

German Historical Institute London Bulletin

Bd. 20

1998

Nr. 1

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WHO'S AFRAID OF HERMENEUTICS?

by Roger Chickering

OTTO GERHARD OEXLE and JÖRN RÜSEN (eds), *Historismus in den Kulturwissenschaften: Geschichtskonzepte, historische Einschätzungen, Grundlagenprobleme*, Beiträge zur Geschichtskultur, 12 (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna: Böhlau, 1996), vi + 414 pp. ISBN 3 412 14595 5. DM 78,-

WOLFGANG HARDTWIG and HANS-ULRICH WEHLER (eds), *Kulturgeschichte Heute*, Geschichte und Gesellschaft, Sonderheft 16 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 333 pp. ISBN 3 525 36416 4. DM 78,-

KLAUS LICHTBLAU, *Kulturkrise und Soziologie um die Jahrhundertwende: Zur Genealogie der Kultursoziologie in Deutschland* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1996), 605 pp. ISBN 3 518 58237 2. DM 68,-

German scholars seem to prefer the *fin de siècle* for their public reflection and debate on historical method. The turn of the nineteenth century brought what many observers regard as the founding moment in the modern historical profession, the birth of the phenomenon subsequently labelled 'historicism', which Ernst Troeltsch characterized as 'the historicization of all our thinking about humanity, its culture, and its values'.¹ The subversive implications of this principle lurked behind the bitter debates that raged over *Kulturgeschichte* at the conclusion of the same century. Freighted with new connotations, the same topos of 'cultural history' has fuelled methodological controversies that are currently underway among German historians – so far with more civility and good will than a century ago. The three volumes under review here serve as welcome reminders of this late-century coincidence, for they all relate, in one way or another, to these great moments.

¹ Ernst Troeltsch, *Der Historismus und seine Probleme: Das logische Problem der Geschichtsphilosophie* (Tübingen, 1922), p. 102.

I

The volume edited by Otto Gerhard Oexle and Jörn Rüsen presents a series of papers that were delivered in November 1993 at a conference in Essen, which addressed the problem of *Historismus*. The conference brought together most of the subject's leading scholars. One of the virtues of the volume is thus to provide an accessible review of debates that these scholars have carried out at great length during the last two decades. The principal issue in the debates has been the question of innovation, the extent to which methodologies that took root in the German historical profession in the early nineteenth century represented a break with the practices of the eighteenth century. One camp has argued that the approach connoted by the term historicism – the definition of history as an end in itself, the centrality of historical individuality, and the development of attendant hermeneutical techniques – represented a paradigmatic shift, the modernization of not only historical method, but also the very definition of history. This position has been ably argued by Rüsen himself, Horst-Walter Blancke, and Ulrich Muhlack. Along with Georg Iggers, Hans-Peter Reill has most systematically defended the opposing position, that the historiography of the early nineteenth century was prefigured in the practices of German academic historians of the late Enlightenment.

Much of the present volume is devoted to restatements of these positions by the principal proponents, as well as by their students. Reill again emphasizes, this time in connection with late-eighteenth-century vitalism, essential continuities between the two traditions. In an analysis of vitalistic elements in the philosophy of Wilhelm von Humboldt, whose *Ideenlehre* figures centrally in the case for historiographical revolution, Reill concludes that historicism represented 'no repudiation of the *Aufklärung's* scientism' (p. 65). Rüsen and Muhlack remain unpersuaded. Rüsen again insists that historicism posed, if not a new paradigm, then at least what he calls a 'disciplinary matrix' (p. 127). Muhlack again calls historicism a 'wissenschaftshistorische Revolution' (p. 219). Gerrit Walther, a student of Muhlack, seeks the signs of paradigmatic upheaval in the realm of rhetoric, in the development of a language to capture the 'new and total reality of the post-revolutionary era' (p. 104). This effort led, on the one hand, to the rhetorical deployment of 'universal concepts' such as *Einheit* and *Menschheit*, and, on the other, to what Walther calls a 'stunted' (*gedrungene*) style, which characterized the staccato of Ranke's narratives and corresponded to

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the 'explosively expanding fullness of what was to be narrated' (p. 107).

