

We've only just begun

Cultural history in Germany

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A Young Scholar's Guide to Cultural History in Germany

While preparing this essay, I thought briefly about giving it a different subtitle. Sitting in front of my computer, I said to myself (or to my computer?) that I should rather call it “A young scholar’s guide to cultural history in Germany”. This heading suddenly seemed to be more appropriate to me because it would reflect on the different audiences this conference volume (and my essay in it) is addressing.

Asking myself “Whom are we talking to as cultural historians?”, four groups or public spheres came to my mind: Firstly, the wider public whom we are trying to convince about the necessity and quality of our work. Secondly, the academic field of the arts in general, whom we are trying to convince as well. Thirdly, we are talking to ourselves in the sense of shaping our own identity as an academic subfield. Fourthly, we are talking about our future—indeed, we are talking *to* our future, and this future is the young scholar thinking about working in the field of cultural history. Now, if this young scholar would come up to me, what would I tell her about cultural history? What should she do (because statistically this young scholar rather is female)—and what should she rather avoid? Are there any chances to making a career in cultural history? And which steps are to be taken of reach that aim? Thus, I am trying to present some (hopefully helpful) rules for that young scholar to help her to find her way through the field of cultural history, including some *dos and don'ts*.

According to the general objective of this conference volume I will roughly split my paper into two parts and try to give you an impression of the institutional framework of cultural history in Germany before I turn to the contents of this field of research.

1. The institutionalization of cultural history in Germany

Let's start with some very basic and practical questions like: Where is cultural history happening in Germany, where can it be studied and where are the institutions specialized in that field of research?

In the last years several courses were established at German universities with a wider or a rather concentrated focus on cultural history¹

1. Bachelor-Level

- BA *Antiquity in Europe (Die Antike in Europa)*, University of Marburg
- BA *Cultural History of Christianity (Kulturgeschichte des Christentums)*, University Erlangen-Nürnberg
- BA *European Cultural History (Europäische Kulturgeschichte)*, University of Augsburg
- BA *Cultural Studies (Kulturwissenschaft)* with a focus on cultural history, University of Bremen
- BA *Cultural Studies (Kulturwissenschaften)* as well with a focus on cultural history, University of Frankfurt/Oder
- BA *Folklore Studies/Cultural History (Volkskunde/Kulturgeschichte)*, University of Jena



Table 1

1 This information was gathered from: <http://www.hochschulkompass.de/studium.html>, 01.03.2010.

2. Master-Level

- MA *European Cultural History (Europäische Kulturgeschichte)*, University of Frankfurt/Oder
- MA *European Cultural History (Europäische Kulturgeschichte)*, University of Augsburg
- MA *European Cultural History (Europäische Kulturgeschichte)*, University of Magdeburg
- MA *Interdisciplinary Medieval Studies (Interdisziplinäre Mittelalterstudien)*, University of Münster
- MA *Cultures of Central and Eastern Europe (Kulturen Mittel- und Osteuropas)*, Humboldt-University of Berlin
- MA *Cultural and Medieval Studies (Kulturgeschichtliche Mittelalterstudien)*, University of Regensburg
- MA *Cultural Foundations of Europe (Kulturelle Grundlagen Europas)*, University of Constance
- MA *Cultural Studies of Antiquity (Kulturwissenschaft der Antike)*, University of Constance
- MA *Folklore Studies/Cultural History (Volkskunde/Kulturgeschichte)*, University of Jena
- MA *Renaissance and Reformation Studies (Renaissance- und Reformationsstudien)*, University of Osnabrück
- MA *Enlightenment—Religion—Knowledge (Aufklärung—Religion—Wissen)*, University of Halle



Table 2



Table 3

It would obviously be easier for our student to specialize on cultural history on the Master-Level, while the possibilities to concentrate on that field on a Bachelor-Level are not really overwhelming. Nonetheless, one could say that there are sufficient possibilities to turn to cultural history at a very early stage.

