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# COMPARING AND CHANGE

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ORDERS, MODELS, PERCEPTIONS



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Antje Flüchter, Kirsten Kramer, Rebecca Mertens, Silke Schwandt (eds.)  
Comparing and Change

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Antje Flüchter, Kirsten Kramer, Rebecca Mertens, Silke Schwandt (eds.)

## **Comparing and Change**

Orders, Models, Perceptions

**[transcript]**

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*Antje Flüchter, Kirsten Kramer, Rebecca Mertens and Silke Schwandt  
Bielefeld, November 2023*





# Modeling and Change

## The Productive Force of Practices of Comparing<sup>1</sup>

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Antje Flüchter/Kirsten Kramer

### Introduction

The feeling of living in a time of accelerating change has intensified in recent months and years—for the German context, one can think of the reactions to the Russian attack on Ukraine and the different attempts to frame this event as the “turn of the times” (Chancellor Scholz), or a 180° turn (Foreign Minister Baerbock). In a completely different sphere and even more recently, we have started wondering how Chat-GPT and other forms of AI will change our world. And finally, climate change is an even larger problem, if not yet concretely felt by everyone. All these phenomena seem to concern society on a macro level, transcending individual perspectives and actions.

The humanities and social sciences, however, have long focused on the micro level, on concrete practices and phenomena, ‘flat ontologies’—not least in opposition to the traditional, mostly national ‘master narratives’ and theories of modernization. But in recent years, a new interest in factors and mechanisms of historical and social change has emerged. It is these questions with which the Collaborative Research Center 1288 “Practices of Change. Ordering and Changing the World” is concerned. We attribute to practices of comparing a productive force; that is: the power and capacity to influence the world. Thus, we understand practices of comparing as an important motor of social and historical change. The SFB 1288 investigates practices of comparing and their connections to other social and cultural practices at various levels, ranging from concrete actions in which somebody compares one thing to another, to the effects of comparing at the level of broader interpretations of the world. This volume focuses on the connection between practices of comparing and change at an intermediate (meso) level; here the term *intermediate* (meso)

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1 This contribution draws from research conducted in the context of the Collaborative Research Centre “Practices of Comparing. Ordering and Changing the World” (SFB 1288). We are grateful to Angus Nicholls and Silke Schwandt for their critical reading and for the stimulating discussion.

means a level between individual acts of comparison on the one hand, and large-scale comparisons on the other—all three levels of comparisons necessarily intertwine and need to be analyzed in their respective complex interplay. This addresses, for instance, practices of comparing that are shared by communities of practice and which structure the way they operate. Examples of this would be the way that seminars work at universities, or the way the rules of procedure structure court sessions. In this intermediate context, models and modeling play a critical role: they accompany our everyday life and significantly contribute to making the transformations of the world meaningful, predictable, and manageable. For this reason, this volume places a special focus on the importance of models and modeling for processes of change: what is the role of models and modeling in relation to practices of comparing and processes of change?

In this introduction, after reflecting on phenomena of historical change, possible relations between practices of comparing and processes of change will be outlined. In addition, different understandings of models and modeling will be examined. Finally, theses on the relation between practices of comparing, models, and processes of change drawn from the contributions to this volume are briefly discussed.

## **Change and Practices of Comparing**

### **Historical Change in History and other Humanities and Social-Science Disciplines**

Since the Enlightenment, several great historical-philosophical designs have been posited, all of which have a goal and a direction, be it the optimization of man, the progression of the world spirit towards itself and the Prussian state (Hegel), communism (Marx), or global Western modernity in the sense of the various modernization theories such as Luhmann's Systems Theory. In the last decades of the 20th century, various schools of thought and approaches have turned against such linear and all-encompassing models of change. In particular, postcolonial studies criticized these grand teleologies for being tailored to Western modernity, thus making Europe or the Western era the model for the rest of the world. This critique is particularly forceful in Dipesh Chakrabarty's formulation that the rest of the world has been relegated to the "waiting room of history."<sup>2</sup> But this criticism of grand theories is itself indebted to the assumption that general laws of social and historical change exist.

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2 Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton 2000.

In contrast to this, sociology has developed the approach of practice theory, which speaks of flat ontologies and tends to leave out macro-level theory.<sup>3</sup> This also relates to the postmodern critique of Western master narratives, which in the past decades has equally been advocated by literary and cultural studies.

At the same time, grand narratives have also been criticized in historical scholarship. *Microhistoria* or *Alltagsgeschichte*—that is, the history of everyday life—have emerged as a reaction against the “great men” who, in the view of historicism and traditional political history, dominated the world. Similarly, there has been a turning away from the big structures that moved history as the social sciences and social history had explained it.<sup>4</sup> Many scholars of historical studies and cultural studies have moved away from this grander macro level and placed the focus of investigation on concrete and local contexts. The focus is now on people and their individual actions, integrated into structures, but not as mere puppets of these structures. Big questions about social or historical change are rarely asked; theory building has been concentrated on the middle range.<sup>5</sup> Hans Medick and David Sabean put it very clearly in their book on emotions and material interests: “No longer is the macro-analysis of overarching structures and processes the focus; more important is the study of contexts of action and experience in which individuals, groups, classes, and strata lived, worked, and survived, resisted, and dominated.”<sup>6</sup> Change is now examined sectorally, issue-by-issue, or simply on a smaller scale: the transformation of

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- 3 Theodore Schatzki, Practice Theory as Flat Ontology, in: Gert Spaargaren/Don Weenink/Machiel Lamers (eds.), *Practice Theory and Research*, London 2016, 28–42; Latour understands in a similar way the social as “flat” and the global as situationally embedded, Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social. An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, Oxford et al. 2007, 16. Nicolini offered some ideas how flat ontologies and macro phenomena might be connected: Davide Nicolini, Is Small the only Beautiful? Making Sense of ‘Large Phenomena’ from a Practice-Based Perspective, in: Allison Hui/Theodore Schatzki/Elizabeth Shove (eds.), *The Nexus of Practices. Connections, Constellations, Practitioners*, London 2016, 98–113. About the micro-macro problem in sociology cf. also Bettina Heintz, Emergenz und Reduktion, in: *KZfSS Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* 56 (1/2004), 1–31.
  - 4 For the German discourse, the publication of Hans Medick’s essay “The missionary in the rowboat”—*Der Missionar im Ruderboot* (1984) in the flagship of social history, the journal *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, showed that everyday history and the ethnologically inspired approach had arrived in the dominant discourse of historical scholarship.
  - 5 This fits in with how important French theorists such as Bourdieu, Foucault, and de Certeau were applied in historical studies. Research questions referred to appropriations, structures of repetition, struggles for position, etc., and precisely the resistant and recalcitrant possibilities of action, cf. Marian Füssel/Tim Neu, Doing Discourse. Diskursiver Wandel Aus Praxeologischer Perspektive, in: Achim Landwehr (ed.), *Diskursiver Wandel*, Wiesbaden 2010, 213–235.
  - 6 Hans Medick/David Sabean, Einleitung, in: Hans Medick/David Sabean (eds.), *Emotionen und materielle Interessen. Sozialanthropologische und Historische Beiträge zur Familienforschung*, Göttingen 1984, 11–24, see 12. Interestingly, this sentence is missing in the English translation of the volume, but there it is emphasized immediately in the second sentence that many histo-

mother-child relationships, the common good, religious change, the emergence of modern female doctors, the structural transformation of courtly society, etc.<sup>7</sup>

However, it also became apparent that this restriction to the micro level yielded results that could be representative of further structures, but which hardly allowed statements about larger processes of change to be made. As Martin Dinges put it, “In other words, one cannot avoid the system level even in historical anthropology if one considers the question of cultural change important.”<sup>8</sup> The historian and political scientist William Sewell Jr. similarly noted that with the transition from social to cultural history, historical scholarship had lost its ability to examine larger transformations.<sup>9</sup>

Significantly, the focus was now less on historical and social change or fundamental social processes and more on cultural change. This reflects not least an altered understanding of change and power. What had changed above all was the understanding of who had power to act; neither was it only the great men, the orders from above that were met with obedience, nor the almost omnipotent structures. Instead, there was an understanding of reciprocity and change; change was the result of negotiation processes. From a micro perspective, processes of change center on individual processes of appropriation. By analyzing these processes, scholars first worked out how contemporaries produced cultural meaning in the first place and also how they negotiated changes in cultural meaning among themselves.<sup>10</sup> This understanding of reciprocity as a motor of social processes was also applied to “harder”

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rians “are no longer sure in what way the stories which they relate to are part of a larger story of political strength, the struggle for power, and the analysis of the forces of domination.”

- 7 Cf. in the German historical studies: Martin Dinges, Formenwandel der Gewalt in der Neuzeit. Zur Kritik der Zivilisationstheorie von Norbert Elias, in: Peter Sieferle (ed.), *Gewalt im interkulturellen Vergleich*, Frankfurt am Main 1998, 171–194; Hans Medick, Spinnstuben auf dem Dorf. Jugendliche Sexualkultur und Feierabendbrauch in der ländlichen Gesellschaft, in: Gerhard Huck (ed.), *Sozialgeschichte Der Freizeit. Untersuchungen zum Wandel der Alltagskultur in Deutschland*, Wuppertal 1982, 19–49; Claudia Huerkamp, *Der Aufstieg der Ärzte im 19. Jahrhundert. Vom Gelehrten Stand zum professionellen Experten. Das Beispiel Preußens*, Göttingen 1985; Winfried Schulze, Vom Gemeinnutz zum Eigennutz. Über den Normenwandel in der ständischen Gesellschaft der Frühen Neuzeit, in: *Historische Zeitschrift* 243 (1/1986), 591–626.
- 8 Martin Dinges, “Historische Anthropologie” und “Gesellschaftsgeschichte.” Mit dem Lebensstilkonzept zu einer “Alltagskulturgeschichte” der Frühen Neuzeit?, in: *Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung* 24 (2/1997), 179–214, 192; also important to the micro-macro question is Hans Medick, who interestingly called for more comparisons at the micro level: Hans Medick, Mikro-Historie, in: Winfried Schulze (ed.), *Sozialgeschichte, Alltagsgeschichte, Mikrogeschichte. Eine Diskussion*, Göttingen 1994, 40–53.
- 9 William H. Sewell Jr., *Logics of History. Social Theory and Social Transformation*, Chicago/London 2005, 18.
- 10 Cf. Martin Dinges, Ehrenhändler als “Kommunikative Gattungen.” Kultureller Wandel und Volkskulturbegriff, in: *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 75 (1993), 359–393, see 386.

historical facts, such as the process of state building, a subject of immense importance in German historiography. Old notions of a process based on command and obedience were countered by concepts of “state building from below”<sup>11</sup> or the use of justice from below (*Justitznutzung*).<sup>12</sup> The subjects were thus given a not insignificant share in the process of state-building.<sup>13</sup>

This reorientation often led to a turn to “practice theory” in German historical scholarship as well as in the field of literary and cultural studies: practice theory not only referred to the micro level, as mentioned above, it also allowed for the actor to be reconceptualized as a decentered subject. Moreover, it also made it possible to think of structure and action as being in a mutually dependent dialectical relationship.<sup>14</sup>

After the important research done by cultural-historical and cultural-scientific approaches, and by micro- and everyday-historical studies, for some time now there have been increasing demands to turn again to the big questions and precisely also to the question of social and historical change. Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger called for a renewed concern with long-term historical change “without regard to biased culturalist regimes of sayability.”<sup>15</sup> Lynn Hunt also pointed out the gaps created by

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- 11 André Holenstein et al., *Empowering Interactions. Political Cultures and the Emergence of the State in Europe 1300–1900*, Farnham 2009; Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger, State and Political History in a Culturalist Perspective, in: Antje Flüchter/Susan Richter (eds.), *Structures on the Move. Technologies of Governance in Transcultural Encounter*, Berlin/Heidelberg 2012, 43–58; for a transcultural context Antje Flüchter/Susan Richter (eds.), *Structures on the Move. Technologies of Governance in Transcultural Encounter* (Transcultural Research – Heidelberg Studies on Asia and Europe in a Global Context), Berlin/Heidelberg 2012.
- 12 Martin Dinges, The uses of Justice as a form of social control in early modern Europe, in: Herman Roodenburg/Pieter Spierenburg (eds.), *Social Control in Europe. 1500–1800*, Columbus 2004, 78–98; Ulrike Gleixner, “Das Mensch” und “der Kerl.” *Die Konstruktion von Geschlecht in Unzuchtsverfahren der Frühen Neuzeit (1700–1760)*, Frankfurt am Main 1994.
- 13 Dagmar Freist formulated (originally in German) that “political rule in the early modern period is to be understood less as an institutional structure or as an event, but rather as a continuous process in which the conditions of the exercise of authority are constantly renegotiated between ruler and subjects, between center and periphery, or between court and province.” Dagmar Freist, Einleitung: Staatsbildung, Lokale Herrschaftsprozesse und kultureller Wandel in der Frühen Neuzeit, in: Ronald A. Asch/Dagmar Freist (eds.), *Staatsbildung als kulturelle Praxis. Strukturwandel und Legitimation von Herrschaft in der Frühen Neuzeit*, Cologne/Weimar/Vienna 2005, 1–47, see 13.
- 14 Marian Füssel, Die Rückkehr des ‘Subjekts’ in der Kulturgeschichte. Beobachtungen aus praxeologischer Perspektive, in: Stefan Deines/Stephan Jaeger/Ansgar Nünning (eds.), *Historisierte Subjekte – Subjektivierte Historie. zur Verfügbarkeit und Unverfügbarkeit von Geschichte*, Berlin/New York 2003, 141–159, see 151, 152.
- 15 Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger, Die Frühe Neuzeit – Eine Epoche der Formalisierung?, in: Andreas Höfele/Jan-Dirk Müller/Wulf Oesterreicher (eds.), *Die Frühe Neuzeit. Revisionen einer Epoche*, Berlin/Boston/Göttingen 2013, 3–27, see 4. It is also interesting to note that established theorists are increasingly being questioned about their explanatory potential for processes of change, cf. about Foucault: Marian Füssel/Tim Neu, Doing Discourse. Diskursiver Wandel

the success story of cultural history, emphasizing precisely the absence of larger paradigms. Major processes (e.g. globalization) have been neglected, she said, as have questions of causality.<sup>16</sup> In other words, change and processes of change have once again become the focus of historical scholarship; Achim Landwehr recently even called the question of historical change the crucial question of historical scholarship.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, in recent times, in literary and cultural studies an increased interest in global dynamics has emerged, which currently is pursued above all in the context of Anthropocene studies.<sup>18</sup>

A clear sign of changing research interests in Germany are new research associations in the humanities and social sciences that deal with the question of change. An example was already provided by the SFB 644, Transformations of Antiquity (2005–2016), which focused on educational systems and the cultural self-construction of society, albeit with a restricted focus on European antiquity and its later reception.<sup>19</sup> Angelika Epple, first spokesperson of our research association, Collaborative Research Center 1288 “Practices of Change. Ordering and Changing the World”, extended the range of enquiry. The SFB 1288 is based on the thesis that practices of comparing not only order and stabilize the world, but can also dynamize the established orders and bring about historical and social change. While actors process their (new) experiences comparatively and integrate them into the familiar order, the addition of new criteria of comparison (*tertia*) can also irritate and change the familiar categories and units of comparison (*comparata*), along with their discourses and interpretations of the world.

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aus praxeologischer Perspektive, in: Achim Landwehr (ed.), *Diskursiver Wandel*, Wiesbaden 2010, 213–235.

- 16 Lynn Hunt, Kulturgegeschichte ohne Paradigmen?, in: *Historische Anthropologie* 16 (3/2008), 323–340.
- 17 Achim Landwehr, Rev. of: Wolfgang Knöbl, *Die Soziologie vor der Geschichte. Zur Kritik der Sozialtheorie*, Berlin/Nördlingen 2022, in: FAZ, 23.8.2022, [<https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buecher/wolfgang-knoebels-die-soziologie-vor-der-geschichte-18263806.html>], last accessed: 08.06.2023].
- 18 Cf. e.g., Pieter Vermeulen, *Literature and the Anthropocene*, London/New York 2020; Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement. Climate Change and the Unthinkable*, Chicago/London 2016; Christophe Bonneuil/Jean-Baptiste Fressoz, *The Shock of the Anthropocene: The Earth, History and Us*, London/New York 2016.
- 19 Cf. Lutz Bergemann et al., Transformation. Ein Konzept zur Erforschung kulturellen Wandels, in: Lutz Bergemann et al. (eds.), *Transformation*, Munich 2011, 39–56. Other disciplines have been much less reticent about change, e.g., from empirical social research, SFB 580, led by Reinhold Sachmann: Demographic Change and the Public Sector Labor Market (2006–2008); from human geography: Political Change in Unbounded Spaces: National and Transnational Campaigns in Comparison, led by Edgar Grande and Hanspeter Kriesi (2002–2009).

## Comparing and Change

Practices of comparing are a fundamental cultural practice. In the form of comparative methods, practices of comparing achieved a special scientific and, moreover, mediated social relevance in the 19th century.<sup>20</sup> Comparative methods were and are attributed a special objectivity. This has been criticized for a long time from different sides, especially by postcolonial approaches, but also from the perspectives of cultural studies and cultural history.<sup>21</sup> The critique of comparative methods and practices of comparing is closely linked to the critique of linear models of history formulated above, for practices of comparing are the very practices that constructed and legitimized these linear models of change. Through practices of comparing, the West became the universal *comparatum* against which other world regions were measured.<sup>22</sup> Practices of comparing ordered people into more or less static groups, even racializing classifications.<sup>23</sup>

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- 20 Cf. the contributions by Angus Nicholls, Walter Erhart and Kirsten Kramer in the present volume.
- 21 Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan, Why Compare?, in: Rita Felski/Susan Friedmann (eds.), *Comparison. Theories, Approaches, Uses*, Baltimore 2013, 15–33; Ming Xie, What does the Comparative do for Theory? in: *PMLA* 128 (3/2013), 675–682; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline*, New York 2003; in view of historical science, cf. Matthias Middell, Kulturtransfer und historische Komparatistik – Thesen zu ihrem Verhältnis, in: *Comparativ* 10 (1/2000), 7–41; Michel Espagne, Jenseits der Komparatistik. Zur Methode der Erforschung von Kulturtransfer, in: Ulrich Mölk (ed.), *Europäische Kulturzeitschriften um 1900 als Medien transnationaler und transdisziplinärer Wahrnehmung*, Göttingen 2006; also cf.: Angelika Epple/Walter Erhart, Practices of Comparing. A new Research Agenda between typological and historical Approaches, in: Angelika Epple/Walter Erhart/Johannes Grave (eds.), *Practices of Comparing. Towards a new Understanding of a fundamental Human Practice*, Bielefeld 2020, 11–38.
- 22 Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*.
- 23 Angelika Epple, Inventing White Beauty and Fighting Black Slavery. How Blumenbach, Humboldt, and Arango Y Parreño Contributed to Cuban Race Comparisons in the Long Nineteenth Century, in: Angelika Epple/Walter Erhart/Johannes Grave (eds.), *Practices of Comparing. Towards a New Understanding of a Fundamental Human Practice*, Bielefeld 2020, 295–328; Kirsten Kramer, Between Nature and Culture. Comparing, Natural History, and Anthropology in Modern French Travel Narratives around 1800 (François-René De Chateaubriand), in: Eleonora Rohland et al. (eds.), *Contact, Conquest and Colonization. How Practices of Comparing Shaped Empires and Colonialism around the World*, New York 2020, 199–224; Antje Flüchter, Den Körper vergleichen – Die Menschen ordnen? Die Bedeutung körperbezogener Vergleichspraktiken zwischen Ethnographie, Physiognomie und Rassentheorie, in: Cornelia Aust/Antje Flüchter/Claudia Jarzebowski (eds.), *Verglichene Körper – Normieren, Urteilen, Entrechtchen in der Vormoderne*, Stuttgart 2022, 229–259.; Christian Pinnen, Colonizing Complexions. How Laws of Bondage Shaped Race in America's Colonial Borderlands, in: Eleonora Rohland et al. (eds.), *Contact, Conquest and Colonization. How Practices of Comparing Shaped Empires and Colonialism around the World*, New York 2020, 245–267.



In the Collaborative Research Centre 1288 we have rendered this criticism productive by developing a methodological perspective from it: we do not compare, but analyze practices of comparing, how they are carried out in different social fields and at different times, and what effects they have, not least in relation to historical and social change.<sup>24</sup> The critique of comparative methods attacked especially their stabilizing and essentializing effects. However, these effects also show the productive potential of practices of comparing, which often prove to be “explorative” procedures that unfold unknown relations between the compared objects (*comparata*) and can fundamentally change the explanation of the world and the ordering of humanity.

We assume a complex structure of practices of comparing that determines the performance and outcome of comparing: two or more units of comparison (*comparata*) are related by a comparability assumption and examined for similarities and differences according to criteria of comparison (*tertia*). The *tertia*, however, do not arise naturally from the *comparata*, but are chosen by the actors of comparison in a specific context and from a specific semantic repertoire. The choice of the *tertia* contours the *comparata* and thus also pre-structures the results of comparing. Therefore, comparing is never neutral. Moreover, we are not interested in the individual act of comparison, but in the routinized act of comparing, in the practices of comparing,<sup>25</sup>

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24 We cover the period from antiquity to the present and include very different fields: e.g., ethnographic texts from different world regions (projects Erhart/Kramer, Epple/Rohland, Petzke/Rapier, Flüchter), but also the comparison of the American and German car market (+Welskopp), the real-estate market (Kramper) and the university ranking (Werron), cf. [http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/sfb/sfb1288/].

25 Cf. on the approaches of the Bielefeld comparative research: Angelika Epple/Walter Erhart/Johannes Grave (eds.), *Practices of Comparing. Towards a New Understanding of a Fundamental Human Practice*, Bielefeld 2020, especially the introduction by Angelika Epple and Walter Erhart; Eleonora Rohland/Kirsten Kramer, Introduction. On “Doing Comparison”—Practices of Comparing, in: Eleonora Rohland et al. (eds.), *Contact, Conquest and Colonization. How Practices of Comparing Shaped Empires and Colonialism around the World*, New York 2020, 1–16; Ulrike Davy/Antje Flüchter, Concepts of Equality. Why, Who, What for?, in: Ulrike Davy/Antje Flüchter (eds.), *Imagining Unequals, Imagining Equals. Concepts of Equality in History and Law*, Bielefeld 2022, 11–30; Martin Carrier/Rebecca Mertens/Carsten Reinhardt, Introduction. Narratives and Comparisons. Adversaries or Allies in Understanding Science, in: Martin Carrier/Rebecca Mertens/Carsten Reinhardt (eds.), *Narratives and Comparisons. Adversaries or Allies in Understanding Science?*, Bielefeld 2021, 7–27; as well as our conceptual working papers: Angelika Epple/Antje Flüchter/Thomas Müller, *Modi und Formationen. Ein Bericht von unterwegs. SFB1288 Workingpaper No. 6*, Bielefeld 2020 [https://pub.uni-bielefeld.de/download/2943010/2943628/WorkingPaper6\_SFB1288.pdf]; Thomas Müller/Leopold Ringel/Tobias Werron, *In der Mitte liegt die Kraft: Eine Praxistheoretische Perspektive auf die „Mesoebene“*. SFB 1288 Workingpaper No. 8, Bielefeld 2020 [https://pub.uni-bielefeld.de/download/2945010/2945064/WorkingPaper8\_SFB1288.pdf]; Ulrike Davy et al., *Grundbegriffe für eine Theorie des Vergleichens. Ein Zwischenbericht. Working Paper des SFB 1288 No. 3*, Bielefeld 2019 [https://pub.uni-bielefeld.de/download/2939

and, in the present contributions especially, in their connections with other cultural and social practices at the intermediate level.

At the intermediate level, two constellations of practices of comparing in particular are important to us: practice formations and communities of practice. The productive force of practices of comparing can be enhanced at the intermediate level by their linkages to larger formations of practice. These are temporarily stabilized, but also retain the dynamic character of practices.<sup>26</sup> The questions of how practice formations are formed, which practices couple with one another, and how they change are closely related to processes of transformation. It seems important—and this can be related to the considerations on historical change formulated above—that there is also an interrelation here: individual practices and practice formations enable and condition each other and are recursively interconnected. However, the question also arises as to what types of actors are important in making connections between practices and formations of practice. We conceptualize these networks of actors as communities of practice. They draw on a common repertoire of practices and practice formations as well as collective processes of knowledge production.<sup>27</sup>

Practices of comparing can be related to change in many ways. Here, a first attempt will be made to systematize the different approaches. Three perspectives of investigation seem to be particularly important.

With the first investigative perspective, we focus on the change of comparisons themselves. Practices of comparing can change in various ways and also in relation to different levels (micro, meso or macro). In general, any practice is dynamic rather than static, i.e., practices of comparing are never repeated in a completely identical way, each new execution may imply a modification. The change of practices of comparing can be seen very clearly on the meso level in the stabilization and change

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563/2939604/WorkingPaper3\_SFB1288.pdf]. In older comparative research, comparison was understood primarily as a semantic, communicative operation, cf. Bettina Heintz, "Wir Leben im Zeitalter der Vergleichung". Perspektiven einer Soziologie des Vergleichs, in: *Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 45 (5/2016), 305–323; often going back to: Niklas Luhmann, Kultur als historischer Begriff, in: Niklas Luhmann (ed.), *Gesellschaftsstruktur und Semantik. Studien zur Wissenssoziologie der modernen Gesellschaft, Band 4*, Frankfurt am Main 1999, 31–54.

26 In doing so, we refer to Frank Hillebrandt's heuristic definition. He understands practice formation as (originally in German) "assemblies of different discursive, symbolic, material and habitual elements generated by practices, which in their specific association unfold a super-situative effect and afflict practices," Frank Hillebrandt, *Soziologische Praxistheorien. Eine Einführung*, Wiesbaden 2014, 103; cf. on this also the further remarks by Müller/Ringel/Werron, *In der Mitte liegt die Kraft*, 6–7.