Despite the occasional nuance offered in these essays, the impression persists that the debate over the originality of historicism has grown tired. As the conflict settles into the recesses of detail, many of the issues have become blurred. The paper by Blancke, Rösen's student, suggests that Reill's views have found significant accommodation among those who advocate the paradigm-shift of the early nineteenth century. Even as it insists on a basic distinction in *Wissenschaftsmatrizen*, Blancke's essay, which is entitled 'Break and Continuity', concedes the extensive modernization of Germany historiography during the *Spätaufklärung*.

Other facets of the *Historismusproblem*, which were likewise rehearsed at the conference, send out more sparks. The first turns on the question of valences; and here the alliances that were formed in the other debate have broken. Muhlack has embraced the reorientation that took place in the early nineteenth century as the breakthrough to modern historical scholarship, whose tenets continue to govern the practice of history to this day. The view of Rösen and Blancke has been more tempered. Like Iggers, these scholars have portrayed the same reorientation as a *Verlustgeschichte*, in which a great deal was sacrificed at the altar of political history; and they have characterized historicism as a nineteenth-century paradigm that has been displaced in the twentieth by the broader and more compelling claims of the French *Annalistes* and the German practitioners of *Historische Sozialwissenschaft*. The debates over the moral accounts occupied much of the discussion in Essen, where Egon Flaig, a student of Oexle, brought the indictment against historicism to a head when he argued that the reorientation of the early nineteenth century suborned a political discourse that was 'directed against the right of peoples to revise or found anew the political order by means of a conscious act' (p. 223).

Flaig thus joined Iggers in emphasizing the ideological freight with which the new historical methods – their enduring claims to general relevance notwithstanding – were loaded from the moment of their birth. In an essay that marks the highlight of this volume, Oexle provides a framework for sorting the enduring claims from the ideological freight. He speaks of historicism first in the broader sense (which he labelled *Historismus I* some years ago). This phenomenon pertains, in the manner that Troeltsch initially used the term, to basic

historicizing practices that continue in rich variation to characterize many of the modern academic disciplines, from philosophy to literary criticism.² This variety Oexle distinguishes from another, which he has called *Historismus II*. This one pertains to the more specific developments associated with the German historical profession in the early nineteenth century, but it has been a persistent source of trouble to historians since Friedrich Meinecke invented it in 1936. Meinecke's intervention defined the terrain on which historians have understood the phenomenon of historicism to this day, but the price has been high. 'In all of the other cultural sciences the word *Historismus* suggests still relevant modern problems', notes Oexle, 'while by contrast, historians have followed a trajectory (*Weichenstellung*) that has led away from this general discourse on the problem of historicism and modernity, hence away from a general discourse with the other cultural sciences' (p. 159). If Troeltsch's understanding of historicism emphasized the relativism that threatened to corrode the foundations of every *Weltanschauung*, Meinecke's celebrated a German ideological achievement that could alone, he claimed, contend with historical relativism. Failure to distinguish the one position from the other, Oexle argues, has left historians isolated in the German academy, still captive to an agenda set less by Ranke than by Meinecke.

The final section of the volume is devoted to the influence of German historiography in other lands. It comprises chapters on Italy, Russia, and the United States. The most illuminating of these comparative essays is Wolfgang Küttler's analysis of the *Historismusproblem* in the GDR. Here the ideological ramifications of the phenomenon governed the historians' discourse from the start, but they underwent a significant modulation during the second half of the GDR's life. Initially, Küttler explains, the East German project was to stand Meinecke on his head in the name of positivism and to demonize historicism – to portray it, in categories devised by Georg Lukacs, as a phase in the 'destruction of reason' and the prehistory of German fascism. The re-evaluation of historical traditions that began in the 1970s, however, extended to Marx's own intellectual roots and sug-

² Otto Gerhard Oexle, 'Die Geschichtswissenschaft im Zeichen des Historismus: Bemerkungen zum Standort der Geschichtsforschung', *Historische Zeitschrift*, 238 (1984), pp. 17-55.