However, taking on specific courses on cultural history is only one way to tackle that field. In addition, there is the possibility to consider some chairs in universities specialized mainly or at least partly in cultural history. Here is a short list that may serve as an overview:

- Chair for European Cultural History (*Europäische Kulturgeschichte*), University of Augsburg
- Within the Faculty of Cultural Studies (*Fakultät für Kulturwissenschaften*) at the Viadrina-University of Frankfurt/Oder there is a whole branch of chairs for cultural history
- Chair for Cultural History (*Fach Kulturgeschichte*), University of Jena

Furthermore there are some research institutes concentrating exclusively on cultural history or have at least a special focus on that field of research. You will not be surprised at the mention of *usual suspects*, who are already familiar to you now:

- Institute of European Cultural History (*Institut für Europäische Kulturgeschichte*, IEK) University of Augsburg

- Institute of Cultural Studies (*Kulturwissenschaftliches Institut*), Essen
- Historical Cultural Sciences (*FSP Historische Kulturwissenschaften*), University of Mainz
- Interdisciplinary Institute for the Cultural History of the Early Modern Period (*Interdisziplinäres Institut für die Kulturgeschichte der Frühen Neuzeit*, IKFN), University of Osnabrück
- Research-Centre for the Early Modern Period (Zentrum zur Erforschung der Frühen Neuzeit), University of Frankfurt/Main
- Interdisciplinary Centre for European Enlightenment Studies (*Interdisziplinäres Zentrum für die Erforschung der Europäischen Aufklärung*, IZEA), University of Halle



Table 4

If we look a little closer at these university courses as well as on the research institutions it is quite obvious that medievalists and early modernists are prevailing in the field of cultural history. Thus, in Germany we have more or less the same situation as in France or in the United Kingdom, whereby scholars concentrating on these periods are much more attracted by cultural history. Even institutions, which do not explicitly concentrate on the Middle Ages or the early modern period, do so at least implicitly, as in the case of the Institute in Augsburg. Of course, this combination of older periods and cultural history does not occur by accident. Being an early modernist myself, I could make it easy by just stating that scholars concentrating on the history prior to the French Revolution are simply the *avant-garde*. But that would indeed be too easy. The reason why

medievalists and early modernists feel attracted to cultural history is the need to shed new light on old problems and sources. Historians concentrating on modern history might not always see the necessity to ask new questions in this way.

But to prevent a possible misunderstanding: This quite impressive list of research institutions does not mean that the cultural history in Germany is swimming in an ocean of funds, stipends, positions, or money in general. In fact, many of these institutes have no money at all, are nothing else but a combination of researchers interested in cultural history. Thus, these are relatively small institutions, organizing conferences, smaller research projects, sometimes offering PhD positions, etc. But it would be bad advice for our young scholar, were she to put her hopes in these institutions. There are other possibilities I will mention soon. But before, the list with important institutionalizations of cultural history has to be closed with some journals. Only one journal in Germany concentrates exclusively on cultural history, the *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* (Archive for Cultural History), concentrates.²

However, in the wider surroundings of cultural history there are several journals which have a special focus on cultural history:

- *Historische Anthropologie* (Historical Anthropology)³
- *KulturPoetik* (Cultural Poetics)⁴
- *Zeitschrift für Kulturphilosophie* (Journal of Cultural Philosophy)⁵
- *Saeculum. Jahrbuch für Universalgeschichte* (Saeculum. Yearbook of Universal History)⁶
- *WerkstattGeschichte* (WorkshopHistory)⁷
- *Jahrbuch für Kommunikationsgeschichte* (Yearbook of Communication History)⁸

Apart from these specialized journals, there are contributions to cultural history in all important major journals in the field of history, including the *Historische*

2 <http://www.historische-anthropologie.uzh.ch/index.html>, 01.03.2010.

3 <http://www.geschichte.uni-erlangen.de/lehrstuehle/mittelalter/forschung/AKG.shtml>, 01.03.2010.

4 <http://www.uni-saarland.de/fak4/fr41/Engel/kulturpoetik/welcome.htm>, 01.03.2010.

5 <http://www.meiner.de/zkph>, 01.03.2010.

6 Unfortunately there is no Saeculum homepage. Information can be gathered at the homepage of the publisher: <http://www.boehlau.de>, 01.03.2010.

7 <http://www.werkstattgeschichte.de>, 01.03.2010.

8 <http://www.steiner-verlag.de/JbKG>, 01.03.2010.

