

## Historical Consciousness in Youth. Theoretical and Exemplary Empirical Analyses

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**Abstract:** The thesis that historical consciousness is an anthropological competence and category is called into question. A concept of modern historical consciousness is outlined which from then on serves as a working concept. This kind of historical consciousness, it is argued, is not a universal anthropological fact, but a result of the development of occidental cultures and societies. Long since a great number of groups and individuals have been deeply affected by this development in which the establishment of a scientific world view and methodical thinking played a major role. Their historical consciousness is modern since it refers to a radically temporalised and dynamic world and since it ties partial representations of this world to (implicit) criteria of validity. Moreover it is closely connected with the possibility of self-critical reflections which are grounded in the historically mediated encounter with strangers. After a concise overview of the important questions and the state of the art in different disciplines, selected results of a broader qualitative-empirical study are presented. In the group discussions which were carried out with young people—only results from a discussion with thirteen to fourteen year old grammar-school pupils (*Gymnasiasten*) are presented here—the analysis revealed clear indicators of a specifically modern historical consciousness. Looked at closely this consciousness is committed in a surprisingly high degree to scientific-methodical standards of rationality. One may welcome this as a successful implementation of a life form oriented towards rationality into young people's everyday life or deplore it as a symptom of the distortion of pragmatic orientations for activity and living by scientific standards: first of all it is a fact that the commitment to tie the reconstruction of past realities, historical events and contexts to an operation of knowledge which is intersubjectively transparent and rationally justified and to reflect this is strongly developed in the young persons we analysed. Their thinking proves to be specifically "modern" also in other respects. In addition to the description of the historical knowledge in content and the historical interests of the young people, this finding is described in detail. Finally it is discussed to which degree the central finding can be applied against the widespread lamentation of an alleged poor historical consciousness of pupils.

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"Again and again, studies revealed a no doubt pathetic state of historical education. Of course, the question was never raised, nor of course answered, whether the level of historical education had ever been better. Never mind the fact that the relation between historical knowledge and historical awareness has remained unsolved in this context and therefore also what the significance of the empirical findings was in the first place."<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Historical Consciousness: Anthropological Universal or Cultural Achievement?

Man's "historical sense" differentiates him from other living beings. At first sight, this view arouses approval, but soon, the need for explanation and correction sets in. There is likely to be a consensus, however, that the *historia rerum gestarum*, which is associated with complex communicative and mental performances, with many and diverse forms of media and representations, can be found in man alone. No doubt, other living beings, too, have a memory and are capable of mnemonic performances.<sup>2</sup> However, one would not want to attribute historical sense or historical consciousness to animals as long as by that one means—roughly speaking—a symbolically mediated ability and practice to merge remembered past events with interpretations of the present and expectations of the future as well as to integrate one's own experiences and actions into such meaningful structures. The "sense of time and timelessness as well as the bond that holds them together" (BRETONE 1991, p.86) is as specifically human as the ability to reflect upon this "cohesion" and to orient one's actions historically. This sense presupposes, according to T.S. ELIOT as cited by Mario BRETONE, "that one does not merely perceive the pastness of the past but also its presence" (ELIOT 1920)<sup>3</sup>—and what is more, one should add, its possible significance for the future. [1]

Explanations and corrections are necessary in two respects: On the one hand it is by no means obvious what *precisely* we mean by historical sense or historical consciousness. On the other hand, the claim of universal applicability of the anthropological definition raises doubts upon closer inspection not because it

1 Hartmann LEITNER (1994, p.5).

2 Animals, too, have a memory (cf. the entry "Tiere" [animals] in PETHES & RUCHATZ 2001).

3 BRETONE does of course not share ELIOT's conception of a basically atemporal and ontological, that is profoundly ahistorical synchronicity of great literature, but rather offers the poet a conception of history, tradition and present past that presents the historian (and his kindred spirits) with the task of recognising in the complex course of similarities and analogies, distances and differences historical connections and developments.

draws a distinct line between man and other genera, but rather because it attributes identical historical consciousness to all human beings. We would like to remind the reader that not too long ago many experts agreed that the above claim of an anthropological historical sense or historical consciousness represented an inadequate generalisation of a merely selective observation. A closer look would reveal the need to distinguish between peoples, societies and cultures *with* historical consciousness from those for whom history and historical consciousness is simply alien. Peoples, societies and cultures *without a history*, so goes the familiar thesis, necessarily have no consciousness of history either. As a rule, this differentiation is linked to the availability of a *writing system* and occasionally, as in W.F. HEGEL's philosophy of history, to the existence of the *state* (HEGEL 1994). As is well known, HEGEL's "History" only commences with the state, which makes it possible and ensures that there is remembering, recording and thus preserving, which previously, during so-called "pre-history", necessarily had to sink into oblivion. According to this view, only with the emergence of the state do peoples leave pre-historic, acephalous, uncivilised communities and enter history. The nexus that links together state and history has long and justifiably been broken. [2]

The view that "scriptless" peoples (often described as "backwards") are without history and historical consciousness has persisted. This is supposed to be true for the peoples of dead epochs as well as for so-called primitive cultures that are still scattered across the globe today. This perspective is however not tenable to such a general degree. It evidently took no notice of oral history and historical consciousness informed by it. This ignorant view of historical consciousness that is not reliant upon written records or the "textual objectivation" (*textuelle Objektivation*) of "life-forms" (*Lebensformen*) and collectively significant events is, so it seems, no longer current either. Rüdiger SCHOTT (1968) has analysed and "relativised" the numerous explanations and versions of this thesis. He did however get caught up in contradictions and blurred important distinctions. We will come back to that later. [3]

We do agree with SCHOTT and others that the view of a necessary link between history or historical consciousness and literacy *can* betray a nostrocetric prejudice. Quite often, this link follows or followed the dubious "logic of progress" of a socio-cultural evolution where a writing system is not just seen as a milestone within the development of human "life-forms" (*Lebensformen*), but rather as a dividing line between two, by no means equally valued, ways of being human. As summarised by Jan ASSMANN (1992, p.66), historical sense or historical consciousness "has turned into an anthropological universal" precisely when the "nexus between writing system and history was dissolved." According to the author (in agreement with SCHOTT), this attitude rehabilitated views like of Erich ROTHACKER, who unambiguously saw historical consciousness as a part of human nature.<sup>4</sup> If "historical consciousness" means nothing more than man's

4 ROTHACKER's anthropology of historical man certainly exerted a certain influence on German-speaking psychologists, in particular on those who put this author into a line of tradition from Johann Gottfried HERDER to Henri BERGSON and Wilhelm DILTHEY to the middle of the 20th century. Hans THOMAE, who was the most significant proponent of the *biographical method* in the German-speaking world, took it for granted that an adequate understanding of man can only

basic ability to recall and imagine past events narratively and relate those to interpretations of the present and expectations of the future then there is certainly much evidence for this view. [4]

Presenting comprehensive ethnological material, Klaus MÜLLER—as SCHOTT before him—thus leads his readers through the long-vanished worlds of primordial cultures, to an age millennia before our calendar. He explains that it was common practice even then to "take up the past by telling stories and making visible the arches that span over all times and join them together into a unified whole" (MÜLLER 1999, p.8). Long before the emergence of archaic advanced civilisations during the Copper and Bronze Age at the turn of the 5th to the 4th millennium BC humans lived in a multi-dimensional interweave of a social space-time and expressed what MÜLLER calls their *historical understanding* (*Geschichtsverständnis*). This understanding determined the perception of the spacio-material environment, which was partly made up of historical signs (*Geschichtszeichen*): "An environment emerges from the past and the history of the people that inhabit it; it is *part of their culture* and shapes their identity" (ibid, p.24). He goes on: "People told each other about the more significant events; the more importance was attached to these stories the more they were told, again and again, across the generations. They were always linked to certain people, and even more to the places where the events took place," perhaps to a special tree, a certain place at the shore of a river, an elevation. "When one walked past them the memory was revived like a piece of wood catching fire" (ibid, p.25). The country was covered with such *mnemonic places*, that Pierre NORA calls *lieux de mémoire* (ibid, p.30). The environment was the myth and event-historical *space-time-world* of a group, landmarks were at the same time markings in a temporal topography from which a community derived its orientation and identity. A similar mnemonic and identity-relevant function was served by numerous objects, which this position views as material narrative abbreviations. Similarly, they can display symbolic, identity-giving and social-integrative power.<sup>5</sup> Such objects *stand for* stories and past events and are often treated like relics, kept in a special place and cared for, etc. [5]

Well, *in this very basic and non-specific* sense historical understanding or historical consciousness and the mnemonic practice of the recalling and imagining of previous times may indeed count as an anthropological universal, regardless of specific variations and differences. Be it myths, legends or mundane event-historical data and stories: according to MÜLLER, without continuous oral handing down even primordial cultures could not conceive of a present and future and consciously shape them. Narrated time is an anthropological universal. Among the many functions for a community that can be fulfilled by historical consciousness MÜLLER's ethnological report focuses on two of them: the

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be obtained through the categories of chronological extension and not through spacial categories. Scientific psychology, too, is said to be committed to this BERGSONian dictum, so that his biographical approach, which placed the individuals' life history in the context of a collective history, was a matter of course. For a critical acknowledgement of THOMAE's conception, see STRAUB (1989, pp.9-33).

5 On the concept of narrative abbreviation see RÜSEN, FRÖHLICH, HORSTKÖTTER & SCHMIDT (1991, pp.230f.) and STRAUB (2001a, p.76).

collective and personal formation of identity and social integration. The telling of stories which relate to the horizon of a common history and partially recall it contributes to both these functions to a large degree.<sup>6</sup> [6]

So far, so good. The view outlined above, as hinted at by SCHOTT himself but not taken seriously enough, contains an important problem. The anthropologisation of history and historical consciousness does correct the nostrocetric devaluation of state and "scriptless" peoples and other groups which, for a long time, were considered not to have a history and develop a consciousness thereof for the simple reason that they did not do it by the same means as "us" or "people like us". The anthropologisation of history and historical consciousness is however based on a rather delicate presupposition: a de-differentiation of the concepts in question. Upon closer inspection, it becomes obvious that there are many differences in what is presented as a conceptual unity: historical sense or historical consciousness is by no means always the same. The supposed uniformity and unity of the concept cannot be maintained empirically, neither from a historical, a cross-cultural comparative, sociological or psychological perspective. If one considers historical consciousness to be an anthropological universal one should define the concept. It then becomes immediately obvious that talking about human nature in general forces one to deal with rather general definitions. Such definitions do not permit one to *categorically grasp and differentially describe* varying conceptions of the self and the world that are rooted in *variable relations to time*. By not settling on such a vague and imprecise concept and therefore on a concept that not least ignores what history and historical consciousness in a complex modern society inevitably have come to mean, one has to direct one's attention to precisely these differences in relation to time. It then becomes obvious that *modern* historical consciousness of complex societies is not limited to the basic operations of a narrative constitution and examination of time, but rather—*inter alia*—that it *includes specific dealings with contingency and change*. This alone unmistakably distinguishes it from other forms of communicative ordering of time and construction of reality. [7]

SCHOTT himself points this out. In his widely read article, speaking on behalf of the historical consciousness of peoples without a writing system, he claimed that it "is not in principle different from that of peoples with a writing system" (ibid, p.200), but then points out that "mythical time" is to be sharply distinguished from the "historical in the narrow sense." SCHOTT illustrates this in the following important remarks:

"Many peoples without a writing system did not recognise a chronological course of events in an uninterrupted cohesion of causal events. Historical events either took place episodically, or they were based on something indefinitely valid. Their historical consciousness thus lacked the consciousness of 'historicity' in the sense that everything is fundamentally understood as changeable and at the same time internally cohesive" (ibid, p.194). [8]

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6 We imagine that narration will be called upon to do even more work regarding this matter—despite NIETZSCHE, BENJAMIN and FOUCAULT.