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gested the wisdom of discriminating between reactionary and progressive varieties of *Historismus*.

Still another question hovers over this volume. It is not mentioned often in the essays, most of which dwell on staple issues; but it provided the occasion of the conference in Essen. Historians must return to the discussion of historicism, remarks Rüsen, because it 'has again become chic' to talk about 'cultural memory and "lieux de mémoire"' (p. 120). In other words, historicism is back, its basic hermeneutical practices repackaged in the new cultural history. Rüsen, the historiographer of *Historische Sozialwissenschaft*, is uneasy about these recent developments, for he has long argued that the supersession of historicism in Germany during the 1970s was an epoch-making achievement. Frank Ankersmit provides the most sustained response to this argument in a jarring essay that concludes the volume. Ankersmit, the historiographer of narrativity, shares Rüsen's perceptions about the relevance of historicism to contemporary discussions, but his excitement over the return reflects an appreciation of historicism that is closer to Muhlack's. Historicism, or what Ankersmit calls 'the historical idea' is, he explains, the 'most fruitful concept that has ever been developed in the history of historical theory' (p. 401). Its proper modern idiom is narrativity, 'a historical theory of narrative substance that has been basically purged of all its metaphysical baggage (*Wucherungen*) and the last traces of Enlightenment substantialism' (p. 403). Its operating premise is that 'the language of the historian does not reflect the coherence of the past, but rather constitutes this coherence' itself (p. 403). This is a fair characterization of the beliefs of at least some of the scholars who are now calling themselves cultural historians, but equating it with historicism, however defined, requires an understanding of this term that finds little echo in the volume's other essays.

II

Ankersmit's essay advertises the extent to which the *Historismusproblem* looms over methodological controversies that have swelled in recent years in Germany. Here the focus of controversy has been the deficiencies of that variety of social history that Rüsen and others have characterized as the German successor to historicism. In emphasizing the modernization of social, economic, and political structures and institutions, the practitioners of *Historische Sozialwissenschaft* have defined a compelling research agenda and have produced an imposing

body of scholarship, but they are vulnerable to the charge of reifying basic historical processes, in which human beings figure as little more than passive objects. The 'subjective factor' – human perceptions of these processes and cultural constructions of their meaning – intrudes, so continues the indictment, at best as a secondary, derivative feature of social and economic change, an epiphenomenon of more fundamental (and measurable) social processes, like class-formation. Attempts to reclaim the 'subjective factor' in historical analysis have thus assembled in the 1990s in Germany under the banner of cultural history. Its central object is to remedy what has been lost or systematically neglected in social history – including an understanding of the high costs that modernization exacted from the multitudes who endured it. The defenders of *Historische Sozialwissenschaft* have in turn drawn attention to the risks of this 'new' cultural history, a remedy that threatens, they claim, to resurrect methodologies and ideologies that have duly been buried with historicism. The neuralgic point is the interpretive procedures that are evidently required for access to the realm of constructed meanings. The techniques that cultural historians have adopted, most commonly under the rubric of 'thick description', bear an uncomfortable resemblance to what was known in a Rankean idiom as *Einfühlung* or *Einverstehen*. Whatever it is called, this hermeneutic indulges the historian's subjectivity and ideological preferences, for it resists the kind of methodological control that 'historical social scientists' have found in analysing serial data and in the open embrace of a Weberian theory of ideal types.

Questions of accommodation between these methodologies have driven the recent controversies. Much of the impetus in these discussions has come from those who populate the fortresses of *Historische Sozialwissenschaft* itself, particularly the journal *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*.³

³ For example: Ute Daniel, 'Klio unter Kulturschock: Zu den aktuellen Debatten der Geschichtswissenschaft', *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht*, 48 (1997), pp. 195-219; ead., "'Kultur' und 'Gesellschaft': Überlegungen zum Gegenstandsbereich der Sozialgeschichte", *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 19 (1993), pp. 69-99; Peter Jelavich, 'Poststrukturalismus und Sozialgeschichte – aus amerikanischer Perspektive', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 21 (1995), pp. 259-89; Olaf Blaschke and Frank-Michael Kuhlemann (eds), *Religion im Kaiserreich: Milieus, Mentalitäten, Krisen* (Gütersloh, 1996).