*Zeitschrift*⁹ as the most traditional and still most important. Articles on cultural history can also be found in the broader field of literary, cultural, visual studies and so on. That there seems to be no further need to establish specialized journals on cultural history in their own right is—I believe—rather a good indication. It shows that the new cultural history in Germany, after it has been confronted with resentment and even hostility for a while, has established itself in the centre of the field of academic history.¹⁰ Cultural-historical approaches certainly do not only have friends (but then: who wants to be friends with everybody?), but now the pursuit of this approach no longer requires justification.

On the contrary, in some areas of historical research cultural issues have become quite dominant. Numerous theses, dissertations and so on refer explicitly to cultural history as the dominant perspective. Apparently many young scholars are expecting to open an innovative potential from cultural history up new perspectives and answer old questions in a different way. Accordingly it is not very surprising that publishing houses respond very positively to this cultural trend. Additional indicators give hints in this direction: The very influential internet platform *H-Soz-u-Kult* (Humanities Social and Cultural History)¹¹ awards a prize for the best historical books in different categories every year. That this prize is taken very seriously, evident by the fact that the publishing houses are advertising the results quite frequently. I will only give you a few examples of books with a focus on cultural history, which have been awarded with that prize in 2008 and 2009:

- Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger about *The emperor's old clothes. The history of constitution and language of symbols in the early modern German Empire*¹²
- Karl Ubl about *Incest taboo and legislation. Construction of a crime 300-1100*¹³
- Jakob Vogel about *A shimmering crystal. A history of knowledge about salt in early modern and modern times*¹⁴
- Karl Schlögel about *Terror and dream: Moscow 1937*¹⁵

9 <http://www.historische-zeitschrift.de>, 01.03.2010

10 The respective discussion has been drawn together by TSCHOPP/WEBER, 2007.

11 <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de>, 01.03.2010.

12 STOLLBERG-RILINGER, 2008.

13 UBL, 2008.

14 VOGEL, 2008.

15 SCHLÖGEL, 2008.

- Sabine Doering-Manteuffel about *The occult. A success story in the shadow of the Enlightenment*¹⁶
- Marian Füssel about *The culture of scholars as symbolic practice: Rank, ritual, and conflict in early modern universities*¹⁷
- And again Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger about *The cultural history of the political*¹⁸

2. The possibilities of funding for cultural history

Well, that's all nice: Offering courses at universities, establishing research institutes without any or only low funding, publishing journals and books some people will hopefully read—but what about the serious stuff, what about money? The relative success of cultural history in Germany really can be seen here. If one looks at the projects supported by the largest research funding organization by far in Germany, the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* (DFG), one finds that cultural history plays quite a prominent part. If you search the database of projects funded by the DFG for *cultural history* there are no less than 135 results.¹⁹ There you will find everything from the cultural history of the human experiment to a cultural history of the diagram. But let us concentrate on the really big projects, like the so called clusters of excellence (*Exzellenz-cluster*), mainly intended for the natural sciences with an almost disappearing part for the humanities. But cultural history cannot be overlooked in that small section: There is a cluster on processes of cultural exchange between Asia and Europe (Heidelberg),²⁰ a cluster on the formation and transformation of space and knowledge in cultures of antiquity (Berlin),²¹ a cluster on religion and politics in pre-modern and modern times (Münster),²² and a cluster on the cultural foundations of integration (Konstanz).²³ All of them refer explicitly to cultural history. And just to make sure of what we are talking about: Every one of these clusters is getting funded with 3 to 8 million Euros every year. Thus for instance,

16 DOERING-MANTEUFFEL, 2008.

17 FÜSSEL, 2006.

18 STOLLBERG-RILINGER, 2005.

19 <http://gepris.dfg.de/gepris>, 02.03.2010.

20 <http://www.asia-europe.uni-heidelberg.de/en/home.html>, 01.03.2010.

21 <http://www.topoi.org>, 01.03.2010.

22 <http://www.uni-muenster.de/religion-und-politik>, 01.03.2010.

23 <http://www.exc16.de>, 01.03.2010.

right now it is quite easy for our young scholar to get funding for a dissertation. Indeed, some of these clusters really had problems to fill all the positions that were established during the so called *initiative of excellence*. It is quite obvious that there will also be some serious problems in the long run. Our young scholar will finish her dissertations with dozens, if not hundreds of other cultural historians—but the possibilities to find an adequate position at a university afterwards are still quite bad and they will get even worse when these clusters of excellence will release a flood of highly qualified young people.

