An orientational potential is lost as a result of the removal of the present era from a framework of modernity capable of providing our times with a temporal direction for life-praxis. Such historical thought posited the

necessity of grasping the factors determining the direction of temporal change in the human world. Such understanding was seen as an essential feature of intentions guiding action and self-interpretations shaping identity. Post-histoire is a historical-specific denial of modernity. It posits the cessation of developments in which the past presented itself as history pregnant with meaning and significance. In view of such a past, the future was projectable as a possibility for renewed meaningful, creative action.

Post-histoire gains in plausibility counterpoised to a specific parameter of historical meaning: the parameter of change. Post-histoire contends that change, as a historically meaningful concept of temporal movement, has long since reverted to catastrophe, or become the shell of an idling motor, with all gears whirling, but without any meaningful alteration. Post-histoire argues that the powers of the human spirit engendering what is qualitatively new and worthwhile no longer play any role in the autonomous movement of rational-function systems - either due to the paralysis of such powers, or because they have simply been rendered ineffective and superfluous.

Post-histoire stands as the skeptical counter image to the revolutionary or evolutionary visions of the concept of progress. That notion, in a variety of forms, basically envisions a final liberation of humankind by a reshaping of the world. In the conceptualization of post-histoire, the dynamics of progress has been replaced by the crystalline form of a culture which blocks and rechannels the driving forces of a subjectivity hungering for freedom. Not only does it make those forces seem superfluous; rather, it also suppresses or banishes them by means of the structural power of hardened institutions.

Thinking about progress had always encompassed the entirety of history in a bid to make plausible to its acting subjects that it was indeed possible to effect substantive change, to improve the world by purposive action. Now that the desired consequences of such action have failed to materialize, one is compelled to a radical conclusion: their absence can only be identified with the end of history as such. The dream of the realm of freedom is transmuted into the nightmare of a spiritual nomadism: those privy to ultimate insight, bereft of all illusion, wandering through the spreading wasteland left in the aftermath of rationalization and disenchantment, now depleted of any potentiality of meaning.⁵

Historiography would be ill-advised to brush off the developments in contemporary intellectual culture as a mere passing fashion. Rather, they should be perceived as a serious challenge to historiography's own efforts to gain insight. The principal impetus for such efforts derives, after all, from questions concerning the problems of orientation as such. Does any justification for such thought (beyond merely trying to reconstruct how it abolished itself) still exist? Or, put more concretely: can historical memory, administered

by history as a scientific discipline, still offer any viable perspective for the future?

Right from the start, the process of modernization has been accompanied by orientation crises. These crises constituted a sort of counterpoise, different but comparable, to the emancipatory promises which accompanied that process culturally. Insofar as such promises were given credence, they even served to propel modernization forward. Romanticism constituted one such early counterpoise in the formative period of modernization. Another historically striking example is the widespread criticism of capitalism, liberalism and Marxism among bourgeois intellectuals at the turn of the last century; here were some of the intellectual roots of European fascism.⁶ One might enumerate various other cultural phenomena that could be characterized as attempts to compensate for the eclipse of meaning in many spheres of life in the wake of the dominance of technical-scientific rationality as a key component of cultural orientation.⁷ Such compensatory efforts tend to have particular success in contexts where progress founded on rationality is not regarded as a positive hope for the future, but rather is experienced as a loss: the forfeiture of a pattern of cultural life that was formerly replete with identity.

Using such historical derivations, historiography can attempt to explicate the peculiarity and attractiveness of postmodernism and post-histoire as conceptions. However, this does not permit historiography to sidestep their challenge. It cannot leave postmodernism on the object level of historical understanding, because postmodernism itself addresses and problematizes principles of such understanding. By the very act of engaging in historical deliberation, historiography is thus challenged to reflect upon its current perspectives and the strategies of historical memory. In the mirror of its own history, it can at least familiarize itself with problems it is now called on to grapple with once again in the aftermath of a weakening of the persuasive power of modern historical perspectives.