In our view, this difference is by no means marginal but rather essential. SCHOTT misleadingly plays it down by rejecting the "opposition" of mythical time in the narrow sense—that is, constituted by historicity—and historical time. In an act of performative self-contradiction he does exactly this while drawing the above distinction. There are, no doubt, good if not necessary reasons to make this contrastive distinction. Modern (western) historical consciousness is initially linked to that consciousness of historicity which is expressed as an awareness of contingency in a world *constituted* by change. This link is remarkable. It strongly suggests scepticism and caution with regard to a concept of history and historical consciousness that is too broad and general. A concept of history and historical consciousness bound to the awareness of historicity is a specific, integral part of the modern (western) world. This conception may since have gained influence in many cultures and appears to us today as a matter of course and entirely natural. Despite this impression however, it is not an anthropological universal. A view of the world not only characterised in such a way that all that exists *in it* is subject to the principles of becoming and passing and therefore, as HERACLITUS and others saw it, is in constant flux, but also characterised as itself contingent, a merely possible order among many, is a historical and cultural innovation of western modernity. Modern temporalisation and *dynamisation* transforms all those orders that had previously been thought of as necessary into contingent phenomena. Modern history and modern historical consciousness stand for precisely that. [9]

ASSMANN, too, having backed an anthropological universalisation of the reference to the past and the temporal orientation of man, initially points out (again following SCHOTT) that "this human basic drive (*Urtrieb*) [the historical sense, C.K./J.S.] is further developed in some societies than in others" (1992, p.67). It is thus a question of *degree or scale* according to which people can be distinguished regarding their engagement with the past and "history"—these differences are quite significant, with some societies seemingly "not developing it to a large degree or even working against this drive or sense, if that is what you want to call it." Later on, however, ASSMANN introduces a qualitative distinction. His thoughts lead to a firm rejection of an undifferentiated concept of historical sense or historical consciousness, to a radical skepticism even concerning all anthropological conceptions of the matter in hand:

"I would thus doubt that there is such a thing as historical sense and consider the term 'cultural memory' more appropriate. I take it as my starting point—along the lines of NIETZSCHE—that the indications concerning the basic equipment of human nature point towards forgetting rather than remembering and that the facts of remembering, of an interest in the past, of inquiry and analysis are the real problems in need of an explanation. Instead of the appeal to a special sense or drive I consider it more reasonable to ask what it was that impelled man to engage with his past" (ibid, p.67). [10]

ASSMANN declares the appeal to a universal historical sense in man, and historical consciousness as an anthropological constant, as both being part of a common myth. What appears "natural" is not so much remembering but rather

forgetting. The naturalness of supposedly ubiquitous mnemonic practices has turned into a problem that is in need of explanation. According to ASSMANN, what needs to be explained is why memory does not *always* yield to the natural desire to forget and how it operates—in its many different forms—when it remembers (reflects, shapes, pragmatically instrumentalises etc.). This task of explaining and analysing concrete processes of forgetting and remembering is no doubt of great importance. From a psychological point of view, too, one can ask about "disincentives and incentives of historical remembering, i.e. blocking and stimulating factors" (ibid, p.67). In our view, however, such a task does not have to be tied to a characterization of forgetting as a "natural" or "primary" human attitude towards the past. Such a move would shift the problem of the naturalisation or anthropological universalisation of historical consciousness rather than circumvent or solve it. Remembering and forgetting are "equiprimordial" and are thus equally indispensable for the acting person. In our present context, a much more important question is how<sup>7</sup> one remembers and forgets and, above all, *how reality*, which (in part) enters our memory, *is imagined and turned into a topic in the first place*. This is what an internally differentiated conception of *historical sense* or *historical consciousness* could help to explain. Our opening remarks on the specific characteristics of modern historical consciousness relate to *this* aspect, which is central to us. And this is also what Hartmann LEITNER (1994) in his insightful—but unpublished and thus largely ignored—work was talking about. [11]

LEITNER (ibid, p.3) deals with the question<sup>8</sup> "What is historical consciousness and what does it mean?" and ignores concrete "substances and contents of historical consciousness" and its practical logic that concerns "the moral dignity and political necessity" of certain orientations and actions. It is of course precisely these substances and contents that are of interest not only to contemporaries, but also to empirical disciplines like psychology, sociology or the theory of teaching history. To put historical consciousness on the agenda of educational establishments and public discourse or complaining (for empirical reasons) about the lack of historical sense of individuals, groups (e.g. "all" pupils or "all" young people), organisations or institutions, means, for the most part, to talk about gaps of knowledge and connected deficits. One laments the gap that separates the present from the past and history, and that precludes one from moving—in an historically informed way—into the future and consciously shape it.<sup>9</sup> Such

7 As is well known, ASSMANN is not interested in the individual but rather in the connection (rooted in structures and practices of memory) and cohesion of individuals who have a sense of belonging together. In other words, ASSMANN is interested in the social or cultural development and maintenance of a connective structure within the dimension of time. This structure creates "a common realm of experience, expectation and action [...], which establishes trust and orientation through its binding and obligatory power" (ASSMANN 1992, p.16). Myths and historical stories aim at justice and continuity. In an answer to the question *how*, i.e. what are the various ways in which "societies remember, and how societies imagine themselves while remembering" (ibid, p.18) ASSMANN refers to so-called "outer dimensions" of human memory. He differentiates between the mimetic memory, the memory of things, the communicative memory and finally the cultural memory, the latter being central for ASSMANN.

8 In the context of this paper, we will not further define the largely synonymously used terms historical consciousness, historical sense and historical self-awareness.

9 We will leave aside the question to what extent the future can be shaped consciously—modern historical consciousness in particular, insofar as it is an awareness of contingency, sets its own

matters, LEITNER only deals with in passing, if at all. Rather, he deals with the *logic* of historical consciousness and assumes that this consciousness "does obviously not simply 'exist' or 'not exist'. [...] Historical consciousness may not be quite like the concepts, morality and language of historical thinking suggest: Here there is history and there a consciousness thereof" (ibid. p.7). In contrast, LEITNER points out another peculiarity of (modern, in the narrow sense) historical consciousness, one which it itself often disregards: its "becoming reflective", which is a necessary part of it and is itself a historical and cultural phenomenon.

"It is obvious that the self-observation of historical consciousness takes place within the discourses of the formation of historical consciousness. And thus the question of historical consciousness shifts. Now comes to the fore the question of the operative logic and cultural significance of the category historical consciousness in general with respect to the substances of historical consciousness as attributable to specific groups regarding historical knowledge and attitudes and as detectable from cultural phenomena. For one can no longer ignore that the discourses about historical consciousness belong to it and historical consciousness is realized in its substances." (ibid.) [12]

This has to be taken to heart by empirical psychology if it wants to deal with historical consciousness without ignoring the historical-cultural quality of this phenomenon. It would indeed be naïve to understand historical consciousness in an abstract anthropological way as merely a kind of general consciousness of time and narrative competence. Similarly, it should not be ignored what historical consciousness *means* for the *individual* cultures and societies and what kind of operative logic can effect orientation within time where one's own present is set in relation to the past and future in specific ways: "To set oneself in relation to history—which is not already given by history itself—that is the fundamental, broader problem" (ibid, p.8) that LEITNER investigates. His sociological analysis thus directs attention to the logic of historical consciousness that precedes any practice and hermeneutics. [13]

We can summarise and add to the important aspects of the specifically modern historical consciousness in the following way: History does not just have an individual subject in "that it accumulates a past 'behind' it in the stream of time and the duration of its existence—what is *behind* us is not, at least not straightforwardly, *with* us" (ibid, p.10). Modern historical consciousness is no more exhaustively explained by a past that it represents and links to interpretations of the present and expectations of the future. Rather, this representation is a conscious and reflective act and linked to a specific conception of reality, which radically temporalises and dynamises all "being" and views it as a becoming that is saturated with contingency—a becoming that has

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boundaries in this respect. We will not deal with this more specific question: what can the forward-pointing will to shape learn from the represented past and history now that the traditional topos *historia magistra vitae* has lost its significance (cf. the classic work by KOSELLECK 1989). Instructions that need only be followed by those living today have no past and history at their disposal any more, in a modernity that is geared towards change. The relationship between the learner and history is thus indirect and "broken" in many ways.



recently lost any kind of philosophically or scientifically proven *telos* of historical progress or decay. Finally, we would like to claim for our working concept that although modern historical consciousness can still be and probably always is bound to a "comprehensive and concrete interest in legitimisation, justification, reconciliation, change" in various practical contexts of day-to-day life *and* in science—that is, "it belongs to the functional frame that we define using the concepts of remembering, handing down and identity" (ASSMANN 1992, p.67). At the same time it is linked to a claim for truth that is ideally substantiated using the methodological means of scientific rationality. Historical consciousness is a certain form of rational construction of reality in this *idealised* sense, which gives expression to certain values and normative standards of a culture that dominates at least in Germany and other parts of the (western) world and determines the curricula of schools and other educational establishments. However it may be related to practical contexts and purposes, its inner logic aims at *knowledge* of the past. Accordingly, it operates methodically and is subject to rational criteria which justify it despite individual procedures and independent of its shortcomings in practice. [14]

It is certainly the case that there are many differences between the historical science and an everyday practical historical consciousness, and no doubt the latter should not be viewed and evaluated in a biased and careless way according to the standards of the former. Everyday practical historical consciousness is in many ways not a mere deficient and dilettante preliminary stage to scientific thinking and research, despite its notorious unprofessional structure. In whatever way it may have its own cause, its own logic and function, it is in many cases, as empirical investigations demonstrate,—at least in our culture and society—often shaped by comparatively general principles of a scientific conception of reality and tied to claims of validity stemming from reasoned argument.<sup>10</sup> Historical consciousness is an awareness of human time, that could often not be understood properly without reference to our scientific world view and the methodological-rational substantiation of statements. Scientific exploration of it can easily be described as the analysis of a kind of "practical epistemology" (WINEBURG 1998, p.336) or as "empirical epistemology". As indicated above: It would be wrong to see research in this area as *exclusively* a matter of practical or empirical epistemology and to leave aside practical logic, from which historical consciousness, which also always functions as historical self-awareness, is never completely detached. Subjective and group-specific ways of dealing with history are never entirely subject to the dictates of scientific imperatives, at times they may care very little about them or even plainly contradict them. [15]

A final important characteristic of modern historical consciousness is its way of dealing with the *alien*. In this respect, historical consciousness is probably the most important forerunner of a general awareness of difference and alterity (*Alteritätsbewußtsein*), which only became established in the second half of the 20th century to any degree worth mentioning. This cognitive and practical stance is a modern phenomenon. It takes that which is not only different but also alien as

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10 Whether and in how far this assertion can be generalised is of course an empirical question.