27 We borrowed the concept of communities of practice from Etienne Wenger and Emanuel Adler, using it somewhat more freely especially in the projects on pre-modern contexts, cf. Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice. A Brief Introduction*, 2011 [<https://scholarsbank.uoreg.on.edu/xmlui/handle/1794/11736>]; on the appropriation of the concepts in our SFB cf. Müller/Ringel/Werron, *In der Mitte liegt die Kraft*, 17–19.

of comparative formations. We understand comparative formations as practice formations whose core consists of stabilized practices of comparing, especially a stabilized set of *tertia*. This set of plausible *tertia* forms the labels characterizing a *comparatum*. The concept of comparative formations can be fruitfully applied to different fields of research, for example, to analyze the ways in which people are ordered and how these ordering processes change. For the Caribbean contact zone, by the end of the early modern period, the triad *race, climate, gender* had become established for the ordering of people;<sup>28</sup> whereas in other contact situations, the comparative formation *food, clothing, health* has proven analytically more helpful.<sup>29</sup> The establishment of such sets is an important change in the respective conceptions of the order of mankind. But they can also be dynamized again and again, which means that individual *tertia* can lose their meaning and eventually be exchanged. Thus, in the European-Christian setting for the ordering of human beings, religious affiliation was replaced by race in the course of the early modern period. The choice of a different *tertium* first takes place at the micro level, in the actual performance of the practice of comparing. As the new *tertium* becomes dominant in the comparative formation, it may change the comparative formation itself or even cause a shift in comparative routines and eventually in broader interpretive horizons.<sup>30</sup>

Building on the change in comparative practice formations there is another question that forms our second perspective on the connection between practices of comparing and change: is there a functional relationship between practices of comparing and change? Do the practices of comparing merely mirror the processes of change or do they instigate them, perhaps even initiate them? Is there, for example, racism first, or do racial theory or the use of racializing criteria come first?

Third, there are practices of comparing that explicitly describe, evaluate, and in some cases even produce narratives of change. All investigations of change or development, whether in the context of Enlightenment historiography or modernization theory, implicitly compare the before with the after; without temporal practices of comparing, narratives of change are not possible. This perspective of inquiry is an important approach to the perception of change and the evaluation of change by contemporaries. Here again, it is the aforementioned comparative formations, the

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28 Cf. Eleonora Rohland, *Entangled Histories and the Environment? Socio-Environmental Transformations in the Caribbean 1500–1800*, Trier 2021, 58, 59.

29 Cornelia Aust/Malte Wittmaack/Antje Flüchter, *SFB-Workingpaper. Vergleichene Körper – geordnete Menschen. Nahrung, Kleidung, Krankheit – Leibpraktiken in vergleichender Perspektive*, Bielefeld 2024 [forthcoming].

30 The change and reconsolidation of a comparative formation or its set of *tertia* suggests changes in the macro level as the overarching level of interpretation or, in terms of praxis theory, the general understanding, cf. Daniel Welch/Alan Warde, How should we understand 'general understandings?', in: Allison Hui/Theodore Schatzki/Elizabeth Shove (eds.), *The Nexus of Practices*, London 2016, 195–208.

choice of the *tertia*, and the labels chosen for the *comparata*, from which evaluations and also larger interpretative frames can be extrapolated. At the same time, studying a chosen set of practices of comparing provides a heuristic basis for a broader understanding of the respective cultural logics and standards of evaluation underlying narratives of change, as these are themselves subject to continual historical transformations.

The complex connections between practices of comparing and processes of change provide important clues for a critical account of model formation and the modeling of change and development that will be highlighted in the following section.

## Models and Modeling

In the recent past, models and processes of modeling have increasingly attracted research attention. Models play a central role in politics as well as in the sciences and arts and are inextricably linked to the experience of social, cultural, or political change in various fields, regardless of whether they aim at mapping, simulating, planning, controlling, or regulating real-world situations, events, or developments.

Especially with respect to the experience and perception of change, models can be understood in their most general form as media that enable the perceptive and cognitive comprehension of reality and thus form the constitutive basis of every human encounter with the world.<sup>31</sup> They provide indispensable frames of reference for our understanding and knowledge of the world. In their basic function, models offer representations or expressions of empirical data, objects, or phenomena that belong to the real world; they take on different forms such as visual diagrams, graphs, or schematic representations like geographical maps, but they can also appear as images, narratives, or in further textual and linguistic forms.<sup>32</sup> Following

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31 On the definition of the basic function of models based on classical epistemology, cf. Herbert Stachowiak, *Allgemeine Modelltheorie*, Vienna/New York 1973, 56: “[...] all cognition is *cognition in models* or *through models*, and any human encounter with the world requires the medium “model”: [...]” (author’s translation).

32 For an account of the functioning of diagrammatic or schematic representations (such as the geographical map) and textual forms (such as the sonnet), cf. Mary S. Morgan, *The World in the Model. How Economists Work and Think*, Cambridge 2012, 380–386; on the role of visualization models within the discipline of history, cf. Silke Schwandt, *Geschichte visualisieren. Digitale Praktiken in der Geschichtswissenschaft als Praktiken der Wissenschaftsreflexion*, in: Karoline D. Döring et al. (eds.), *Digital History: Konzepte, Methoden und Kritiken Digitaler Geschichtswissenschaft*, Berlin/Boston 2022, 191–212; cf. also Bruno Latour, *Visualization and Cognition. Thinking with Eyes and Hands*, in: *Knowledge and Society* 6 (1986), 1–40; on the definition of artistic and literary artifacts as “secondary model-forming systems,” (*sekundäre modellbildenden*

current research approaches,<sup>33</sup> in these different forms of manifestation, models provide “small-world accounts” that are characterized by their “typicality” and “representative” status with respect to objects, situations, or events belonging to the real world.<sup>34</sup> Crucially, these accounts of the world do not merely offer mimetic or illustrative images of a given world or reality. Rather, they are built on rule-guided simplifications of real phenomena and form-based structural scale reductions. Each of these in their own way involve processes of selection, condensation and abstraction of the represented empirical data and objects; these processes reduce the diversity and complexity of the phenomenal world, thus ensuring its comprehensibility and meaningfulness.<sup>35</sup>

Hence, models always appear to be situated in the interplay of representation, expression, and interpretation of the real world; they attain their special heuristic or epistemic value in that they not only present external orders of phenomena or objects belonging to empirical reality, but also create their own ordering patterns and arrangements. These ordering arrangements come to open up new ways of seeing the world that would not be obtained if the respective model formations were not in place. Models and modeling thus have an eminently “explorative” force, which is apparent not only in the sciences, but also in the fields of politics or the arts, where they act as mediators between theory and the real world.<sup>36</sup> The selection of modeling parameters always proves to be related to preceding theoretical approaches, categories or concepts, while at the same time offering new stimuli for reasoning and theorizing about the world. It is precisely due to the constant interaction with theories, conceptualizations, and categorizations related to the real world that models and modeling practices acquire a “performative” dimension. Through their use of simplification, abstraction, and compression of large amounts of data into “manageable” units, models generate new information or research questions and reveal aspects of the complex empirical reality that previously had not been visible.

In addition, models not only offer representations of an already existing reality, but can also provide central tools for the operationalization of data and direct interventions of actors in the real world. In recent research, therefore, a distinction

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*de Systeme*) cf. the theoretical reflections in Jurij M. Lotman, *Die Struktur literarischer Texte*, Munich et al. 1989, 19–54.

33 Cf. Stachowiak’s general definition of elementary features of models, Stachowiak, *Allgemeine Modelltheorie*, 131–134; and, above all, the instructive theoretical reflections on the structure and impact of economic models presented in Morgan, *The World in the Model*, 378–412.

34 Morgan, *The World in the Model*, 380.

35 On comprehensibility as an effect of data selection and compression, cf. Morgan, *The World in the Model*, 392; see also Silke Schwandt’s chapter in the present volume.

36 On the role of models as mediators in the sciences, cf. Mary S. Morgan/Margaret Morrison (eds.), *Models as Mediators. Perspectives on Natural and Social Science*, Cambridge 1999.

has been drawn between models *of* things and models *for* things,<sup>37</sup> the former denoting formalized descriptions of a given reality, the latter referring to tools whose use serves concrete practical purposes. In their formal rules, these models define mandatory instructions for individual or collective social action,<sup>38</sup> which allow for direct manipulations or transformations of things in the real world, thereby marking the transition from theoretical-epistemic artifacts to social, cultural, scientific, or artistic modes of action and practices.

This practice-based perspective also informs the terminological and conceptual differentiation made between “models” and “modeling”: the term *model*, understood in the sense outlined above, refers to artifacts that constitute “working objects,”<sup>39</sup> ordering systems, and objects of research that work as tools for interpreting specific segments of the real world and for structuring and ordering this world. “Modeling,” on the other hand, refers to historically varying practices that underlie each act of theorizing, model formation, and data processing.<sup>40</sup> The focus here is rather on the fundamental decisions, assumptions, implications as well as “general understandings,”<sup>41</sup> which through their dynamic interplay bring about the creation of concrete models and determine in which way these come to shape our knowledge about the real world and our actions in this world.

At the same time, it is precisely in a praxeological perspective that significant connections between models, modeling, and comparative practices come into view. On the one hand, models themselves can be described as more or less complex comparative arrangements based on prior ways of relating phenomena or objects in the real world. The creation of an abstract ordering model usually presupposes the formulation of analogies and differences between the specific objects or segments of a real world that are abstracted from in the process of model formation. Each abstraction is accompanied by the selection, highlighting, and suppression of certain *tertia* that define the “grounds of comparison” under which objects are grouped together or distinguished, as was illustrated by the different ways of classifying the

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37 On this distinction and its conceptual implications, cf. Evelyn Fox Keller, *Models of and Models for. Theory and Practice in Contemporary Biology*, in: *Philosophy of Science* 67 (2000), 72–86; cf. in a similar vein Willard McCarty’s dualistic definition of models as “either a *representation of something for purposes of study*, or a *design for realizing something new*”; Willard McCarty, *Humanities Computing*, Houndmills 2014, 24; cf. also Silke Schwandt (ed.), *Digital Methods in the Humanities. Challenges, Ideas, Perspectives*, Bielefeld 2021, 11.

38 On the function of models to provide recipes for acting directly in the world, see the contributions by Maximilian Benz and Antje Flüchter in the present volume.

39 Lorraine Daston/Peter Galison, *The Image of Objectivity*, in: *Representations* 40 (1992), 81–128.

40 Cf. Morgan, *The World in the Model*, 393–399; cf. also Silke Schwandt’s chapter in the present volume.

41 Welch/Warden, *How should we understand ‘general understandings’?*, 183–196.

covid virus according to changing *tertia* (such as the R number, growth rate or capacities of intensive care units). Here, it is especially the productive heuristic dimension that connects modeling and comparative practices. Both types of practices are able to accomplish specific ordering and orienting tasks in that they do not rely on known properties of the phenomena and objects being compared or modeled, but prove to be “exploratory” operations in the sense outlined above, capable of uncovering unknown relations between elements related to each other. Comparative and modeling practices, then, replace prior epistemological views with other types of experience and knowledge, which open various spaces for new interpretations and modes of social action. On the other hand, models themselves also form objects (*comparata*) of comparisons. As a rule, every practice of modeling is related to groups of specific actors or communities of practice with shared repertoires of knowledge and action. The selection or creation of a model thus always depends on the respective (political, scientific, religious, artistic) interests of the actors. The choice of specific parameters and functions (representation, simulation, prediction, etc.), presupposes comparison with other models regarding their respective expressivity with respect to the modeled world. Consequently, comparative practices at different levels assume a key role with regard to the formation of historical models and modeling procedures.

With regard to the central question addressed in this volume it should also be underlined that there is a complex relationship between models or modeling practices and processes of historical change. On the one hand, models can represent and explain historical change by postulating specific relations between past, present, and future in relation to actors and events or developments, as well as particular causalities that make the transformations of the world meaningful.<sup>42</sup> In this case, modeling such as that underlying the stage models of nineteenth-century evolutionary theory or narratives of world political change in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries<sup>43</sup> provides a central frame of reference for experiencing and interpreting historical change in the real world. On the other hand, changes in the world can be traced in the changing role of models and modeling practices: in some fields—such as modern economics—empirical reality is no longer perceived merely through the lens of models, but, in the present, has itself been transformed into sets of modeling processes. Here, historical change occurs in the functional shifts of forms of theorizing

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42 On the necessity of developing ordering concepts for the thinking of history, cf. Jürgen Osterhammel, *Weltgeschichte. Ein Propädeutikum*, in: *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 56 (9/2005), 452–479, see 453.

43 On stadial models underlying evolutionary theory, see the contributions by Angus Nicholls and Kirsten Kramer in the present volume; on model-based narratives in world politics and the forms of political change addressed in these narratives, cf. Mathias Albert's and Thomas Müller's chapter in the present volume.

that increasingly replace the experience of the real world, thus becoming themselves part of a complex “world-making.”<sup>44</sup>

More importantly, models themselves often appear to be the central motor of change: they permanently alter our worldview and, by providing instructions for action, act as tools for concrete interventions made by actors and communities of practice in the real world. Models assume a specific function of planning, prediction and regulation, especially in the context of the modern understanding of history, which is based on the idea of an open future and, according to Reinhart Koselleck, relates a specific “horizon of expectation” (*Erwartungshorizont*) to a given “space of experience” (*Erfahrungsraum*),<sup>45</sup> an understanding of history that, of course, increasingly loses its legitimacy in the light of climate change and the progressive “uncertainty” of the world we live in today.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, models and modeling are themselves subject to change and can bring about fundamental transformations in given practice formations or communities of practice, which contribute to changes in both shared epistemologies and modes of action, thereby indicating or implementing long-term processes of change.

In their communal forms of pragmatic use, models and modeling can thus be regarded as decisive factors for discursive, social, or political transformations that constitute historical change as a whole, both on the meso level and on the macro level; especially when linked to historically variable comparative practices, the study of models and modeling thus opens up a privileged access to answering the question of how change is imagined, represented, and realized in different historical periods.

## The Contributions to this Volume

There are many ways in which models and operations of modeling, practices of comparing, and processes of change can interrelate and influence each other. The contributions gathered in this volume unfold and analyze different aspects of these interrelations and interdependencies, as will be outlined in the final part of the introduction.

The present volume begins with two conceptual contributions that address the question of what models are and how they can be used within the framework of research on comparisons. Silke Schwandt aims to explore the viability of modeling as

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44 Morgan, *The World in the Model*, 406.

45 Cf. Reinhart Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft. Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeit*, Frankfurt am Main 1989, 349–374.

46 On this revision of the understanding of historical time, caused by the contemporary experience of the Anthropocene, cf. Dipesh Chakrabarty, Anthropocene Time, in: *History and Theory* 57 (1/2018), 5–32.



a research practice in history, focusing on the particular implications underlying this theoretical framework. The chapter is followed by the contribution of PhD students Jacob Bohé, Charlotte Feidicker, Angela Guttierrez, Frederic Kunkel, Laura-Maria Niewöhner, and Malte Wittmaack, who examine the ways in which models and modeling practices can be applied to their particular fields of research.

The contributions by Walter Erhart, Angus Nicholls, and Kirsten Kramer focus on the relationship between modeling and comparison in the context of ethnography, comparative theories of stadial change, and (travel) literature.

The following three chapters address how change can be explained through models and how models mediate between theoretical concepts and individual practices. They are situated in the context of international politics (Mathias Albert/Thomas Müller), of world description in history and advice literature (Antje Flüchter), and of pre-modern piety (Maximilian Benz).

The volume concludes with two outlooks: Daniel Eschkötter analyzes practices of producing satellite images in their relation to the perception of change; Angelika Epple, in turn, highlights the connection between models, comparative practices, and change in the context of theoretical reflections on global history.

## Models and Modeling as Research Objects

**Models** figure as privileged objects of investigation in a wide variety of fields. Particular attention is paid to models that appear as **representations of the world (models of)**. Mathias Albert and Thomas Müller analyze narratives from the field of international politics in the 20th and 21st centuries to examine how storytelling practices interact with forms of theorizing and models of world politics in describing and explaining what can be considered political change. By contrast, Antje Flüchter inquires, in the context of an analysis of pre-modern models of the state and history, in what ways these models reveal a specifically early-modern understanding of historical change. A different perspective is developed in Walter Erhart's essay. He explores the complex interrelation established in the 18th and 19th centuries between models of geography, natural history, or ethnography on the one hand, and descriptions of foreign peoples and cultures, as presented in European travel literature of the period, on the other. Closely related to this question are the observations presented by Angus Nicholls, who links the beginnings of the discipline of Comparative Literature in the 19th century to the stadial models of evolution developed in the sciences during the same period, and by Kirsten Kramer, who sheds light on the critical confrontation with evolutionary models implied in the programmatic definition of exoticism proposed by the French travel writer Victor Segalen at the beginning of the 20th century. Another shift in focus can be observed in Silke Schwandt's chapter, which interprets a painting by Lucas Cranach as a model representation based on key assumptions underlying the Reformation's doctrine of redemption. Images and

visual practices are also addressed in Daniel Eschkötter's chapter, which examines the particularities of the technical media dispositive of "before-and-after satellite images," understood as condensed micro-narratives or models that exhibit a temporal order of images which can be related to political orders of the global world. Malte Wittmaack's contribution focuses on early-modern comparisons of Christians and Muslims; it is based on an understanding of models as ideal types that bring into view central characteristics of the respective peoples, cultures, and religions. From a similar perspective, Angela Gutierrez analyzes the modern genre of *casta* paintings in Cuba as a model that can be interpreted as a concise visual representation of colonial racial classification and hierarchization, thus revealing fundamental features of the societal order.

Furthermore, in various historical, political, and cultural contexts, **models** are conceived **as tools (models for)** that operationalize information and data in view of concrete interventions in the real world. Daniel Eschkötter explores the operational capacities of satellite images in the context of broader investigative or governmental networks of surveillance and tracking, focusing on the visualization of social or political conflicts, crises and crimes in the present. Frederic Kunkel and Jacob Bohé present an analysis of contemporary real-estate markets and property valuation in the United Kingdom, which highlights the central operational role of modern economic models. Mathias Albert's and Thomas Müller's essay deals with the use of operational models in world politics; the authors point out that model-based narratives of periodization and historical regularities can function as a guide for foreign policy or the creation of a stable international order. Maximilian Benz, in contrast, focuses in particular on the practical function of models in late-medieval piety, interpreting the comparative model of *synkrisis* as an instrument for the formation of moral self-practices performed by the individual. In a similar sense, models in early-modern advice literature as examined by Antje Flüchter are understood as ethical instructions for action aimed at individual behavioral change and improvement.

However, in many instances, investigations do not focus on models alone, but also explore the **modeling practices** on which they are based. Laura Niewöhner's observations on the denazification system in postwar Germany highlight the role of American administrators as modelers who create new semantic patterns and categorizations. In Kirsten Kramer's chapter, the theory of exoticism appears as an expression of a modeling practice based on the critical revision of prior literary and scientific models of diversity. Daniel Eschkötter, in contrast, sheds light on modeling practices in the context of remote sensing that inform the production of visualization models underlying satellite images.

## Modeling as Research Practice and Strategy

**Modeling** not only comes into focus as an object of investigation, but also plays an important role as a key element in **research practices and strategies**. As Silke Schwandt's contribution demonstrates in a theoretical perspective, modeling processes in digital history are used both to document the researchers' own theoretical assumptions and to process data. Concrete examples of modeling practices in the field of digital history are provided by Laura Niewöhner and Charlotte Feidicker, whose contributions deal with the transformation of research questions into computational models or languages and annotation practices applied to denazification documents and medieval manuscripts from the field of English legal history. As Angelika Epple's essay reveals, modeling proves to be an important research strategy in the area of theory building in non-digital history as well: she not only discusses existing interpretive models of history and the historical process, but also develops her own contingency-based theoretical model of global historical change.

The contributions to this volume thus illustrate that models and modeling are currently gaining increasing relevance not only in the natural sciences, economics, and the digital humanities, but also in the broader field of the "classical" humanities, as they contribute both to the opening of historical fields of knowledge and to the expanding of the methods used by the different disciplines involved.

## Models and Practices of Comparing

We are most interested in two ways in which practices of comparing relate to models. **Models are often based on practices of comparing**. The categories or parameters of models are formed via practices of comparing. The evolutionary and comparative models that Kirsten Kramer, Angus Nicholls, and Walter Erhart examine are based on practices of comparing that focus on cultures and their assumed level of civilization. The same applies to the models through which people or their bodies are ordered in Malte Wittmaack's and Angela Gutierrez's examples. Mathias Albert and Thomas Müller examine three narratives used in international politics to describe and explain changes in world politics. These narratives are based in different ways on temporal comparisons that relate previous states to later ones. Maximilian Benz examines the effect and reception of Thomas à Kempis's "De imitatio Christi." Using this text in pious practice, the believers compare themselves with Jesus, the saints, or ideal selves. The underlying models emerge through practices of comparing; but most importantly, ethical subjectivity emerges as a practice of self-comparison.

However, models are not only formed through practices of comparing. The **comparing of models** proves likewise to be central to our research context. Angelika Epple compares different models of the course of history (Marxism, historicism, modernization theory) before developing her own model of global history and historical

change. In Kirsten Kramer's article on Victor Segalen, the critical revision of evolutionary theories proves to be built on a comparison of different representational models of diversity. Similarly, Angus Nicholls compares the epistemologies underlying evolutionary models and cosmopolitanism in his essay on the foundation of early comparative literature (e.g. Wilhelm Scherer). Silke Schwandt shows the great argumentative power of visual comparison of models in her article: she describes how, in a famous painting, Lucas Cranach compares the new Lutheran model of redemption with the law-oriented model of damnation ascribed to the old, later Catholic Church in a polemic way. Daniel Eschkötter also compares different models of images present in satellite imaging as well as the media adaption of such images. Malte Wittmaack and Angela Gutierrez examine how the ordering of mankind was shaped and changed by comparing different body models in the *longue durée*. According to Wittmaack, the humoral concepts shaped how European travelers in the 16th century perceived the Ottoman population; whereas, according to Gutierrez's analysis of the famous *casta* paintings, the diverse population of Cuba in the 18th century was divided into clearly distinct groups through visualization, a division that was further simplified by the racializing models of the 19th century.

Practices of comparing thus prove to be fundamental to the formation of models; the importance of models as arguments or for establishing plausibility depends in many cases on how they perform in comparison with other models.

## Practices of Comparing and Change

The research on these questions conducted in Bielefeld thus far assumes that practices of comparing have a productive force. Practices of comparing and processes of transformation or change can enter into various relations with each other, as has been argued above. In the essays of this volume, several perspectives on possible connections are unfolded in more detail.

Our first perspective focuses on the **changing practices of comparing** themselves. Many of the essays elaborate on such changes in comparing itself: Walter Erhart shows how comparative practices both in world-travel literature and in scientific disciplines underwent significant changes in the 19th century. In Maximilian Benz's article, practices of comparing with God or saints are transformed into acts of self-comparing. The change in the *longue durée* as presented by Malte Wittmaack and Angela Gutiérrez is due to a change in the contouring of the units of comparison (bodies, castes, races) by other criteria (food, skin color, genes).

If a **functional connection between practices of comparing and change** is assumed, the question remains whether changed practices of comparing reflect altered conditions, or whether modifications in the structure of comparisons have promoted or even triggered change. Angus Nicholls highlights the close relationship between particular practices of comparing and change in academic fields such

as anthropology, ethnography, and the beginnings of comparative literature. The texts analyzed by Maximilian Benz and Antje Flüchter invite the readers to compare themselves to the described ideal (either of a healthy body or the Christian doctrine of justification) and demand that one should change and converge with the ideal. Moreover, the concrete improvement of the believer leads, as Maximilian Benz elaborates, to practices of self-comparing and consequently also to a new form of the self. Kirsten Kramer outlines the functional connection between the change in practices of comparing and the emergence of a new understanding of human diversity in French ethnography. Laura Niewöhner describes modeling in the context of the U.S. denazification process in Germany after 1945: the comparison—based on subdivisions ranging from heavily implicated persons, via bystanders (*Mitläufer*), to uninvolved persons—had a structuring effect on West German society. The productive force of comparison is also evident in the orderings of people as depicted by Malte Wittmaack and Angela Gutiérrez. This is particularly the case with the *casta* images, as they classified the very diverse population of Cuba into a few fixed castes depending on the “mix” of ethnic heritages and skin color. Angelika Epple argues that practices of comparing are a driving force for globalization.

Finally, **comparisons can be used to evaluate change**: teleological views of history, be they present in Marxism or modernization theory, use temporalizing practices of comparing to place states or cultures and societies in more or less developed positions on a hierarchized timeline. Angelika Epple makes this clear in her sketch of different views of history, but it also applies to the evolutionary models described by Walter Erhart, Angus Nicholls, and Kirsten Kramer in various contexts. This is also very visible in the advisory texts and contemplative literature studied by Antje Flüchter and Maximilian Benz. In their comparisons with ideals, these texts favor the change toward being a better person or living a longer life. Similarly, Mathias Albert and Thomas Müller elaborate that many of the narratives used to explain change in world politics likewise function in such a way. In his case study, Daniel Eschkötter examines how a particular form of representing—the change between “before” and “after”—is accomplished by using different image techniques and models, as well as by linking the procedure to specific goals (like exposing crime). The field of enquiry related to the interplay of models and modeling, practices of comparing, and larger- or smaller-scale historical transformations, is complex. All three elements can condition, support, or even challenge each other. The articles collected in this volume prove the productive force of practices of comparing in their relation to models and modeling.

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# Modeling, Ordering, Comparing

## Mediating Theoretical Frameworks and Empirical Evidence in History

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Silke Schwandt

**Abstract** *This article aims to explore the value of modeling as a research practice in history and its relationship to practices of comparing and ordering, and to make these theoretical frameworks more explicit. It addresses the implicit models present in historical writings and the materials that provide insights into historical actors' practices.*

*Modeling is crucial for sense-making in scientific and humanistic disciplines, such as history. But models are not neutral representations; they are rather restrictive, simplified, and sometimes ideological. The key is to make modeling practices explicit. The article presents two different examples of practices of modeling: (1) Lucas Cranach the Elder's 16th-century painting *Damnation and Redemption*, and (2) modeling practices in digital history. Both examples show that modeling practices are closely linked to practices of comparing.*

### History, Theory, and Models

Practices of comparison as a research concept and an analytical framework require a general understanding – in a way, a model – of thinking about the process of comparing. What are the elements that constitute a comparison? How is this linked to (sociological) practice theory? The previous work of the research center on Practices of Comparing has developed a generalizable model for thinking about practices of comparing which highlights that the necessary elements are 'things to be compared (*comparata*)' and a specific regard in which at least two things are compared to each other (*tertium*). In this sense, modeling is an essential part of research practices, not only within the natural sciences where the concept is well established, but also in the social sciences and the humanities. In this article, I will focus on the role that models and modeling practices play in history. By providing different examples, one from history and from history writing, I will make the case that models and modeling practices are inherent in historical thinking.