However, the clusters of excellence are only the tip of the iceberg. Apart from that there are several graduate schools, research groups and priority programmes, all of them with a respectable part of cultural history. (Not to forget that the DFG is also funding this conference.) And apart from the DFG there are still more organizations funding research projects, such as the Henkel-, the Thyssen- or the Volkswagen-foundation to name just the majors.

But let us not forget that the success of cultural history in terms of raising funds really is a double-edged sword. On the hand it is great to see that cultural history obviously is able to receive support even with huge projects and large amounts of money. On the other hand we still have our young scholar sitting in front of us, thinking about her future in cultural history—and we have to face her with the hard facts that there is a *normal* academic life which is not getting funded. And that the possibilities to get a position, even on a tenure-track basis, are difficult and probably will become even more difficult. But our young scholar quite is convinced that she will be able to make an academic career and she is convinced that cultural history is the field in which she has something to say—and her enthusiasm is slowly convincing us. Thus, what we need now are some ideas on a subject she would be interested in and that would—at best—open up new perspectives for cultural history. Which topic should she choose?

3. Past, present and the future of cultural history in Germany

That was the easy part. Now that we assured ourselves that the institutional conditions of cultural history in Germany are not that bad—at least not that worse than in other fields of research in the humanities and that in some respects the situation is even better—and before we can give our young scholar really good advice about her research topics, we have to turn to a much more difficult question: What is being discussed in Germany under the heading of *cultural history*? What are the main subjects, with whom is cultural history cooperating, who are

the main opponents? These aspects must be clarified before we can really say anything about promising fields of research for the future. No doubt, these questions are important for our young scholar, because mistakes should be avoided if you want to make a living of cultural history; at the same time the aim should be to establish new topics and to open up new perspectives. What can we tell our young scholar, which advice can be given? Maybe the best way to answer these questions is to concentrate on the *problems* of cultural history, because that is probably the best way to learn about the strengths and weaknesses of an academic discipline. I would like to look at two perspectives: Firstly, look at the problems cultural history is posing to others, second, the problems cultural history has with itself—or should have with itself.

3.1 The problem cultural history poses to others

When we turn to the problems cultural history is posing to others, we have mentioned one since the turn of the century: its success cultural history profits, from a large popularity, not only in terms of research funding. Stroll through any bookstore, take a look at the growing number of popular magazines with historical content and switch on any of the history programmes on television—cultural history will show an inestimable presence. However, cultural history not only enjoys increased attention in the media and in the broader public but—as we all know—also in the community of professional historians since the beginning of the 1990s.²⁴

A second problem is tightly connected with the first one; it is the question of the status of cultural history. For quite a while now there are debates going on about the aims, the basis and—generally speaking—the meaning of cultural history. These discussions very often circle around the problem of self-definition of cultural history. What is cultural history all about? Since it follows a broad term of culture—one not restricted to an understanding of culture as arts, everyday life, material culture, etc.—it is difficult to make clear what it really wants to know. Sometimes cultural history appears as an approach that evokes the impression to know everything and to be able to explain everything—and for that reason—many critics say—cultural history in fact knows and explains nothing

24 The birth date of the new cultural history is marked by the publication of the volume of HUNT, 1989.

anymore. The problem arises: Is cultural history really such a vague field of research?²⁵

To make one thing clear: I think that it is very positive and very productive that cultural history raises all these questions. It helps not only to shape its own programme, but it makes everybody in the field of historical research think about their work, about their preconceptions and their bases. Thus, cultural history in general is a challenge, maybe even a provocation—and that is very important!

That cultural history functions as a productive provocation can be seen by the fact that problems with that approach are often being brought forward by those who are *not really* in favour of it. Sometimes it is even said that, because of its character, cultural history is representing a massive threat for the academic conception of history.²⁶ And of course, there is a point. Even within cultural history regret is being expressed from time to time, that it has not been made sufficiently clear what this approach is all about and that it is the concept of culture in particular which leads to considerable blurs and uncertainties.