Ernst Troeltsch conceived his well-known studies on historicism as a response to such a challenge. His work reflects in concentrated form the direction of thrust of postmodernism in regard to the tradition of the potentialities available to such thought to respond to these impulses:

The destruction of historical education and of historical knowledge itself could only be comprehended as a decision on behalf of barbarism. It could only be implemented by a return to barbarism in all other spheres of life as well. But this is not a matter that can simply be desired and then acted upon ... Rather, it is the woeful, infinitely protracted legacy of superannuated cultures - not a joyous redemption to strength and freshness. We must bear our heavy burden. We can sort through

and sift that bundle, and carry it upon our shoulder. Yet since it contains all our possessions, all our tools for living, we cannot simply toss it away.⁸

For historiography, facing up to the orientation crisis resulting from the inroads of postmodernism and post-histoire initially entails an examination of the previous means by which it has achieved orientation in time - means which today are being called into radical question. Only then will it become clear where the orientational inadequacies lie if the achievements of historical thought are rejected as a result of a modernizing trend towards greater *scientization* of intellectual pursuits.

Professional historians in West Germany are currently caught up in a vehement dispute regarding the proper interpretation of recent German history. That debate has attracted the full attention of a broad audience interested in historical questions, thus underscoring the importance that historiography still maintains in the historical culture of the present. Such an importance appears to have been little affected by the relativization of history's orientational function, pursued for a time quite successfully by the social sciences.

In view of the public echo and vehemence of this *historians' debate*, it might seem as if the problems posed by postmodernism (and its extrapolation, the post-histoire) for a historical perspective in the present have been refracted and concentrated here through the prism of a continuing central problem in historical orientation for Germans: i.e., their as yet unmastered relationship with Germany's National Socialist past.

In actuality, however, that is by no means the case. The frontlines staked out in the historians' debate (*Historikerstreit*) have remained relatively untouched by the objections and contradictions historiography has experienced in respect to modernity. The historians' debate is contained completely within the perimeter of this modernity. The discontents which postmodern thought absorbs from widespread experiences of contemporary crisis and utilizes for demolishing established forms of historical thinking have had only a very indirect and weak impact on this debate, if at all. The historians' debate may overburden such forms of historical thinking: for example, when differing conceptions regarding scientific method and the relationship between historiography and politics clash, revealing peculiar weaknesses in the underlying scientific principle of rational argumentation. Yet there is no overstepping of the boundaries of these forms of thought, most definitely not in the intentions of the debate's participants. The historians' debate as part of historical culture in the Federal Republic does not reflect any *new unintelligibility*⁹ since its argumentational strategies are fully contained within previously evolved paradigms of historiography. The opposing fronts are well charted, and the

respective positions can be located and characterized with unambiguous clarity in terms of the history of the discipline.¹⁰

The modernity of historical science

If we are to comprehend and confront the challenges posed by postmodern thinking for historical science, it is absolutely necessary for us to explicate what is meant by modernity. In the process of modernization, what interpretative potentials for comprehending the experience of time has historical thought opened up? Can limits for these potentials be demonstrated, limits which must be overstepped in view of the current crisis of orientation in the modernization process?

In a survey of the course of development which historical thinking has taken since the beginning of the 18th century, it is possible to discern three main shifts in the modernization process. The first was brought about by Enlightenment.¹¹ It moved the human capacity of reason to the centre of the historical stage by making reason the criterion of historical judgment for the subject of historical understanding; for its object, similarly, it placed human cultural achievements, made possible by reason, at the centre of deliberations.

The second shift, begun by late Enlightenment, was brought to full completion within historicism.¹² The previously dominant pattern of creating historical meaning, exemplified by the slogan *historia vitae magistra*, was now supplanted by another: genetic thinking. This new pattern highlighted the aspect of change, making it the dimension which was truly meaningful and of consequence for the orientation of human actions; and this in contrast with all attempts to reduce processes in time to underlying elements of duration or encompassing principles of supratemporal validity. In this second shift, a mode of historical thinking focused on example is replaced by a perspective which is genetic in orientation.

The third shift, whose origins are datable to the end of the 19th century, was effected by a development in historical thought exemplified by Marxism, the *Annales* school, and social and structural history.¹³ Historical thought here taps a new social depth in historical experience. The historical perspective turns its attention from events driven by purposive human action to focus instead on changing constellations of factors conditioning action, and their systematic interconnections.

All three shifts represent epochs in the rationalization of historical thought. Through rationalization, such thought takes on its distinctive shape, fashions its own self-image - and, of course, acquires the prestige of science. History, as an independent discipline equipped with its own methods and disciplinary

identity, begins to crystallize starting with the late Enlightenment. It then evolves in decisive fashion in the age of historicism.