Thinking about modeling practices in history requires us to think about history practices first. What is it that we do when we do history? While there are many different understandings of history as an academic discipline, I want to focus on two general understandings before focusing on the question of modeling: (1) history is a concept represented by a *collective singular*<sup>1</sup> and (2) history is about narratives.<sup>2</sup> The first presumption addresses the question what history is on a theoretical level, while the second one combines theoretical presumptions with the questions of how to write history. Both examples have been very influential in history and serve as representations of different kinds of theoretical frameworks present in historical research for the sake of argument in this article.

Reinhart Koselleck coined the concept of *collective singulars* as part of his occupation with conceptual history. On the one hand, *collective singular* serves as term to describe what was later framed as *Grundbegriffe*: terms which denote concepts and can condense many different, historically variable meanings (examples are “state,” “liberty,” or “status”).<sup>3</sup> For Koselleck, most of these terms – and others of the same nature – took on this form in the late 18th century and served as concepts that actually create (collective) experiences (*Erfahrungsstiftungsbegriffe*).<sup>4</sup> History as opposed to histories in the plural, is one of these concepts. It became a term that denoted both the object of historiography and its theory at the same time.

“The history of events and the way they are researched and narrated were thus brought to a common concept. The conditions of action and the conditions of their cognition, or in other words: the extra-linguistic and the linguistic preconditions of every kind of history, were conceptually thought together. If you will, this was a purely transcendental turn anticipated in the history of language: The conditions of reality are at the same time the conditions of its cognition.”<sup>5</sup>

Hence, the way we think about and write history is closely linked to the general understanding of what history actually is, how it proceeds, and how it relates to actions and events as well as the respective understanding of temporality.

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- 1 See Reinhart Koselleck et. al., *Begriffsgeschichten. Studien zur Semantik und Pragmatik der politischen und sozialen Sprache*, Frankfurt am Main 2006, 56–76.
  - 2 See, for example, Hayden V. White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* [Reprint], Baltimore et. al. 1990.
  - 3 Koselleck, *Begriffsgeschichten*, 67, 68.
  - 4 Koselleck, *Begriffsgeschichten*, 67, 68.
  - 5 Koselleck, *Begriffsgeschichten*, 75 (author’s translation).

Hayden White is best known for his works on *metahistory*<sup>6</sup> and the use of narratives in history writing and research.<sup>7</sup> Adding to what Koselleck said about history being the theoretical concept on the one hand, and the very object of the study of history on the other, White claims that history also serves as a model. For him,

“the basic problem of historical thought [...] is to construct a verbal model of the historical process, or some part of it, which, by virtue of its status as a linguistic artefact, can be broken down into the levels of lexicon, grammar, syntax, and semantic.”<sup>8</sup>

Both Koselleck and White focus on language in their reflections on history, because history has always been told and expressed in language. Both talk about history, or the historical process, as framed by something that is at the same time extra-linguistic and part of the grammar which governs the history-telling of historians. And while White's use of the term *model* might have been mainly metaphorical, modeling is a perfect way to think about the operationalisation of theoretical frameworks and general understandings in the process of historical research. White goes on to describe the way in which the verbal model of the historical process works by saying that to think about the historians' work in this way allows for the assumption that “different historians stress different aspects of the same historical field [...] because they actually *see* different objects in that field”.<sup>9</sup> Presuppositions and assumptions about a certain historical event or process serve as a framework for the analysis of the historical material. This is by no means a new understanding of the practice of history writing. Michel de Certeau promoted a similar understanding of models in historiography, relating the process of modeling to the “system of interpretation” underlying the historical narrative.<sup>10</sup> Both authors, White and de Certeau, were not actual advocates of modeling but they used both terms, *model* and *modeling*, to describe a common practice in historiography that deals with the underlying frameworks, understandings, assumptions, and presuppositions that are often implicit in history writing. Reflecting on the use of models or modeling – even in a metaphoric sense – to be more explicit about theoretical frameworks in historical research is

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6 Hayden V. White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, Baltimore 2000.

7 See also Hayden V. White, The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality, in: *Critical Inquiry* 7, Nr. 1 (1980), 5–27.

8 White, *Metahistory*, 274.

9 White, *Metahistory*, 274. [emphasis in the original].

10 Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, New York 1988, 29.

the aim of this article.<sup>11</sup> What is the added value of modeling as a research practice in history? And, to take it one step further, what are the models that are implicitly present in historical writings – or even in the material that tells us about the practices of historical actors?

### **“Models as Mediators between Theory and the Real World”<sup>12</sup>**

Models and modeling have been a topic in many academic disciplines. The reflection on the terms and their practical value in the sciences as instruments has been explicitly discussed in the history and philosophy of science with a particular focus on the relevance and practical application of models in the natural sciences. While the differentiation between the natural sciences and the humanities and social sciences has been reimagined many times since its conception in the 19th century, it is still present in the different methodologies. One of the main differences in this respect is the concept of empirical evidence, or empirical science. Empiricism in the natural sciences denotes a basic methodology which focuses on systematic observation and the experimental validation of theories or theoretical assumptions. While the empirical evidence in the natural sciences, and also in some parts of the social sciences, is quantifiable data (e.g., measurements or survey data), the evidence in historical research is the information we have about past events; and this information has usually come down to us in the form of cultural artefacts like texts or images. And while all evidence always has to be interpreted, the way that this interpretation process is framed, can again be very different in the natural sciences and the humanities.

In the natural sciences, the specific function of models has been discussed as mediating between theory and empirical evidence.<sup>13</sup> Models are understood as something that operationalises theoretical assumptions to make them falsifiable by empirical evidence. Evelyn Fox Keller has suggested to differentiate between “models of” and “models for” to analyse the specific functionality of modeling for scientific research practices.<sup>14</sup> She uses the metaphors of *tools* or *instruments* for

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11 A slightly different but related argument has been made in Silke Schwandt, *Opening the Black Box of Interpretation: Digital History Practices as Models of Knowledge*, in: *History and Theory* 61, Nr. 4 (2022), 77–85. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hith.12281>.

12 The title of the chapter refers to Mary S. Morgan/Margaret Morrison (eds.), *Models as Mediators: Perspectives on Natural and Social Science*, Cambridge 1999, [<https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511660108>].

13 Cf. Morgan/Morrison, *Models as Mediators*, and more recently Bernhard Thalheim/Ivor Nissen (eds.), *Wissenschaft und Kunst der Modellierung: Kieler Zugang zur Definition, Nutzung und Zukunft*. Berlin/Boston 2015, [<https://doi.org/10.1515/9781501501234>].

14 Evelyn Fox Keller, *Models of and Models for: Theory and Practice in Contemporary Biology*, in: *Philosophy of Science* 67 (3/2000), 72–86, [<https://doi.org/10.1086/392810>].

models, thereby highlighting their role as research facilitators. Following Nancy Cartwright, Keller states that models are “not theoretical claims” but are designed to be “tools for interpreting and/or representing pieces of the world more or less usefully, above all, for making more or less accurate predictions about the behaviour of particular concrete systems.”<sup>15</sup> Here, models are built not only in order to represent something in a specific form, but also to be used in the process of prediction and simulation which might be alien to historical research. But models can also help in the process of interpretation, and the differentiation between *interpreting* and *representing* is crucial to understand the difference between “a model as a noun”, as Keller puts it, and the process of modeling: “a model as a noun [is] an entity that can be employed as a quasi-independent tool for designing new kinds of experiments, for posing new kinds of questions, and for guiding new kinds of manipulation of the system itself.”<sup>16</sup>

Apart from the natural sciences, models and modeling have also been widely discussed in the social sciences, especially in economics. Mary S. Morgan has argued that for economists models serve as representations of the world.<sup>17</sup> Models became somewhat different objects of knowledge in economics than in the natural sciences, where models serve as frameworks for experiments and as a basis for the falsification of theories: “they [economists] learnt to create models to represent economic life at many levels, to reason and theorize with them, and to apply that new knowledge to understand their world.”<sup>18</sup> What this perspective adds to the reflection on models and practices of modeling is that models can also serve as a means of structuring and ordering the world; a specific understanding of the “world in a model” as a key to making sense of the world.

## Models and Modeling Practices in History

Franziska Loetz has argued that for historians theory, or theory building, is actually the formulation of models (i.e., the practice of modeling).<sup>19</sup> For her, a model is a “defined set of interpretative statements for the description of ‘reality’, which are deemed to be true and have a general character”.<sup>20</sup> Loetz uses the concept of *model*

15 Fox Keller, *Models of and Models for*, 74.

16 Fox Keller, *Models of and Models for*, 82.

17 Cf. Mary S. Morgan, *The World in the Model: How Economists Work and Think*. Cambridge 2012, [<https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139026185>].

18 Morgan, *The World in the Model*, 380.

19 Franziska Loetz, *Theorie und Empirie in der Geschichtsschreibung: Eine notwendige Wechselbeziehung*, in: Norbert Paul/Thomas Schlich (eds.), *Medizingeschichte: Aufgaben, Probleme, Perspektiven*, Frankfurt am Main/New York 1998, 22–44.

20 Loetz, *Theorie und Empirie in der Geschichtsschreibung*, 25 [author’s translation].



to describe the operationalization necessary to apply theoretical frameworks—like, for example, Koselleck’s collective singulars—to the empirical evidence and the historical material. Models provide the parameters of the interpretation thereby representing the general assumptions that guide us in the practice of history writing. And while this has been theorised many times, including, e.g., by Michel de Certeau, there has also been ample critique about the added value of generalisation in historical research in particular and in the humanities in general. Petra Gehring has recently questioned the added value of generalisation in an article focussing on the worth or possible expendability of the concept of collective singulars, since they are “regarded as metaphysical, ideological, or at least as simplifications”.<sup>21</sup> Using collective singulars as theoretical frameworks and as a basis for modeling historical research questions must be subject to critical reflection. What does a model imply on the level of world views, general understandings, or even ideologies? As historians, we should not only build and use models as heuristic tools, but also identify and historicize models and modeling practices used by historical actors. The following two examples will therefore focus on (1) *models as research objects*, and (2) *modeling as research practices*.

### Ordering the World through Practices of Comparing: Lucas Cranach and the concept of *Damnation and Redemption*<sup>22</sup>

Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472–1553) worked as a painter at the court of Frederick III, the Wise, Elector of Saxony, starting in 1505. He is one of the first painters of his time to turn his workshop into a lucrative business. Building on his reputation due to his position at court, he even served two terms of office as mayor of Wittenberg. There, he became close friends with Martin Luther, the German Reformer who came to Wittenberg to teach at the university in 1508. Cranach was witness to Luther’s marriage to Katharina von Bora in 1525. This close relationship also informed his art and is believed to have inspired the iconographic program presented in one of his most famous paintings: *Damnation and Redemption* (Fig. 1).<sup>23</sup>

The painting is divided into two panels with law and damnation represented by the scenes depicted on the left panel and grace and redemption represented on the right. The tree which separates the panels stands at the center of the picture and

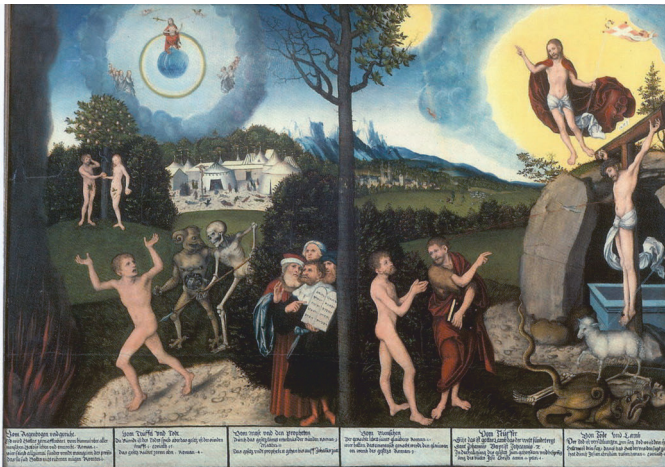
21 Petra Gehring, *Wie verzichtbar sind Kollektivsingulare wirklich?*, in: *Deutsche Vierteljahrschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 97 (1/2023), 65–71; see 65, [<https://doi.org/10.1007/s41245-023-00164-2>].

22 *Damnation and Redemption* refers to an iconographic program conceived and promoted during the Age of Reformation in Germany in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

23 The German title of this painting is *Gesetz und Gnade* and it is currently exhibited at the Stiftung Schloss Friedenstein in Gotha, Germany.

has a dried out and dead crown on the left and a green, living crown on the right. Another important element of the picture is a naked figure representing man who is being hoarded towards the flames of hell by two skeletons in the left panel, while he is led towards Christ in the right panel. The other images depict typological scenes from the Old and New Testament. The overall structure of the painting follows the principle of opposition and juxtaposition.

Fig. 1: Lucas Cranach the Elder: *Damnation and Redemption* 1529



Available in the public domain: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cranach\\_Gesetz\\_und\\_Gnade\\_Gotha.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cranach_Gesetz_und_Gnade_Gotha.jpg)

Luther and Cranach are believed to have worked on this program together and the text below the picture is often ascribed to the Reformer.<sup>24</sup> The text panels contain Bible verses referencing the scenes in the painting.<sup>25</sup>

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- 24 See for the role of Luther and Cranach as mediators of the new faith: Anne-Marie Bonnet et al. (eds.), *Lucas Cranach der Ältere: Meister, Marke, Moderne*. Museum Kunstpalast 2017, especially Daniel Görres. *Der Mönch und der Maler. Luther und Cranach als Vermittler eines neuen Glaubens*, 44–51.
- 25 This is a rough translation by the author of the German transcription: Of the rainbow and judgement. God's wrath is revealed from heaven over the lives and wrongs of all men. Roman. 1./ We are all sinners and lack praise, so that we cannot boast of God. Roman. 1./ Of the cup and death / Sin is the spear of death but the law is the power of sin. 1 Corinth.15. The law judges wrath. Roman. 4./From Moses and the Prophets / By the Law comes knowledge of sins Roman. 3./ Matthew.11./ The Law and the Prophets go down to the time of John / Of Man / The rightful living of his faith Roman.1./ We hold that a man may be justified in the faith / on the basis of the Law Roman.3.Of the death / Behold, the Lamb of God who bears the sin of

Cranach's painting can be read as a model of the new faith that Luther promoted. The message is simple: if you adhere only to the law, there will be damnation. If you orient yourself towards Christ's grace there will be redemption. In this case, the model is highly ideological. It communicates the general assumptions of the Reformation—*sola fide, sola gratia, sola scriptura*—and juxtaposes it against the “old faith,” which should become what we know as Catholicism after a process of confessionalization. Here, we can see how modeling worked in practice in the 16th century. Mary S. Morgan argues that “model-making gives *form* to ideas about the world and in the process gives *formal* rules to reason with.”<sup>26</sup> The whole composition of *Damnation and Redemption* works in a similar way: it gives form to the ideas of the Reformation and even provides formal rules to take as a guideline for the personal road to salvation. It also provides a visualisation of the model that is easy to follow, which is another important element of modeling and sense-making pointed to by Bruno Latour.<sup>27</sup>

As a historical model, *Damnation and Redemption* represents a specific order of the world that the German Reformers wanted to promote and gives it a specific form. The mode in which this order is established is comparative. Different scenes from the Old and New Testament are related to each other typologically. The Brazen Serpent in front of the tents on the left side corresponds to the Crucifix, the Fall of Man corresponds to the risen Christ, and Moses with the Ten Commandments corresponds to John the Baptist, pointing towards Christ. From the perspective of the viewer this model is an invitation to compare themselves to the man depicted in the picture to evaluate their own lives and faith. Hence, practices of comparison are inscribed into the model on different levels: on the one hand they are an integral part of the structure and built into the model itself, and on the other hand they are essential to the affordance to act according to the model.

Analyzing Cranach's *Damnation and Redemption* as a visualized model of the Reformers' world view helps to identify the underlying general assumptions as well as the communicative goals associated with the program. In this sense, the picture truly is a ‘world in a model’.

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the world / Saint John the Baptist.2 / In the sanctification of the Spirit to the obedience and praise of the flower of Jesus Christ amen.1.petri.1 / Of death and lamb, death is swallowed up in victory, death where is your spit, light where is your victory, thanks be to God who has given us victory through Jesus Christ our Lord. 1 Corinthians 15

26 Morgan, *The World in a Model*, 92.

27 See Bruno Latour, Visualization and Cognition: Thinking with Eyes and Hands, in: *Knowledge and Society* 6 (1986), 1–40.

## Modeling as Operationalisation: Comparative Practices and Quantification

As I have argued earlier, historians need to be aware not only of historical actors and their convictions and assumptions, but also of the theoretical assumptions present in their own work – not least in order to avoid anachronisms when imposing their presuppositions to the historical case. Models can serve as a heuristic tool to help identify and explicate theoretical frameworks like in the example above. But engaging in the process of modeling practically, allows us to manage and document our own assumptions. As Loetz pointed out, it is not a novel approach to use modeling practices to mediate theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence. But the explicit discussion of models and modeling has been rather sparse in historical research. In the field of digital history, though, there has been more profound engagement with concepts of modeling over the last 10–15 years.<sup>28</sup> Because of its inherent interdisciplinarity, the digital humanities as well as digital history have a specific perspective on modeling as a practice of mediating different disciplinary approaches and interests. Joining any of the humanities' disciplines with computer-science methods puts specific emphasis on processes of modeling in the sense of operationalization.

One of the main characteristics of digital history is that because of its implementation of quantitative methods from data science, statistics, and similar fields, it deals with data as its research object instead of (only) texts, images, or artifacts. This means that in the first steps of the process, theories, or theoretical frameworks have to be translated into questions and concepts, which then need to be formalized to make them suitable to quantitative methods. In the context of a project on “Comparative Approaches – Law of Precedent in Late Medieval England” we focus on analyzing medieval court practices as *practice formations* related to practices of comparing. Following a praxeological approach, we want to identify practices of comparing within a set of different practices and ask how these practices shaped the legal order, and legal procedure in particular. Another focus of the project lies with the analyses of the different actors involved in the court sessions conceptualized as *communities of practice*.<sup>29</sup> To operationalize these approaches, we need different models which focus on the general assumptions implied by the theoretical frameworks, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, allow us to map these concepts to the available data. Practices of comparing consist of at least two things which are being compared (*comparata*) in a specific regard (*tertia comparationis*) and always involve actors who carry

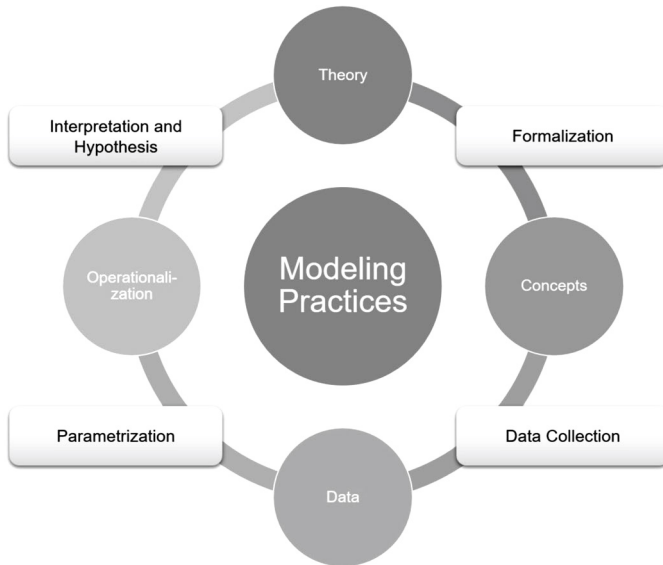
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28 See for an overview of the specific field Fotis Jannidis/Julia Flanders (eds.), *The Shape of Data in Digital Humanities: Modeling Texts and Text-based Resources*. London 2018, [<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315552941>].

29 See for the project description [<https://www.uni-bielefeld.de/sfb/sfb1288/projektbereiche/d02/>, last access: 18/05/2023].

out a comparison, often for a specific purpose.<sup>30</sup> To identify these practices in the context of a digital- history project, we need to conceptualize markers in a way to make them discernible by data-/text mining methods. Once they are discernible, we can then ask how they might be connected to other sets of practices to form *practice formations*. *Communities of practice* are groups of people who share a set of practices as their main moment of cohesion. In most regional medieval courts of the 13th to 15th centuries there were few to no professional legal actors present. The people involved came together for this particular purpose from the local communities and formed a community of practice which lasted only for the moment of the court session.<sup>31</sup> To analyze these groups of people we need to identify the relevant actors and understand their relationships constituted at court. This might be done by applying computational methods like Named Entity Recognition (the automated identification of person names, and locations, etc.) and network analysis.

Fig. 2: Modeling Practices in Digital History



This image was generated by the author.

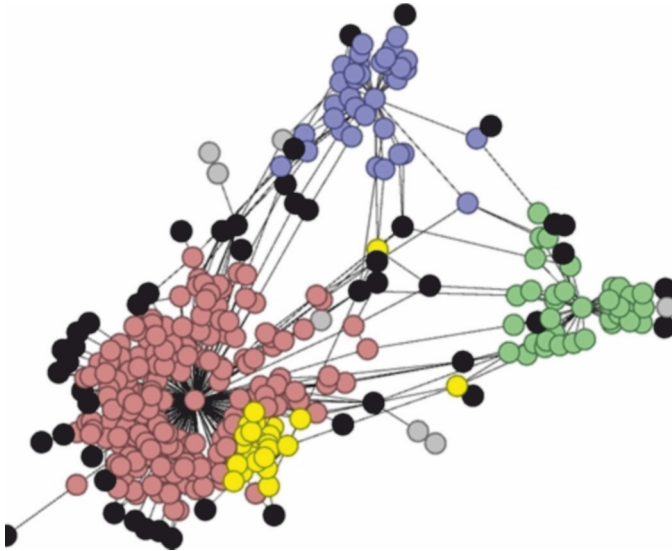
30 See for the conceptual work of the SFB 1288, e.g., Angelika Epple/Walter Erhart (eds.), *Die Welt beobachten: Praktiken des Vergleichens*. Frankfurt am Main/New York 2015, as well as the Working Paper Series [<https://www.uni-bielefeld.de/sfb/sfb1288/publikationen/>, last access: 18/05/2023].

31 Cf. Silke Schwandt, *Rechtspraxis als soziale Praxis. Das Beispiel der Huntingdonshire Eyre von 1286*, in: *Das Mittelalter* 25, (1/2020), 83–102, [<https://doi.org/10.1515/mial-2020-0007>].

The next step then focuses on the data itself and the necessary modeling and processing of the data. Medieval court records have to be transformed into machine-readable formats and this also is a modeling process.<sup>32</sup> Both processes are characterized by formalization, parametrization, and operationalization. Research questions are translated into formal concepts which are in turn associated with specific parameters of the model (which kinds of textual or linguistic information are relevant for the question?). The model is then used to process the data, i.e. the empirical evidence, accordingly and the results will be presented in a way which represents the modeling process.

If we look at the people present in court during the Huntingdonshire Eyre of 1286 and ask for their relationship to each other, we might arrive at a visualization like figure 3.<sup>33</sup>

*Fig. 3: Visualizing of people interacting at court during the Huntingdonshire Eyre of 1286, realized with Gephi by the author.*



32 See for a detailed description of data modeling Piotr Banski/Andreas Witt, Modeling and Annotating Complex Data Structures, in: Jannidis/Flanders (eds.), *The Shape of Data in Digital Humanities*, 217–35, [<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315552941>].

33 For the edition of the Huntingdonshire Eyre see Anne Reiber DeWindt/Edwin Brezette DeWindt, *Royal Justice and the Medieval English Countryside: The Huntingdonshire Eyre of 1286, the Ramsey Abbey Banlieu Court of 1287 and the Assizes of 1287–88*. Toronto 1981.

Visualizing a community of practice can happen in many different ways depending on the presupposition underlying the modeling process. For this example, the nodes of the network graph represent people who were present at court as litigants. The edges connecting the nodes show which people were part of the same case. The different colours represent the social groups that the people involved were a part of.<sup>34</sup> Bringing this information together as parameters for the network model, we can see how the community of practice was constituted. The clusters show that in most cases, the people involved in the same case came from the same social group, thus forming a community within the community. But there are some nodes which break the general pattern and ask for a closer look and a deeper explanation. We can assume that there are some cases where the borders of the social strata were less impervious than we would have expected.

What this example also shows is that the pattern recognition that is at the heart of this kind of modeling practice, is inherently comparative. In order to recognize the pattern, or to find the outliers in a network like the one above, the position, distribution, size, or colour of the nodes is compared and then interpreted within the framework of the general model. Modeling practices, therefore, most often are connected to practices of comparing.

## Modeling, Ordering, Comparing – and now?

Let's go back to the beginning: Mauricio Suárez argues that there are two aspects to the slogan 'scientific models mediate between theory and the real world' – one methodological and one epistemological. "Model building is a pervasive feature of the methodology [...] to arrive at theoretical representations of real systems", while at the same time models relate to "issues such as the nature of explanation".<sup>35</sup>

Modeling is an essential part of the scientific procedures of sense-making – and not only in the natural sciences. On the contrary, the understanding of history as a generalizable model shows that the humanities also productively engage in process of modeling – albeit with a different goal. Historians do not necessarily build 'verbal models' as a result of their research. Such models are rather built at the beginning of a research process to operationalize the mediation between theoretical assumptions and empirical evidence.

And as the example of Cranach's conceptual painting *Damnation and Redemption* has shown, this is not only a scientific or academic practice. Models and modeling

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34 The classification follows the bibliographical register in DeWindt, *Royal Justice*.

35 Mauricio Suárez, The Role of Models in the Application of Scientific Theories, in: Morgan/Morrison (eds.), *Models as Mediators*, Cambridge 1999, 168.

practices serve many different purposes and, therefore, are never just neutral representations of the 'real world'. They are highly restrictive, simplified and manipulative, and sometimes even ideological. The most important thing about modeling is therefore to make it explicit as an integral part of our research practices.