Looking at the state of art of cultural history, it is not surprising that this approach is confronted with the argument to do everything and nothing at the same time. Regarding the topics being tackled in this field, one indeed has the impression that no aspect of past life is left aside. There are the *classical* subjects like the histories of body, sex and gender, identity and alterity, communication and media, knowledge and science as well as the arts or the importance of memory for past and present societies. But one also finds cultural histories of politics, economy, technology etc.

Anyway, the question has to be asked if the critics are not right: Isn't this approach really too all-encompassing? Doesn't it mean that cultural history can do nothing anymore, because it wants to do everything? Against the background of the variety of topics, is it possible that cultural history remains in the state of a dilettante in all these possible fields of research? Is it possibly that cultural history produces nothing but *fashionable nonsense*?

One reason for these discussions, and even for these misunderstandings, is the fact that cultural history in Germany neither as a concept nor as an approach is a radical innovation; on the contrary, it can look back at a very long tradition. For this reason there are always certain preconceptions regarding cultural history, preconceptions which quite often turn out to be misunderstandings. Cultural history, as it is being practiced (again) for about two decades, has certain

25 I worked on this topic to a larger extent in LANDWEHR/STOCKHORST, 2004; LANDWEHR, 2005; LANDWEHR, 2009.

26 WEHLER, 1998; Id., 2001.

ties to older traditions, but shows a profile of its very own altogether. This profile sometimes contradicts general ideas about cultural history.

Let me just briefly mention a few of the influences that paved the way for the *new cultural history* in Germany. Firstly, there is the tradition of the historiography of the enlightenment with names like Johann Christoph Adelung, Johann Gottfried Herder and many others.²⁷ Secondly, there is the branch of cultural historians working in the late 19th and early 20th century, with the Swiss Jacob Burckhardt being very influential in Germany, but also with scholars like Karl Lamprecht, Eberhard Gothein, or Kurt Breysig. These traditions, especially the second, still influence the perception (or rather misperception) of cultural history in the wider public and even among historians not really in favour of cultural history.²⁸ However, *the usual suspects* of the international discussion have been much more influential for the new cultural history in Germany, e.g. all the debates about postmodernism and poststructuralism, probably even more so the tradition of German cultural philosophy and cultural sociology of Max Weber and Ernst Cassirer. During the 1980s the discussions about historical anthropology, micro-history and the history of everyday life (*Alltagsgeschichte*) directly influenced the new cultural history.²⁹ Something that has not been too important in Germany was the Cultural Studies.³⁰

Thus, we have quite a long tradition of cultural history, but at the same time an actual practice of cultural history which contradicts these traditions in many ways. For some people cultural history therefore does not seem to require explanation, because it appears so self-evident, because everybody seems to *know* what cultural history (traditionally) is all about—and because of all these aspects an explanation is all the more necessary. The most problems caused in the preoccupation with cultural history is the fact that it takes a different path of self-definition.

The present-day cultural history does not seek the easy way to characterize itself, because it does *not* define a certain area of life as *culture* to which it dedicates itself. If culture would be conceived as a residual, the aim would be

27 Silvia Serena Tschopp recently drew attention to the wide range of cultural historians in the German enlightenment, TSCHOPP, 2009, p. 584.

28 About the history of cultural history in Germany: JUNG, 1999; HAAS, 1994; SCHLEIER, 2003.

29 See the respective chapters in DANIEL, 2001.

30 Therefore the Cultural Studies in the German speaking countries refer mainly to the British tradition: LUTTER/REISENLEITNER, 2008; MARCHART, 2007; GÖTTLICH et al., 2001.

determined by delimiting the concept of culture compared to other concepts such as nature, civilization or society. Another (far too simple) solution chosen frequently in the past is the understanding of culture as *totality*. A certain conglomerate, determined either ethnically, nationally or religiously, is said to produce certain values, norms and artefacts which transform culture into a unity.³¹

The new cultural history — that now is really not *that new* anymore — pursues a considerably different approach. It conceives culture as production of meaning and therewith puts the perspectives of different observers at the centre and propagates this certain cultural perspective on all objects of human life as its core element. Thus it is not the object of research but the perspective that forms the central element of cultural history.³²

To take hold of cultural history and to characterize it more precisely sometimes appears to be difficult, because it does not submit itself to the usual ways of self-definition used in historical approaches. Usually, a historical approach is expected to define itself via its object: While economic history is dealing with economy, political history with politics, legal history with the law etc., one would expect that cultural history with culture. Far from it! Cultural history chooses explicitly another way by rejecting a defined object of observation. To put it clearly: Cultural history doesn't have any (specific) object at all, but turns to all historical phenomena, be it the theatre of the 18th century, rural clothes in the Alps, warfare in antiquity, procedures in the stock exchange market or programs of communist parties. There is no specific area of life called *culture* that could neatly and tidily be separated from other areas of human life (and in fact there never has been one). Thus, one has to say that culture surely is not everything — but culture is everywhere.