Until recently, the developmental process encompassing these modernization shifts lent itself readily to plausible interpretation as a form of progress. Historical thinking achieved its status as a science; standards of rationality evolved, one stage surpassing the next in the various developmental shifts; they thus interpreted themselves as a rising curve marking a general deepening and expansion of the methodological rationality of historical research. To put it briefly, such progress in historical rationality consisted in the first shift in the establishment of historical research as a methodologically structured procedure for gaining knowledge; in the third shift, in the development of theoretical constructs of historical interpretation specific to history.

This progress underwent internal ruptures and dislocations. Each shift in rationalization was based on deficiencies in the creation of historical meaning in the previous phase, and led in turn to new deficiencies. A glance at these inadequacies can serve to open up modern historical thought to the postmodern critique of its standards of rationality, and clarify whether - and how - such thought can best confront this critique.

The late Enlightenment and historicism criticized inadequacies of *temporality* in the criterion of reason specific to Enlightenment. The multiplicity and heterogeneity of the cultural creations of the human spirit allowed only for an incomplete historical interpretation from the perspective of a quasi-natural faculty of reason. Historicism overcame this inadequacy by its categories of development and individuality, but suffered itself from an experiential deficiency when it came to the economic and social factors shaping purposive human action. The inadequacy marking the last modernization shift in historical thought was a lack of subjectivity in connection with the recently disclosed dimension of social depth in historical experience.

Consequently, the evolution of the modernization of historical thought can also be conceptualized as a history of deficiency or loss. With each subsequent shift in rationalization, the process of modernization generates the corresponding deficiencies in meaning for the respective standards of rationality. The previous course of evolution indicates that these deficiencies were remedied and eliminated within new developmental processes in historical thought, interpretable as a continuation and intensification of modernization.

Does that still hold true today? This question is more than merely rhetorical, since the lack of meaning decryd by postmodern thought involves a recurrent and enduring principle in such modernization shifts: namely, the principle of the modernizing rationality of historical thought, its claim to reason and enlightenment associated with *Verwissenschaftlichung*, its enhanced scientific rigour. What is basically at stake here is the methodological rationality which

constitutes history as a scientific discipline, quite independent of its several variants. It is this rationality which - as a principle of cultural orientation for human life-praxis - has presumably led to conditions which such rationality can neither cope with nor comprehend.

This situation can be illustrated by the *capricho* by Francisco Goya bearing the telling title: "The dream of reason produces monsters".¹⁴ Is methodical rationality's modernizing conception of reason - a notion which also captivated historiography in the process of its genesis and formation as a science - ultimately, in fact, nothing but a monster? A monster from which we must flee, in the light of contemporary experiences of catastrophe, in order to be able to escape our own self-destruction, even in historical thought? The challenge postmodernism presents to historiography can be encapsulated in radical form in this question: is the dream of reason - embarked upon by historical consciousness at the very latest starting with Enlightenment, and in which modern historiography was developed - now finally at an end? Has it soured into a nightmare, where the compulsions of the idea of progress now enthrall the human intellect, leading to a situation in which the heedless trek forward down on the path of previous progress can only end in catastrophe?

Critique of modernity and postmodern thinking in historiography

Historiography has confronted the challenges of postmodernism in various ways. It is possible to distinguish two modes of reaction to the new experiences of time and the corresponding thought patterns. In one mode, it evades these challenges by means of a traditionalism offering supposedly time-tested patterns of historical interpretation for solving the current orientation crisis: it searches for "a point to cast anchor in the cataracts of progress".¹⁵ Historiography makes available historical reference points that have crystallized in the process of modernization and proven their usefulness; now, they can presumably function to contain and channel its crisis-ridden developments.

One such reference point is the historical category of the nation. It is bound up with a mode of thinking which regards national identity as the sole stable form of historical self-understanding fulfilling the need for orientation in contemporary life. This category holds out the promise of assuaging the temporal disquietude of the contemporary age by casting a wistful eye backward to age-old national traditions. In its programme, the deficiencies in meaning signalled by postmodernism are to be remedied by the legacy of a unique, millennium-old national culture. The nervous intellectuality of currents critical of the times is to be calmed by the sedative of enduring cultural tradition. The temporal rupture between the modern and the postmodern is

submerged in the deep and silent continuity of those long-term historical developments which have led to the time-honoured traditions of one's own culture.