an opportunity for an understanding directed towards the self (cf. references by STRAUB, GARZ & KRÜGER 2001). What seems natural to "us today", according to Bernhard WALDENFELS (1997, p.10) "started to cross the problem threshold only very late, towards the end of the 18th century". There are a number of reasons for this slow but nonetheless conspicuous propagation of the recent attention to, and practical interest in, the alien. Among the most important are an increase in mobility, recent migrations and communication technologies that are accessible world-wide. It is still no easy task not to exclude and fend off the alien nostrocetrically but rather be tolerant towards it, a tolerance that often enough leads to critical self-reflection and relationally structured self-change that is regarded as natural and positive while in previous times it would have only evoked surprise and irritation. The alien is increasingly understood as a welcome challenge that should not immediately be met with aversion and aggression. The inquisitive interest in the alien is no longer cause for bewilderment—although the unknown, in all its manifestations, is by no means only attractive and fascinating with its promises of broadening one's own perceptual perspectives, possibilities of experience and potentials for acting, it also causes insecurity and alarm (BOESCH 1998; WALDENFELS 1997). The alien may not least mark principle boundaries of understanding and impose limits to one's own freedom to act a certain way. It is thus not only experienceable as something external, but rather it may, beyond that—sooner or later—, prove to be an integral part of one's own self and world. Let us recapitulate: For the socio-cultural reevaluation of the alien and the accompanying change of mental structures, modern awareness of historicity and therefore the European historisation of world and self was of great importance. This was of course reinforced by the discovery of "new worlds" in geographically remote regions, which contributed in their own way to the awareness of the "contemporaneousness of the unctemporaneous" (*Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen*) or, without the deeper logico-developmental meaning, to the awareness of the different, heterogeneous, alien and foreign at the *same* time. The great importance of this new historical consciousness for the discussion of the alien even in the 20th century can be seen in GADAMER's philosophical hermeneutics, which as late as the 1950's tried to make sense of the intertwined understanding of the alien and one's own using the paradigm of chronological distance (GADAMER 1960; see also STRAUB 1999, pp.250-277). With hindsight, however, GADAMER saw that this paradigmatic perspectival narrowing represented a no longer justifiable one-sidedness of his theory of understanding. Synchronic experiences of difference, alterity and "alienness" (*Fremdheit*) are as important nowadays as diachronic ones—in our "life-world" (*Lebenswelt*) may be even more important. [16]

The working concept outlined above, which is still very rough and nevertheless highly assumptive, will be used in our empirical studies. We will proceed in such a way that the theoretical concept remains open to empirically substantiated differentiation and modification. A complete rejection of the concept is not likely, for the following simple reason: We have developed its broad contours not only in the course of the discussion of the relevant literature but also in the course of a first analysis of our empirical material. Our considerations so far, in as far as they are explications of the central components of the term "historical consciousness",

to some extent anticipate the presentation of our empirical research results. A more detailed account of our results will of course clarify the concrete significance of our abstract, theoretical definition. Two things will have to be considered in this regard. [17]

The definitions of modern historical consciousness are, as mentioned before, idealised characterisations that focus on culture-specific elements of a communicative-temporal constitution of reality. This does not however mean that there is only this type of historical consciousness in modern societies. Rather, in these areas, too, a synchronic heterogeneity has to be presupposed that even today allows for the possibility and existence of alternative relations of self and world side by side with specifically modern modes of thinking about, and being situated in, history. This is partly the case for the trivial reason that historical consciousness is of course not innate but rather the product of a complex biographical development during the course of which a person is socialised and "culturalised". And this development does not proceed in the same way for all members of modern society. In addition to individual differences, there are variations in particular with regard to social milieu. As the title of our paper suggests, our empirical studies relate to the historical consciousness of young people—in this paper we concentrate on grammar-school pupils (*Gymnasiasten*). [18]

Secondly, we use the concept of historical consciousness—unlike LEITNER—as a *subject-theoretical* category without having individual persons in mind. We could attribute historical consciousness to individuals or show the lack of it in others and thereby understand it as a specific personal competence that can be possessed to varying degrees. This does not mean, on the other hand, that empirical interests always have to be directed at single intra-individual (development-dependent) or inter-individual differences. As the presentation of our empirical findings shows, the present paper will deal with the analysis of an historical consciousness as it is expressed in *groups* of young people. This can then be reconstructed as a competence characterizable in an idealised way—without *having* to attribute this competence, or the lack of it, to individuals. In what follows, we will regard this competence as a reflective form of a communicative construction of reality of collective subjects, namely of "situative groups" of young people. Methodologically, this interest will be realised through the deployment of group discussion. [19]

To summarise: The question of disincentives and incentives of historical consciousness cannot only be asked in relation to cultures, societies and larger communities. In the life of individuals and small, so-called "real us-groups" which have to be distinguished from anonymous larger groups, there can be disincentives and incentives for historical consciousness. Individuals are, of course, members of a culture or society, which always represents the context of their development. Our exemplary empirical studies will always be related to this context. The young people that took part in our group discussions grew up, to use a term coined by Claude LÉVI-STRAUSS, in a "hot" culture and society.<sup>11</sup> Their

<sup>11</sup> While SCHOTT rejects this differentiation with regard to the present topic as a stereotyped and strangely "totemistic" differentiation, ASSMANN (1992) and LEITNER (1994) take it up, use it

enculturation and socialisation was full of incentives for historical consciousness, however individual differences may have adapted its awakening and development. Individuals' interest in history may be manifested in different ways, or may be hardly present—however, they are no doubt situated within the context of a socio-culturally dominating view of reality that is modern or historical in the sense described above. To anticipate, this is what our exemplary empirical analyses demonstrate. [20]

The initial selected results of a more comprehensive study do not merely shed light on some of the content and substance of historical consciousness of a select group of four young people who talked about "history" for two hours. Apart from this insight into the specific interests and relevancies as well as factual knowledge, which, as is well known, significantly varies from group to group, our analysis of this group discussion allows an insight into the *fundamental structures and functions* of historical consciousness or historical self-awareness of thirteen to fourteen year-old grammar-school pupils (*Gymnasiasten*). The concept of historical self-awareness typifies what historical consciousness generally typifies: its dependence on perspective, which shows it to be a mode of *practical* intelligence (cf. STRAUB 1998b, 2001b). As one can see, the way the young people taking part in our group discussion think, feel and talk is informed by a modern, historical conception of reality—in a way, that is, which from a socio-cultural and developmental psychological point of view must be regarded as laden with presupposition. The young people in our study have gone through learning processes that bring out striking differences between them and members of a pre-modern culture or society. They do no longer think of reality as an unmovable substance, even in its established practical-normative foundations. [21]

These learning processes, or their results described by us, mark this gradual transition from the world of the child to that of the young person. There are still no empirical investigations, in particular no longitudinal studies, that allow a reconstruction and description of these developments *in detail* (cf. next section), and finally to theoretically model and explain them. This deficit will not be rectified in this paper either. We can however substantiate to some significant degree and discuss some select aspects of the fact that even during the first months and years during young age historico-narrative competencies are developed that establish that the persons involved are unmistakably members of a modern society. The young people involved relate to history as a becoming and changing, they relate to a reality that is always situated in a present marked by particular persons' experiences and expectations, worries and hopes, a reality that is thus open to deviant, correcting, alternative and competing ideas. Their historical consciousness is operative within a discursive realm where each statement can meet a sceptical response, where each argument can have a counter-argument. Historical and historically mediated definitions of reality are not least, as our examples illustrate, a matter of dialogue and discourse. Whatever counts as reality within a given group depends on what has been negotiated as such, at least preliminarily. [22]

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constructively and expound it.

## 2. Historical Consciousness from an Empirical Perspective: Notes on the Current State of Research

The empirical exploration of the development of historical sense in children, young people and adults, which was largely informed by the works of theoretical historians (cf. RÜSEN 1983, 1989, 1990), was primarily pushed ahead in recent years by historical educationalists. A preliminary overview is provided by v. BORRIES for example (1997). Theoretical and educational periodicals regularly publish informative empirical studies. Amongst those are the specialist journals: "Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht. Zeitschrift des Verbandes der Geschichtslehrer Deutschlands (History in research and teaching. Journal of the association of history teachers in Germany)" (since 1950), "Geschichtsdidaktik. Probleme, Projekte, Perspektiven (The theory of teaching. Problems, projects, perspectives)" (from 1976 to 1987), "Geschichte Lernen (Learning history)" (a continuation of the journal "Geschichtsdidaktik [The theory of teaching]"), "Geschichte, Politik und ihre Didaktik. Beiträge und Nachrichten für die Unterrichtspraxis (History, politics and its didactics. Contributions and news for teaching in practice)" (since 1973) and "Internationale Schulbuchforschung. Zeitschrift des Georg-Eckert-Instituts (International textbook research. Journal of the Georg-Eckert-Institute)" (since 1979). Other social and cultural sciences—including educational theory and psychology (cf. STRAUB 1998a)—have also contributed more and more to the development of a theory and the empirico-methodological exploration of historical consciousness (of various groups, differentiated according to, for example, age and generation, experiential background and expectational horizon). Many different problems were examined in this regard. In what follows, we will list the most important areas, some focal points and exemplary works.<sup>12</sup> In particular, we can distinguish between [23]:

- Investigations into the acquisition and state of historical knowledge in different age groups and socio-structurally distinguishable groups; learning processes in and out of school are taken into consideration (anthologies: v. BORRIES, PANDEL & RÜSEN 1991; CARRETERO & VOSS 1994; FÜRNRÖHR & KIRCHHOFF 1976<sup>13</sup>; VOSS & CARRETERO 1998; individual contributions: BELL & McCOLLUM 1917<sup>14</sup>; v. BORRIES 1982, 1992, 1995a; v. BORRIES & LEHMANN 1991; v. BORRIES & KÖRBER 2001; FILSER 1983; GORMAN & MORGAN 1930; JEISMANN, KOSTHORST, SCHÄFER, SCHLÖDER, TEPPE & WASNA 1987; KAMPEN 1976; KNEEDLER 1988; KNIGGE 1988; LEHMANN & MIROW 1991; MIROW 1991; PENUEL & WERTSCH 1998;

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12 We cite anthologies and individual contributions separately, although some exemplary and/or particularly relevant contributions from the anthologies are listed under the category "individual contributions". As is already evident from the list of journals, we focus—although not exclusively—on works from the German-speaking world.

13 This anthology is one of the first significant examples of a historical didactics, which, after mostly theoretical-normative reflections, from the 1970s increasingly turned to empirical phenomena.

14 According to WINEBURG (1998, p.303) this study is one of the first Anglo-American empirical investigations into historical consciousness—for a concise historical overview of the empirical and theoretical study of historical consciousness mainly from the perspective of educational psychology (cf. WINEBURG *ibid.*, pp.300-318).