Especially for the research on practices of comparing, thinking about models and modeling practices does offer an added value: not only are comparisons often dependent on models, but the way that we frame our approaches to researching comparisons is as well. By making them explicit, their explanatory power becomes apparent and will help to engage with the presuppositions present in not only historical but also contemporary models of the world.

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# Making Use of Models

## Perspectives in Historical Research

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Jacob Bohé/Charlotte Feidicker/Angela Gutierrez/Frederic Kunkel/  
Laura Maria Niewöhner/Malte Wittmaack

**Abstract** *This essay sheds light on the question of how models and modeling could be applied to historical research. In three sections, different research fields in History will be explored concerning this question, i.e., economic history, situations of cultural contact, denazification, and the use of models in Digital Humanities. In every section, two authors discuss problems and chances in using models and modeling in their research projects within the SFB 1288 “Practices of comparing.” This essay relates to a “Roundtable” of doctoral students held on the Midterm Conference of the SFB: “Comparing & Change: Orders, Models, Perceptions.”*

### Introduction

Today we are confronted with models in many contexts. We use them to transfer knowledge and understand complex causalities. In schoolbooks, students learn about the complexity of cellular processes with the help of visual models. Economists structure economic processes on the macro level in the form of models, such as Business Cycles, for a better understanding. Also, climate scientists describe climate change using models to highlight the future consequences of humans' actions in the present. These are just three possible examples of the use of models that we encounter in everyday life.

The SFB Midterm Conference made it obvious that the concept of models is used differently in each discipline. Therefore, it became very clear to us that it has to be defined specifically what properties a model has and with what aim it is created. Driven by the question of to what extent the concept of models can be fruitful for the various PhD projects, six contributors to the Young Researcher Forum at the SFB Midterm Conference have taken on the challenge of exploring the potentials and limits of modeling in historical research. According to this format, this article is constructed as an experimental essay with different perspectives on models. Based on the research interests of the participants, the article is split into three topical sec-

tions: the role of models in property markets, models as means to order people in cultural encounters, and the potential of models in sense-making. After each section, the authors summarize questions and problems that arose from thinking in models.

As a starting point for our discussion, we studied the ideas of Mary Morgan. Representing the field of History and Philosophy of Economics, Morgan pointed out that models seek to represent the world through the translation of words into (not exclusively mathematical) codes for a better understanding of circumstances, processes, and actions.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, all models share two common aspects: first, models require a specific language. To describe the represented object and to simplify processes, it is necessary to use specific terms. Second, models can appear in an array of visual forms. These visualizations embody an imagination of the world.<sup>2</sup> As such, models become research objects themselves.<sup>3</sup> In this manner, models create new accounts of the world with the help of visualizations and representations, enabling us to see large-scale and typical phenomena clearly, in more detail or from a new angle.<sup>4</sup>

This article has taken on the challenges of using models as research objects and research practices. The first section focuses on models as research objects to trace the relations between property and financial markets. Frederic Kunkel analyses the development of Discounted Cash Flow techniques in distinction to comparative models of valuation in Great Britain from the 1960s to the 1990s. Jacob Bohé argues for valuation forms as a special type of model, relying on the work of Mary Morgan as well as his own. He further emphasizes the usefulness of valuation research for understanding the developments in the property market in the German Federal Republic. The second section focuses on concepts of bodies in time and space. To what extent did historical actors use concepts of body, blood, and race in cultural encounters, and can these be defined as models? Malte Wittmaack examines the role of bodies in one German-written travelogue from a journey to the Ottoman Empire in the 17th century. Angela Gutierrez concentrates on multi-racial family representations through the casta paintings in the 18th century and models that justified racial hierarchies in the 19th century. The third section is a combination of both models used by historical actors and modeling as a research practice. Laura Maria Niewöhner highlights the role of denazification in the US-American occupied zone in Postwar Germany and develops a perspective on how to operationalize the question of modeling as a research practice with digital tools. Following this, Charlotte Feidicker discusses

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1 Cf. Mary S. Morgan, *The World in the Model. How Economists Work and Think*, Cambridge 2012, 94.

2 Cf. Morgan, *The World in the Model*, 98.

3 Cf. Morgan, *The World in the Model*, 380, 386.

4 Cf. Morgan, *The World in the Model*, 95, 96.

the use of annotations as a modeling process that influences both analog and digital approaches in historical research.

## Models as Research Objects in Economic History

### Modeling the British Property Market (Frederik Kunkel)

Financial and property markets have always been closely linked. Nevertheless, various academic disciplines have repeatedly discussed the development and the connection of the two markets with reference to the phenomenon of financialization.<sup>5</sup> Generally speaking, the majority of these approaches commonly assume that the logic and practices of the financial sector have increasingly dominated the real economy (i.e., property markets) since the 1960s.<sup>6</sup>

### Financialization through the lens of economic modeling

In the context of British property markets, I want to examine these assumptions through the perspective of Mary Morgan's conceptualization of economic modeling, by utilizing models as an indicator of financialization. Analysing the development and impact of economic modeling is, in principle, nothing new. Relevant studies have illustrated the dynamics of certain economic models and their effects on the real economy.<sup>7</sup> However, as Morgan describes it, the performance of certain models does not explain their status as the "right model for the job."<sup>8</sup> As a crucial point for the development of economic models, Morgan points out that "those creating economic models must pick out what they take to be the salient points of the economy [...]."<sup>9</sup>

Transferring these considerations to the British property market results in a promising praxeological approach to understanding the relationship of finance and

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5 Cf. Manuel Aalbers, *The financialization of housing. A political economy approach*, London/New York 2016; Natacha Aveline-Dubach, The financialization of real estate in megacities and its variegated trajectories in East Asia, in: André Sørensen/Danielle Labbé (eds.), *Handbook of megacities and megacity-regions*, Northampton 2020, 395–410.

6 Cf. Ewald Engelen, The Case for Financialization, in: *Competition & Change* 12 (2/2008), 111–119; Johnna Montgomerie/Karel Williams, Financialised Capitalism. After the Crisis and Beyond Neoliberalism, in: *Competition & Change* 13 (2/2009), 99–107.

7 Cf. Donald MacKenzie, The Big Bad Wolf and the Rational Market. Portfolio Insurance, the 1987 Crash and the Performativity of Economics, in: *Economy and Society* 33 (3/2004), 303–334; Donald MacKenzie, *An Engine, Not a Camera. How Financial Models Shape Markets*, London 2006.

8 Morgan, *The World in the Model*, 399.

9 Morgan, *The World in the Model*, 383.

real economy, wherein the “doing” of a model is closely linked to certain techniques of economic valuation.

### Modeling the British Property Market

As of the 1960s, booms and busts on the British property market—affecting both access to and the profitability of investment properties—led to surges in numbers of market participants, primarily from the financial sector (e.g., insurance companies and pension funds). As a result of these influxes, the question concerning the “most suitable” valuation technique and the respective underlying model was the subject of recurring debates.

The reason for these debates resides in the fact that unlike, for example, stock markets, where the market price in the form of mere transactions is a positive statement, real-estate markets require the intermediate step of valuation due to the heterogeneity of assets.

In the UK, the traditional valuation technique aimed to calculate a market price through the comparison of past prices. This technique varies fundamentally from the logic of the financial sector, where valuations primarily aimed at determining the *Investment Worth* through future cash flows in distinction to comprehensive market prices.

In the course of changing economic contexts and the influx of financial investors, this divergence posed a major problem, especially in the face of bear markets. As prices fell, the number of transactions required for a reliable valuation (i.e., established comparative method) decreased and the valuation inevitably became more subjective. In consequence, this prevented investors from comparing returns from property with alternative investment opportunities (e.g., equities, bonds, index-linked gilts), whose valuation techniques were focused on the rational estimation of cash flows.

My objective now is to determine the relationship between financial and property markets in the UK by analysing how different actors approached certain forms of modeling, the corresponding valuation techniques of which ultimately prevailed in varying historical contexts.

### Historical Indications

Thus far, there are indications that the demand for new approaches to modeling goes hand-in-hand with certain economic turning points between 1960 and 2000. For example, stockbrokers first criticized the current valuation model in the aftermath of the secondary banking crisis of 1973.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, in the context of the booming property market of the 1980s and the major influx of more sophisticated financial players, experts from the established professions attested that “consequently if surveyors are

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10 Cf. Andrew Baum/Neil Crosby, *Property investment appraisal*, London 1988, 18.

to maintain their position they must, at the very least, attune themselves with alternative approaches, even if they do not necessarily agree with them.”<sup>11</sup> A further example is provided in a publication by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors in the aftermath of the housing crisis of the early 1990s. It explicitly states that “the valuation profession needs to improve the technical element of its skill by updating and extending its use of mathematical models.”<sup>12</sup>

Taking the publications cited above into deeper consideration, my aim is to render financialization more tangible by looking at the practices that go hand-in-hand with the attempt to enforce certain valuation standards through models. Though the exact course of events, the various positions, and groups of actors as well as the impact of the debates on valuation practice cannot be fully described here, highlighting the process of modeling itself seems to be a promising path to sharpen the definition of financialization in a more selective and event-related way.

## Forms as Models (Jacob Bohé)

### Forms as special models

After the first part of this section has explored the usage of classical economic models in the realm of property valuation, I want to broaden the understanding of models in the context of property valuation. As a starting point, it is useful to recapitulate what typical economic models are. According to Mary Morgan:

[...] economic models are pen-and-paper objects, not objects of, or in, the world but artifacts made to represent – to depict, denote, or describe – things in the world [...]. The models of economists are diagrams, sets of equations, or accounts, in which economists adopt standardized and formalized conventions to denote their phenomena of interest [...].<sup>13</sup>

From this description of models, similarities to forms can be drawn. Forms are also pen-and-paper objects made to represent things in the real world. Just like models, forms adopt standardized and formalized conventions about property valuation.<sup>14</sup> My research examples revolve around the special case of property valuation by

11 Michael Patrick, What Use is Property Performance Analysis, in: *Journal of Valuation* 2 (2/1984), 137–141, see 137.

12 RICS, Commercial Investment Property. Valuation Methods. An Information Paper, London 1997, 19.

13 Morgan, *The World in the Model*, 382.

14 Cf. Klaus P. Keunecke, *Immobilienbewertung: Entscheidungsorientierte Ansätze bei der Grundstücks- und Gebäudebewertung*, Berlin/Heidelberg 1994, 36–37; Viktor-Hermann Müller, Die Bewertung von Immobilien: Verfahrensweisen, quantitative und qualitative Methoden, in: Marlies Brunner (eds.), *Geldanlage mit Immobilien*, Wiesbaden 1994, 267–87, see 270–271.

banks for building loans. The goal of these valuations is to derive a loan value (Beleihungswert) that builds the basis for a loan that is backed by the property itself as a security. Historically, banks have used complex forms that developed within each bank individually. These conventions led to the emergence of different forms depending on the type of building.<sup>15</sup>

My first example focuses on the emerging mass market for self-owned properties in the 1970s. This required banks to change their valuation forms—to shorten and simplify them. This also meant that forms became more specialized and focused on certain types and sub-types of properties. While this made the valuation of near-standard properties easier, it meant that the forms had weak points when properties fell outside these idealized characteristics.<sup>16</sup> The emergence of penthouses in Germany was such a special valuation case. The problem for valuation stems from the fact that the penthouse sits on top of an apartment building. While the penthouse is clearly part of the same building as the remaining apartments, it is also clearly distinct from the apartment units. This led to the discussion of whether penthouses should be valued as part of the apartment building or if the penthouse should be valued as a single house and then added to the value of the remaining apartment building. In this latter approach, new sub-forms were introduced for this special type of property.<sup>17</sup>

The second example is comprised of highly individualized and expensive single-family homes. Here, I want to recall that the property valuation by banks is focused on using the property as a security for the loan itself. Thus, the property should guarantee a minimum price when being offered for sale. As a result of these properties being highly individualized and expensive, the calculated values were not reached when sold. When sold within a few years after their completion, many of these properties could only recoup 50 to 70 percent of their original value. This meant that with the use of standard valuation forms banks unknowingly started to engage in risky loans.<sup>18</sup>

As special types of models, forms share characteristics with models. They are also pen-and-paper objects, and they work in a similar fashion. The first example has shown how abstract forms can be modeled to depict real-world objects, while the second example has shown the representation problem of forms. If large parts of

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15 Cf. Fritz Pohnert, *Kreditwirtschaftliche Wertermittlung: typische und atypische Beispiele der Immobilienbewertung*, Wiesbaden 1981, 14.

16 Cf. Pohnert, *Kreditwirtschaftliche Wertermittlung*, 14; Theo Gerardy, *Praxis der Grundstücksbewertung*, München 1971, 51; Friederike Sattler, *Der Pfandbrief 1769–2019: von der preussischen Finanzinnovation zur Covered Bond Benchmark*, Stuttgart 2019, 189.

17 Cf. Fritz Pohnert, *Kreditwirtschaftliche Wertermittlung: typische und atypische Beispiele der Immobilienbewertung* (4. Aufl.), Wiesbaden 1992, 46.

18 Cf. Theo Gerardy, *Praxis der Grundstücksbewertung* (3. Aufl.), München 1980, 621–622; Pohnert, *Kreditwirtschaftliche Wertermittlung*, 25–29.

the initial value are lost in a few years, it indicates that these forms cannot represent the real world in the envisaged way.

### The Value of Valuation Research

Having shown how forms are a special type of model, I will now proceed to address the added worth of studying models of valuation. I want to focus on two aspects based on my own research. I want to highlight, first, the value of models for understanding financialization processes in the property market, and second, what this can teach about the relation between different actors on the property market.

Financialization has been extensively researched, especially in the social sciences. A historical perspective that considers historical continuity and changes in valuation models can shift research focus and enhance understanding of financialization and its processes. Utilizing the practical application of valuation methods opens up the terrain for praxeological research into practitioners of valuation practices. It can shed light on the formation and change of conventions or standards of property valuation. Here, through the lens of valuations, the intrusion of financial actors into the property market can be traced and analyzed. With the help of valuation models different groups can be sketched for the property market, depending on what valuation models they advocate.

### Conclusion

Identifying what models are is not as intuitive as it seems, which the next section will explore further. This text has provided arguments for why valuation forms are special types of models. As models they are “artifacts made to represent [...] things in the world [...]”<sup>19</sup> The forms are modeled with real-world counterparts in mind but without the intention to fully depict them. However, their degree of success at adequately representing a real-world object—in this case, the value of a property—can fall short. In some cases, it can fail dramatically. Building on this argument the text has shown why research into valuation models is a worthwhile endeavor. It can shed light on financialization processes in the property market and it can highlight relations between financial intermediaries.

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19 Morgan, *The World in the Model*, 382.



## From Ideal Types to Models? The Relation of Ideal Types and Models in Ordering People from the 17<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> Century

### Ordering—Modeling—Comparing from an Early Modern Perspective (Malte Wittmaack)

Early modern travelers were confronted with an unfamiliar society in the Ottoman Empire. Travelers used customs, such as the moderate eating habits in the Ottoman Empire, as an exemplum.

Unlike the mathematical models that are closer to what Morgan presents, models in the early modern period are more ideal types, which in themselves could be considered models, but not so clearly as the numerical models in economics. How, then could these ideal types or *exempla* in the early modern sense be understood as models?

In the course of cultural exchange, comparisons facilitate the positioning of the self relative to others, and power dynamics inform the notion of ideal types that are negotiated in these exchanges.

Below I will also draw attention to the analytical models that historians use to understand their sources.

The first model type can be explored in Ferdinand von Triolo's travelogue. He was a nobleman who traveled to visit Jerusalem, and wrote:

They do have hospitals/but few sick people; and what I have been most astonished about/has been/that so few poor/crooked and lame people are found among them/who beg back and forth in the alleys or streets as they do among us/I do not know whether the good climate or the great barrenness to live is the cause of this: For they usually do not drink wine/do not use many different dishes/as it is common in Christianity/where one loads the body with unnecessary food/and one cannot get enough of preparing the tasty morsels/nor does one consider/perhaps overfilling the stomach with it/because of this one must rightly say : Gluttony kill many like the sword.<sup>20</sup>

What can be seen in this part of Triolo's description is a multilevel, complex comparison:<sup>21</sup> at one level, he compared the Ottoman Empire and the Holy Roman Empire

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20 Ferdinand von Troilo, *Orientalische Reise-Beschreibung, wie dieselbe aus Teutschland über Venedig, durch das Königreich Cypren, nach dem gelobten Lande... von dannen in Egypten ... und vielen andern entlegnen Morgenländischen Orten mehr ... vollbracht*, Dresden, 1676, 542 (author's translation).

21 Cf. Angelika Epple/Antje Flüchter/Thomas Müller, *Praktiken des Vergleichens: Modi und Formationen. Ein Bericht von unterwegs. Workingpaper des SFB 1288 No. 6*, Bielefeld 2020, [<https://doi.org/10.4119/unibi/2943010>].

regarding the number of hospitals and unhealthy people in the streets. On another level, he compared the different eating habits of the Ottoman and the Christian people and the climate they lived in, regarding the effect that these aspects had on the body and on someone's health. Between these two comparisons, he constructed a causal relationship: The moderate eating habits and the mild climate he made responsible for the health and the good condition of Ottoman people.

The model is, so to speak, the result of a comparison because Christians and Muslims, as *comparata*, were compared regarding eating habits.<sup>22</sup> At the end of this comparison, the Muslims were marked as a positive example. These comparisons, with positive connotations concerning the Muslim Ottoman population, had the aim of improving people's habits and customs in Christendom. The idea of self-comparisons by the readers of travelogues, which the author intended, could be an example of early modern ideas of the connection between model, comparisons, and change: models were, in this report, and also in other travelogues, constructed through comparisons. These comparatively generated models could and should be used for self-comparisons with the aim to improve the Christian readers' behavior. Here change should not be understood as a macro phenomenon like "historical change." The authors intended the personal change of individuals. This kind of model is, in my opinion, typical regarding early modern notions of models. Models were constructed so that people could orient themselves according to them. They were not just ideals; people were supposed to reflect on them, compare themselves to the models, and base their behavior on them. The Turks as models includes an interesting contradiction because, in some instances, the Turks were constructed as a positive example, whereas most of the time they were perceived as "the infidels." But travelers observed the Turks from an idealistic perspective which emphasizes only the things that should be improved in Christianity. In the text, there is no admiration of the Turks in general, especially not in the case of their religious habits.

The second model I want to sketch out is my analytical model: in my own project, I'm interested in comparisons that order people in cultural contact, and which are related to the body. To understand bodies in premodern Europe, historians need to know the characteristics of early modern body knowledge. Barbara Duden said we "cannot be too careful not to use [our] own body as a bridge to the past."<sup>23</sup> So in the first instance, I had to leave "models" of the modern body behind before I was able to analyze the premodern body. I decided to use methods from historical anthropology to investigate the conceptions of the bodies that the travelers had and used in their

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22 Cf. Rebecca Earle, *The Body of the Conquistador. Food, Race and the Colonial Experience in Spanish America, 1492–1700*, Cambridge 2012, 3–5.

23 Barbara Duden, *The Woman Beneath the Skin. A Doctor's Patients in Eighteenth-Century Germany*, Harvard 1991, 2.

texts. A method like this was not completely determined by abstract theories and complexes of early modern body knowledge. I wanted to analyze how the historical actors understood and used these ideas in their own way. I suggest that body knowledge in the early modern period was for most people a kind of latent knowledge, like medical knowledge is for us in modern times. I started to ask which discourses the early modern travelers related their bodies to and how they explained their bodies' health and functioning. But this also seemed to be a model of the early modern understanding of the body. The question is whether we can analyze historical sources without a concrete model, because our methodological tools are always tools to reduce the complexity of the many things we can find in historical sources.

I constructed a model from theoretical literature to search for the body in early modern texts. I used this method to avoid an ahistorical narrative.

While as researchers we utilize models to investigate our objects, the use of models to describe the object itself would not be so helpful to my research. Nevertheless, it seems necessary to think further about models: what role will models as a research object play in early modern thinking? How can theories of models and modeling be applied to early modern sources, and what advantages will the term 'model' have in the research of early modern times? Were there other ways of thinking to reduce complexity in the early modern world which were not labeled as 'modeling' but which had the same function? The question also arose regarding the relationship between theories, methods, and models in historiography. Are there theories and theoretically based models to analyze sources?

### **How Historical Actors Mold Racial Hierarchies through Models in the Americas (Angela Gutierrez)**

In her book *The World in the Model*, Mary Morgan writes about models as representations of a world, a concept, mechanism that is imagined by the modelers. The text states that economists "use their imaginations about the hidden workings of the economic world to make representations of those workings in equations or diagrams." While they need not be purely mathematical, they represent a slice of the world, depending on what elements of life they are supposed to illustrate.<sup>24</sup> Models have two elements that make them helpful in understanding abstract concepts. In my view, models help me visualize and distinguish the foundations of a mechanism, but they also allow a deeper understanding once those foundations are established, a zooming out and in if you will. However, there is a further distinction, namely how historians or scientists use models to look at the world or, in my case, the past, and how our actors use models to understand their worlds. A model, to

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24 Morgan, *The World in the Model*, 118.

me, is a representation of the world but also a tool with which to look at it differently and find nuances that I could not see before. In using the approach of practices of comparing, establishing the *comparata* (entities or objects being compared) and *tertium* (the point of relation) in a visual model helps me to do that. My dissertation topic focuses on the journalistic community and how they wrote about race and racism from the last Cuban war of independence to the massacre of 1912, as well as investigating which practices of comparing contribute to changes in perceptions of racial classification and identity, by concentrating on the position of the actor and what they *do* when they compare. The act of comparing as a practice plays a critical role in the way in which categories are formulated, hierarchies are ordered, and boundaries are constructed.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, the model of what is seen as important for comparisons is helpful in identifying those elements from discursive debates on a given topic. There are a variety of ways that actors use models with regard to the topic of race and racism in the Americas, ranging from colonial racial hierarchy to racial science. For example, the *casta* paintings that depict various multiracial families (up to 16 paintings in a series) provide a visual distinction of racial hierarchies through an imagination of how the colonial world should look, from the top down. These models of human stratification are used to simplify and order the miscegenation occurring far from the seat of colonial rule and colonial control. At the end of the 18th century, these paintings of “*casta* imagery emphasized not a *casta* taxonomy but a physiognomic view of colonial bodies marked by *calidad* (Class) that is, the appearance, circumstances, and assumed inherent character of types of mixed-blood persons.”<sup>26</sup> These paintings then visualize a molding of societal order due to the increasingly blurred lines that came from racial mixture into a clear categorization that outlined how certain people should dress and what occupation they should have; even elements of behavior are visually represented. While this example is not directly related to my period of investigation or the space in which my research takes place, the representation still reflects a constructed order in which these paintings visualize the racial hierarchy.

Later in the late 1800s and early 1900s, scientific racism was also creating models to justify a racial hierarchy through numerical tables that compare the measurements of skulls, creating connections between the numbers and the characteristics they were meant to represent. In 1900, the body of the beloved Afro-Cuban general, Antonio Maceo, was exhumed to allow scientist to measure his skull and skeleton, which allowed them to correlate his “remarkable capacity” with the craniums of the

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25 Cf. Willibald Steinmetz (ed.), *The force of comparison. A new perspective on modern European history and the contemporary world* (New German Historical Perspectives, 11), New York/Oxford 2019, 8–9.

26 Magali M. Carrera, *Imagining identity in New Spain. Race, lineage, and the co-lonial body in portraiture and casta paintings*, Austin 2003, 120.

white race.<sup>27</sup> The classification of people lent a sense of authority to racial scientists, who held the measurements of European bodies to be the ideal, the model of humanity. For example, German Scientist Johann Blumenbach, who collected skulls and kept records of their measurements, referred to the Caucasian skull as the most beautiful in form.<sup>28</sup> These measurements presented a legitimization of a racial hierarchy and created numerical models in which the boundaries of categories were delineated, but are models the articulation of an ideal or tools with which to investigate? Or both?

Morgan explains the Edgeworth box as a malleable small-scale object, a model that is created to represent the economic exchange between individuals. The development of this model through the addition of details, such as different curves that display insights from the different elements of the exchange, shows how change occurs through an ever-evolving re-articulation of how people understand the world. Language develops, and so do the many mediums in which we can imagine the world around us, and meaning is developed from this. While, as the author states, the Edgeworth box cannot be reduced to mere language, once we have a medium of articulation, then new views or perspectives of the world can be formed. Models are then loosely the description of a world we imagine but are also a way to perceive or become conscious of certain elements that were difficult to see without the model—further elements that one cannot see, such as a connection or a trend. The question is then how loosely we can define what a model is and its possibilities in the field of history.

## Conclusion

In our premodern sources, we identified ideal types more often than models. Models and ideal types worked in a similar way regarding their building process and in their function to reduce the complexity of the world. For their ideal types, the actors select certain aspects of the world and neglect others. From this finding, we raise the question of whether “modern” models were influenced by premodern ideal types in the *longue durée*.

While ideal types aim for individual change—for example, eating habits—models seek to predict larger phenomena like societal growth. In our opinion, they differ in terms of the level of change that they address. The demographic statistics collected through census records inform government officials to act and create policies tied to the information. Ideal types, in contrast, were built to facilitate an individual

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27 Alejandra M. Bronfman, *Measures of equality: social science, citizenship, and race in Cuba, 1902–1940*, Chapel Hill 2004, 1.

28 Thomas Junker, Blumenbach's theory of human races and the natural unity of humankind, in: Nicolas Rupke/Gerhart Lauer (eds.), *Johann Friedrich Blumenbach. Race und Natural History, 1750–1850*, New York 2018, 104.

change in people's behavior, as can be seen in the case of Casta paintings or in the Ottoman Empire. These ideals reflect the construction and stabilization of social life into certain (hierarchical) orders.

It can be helpful to reflect on the models we use to look at our sources in History: modeling as a research practice. The Methodology of History can fruitfully be described as modeling, which will be elaborated upon in more detail in the following section.

## Modeling as a Research Practice

### Denazification as a Model (Laura Maria Niewöhner)

As Morgan explains, "Modelmaking gives form to ideas about the world."<sup>29</sup> Following this broad definition, the concept of models addresses different forms, such as models as an ordering tool (much as was discussed in the previous section), modeling *performed* by historical actors, and *modelling as a research practice* on a *theoretical* and *methodological* level.