Yet one cannot cast anchor in the midst of cataracts. The historical category of the nation was long ago shattered in the process of political developments which necessitated new forms of collective historical identity beyond the framework of national identity. Such new forms of collective identity are requisite for the involvement, in the subjectivity of the ruled, of a cultural counterweight to political rule, now developing supranational forms - and should thus not be limited to a mere bureaucratic mechanism, hobbled by corresponding deficiencies in legitimization. The temptation of a traditionalist lull before the storm of postmodernism is therefore highly deceptive.

However, historical thinking has also taken other paths. It has not only sought out points of rest in the accelerating movement of modernization, but also scrutinized this movement critically against the grain of its own ideology of progress. It has dealt with the contradiction between the promise and product of modernization in a historical critique which presents the costs and victims of the developmental process leading to contemporary patterns of living. Using such a historical balance sheet, it places the orientation crisis of the current age in its proper historical light. Such thinking demonstrates that - and illustrates how - the traditional conception of development and progress must be called into question in the light of aberrant historical experiences. However, what can this mode of historical thought - deviating from traditional patterns of interpretation - offer to replace the criticized conception of progress and development, a conception which has shown itself to be so impervious to its social and human costs? Only on this level, where new historical experiences are processed within the conceptual framework of broad, encompassing periods - on the level of interpretive patterns effective in a historical orientation in the present - can there be any decision about the question as to whether historical thinking itself has already taken a step toward postmodernism, or can take such a step in future.

The findings remain ambiguous. The critique of progress can lead to a flight of historical memory from the orientational problems of the current age into more or less elaborated historical counter-images. The step forward toward postmodernism is avoided - or only feigned - by means of a step (backward) into the premodern. Patterns of cultural life which have a compensatory function in dealing with the crisis experience of the present era are found in a key period which generated developments leading to the present social and cultural realities - i.e. in the early modern period. Thus, for example, the village in the Pyrenean mountains Montailhou is presented as a Rousseauesque counter-image to our own time.¹⁶ The historical perspective turns in alienation

from the genesis of the present age to dwell in fascination on the past as a thinkable alternative. There is something akin to this in historiographical presentations of a premodern folk culture: they invite us to engage in a historical identification that makes our own patterns of cultural life seem estranged by contrast. In the person of the miller Menocchio, intellectual disappointment about the outcome of the movement of the late 1960s crystallizes in a historical figure: in Menocchio, the desired future which failed to materialize now becomes an element in a freshly discovered past.¹⁷ This also holds true for feminist interpretations of witches: such sorcerers are believed to represent a concept of humanity at the beginning of the modern period - a humanity which was successively eroded as modernizing rationality was translated into the inhumane structures of domination characteristic of modern patriarchy.

With this strategy of counter-images, historical thought confirms the existence of the contemporary orientational crisis, though it is unable to provide a serious resolution to that crisis. That alternative past is recalled as an age which is one's own "true" time - the present appears as estrangement, as expropriated time. These historical counter-images provide only a negative orientation to one's own present. They do not open up any perspectives for the future which can serve to guide action. Although they compensate for the deficiency of meaning in modern historical thought as it confronts the current experience of the consequences of modernization, they do not eliminate it. Rather, they help us to avoid the severity and gravity of this experience. Since there is no path leading back to that fascinating historical alternative, its historiographical image descends upon the present like a veil, blurring its contours.

As long as this historiographic strategy of premodern counter-images to the present remains caught up in the antithesis of *then* vs. *now*, it is not (yet) postmodern. It only brackets the genetic mode of thought of modern historical thinking, but does not replace it with another conception of the interconnections between past, present and future. Are there conceptions which escape the seductive sway of modern progress and development-oriented thinking in a postmodern fashion? Do forms of thought already exist which do not conceptualize the present in terms of the category of change?

Although such a uniform and easily identifiable structure of thought is not as yet available, there are promising beginnings pointing in this direction. The history of everyday life, historical anthropology and microhistory represent new forms of historical thinking which evince several distinctly postmodern features. They share in common the circumstance that they no longer operate with genetic categories of time, but rather wish to replace them by another historical perspective. In the category of *everyday history*, the self-experience of subjects affected by historical change takes on a greater value for historical interpreta-

tion than the analytical constructs with which respective changes are reconstructed from the vantage point of the contemporary observer. The developmental lines of objective circumstances of life are spliced into the knot of a subjective involvement. This genesis is recollected from the perspective of that subjectivity: from the *experience* of those who have lived through the genesis of current circumstances of life as actors and (suffering) subjects. In this involvement, that genesis loses the character of an objective direction in time, and becomes a subjective fact (*Befindlichkeit*). The analytical procedures reflective of modern historiography's standard of rationality are unsuitable for its explanation.