ROSENZWEIG & WEINLAND 1986; RÜSEN, FRÖHLICH, HORSTKÖTTER & SCHMIDT 1991; SHELILT 1980; WERTSCH & ROZIN 1998). [24]

- Studies into the ontogenetic or biographical development of historical consciousness; the lack of longitudinal studies is conspicuous. Hypotheses from developmental psychology are not as a rule worked out satisfactorily. They usually content themselves with cursory remarks on genetic structuralism. Sometimes, PIAGETian insights—from other areas of cognitive development, in particular, from the field of the development of physical consciousness of time—are transferred directly to historical thought. It is worth mentioning in this context, that PIAGET (1933) has carried out a (small) study on the historico-conceptual understanding in children, which was discussed in VYGOTSKY's (1977, pp.181-191) most famous work "Thought and Language" but remained unnoticed otherwise. Apart from references to genetic structuralism (PIAGET's, KOHLBERG's, SELMAN's) or—less frequently—to VYGOTSKY's approach, there are references to developmental (psycho)logical concepts analysed by theoretical historians. Insofar as theoretical considerations are related to empirical data, these data are in some cases retrospective data gained from adults remembering childhood and young age. (Anthologies: v. BORRIES & PANDEL 1994; RÜSEN 2001; individual contributions: v. BORRIES 1987a, 1988, 1990; EL DARWICH 1991; FRIEDEBURG & HÜBNER 1964; JURD 1973; KLOSE 1994; KÜPPERS 1966; LÉTOURNEAU 2001; NOACK 1994; PANDEL 1991, 1994; PIAGET 1933; ROTH 1965; SEIXAS 1998; SONNTAG 1932.) [25]
- Works in connection with historical consciousness and other, perhaps "related" cognitive competencies like moral or political consciousness or general narrative competences; in part, these studies do not focus on historical consciousness and only discover something about it in passing (Individual contributions: BECKER 1989; BERTI 1994; v. BORRIES 1994a; BOUEKE, SCHÜLEIN, BÜSCHER, TERHORST & WOLF 1995; a concise summary of the studies that have been conducted at the University of Bielefeld on narrative competence by BOUEKE et al. which is at the same time firmly geared to the relationship with developmental models of historical consciousness is offered by WOLF 2001; DELVAL 1994; FURNHAM 1994; HABERMAS, FRIEDEBURG, OEHLER & WELTZ 1961; LUTZ 1989; OEHLER 1959; RAASCH 1964; SCHMIDT 1987; TESCHNER 1968; TORNEY-PURTA 1994; TORNEY, OPPENHEIM & FARNEN 1975). [26]
- Studies specifically on historical consciousness related to the time of National Socialism; in most cases, works on historical consciousness do not focus on a particular historical subject area. When they do, these studies deal almost exclusively with National Socialism, its conditions and consequences—at least in Germany, for obvious reasons. These studies discuss pupils' (mostly deficient) state of knowledge, explore inter-generational ways of passing on historical data and undertake psycho-analytically oriented reconstructions of the "dark traces of the past" (anthologies: DOMANSKY & WELZER 1999; GEULEN & TSCHUGNALL 2001; GRÜNBERG & STRAUB 2001; MÜLLER-HOHAGEN 1996; RÜSEN & STRAUB 1998; individual contributions: v. BORRIES 1980; BOSSMANN 1977; GEISSLER 1981; KÖNIG 2001, 2002;

ROESE 1963; STEUDEL & WRANGEL 1959; STRAUB 2001a; WELZER, MONTAU & PLASS 1997; WIESEMÜLLER 1972). Von BORRIES' research (1987b, 1989) is an example of a work that examines other subject areas— i.e. knowledge about colonial history and the Middle Ages. [27]

- Comparative cross-cultural studies that so far exhibit considerable theoretical and methodological deficits and can only with reservation be considered comparative cross-cultural studies. As a rule, the cultural specificity of historical consciousness is simply equated with the nationality (or mother tongue) of those participating in the study.<sup>15</sup> (Anthologies: ANGVIK & v. BORRIES 1997; v. BORRIES & RÜSEN 1994; individual contributions: BECHER & v. BORRIES 1997; v. BORRIES 1994b, 1995b, 1999; RÜSEN, GROSSE-KRACHT, HANENKAMP & SCHMIDT 1994). [28]
- Studies that expound the processes of historical thinking of professional historians, teachers as well as laymen and expect this to be informative regarding more general issues of historical consciousness (anthology: WINEBURG 1994; individual contributions: FRISCH 1989; JACOBS 1988; LOWENTHAL 1989; WINEBURG 1991, 1998; WINEBURG & FOURNIER 1993, 1994). [29]
- Studies on pupils' historical interest (at school); this area of research was mainly pursued within educational psychology during the turn of the last century<sup>16</sup> and was partly embedded in the question of school interest in general; we refer for example to the works of William Stern. Unfortunately, their results quite often missed the intended target since the research method

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15 The results of the "intra-European" comparative study carried out by v. BORRIES (1994b) and a number of associates are, in our view, largely uninterpretable. The many methodological shortcomings alone, which are pointed out by the author himself, cast doubt on the initial claim of the "foundational and pragmatic significance of such studies" (p.13). The expected gain of the so-called "cross-cultural comparisons" did not ensue for the simple reason that "culture" was straightforwardly equated with "nation", which was in turn represented by a *small number* of pupils each. *On average*, there were 100 pupils for each country investigated, for example: 32 boys and 68 girls for "Russia", 74 boys and 91 girls for "Poland", 12 boys and 66 girls for "Great Britain", 12 boys and 14 girls for "Sweden". This does not just mean, and v. BORRIES points this out himself of course, that these were not representative samples. As long as it remains unclear in how far belonging to a different nation implies a difference in culture, no culture-specific typisation of the participants' historical consciousness is possible. Von BORRIES rightly warns us "about overrating the results [...]. Random sample mistakes for such a small population (in Sweden for example it was only one single class) are enormous. This is not only the case for countries like France and Great Britain with particularly few subjects in each cell. There cannot be any clear statements about historical consciousness *on average* across Europe, nor about individual countries and certainly not about the trustworthiness of *comparison*. Instead, it is at best possible to make statements about the historical consciousness of those that were questioned. This restriction is important. It allows one to initially accept surprising results or [...] results that turn out contrary to expectations" (ibid, p.20) The question then arises, however, why the results of the survey study are presented as a cross-cultural study in the first place. It remains uncertain, in what sense the differences between countries, which themselves are dubious for reasons mentioned above as well as other methodological ones (for example, the complex problem of conceptual, theoretical and methodological equivalence was barely treated adequately), represent cultural differences. What is more, it is questionable to what extent the research results do indeed establish differences of *historical consciousness* if this is understood along the lines of v. BORRIES' definition, which he himself views as binding (p.13, 15f.). Cf. the discussion of future research on the reconstruction of a narrative-historical competence with which Jörn RÜSEN, Klaus GROSSE-KRACHT, Bernhard HANENKAMP & Hans-Günter SCHMIDT (1994, p.202 f.) conclude their report on a methodologically more careful study.

16 Just the fact that these studies are rather old indicates that additional empirical research is necessary.

used (questionnaires with closed items) tended to thwart the very thing under investigation, i.e. the specific interests of those questioned rather than of those doing the research or planning the curriculum. Moreover there was often a reduction of the concept of historical interest to the question of the popularity of history as taught in schools (ANWANDER 1974; DÜCK 1911; GEHRECKE 1960; LOBSIEN 1909; LODE 1913; MARIENFELD 1974; STERN 1905). [30]

- Works on the role of the (mass) media in conveying historical knowledge and on the influence of the media—in particular film and television—on, especially young people's, historical consciousness (anthology: KNOPP & QUANDT 1988; individual contributions: BEIGEL 1984; v. BORRIES 1984; FEIL 1974; HEY 1988; KÖNIG 1998; MAGNUS 1979; PROTZNER & HOPPERT 1986). [31]
- Analyses of historical representations in school books; the Georg-Eckert-Institute for textbook research in Braunschweig has contributed a large number of works in this field (since 1979, this institute has been publishing its own series called "Studien zur Internationalen Schulbuchforschung [Studies on International Textbook Research]"); of the dozens of books, we shall name the following, for exemplary purposes; anthologies: JEISMANN 1982; KEGHEL 1999; RIEKENBERG 1994; individual contribution: MÄTZING 1999) [32]
- Studies on the effects of history as presented in museums; these works deal with such questions as the design of historical exhibitions or museums or visitors' reactions to particular exhibitions (anthologies: *Geschichtsdidaktik [the theory of teaching history]* 9, No. 1, 1984; *Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung [Hamburg Institute for Social Research]* 1998; KUHN & SCHNEIDER 1978; individual contributions: GRÜTTER 1990; HEER 1998; ZIPFEL 1998). [33]
- The investigation of the advantages and disadvantages of particular procedures of data collection, like the "essay method" or "objective tests" as well as general methodological considerations and discussions of alternative methods of studying historical consciousness (BILLMANN-MAHECHA 1998; FREUDENTHAL 1933; SACKETT 1919; WEAVER & TRAXLER 1931). [34]

### 3. The Methodological Structure of the Study

Empirical studies on historical consciousness employ various methods of empirical social research, quantitative procedures as well as qualitative methods. So far, the method of group discussion has rarely been utilised (cf. STRAUB 1996/2001a). General considerations, however, suggest that this method in particular can lead to significant insights concerning content, structure and development as well as the functions of historical consciousness (BILLMANN-MAHECHA 1998, pp.283-296).<sup>17</sup>

17 In the German-speaking world, the procedure of group discussion was initially developed and used in the context of empirical works of the Frankfurt institute of social research (cf. MANGOLD 1960, POLLOCK 1955, WIGGERSHAUS 1997, pp.494-491). Otherwise, the method was not employed much in scientific research (unlike in commercial survey and market research), at least not as a central survey procedure in the context of empirically producing and testing theoretical hypotheses. This did not change for some time until the works of NIESSEN (1977), VOLMERG (1977) and KRÜGER (1983) gave the procedure new impetus. In the meantime, group discussions have gained a regular place in textbooks of *qualitative* social



"Historical consciousness does not merely enable but also demand the ability for controversial discourse, which is based on an insight into the partiality and fallibility of one's own interpretations and evaluations. [...] Historical consciousness of this kind enables and even necessitates communication between persons and groups, peoples and religions, and, through these tensions and controversies, it verges towards what could be called 'cosmopolitan' consciousness" (JEISMANN 1988, p.22). [35]

The participants' statements provoke contradiction, commentary and agreement and so the discussion develops a momentum of its own. This enables the moderator of the discussion to keep in the background, and at times to keep out of it altogether. This in turn means that the interpreter is faced with a literally transcribed text that is structured by the spontaneous prioritising of the research partners themselves. In group discussions of this type, no data are tested that serve to confirm or reject the researchers' hypotheses. Rather, the discussions are set up in such a way that the participants are able to express their historical consciousness according to *their own priorities* and in their *own language*, i.e. as "freely" as possible. [36]

The basic discussion stimuli included text excerpts about educational questions in the Middle Ages or the life of a working-class family at the end of the 19th century, postcards of an aristocratic family or workers on strike, tape recordings of a radio advertisement from the 1950's and the request to bring along (or simply imagine and describe in case the object was not portable or simply no longer existed) to the discussion an object that the young people would in the widest sense associate with history.<sup>18</sup> This last basic stimulus was particularly effective (see KÖLBL 2001) and was also used in the group discussion that will be analysed in what follows. [37]

The discussions that emerged in this way were transcribed literally<sup>19</sup> and finally analysed according to the procedure of sequential interpretation that was developed in critical examination of Barney GLASER's and Anselm STRAUSS' conception of comparative analysis and empirically founded formation of concept

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research; independent monographs do also exist (cf. BOHNSACK 2000a, pp.123-142; DREHER & DREHER 1995; FLICK 1995, pp.131-142; KRUEGER 1988; LAMNEK 1998; LOOS & SCHÄFFER 2001; MORGAN 1988). Empirical research projects successfully work with group discussions (cf. for example SCHÄFFER 1996; STRAUB 1996/2001a; WELZER, MONTAU & PLASS 1997). The development in the Anglo-American world was different, by the way. BOHNSACK (2000b, pp.372-374) mentions two developmental strands in this respect. One of them is covered by the works of MORGAN (1988), although group discussions are here reduced to their mere heuristic value. The other more productive and innovative strand is dealt with in the works from the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, Paul WILLIS' for example, within style and milieu research (cf. WILLIS 1979).