An act of modeling can be traced in denazification tribunals of the American occupied zone of Postwar Germany. How did historical actors use models as an ordering and structuring tool?

In the denazification, various groups of interest, such as Germans as subjects of the tribunals, administrators of the Special Branch of the Office for Military Government for Germany (OMGUS), administrators from Tribunals/Spruchgerichte, and witnesses, came together for one purpose: dealing with the National Socialist Past. With the introduction of the law *Gesetz zur Befreiung von Nationalsozialismus und Militarismus* on March 5 1946 by the OMGUS, the denazification system was institutionally implemented in Germany. In the preprocess American administrators have found themselves in the *role of modelers*: the very new concept of denazification can be characterized as a categorization system.<sup>30</sup> It aimed to classify Germans from several regions and professions according to the categories of *Major Offenders* (I.), *Offenders* (II.), *Lesser Offenders* (III.), *Followers* (IV), and *Exonerated* (V.).<sup>31</sup> It sought for the evaluation and sanctioning of the involvement of individuals in the National Socialist state.

29 Morgan, *The World in The Model*, 92.

30 Cf. Stefanie Rauch, Good Bets, Bad Bets and Dark Horses: Allied Intelligence Officers' Encounters with German Civilians, 1944–1945, in: *Central European History* 53 (1/2020), 120–145; Lutz Niethammer, *Die Mitläuferfabrik. Die Entnazifizierung am Beispiel Bayerns*, Berlin 1982, 12–13, 260–318.

31 Cf. William E. Griffith, Denazification in the United States Zone of Germany, in: *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 267 (1950), 68–76, see 70.

Models require new languages and new types of representation to describe and analyze larger phenomena:<sup>32</sup> by establishing new categories, American administrators established new semantic patterns that created a new representation of German society members. One term to describe a person who was involved in the National Socialist State to a certain degree but without being particularly active in their engagement would be the category *Follower*. On this institutional level, an *act of modeling* as a way of dealing with the National Socialist society can be observed. It not only seeks to categorize Germans but also provides an institutional tool to bring order from above to the society in Postwar German through this categorization.

### How did historical actors model?

On a micro level, American administrators and members of the Tribunals/*Spruchgerichte* acted according to the logic of the denazification: namely, through investigating a subject and his or her National Socialist past in each case. This seems like another *practice of modeling* by contemporaries itself. Members of the Court Chamber/*Spruchgerichtskammer* evaluated the presented narrations, or “Entnazifizierungsgeschichten,”<sup>33</sup> of each Tribunal’s case. The term means that each case subject unfolded a specific narration during the tribunal to reach the “best” result for him or her. For this purpose, members of the Tribunals/*Spruchgerichte* referred to investigation reports made by the Special Branch of the OMGUS, interrogations or testimonies.<sup>34</sup> However, from this perspective, the verdicts/*Spruchurteile* seem like a result of modeling: *modeling of one’s individual past* in the sense of creating a perception from the case subject’s past, which is linked to the grand model or categorization system of denazification as a large-scale phenomenon. In addition, for example the Tribunals’ subjects performed *practices of modeling* while shaping their narrations about the past. By adding several ego-documents, which were intended to testify to the Tribunals/*Spruchgerichte* that they were innocent, the tribunals’ subjects contextualized their own questionnaires/*Fragebögen* and created an image of themselves. In so doing, they participated actively in the court case.<sup>35</sup>

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32 Cf. Morgan, *The World in The Model*, 98.

33 Hanne Leßau, *Entnazifizierungsgeschichten. Die Auseinandersetzung mit der eigenen NS-Vergangenheit in der frühen Nachkriegszeit*, Cöttingen 2020, 34.

34 Regarding to its broad tradition of the tribunal’s documents, a few files from the Hessen Region can serve as examples for this modeling process: cf. The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), 7062935, Fragebogen Files Relating to Denazification, 1945–1948, Container 85 Dossier 9, Container 92 Dossier 347.

35 Examples for ego-documents written by tribunal’s subjects from the Hessen Region: cf. NARA, 7062935, Container 53 Dossier 168, Container 53 Dossier 177.

## How do researchers model research objects?

By identifying the concept of denazification as a model and searching for practices in the tribunals, the notion of *modeling as a research practice* became visible. The specific act that an historian performs is that of modeling the research subjects from the past. Practically speaking, adapting praxeological concepts and imagining the groups of interests that participated in denazification tribunals as a *community of practice* seems like *modeling as a research practice on a theoretical level*.<sup>36</sup> Theoretical concepts help researchers to structure both historical phenomena and research subjects. It is important to stress this degree of reflection because it opens up the research field for methodological questions: firstly, how can historians access *practices of modeling performed* by historical actors described above? Secondly, how is it possible to make the actions of historical actors as modelers in a communicative space, such as during denazification, visible? As shown, historians often consider research subjects by taking into account certain assumptions or definitions of phenomena. Traditionally, this part of the research process is driven by hermeneutical analyses. In engaging in this way, historians perform modeling themselves; they create new terminologies and to some extent present the past in partly new ways. The development of the research process is not always transparent, however. To approach this dilemma, the methods of the field of digital history offer a way to journal research processes and modeling as a research practice. Working with digital tools requires the transformation of one's own research questions explicitly into computational data, languages, and models.<sup>37</sup> In particular, modeling in this case means integrating data and plain text from the historical material into digital workflows. One option could be annotating historical texts; another option could be to set up a database. Both ways inhabit *modeling as a research practice on a methodological level*. Which approach is more effective depends on the researchers' interests. They need to be clear because they greatly influence the workflow with digital tools, and determine what will be visible and what will remain invisible after the usage of digital methods.

## Thinking in Models (Charlotte Feidicker)

As discussed, modeling as a research practice becomes an important question in digital history workflows. One central point of working digitally is dealing with digital data, which methodologically influences the entire workflow of a research project.<sup>38</sup>

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36 Cf. Etienne Wenger, *Communities of practice. Learning, meaning, and identity*, Cambridge 1999.

37 Cf. Fotis Jannidis, Grundlagen der Datenmodellierung, in: Fotis Jannidis/Hubertus Kohle/Malte Rehbein (eds.), *Digital Humanities. Eine Einführung*, Stuttgart 2017, 99–108, 100–101.

38 Cf. Simone Lässig, Digital History, in: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 47 (2021), 5–34, see 6–7.



A leading definition of data as digital data was given by Schöch: “Data in the humanities could be considered a digital, selectively constructed, machine-actionable abstraction representing some aspects of a given object of humanistic inquiry.”<sup>39</sup> Schöch already limits the term “data” to exclusively digital data, and stipulates that it must be processable by computers. He emphasizes the creation of data as driven by (scientific) interests that create a selective perspective and thus determines the data’s selection process itself. Moreover, data is created and processed with certain tools, each of which has its own possibilities and limitations. In short, it has to be noted that the production of data—i.e., of machine-readable information entities—depends on many preconditions. If the conditions change, different data emerges.<sup>40</sup> Keeping this in mind, the given definition addresses an important aspect of data, regardless of whether it is described as digital or analog: data is an abstraction that represents certain aspects of a question in the humanities.<sup>41</sup>

But it is not only data that can be defined as an abstract representation of whatever entity. Models are defined as such, too. Thus, the question arises as to what the relation between data and models looks like. Data is what models model or, the other way round, a model gives the data its framework.<sup>42</sup>

Whether analog or digital, doing historical research is always a process of modeling. More explicitly, it is a process of modeling the past on the basis of data from the past, using contemporary methods. How the information entities are related to each other depends on the data model that a historian creates. This model is thus created from the point of view of the historian living in the present, and is therefore strongly influenced by the historian’s understanding of the past through living in the present. Since modeling is a process of relating information entities to each other from a specific perspective that creates a representation of something, I describe the process of understanding the world—whether the past, present, or future world—as a modeling process. By creating and dealing with digital data, this process becomes very explicit. That is because every information entity has to be defined explicitly to be processable for a computer.

Let us imagine that I find a medieval handwritten manuscript from the area of English legal history in an archive. Further, that I manage to digitize the main text into plain text by first scanning the document and then (semi)-automatically transcribing it with HTR software. When rendered in plain text, a human is able to read

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39 Christof Schöch, Big? Smart? Clean? Messy? Data in the Humanities, in: *Journal of Digital Humanities* 2 (2013), 2–13, see 4.

40 Cf. Schöch, Big? Smart? Clean? Messy? Data in the Humanities, 3, 4.

41 Cf. Schöch, Big? Smart? Clean? Messy? Data in the Humanities, 4.

42 Anna Neubert/Silke Schwandt, Comparing in the Digital Age. The Transformation of Practices, in: Angelika Epple/Walter Erhart/Johannes Grave (eds.), *Practices of Comparing. Towards a new understanding of a fundamental human practice*, 378–399, see 394, 395.

the manuscript very easily. Furthermore, if the person understands the language in which the text is written, they can understand the content. This understanding improves with the amount of contextual knowledge the person has. In contrast, the computer does not understand any content of this plain-text format. For the computer, the plain text is a string consisting of ones and zeros. This is why, at this stage, the most I can do with the plain text is to search for a certain sequence of letters in it or count the number of words used. For most historical research, more complex query options are needed.

At this point, it is important to think about what kind of output from working with this digital data a research project is aiming for. For example, if one would like to create a database by using a specific database-management system, the data has to be structured in a different way than if the aim is to track down a citation network in a corpus or to visualize information in diagrams. For all these scenarios a computer program needs more information than just: “there is a string.” A good way to enrich the string with information to categorize and structure the ones and zeros is to make annotations.<sup>43</sup>

Annotations give information about a piece of data. For example, a string can be classified as a text written by a specific author. Further, I can categorize a given information entity as a token of a specific type.<sup>44</sup> For example, it is possible to tag the name “Matthew” as a name. More specifically, I could also tag “Matthew” as a name of a human that was an evangelist who was also an apostle and wrote a part of a book that we call “The Bible.” By annotating such information, I give specific perspectives on the world that I live in. On the one hand, this information explicitly explains what kind of subjects exist in my world: humans, names, evangelists, apostles, books. On the other hand, the information given explains how these subjects relate to each other: humans can have names; humans can be apostles and humans can be evangelists, and they can be both but don't have to be both; humans can write books and books can be special religious books; books can have names, etc.

Annotating a text is giving information about my interpretation of this text. As they are interpretations, annotations are never objective. People can only annotate what exists in their world (whether real or unreal) and in a research process, they would only annotate what is important for their research. Therefore, annotating is a method by which I explicitly express theoretical assumptions—I model. I model because I determine which entities occur in my studied world and how these entities relate to each other. This kind of methodological work is something that all histori-

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43 Cf. Jannidis, *Grundlagen der Datenmodellierung*, 101.

44 Cf. Andrea Rapp, *Manuelle und automatische Annotation*, in: Fotis Jannidis/Hubertus Kohle/Malte Rehbein (eds.), *Digital Humanities. Eine Einführung*, Stuttgart 2017, 253–267, see 255–257.

ans do—whether analog or digital. Those who work digitally just have to model in a computer-understandable format.

I would like to speak of “modeling” in the context of doing historical research because the following becomes very clear in digital work: if one uses a different theory as a concept to understand the past and adds different information to the primary sources, one gets a different result. As this result becomes the basis of further scientific historical interpretation, historians obtain a specific, modeled perspective on the past that is determined by their way of relating data in the present.

## Conclusion

In section IV, we have experienced models as a fruitful theoretical and methodological approach for historical research. It can be helpful to understand modeling processes used by historical actors. Identifying these processes opens up perspectives about narrations, perceptions, and evidences historical actors have created to make sense out of their reality.

Using models as a methodological research practice—especially in digitally driven approaches—reveals the theoretical assumptions historians use to interpret research objects from the past. These digital approaches require computer-understandable, and thereupon specified, definitions of the historical assumptions. This includes clear research questions and interests just as much as queries, annotation categories, and data structurization. Therefore, modeling as a research practice maximizes the intersubjective comprehensibility of historical research. We wanted to think about how the notion of models could work with practices of comparing, which is an important element of our projects, and the possibility of uncovering a new perspective through such a notion.

## Final Conclusion

Coming from vastly different projects, we questioned the notion of models within our work. In the process it became clear that there were different types of models, as reflected by the sections of this article. These different types of models also informed how the article is structured.

The first section is closest in following the description made by Morgan on models that actors use to reduce complexity. The usage of her concept is a fruitful tool because models not only describe but also shape reality in a specific context, such as the real-estate market.

In the analysis of the stratification of people in ethnographic sources, the concept of models is not easily applicable. Instead, we were able to identify ideal types in the second section. The exact difference between models and ideal types, as well

as the question of whether models can be identified in premodern sources at all, has to be researched further.

The last section bridges modeling performed by historical actors and modeling as a research practice by structuring knowledge and logical relations between data. The relevance of a logical data structure in (knowledge) models became obvious by using methods of digital history. In the field of digital history, models structure digital data and therefore make information entities machine-processable. At the same time, models—whether digital or analog—help us to think through complex logical information relations.

Coming from different spatial and temporal contexts, thinking about models helped us to understand connections and differences between our projects. We gained clarity regarding the essential entities and questions that shape our research. Therefore, we suggest experimenting with the concept of models in order to explore new perspectives.

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# World Travel Literature

## Ethnography and the Rise and Fall of Comparative Practices

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Walter Erhart

**Abstract** *This essay looks at world-travel reports in the 18th and 19th century as representations and enforcements of global comparisons. It argues that these comparisons helped to develop a global, albeit colonial frame of knowledge about the world, provided material and systematic accounts for the developing field of comparative sciences, and brought about historical change by coping with the growing, often irritating number of comparative practices and perspectives. The possibility of comparing the world's peoples, customs and morals established ethnography and anthropology as academic disciplines. As ethnographic comparisons multiplied and became manifold, and even contradictory and misleading, however, comparisons were ordered and reduced either by romantic projections or by classifying human beings and societies within narrow frames of prehistoric stages and "races". As the history of world-travel accounts demonstrates, these reductionist reworkings of comparative practices produced a modernity and an ethnology that tended to forget their ambiguous comparative origins*

For almost one hundred years, roughly between 1750 and 1850, world-travel reports were marked as a literary genre of their own. "It is always worthwhile to listen to every man who tells us about his journey around the world."<sup>1</sup> The German poet Christoph Martin Wieland opens his review of Georg Forster's famous report on James Cook's second journey around the world with this remark while adding that he "knows of no poem," no literary work given by "an epic or dramatic poet" that is able to give us "as much pleasure and affection" as such a travel report. Given that a world-travel report, in Wieland's view, unites all the qualities of fine literature—"the new and the magic, wonder and terror, the beautiful and the graceful"<sup>2</sup>—this genre, indeed, was a rising star on the book market. There were numerous—at least fifty and probably more—volumes of accounts of "journeys" and "voyages around the world" published from the 18th to the middle of the 19th century, written in English,

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1 Christoph M. Wieland, Auszüge aus Jacob Forsters Reise um die Welt, in: *Sämtliche Werke* (1794–1811), Bd. VIX, Supplemente. Fünfter Band, Reprint Hamburg 1984, 175–246, see 179.

2 Wieland, Auszüge aus Jacob Forsters Reise um die Welt, 180–181.



French, German and Russian, with immediate translations and often several books and reports coming out of one journey.

Only a few famous examples, though, are still known today; for instance, several reports—Forster's included—on James Cook's three world travels, and Bougainville's classic early French account *Voyage autour du monde* (1771). Other works were produced by naturalists like the German poet and botanist Adelbert von Chamisso (*Reise um die Welt*, 1836) who were following Alexander von Humboldt's legacy of natural history recorded around the globe, and Charles Darwin, who sailed on board the *Beagle* in the 1830s, created his own scientific travel report in 1839 (*Narrative of the surveying voyages of His Majesty's Ships Adventure and Beagle between the years 1826 and 1836*), later popularized under the title *A Naturalist's Voyage round the World* (1860).

World travels were colonial enterprises undertaken by British, French and Russian expeditions. Their assignments and their claims consisted in enlarging empires, founding colonies and establishing trading zones, but the travels were also proposed as scientific endeavors. Many of these books were written by naturalists and, in fact, each expedition was accompanied by at least one naturalist who was commissioned to do research, gathering facts and all kinds of knowledge about the world, describing geography, plants, animals and "indigenous" people.<sup>3</sup>

Also—and most of all—journeys around the world were about comparisons. In botany as well as in viewing the world from economic or ethnographic perspectives, comparisons became the main practice when traveling and writing world-travel reports. James Cook's travels in the 1760s and 1770s had already witnessed a rise in comparative practices in an unprecedented way as authors moved constantly from recording local details to describing global measures:

Comparisons became more and more important to Cook's voyages [...]. More than just organizing data, the collection creates the possibility for a new discourse, not of discovery or identification, but of comparisons, and the scale of these comparisons is global.<sup>4</sup>

In the following, I will show how the comparative practices of world travels and world-travel literature underwent significant change in the course of the 19th century, in quantitative measures as well as in their qualitative dimensions. Moreover, since comparisons in these genres of traveling and writing played a decisive role in

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3 Cf. Glyn Williams, *Naturalists at Sea. Scientific Travellers from Dompier to Darwin*, New Haven/London 2013.

4 Brian W. Richardson, *Longitude and Empire. How Captain Cook's Voyages Changed the World*, Vancouver/Toronto 2005, 152.

the development of anthropology and ethnology as subfields, practices of naturalists, and academic disciplines, comparisons not only changed but brought about historical change—through the emergence of sciences but also in the way Europe dealt with the growing knowledge on the world, its inhabitants, cultures, societies and manners beyond European frontiers. The growing body of different comparisons that will be studied in the first part of this paper became a problem and an engine of historical and epistemological change because the need to reduce and categorize comparisons—here and probably in other cases as well—led to new hierarchies, classes and points of comparisons (*tertia comparationis*) that could be productive and restrictive at the same time. European notions of anthropology, of humanity and universality, but also of racism and white superiority might all have their roots—albeit differently—in these processes of world-travel practices.

In the early 19th-century travels around the world practiced comparison on a large and global scale. Journeys around the world were established as an exclusive experimental field for the so-called comparative sciences that were founded and were flourishing in the same period.<sup>5</sup> The travel reports combined descriptions of various phenomena treated in comparative anatomy, geography, natural history, botany and anthropology. Their form created a literary fusion of travel narrative and nature writing, providing empirical evidence and data for geography and natural history as well as anthropology.<sup>6</sup>

Charles Darwin was one of the last world travelers in relation to the scientific outcome of such journeys around the world, which were soon superseded by steam boats and tourism on the one hand, and by much more detailed scientific and specialized local research in different regions of the world on the other. At the end of his report, Darwin highlights comparison as the overall standard method:

In conclusion it appears to me that nothing can be more improving to a young naturalist, than a journey in distant countries. [...] The excitement from the novelty of objects, and the chance of success, stimulate him to increased activity. Moreover, as a number of isolated facts soon become uninteresting, the habit of comparison leads to generalization.<sup>7</sup>

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5 Cf. Michael Eggert, *Vergleichendes Erkennen. Zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte und Epistemologie des Vergleichs und zur Genealogie der Komparatistik*, Heidelberg 2016.

6 Cf. Walter Erhart, "When comparing, and seeing others compare". Irritationen des Vergleichens in der Weltreiseliteratur von Humboldt bis Darwin, in: *Euphorion* 114 (2020), 427–458.

7 Charles Darwin, Narrative of the surveying voyages of His Majesty's Ships Adventure and Beagle between the years 1826 and 1836, describing their examination of the southern shores of South America, and the Beagle's circumnavigation of the globe. Journal and remarks. 1832–1836, London 1839, 607–608.

With the term “comparison” Darwin summed up the work of his scientific forefathers and fellow travelers. With “generalization” and his travel’s outcome, though, he followed a different path. Darwin, in many respects, was the last and the first of his kind: still being a “gentleman traveler” and an all-compassing naturalist on the one hand, an ongoing scientist and biologist on the other. Whereas his report is clearly modeled after the established genre, tracing the same route around the world, gathering observations and adventures of all kinds, and even mixing literary styles, the outcome was quite different. He drew his revolutionary scientific conclusions—much later—on the basis of a few pieces of evidence on his global travel route and he practiced the “habit of comparison” in a very specialized field. By comparing and studying animals, he observed that the old zoological order of classifications—species, genus—was not sufficient to explain varieties. In retrospect, in his work on *The Origin of Species*, he described comparisons as the early key to his theory of evolution.

Many years ago, when comparing, and seeing others compare, the birds from the separate islands of the Galapagos Archipelago, both with one another, and with those from the American mainland, I was much struck how entirely vague and arbitrary is the distinction between species and varieties.<sup>8</sup>

As a scientist in the making, Darwin was the first and probably the only world traveler who later became a specialized world-famous biologist and theoretician. Traveling to the South American coastline and to the Galapagos islands, however, would have been enough for that. With Darwin, and during the course of the 19th century, world traveling as a scientific enterprise completely disappeared—partly due to the emergence of new sciences that superseded the all-compassing role of the “naturalist”: specialized disciplines such as geography, biology, philology, and ethnology. Speaking with Darwin, “generalization” led the way to scientific specialization and to an academic discipline by turning comparison into a clear-cut method for discerning similarities and differences among species and specimens.

While comparisons may have gained their reputation as neutral scientific tools and methods, comparative practices have always been far from innocent instruments. They are not only one-sided and highly normative,<sup>9</sup> but also situated within

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8 Charles Darwin, *On the origin of species by means of natural selection, or the preservation of favoured races in the struggle for life*, London 1859, 48.

9 Cf. Hartmut von Sass, *Vergleiche(n)*. Ein hermeneutischer Rund- und Sinkflug, in: Andreas Mauz/Hartmut von Sass (eds.): *Hermeneutik des Vergleichs. Strukturen, Anwendungen und Grenzen komparativer Verfahren*, Würzburg 2011, 25–47; Angelika Epple/Walter Erhart (eds.), *Die Welt beobachten. Praktiken des Vergleichens*, Frankfurt am Main 2015; Bettina Heintz, “Wir leben im Zeitalter der Vergleichung.” Perspektiven einer Soziologie des Vergleichs, in: *Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 45 (2016), 305–323.

socially and historically changing situations.<sup>10</sup> Instead of forming the scientific basis of world travel's naturalists—by bolstering the success story of scientific progress through refined methods of discoveries and research, for example—comparisons have always been part of colonial enterprises and power relations. They disclose hierarchies, tensions and failures by coming to terms with the known and the unknown, especially with regard to those phenomena that constituted the fame and popularity of world travel reports: the encounters with “indigenous” people. Early comparative anthropology, therefore, might be a case in point: it reveals the changing features of comparisons and the role of supposedly innocent and neutral practices while dealing with alterity and otherness.

When the American author Tony Horwitz set out to repeat James Cook's travels and followed his path around the modern world, he observed Cook's double image and legacy in accordance with the once heroic age of discovery on the one side, and the postcolonial critique of Western imperialism on the other. Horwitz felt at ease vis-à-vis “the pendulum swing of historical memory” and reminded the reader of the ambivalence of the historical encounter itself: “Cook [...] wasn't the wicked imperialist [...]. Nor was he the godlike figure [...]. In remembering the man, the world has lost the balance and nuance I so admired in Cook's own writing about those he encountered.”<sup>11</sup>

Research on ethnographical world-travel literature in the last century almost followed the two steps observed by Horwitz<sup>12</sup>. A once much-praised “age of discovery” was replaced by a harsh postcolonial critique of the “fatal impact”<sup>13</sup> of Western imperialism and colonialism all around the world, thus tracing the way the “new world”, its nature and its inhabitants were made historyless and permanently overwritten and created by Europeans' “imperial eyes.”<sup>14</sup> After this “pendulum swing of historical memory” (Horwitz) had occurred, soon glimpses of a “mutual discovery”<sup>15</sup> between European and “indigenous” people came into view: multiple

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10 Cf. Renaud Gagné/Simon Goldhill/Geoffrey E. R. Lloyd (eds.), *Regimes of Comparatism. Frameworks of Comparison in History, Religion and Anthropology*, Leiden/Boston 2018.

11 Tony Horwitz, *Into the Blue. Boldly Going Where Captain Cook Has Gone Before*, London 2002, 296.

12 Cf. Walter Erhart, *Weltreisen, Weltwissen, Weltvergleich – Perspektiven der Forschung*, in: *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur* 42 (2017), 292–321.

13 Alan Moorhead, *The Fatal Impact. An Account of the Invasion of the South Pacific 1767–1840*, New York 1966.

14 Cf. Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay. An Exploration of Landscape and History*, Minnesota 1987; Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes. Travel Writing and Transculturation*, London/New York 1992; For a broad history of the historical process cf. Wolfgang Reinhard, *Die Unterwerfung der Welt. Globalgeschichte der europäischen Expansion 1415–2015*, München 2016.

15 Lynne Withey, *Voyages of Discovery. Captain Cook and the Exploration of the Pacific*, New York 1987, 11.

entanglements and negotiations,<sup>16</sup> a “science in action”<sup>17</sup> that circulated between peoples and cultures differently in different regions of the world. While looking closely at the actions, situations and practices taking place in different ethnographical accounts and encounters, densely intertwined relations, unexpected counteractions, various Western failures, and indigenous strategies came into view, thus “breaking up us/them oppositions”<sup>18</sup>—an approach that has continued to guide ethnographic studies for a long time. Even a single journey cannot be put into clear-cut categories of colonial appropriation and neatly-placed dichotomies and oppositions. Diverse sources and different perspectives within the multitude of log books, field notes, diaries and travel reports reveal contradictions and setbacks in the interior space of colonial enterprises, for example “indigenous” codes and practices that were bound to irritate and disturb the European travelers.<sup>19</sup> Europeans’ views and attitudes, and even their subjectivities and identities, were both strengthened and weakened at the same. While some officers and naturalists may have been eager to establish rule and order on the appropriated territories, other members of the expedition may have suddenly felt closeness to and solidarity with their non-European alien companions—as plainly discovered and studied, for example, on behalf of the Russian world travel expedition led by Adam von Krusenstern from 1803 to 1806.<sup>20</sup>

A post-postcolonial view of world-travel literature may follow a path that shatters certainties and routines on both sides of affirmation and critique, provincializing Europe<sup>21</sup> and dissolving the monolithic forces of the universal European impact at the same time.<sup>22</sup> Interesting enough, the views regarding comparisons have developed in a similar vein. After the undoubted preference for comparison as an “objective” scientific Western method its practice was challenged by a postcolonial

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16 Cf. Nicholas Thomas, *Entangled Objects. Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific*, Cambridge/London 1991.