The progress in rationality of historiography in the third modernization shift measured itself in terms of the proximity of its research methods to the social sciences - e.g. economics, sociology and political science which focus on the motive forces of modernization as a theme - and in so doing promoted itself in terms of the thought-forms of anthropology and ethnology. These sciences are concerned with time-periods and locales of human life which cannot be subsumed under a genetic conception of the origin of modern societies. Consequently, the methods are especially well suited for systematically detaching (*verfremden*) the historical perspective regarding the genesis of the modern world.¹⁸ They highlight those aspects of phenomena, previously interpreted in the light of the category of progress and development, which eluded this category: i.e. its temporal uniqueness, by dint of which it refuses to be classified within the framework of the prehistory of the present.

Microhistorical methods of investigation and forms of presentation lend themselves well for utilization by such a mode of historical thought. They remove phenomena from the context of an encompassing temporal direction of progressive change. Such methods disclose the uniqueness and unique meaning which phenomena had within the cultural horizon of the historical actors involved - as opposed to the directional meaning they have as part of an embracing process extending over an entire era.

Salvaging such unique meaning, of course, has its price. It is frequently bought at the cost of doing without any theoretical constructs in historical interpretation. The macrohistorical conditions of the individual historical phenomena, which now occupy the centre of critical attention, are "blotted out" in this way. Historiography considered working within a theoretical framework of reference for historical interpretation to be one of the achievements of its modernization. Such constructs were also intended to render intelligible broad temporal processes underlying individual historical phenomena in the genesis of the modern world. They conceptualized these macrohistorical conditions, which now retreat before a mode of historical thinking that no longer wishes to mediate phenomena in terms of such broad-scale processes. The historical

states of affairs dealt with in such constructs do not forfeit their reality or effectivity, despite the loss of plausibility of theoretical conceptualizations of long-term historical processes. Instead, they threaten to become the uncomprehended background of historical insights which, lacking that background, lead to false conceptions, to a loss of historical experience.

Thus, the postmodern turn in historiography has its credits and debits. Among its credits is an increase in the historically unique meaning of the past. Yet what about the debit side of the ledger?

Oriental deficiencies of postmodern historical thought. Or: What is indispensable?

There are basically three deficiencies which remain in the wake of the postmodern turn in historiography toward history of everyday life, microhistory and historical anthropology: deficiencies in modernization experience, enlightening rationality and methodological theoretization. These deficiencies are manifested in differing degrees. However, they are an essential by-product of the postmodern shift away from theory and a macrohistorical mediation of historical phenomena focused on global trends running through contemporary social and cultural realities - toward a search for a new mode of understanding.

(a) Vis-à-vis microhistory, historical thought cannot dispense with the experience of modernization and its unique temporal dynamics. If historical self-understanding of the present were to be located beyond the constraints which can be shown to exist macrohistorically in the development of modern patterns of culture, then fundamental dimensions of that history condensed in contemporary social and cultural realities would be eliminated from the awareness of historical self-understanding. Technical progress, economic exploitation of nature, the arms race, the perfecting of domination by bureaucracy and a purely rationalistic interpretation of the human condition would take on the trappings of a *natural* state of affairs - one in which they could then, no longer subject to critique and opposition, continue to thrive unimpeded and unchecked. The "pinpointing" of the historical perspective in microhistory intensifies the depth of experience of historical alterity. Yet it is indisputable that this intensification is achieved at the cost of breadth in scope of historical experience, the temporal ligature linking present and past.

(b) The fascination with the enhanced experience of alterity, of otherness - heightened by microhistorical, everyday historical and anthropological approaches - in the postmodern currents within historiography can amal-

gamate with an emotive historical culture overflowing into the irrational, and with kindred mythopoetic strategies for creating meaning. The metaphor of "cold" abstraction employed by criticism of the use in research of historical theories points in this direction. Faced with such tendencies, historiography cannot dispense with the medium of argumentative and discursive reason. Given the manifold multiplicity of historical identities, what other medium is indeed possible if historiography aims to promote intracultural and intercultural understanding within the global society and communications network now in the process of formation? The "coldness" of modern historical thought lies ultimately in its sober attentiveness to facts - a perspective which views the wistful search for a historically "hale" world as problematic, as a mistaken path in historical orientation. A historiography which is not prepared to sacrifice methodical reason for the buoying warmth of Rousseauesque counter-images juxtaposed to the contemporary experience of an era of crisis remains a source of sobriety.