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The volume that Wolfgang Hardtwig and Hans-Ulrich Wehler have edited is thus a primary document in the current discussions; and like a number of other such documents, it suggests an effort at damage control.⁴ It purports to fulfill a number of objects. Like the useful anthology that Lynn Hunt edited several years ago, it furnishes an introduction to some of the basic concepts and techniques of the new cultural history.⁵ An extended essay by Thomas Mergel provides a background survey of methodological controversies among the ethnographers. A similar survey by Carola Lipp summarizes a large body of social-science literature on the theme of political culture. Ernst Hanisch does the same for the 'linguistic turn'. A number of the essays are by younger scholars who have exploited methods of cultural history in their own research. These include Philipp Sarasin's smart report on the history of hygienic practices, Frank-Michael Kuhlemann's piece on religion, and an essay by Charlotte Tacke and Hans-Gerhard Haupt on the challenges posed by a cultural history of European nationalism.

The tone of the essays in this volume is nevertheless a great deal more cautious and tentative than in Hunt's. Cultural history is treated here like a pill, the benefits of which are not entirely clear even to the doctors. Postmodernism looks like the Trojan horse of 'neo-historicism' (p. 59). Discourse analysis has awakened the spirit of Hegel (p. 170). The ambiguities, inconsistencies, and conceptual confusions that have attended the study of culture and *mentalités*, and hence what one author calls the 'euphorically celebrated history of mentalities' (p. 182), are the objects of repeated strictures. Hanisch's crusty diagnosis of the linguistic turn is the most alarmed of the essays, but it speaks to anxieties that pervade the volume. 'Are the traditions of western rationalism still valid', he asks, 'or are they not?' (p. 219).

Many of these strictures speak to difficulties that have not sufficiently occupied North American enthusiasts of cultural history, to whom Clifford Geertz has supplied much of the theoretical canon. The general uneasiness in the present volume corresponds, in all events, to the level of theoretical abstraction at which German scholars have chosen generally to engage the problem of cultural history and its

⁴ See Thomas Mergel and Thomas Welskopp (eds), *Geschichte zwischen Kultur und Gesellschaft: Beiträge zur Theoriedebatte* (Munich, 1997).

⁵ Lynn Hunt (ed.), *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley, 1989).

relationship to social history. In this respect, the most interesting aspect of the volume is the attempt to make the pill more palatable by identifying a defensible theory, which can open the basic insights of cultural history without loosening the secure moorings of social history. The essays by Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey on Pierre Bourdieu, Bernd Roeck on Aby Warburg, and Lutz Raphael on the practical implications of several contending theories all represent facets of this enterprise, as do the remarks of August Nitschke, an anthropologist, who claims to have found a way to synthesize social and cultural history in what he calls a process-oriented as opposed to an anthropomorphic understanding of culture. In the end, though, the volume's most compelling defense of cultural history – the pill's sweetest sugar-coating – is to fashion a Max Weber to fit it.

In view of the Weberian aura that has bathed (west) German social history during the past several decades, this project looks at first glance like an act of sacrilege. The governing concepts and methodologies of *Historische Sozialwissenschaft* flow directly from a common reading of the Great Sociologist. Weber's theory of rationalization has enabled German social historians to address secular processes of modernization in a manner that is free of the taint of Marxism. Weber's reflections on the ideal type and 'interpretive causal analysis' have furnished the practical criteria by which German social historians have sought to free their research from the taint of hermeneutics.