18 The choice of basic stimulus is of some importance as it is to encourage a *lively discussion*. This purpose is of course served by a variety of stimuli. Often, excerpts from films and texts of a more or less provocative nature are used. In this context we particularly refer to the above mentioned study by WELZER, MONTAU and PLASS (1997). This study also used group discussion with older people, where the basic stimuli were, for example, film scenes with Hitler on the Obersalzberg, torch-bearers during the Olympic games or children performing the Nazi salute.

19 Our system of transcription used notational rules which included speaker changes and the recording of synchronic, overlapping utterances and the transcription of para-linguistic utterances and pauses (of various lengths) as well as other electro-acoustic signals.

and theory (cf. STRAUSS 1991). The theoretical and methodological reasons for such a time-consuming procedure as well as the description of the individual interpretative steps can be found elsewhere (e.g., BOHNSACK 2000a, pp.143-177; STRAUB 1999, pp.201-226; empirical examples are offered by SCHÄFFER 1996 or STRAUB 1993), which means that we do not have to give a detailed description here. In summary: the transcript was initially structured according to formal considerations and those of content and then organised using a kind of key-word register. The initial overview of the course of the discussion and the subject-matters raised was followed by the so-called formulating—a kind of paraphrasing—interpretation of the most topically relevant text segments. In a subsequent comparative step, which can be thought of as a "determining" or "reflecting" interpretation, the statements of the discussants are analysed using various comparative horizons that allow one to go beyond one's own frame of interpretation. This happens with reference to theoretical, empirical, everyday and also thought-experimental comparative horizons. [38]

#### **4. Young People in History: Initial Results of an Empirical Study**

The participants in our study, which we will report about selectively, were young people between the ages of 11 and 17. At the time of the study, the participants went to different types of schools. In what follows, we will refer to one single group discussion that was carried out in March 2000 by one male and three female grammar-school pupils (*Gymnasiasten*) between the ages of 13 and 14. The discussion took place in a room belonging to a Catholic parish from which our research partners were recruited. The young people volunteered when during one of their meetings they were asked if they felt like taking part in a four-way discussion on the subject of history. The participants were all in their eighth year in the same school in a medium-sized town in the southwest of Germany. [39]

The aim of the presentation of select results of this individual case study is clearly demarcated. We do not of course make any claim of representativeness. Our remarks are not representative of neither young people of a certain age group in general nor for grammar-school pupils (of a particular type, in Germany etc.). It is of no interest to us in this context, in how far our findings can be generalised in a quantitatively specified way. What we would like to stress are some structural aspects of the historico-narrative competence that is pronounced at a young age in Germany. Taking into consideration our earlier thoughts on the specifically modern conception of historical consciousness, we can say about this competence that it is itself a historically situated, culture-specific ability. [40]

Our empirical results are closely bound up with the method employed. On the level of data collection the procedure of free group discussion enabled these young people to articulate their historical knowledge *according to their own priorities and in their own language*, and they were thus able to relate it to their own life, to the present and to the future. To describe it succinctly: these articulations have the narrative character of *historical self-awareness* with recognisable pragmatic psychological functions. This can only be identified if, during the course of the analysis of the taped and transcribed group discussions,

one can employ interpretative procedures that allow a precise and comprehensive reconstruction of the participants' understanding of self and the world. [41]

In this paper we will restrict ourselves to the *results* of a small number of comparative interpretations of select parts of the text, which we will, in some cases, cite. This way, we will of course not be able to reconstruct our research results embedded in sequential analyses. The group discussion's appearance of richness, complexity and dynamics is drastically reduced by our selective procedure which is oriented towards specific aims of representation. This is evident from the severely condensed sketch of the course of the discussion, which will precede the selected research results. The presentations of the results will initially relate to the historical topics dealt with by the research partners in order to mark the most important *contents* of historical consciousness as articulated by the group. Finally we will present a briefly documented *glossary of historical terms* which will shed light on the complex structure and functions of our young people's historical thinking and historical self-awareness. In a separate passage at the end, we will discuss the possible consequences of our empirical findings for science and education. [42]

#### 4.1 Overview of the course of the discussion

Heide<sup>20</sup> begins the conversation and describes objects (which she did not bring with her) and interprets them historically. The two objects are a cushion and an apron. Both objects were made by her grand-mother after the Second World War out of a swastika flag. The home-made pieces of craft work enable one to see, according to Heide, "how things used to be." Like Heide, Miriam did not bring an object along either, but rather presents an imagined object. If she had brought something along it would have been her family's "proof of Aryan descent". On the one hand, she said, she had been shocked when she saw the "book" for the first time, and on the other hand, it was almost a kind of "family history" as it contained many data relating to the family. Karin, the third participant, talks about a pillow that her grand-mother, a former seamstress, had made. Achim brought along "The big book of jazz" and explains his choice by saying that he is very interested in music and its history. [43]

After the presentation and description of the mostly imagined and thus only symbolically present objects the debate keeps going back to the question of the benefits of a "tangible" past. This is the term the young people use for that part of the past that they can identify with the most, may be due to stories told in the family. At the opposite pole, there are phenomena—like certain aspects of the Roman times—which the participants were not able to identify with in this emphatic way that is close to their own experiences and enabled through communicative passing down. The participants express, to use a distinction made by Jan ASSMANN (1992), different modes of effect of the communicative and cultural memory from the perspective of the receiving subject. [44]

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20 We have, of course changed the participants' names to preserve anonymity.

In this context, there is talk about "keepsakes" that facilitate access to the past. The family objects presented by the three girls are such keepsakes. But it is not only "family history" that is of interest, but also certain parts of Roman time as well as the "exciting" time of the witch-hunt. This brings the discussion to progress and regression in history. Apparently, Roman times are particularly interesting because the town where they live has many buildings that remind of that time. Now the conversation turns to museum visits. [45]

Achim is of the opinion that such a visit has the advantage that in a museum you can find out "how it really was", unlike on TV, where you can see "sword-and-sandal adventures" that are not faithful to reality. Another advantage is that in a museum the past is presented "graphically". This graphic quality is a contrast to reading of boring history books. The participants talk about several different exhibitions and museums that they have visited, amongst others a museum with prehistoric exhibits. This leads to the question whether natural history is interesting, but they do not come to an agreement. They do agree, however, that our century is interesting. [46]

As a result, Achim decides to introduce his book on Jazz in greater detail. Then the discussion comes back to the objects that Heide had introduced at the beginning. Miriam suspects that she would feel uneasy in their presence. Achim and Heide reject this, saying that such objects could be a symbol for their grand-parents having had a "guardian angel" that helped them through that period. This is followed by a fairly long discussion on the time of the Nazis, its representation in books and films as well as in their grand-parents' stories and a Jewish neighbour who survived Auschwitz. The participants find all this very interesting, in particular if it is told by people who have first-hand experience of that time. They contrast this with what they have to study in their history classes. [47]

The fact that the discussion takes place in a church-owned room causes Heide to ask about the historical accuracy of the Bible. The ensuing debate about the symbolic content of biblical texts and their compatibility or incompatibility with scientifically proven knowledge takes up much room. In this context, conversation again turns to the role of cinematic and literary presentations of historical phenomena, which are now analysed in detail. A consensus is quickly reached about Karl May's books, which are said to communicate an entirely unrealistic picture of red Indians. They contrast this with the "House of History" in Bonn. There, you can find out how people really felt at that time, for example in a room that is the reproduction of a gas chamber. This leads to further discussions of the Nazi time. [48]

The conversation continues with the question for one's own history as member of a family and as someone with a biography. Soon, however, they leave this topic and Achim again starts talking about his book, initiating a more general discussion about aspects of the history of music, which carries on for some time. Towards the end of that part of the discussion Heide repeatedly asks to talk about the witch-hunt. This is what they do and, amongst other things, also discuss how the witch-hunt came about and how it was established whether

someone was a witch. The idea of a scapegoat leads to a comparison between the witch-hunt and the persecution of the Jews. Via the realisation that someone like Jeanne d'Arc was also treated like a witch, the participants start talking about the role of the church then and now. In this context, they also discuss the significance of Martin Luther. [49]

Karin then turns the other participants' attention to the subject of the origin of proverbs. They discuss this for a while and soon abandon it in favour of a discussion of the slaves in the USA. This again, as with the witch-hunt, is compared with the persecution of the Jews during the Third Reich. [50]

The participants of the discussion now run out of ideas and so the moderator offers a postcard picturing a strike at the end of the 19th century. He asks them to look at it and comment. The young people mostly talk about who the posh man in the hat is and who the people in the crowd are. The only thing that is clear is that the people in the crowd are poor and that the posh man is rich. [51]

The discussion ends with the young people wishing to find out the "true story" that is represented on the postcard. [52]

#### **4.2 Contents of historical consciousness: thematic spectrum, relevancies and dynamics of the group discussion**

During the group discussion, many historical topics are covered by the young people. The content of historical consciousness of the young people can be assigned to six categories. The categories that we established according to the pupils' observations and use of language are: "historical figures and personalities", "historically important groups", "historical sites", "historical periods and epochs", "historical events and processes" and finally "media of historical representation". These categories are drawn from simple questions like: Who did what when? Who is responsible? Who experienced something where and when? What happened or developed where and when and what were the consequences? [53]

All these central questions for the formation of categories include references to the conditions, the course and consequences of particular events for those involved, those affected directly or indirectly as well as their ancestors. They open up a framework for the analysis of historical stories. This framework is oriented towards general narrative models, in particular towards the Bielefelder narrative scheme by BOUEKE, SCHÜLEIN, BÜSCHER, TERHORST and WOLF (1995). The framework proposes an analysis of the following: how do the young people announce a historical narrative, what belongs to its "exposition", what "complications" are talked about, what "solution" is proposed and what "codes" are used to return from the narrative world to the present world of the "here and now"—in order to reflect upon the significance and practical relevance for one's own present and future. As is evident from our small number of remarks, narrative-theoretical considerations form the widest frame for our psychological analyses of the historical consciousness and historical self-awareness of young

people (cf. in detail STRAUB 1998b). Like any narrative scheme, it has certain slots —the above mentioned categories—that can be filled in various ways by actual stories. [54]

The majority of the words in the list below were used by the young people themselves. Only in exceptional cases did we add to it. They, too, mark themes and problems of historical consciousness that were introduced and talked about by the participants. The list serves to document and to clarify certain criteria of order of the discussion's manifest content. The subjects are not listed according to the order in which they were treated during the group discussion. Within each category, they are arranged according to subject and historical sequence of events. During the course of the presentation of select results, we will come back to the list and the categories that we introduced.