(c) In contrast with the fragmentation of historical experience into microhistorically processed individual images of the past, historiography cannot dispense with theoretical work on the categoric analysis of historical experience as a whole. Instead of playing off history from below against history from above, elite history against people's history, alien history against one's own, the connection between all these aspects should not be overlooked, and work on inclusive syntheses must not be abandoned. Such categoric analysis and historical synthesizing require a historical bond with the present which involves more than an abstract juxtapositioning of current sociocultural realities vis-à-vis remembered alternatives. The contemporary crisis in orientation can be solved only if the present establishes links and linkages, enriched with concrete experience, with that past which must now take on a new historical meaning for a critique of modernity. The *Annals* School has justifiably been accused of lacking such notions of connectivity, and this continues to be a valid argument against the postmodern current within this school.

The procedures and perspectives of historical thought mentioned belong to the specifically modern organon of historiography. But is this organon sufficient to eliminate the orientational deficiencies deriving from the experience of the negative consequences of modernization? Is the previous set of instruments of historical enlightenment adequate for the task at hand? In view of the new possibilities for historical thinking opened up by the above-sketched turn in historiography toward postmodern thought-forms, a negative answer seems likely. It cannot be disputed that the culture of historical inter-

pretation adhering to the standards of rationality in modern historiography has reached its outer limits in the contemporary experiences which give rise to postmodernism.

How can it surmount these boundaries? A renunciation of the standards of rationality achieved in the process of modernization is as much out of the question as is a restriction solely to their potentialities. If these two alternatives are to be avoided, then a key question must be raised: is there an untapped developmental potential lying in the resources of historical-interpretative reason which has been formed as a product of the modernization shifts experienced by historiography? What about the future ability of historical reason to serve as a source of enlightenment for present conditions via the agency of historical memory? The *capriccio* by Goya mentioned earlier can be seen as just such a question: is reason nothing but a monster-hatching slumber? In conclusion, I would like to argue for the option of trying our hand at awakening.

The awakening of historical reason

In order not to lose my way in the game of metaphors that Goya's sketch - as a symbol of an orientational crisis - can precipitate, I would like to argue systematically, proceeding in three steps. (a) If historical reason is to "awaken", then it is important to clarify first just what is meant by "reason" in historical thought. (b) In addition, it is necessary to elucidate the nature of its "sleep", i.e. its restrictions in historical thought. (c) Finally, it must be made plausible just how these restrictions can be overcome.

(a) What is meant when processes and procedures of historical interpretation involved in the meaning-creating activity of historical interpretation are termed "rational"? "Reason" refers to *thought* in the memory-work of historical consciousness. It signifies formal, contentual and functional facets of historical thought.

Historical thinking is *formally* rational if it is carried out in a specific mode of language and communication: if such thought is conceptually and methodically ordered, related to empirical experience and oriented toward consensus. "Reason" here signifies the argumentative character of historical thought, which is inextricably bound up with its claim to scientific validity. Historical thinking is *contentually* rational if it recalls processes and events of humanization in the past - the elimination of distress, misery, suffering, oppression and exploitation, and emancipation from given or outwardly imposed constraints, empowerment to autonomy and participation. Historical thinking is *functionally* (or *pragmatically*) rational if it has an impact as a factor of orientation on

the life-praxis and process of identity-formation of its subjects - i.e. if historical memory can function to facilitate action and the formation of identity.

(b) These potentialities of reason in historical thinking have generally unfolded only in a highly restricted ("sleeping" or dormant) form in the modernization shifts marking the development of historiography. In *formal* respect, it often tended to fall back on the techniques and methods of historical research and to reject the decisive criteria of meaning in historical interpretation as being external to science. However, historiography nonetheless allowed such criteria a certain role in the writing of history, since without them it is impossible to write any history whatsoever. A historiography which restricts its options for rationality to research-technology renders itself defenceless and subject to the dictates of external authoritarian ideological manipulation in terms of broader meaning - and external here almost always implies "from above". Professionalized into a research technocrat, the historian then has no problem in playing the role of ghostwriter for politicians, sunning himself in the shadows of power.

However, there is also another manifestation of (formal) claims to reason and rationality in the modernization process of historical thought, to which historiography owes its specific claims to rationality. Such claims can appear as omnipotent or tyrannical rationality in the guise of a fully developed system of historical interpretations with pretensions to scientific validity. Science becomes the instrument of the creation of historical meaning. But the claim to scientific validity then hardens into dogmatism of a world-view that emerges as ideology.