What is this perspective of cultural history? It is the question of systems of meaning with which societies of the past have equipped their world to transform it into a sensible and meaningful world. Cultures therefore can be understood as systems of meaning and distinction in other words as specific forms of interpretation of the world, which are produced, continued and transformed in the historical process. Cultures therefore cannot be reduced to the status of a superstructure vaulting the *real society*. Cultures are symbolic forms to organize reality without which individuals and social groups simply could not exist as they represent the necessary and constitutive background to all social practices. With this specific perspective it is surely not possible for cultural history to recognize everything, but it can focus on towards everything.

31 That is the direction of the argument in MAURER, 2008.

32 LANDWEHR/STOCKHORST, 2004; LANDWEHR, 2009.

At this point our critical young scholar raises her voice. She asks: If cultural history is concerned with the production of meaning in past societies, is it then not in danger to do exactly what it's critics say? Is cultural history not the (more or less) successive attempt to evoke the belief that cultural historians know everything and can do everything?

Yes and no (a typical answer for a cultural historian, one might say: neither fish nor fowl...). Cultural history is not an approach for and about everything, because it freely accepts its own restrictions. It cannot produce statistics of mortality nor does it collect economic data and it does not analyse the constitution of social strata. But, of course, cultural history is interested in statistics of mortality, in economic data and in the constitution of social strata, and therefore happily works together with all the experts in the respective fields of history. And in this sense, cultural history of course is an approach for and about everything because it leaves no aspect of history aside. It is concerned with economy, law and politics as well as the arts or the everyday life of people. Thus, cultural history is not everything, but it is everywhere. That's what a certain perspective does: You cannot see everything, but you can look everywhere.

What are the consequences of this understanding of cultural history? It results in a more radical way of historicization that leaves nothing aside. Cultural history has to show that all objects of past and present realities, especially those taken for granted and those that seem to be self-evident, have no other basis than their historical contingency. That is true even of the idea of fundamental historicity of social reality.

A first consequence is the special attention that has to be paid to the relations between observer and observed, between historian and history. The subject of practicing cultural history cannot be separated from the object called *cultural history*.³³

A second consequence primarily arises from the circumstance of the *historical* perspective on cultural objects, and that is the fundamental contingency of historical developments and the openness and uncertainty of human experiences. The analysis of reciprocal relations between practices and structures not only shows their mutual dependence and historicity, but also dismantles every form of teleology still characteristic for approaches of modernization theory.

A third consequence is the multiplication of historical approaches and objects. If culture can be understood no longer as a homogeneous thing, then this applies also to *reality* and *history*. We inevitably have to deal with a multitude of realities and histories. The great task consists of making this circumstance

33 GOERTZ, 2001.

manageable both theoretically and methodologically. One of the greatest projects of cultural history therefore would not only be to establish something that could be called the non-unity of history,³⁴ but make clear at the same time that this non-unity is not a loss in clarity but a gain in complexity. As Einstein once said: Everything should be made as simple as possible—but not simpler.

A last—and I think, very important—consequence arises directly from the social dimension of the broad concept of culture, being the insoluble connection between culture and power. Culture is a social product, therefore it is neither innocent nor unproblematic, but it is inevitably controversial and disputed. Individuals and collectives are interested in establishing their specific form of the system of meaning as generally binding. Speaking with Pierre Bourdieu, one could call this the question of who manages to win the dominance of interpretation about reality a problem of symbolic power³⁵.

Cultural history has to offer a fresh perspective on past life. It does not reinvent the past nor does it completely renew history. At best it can offer new questions and puzzle us with different problems.