Nevertheless, the search for an alternative Weber has been underway for several years; and the essays in this volume document how far it has proceeded.⁶ In their introduction, Hardtwig and Wehler concede that historical social science has relied on a 'halbierter Weber'. Ignoring the other half, they note candidly, has resulted in the neglect of 'the world of subjective experiences, frames of perception and meaning, the forms of symbolic understanding that guide behaviour' (p. 12). Other authors dwell on the same theme. In an analysis of Weber's reception in the

⁶ Friedrich Tenbruck, 'Die Aufgaben der Kultursoziologie', *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, 31 (1979), pp. 399-421; Wilhelm Hennis, *Max Webers Fragestellung: Studien zur Biographie des Werks* (Tübingen, 1987); Detlev Peukert, *Max Webers Diagnose der Moderne* (Göttingen, 1989); Friedrich Jaeger, 'Der Kulturbegriff im Werk Max Webers und seine Bedeutung für eine moderne Kulturgeschichte', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 18 (1992), pp. 371-93.

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Federal Republic, Mergel points out that the sociologist returned to Germany after 1945 in a 'Parsonized' form (p. 56).⁷ Redressing the balance, restoring the Weber who was sensitive to the symbolic dimension and the weight of cultural constraint in human affairs, is a central motif not only in Mergel's essay, but also in the thoughtful pieces by Oexle, Lipp, and Gilcher-Holtey. Given the reigning distrust of hermeneutics, there is little danger that Weber will now be 'Geertzified'. Geertz's name, like Foucault's, is in fact conspicuous in the infrequency with which it is invoked in this volume. By a wide margin in this volume, the contemporary theoretician of choice to preside over the marriage of social and cultural history is Bourdieu. For all their eclecticism, his theories seem best suited to blend the current interest in culture with the insights of Weber (and Georg Simmel, as some authors note) without sacrificing the hard-won methodological rigour of *Historische Sozialwissenschaft*. Bourdieu's achievement, notes Lipp, is most clearly to make 'manifest the structural and political elements in culture and the cultural elements in social structure' (p. 102).

III

Judgement is best withheld on whether it is fair or accurate to claim Max Weber in the name of cultural history, as this term is understood today. The test of this claim surely lies foremost in what Oexle has called the 'pivotal era (*Achsenzeit*) of modern scholarship' between 1890 and 1930 (Hardtwig and Wehler, p. 15). In this era, the scientific analysis of 'culture' already stood at the centre of academic debate; and the concepts that issued from these controversies have proved remarkably durable. Furthermore, the German historical profession's isolation for much of the present century followed from its own emphatic rejection of the kind of social history that the term *Kulturgeschichte* then implied. The writing of social history in Germany thereupon fell to economists and sociologists, who were also at the forefront of methodological discussions about the *Kulturwissenschaften* generally.

⁷ On this theme see Guenther Roth, 'Max Weber's Empirical Sociology in Germany and the United States: Tensions between Partisanship and Scholarship', *Central European History*, 2 (1969), pp. 196-215.

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Klaus Lichtblau's study is an excellent place to begin the historical analysis of modern theories of culture. Lichtblau is a sociologist, but he has written a powerful piece of intellectual history, which rests on a close and imaginative reading of canonical texts. Its theme is the encounter of German sociology's founding fathers with the 'crisis of cultural modernism' at the beginning of this century. Amid the dissolution of the beliefs and cultural certainties of occidental culture, these scholars struggled to define methodologies that could support systematic, scientific analysis of cultural fragmentation and address phenomena that eluded the categories of reason. Lichtblau's account focuses on two generations of German social thinkers, whose principal representatives were respectively Weber and Simmel, then Max Scheler and Karl Mannheim. The book revolves about their analytical confrontation with several related challenges, the metaphysical and ethical legacy of Nietzsche, the 'aesthetic remystification of the world', and the 'rehabilitation of love'. These challenges were linked in their apparent defiance of accepted modes of *fachsoziologische* analysis. Nietzsche's work seemed to embody nothing less than an 'anti-sociology', the triumphant repudiation of any attempt to subject cultural or social behaviour to regulative modes of understanding. Aesthetic creativity, whether musical, literary, or artistic, likewise resisted sociological analysis, in so far as it, like religion, invoked meanings that were elusively figured in metaphors, symbols, and other signs. Similar features appeared to bar methodological access to the realm of eros, the anti- or arational *Lebensmacht* in which the rational pursuit of interest, the concept that underpinned the psychology in modern sociology, could claim little purchase.