In terms of *content*, restricted reason in the modernization process acts to create the very opposite while claiming to advance humanization and barbarism. Thus, the historical experience associated with the symbol of the guillotine stands for the rational principle of equality; the civilizational claims of Europe transmute into the barbarism of imperialism, and so forth. Historical memory which does not see through this dialectic remains at its mercy. It propagates a rational principle of modern living by muzzling and repressing the awareness that what is totally irrational has occurred precisely in the name of this principle: oppression, compulsion, terror, organized murder. The examples of such "blind" reason in the historical process are legion. These are always especially precarious wherever unlimited domination is exercised in the name of freedom (which is understood as the elimination of domination).¹⁹

In *functional* perspective, the modernizing rationality of historical thought must be considered highly limited wherever it leads to consensually-based constraints linking sense of self with images of the enemy in the formative processes of historical identity. It then creates sources of aggression which tie self-affirmation to the negation of the otherness of the others. "Negation" here

is formulated as a principle of action - i.e. as concrete impairment, or even destruction, of the identity of the other. There are numerous examples of such constraints of consensus formation exercised by historical thought, such as all forms of national identity which bind national self-assertion in compulsive fashion to the negation of what is alien and different - in the form of sworn enmity, etc.

(c) Confronted with these constantly recurrent restrictions on reason in the development of modern historical thought, how is it possible to conceive a form of rationality which overcomes such restrictions? A rationality which "awakens" and opens up new potentials for historical interpretation?

Informal terms, such a potential could be tapped in an attempt by historiography to assay its possibilities of rational argumentation in the process of the creation of historical meaning - modestly, without pretension, because meaning cannot be created in the medium of rational argumentation as such, although argumentation does not need to forego its role in creating historical meaning. On the contrary: rational argumentation can and must be employed as a critical check on the creation of historical meaning. Thus, for example, it should be applied against mythopoetic and irrational forms of such creation. To accomplish this, of course, the standards of rationality of modern historical thought must be anchored in the linguistic depths of the creation of historical meaning. They must be rooted at that point where history is shaped by means of historical consciousness from the multiplicity of memories. From the perspective of the postmodern theory of history, this dimension involves nothing but rhetorical and poetic-imaginative processes in the creation of meaning. In countering that view, the modernity of historical thought and its associated claim to enlightenment should be made visible and given a foundation within the framework of the basic narrative patterns of historical consciousness. Historical theories, for example, can be explicated as narrative structures. In this way, they acquire an importance in the mental procedures of historical narration as manifestations of a form of rationality inherent in narration itself.²⁰

Such a theorization does not mean to imply that historiography has an ability to create meaning, even though its formal principles of reasoning in rational argumentation are of some consequence for the application of fundamental criteria of meaning in order to interpret historical continuities in time. Preserving a due measure of intellectual modesty, historical thinking can venture to open itself to extra-scientific and pre-scientific potentials of meaning. Historiography can employ its methodological reasoning to keep alive historically significant memories. In such a case, it can reappropriate the recollected significance (if it corresponds to the notion of reason immanent in argumentation itself). There can then be no argument claiming that traditions which tend to

guarantee meaning are being debilitated by the rationality of scientific thought. Employing the medium of rational argumentation, traditions can even be additionally enhanced through the rationality inherent in such argumentation. The standards of rationality which have accrued to the science of history in the course of modernization changes in historical thinking, are rooted in the narrative structures of historical meaning. They constitute a necessary condition for assuring that historical memory does not forfeit its power of persuasion along with that of truth.

In terms of *content*, historical thinking can elude the danger of a blind reversal of claims to the rationality of human action into irrational results, if it can demonstrate the presence of this dialectic itself in historical experience. In so doing, there has been no abandonment of the standards of reason which have aided man in eliminating distress and suffering and gaining autonomy and discursive ability. Rather, these standards have also assisted us in deepening our understanding of historical experience. They can act as criteria of critical historical judgment by their ability to render the mistakes and unfulfilled pledges of the past visible. Thus, they open up future perspectives for humanizing abilities and action via the agency of historical memory.