17 Bruno Latour, *Science in action. How to follow scientists and engineers through society*, Cambridge 1987, esp. 215–257.

18 Thomas, *Entangled Objects. Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific*, 5.

19 Cf. Neil Hegarty, *Unruly Subjects. Sexuality, Science and Discipline in Eighteenth-Century Pacific Explorations*, in: Margrett Lincoln (ed.), *Science and Exploration in the Pacific. European Voyages to the Southern Oceans in the Eighteenth century*, Woodbridge 1998, 183–197; For the importance of different written accounts cf. Philippe Despoix, *Die Welt vermessen. Dispositive der Entdeckungsreise im Zeitalter der Aufklärung*, Göttingen 2007.

20 Cf. the fascinating close account by Elena Govor, *Twelve Days at Nuku Hiva. Russian Encounters and Mutiny in the South Pacific*, Honolulu 2010.

21 Cf. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton/Oxford 2000.

22 With regard to the German example: Russell A. Berman, *Enlightenment or Empire. Colonial Discourse in German Culture*, Lincoln/London 1998; Glenn H. Penny, *Im Schatten Humboldts. Eine tragische Geschichte der deutschen Ethnologie*, München 2019.

critique of its normative implications especially within ethnographic and geopolitical contexts. The question “why compare?” unsettled the belief in a procedure that promised to gain simple knowledge about two objects by discerning their similarities and differences. The “neutral” practice of comparison was dismantled as a practice in which the comparing actors not only choose and evaluate the *comparata* but also determine the point of comparison, the *tertium comparationis* while failing to realize that those who compare always determine the start, the direction and the purpose of the comparative practice. By starting and directing the line of questioning they always draw the “other” and the “unknown” into the sphere of the “known,” thus reaffirming the power and the judgments of those who compare.<sup>23</sup>

The unease with comparison, however, did not end with its denial. The question “why not compare?”<sup>24</sup> drew its evidence and importance not only out of the fact that comparing is unavoidable but that comparing itself needs an elucidation of why and how it is deployed and put to work in the first place. A “reflexive comparison”<sup>25</sup> might be one that is cautious and suspicious: dealing with different *tertium comparationis*, always reconceiving the known in terms of the unknown, suspending pre-established categories, turning from the objects of observations to the actors and means of comparison.<sup>26</sup>

Studying comparative practices in world-travel literature gives an important insight into the way Europe dealt with global encounters at an early stage of transnational and intercultural exchanges. Instead of being a neutral instrument, comparison reveals how Europe came into being as a global reference and a global power structure; a look at comparative practices in relation to groups, cultures, nations and civilizations may also show how comparison itself is enacted and transformed, how comparative practices are desired and feared, supported and denied—up to the current digital age when metric comparison has reached unprecedented and unimagined heights.<sup>27</sup> Reports of imperial and scientific travels around the world in the 19th century not only proliferated global comparisons, they also illuminated the changes and risks in comparing: how it has been turned into a universal practice that was discovered, imitated and multiplied by Europeans, but also how it became an instrument whose power spread out and was called into question at the same time.

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23 Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan, ‘Why Compare’, in: Rita Felski/Susan Stanford Friedman (eds.), *Comparison. Theories, Approaches, Uses*, Baltimore 2013, 15–33.

24 Susan Stanford Friedman, Why not Compare?, in: Rita Felski/Susan Stanford Friedman (eds.), *Comparison. Theories, Approaches, Uses*, Baltimore 2013, 34–45.

25 Haun Saussy, *Are We Comparing Yet? On Standards, Justice, and Incomparability*, Bielefeld 2019, 22–23.

26 Cf. Angelika Epple/Walter Erhart/Johannes Grave (eds.), *Practices of Comparing. A New Research Agenda between typological and historical Approaches*, Bielefeld 2020.

27 Cf. for example the argument in Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism. The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*, London 2019, 461–465.

For Wilhelm von Humboldt, comparison clearly marked the key to anthropology in all its aspects. In his essay “Plan for a Comparative Anthropology” (1797) he relates “the species-specific character of human beings” to “humans’ individual differences” in a programmatic way. It is comparative anthropology where “the characteristics of the moral character of the various human categories can be placed next to one another and evaluated comparatively,” and besides historians and biographers, mostly “travel writers, poets, and authors of all kinds [...] collect data pertinent to this science.”<sup>28</sup> World travels not only provided the global frame for this kind of practice (as von Humboldt’s brother Alexander never tires of asserting and demonstrating in his own reports on his almost world-wide travels<sup>29</sup>); they also constituted laboratories for comparative sciences, including with regard to anthropology and its encompassing studies on civilizations, the course of history and the rules of social and moral behavior. The English translator of a French report on a journey round the world led by Jean d’Entrcasteaux in the years from 1791 to 1794 saw the genre of travel reports as a constitutive part of moral philosophy and social theory:

The Moral Philosopher, [...] who loves to trace the advances of his species through its various gradations from savage to civilized life, draws from voyages and travels, the facts from which he is to deduce his conclusions respecting the social, intellectual, and moral progress of Man.<sup>30</sup>

Over the course of world-travel history, from the early expeditions of Louis-Antoine de Bougainville and James Cook up to the almost routinized travels in the 19th century, there were several stages of comparing while “discovering”, encountering and describing “indigenous” people, mostly of the southern seas, Polynesia and Australia, and including the Inuit in the North. First, the new foreign worlds were compared almost exclusively with regard to European examples, norms and standards; Georg Forster’s *Travel around the World* is the classic example. In morals, manners and aesthetics, Europe was almost always the *comparatum* and the *tertium comparationis* at the same time. Already in François Lafitau’s *Mœurs des sauvages américains, comparées aux mœurs des premiers temps* (1724) the people of the American “New World” were compared with figures and constellations of Greek and Roman antiquity. Louis-Antoine de Bougainville, in his *Voyage autour du monde*

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28 Wilhelm von Humboldt, Plan einer vergleichenden Anthropologie, in: *Werke in fünf Bänden. Bd. 1. Schriften zur Anthropologie und Geschichte*, Darmstadt 1960, 337–375, see 337.

29 Christine Peters, *Die Weltreiseberichte von Humboldt, Krusenstern und Langsdorff. Praktiken des Vergleichens und Formen von Weltwissen*, Berlin/New York 2022.

30 [Anonymus], Translator’s Preface, in: Jacques Julien Houtou de la Billardièrre, *Voyage in Search of La Pérouse [...] during the Years 1791, 1792, 1793, and 1794*, London 1800, vol. I, v-xii, v.

(1771), called Tahiti the “Nouvelle-Cythère,”<sup>31</sup> Georg Forster praised it as “*Calypso’s* magic island.”<sup>32</sup> Forster compared Tahitian women to “nymphs”<sup>33</sup> and “Amphibia”<sup>34</sup> while putting the strength and diligence of Polynesian sailors in relation to ancient mythological heroes.<sup>35</sup> In the early 1790s, George Vancouver mentioned the apparition and the character of landscapes mostly when they could be compared with their European counterparts: “On landing on the west end of the supposed island [...], our attention was immediately called to a landscape, almost as enchantingly beautiful as the most elegantly finished pleasure grounds in Europe.”<sup>36</sup> Likewise, the peculiarity of “indigenous” people on the American Pacific coast in Vancouver’s report is almost exclusively seen with regard to European standards: “A pleasing and courteous deportment distinguished these people. Their countenances indicated nothing ferocious, their feature partook rather of the general European character; their color a light olive [...]”<sup>37</sup>

The second stage of comparing included the comparison of different travel reports prior to the journey that actually took place. After 1800, the growing number of travel reports slowly became the reference of the traveler’s own experiences. Heinrich Langsdorff, a naturalist on board the first Russian journey around the world led by Captain Adam von Krusenstern, reassures his readers that there was no boredom among the crew although they traveled the seas for months between landfalls. Indeed, there was an “exquisite copious library” on board; while heading for Teneriffa, for example, “comparisons between the different travelogues” were made.<sup>38</sup>

The third stage of comparing involved comparisons among the objects found in the New World. Whereas in the natural sciences, botany being an exemplary case, there was an established classification system that registered and organized the empirical diversity,<sup>39</sup> in anthropology, the ethnographic observations were empirical

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- 31 Louis-Antoine de Bougainville, *Voyage autour du monde par la frégate la boudeuse et la flûte l’Etoile* [1771], Paris 1981, 146.
- 32 Georg Forster, *Reise um die Welt*, Frankfurt am Main 1983, 548.
- 33 Forster, *Reise um die Welt*, 251.
- 34 Forster, *Reise um die Welt*, 400.
- 35 Forster, *Reise um die Welt*, 593–596; Cf. Robert Leucht, Griechische Wilde. Vergleiche zwischen Antike und Neuer Welt, 1752–1821 (Lafitau, Böttiger, Winckelmann, Bougainville, Forster, Chamisso), in: *Euphorion* 109 (2015), 375–399.
- 36 George Vancouver, *A voyage of discovery to the North Pacific Ocean and round the world, 1791–1795. With an introduction and appendices*, ed. by William Kaye, 4 vols., vol. 2, London 1984, 513.
- 37 Vancouver, *A voyage of discovery to the North Pacific Ocean and round the world*, vol. 2, 412.
- 38 Georg H. von Langsdorff, *Bemerkungen auf einer Reise um die Welt in den Jahren 1803 bis 1807*, Bd. 1, Frankfurt am Main 1812, 6–7.
- 39 Patricia Fara, *Sex, Botany, and Empire. The Story of Carl Linnaeus and Joseph Banks*, New York 2004.



and provisionary right from the start. The “state of nature” as compared to civilization was a more theoretical and philosophical concept, almost a rigid set of expectations that was to meet reality in the first place. In the course of a few decades, though, the concept of a uniform “state of nature” gave way to a multitude of “indigenous” societies that even made it difficult to hold on to one “mankind” to be classified. The numerous world-travel documents of James Cook, George Vancouver and Charles Darwin, Bougainville and Jean de La Perouse, Joseph-Antoine-Raymond Bruny d’Entrecasteaux and Jules-Sébastien-César Dumont d’Urville, Adam von Krusenstern and Adelbert von Chamisso, Heinrich Langsdorff and Otto von Kotzebue<sup>40</sup> did not produce a coherent picture of the “natural state” or a natural and cultural history into which every encountered people or culture fit nicely. Instead of the discernible unity of mankind an unexpected multitude of forms of living was to be discovered.<sup>41</sup> These varieties and peculiarities first of all triggered the need to develop studies of “indigenous” peoples and—in the long run—ethnography and anthropology as scientific fields of their own. As early as 1800, the anonymous translator of d’Entrecasteaux’s travel report states in the preface what, for a world traveling naturalist, might be the outcome of empirical ethnographic discoveries:

He sees savage life every where diversified with a variety, which, if he reasons fairly, must lead him to conclude, that what is called the state of nature, is, in truth, the state of a rational being placed in various physical circumstances, which have contracted or expanded his faculties in various degrees [...]<sup>42</sup>

While producing a large number of differences, relations, contingent circumstances and influences, the European civilization itself turned out to be a quite relative point of reference. If he had space to elaborate on that in his preface, the translator continued, he would be able to demonstrate, “that the boasted refinement of Europe entirely depends on a few happy discoveries.” If Europe were to lack iron, for example, some nations would soon return to those state of natures they inhabited at their very beginnings: “the privation of iron alone, would soon reduce them nearly

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40 For the variety and history of those travels around the world cf. John Dunmore, *French Explorers in the Pacific. I: The Eighteenth Century. II: The Nineteenth Century*, Oxford 1965; Andreas Daum, *German Naturalists in the Pacific around 1800. Entanglement, Autonomy, and a transnational Culture*, in: Hartmut Berghoff/Frank Bies/Ulrike Strasser (eds.), *Explorations and Entanglements. Germans in Pacific Worlds from the Early Modern Period to World War I*, New York/Oxford 2019, 79–102; Walter Erhart, *Weltreisen. Zur Geschichte einer ethnographischen Gattung*, in: Jonas Nesselhauf/Urte Stobbe (eds.), *Mensch & Mitwelt. Herausforderungen für die Literatur- und Kulturwissenschaften*, Hannover 2022, 149–170.

41 Cf. Harry Liebersohn, *The Travelers' World. Europe to the Pacific*, Cambridge 2006, 298–306.

42 [Anonymus], *Translator's Preface*, vi.

to the barbarous state, from which, by a train of favorable events, their forefathers emerged some centuries ago."<sup>43</sup>

In this perspective, peoples on distant continents might still achieve an "advanced" civilization while Europe, someday, could fall back to a post-historical state of culture, where travelers and scholars from Oceania and Australia would go to as tourists and archeologists:

If so, the period may arrive, when New Zealand may produce her Lockes, her Newtons, and her Montesquieus; and when great nations in the immens region of New Holland, may send their navigators, philosophers, and antiquarians, to contemplate the ruins of *ancient* London and Paris, and to trace the languid remains of the arts and sciences in this quarter of the globe.<sup>44</sup>

In his moral and philosophical tone, the English translator clearly built on the enlightened philosophy of Adam Ferguson in "An Essay on the History of Civil Society" (1767). His arguments and imaginations, however, may also have been drawn from the following travel report itself. Its author, the French naturalist La Billardière, often expresses his surprise while encountering Polynesian and Malaysian citizens. His expectations are disturbed by discovering different and incompatible states of nature. He is irritated, for example, by discrepancies between "indigenous" people living side by side on separate islands: "It was surprising to meet with so great a difference in the manners of savages, so little removed from each other, and who practiced the same arts."<sup>45</sup>

As it turned out, there was no pure "state of nature." In fact, the same development and cultural status ("the same arts") produced different, sometimes opposing effects concerning morals and manners. Therefore, knowledge about "indigenous" people was often not verified in the first place but empirically challenged—by complex situations and sometimes quite contradictory encounters.<sup>46</sup> Journeys around the world produced the global frames of comparative sciences, but by way of experience and heterogeneity, the established points and aspects of comparison slowly lost their importance and applicability. What seemed to fit globally within the natural sciences, comparing everything with everything in geology and botany (with

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43 [Anonymus], Translator's Preface, vii.

44 [Anonymus], Translator's Preface, viiif.

45 De la Billardière, *Voyage in Search of La Pérouse [...] during the Years 1791, 1792, 1793, and 1794*, vol. 1, 309.

46 Cf. Brownen Douglas, In the Event. Indigenous Countersigns and the Ethnohistory of Voyaging, in: Margaret Jolly/Serge Tcherkézoff/Darrel Tryon (eds.), *Oceanic Encounters. Exchange, Desire, Violence*, Canberra 2009, 175–197.

Alexander von Humboldt as the much-praised forerunner)<sup>47</sup>, proved to be quite distorting in ethnography. The more global observations and encounters became, the more diverse, multilayered, almost inscrutable, humankind seemed to present itself as being. While the German poet and botanist Adelbert von Chamisso—writing about his world travels that took place in the years from 1815 to 1818—draws exclusively and professionally on the comparative method in classifying plants and animals, especially in his first “naturalist” and official travel report *Bemerkungen und Ansichten* (1821),<sup>48</sup> he is quite reluctant in comparing and measuring “indigenous” people. In his reconstructive and much later-written *Reise um die Welt. Ein Tagebuch* (1836), he even warns about the one-sidedness of European judgments.<sup>49</sup>

As a result of the growing literature and the increasing number of foreign-travel experiences around 1800, world-travel literature almost seemed to have been disturbed by the varieties, possibilities and contradictions of ethnographic comparisons. One should not overrate the influence of 18th-century literature about American “indigenous” people as a direct source of Europeans’ unease with their own civilization—as David Graeber and David Wengrow have done recently in their impressive work *The Dawn of Everything. A New history of Humanity*.<sup>50</sup> Their argument that the philosophy of history and the entire idea of Western progress were born out of the unsettling information about egalitarian “free” societies overseas may rely too heavily and exclusively on just a few sources; their insistence on the power of information and reports about a global variety of different societies and manners, however, clearly marks a point in the dynamic of ethnographic comparative practices on a large scale. As fast as the Western subject may have been called into question by countless confrontations with human beings in the South Pacific,<sup>51</sup> the sheer quantity of divergent ethnographic material was destined to disturb and shatter the mighty *tertia comparationis* that used to be in place to evaluate and categorize

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47 Cf. Oliver Lubrich, Alexander von Humboldts globale Komparatistiki, in: *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur* 45 (2020), 231–245; Christine Peters, Historical Narrative versus Comparative Description? Genre and Knowledge in Alexander von Humboldt’s *Personal Narrative*, in: Martin Carrier/Rebecca Martens/Carsten Reinhardt (eds.), *Narratives and Comparisons. Adversaries or Allies in Understanding Science?*, Bielefeld 2021, 63–84.

48 The report is published as the naturalist’s third volume of the official travel report edited by the captain, Otto von Kotzebue, *Entdeckungs-Reise in die Südsee und der Berings-Straße zur Erforschung einer nördöstlichen Durchfahrt unternommen in den Jahren 1815, 1816, 1817 und 1818, auf Kosten Sr. Erlaucht des Herrn Reichs-Kanzlers Rumanzoff auf dem Schiffe Rurick unter dem Befehle des Lieutenants der Russisch-Kaiserlichen Marine Otto von Koetzebue*, Weimar 1821.

49 Cf. Walter Erhart, “Beobachtung und Erfahrung, Sammeln und Vergleichen” – Adelbert von Chamisso und die Poetik der Weltreise im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert, in: Angelika Epple/Walter Erhart (eds.), *Die Welt beobachten. Praktiken des Vergleichens*, Frankfurt am Main 2015, 203–233.

50 Cf. David Graeber/David Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything. A New history of Humanity*, London 2021, 27–77.

51 Jonathan Lamb, *Preserving the Self in the South Seas 1680–1840*, Chicago/London 2001.

ethnographic information. On their travels, in the reports of naturalists, officers and sailors as well as in diaries, logbooks and letters, one can almost sense the efforts involved in coming to terms with the contradiction of pre-established notions on the one hand, and the experiences of real-life encounters on the other.

Adam von Krusenstern, for example, while landing on the Marquesas islands in 1804, did not expect to meet quite “civilized” people and seemed quite astonished by their friendly behavior and their neat settlements. Beforehand, he had read about anthropophagous cultures on exactly these islands where now he encountered no brute or “savage” behavior. More than that, two Europeans who had lived on the island for a few years, a French and an English man, provided more information about the islands – each in his own way, and obviously contradicting themselves. As those “beachcombers”<sup>52</sup> turned out to be unreliable narrators (the Europeans had to choose whom to believe, and the reports of the captain Krusenstern and the naturalist Langsdorff differ in that respect), as different groups and “classes” of the expedition were offended and attracted by the islanders in quite different ways,<sup>53</sup> Krusenstern himself did not trust in what he was seeing, therefore turned—despite all appearances—back to his pre-established European notion and quite bookish information. He tells his readers foremost that he had almost been “tempted” and “misled” (“verleitet”) by the beautiful shape of the islanders’ male bodies (which reminded him of Greek statues) to conclude on the beautiful inner form of their soul.<sup>54</sup> He concedes at one point that he had to “scare away” his “pleasant emotions” when confronted with the charming villages by reminding himself that he was in the houses of cannibals.<sup>55</sup> There is almost magic and wonder attached to appearances and experiences, otherwise they could not display their illusionary and treacherous character. Heinrich Langsdorff, the expedition’s naturalist, even speculates that the islanders’ “charming and complacent traits” pointing to their “good nature” (“Gutmüthigkeit”) would have kept the visitors in an almost maniac

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52 Regarding the role of these “beachcombers” in the history of ethnographic travels cf. Greg Denning, *Beach Crossings. Voyaging across Times, Cultures, and Self*, Philadelphia 2004.

53 Elena Govor, *Twelve Days at Nuku Hiva. Russian Encounters and Mutiny in the South Pacific*, Honolulu 2010.

54 Adam Johann von Krusenstern, *Reise um die Welt in den Jahren 1803, 1804, 1805 und 1806 auf Befehl seiner Kaiserl. Majestät Alexanders des Ersten auf den Schiffen Nadeshda und Newa unter dem Commando des Capitäns von der Kaiserl. Marine*, Berlin 1810–1812, Bd. 1, 168: “[...] wenn man aber weiß, welcher Abscheulichkeiten diese schönen Menschen fähig sind, so verschwindet das gute Vorurtheil von ihrem Menschenwerthe, zu welchem man so leicht durch die schöne Form des Körpers verleitet wird [...]”

55 Krusenstern, *Reise um die Welt*, 139: “Diese reizenden Anlagen trugen viel dazu bey, jene unangenehmen Empfindungen auf einige Augenblicke zu verscheuchen, die der Gedanke bey uns erregen mußte, daß wir uns in den Wohnungen von Cannibalen befänden, welche an den größten Lastern kleben, und die unnatürlichsten Verbrechen begehen [...]”

“delusion” (“Wahn”) that they were meeting a “friendly, courteous and good people.”<sup>56</sup> More than Langsdorff, who later took great pains to explain, understand and defend anthropophagous rituals in great length, Krusenstern immediately flew from his own experiences while holding on to his prejudgements. Here, the unease with contradictions and divergent information clearly led to the strengthening of certainties and pre-established beliefs. Exactly those points of comparison became stronger that shielded the comparing actor from being thrown into the multitude of *comparata*. Fixing and returning to a pre-established *tertium comparationis* in turn helped to get things in order. Instead of questioning the “known”, Krusenstern almost closed his eyes and hooked on to theoretical certainties of a European *tertium*, thereby domesticating and reducing the “unknown” that had started to bother the European consciousness.

The same was happening when Adelbert von Chamisso was visiting the Ralik and Ratak chain islands (later called Marshall Islands) in 1817, albeit in an opposite way. Chamisso was overwhelmed by peaceful, friendly, and cooperative islanders, and for him, they were an example of how unfitting the term “savages” in general was, and how their demeanour might be used to critique and shame the so-called civilizations in the West. As strong and experience-driven his notion of the “noble savage” seemed to be, he was unwilling—like Krusenstern—to give it up when he was confronted with other facts with which to compare it. When the European visitors learned about warlike conflicts and violence between different island people, Chamisso was—and remained—tight-lipped and uncomfortable, affected by this inconvenient information. In his original diary he mentions the fact quickly by pointing to his “reluctance” to take back his “premature judgement.”<sup>57</sup> In his later writings he almost tried to conceal the unpleasant interference.<sup>58</sup>

For Krusenstern and Chamisso, both on quite opposite sides of a “political” ethnographic spectrum, more comparisons did not get closer to the truth. Quite on the contrary: instead of accepting and inviting more *comparata*, the travelers were quick to fix their *tertium comparationis*. Instead of using their own background as

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56 Georg H. von Langsdorff, *Bemerkungen auf einer Reise um die Welt in den Jahren 1803 bis 1807*, Bd. 1, Frankfurt am Main 1812, 94: “Die meisten haben so einnehmende und gefällige Züge, daß wir darin und in ihrem Umgang die Gutmüthigkeit mit den lebhaftesten Zügen zu bemerken glaubten, und wir sie, so wie Cook und Forster, mit dem Wahn ein freundschaftliches, zuvorkommendes und gutes Volk gefunden zu haben, verlassen haben würden.”

57 The original diaries were published recently, cf. Adelbert von Chamisso, *Die Tagebücher der Weltreise 1815–1818*, ed. by Monika Sproll/Walter Erhart/Matthias Glaubrecht, 2 Teile, Göttingen 2023, Teil 1: Text, 228f. (Bl. 37v, 38r): “[...] hier herrscht also Krieg und ambitionen Kriege wie Überall, und wir mußten mit Unlust unsern ersten voreiligen Urtheil zurücke nehmen.”

58 Cf. Walter Erhart, Chamisso's Ethnographie, in: Adelbert von Chamisso, *Die Tagebücher der Weltreise 1815–1818*, ed. by Monika Sproll/Walter Erhart/Matthias Glaubrecht. 2 Teile, Göttingen 2023, Teil 2: Kommentar, 41–59, see 52–53.

one of many *comparata*, they were eager to elaborate on their own solid and immovable background from which they decided to see the world. In the midst of their travels, Krusenstern and Chamisso turned away from their irritating experiences by holding on to cultural concepts that even increased their “scientific” power and popularity in the course of the 19th century: on the one hand the conviction of European colonialists, travelers, philosophers and writers that they were the avant-garde and the masters of history and progress, on the other hand the romantic view of a once-prehistoric harmony and unity of mankind before colonialism and modernity. While Krusenstern almost built a wall around the pre-established notion of the advancement of his own culture (“in a word, they are all cannibals”),<sup>59</sup> Chamisso was seeking glimpses of an unrestrained, single humanity by building bridges between a “primitive” past and a seemingly advanced civilization (“It is everywhere like us”).<sup>60</sup>

While studying these and other, often opposing reports about ethnographic encounters you can almost sense how reassuring it was to view the various “indigenous” human beings in a prehistoric perspective—living either in a “wild” and “savage” preliminary stage or in a lost paradise, an antidote to our over-artificial civilization. Both are the requisites of the evolutionist theories of 19th-century ethnographic research, two sides of the same Eurocentric coin, because the point of comparison clearly remained fixed on a European perspective, either in an imperialist racist or in a romantic manner: a close reading of some of these travel reports reveals how travelers in general almost avoided seeing their encounters as just contemporary experiences. In pushing back the contemporary as such, a new perspective, a new *tertium comparationis*, was enforced and put in place: the prehistoric and the concept of stadial change.<sup>61</sup> Indigenous life was read as a text that had once been written, and in this respect, ethnography became a part, a follow-up, even a branch of philology. That is why a lot of these global-travel reports are interested in languages documented in a variety of comparative studies on oral languages. Ethnography became a way of reading history, thereby turning human beings into historical objects—objects of historical scholarship. By restricting and reducing comparisons, a new regime of comparative practices took shape: *comparata* were put into temporal categories of advancement, latecoming and unescapable backwardness; wavering and unreadable points of comparisons were cut back to strong, undoubted and pre-fixed *tertia comparationis*.