Alexander the Great	Friedrich Spee	The Beatles
Nero	Anna von Steinforst (a witch)	Kennedy
Jesus	Bach	Kennedy's assassin
Emperor Otto	Beethoven	Helmut Kohl
Johanna von Orleans	Hitler	Gorbachov
Jeanne d'Arc	Schindler	Gerhard Schröder
Leonardo da Vinci	Duke Ellington	
Martin Luther	John Coltrane	

Table 1: Historical figures and personalities

Pygmies	Cowboys	Hitler Youth
Celts	Slaves	The German during the Third Reich
Pharaohs	Witches	Nazis
Romans	Monks	Jews in the Third Reich
Mayas	Popes	Hippies
Incas	Kings	
Red Indians	White Rose	

Table 2: Historically important groups

Issos	Basilica	Concentration camps
Egypt	The Wild West	Air-raid shelters
Ostia Antica	Stalingrad	Gas chamber
Imperial baths	Auschwitz	GDR

Table 3: Historic sites

Ice Age	Middle Ages	Second World War
Classical antiquity	Our century	
Roman times	National Socialism	

Table 4: Historical periods and epochs

Battle of Issos	Assassination attempt on Hitler	Fall of the Berlin wall
The missions of Otto the Great	Persecution of Jews	German re-unification
Witch-hunt	Revolt in '68	Election of Gerhard Schröder
The sinking of the Titanic	Election of Helmut Kohl	

Table 5: Historical events and processes

Books:	Bible Books about Red Indians Novels by Karl May "Schwarz, Weiß, Karriert (Black, White, Checked)" (a novel about a black girl in the United States in the 19 <sup>th</sup> century) "Das große Buch vom Jazz (The big book of Jazz)" Book series "Erfahrene Geschichte (Experienced History)" "Fahrt im August (Journey in August)" (a book about the Shoah) "Familie Weber (The Weber Family)" (Novel about a family in Nazi Germany)
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Films:	"Sandal adventures" on TV "Der Wurm in der Asche (The Worm in the Ash)" (a film about Noah's Ark) A film about Jeanne d'Arc "Titanic" "Life is beautiful" "Schindler's List" A film about the White Rose
Reports and stories from eyewitnesses:	The story of a Jewish neighbour who survived Auschwitz Grandparents' stories about the Nazi time and the post-war period
Relics/documents/artifacts:	Dinosaur skeletons Fossils Mammoth babies Ötzi Celtic graves The mummies of the Pharaohs Mosaics Ancient coins A swastika flag turned into an item of practical use The family's proof of Aryan descent A pillow sewn by grandmother
Museums:	A mammoth museum The federal museum

Table 6: Media of historical representation [55]

The list does not of course cover the whole range of the group's historical knowledge. Although the subject-matters discussed are by no means the result of a choice without reason, as if a random generator had drawn a topic out of a box containing the history of the world. The topics and questions display motives, priorities and interests, emotional involvement, worries, hopes and curiosities, cognitive criteria of the construction of historical realities and moral standards of the assessment of actions, routine knowledge and habitual ways of speaking— but nevertheless they are not entirely unaccidental. Different groups may produce new material just like a different context and time of the conversation may lead to new topics. Of course even partially coincidental expressions of historical consciousness can be interpreted, not just with regard to the content of historical consciousness but also regarding the pupils' structural and functional aspects of historical (self-) awareness. Such interpretations have to rely upon comparative analyses, and, in a methodically controlled way, inter- and intra-textual comparisons can also be made. [56]



At first sight, the sheer volume of the historical topics discussed or mentioned is impressive. These reach from the Ice Age to the election of Gerhard Schröder to chancellor. A comparative analysis within the group discussion soon reveals some focal points and distinctive features. In order to identify these, there can be initial quantitative evaluations while avoiding certain fallacies. Merely mentioning the topic does not give insight into the young people's priorities. Some historical figures and events are only mentioned in passing, while others are discussed at great length. Neither is the frequency or length of the debate about a particular topic necessarily an indication of its *psychological* significance. A closer look at the group discussion under consideration reveals the following picture: in the first few minutes of the discussion the participants (apart from one) exclusively talk about imagined or described objects from their immediate living environment that are related to (a) their own family and/or (b) the Third Reich. As is evident from the course of the discussion outlined above, the conversation which followed is mainly about the participants' specific historical interests. One of the pivotal and crucial points of the entire conversation is the negotiating of what are considered legitimate interests; these points generate, as it were, the dynamics of the discussion. Of interest is that which belongs to the young people's "life-world" (*Lebenswelt*)—"a tangible past", as they put it—be it in the form of symbolic objects, in the form of stories as told by relatives who were eye-witnesses to a particular time. On the other hand, historical phenomena that are *particularly alien* and thus particularly exciting are also of special interest. The near and the far, the familiar and the alien, the close and the incomprehensible can all signal psychological relevance. [57]

The time of the Third Reich, which keeps coming up as a topic of discussion, is of extreme significance to the young people's historically mediated identity. This may be regarded as one of the many signs of the German's "fixedness" (*Fixiertheit*) (Karl Heinz BOHRER)<sup>21</sup> to their NS past and at the same time as a lack of a "relation of historical distance" and as such lamentable. However it is not at all clear why the former (interest for the NS past) should exclude the latter (a relation of historical distance). This interest may on the other hand be regarded as a welcome, trans-generationally mediated relationship without which reflection upon a historically unique "crime against humanity" and its psychological integration would hardly be possible. Independent of such normative, ethical and political judgements, the group's prioritising is an empirical fact—not a methodological artefact, given that the scientist did not attempt to influence the discussion's subject-matter. In view of the ubiquitous presence of topics relating to the NS time in schools and in the public media, the group's interest may not be very surprising. The interest also, however, reflects a kind of emotional involvement with this period, an involvement that is of great psychological significance. The psycho-social relevance of the topic is variously indicated. [58]

It is evident not only from the relatively large number of relevant key-words, from the amount of time spent discussing it, or from the fact that two of the objects described come from that period. In addition, there are at least three further

21 This is what Karl Heinz BOHRER said in his recent GADAMER lecture in Heidelberg (cf. the newspaper article by Gustav SEIBT 2001).

aspects: a number of literary and cinematic representations of the Shoah, day-to-day life during the NS time and the Second World War are discussed. Further, the discussion also focuses on museum replicas of air-raid shelters and museum exhibits about the period in general. Finally, family history is questioned with regard to the subordinate history of the NS time. We conclude our remarks on the contents of historical consciousness and the participants' interests and priorities with a discussion of the structural aspects that are of particular importance in the present context. [59]

#### **4.3 Structural aspects of historical consciousness: a glossary of methodological terms of historical thought**

In this paragraph we will primarily deal with fundamental cognitive operations of historical consciousness and therefore with a specific form of thought or human intelligence. Elsewhere (STRAUB 1998b), we identified this mode of thinking—following Jerome BRUNER's talk about a narrative mode of thinking and Paul RICOEUR's thoughts about narrative intelligence—as a variant of practical-phronetic reason. We will limit ourselves to a small number of empirically demonstrable conceptual instruments and modes of operation of historical thinking. These will make it obvious that the young people are far from uncritically recognising historical statements—rather, the group investigates individual statements and topics put up for discussion. Their means of investigation are rational and at times even methodological, and their example is unmistakable. It is obvious that the group is to a large extent committed to standards of rationality that are no doubt related to those of the historical science. As mentioned above, the structural and formal aspects of the young people's historical consciousness should not simply be reduced to a deficient variant of thinking that merely attempts to follow strict criteria of scientific reason. Neither should our participants be regarded as mere "budding scientists" whose concepts, methods and "theories" are in some way imperfect, "naive" or "subjective". Although the thinking developed by our group could not be adequately reconstructed without reference to the historical science, the participants are nonetheless subjects, who are influenced by history in their day-to-day experiences before the development of a reflective historical consciousness guided by reason. Their initial pre-reflective identity is not least constituted historically. Their "thinking about history" develops within the mode of "subsequency" (*Nachträglichkeit*) and is thus founded upon emotional involvement. [60]

In particular, we will discuss the following topics, concepts and methodological operations: "defining of the concept of time and history", "types of reasons for the validity of historical statements", "methods of historical understanding" and "concepts of historical development". The five topics have in common that they are fundamental aspects of historical thinking, aspects, that is, that in a way constitute the young people's "theory of history". This theory of history determines what can legitimately be called historical, how the large amount of empirical historical data are to be structured, which historical statements can be regarded as true and which cannot, how one is to understand the historical and understand oneself in the light of history, and finally whether and in what way one can speak

of progress of or in history. We have listed some of the young people's "theoretical" and "methodological" questions that are central for the clarification of these questions. For reasons of space, we will only deal with a few select concepts in the detailed presentation of our results. [61]

#### 4.3.1 Defining of the concept of time and history

How do our young people represent the most important concepts for historical consciousness, namely the concepts of time and history? It can be established that the concept of time and history as used by our participants cannot be easily separated. We will therefore present them in one section. The expressions listed in the following table are the structurally essential elements and relations. The tables are independent of each other. We will deal with table 7 first of all.

Present	The present as future past	Our century
Past	Then	
Future	Now	

Table 7: Definition of the concept of time

Natural history	One's own history, the historicity of the self
History of mankind	History vs. mere past
Family history	

Table 8: Definition of the concept of history [62]

It is hardly worth mentioning that our young people are able to make the basic distinction between "past-present-future" and that they can use it competently. They are equally familiar with these elementary categories of consciousness of time and history as with the related ideas of "then", "now" or "our century". In addition, more complex operations are used as well. It is remarkable, for example, that the young people's present is anticipated as a future past in consideration of the future. [63]

#### The present as future past

Miriam: I often imagine what the people that will live a hundred years from now will think about us. (Lines 306-308)

Miriam's statement exhibits a complex thought operation which not only anticipates the present as a future past, but also brings into play an evaluative perspective and the judgment of those who look back on us and our world. Our time, too, will one day be the object of historical understanding. Miriam's statement is by no means a mere matter of course: it implies the idea of a continuity of historical interest—not least an interest in the time in which Miriam lives herself.

Articulated every-day historical consciousness does not, for the time being, include the "end of history". Miriam's statement also contains the idea of the historicity of history: in a hundred years, our present will be the past and will be implied with the eyes of others whose historical distance is not only one of time but also a relation of partially different "life-forms" (*Lebensformen*). What is for us familiar and natural may, in a hundred years, be understood and judged differently. Change and alteration and their anticipation make our own historical existence appear as a possibility that is perceived and assessed differently at different times. [64]

A short while later, Heide tersely utters a sentence that makes it clear that the young people are quite aware that history is not simply a matter of the past but rather (in its already evident relation to the present) that it comprises another dimension of time, the future:

Heide: Yes, well, I think that the future also belongs to history. (L. 331f.) [65]

The thought and language of our grammar-school pupils (Gymnasiasten) thus straightforwardly mirror those scientific definitions that see historical consciousness as a mental competence that concerns the relation between interpretation of the past, understanding of the present and perspectives of the future (JEISMANN 1988). They thus take as their theme from many different perspectives—their own and others, e.g. future generations—that which is included as a time dimension of the future in the construction and reflection of history and historical practice. The young people are far from viewing history as a meaningless archive, but rather they see the cognitive and practical relevance of the anticipated future for the discussion of the past. [66]

Apart from the differentiation and "relationisation" (*Relationierung*) of the temporal dimensions of the past and future, the pupils divide "history" in another respect, by opening up different "departments" or "sub-disciplines" of history. As is evident from table 8, what counts as history is by no means only the history of mankind or even the history of important historical figures or collectives. Rather, it is clear that our participants put their family's history into an historical context and that they understand family history itself as historical, or historically mediated. The same is true for the individual himself who can be approached reconstructively from the perspective of the young person in relation to past biographical phases—one's own early childhood for example—via family albums looked at with mother or siblings, or via parents' stories about that time, which is only accessible through these stories which then have to be integrated into one's picture of oneself. Nor is it the case that the participants' historical perspective is limited to humans and their history, but rather extends to non-human history. [67]

Finally, there is a difference that does not open up any sub-divisions but is important for all the above mentioned categorial definitions: the difference between history as the entirety of that which occurred empirically before a particular point in time and history as those past events that can be assigned significance and are thus *made* into historical events. [68]

### Family history, one's own biography, one's own historicity

Heide: What are you talking about?

Achim: Nothing. Of her birthdays. That is also history.

Karin: About birthdays is what I like/for me it is history when I see my photos of my brothers and sisters/

Achim: Yes,  
yes/

Karin: as babies.