In *pragmatic* respects, the constraints inherent in the historical orientation of societal reality and the formation of historical identity can be overcome by an act of bridging: one must link the practical impact of historical knowledge with the communicative principle of the mutual recognition of differing historical standpoints and perspectives. One would be warranted in speaking about "progress" in historical rationality if the ability to recognize the "otherness" of the others and to understand unique meaning in the manifold multiplicity of cultures from different eras, were made a criterion for the formation of consensus in the historical culture of a society. By virtue of such progress, one could overcome the juxtaposition of modernity and postmodernism in historical thinking. That opposition would be supplanted by a move in historical thinking which all those involved in the dispute about the modernity of historical thought might then view as the very goal their own contribution to historical culture was aiming at.

Notes

1 See Wolfgang Iser, 1987. "Vielfalt oder Einheit? Zum gegenwärtigen Spektrum der philosophischen Diskussion um die 'Postmoderne'." *Französische, italienische, amerikanische, deutsche Aspekte*. In: *Philosophisches Jahrbuch*, 94:111-142.

- 2 Cf. Jörn Rüsen. 1987. "Fortschritt, Geschichtsdidaktische Überlegungen zur Fragwürdigkeit einer historischen Kategorie". In: *Geschichte lernen*, 1:8-12.
- 3 Dietmar Kamper. 1987. "Nach der Moderne - Umriss einer Ästhetik der Posthistoire", typescript, p. 13; also idem, "Aufklärung - was sonst? Eine dreifache Polemik gegen ihre Verteidiger". In: Wilem van Reijen (ed.): *Die unvollendete Vernunft: Moderne versus Postmoderne*, 37-46. Frankfurt/M.
- 4 See in particular Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht. 1988. "Posthistoire Now". In: Ursula Link-Heer (ed.), *Epochenschwellen und Epochenstrukturen im Diskurs der Literatur- und Sprachgeschichte*, 34-55. Frankfurt/M.
- 5 On the desert as the form of cultural life of post-histoire, cf. H. Böhlinger. 1985. "Die Ruine in der Post-histoire". In: *Begriffsfelder. Von der Philosophie zur Kunst*, 23-37, esp. 33-36.
- 6 See in particular Helmut Berding. 1969. *Rationalismus und Mythos. Geschichtsauffassung und politische Theorie bei Georges Sorel*. München.
- 7 Thus for example: Fritz Stern. 1963. *Kulturpessimismus als politische Gefahr. Eine Analyse nationaler Ideologie in Deutschland*. Bern.
- 8 Ernst Troeltsch. 1922. *Der Historismus und seine Probleme*, 24. Tübingen.
- 9 Cf. Jürgen Habermas. 1985. *Die Neue Unübersichtlichkeit*. Frankfurt/M.
- 10 Cf. the superb survey by Winfried Speitkamp. 1987. "Die Historikerkontroverse und der Holocaust". In: *Geschichtsdidaktik*, 12:217-228.
- 11 Cf. Hans Erich Bödecker et al. (eds) 1984. *Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft im Zeitalter der Aufklärung*. Göttingen.
- 12 Cf. Horst Walter Blanke & Jörn Rüsen (eds). 1984. *Von der Aufklärung zum Historismus. Zum Strukturwandel des historischen Denkens*. Papeborn.
- 13 Cf. Georg G. Iggers. 1978. *Neue Geschichtswissenschaft. Vom Historismus zur historischen Sozialwissenschaft. Ein internationaler Vergleich*. München.
- 14 Cf. Folke Nordström. 1962. *Goya, Saturn and Melancholy. Studies in the Art of Goya*, 116 ff. Uppsala.
- 15 Michael Stürmer. 1986. *Dissonanzen des Fortschritts*, 209. München.
- 16 Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie. 1980. *Montaliou. Ein Dorf vor dem Inquisitor 1294-1324*. Frankfurt/M.
- 17 Carlo Ginzburg. 1979. *Der Käse und die Würmer. Die Welt eines Müllers um 1600*. Frankfurt/M.
- 18 For a programmatic statement, see Hans Medick. 1984. "Missionare im Ruderboot? Ethnologische Erkenntnisweisen als Herausforderung an die Sozialgeschichte". In: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 10:295-319.
- 19 Cf. Jörn Rüsen. 1981. "Geschichte als Aufklärung? Oder: Das Dilemma des Historischen Denkens zwischen Herrschaft und Emanzipation". In: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 7:189-218.
- 20 Cf. Jörn Rüsen. 1986. *Rekonstruktion der Vergangenheit. Grundzüge einer Historik II: Die Prinzipien der historischen Forschung*. Göttingen.