Lichtblau's analysis of the modernist challenge to German sociology begins with a survey of the *Nietzsche-Rezeption* in the work of Simmel and Weber, as well as Scheler and Werner Sombart. It then addresses the efforts of the same thinkers to work out a sociology of aesthetic experience and erotic emotion. The final part of the volume argues that the same 'crisis of modernity' which the sociologists of the first generation experienced as the fragmentation of both culture and knowledge of it was played out during the Weimar years as a *Wissenschaftskrise*, a bitter, intergenerational academic debate over the 'basic relativity and partisan character of all knowledge' (p. 419). Before the Nazi *Machtergreifung* brought it to a sudden conclusion, the debate had spawned its own resolution in the form of a modern sociology of

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knowledge – ‘a genuine sociological theory of culture (p. 456)’ – which was most ably represented, in Lichtblau’s view, by Mannheim.

It is impossible to do justice here to the range, richness, insight, or provocation that Lichtblau’s study offers. One facet of the study will reward brief attention, however, for it suggests how much the current German controversies over social and cultural history are replicating scholarly debates of nearly a century ago. To this degree, Lichtblau’s analysis engages centrally the question of Max Weber’s relevance to the new cultural history.

Weber shared a general belief that aesthetic and erotic phenomena made up a distinct category of ‘cultural objectifications’, whose study required categories of understanding that were unlike those appropriate to the analysis of modern, rationalized forms of social behaviour. These cultural phenomena reflected instead an irrational order of experience, which could be expressed, communicated, and ‘objectified’ only by symbolic means. The difficulty was, in Weber’s view, the incommunicability of this ‘subjective experience’ (p. 335n), the absence of external controls to test the intersubjective validity of meaning symbolically conveyed in this way. These meanings remained subjective, individual, and immanent; they could not be counted, nor could their validity be ratified generally – ‘even’, as Weber once described the acid test, ‘by a Chinaman’.⁸

Weber’s fascination with the erotic and aesthetic dimensions of human behaviour correlated with his legendary ambivalence about the processes that promised – or threatened – to temper the non-rational features of modern life. From one standpoint, however, the inaccessibility of the aesthetic and erotic to genuine scientific knowledge represented a fundamental defect in Weber’s eyes, for his sociological project was, as has recently been noted, ultimately directed towards a model of rational social action.⁹ The resulting epistemological dichotomies in the work of both Simmel and Weber are the topic of extended analysis in Lichtblau’s volume. He notes that for the two

⁸ Max Weber, ‘Die “Objektivität” sozialwissenschaftlicher und sozialpolitischer Erkenntnis’, in id., *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre*, ed. Johannes Winckelmann (Tübingen, 1982), p. 155.

⁹ Thomas Welskopp, ‘Der Mensch und die Verhältnisse: “Handeln” und “Struktur” bei Max Weber und Anthony Giddens’, in Mergel and Welskopp, *Geschichte zwischen Kultur und Gesellschaft* (as in note 4), p. 55.

sociologists, the sphere of 'aesthetic and erotic values' remained, in its 'Autonomie und Eigengesetzlichkeit' (pp. 343-4), distinct from the 'genuine "rational" forms of human behaviour (*Lebensführung*)' (p. 265). If the one realm constituted the field of proper social-scientific analysis, the other was home to hermeneutics; it demanded something quite different, the employment of the 'empathetic-receptive capacities' (p. 301) and an 'understanding of symbols in the tradition of Goethe, Schleiermacher, and the romantics' (p. 217). But the terms that further marked this distinction were invidious. Hermeneutics could not yield 'real' knowledge of society or culture. It was passive, receptive, private, experiential, impressionistic, and – as the commentaries of both Simmel and Weber on gender made painfully clear – feminine. Simmel's views on academic history, which Lichtblau analyses under the rubric of 'masculine *Wissenschaft* and "feminine culture"', are instructive in this light. They did not altogether flatter the traditions in which this discipline had matured. "The feminine-natural", reads Lichtblau's paraphrase, 'could provide the basis for quite "original contributions (*Leistungen*)", in the sense of an empathetic, re-experiencing (*einfühlend-nacherlebenden*) "understanding" of past events' (p. 301). In this light, 'historical knowledge' carried an asterisk.