Heide: Yes exactly. I have such a photo album. It is very interesting. My mother has a photo album full of pictures of myself until now and I keep looking at it. That is quite interesting.

Moderator: mh

Miriam: Yes, they are nice memories.

Karin: When I was a baby, and of course I wasn't there and when my mother and I look at it she tells me many stories about what I used to do. (L.1500-1518)

The conversation about birthdays emphasises one's own historicity and that of relatives. The photos serve as material traces of the recalling of times that one did not witness oneself—the growing up of one's siblings—, and on the other hand, they can inform about part of one's own development that one no longer remembers. This directs attention to the significant role that close relatives play for this "memory work": in this case it is Heide's mother who put together a photo album and for Karin, too, the mother plays an important role whenever they look at photos together and the mother tells her what she "used to do". And so mother and photo album function as a kind of "biography generator" (HAHN 1987) for those parts of the daughter's biography that she has no memory of but which she acquires in the course of her mother's stories. The section as a whole makes it clear, however, that the participants do not yet differentiate between the significance of an autobiography for the *individual* and history as *collectively* significant: family history and autobiography are simply subsumed under the category of history. This may however not just be regarded as an unfortunate category mistake, but possibly as an awareness of the historicisation of larger areas of our "life-world" (*Lebenswelt*). For the young people participating in our discussion, unlike for former generations, it is not only the important acts of great men that count as historical events but also the past of every-day people. [69]

### Mere past and history

In the German language, unlike in many others, one makes a distinction between history (*Geschichte*) as the entirety of the events that are in the past and history (*Historie*) as a concept that directs attention towards the meaningfulness of certain past phenomena (cf. the keyword "history" [*Geschichte*] in the "Enzyklopädie Philosophie und Wissenschaftstheorie" [Encyclopaedia of philosophy and philosophy of science]). At least to some extent the study's participants are aware of this distinction.

Achim: 1990 is really history, too, like 1999.

Heide: And the last second when we talked, that is history too.

Achim: I would not go to that extreme. It is the past but—(L. 852-857) [70]

Achim asserts that it is not just events and epochs far in the past that can count as history, but also times that are not so far in the past, perhaps only one year. Heide radicalises this view and claims that even the time when they talked just one second ago is history. Achim does not want to go this far however and hints at an essential difference: although the previous second "is the past but—", he does not carry on because he gets interrupted. As he never goes back to the sentence that he begun we can only assume that he would have added "but not history". A completion like that seems to suggest itself. It now becomes clear that the young people's conception of history—as if they had internalised the teachings of historicism—does not stop at their own present. History is thus not simply what happened long ago waiting to be archived. [71]

#### 4.3.2 Categories on the structuring of history

Dates	Dates of the year
Facts	Selectivity of historical representation

Table 9: Categories on the structuring of history [72]

We will now deal with the question of how the concept of history as developed by the participants is to be assigned to fundamental categories. Although we will not deal with it in any more detail, we will mention one important aspect of the complex in question: The terms "dates", "facts" and "dates of the year" are usually mentioned with pejorative intent; they appear in contexts which our young people do not associate with historical interest, but rather with its opposite: The teaching of historical knowledge in the form of disjointed, boring and abstract historical matters of fact. Also the topos of the "selectivity of historical representation"—which we will discuss in more detail—is owed to this context, as it is mentioned critically with respect to the above practice—and mainly blamed on the schools. [73]

#### Selectivity of historical representations

Karin: What is missing /the things that are interesting, they are left out. (L. 781f.)

Achim: Or for example, I want to say, it's a blunt example but I think about hippies and stuff there is nothing in the, uhm, history book, on that period. Where the revolution started, that is also a historical matter. (L. 817-821)

The participants are aware that what they are taught as history or read in history books is not the "whole" history but rather a selection of all kinds of historical phenomena. This consciousness is even more distressing when during the course of the selection at school they leave out precisely those aspects of history which the

young people would like to find out more about: "the things that are interesting, they are left out". Particularly aspects of the most recent history, like the time of the hippies and the revolt of '68 fall victim to this selection procedure. [74]

It is difficult to gather from the citations whether the participants only know about the impossibility of a complete historical representation under certain empirical conditions—like the reality at school—or whether they recognise the logical impossibility of a total historiography. In any case, they are aware that a selective order is created in concrete situations of history teaching. This knowledge of the polyvalence of historical material, which can only be talked about in part and is dependent on factors such as the given situation, power and time, is in turn itself dependent on cultural-historical factors and in its emphasis on plurality specifically modern. [75]

#### 4.3.3 Types of reasons for the validity of historical statements

Which representations can one trust	Reports that prove historical accuracy
Testimony and historical representations	Biblical and scientific representations of history

Table 10: Types of reasons for the validity of historical statements [76]

Although they do not call it that, the young people operate with criteria of validity regarding the truth of historical statements. They ask for the trustworthiness of historical representations, whether something was reported by someone who had seen it himself or herself, they ask about visible proofs and the status of biblical versus scientifically proven historical interpretations. [77]

#### Which representations can one trust?

Achim: When one sees films on TV, sword-and-sandal adventures, or however you call them ((they all laugh)) I just find that a bit strange, because we always /there are always warriors and they are intelligent and that is more like, hmm, the thought of our time transported into the past. Transported into the suits and gear of the past.

Moderator: mh

Achim: And I think that's really rubbish. And when one goes to the federal museum like, then you can really/there you can really find out about the culture and stuff. (L. 251-265)

Achim recognises the lesser quality of these "sword-and-sandal adventures". Only the clothes shown in the films correspond to the clothes of the time. Otherwise, all differences between present and past are erased. These are not warriors whose thinking and acting is different to our way of thinking and acting today. The supposed historical characters presented resemble us in important aspects. The fact that they are dressed in a different way is the only difference. This difference however cannot deceive Achim into thinking that the film can show him something that is of historical substance, that shows him the

peculiarities of the people presented compared with us today. His judgement is thus logical: "I think that's really rubbish." Achim does not have to rely on cinematic representations since he knows that there is a federal museum in his town where one can see exhibits where one can "really find out about culture". Unlike in the cinematic representations, there, you cannot see anything that is entirely the artificial product of today's thinking and that serves interests other than those of historical illumination. On the contrary, there, he finds objects like mosaics which were not made by us but by members of previous generations and which, in their materiality, "tell" us something about the culture of the time. [78]

### Testimony and historical representations

Karin: My brother loves Winnetou. Then I read some and it was all rubbish. He was never with the Red Indians and still writes about how it used to be. (L. 1199-1202)

The role of literary representations is talked about several times during the course of the discussion. A distinction is made between literary dramatisations that merely aim for suspense, and representations, even if they are suspenseful, that seem realistic due to their narrative plausibility. *That* they are realistic at least partly depends on an author's perceived authority. As far as Karl May is concerned, the participants agree with Karin's judgement, but not about the novels' literary content. If someone hasn't even *seen* Red Indians, about which he claims to know so much about, then he has to be denied the ability to write about them realistically. (We will not go into the obvious naivety compared with the standards of theoretical history of the concept of testimony as formulated by the group) [79]

### Reports that prove historical accuracy

Like the above citations, the following part of the transcript shows that the topos "to-see-something-with-one's-own-eyes" is of the utmost importance in the assessment of historical validity. In the context of a discussion about the so-called "Ötzi", Miriam says the following:

Miriam: I know that's how it was, definitely, when one finds someone like that. I mean, he has /after all, nobody threw a doll into there ((laughs)). (L. 428-430) [80]

The fact that "Ötzi" was found is evidence for Miriam that that person has existed. This is obvious from the phrases "I know that's how it was" and the special emphasis on "definitely". Her statement is further emphasised by the negation (which is not to be taken seriously [Miriam laughs]) of the suspicion that someone may have simply thrown a doll into the site where Ötzi was found. Here, too, there is a piece of evidence that can be examined with one's own eyes. It would be the task of developmental psychology to investigate how the role of an "eyewitness account" changes. A possible developmental sequence would be that children still more or less believe the reports of people in authority, older children and young people may demand visible evidence and slightly older adolescents may be more



aware of the problem of historical certainty, which could be manifested in the expounding of the problem of the boundaries between fiction and historical fact. [81]

### Biblical and scientific representations of history

As the brief summary of the course of the discussion illustrates, the contrast between biblical stories and scientifically proven historical representations—if one includes natural history—plays a big role in the discussion. The young people are on their guard, however, not to play them off against each other. Rather, they attempt, so it seems, to demonstrate the *limits of validity* for both areas in order to show their partial compatibility.

Heide: Yes, in our religion class we are talking about, ehm, what science has found out, the beginning of the world and the religious picture and that, with Adam and Eve and that. Because, ehm, I think you can't connect the two, because, ehm, I would believe both: the one is more symbolic and the other kind of scientific. It's quite possible that God made it, that the big bang happened. That's how one can imagine it. (L. 918-926) [82]

Heide's statement does not describe the contradiction between a scientific enlightened natural history and a biblical representation of the beginning of the world which could not be solved. The phrase that the religious picture cannot be connected with the scientific one makes it clear that a "one-to-one-correspondence" should be excluded. One would not do justice to the truth of modern science if one took the Bible literally nor would one do justice to the claims of Christian ideas if one judged the bible by only scientific criteria. Heide circumvents such a conflict. According to her statement, the two discourses' elements of truth are situated on different levels. Science proceeds rationally and religion symbolically. It is also by no means ruled out that the big bang could be the final grounding for the origin of the world. It is possible, according to Heide, that there was indeed a big bang but that God "made" it. [83]

#### *4.3.4 Methods of historical understanding*

Tangible past	Identify with	Past "life-forms" (Lebensformen)/alienness
Keepsake	Empathy	Traditions
Remembering	Imagining	Customs

Table 11: Methods of historical understanding [84]

History for our young people is not simply an open book that they can look at and read with no further ado only to then go back to their day-to-day life having been thoroughly enlightened. Not every historical topic is interesting and equally accessible. The metaphorical phrase "tangible past", which the participants oppose to abstract historical knowledge, is evidence of that. This, as it were, vivid past, whose representations—which are analogous to the tactile qualities of

material objects that can be touched—impart a concrete, vivid idea of the bygone which fires their enthusiasm and appears promising. The present or imagined "keepsakes" for example arouse an immediate desire for historical understanding and at the same time convey a picture that triggers associations which can assist understanding. They facilitate hermeneutic operations, suggest questions and enable what the group calls "empathy", "identifying with" and historical "imagining". Understanding however runs into a not directly surmountable barrier as soon as it is confronted with particularly *alien* "traditions" and "customs". It is not least this extraordinary alienness, which transcends all familiar order, that attracts the young people's increased attention. [85]

### Abstract knowledge versus "tangible past"

Heide: Well I think that when one hears the world history one is more likely to think of the Romans or something/

Moderator: mh

Heide: but I find it more interesting the way things are now /like our century /

Achim: tangible/

Heide: because/

Achim: more than tangible/the tangible past

Heide: yes, there are still many signs and connections and that and like grandparents' stories or something. (L. 110-121)

Heide associates the word history with common school topics like Roman classical antiquity. More interesting however than these conventional areas of the curriculum is, so she says, the present century. Achim now throws in the word "tangible" and specifies it with the phrase "more tangible/tangible past". Compared with the time of the Romans the present century is very close, tangible, that is, it is related to today in "life-form" (*Lebensform*) and practice. Heide illustrates this by referring to signs, direct connections and grandparents' stories. She mentions that there is much in her environment that presents past events from the 20th century. In addition, there are "connections" like family relations. Because relatives talk about their own past even the young remain connected to this "tangible" past. This makes clear the contrast with the topics commonly associated with history. We do not know anybody who experienced the "time of the Romans" and who could tell us stories about it. Our knowledge of that time has for a long time been a matter of cultural memory, while the second world war and the post-war era is remembered on the basis of a communicative memory which comprises around 80 to 100 years. It is thus closely related to the experiences of significant others with whom one may have a very personal relationship. [86]

## Keepsakes

Heide: And I think it's cool when you have keepsakes relating to it and that. (L. 123 f.)