Obviously, ethnographic world-travel reports between 1750 and 1850 multiplied the *comparata* and the possibilities of comparative practices. At the same time, how-

59 Krusenstern, *Reise um die Welt*, 200: “Mit einem Wort, sie sind alle Cannibalen.”

60 Adelbert von Chamisso, *Sämtliche Werke*, Bd. 2, München 1975, 408: “Es ist überall wie bei uns.”

61 Cf. Fritz Kramer, *Schriften zur Ethnologie*, Frankfurt am Main 2005, 27–28.

ever, like in the comparative natural sciences at the same time,<sup>62</sup> multiple comparisons generated the need for reduction, categorization and generalization. Therefore, while the irritations grew, the idea of world history, of prehistoric history and progress were strengthened and reaffirmed. Another consequence of doing away the irritations of comparing while traveling the world was the desire to categorize the multiplicity of indigenous forms of life. When the French Jules Durmont d'Urville traveled around the world in the 1820s, there was nothing new to discover—geographically but also in terms of unknown “indigenous” people. What he did in the early 1830s—in his essay “Sur les îles du grand ocean”—is seen today as one of the inventions of modern racism.<sup>63</sup> Starting from his own travels, he reduced the world's population into three races and situated them on a clear historical scale—as either capable or not capable of progress and development towards an universal future as embodied in Europe.<sup>64</sup>

Of course, comparisons did not stop in ethnographic travels and research. In fact, nobody would speak against what Robert Borofsky said in 1997, in a reply on a discussion following his article “Cook, Lono, Obeyesekere, and Sahlins” summarizing the turns, conflicts and debates in his discipline: “What anthropology is all about, ultimately, is comparison.”<sup>65</sup> However, the problem with comparisons might be that they did not go on forever but that, in certain areas, the dynamic of comparative practices always created histories of their own, rises and falls, abundance and cut-backs. The history of ethnography and anthropology, therefore, can be seen as a constant struggle over comparative measures, and today may still raise the need for constant awareness of the uses and misuses of comparative frames.<sup>66</sup> Traveling round the world brought up the problem of comparison in a specific way that might teach us a lesson particularly today: too many comparisons multiplied the *tertia comparationis* until the previously common and confirmed *tertia* lost their grounding assumptions and got out of the way; in turn, too many comparisons gave rise to newly demanded and created *tertia* that put things in order again. World travels never ceased to provide new evidence that could be included in the growing multitude of comparisons but they also dealt with the need and necessity of ordering *comparata*

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62 Cf. Martina King, Gesteinsschichten, Tasthaare, Damenmoden. Epistemologie des Vergleichens zwischen Natur und Kultur – um und nach 1800, in: *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur* 45 (2020), 246–266.

63 Liebersohn, *The Travelers' World*, 225–230.

64 Cf. Jules Durmont d'Urville, Sur les îles du grand ocean, in: *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie* 17 (1832), 1–21.

65 Robert Borofsky, Cook, Lono, Obeyesekere, and Sahlins, Forum on Theory in Anthropology, in: *Current Anthropology* 38 (1997), 255–282, see 279.

66 Cf. Michael Schnegg, Anthropology and Comparison. Methodological Challenges and Tentative Solutions, in: *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 139 (2014), 55–72; Cyril Lemieux, Faut-il en finir avec le comparatisme?, in: *L'Homme. Revue française d'anthropologie* 229 (2019), 169–184.

by creating and stabilizing certain *tertia comparationis* within frames of knowledge that were being reaffirmed, discovered or even invented. In the same process, new and unsettling comparisons lost their power and their legitimation while new *tertia comparationis* put knowledge systems in their place. Pushing back comparisons, for example, implied reducing and restricting the multilayered social realities of the 'Other' to a structure (termed in well-known "universal" terms such as "totem", "taboo", "fetish", "ritual") that made it easy to oppose them to European society *in toto*—a process of ethnocentrism that was not even overcome by social anthropology in the 20th century.<sup>67</sup>

Traveling round the world and comparing cultures changed the world, but reducing and delegitimizing comparisons also brought about change. Historicizing and generalizing from the roots of academic disciplines such as philology, anthropology and ethnology. They did not need world travels anymore. Adolf Bastian, the founder of the Berlin "Völkerkundemuseum," and also one of the founders of ethnology in Germany, wrote a short literary piece on his world travels in a popular journal in 1860,<sup>68</sup> while a few years later, in 1869, he produced a systematic account of all peoples in the world in his three volumes of *Der Mensch in der Geschichte*.<sup>69</sup> And one of the last-ever scientific journeys around the world, the Austrian expedition led by Karl von Scherzer in the 1850s, produced eighteen volumes of scientific reports.<sup>70</sup> The report on ethnography—"Anthropologischer Teil, Dritte Abteilung: Ethnographie"—was written by Friedrich Müller, a professor of oriental linguistics in Vienna, who was not even on board the ship. He worked as a combination of naturalist and linguistic ethnographer, and clustered the populations of the earth into categories: "mankind divided into races and peoples."<sup>71</sup> He actually identified seven "races," and together suggested that they formed, one after another, a record of "continuous progress in the history of development."<sup>72</sup> Like Bastian, he just uses the material to order and categorize the ethnographic world. This kind of generalization was one of the starting points of ethnology as an academic discipline. It took a long time, however, to overcome the restrictions and the worldviews that originated with the ethnographic desire and the felt necessity to do away with too many irritating comparisons. When anthropologists today reclaim the independence and equality

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67 Cf. Kramer, *Schriften zur Ethnologie*, 65.

68 Adolf Bastian, *Meine Reise um und durch die Welt*, in: *Illustrierte Zeitung* 35 (1860), 219–222.

69 Cf. Adolf Bastian, *Der Mensch in der Geschichte. Zur Begründung einer psychologischen Weltanschauung*, Berlin 1869.

70 Cf. Karl von Scherzer, *Reise der österreichischen Fregatte Novara um die Erde, in den Jahren 1857, 1858, 1859*, Wien 1864.

71 Friedrich Müller, *Reise der österreichischen Fregatte Novara um die Erde, in den Jahren 1857, 1858, 1859. Anthropologischer Theil. Dritte Abtheilung: Ethnographie*, Wien 1868, X.

72 Müller, *Reise der österreichischen Fregatte Novara um die Erde*, XXVII.



of “indigenous” thought, of animism,<sup>73</sup> spirits,<sup>74</sup> mythology and cosmology,<sup>75</sup> they finally turn to Adam von Krusenstern’s fear of “delusions” and “temptations” as Europe’s own heritage. To take oneself, to take Europe, to take Western modernity as just one small and limited *comparatum* among many others is not just a new idea but a new point of departure—perhaps, even, the promising start of a new rise of comparisons.

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73 Philippe Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture*, Chicago 2014.

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# Stadial Change and the Emergence of Comparative Studies in German-Speaking Europe Around 1870–1900

Hugo von Meltzl Reads Wilhelm Scherer

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Angus Nicholls<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract** *This paper examines how comparative models of stadial change taken from nineteenth-century ethnography and anthropology influenced the early history of comparative literary studies in German-speaking Europe between circa 1870 and 1900. Its focus is on the comparative methods developed by Wilhelm Scherer in his Poetik (1888), which were in turn adopted by the first European journal for comparative literature, the Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum (1877–1888).*

## Introduction: Comparative Literature's Disciplinary Origins in the Late Nineteenth Century

Today it is often forgotten that models of stadial change, along with the colonial power structures that lay behind them, were central to the formation of comparative literature as an academic discipline in the last few decades of the nineteenth century. Especially in the anglophone world, these nineteenth-century origins are often obscured by a focus upon mid-twentieth-century émigré scholars from central Europe who fled Nazism and continued their careers in the United States: chief among them Erich Auerbach, René Wellek, Leo Spitzer and Lilian R. Furst. There in the USA

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1 All translations from the German are my own unless otherwise noted. I thank the *Österreichische Nationalbibliothek*, Vienna, for assistance in accessing the original copies of the *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum*, photos of which are reproduced here. Part of the research conducted for this paper was funded by the Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung during a research stay at the University of Bielefeld in 2022. I thank my Bielefeld hosts Walter Erhart and Kirsten Kramer for their hospitality and for their collaboration on this work. All errors and omissions are my own. Some of the arguments in this essay appear in a more extended form in: Angus Nicholls, *Aesthetics and Anthropology in the Early Years of Comparative Literature: The Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum*, in: *Comparative Literature* 76 (3/2024), in press

they built—or, as I shall argue here, *revived*—a field that would come to have its core in mostly west-European literatures, with the dominant languages being English, French, and German. It is this origin story—one emphasizing postwar European cosmopolitanism—that probably led Franco Moretti to declare in 2000 that comparative literature has been a “modest intellectual enterprise, fundamentally limited to western Europe, and mostly revolving around the river Rhine (German philologists working on French literature). Not much more.”<sup>2</sup> Although Moretti’s take on comparative literature’s history is a polemical one tinged with irony—having as its aim the installation of world literature as the primary discipline that compares literatures—it is difficult to contest the charge of western Eurocentrism that he levels. Why, then, did the focus of western comparative literature end up being so restricted and Eurocentric?

As I will argue below, part of the reason for this predominant focus on western Europe lies in the centrality of stadial theory to the early history of the discipline. Stadial theory proposes that that all cultures progress and change through purportedly universal stages of cultural evolution. As historians of anthropology such as George Stocking note, it was a central feature of what came to be known as the ‘comparative method’ of the nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> According to this teleological model of change, only those cultures that are regarded as the ‘most developed’ according to Eurocentric criteria are admitted to the canon of literary studies proper. By contrast, those cultures viewed as ‘backward’ become the subjects of ethnographic collection, curation, and preservation, largely because it was presumed that prolonged contact with European ‘civilization’ would lead to their extinction. Models of stadial change, often based on colonial ethnography and claiming to be inductive, prejudice-free, and therefore ‘scientific’, were used in this way to study cultures on a purportedly universal axis of evolutionist temporal comparison.<sup>4</sup> In this way, so-called ‘primitive’ non-European cultures were thought to occupy a developmental stage long left behind by the cultures of Europe, thereby purportedly offering insights into European prehistory.

In recent literature on the history of comparative literature, there has admittedly been some, albeit limited, examination of these nineteenth-century origins. In *All the Difference in the World* (2007), Natalie Melas offers a brief overview of the role played by evolutionism in anglophone comparative literature of the late nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup> David Damrosch’s more recent and rather US-centric history of the discipline—*Comparing the Literatures* (2020)—does also explore, albeit rather briefly

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2 Franco Moretti, Conjectures on World Literature, in: *New Left Review* 1 (2000), 54–68, 54.

3 George S. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, New York 1987, 170.

4 On this temporality of comparison, see Natalie Melas, *All the Difference in the World: Post-coloniality and the Ends of Comparison*, Stanford 2007, 15–19.

5 Melas, *All the Difference*, 1–43.

and unsystematically, some of the nineteenth-century European origins of the field in well-known authors such as Johann Gottfried Herder and Madame de Staël, in lesser-known works such as the Irish scholar Hutcheson Macaulay Posnett's 1886 monograph entitled *Comparative Literature*, and in Hugo von Meltzl's and Samuel Brassai's journal, the *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* (ACLU, 1877–1888) which is widely regarded as having been the first academic journal in the field (more on that journal below). Despite this, Damrosch's predominant focus remains the history of the discipline in the US, especially the contributions and legacies of its émigré central European founders and their later post-colonial critics such as Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak.<sup>6</sup> In her polemic of 2003, *Death of a Discipline*, Spivak already tells an earlier version of Damrosch's post-war origin story when she argues that comparative literature—by which she seems almost exclusively to mean US comparative literature—emerged as part of the “Euro-US cultural dominant” of the Cold War.<sup>7</sup> The discipline's concentration on literatures and cultures belonging to the NATO countries—that is, its west-Eurocentrism—is explained by Spivak as being the result of a neo-colonial distinction between ‘civilized’ western Europe and North America on the one hand and other purportedly less ‘civilized’ areas of the globe on the other. While, in Spivak's account, western Europe and anglophone North America were thus the core domains of literary studies and comparative literature, the rest of the world was consigned to area studies: regions to be understood not primarily in terms of their literatures but through other less aesthetically oriented disciplines such as anthropology and political science. In the words of Spivak: “Area Studies related to foreign ‘areas.’ Comparative Literature was made up of Western European Nations. This distinction, between ‘areas’ and ‘nations,’ infected Comparative Literature from the start.”<sup>8</sup>

It all depends, though, on what one means by *the start*. Spivak's Cold War primal scene for comparative literature elides an earlier and less well-known disciplinary history belonging not to the nineteenth century in its entirety, but roughly to its final three decades: the period in which comparative literature first began to be a field of academic study at universities and in learned journals. To be sure, the terminus *comparative literature* was already in use in the first half of the nineteenth century. Abel-François Villemain—who had visited Goethe in Weimar—already refers to *littérature comparée* in a series of lectures delivered in 1828 and 1829. But as Ulrich Weisstein notes in what is probably still the most comprehensive account of the discipline's nineteenth-century institutional history in western Europe and the USA, comparative literature did not become a subject of systematic university study in France until

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6 David Damrosch, *Comparing the Literatures: Literary Studies in a Global Age*, Princeton 2020, esp. 12–50, 66–83, 84–121.

7 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline*, New York 2003, 25.

8 Spivak, *Death of a Discipline*, 8.



after 1890, with the first chair being awarded to Joseph Texte in Lyon in 1897.<sup>9</sup> The first known European chair in the discipline was taken up by Francesco de Santis in Naples in 1871.<sup>10</sup> Other major western European nations took a long time to follow. Despite the efforts of Wilhelm Scherer in the late nineteenth century to found a subject that he thought of as comparative poetics (to be discussed further below), the first German chair in the discipline was not established until the mid-twentieth century in Mainz.<sup>11</sup> In terms of publications, however, German-speaking central Europe was a scene of innovation: the first journal in the field, the *ACLU*, was to some extent dominated by a theoretical perspective stemming from Weimar classicism, and was quickly followed by Max Koch's *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Litteraturgeschichte (Journal for Comparative Literary History)* in 1887.<sup>12</sup> In Britain, meanwhile, modern European languages and literatures (let alone comparative literature) only managed to establish themselves as independent disciplines around the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>13</sup> The United States was the real pioneer in the anglophone world, with the first courses in comparative literature being taught at Cornell in 1871, the first chair being established at Harvard in 1890 (held by Arthur Richmond Marsh), and the first department at Columbia University in 1899.<sup>14</sup>

This short overview thus suggests that comparative literature began as an academic field with chairs and journals—as opposed to a mere collection of theoretical ideas—in the final three decades of the nineteenth century. What was decisive about this period for the establishment of the discipline? One possible answer is provided by Erhard Schüttpelz's arguments concerning the benefits of revising our understanding of *Weltliteratur* by seeing it from a *longue durée* perspective informed by the work of Fernand Braudel.<sup>15</sup> The most lasting and significant meaning of *Weltliteratur*—and one that has enjoyed a renaissance in the anglophone world since around the time of Damrosch's 2003 monograph on the subject<sup>16</sup>—is one that invokes a canon of translated global masterpieces, usually novels written in the European mode. Notwithstanding the fact that Goethe made many more statements on *Weltliteratur* that had everything to do with the increased global circulation of

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9 Ulrich Weisstein, *Comparative Literature and Literary Theory: Survey and Introduction*, Bloomington 1973, 171–172.

10 Weisstein, *Comparative Literature*, 234.

11 Weisstein, *Comparative Literature*, 187–188, 201.

12 Weisstein, *Comparative Literature*, 189.

13 Joep Leerssen, *Comparative Literature in Britain: National Identities, Transnational Dynamics 1800–2000*, Cambridge 2019, 87–89.

14 Weisstein, *Comparative Literature*, 208–211.

15 Erhard Schüttpelz, *Weltliteratur in der Perspektive einer Longue Durée I: Die Fünf Zeitschichten der Globalisierung*, in: Özkan Ezli/Dorothee Kimmich/Annette Werberger (eds.), *Wider den Kulturzwang. Migration, Kulturalisierung und Weltliteratur*, Bielefeld 2009, 339–360.

16 David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?* Princeton 2003.

texts and far less to do with notions about canon formation,<sup>17</sup> his most well-known remarks on the subject do involve him comparing a translation of a Chinese verse novel to European literary texts, combined with his conviction that despite the merits of this Chinese novel, it was only the ancient Greeks who laid down timeless and universal criteria according to which we can make assessments about literary value.<sup>18</sup>

With Goethe's dominant legacy in mind, Schüttpelz makes the point that founding a field—namely world literature—based on texts that are already said to have qualified for admittance into its canon quickly ends up being a circular enterprise.<sup>19</sup> This is demonstrated by the fact that Goethe's would-be 'universal' aesthetic criteria are in fact particular to ancient Greek aesthetics and their later reception in classical Weimar. One would do better, Schüttpelz argues—and in this he is close to Moretti—to re-theorize world literature by bracketing out the question of literary value or principles of canon formation, and by seeing its emergence as being analogous to what Braudel referred to as *économie monde*: the globalized economy that emerged between 1500 and 1800 in conjunction with the European colonial project.<sup>20</sup> This notion of world literature resembles that already sketched by the Danish scholar Georg Brandes in 1899. Brandes regards the success of a text on the world literary stage as depending much more upon the language of power in which it is written—it should be in English, German, or French—than upon its literary quality, while also seeing advances in communication and translation as being crucial for the advent of world literature.<sup>21</sup>

In Schüttpelz's account, European globalization, which he sees as the precondition for a more descriptive and non-canonical idea of world literature as transnational literary commerce, reached its height in what he calls the period of imperialism, spanning from around 1880 until the end of the Great War.<sup>22</sup> The main writings of Brandes fall precisely within this period, during which, according to Schüttpelz, the international mobility of peoples and goods reached a decisive new intensity. It is arguably no coincidence that the main impetus behind comparative studies in the humanities significantly coincides with the century immediately preceding this imperial period (roughly 1780–1880). Despite Schüttpelz's quite restrictive definition of his imperial period to the years of 1880–1919, comparing things—climates, landscapes, animals, plants, languages, legal systems, peoples—had of course been

17 Cf. Angus Nicholls, *Weltliteratur* (World Literature), in: Charlotte Lee (ed.), *Goethe in Context*, Cambridge 2024, in press.

18 Goethe to Eckermann, 27 January 1831, in: Johann W. von Goethe *Sämtliche Werke. Briefe, Taugbücher und Gespräche* 2/12, Hendrik Birus et al. (eds.), Frankfurt am Main 1985–2003, 225.

19 Schüttpelz, *Weltliteratur in der Perspektive einer Longue Durée* I, 339.

20 Schüttpelz, *Weltliteratur in der Perspektive einer Longue Durée* I, 339–340.

21 Georg Brandes, *Weltliteratur*, in: *Das literarische Echo* 2 (1899–1900), 1–4.

22 Schüttpelz, *Weltliteratur in der Perspektive einer Longue Durée* I, 339–344.

a longstanding colonial activity in the centuries prior to 1880. What distinguished the later nineteenth century was its progressive theorization and systematization of methods of comparison. As we shall see, within these processes of systematization, the task of theorizing both cultural difference and historical change was a key concern.

In a recent article, Devin Griffiths writes that “comparative anatomy and comparative philology deserve equal billing as the fields of enquiry that raised the comparative method to prominence in the nineteenth century.”<sup>23</sup> And as Siraj Ahmed has recently argued at length, comparative philology was conceived as part of the project of mastering the local languages of colonized territories in order to administer them legally, the paradigm case being William Jones, the colonial judge and philologist in British Bengal, whose *Third Anniversary Discourse* of 1786 served as the model for later *Indo-Germanistik* from Friedrich Schlegel to Franz Bopp to Max Müller.<sup>24</sup> Joep Leerssen’s recent study *Comparative Literature in Britain* (2019) also demonstrates how this tradition of scholarship, steeped in the colonial need to compare Europe with non-Europe, formed one of the main lines of influence upon the emergent discipline of comparative literature in the British Isles.<sup>25</sup> To use the language of Sheldon Pollock, these modes of comparison were *hegemonic* because they took European developmental criteria to be a universal standard. “We sometimes forget,” argues Pollock,

that nineteenth-century Europe is the high-water mark of historical-comparative studies across all disciplines—ethnology, history, law, literature, mythology, religion. It is not news, but it is also not inconsequential, that such projects were linked to the age of discovery and colonialism, and comparativism itself to the self-understanding of European supremacy [...] It is not a far step from this way of thinking to a very concrete and serious kind of domination that has been and still is underwritten by this form of comparison, namely modernization theory. In its core this is clearly a form of comparativism, mixed with a stadial or evolutionary vision of history.<sup>26</sup>

In Pollock’s terminology, comparison becomes comparativism when it is systematized into a theory, in this case one involving models of stadial change. His remarks demonstrate that the neo-colonial ‘infection’ diagnosed by Spivak as lying at

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23 Devin Griffiths, The Comparative Method and the History of the Humanities, in: *History of the Humanities* 2 (2/2017), 473–505, 477.

24 Siraj Ahmed, *Archaeology of Babel: The Colonial Foundation of the Humanities*, Stanford 2017.

25 Leerssen, *Comparative Literature in Britain*, 21–31.

26 Sheldon Pollock, Comparison without Hegemony, in: Hans Joas and Barbro Klein (eds.), *The Benefit of Broad Horizons: Intellectual and Institutional Preconditions for a Global Social Science*, Leiden 2010, 185–204, 195, 201.

the heart of comparative literature took hold much earlier than at the onset of the Cold War.

Yet as a discipline, comparative literature has largely failed to consider this aspect of its history in any detail. As Devin Griffith notes,

unlike either anthropology or sociology, twentieth century comparative history and comparative literature have largely avoided extended consideration of the place of the comparative method in the previous century, generally seeking instead to frame comparativism in fresh terms suited to their objects of study [...] While Hugo Meltzl and other early practitioners, [...] understood the study of comparative philology and PIE [proto-Indo-European, A.N.] as foundational to their approach to literary comparison, World War II reset the table. In its aftermath, scholars like Erich Auerbach and René Wellek emphasized the transnational and cosmopolitan aims of comparative literature.<sup>27</sup>

Although the main achievements and publications of PIE scholars such as William Jones, Friedrich Schlegel, Franz Bopp, and Max Müller appeared prior to the onset of Schüttpelz's age of imperialism around 1880, the chief focus of this paper is on one of the early practitioners of comparative literature mentioned above by Griffiths, and a figure who falls squarely within Schüttpelz's imperial period: Hugo von Meltzl and his journal the *ACLU*, founded in 1877 and lasting until 1888.

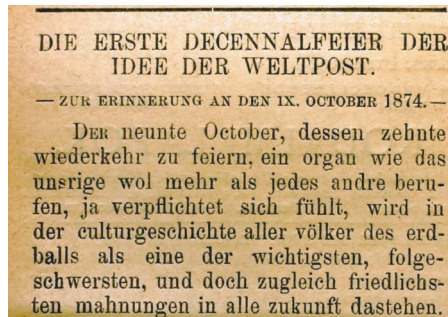
In their three-part mission statement for the *ACLU* written in 1877–78, Meltzl and his co-editor Samuel Brassai describe comparative literature as a “science of the future” (*Zukunftswissenschaft*).<sup>28</sup> Part of this future-directedness had to do with an increased optimism concerning the benefits of communication technologies. Here the relevance of Schüttpelz's arguments about the intensification of global communication is underscored by the fact that the *ACLU*'s editors wrote an article celebrating the tenth anniversary of the idea of a global postal service, which they see as having originated with the Treaty of Bern in 1874.

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27 Griffiths, *The Comparative Method*, 490, 492. An exception here is Melas (see her *All the Difference in the World*).

28 Vorläufige Aufgaben der vergleichenden Litteratur, in: *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universalium* (hereafter *ACLU*). This mission statement appeared across three separate issues of the journal: 9 (May 15, 1877); 15 (October 15, 1877) 24 (February 28, 1878), this quote: 9 (1877), 182. From 1879 onwards, the *ACLU* carried two numbering systems: *Novae Seriei*, on the top left, which related to the numbering of issues after the adoption of the new Latin title in that year, and *Totius Seriei*, on the top right, which represents the total number of volumes and issues dating back to the journal's inception in 1877. The numbers used here and throughout relate to *Totius Seriei*.

Fig. 1: Die erste Decennialfeier der Idee der Weltpost, *ACLU* 16 (155–158/1884), 67.<sup>29</sup>



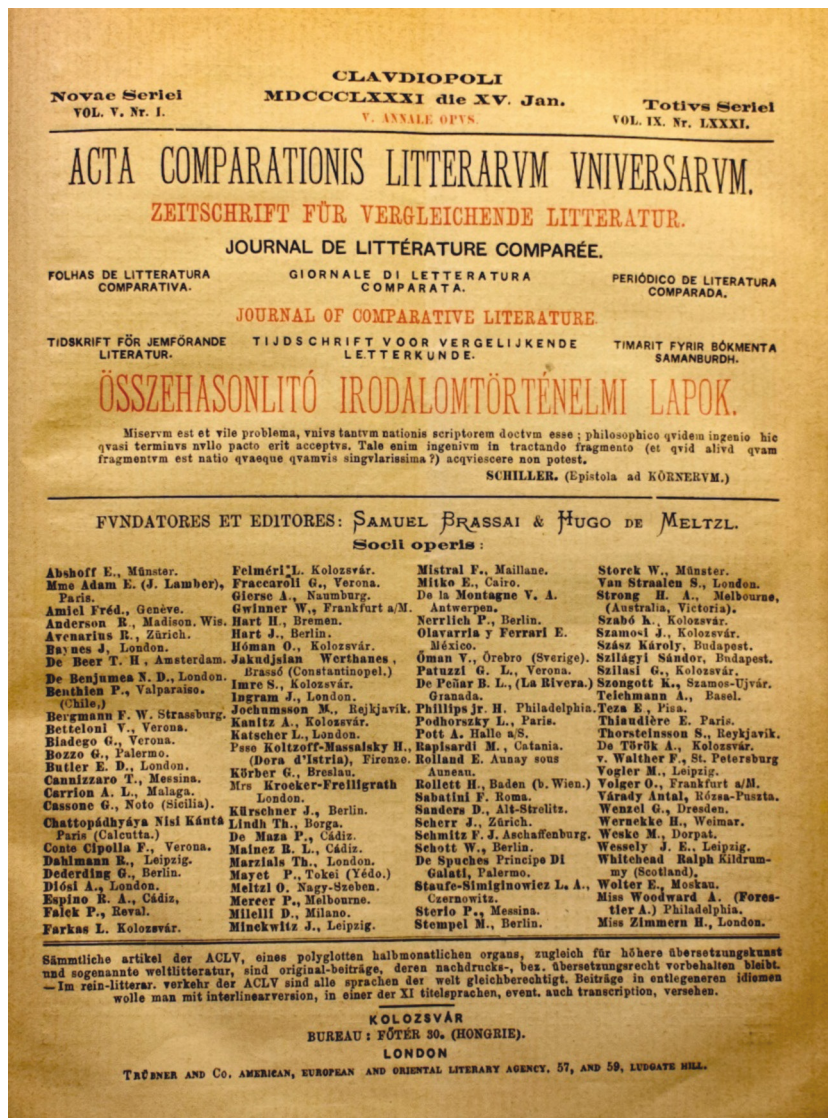
As will become clear below, the journal saw the global postal service as crucial to its purpose of gathering ethnographic reports from all over the world, including colonized territories as distant from Europe as Australia. In the interpretation of this global material, the comparative method belonging to nineteenth century ethnography—to be described in its main lineaments below—plays a central role. Another important protagonist in this chapter will accordingly be the theorist who informed the version of the comparative method elaborated in the early issues of the *ACLU*. In one of the key methodological statements of the journal, Meltzl invokes Wilhelm Scherer's call for the application of ethnographic comparative methods to the study of literature. An examination of the influence of ethnography on Scherer's posthumously published *Poetics* (*Poetik*, 1888), will reveal the extent to which Scherer himself relied on ethnographic sources derived from travel literature. The context of these sources was also, of course, colonial.