3.2 The problems cultural history has with itself

So far we were concerned with the problems cultural history is posing to others, but we shall not forget the problems cultural history has with itself. I spoke a lot about the possibilities of cultural history, the chances it has—but it is not at all clear if this approach is able to accept all these options and if cultural history really will be as promising as we all hope. So let us not forget our young student, eager to work in the field of cultural history: What can we tell her about the dangers and problems of cultural history? Which mistakes should be avoided?

A first possible difficulty the new cultural history could one day face is the restriction to certain set topics, that is: to maintain the status quo. As I mentioned briefly before, there is a set of well-established research topics of cultural history in Germany, mainly the history of memory, of body, sex, and gender, the history of the sciences, of everyday life, of media and communication, and certainly a few more. To prevent a possible misunderstanding: All of these topics are and were enormously important and certainly should not be left aside. But I think that it would be dangerous if cultural history voluntarily restrict itself to these topics. If what I said before about cultural history being characterized by a particular perspective directed to all aspects of past life is true, then it would

34 HAUSEN, 1998.

35 BOURDIEU, 1989.

be dangerous if cultural history would if only take into account a certain set of these aspects.

There are a few things and some blind spots coming to one's mind: In Germany there has been quite an intensive discussion about a cultural history of the political during the last years.³⁶ This has been quite fruitful and I think that it should be continued with respect to other fields of historical research and past life. In Germany there are the first hints of cooperation between cultural and economic history.³⁷ This would without doubt be a very interesting field for future research. But there are some enormously important subjects completely left aside so far. We have quite an intensive discussion about the cultural history of the sciences, but what about the history of technology? What about legal history that—to my knowledge—has not yet seen a cultural turn? In the field of military history, the history of war and violence there have been made some efforts as well,³⁸ but there is still a lot to do. As far as I can see there is no cultural history of society at all.³⁹ I could go on with this list, but what I am trying to say is obvious: Cultural history cannot and must not restrict itself; it has to broaden the range of its topics.

That is also true for another field of research sometimes (incorrectly) called *culture and its other*. It is meant to establish a contrast between culture and materiality or between culture and nature. From a theoretical point of view it is hardly understandable how and why there should be an opposition. Speaking as a cultural historian it is clear that materiality and nature are parts of historical cultures just as everything else. And of course there has been considerable work done by cultural historians in that field. But what we see right now is something like a *material turn* (although I've really had enough at the word *turn* anymore) and cultural history has to pay attention to play its part in that field.

Now allow me to make a last theoretical point. One really could not say that cultural history is not aware of its theoretical basis. On the contrary, there is a wide discussion of a group of theoretical authors important to cultural history as well as to other disciplines in the wide field of cultural studies. I already mentioned Max Weber and Ernst Cassirer as specific German influences, Niklas Luhmann surely has to be added, and then there are of course Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault, and Michel de Certeau and many, many others. I think that

36 STOLLBERG-RILINGER, 2005; MERGEL, 2002; LANDWEHR, 2003.

37 BERGHOF/VOGEL, 2004; HILGER/LANDWEHR, (forthcoming).

38 PRÖVE, 1999.

39 Although there are the important arguments of JOYCE, 2010.

these discussions are enormously important, because cultural history has to reflect theoretically on what it is doing empirically.

But aren't there any theoretical offerings cultural history has to make itself? Why should we leave theoretical thinking to philosophy, sociology and the like? It is not just possible, but I believe necessary, to take the empirical results of cultural history and turn them into a theoretical approach in its own right. Cultural history also has to make theoretical contributions, thus, a theory of cultural history (by cultural historians) really would be a task for the future.

4. Conclusion

If by now our engaged and courageous student is not completely confused by this *tour de force*, what might her overall impression be of the present state of cultural history in Germany? She probably might think that the situation is sufficiently paradox. On the one hand cultural history in Germany is well established: cultural historians successfully obtain university positions, the subjects of cultural history are present in the academic sphere as well as in the public and the media, impressive research programmes are concentrating on cultural history. At the same time one has to note that: cultural history in Germany is not too well institutionalised, some thematic (self-) restrictions are becoming obvious, and cultural history is sometimes seen as a mere short-term fashion. While leaving the office, she might say to herself: Cultural history still has to prove its ability to open new perspectives, it has to do so again and again—we've only just begun.

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