For our own century there are not only the stories of grandparents' and other relatives. As mentioned above, we are connected with this time via keepsakes. Such objects, that can be looked at, shown, touched, perhaps taken away, used or put away may direct our attention to the fact that they do not date from our days by their appearance alone. They may be loved or hated, they may fill the owner or onlooker with pride or shame, they may arouse sorrow or hope.<sup>22</sup> In any case they embody narrative abbreviations and occasions for remembering that evoke stories and eventually a picture of history. They stand for a time that one can remember, in order that one can partake in the past and the experiences of others at least virtually, imaginatively and emotionally—a fact which may cause one to be moved. The symbolic value of these keepsakes is evident from the fact that their worth lies not in their use—often, they will in fact have lost this instrumental function. The swastika flag that was made into cushions, aprons and tablecloths is of no practical interest to us nowadays. On the contrary, it stands for a story that informs about the life of grandparents and their historically and not least trans-generationally mediated influence on our life today. [87]

## Empathising, identifying with, imagining

Achim: I think the thing about the tangible past, second world war and that I find more interesting – only I know someone who knows all sorts of dates and facts, he knows all about the second world war by heart, but the factual stuff, I am more interested in the human side of things. Then with my granddad I can, he was a soldier for example /

Moderator:

mh

Achim: and he was prisoner of war with the Americans and that and he talks about it and then you can identify with it. One can imagine what he felt and what he thought. (L187-202)

Achim expresses his unease with pure factual knowledge. For him, what is more important than knowledge of dates and facts is the "human side". This can be imparted through stories (as told by relatives). To this day, his grandfather gives him an idea about what he used to do and experience, what he thought and felt as soldier and prisoner of war. Achim's remarks further put into concrete terms the concept of a "tangible past". The exceptional role of stories is stressed once again. It are these stories, and not a list of facts and data, what enables Achim's historical understanding through empathy, identification and vivid imagination. By means of this narratively mediated act of historical imagination Achim can *virtually* bridge the gap of time and historical difference.

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<sup>22</sup> A detailed psychology of identity-relevant objects was recently presented by Tilman HABERMAS (1999).

Achim: Now for example I can, while I am sitting here, I don't want to say anything against the Romans again ((laughs)) I find it quite interesting, but that is after all /when now /when someone now tells you that the Romans did this and that, you can't really imagine it today.

Karin: Yes, I/

Achim: Is/Yes, I find that interesting too, but today I can't really /I can't identify with /

Heide:

well I think/

Achim: such a person. (L. 202-216) [88]

Heide has the following comment:

Heide: [...] but I was, ehm, a year ago or so in Rome with my parents and a group and we went to Ostia Antica and that is a town that /a town of ruins and I thought that was really interesting, there were entire houses and that and you could identify with it really well—shops and squares and that, and I think, when you imagine how it used to be and that, I find that quite interesting. (L. 218-227) [89]

"Identifying with" is not only possible through eye-witness accounts, nor does it depend on whether the object that arouses historical interest originates from relatively recent times. Ruins, too, can be of assistance, at least when they, like in Ostia Antica, convey the image of "entire houses" and "shops and squares". All in all we can say that for the group distance in time does not correlate with the barriers and possibilities of historical understanding. The Middle Ages can appear more alien than the time of the Romans. Distance in time can turn out to be the more tangible past. [90]

#### Traditions, customs, old ways of life

The young people often use words such as "traditions", "customs" and "ways of life" and thus emphasise profound historical differences. This otherness in particular arouses their interest, especially as the other turns into the alien. This aspect can count as an indicator for modernity. Such experiences and reflections accompanied by curiosity and interest do not, as explained above, have a long history. Our young people express experiences and reflections that document their receptivity, especially to that which is historically alien. The transcript of the text is full of examples about the fascination for past times. As the course of the discussion as summarised above demonstrates, the witch-hunt of the Middle Ages for example arouses particular historical fascination.

Heide: Yes, okay. The witch-hunt is also /

Achim: (((laughing))) is also really cool ((they all laugh))/

Heide: ((emphasis)) interesting. All the things that happened there are really quite sensational. (L.1743-1748) [91]

Slaves in Roman classical antiquity present a further example (although not quite as spectacular):

Miriam: Because the Romans had different, like, traditions and that and when you were a slave, nowadays it's more difficult to imagine that. (L. 140-143) [92]

The historically established existence of slaves or the witch-hunt of the Middle Ages is not merely something which is different compared with today. It is alien. With BOESCH (1998, p.77) we can say that "the alien [...] is not only different but *unfamiliar*, and this unfamiliarity can frighten as well as attract us." The difficulties that arise when one tries to imagine how it may have been to be a slave, or more to the point: how the witch-hunt happened and why, do not just build barriers to the imagination and even more to understanding but also to the permanent incentive for further engagement. Miriam, Heide and the other participants do not simply stop at the realization of hermeneutic problems, they continue to talk about these "difficult" topics throughout the discussion. [93]

The NS time, too, is of course alien in many respects. What is unique about it is that it turns into strangers one's closest and most familiar relatives in a particular way, that it "carries away" the past even more than another past could have. This is because for some participants, when pondering their own grandparents' past, grave doubts set in concerning their actions during the "Third Reich", doubts that turn those that are familiar and loved people into suspects. In this context, we would like to mention one last example:

Miriam: Yes, I also think somehow, whenever I talk to my grandparents about it, I always think, how they are being evasive, somehow as if ((emphasis)) they didn't know anything about it or perhaps they know ((emphasis)) really not very much, but I always somehow think that they are being evasive and don't want to tell me, because for them /because they themselves don't want to hear it or perhaps because they themselves ((emphasis)) do not want to admit that they didn't do anything or that they didn't have the courage to help or something. (L. 676-686) [94]

#### 4.3.5 Concepts of historical development

Progress
Regression
Origin

Table 12: Concepts of historical development [95]

There are many everyday concepts of historical development as well as philosophical and scientific ones: Examples are the famous eternal recurrence of the ever-same, eschatological conceptions of history of religious origin or secular teleological philosophies of history like HEGEL's or MARX'. There are other ideas that assume a radical openness of history that do not recognise a goal and

understand it as entirely contingent. Because the young people made only very few remarks concerning this topic, it was difficult to identify which conception of historical development they subscribe to. In a number of places, they express an understanding of history as (potentially) developing. This understanding is expressed in the terms "progress", "regression" and "origin". [96]

### Progress/Regression

Miriam: [...] because, when one looks at history then one sees that there was mostly great progress. And whether that may be the case in the near future, that there is big progress, perhaps life on the moon or something like that?

Achim: Yes, or steps back. Like with from the Roman Empire/

Heide: or nuclear bomb/

Achim: to the Middle Ages. (L.311-319)

When one looks at *history* the young people detect "big progress". This poses the question whether there will be more progress in the near future. Life on the moon perhaps? They do not however exclude the possibility that there may be no such progress but rather a "step back". They cite examples: there is the supposed step back from the Roman empire to the Middle Ages—a point of view which may be the result of the common phrase "dark ages"—, and, a more current example, the invention or deployment of the nuclear bomb. The group is thus perfectly aware that there are *no certain expectations* concerning the future. There can be progress as well as regression. There can be no definite prognoses. The historical realm of experience and horizon of expectation concerning the future is open. One can assert that the young people have an awareness of contingency. This shows that the two concepts of "progress/regression" are used separately for each individual case. *History* for our young people neither represents a history of decay, nor an exclusively optimistic development towards something better. The certainty, however, that follows from both of the above global conceptions of history does not exist for the participants. [97]

### Origin

It is remarkable that the participants talk about origin in this context:

Heide: Look, when one finds all these fossils and that, then one can, then one can somehow trace back important steps/

Karin: but/

Heide: how everything originated and that (L. 459-463) [98]

The idea that it should be possible to use fossils to reconstruct important steps of natural history demonstrates that the young people are aware that things do not simply exist but rather are subject to the dynamics of origin, change and development. Things are not as they were yesterday, and what is certain today can look different tomorrow. [99]

Most philosophical conceptions of history of course presuppose an "origin". In pre-modern understandings of history, too, there are stories—mostly myths and legends—, that deal with the origin of the world and its development up to now. The crucial differences between such conceptions and the one mentioned here is not only that the former lacks the idea of historicity but also that the young people rationally examine their view of origin and development. The history of origin and development, including its contingent elements, is not simply *believed* or *taken* to be true, but rather it can be traced with the help of material evidence and other criteria in an *inter-subjective* way. [100]

## **5. Consequences for Further Research and for Educational Endeavours in and out of School**

Even in historical didactics, young people's (and children's) consciousness and self-awareness of history has not been acknowledged appropriately, it is in fact often underrated. This underestimation is mainly due to conceptual uncertainties that are lamented by Hartmann LEITNER, whose words we used as the motto for our paper. Criticism of the lack of historical consciousness usually goes hand in hand with pointing out discrepancies between normative expectations of pupils' knowledge and their actual knowledge. The view of historical consciousness as a formal competence which can be conceptualized theoretically and in particular as a specific attribute of a highly scientific modernity may lead to an entirely different result. [101]

Critical diagnoses that merely relate to knowledge deficits or educational gaps in the day-to-day sense are common. Such results are usually tied to gloomy prognoses of unwelcome actions and "life-forms" (*Lebensformen*)—as if gaps in knowledge pave the way to a "relapse into barbarism". All this is alarming in many respects. Firstly, in this context, the nexus between knowledge and action is by no means as obvious and unambiguous as these complaints may suggest. Secondly, it will have to be considered that a substantial part of empirical research within historical didactics and other disciplines represent methodological artefacts—we remind the reader of the particularly blatant example of so-called cross-cultural research. Thirdly, as mentioned before, it is obvious that the above criticisms always deal with factual knowledge, whereas the often impressive structural competencies remain strongly underrated. Our case study provides an exemplary impression of these assumptive and complex abilities. [102]

The result of the sequential analysis of our group discussion sketched so far indicates that the historico-narrative competencies of adolescents is largely underestimated, or at least, that we have an inadequate picture of those abilities and their development. We do not of course wish to make rash generalisations on the basis of our initial empirical results. In agreement with colleagues of our own discipline and related subjects we presume variable forms and manifestations of historical consciousness and historical self-awareness even within the same age-group. As is well-known, biological age is not a good measure of the socio-culturally imparted development that is of interest here. Historical consciousness and historical self-awareness originate and develop

*implicitly*, to be precise: it proceeds in the course of the participation in the socio-cultural practice of temporalisation, dynamisation and historisation of the world and the self. Individuals and groups are to varying degrees exposed to socio-cultural incentives and disincentives that promote or impede the historical sense. The group discussion presented by us no doubt testifies to an historical consciousness that is not only "vivid" and varied but also has a certain specific quality. As was explained with the help of several indicators, this awareness is an unmistakably modern phenomenon. The subjects who express it and understand themselves in the light of historical reality are part of an order that is analysable using the methodological means of critical reason even though no amount of reason can save it from remaining at least partially alien and entirely contingent, changeable and transient. [103]

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