The question is apt whether the epistemological dualism can be sustained, now that Foucault has drawn attention to the symbolic meanings that massively gild the iron cage itself. Lichtblau's study raises questions, in all events, about the legitimacy of using a Weberian sweetener to coat the pill of cultural history, at least if this discipline is supposed to reconcile hermeneutics and 'historical social science'. In more than one sense, Weber and Geertz inhabit different worlds. The dichotomies that Simmel and Weber identified continue to mark off the basic oppositions in methodological controversies today, for neither thinker could suggest the framework of a unified science of culture, which would blend hermeneutics and scientific analysis in order to objectify the subjective and allow for the rational scrutiny of the non-rational. Lichtblau, however, is hopeful none the less, for he is persuaded that this feat was accomplished during the *Achsenzeit*. The achievement belongs, he insists, to Mannheim. Lichtblau's devotion to this epigonal figure is perhaps the most remarkable feature of this remarkable book. "The resolution of this "quarrel among the faculties"', he announces in the beginning, 'is Mannheim, straight and simple' (p. 22). Mannheim's essential contribution, argues Lichtblau, was to work out a 'documen-

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tary interpretation of symbols', by means of which it would be possible 'to situate specifically irrational moods, emotions, and experiences (*Erlebnisgehalten*) within the structural complexes that, in a given epoch, process meaning (*sinnverarbeitende Strukturbildungen*)' (p. 500). Mannheim hence defined social existence as a 'system of meanings (*Sinnzusammenhang*)', a 'mental infrastructure that helped lend form to mental elements in the superstructure'. From this perspective, the social scientist could 'relate meaning to meaning' in the context of a 'unified context of meaning specific to a social group or historical epoch' (p. 514). These unified contexts were particularly evident, Mannheim believed, in generational groupings.

Mannheim does emerge here as a precocious thinker, whose categories of analysis seem to offer succour to both sides in the current German debates on cultural history. Perhaps for this reason, the impression is difficult to suppress that Lichtblau has 'Bourdieuized' his hero. Mannheim, Lichtblau explains, proposed to 'determine the mental habitus of those whom he studied', an undertaking that promised a comprehensive approach to culture, which encompassed 'all the statements and cultural objectifications of a person, a group, or even an entire epoch' (p. 503). Here, however, Mannheim's difficulties began (as do Bourdieu's). The 'synopsis' that captures this habitus, Lichtblau confesses, was to be 'reconstructed by the observer himself' (p. 503). And to the question of the 'knowing subject', the licence by which the observer was entitled to engage in this reconstruction, Mannheim could appeal only to the privileges of *freischwebende Intelligenz*, the intellectuals who 'hovered free of partisan and ideological attachments' (p. 526).¹⁰

So the wheel comes full turn. Mannheim's epistemological credentials are as venerable as they are familiar. Their lineage extends at least

¹⁰ 'Position in the classification struggle', notes Bourdieu at the conclusion of a prodigious exercise in classification, 'depends on position in the class structure; and social subjects – including intellectuals, who are not those best placed to grasp that which defines the limits of their thought of the social world, that is, the illusion of the absence of limits – are perhaps never less likely to transcend the "limits of their minds" than in the representations they have and give of their position, which defines those limits.' *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA, 1984), p. 484.

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as far back as the early nineteenth century, to the great scholar who defined the historian's hermeneutic privilege on the same basis, if in a different idiom, as the ability to 'extinguish the self'. Lichtblau's study thus invites the same conclusion as do the other two volumes under review here. Ranke's ghost will not be banished easily from the debates at the end of the present century. Nor is it clear that it can be – or should.

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