## The *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum*

The *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* was published out of Cluj (Hungarian: Kolozsvár; German: Klausenburg) in the then Austro-Hungarian Empire. Its editors were Hugo von Meltzl (1846–1908), a native speaker of German and Professor of German at Klausenburg University, and Samuel Brassai (1800–1897), a polymath whose first language was Hungarian. The journal was originally published under the Hungarian title of *Összehasonlító Irodalomtörténelmi Lapok*, before changing to its Latin title in 1879.

29 The excerpt depicted reads: "The ninth of October, the tenth anniversary of which a journal such as ours, more than any other journal, feels called upon and indeed obligated to celebrate, will for all times henceforth stand in the cultural history of all peoples on the earth as one of the most important and momentous but also the happiest of reminders."

Fig. 2: The cover of the *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Vniuersarum* 81 (1881).



As this cover image from 1881 demonstrates, the journal made an ostentatious commitment to polyglotism. The initial idea, at least in theory, was to publish in all languages of the world, with interlinear translations to be provided for so-called minor languages. The journal's goal of achieving universal linguistic coverage stemmed from the oft-quoted maxim that appeared on its cover page in some issues (see Fig.

2), and which held that within the journal's pages "all languages of the world have equal rights."<sup>30</sup> In recent years, this seemingly radical and progressive polyglotism has seen a revival of interest in this short-lived and relatively obscure journal, as some of the recent secondary literature on the *ACLU* demonstrates.<sup>31</sup> What is less emphasized in the secondary literature—albeit with some exceptions<sup>32</sup>—is the fact that this ambitious program soon revealed itself to be impossible in practice, leading to a revised policy of "decaglotism," which committed to publishing in at least ten languages, nearly all of which were west-European, and whose literatures were said to be of 'world' rank. These languages—Hungarian, German, French, English, Portuguese, Italian, Spanish, Swedish, Dutch, and Icelandic—were later joined by Russian in 1884, and when one includes Latin, the total number of languages officially recognized by the journal amounts to twelve.

An overview of the first ten issues of the *ACLU* reveals that most of the articles published in the journal appeared in German and Hungarian, followed by other European languages such as French and English, occasionally Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and Dutch. The editors of the *ACLU* were keenly aware that the reduction of the journal's scope from a radical or (at least in principle) unrestricted polyglotism to the initial ten-language policy of "decaglotism" would require a theoretical justification. The arguments used by the journal's editors to justify this restriction reveal that early practitioners of comparative literature took recourse to ethnographic research methods during the formative stages of the discipline. Why did they do this?

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30 The full German sentence is: "Im rein litterar. Verkehr der *ACLU* sind alle sprachen der welt gleichberechtigt."

31 A detailed list of secondary material on the *ACLU* cannot be supplied here, but can be found in Angus Nicholls, *Aesthetics and Anthropology in the Early Years of Comparative Literature: The Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum*, in: *Comparative Literature* 76 (3/2024), in press. A recent example of a largely positive evaluation of the journal's polyglotism can be found in Damrosch's *Comparing the Literatures*, 30–49.

32 Cf. Levente T. Szabó, *The Subversive Politics of Multilingualism in the First Journal of Comparative Literary Studies*, in: Britta Benert (ed.), *Paradoxes du plurilinguisme littéraire 1900. Réflexiones théoretiques et études de cas*, Brussels 2015, 229–250; Angus Nicholls, *The Goethean Discourses on Weltliteratur and the Origins of Comparative Literature: The Cases of Hugo Meltzl and Hutcheson Macaulay Posnett*, in: *Seminar* 54 (2/2018), 167–194; Anca Parvulescu and Manuela Boatcă, *Creolizing the Modern: Transylvania Across Empires*, Ithaca 2022.

Fig. 3: Contents page for the first ten issues of the ACLU, organized by language.

<b>INHALT.</b>	
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	<i>Seitenzahl.</i>
Előszó . . . . .	1
<i>Meltzl.</i> A ki a világ költészetébe bevezette a magyart. (Wer die ungarische Dichtung in die Weltpoesie eingeführt hat.) . . . . .	4
<i>Brassai.</i> Fordítás példája. (Beispiel einer Übersetzung.) . . . . .	9
<i>Meltzl.</i> Egy triglott mű. (Ein triglottes Werk.) Butler. . . . .	33
<i>Varga J.</i> A pillangó és mch. (Victor Hugo's Gedicht.) . . . . .	55
Német, francia vagy angol? (Deutsch, französisch oder englisch?) . . . . .	66
<i>Brassai.</i> Népdaok Milo szigeteről. (Volkslieder von der Insel Melos.) Tommaseo-Teza. Külföldi szemle. (Ausländische Revue.) In den Nrn I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VII, VIII.	73
<b>DEUTSCHE ARTIKEL.</b>	
Die neugegründete Petöfigesellschaft. . . . .	13
Philosophie des Romans. . . . .	14
Inländische Revue (Magyar szemle) in den Nrn I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VII, VIII, X.	
Magyarische Volkslieder I—XIV. in den Nrn I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VII, VIII, IX, X.	
Bibliographie in den Nrn I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VII, VIII, X.	
<i>Meltzl.</i> Zur vergleichenden Aesthetik der Lyrik . . . . .	39
<i>Gedicke.</i> Die verhängnissvollen Tränen. Dramatisches Gedicht nach dem Japanischen . . . . .	41
Kisfaludygesellschaft. (Feierliche Sitzung.) . . . . .	75
<i>Schott W.</i> Nippon. . . . .	107
<i>Brassai.</i> Fennica aut Mongolica? . . . . .	145
Japanisches Uta . . . . .	167
<i>Wessely.</i> Das Wesen und die Bedeutung der Lyrik. . . . .	169
<i>Meltzl.</i> Vorläufige Aufgaben der vergleichenden Litteratur. . . . .	179
<i>Wernecke.</i> Norwegisches Lied nach B. Björnson. . . . .	214
<b>FRANZÖSISCHE ARTIKEL.</b>	
<i>Cannizzaro.</i> Revue littéraire. I. (Marquand. — Salvo-Cozzo. — Lombardi. — D <sup>e</sup> Spuches. —)	129
— — — — — Revue littéraire. II. (Salomone-Marino. — G. Pitré. — G. Cassone.) . . . . .	155
<b>ENGLISCHE ARTIKEL.</b>	
<i>Butler.</i> Homeless translated from the Hungarian of Vörösmarty . . . . .	100
— — — — — The deserted dwelling of János Arany . . . . .	117
Literary Notes (I—II) (II. S. 159) . . . . .	118
<i>Butler.</i> Hope and Memory of Kőlcsey . . . . .	126
— — — — — The forsaken mother of Vörösmarty . . . . .	150
— — — — — Weary of Gyulay Pál . . . . .	161
<i>Marsialis.</i> Le retour du marin trad. en Anglais. . . . .	182
<i>Butler.</i> The Appeal (Szózat) of Vörösmarty . . . . .	188

One explanation can be found in the general tendency towards induction and positivism that dominated the European humanities during the 1870s and 1880s. In the emergent humanities, including in early comparative literature, this led to an increased invocation of empirical and would-be natural scientific methods. In literary studies, one of the main questions accordingly became that of literary *causation*: from what psychological processes did literature originally emerge and what were its functions? And how does literature change through processes of cultural evolu-



tion? Some of the most influential answers to these questions were provided by stadial models of cultural evolution. The basic explanatory model used in these stadial theories is that of change from simple to complex development, an idea that found its most canonical expression in Herbert Spencer's essay of 1857, "Progress: its Law and Cause."

Influenced by Goethe's ideas about morphology and by Karl Ernst von Baer's embryology, Spencer argued that the development of biological organisms could be used as a model to explain social and cultural development. In his words, the "law of organic progress is the law of all progress." The general tendency identified by Spencer was one involving change from simplicity to complexity of organization:

In respect to that progress which individual organisms display in the course of their evolution, this question has been answered by the Germans. The investigations of Wolff, Goethe, and Von Baer, have established the truth that the series of changes gone through during the development of a seed into a tree, or an ovum into an animal, constitute an advance from homogeneity of structure to heterogeneity of structure [...] Now, we propose in the first place to show, that this law of organic progress is the law of all progress. Whether it be in the development of the Earth, in the development of Life upon its surface, in the development of Society, of Government, of Manufactures, of Commerce, of Language, of Literature, Science, Art, this same evolution of the simple into the complex, through a process of continuous differentiation, holds throughout.<sup>33</sup>

When applied to societies and their belief systems, stadial models describe a transition from polytheistic animism, via monotheistic religion and metaphysics, to positivist science. Auguste Comte's *Cours de philosophie positive* (1830–1842), to name one of the earlier examples, theorizes that culture evolves through theological, metaphysical, and scientific stages. In Edward Burnett Tylor's *Primitive Culture* (1871), a similar tripartite system of cultural evolution is organized around animism or polytheistic religion, monotheism, and science. And under the influence of Tylor and other evolutionists, the second edition of James George Frazer's *The Golden Bough* operates with stages referred to as magic (by which Frazer means totemism), religion, and science. Based on the theory of human monogenesis, stadial theory holds that all human cultures progress through the same stages of evolution, though at different speeds. So-called 'primitive' peoples in colonized territories were believed to occupy the lower or more 'backward' levels of this universal scale, thereby allegedly providing Europeans with an insight into their own prehistories, while also justifying the paternalistic and 'developmental' goals of colonialism.

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33 Herbert Spencer, Progress: Its Law and Cause, in: *Westminster Review* (January to April 1857), 445–485, 446.

In practice, however, what often occurred was that the stadias model was already in place before the fieldwork was carried out, so that evidence was selected to confirm a pre-existing theory. An example of this was Frazer's interest in Australian Aboriginal religion or totemism, which partly emerged from his correspondence with Baldwin Spencer, the British-Australian biologist-*cum*-anthropologist who studied the Arrernte Indigenous culture of central Australia in the late nineteenth century. As I have shown elsewhere,<sup>34</sup> Frazer suggested to Spencer that he should find a 'magical'—meaning pre-monotheistic—totemism for him in Australia. Spencer obliged, arguing in 1899 that

The hypothesis which is now suggested, and which has been advanced independently also by Mr Frazer, is that in our Australian tribes the primary function of a totemic group is that of securing by magic means a supply of the object which gives its name to the totemic group.<sup>35</sup>

Spencer satisfied Frazer's need to find 'magical' thought-systems in Australia, not only because his own observations were shaped by Frazer's stadias model, but also because Spencer's career was dependent on Frazer's support, since Frazer recommended to his publisher (Macmillan in London) that they should publish Spencer's *Native Tribes of Central Australia* (1899), which Spencer had co-written with his fieldwork companion Francis Gillen.<sup>36</sup> It was therefore no surprise when, in the first volume of the 1900 edition of the *Golden Bough*, Frazer claimed that while "magic is universally practiced" by Indigenous Australians, "religion in the sense of a propitiation or conciliation of the higher powers seems to be nearly unknown. Roughly speaking, all men in Australia are magicians but not one is a priest."<sup>37</sup> Stadias models were therefore not just 'pure' theory, but something like academic infrastructures that undergirded not only the gathering and interpretation of evidence but also pathways to publication and the formation of academic careers.

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34 Angus Nicholls, Anglo-German Mythologies: The Australian Aborigines and Modern Theories of Myth in the Work of Baldwin Spencer and Carl Strehlow, in: *History of the Human Sciences* 20 (1/2007), 83–114.

35 Baldwin Spencer/F. J. Gillen, Some Remarks on Totemism as Applied to Australian Tribes, in: *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 28 (3–4/1899), 275–280, 278.

36 For an overview of these events, cf. Nicholls, Anglo-German Mythologies; cf. also Baldwin Spencer/F. J. Gillen, *The Native Tribes of Central Australia*, London 1899.

37 James G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, vol. 1, London 1900, 71.

For all these reasons, stadial models of development have, at least since their critique by Franz Boas,<sup>38</sup> been thoroughly discredited in anthropology and sociology, so why reexamine them now? My claim is that their influence has been overlooked in the history of comparative literature. How a discipline begins can also influence its later lines of development, sometimes in subterranean ways. The forgotten pre-history of comparative literature is therefore of importance, not least because it is so bound up with colonial history. Yet while stadial models were often used by Europeans with respect to non-European cultures to justify colonialism, they can also be found within strictly intra-European discussions of culture. As the final section of this paper will show, a case in point is the *ACLU*, which used stadial theory to justify its eventual restriction to ten (later twelve) European languages, but which did so in a global context that also incorporated the discourses of colonial ethnography.

The most celebrated and frequently anthologized text from the *ACLU* is its three-part mission statement, the “Vorläufige Aufgaben der vergleichenden Litteratur” (“Preliminary Tasks of Comparative Literature”), which was published across three issues of the journal between the years of 1877 and 1878.<sup>39</sup> In 1973, the first two parts of this text were translated into English as “Present Tasks of Comparative Literature” and included in an anthology of essays on the early history of comparative literature.<sup>40</sup> This translation has subsequently been reprinted in a number of other anthologies,<sup>41</sup> again without the inclusion of its crucial third part, which will appear for the first time in English, along with an accompanying critical essay, in 2024.<sup>42</sup> The title of the 1973 translation already contains a crucial error: *vorläufig* cannot be translated as “present,” because in that rendering, the temporary, preparatory, and provisional status of the field’s tasks—all of which are expressed in the German prefix *vor*—are elided. It is not merely the case that the editors of the *ACLU* were undertaking an assessment of their new field at the present time; rather, they were

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38 For one of Boas’s earliest critiques of evolutionist stadial theory, cf. Franz Boas, The Limitations of the Comparative Method, in: *Science* 4 (103/1896), 901–908. On Boas, see also the contribution of Kirsten Kramer to this volume.

39 Cf.: Hugo Meltzl, Vorläufige Aufgaben der vergleichenden Litteratur, in: *ACLU* 9 (1877), 179–182; Hugo Meltzl, Vorläufige Aufgaben der vergleichenden Litteratur. II. Das Prinzip des Polyglottismus, in: *ACLU* 15 (1877), 307–315; Hugo Meltzl, Vorläufige Aufgaben der vergleichenden Litteratur. III. Der Dekaglottismus, in: *ACLU* 24 (1878), 494–501.

40 Present Tasks of Comparative Literature, trans. Hans-Joachim Schulz and Phillip H. Rhein, in: *Comparative Literature: The Early Years*, Chapel Hill 1973, 53–62.

41 Cf. *The Princeton Sourcebook in Comparative Literature*, ed. David Damrosch, Natalie Melas and Mbongiseni Buthelezi, Princeton, 2009, 41–49; Theo D’Haen/César Domínguez/Mads Rosendahl Thomsen (eds.), *World Literature: A Reader*, Abingdon 2013, 18–22.

42 Hugo Meltzl, Preliminary Tasks of Comparative Literature Part III: Decaglottism, trans. Angus Nicholls, in: *Comparative Literature* 76 (3/2024), in press.

keenly aware that any statement of principles could only ever be provisional, precisely because two of comparative literature's key tasks could only ever be realized in the long term, if at all. The first of these lay in assembling a global canon of texts; the second was creating an international network of scholars with the requisite linguistic expertise to interpret them in their original languages. The fulfillment of both aims was dependent on the global postal service that the journal's editors so prominently celebrated in 1884.

In the second part of the "Preliminary Tasks," which is subtitled as "Das Prinzip des Polyglottismus" (the principle of polyglotism), the editors argue that "true comparison is only [...] possible when the objects to be compared appear before us in their most unadulterated state."<sup>43</sup> Here unadulterated (in German: *unverfälscht*) means in the original language of composition. But within their overall conceptual organization of comparative literature, the *ACLU*'s editors also recognize that translation is a necessity. They therefore provisionally position their nascent discipline between two principles that stand in antagonism with one another: on the one hand, the "Prinzip des Polyglottismus" represents the idealized telos of comparative literature; on the other, the "Übersetzungsprinzip" (principle of translation) recognizes that reading all sources in their original languages is an entirely utopian expectation not only for their journal, which belonged within a central European context dominated by the imperial languages of Hungarian and German, but also for literary comparison itself, which is always undertaken from a specific linguistic and geopolitical standpoint.<sup>44</sup> The tension between these two principles eventually forced the editors of the *ACLU* to formulate a stadiad justification for their third principle of "decaglotism."

Before turning to the *ACLU*'s theorization of "decaglotism," it is important to take one aspect of the journal's epistemology into account. In an important footnote appearing in part one of the "Preliminary Tasks," the editors claim that the "most natural point of departure for the writing of literary history" is something that they call "modern inductive philosophy." They then proceed to accuse earlier literary histories—most notably that of Georg Gottfried Gervinus in his *Neuere Geschichte der poetischen National-Literatur der Deutschen* (*Most Recent History of the Poetic National Literature of the Germans*, 1842)—of failing to live up to the most important requirement of the inductive method: a scientific, prejudice-free, and non-nationalistic approach to the primary sources. To achieve the required level of objectivity, one must therefore use a "philosophy resting upon a solid natural-scientific and ethnological foundation."<sup>45</sup>

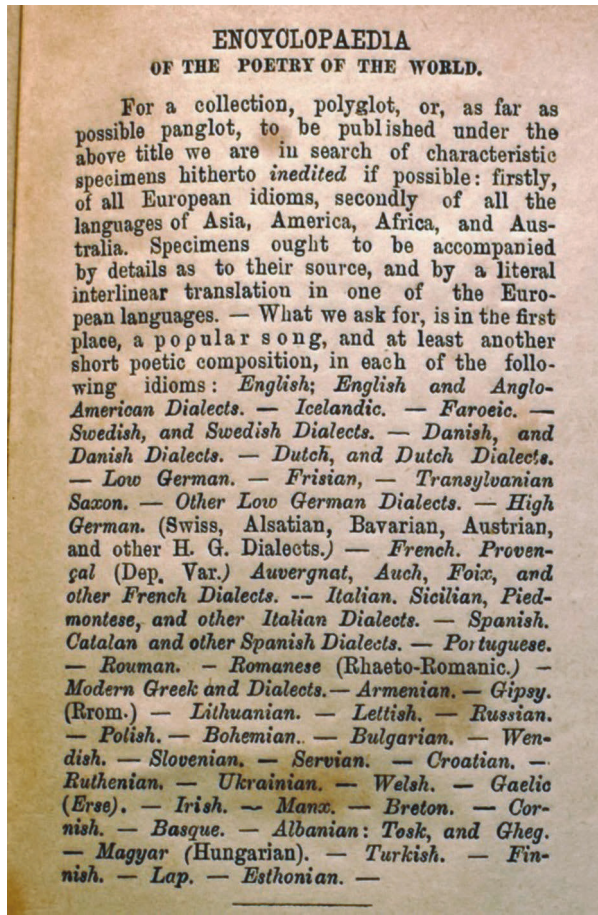
The *ACLU*'s ethnological inclinations can be found in one of its many subsidiary aims, that of compiling an "Encyclopedia of the Poetry of the World."

43 Hugo Meltzl, *Vorläufige Aufgaben der vergleichenden Litteratur*. II., 308.

44 Hugo Meltzl, *Vorläufige Aufgaben der vergleichenden Litteratur*. II., 307–310.

45 Hugo Meltzl, *Vorläufige Aufgaben der vergleichenden Litteratur*, 179–180.

Fig. 4: Call for contributions to an "Encyclopaedia of the Poetry of the World," *ACLU* 60 (1879), 177.

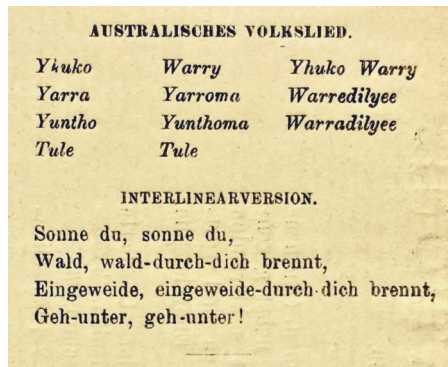


In this image, taken from an issue of the *ACLU* published in 1879, the editors announce their desire to launch a "polyglot, or, as far as possible panglot" collection, which would encompass "all European idioms" as well as "all the languages of Asia, America, Africa, and Australia." The literary "specimens" as they are called here in natural-scientific English, "ought to be accompanied by details as to their source, and by a literal interlinear translation in one of the European languages." The editors explicitly state that the emphasis of their collection will be "popular song," which they refer to elsewhere in the journal as *Volkslieder* (folksongs).

Here the close relation between early comparative literature and folklore studies becomes apparent. Two years after their announcement of the "Encyclopaedia of the

Poetry of the World,” the *ACLU* published a call for ethnographic sources issued by the South African Folklore Society. Invoking the cause of a “science of Man,” this call expresses a special interest in that which is seen as being “especially primitive in the languages and ideas of the South African aboriginal races.” The call is given a particular urgency, due to the claim that “European civilization is gaining ground among the Natives,” a situation that will lead to these sources being “if not altogether lost, at least far less frequent than they are now.”<sup>46</sup> Here stadial theory is already implicitly present in the claim that so-called ‘primitive’ cultures will inevitably decline when they come into account with European modernity.

Fig. 5: *Australisches Volkslied*, *ACLU* 145–148 (1884), 86.



The focus of the *ACLU* on so-called ‘primitive’ non-European sources can also be seen in the above submission from Herbert Augustus Strong (1841–1918), who was Professor of Comparative and Classical Philology at the University of Melbourne, and who had promoted the *ACLU* in Australia.<sup>47</sup> As the editors of the *ACLU* write: “Mr H. Strong [...] was so friendly as to draw our attention to this sun-hymn, which the Reverend Mr. Bulmer transcribed along the Murray and Edwards rivers from a local dialect.”<sup>48</sup> John Bulmer (1833–1913) ran Anglican missions, firstly at Yelta in the Murray River region of Victoria between 1855 and 1860, and later at Lake Tyers in

46 *ACLU* 99–100 (1881), 111–112.

47 G. R. Manton, Strong, Herbert Augustus (1841–1918), in: *Australian Dictionary of Biography* 6 (1976), URL: <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/strong-herbert-augustus-4659> [last accessed: May 14, 2023]. Strong wrote a positive account of the *ACLU*’s translations of Petöfi into other languages. Cf. Herbert A. Strong, A Polyglot Love-Song, in: *The Melbourne Review* 3 (January to October 1878), 108–112.

48 *Australisches Volkslied*, in: *ACLU* 145–148 (1884), 86.

Gippsland, from 1861 to 1908. He transcribed local Indigenous languages and songs as part of his missionary activities in both locations and was an important contact for the evolutionist anthropologist Alfred William Howitt (1830–1908).<sup>49</sup> Bulmer's reports on Indigenous cultures in Australia are referenced in the source to which Strong had directed the editors of the *ACLU*: an 1878 article entitled "The Australian Aborigines" written by a certain D. Macallister for the *Melbourne Review*. Macallister's article is thoroughly stadial, opining that Aboriginal Australians will soon "have ceased to exist, being destined seemingly to sink in the struggle of races." For this reason, he writes, "it is well that, for the information of future anthropologists, all that we know or can collect relating to the Aborigines should be placed on permanent record." Like Spencer and Frazer, Macallister also concludes that Indigenous Australians are entirely without religion: "Religion, or worship, they had none; none, at least, in any sense in which those terms are used by us."<sup>50</sup>

In which Indigenous language was this so-called sun-hymn written? The fact that this source was transcribed by Bulmer near the Murray River suggests that its original language was *Marawara*, a dialect spoken by the mission community at Yelta, and the southernmost dialect of the *Pakantji* language. According to the scholarly literature, the last speaker of *Marawara* died in 1939.<sup>51</sup> The conditions under which sources such as these were acquired throws into question the *ACLU*'s methodological claims about prejudice-free induction. According to Luise Hercus, the eminent researcher of Indigenous Australian languages, Bulmer often misunderstood his Aboriginal informants, who resorted to frequent repetitions and slower, more simplified modes of speech to make themselves understood to him.<sup>52</sup> The information that Bulmer received was therefore likely to have already been a simplified version of *Marawara*, which he then further transformed by rendering it into English, before the editors of the *ACLU* translated it into German: a process involving three stages of radical mediation. Such processes of mediation and translation also involved asymmetries of power associated with the colonial and missionary contexts in which the source was transcribed, a context informed

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- 49 Cf. the entry on John Bulmer, including Bulmer's correspondence with Howitt, in: *Howitt and Fison Archive*, URL: <https://howittandfison.org/article/91440> [last accessed: May 15, 2023]. Cf. also, W. E. H. Stanner, Howitt, Alfred William (1830–1908), in: *Australian Dictionary of Biography* 4 (1972), URL: <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/howitt-alfred-william-510> [last accessed: May 15, 2023].
- 50 David Macallister, The Australian Aborigines, in: *The Melbourne Review* 3, (January to October 1878), 137–161, 137, 149. The editors of the *ACLU* reference this article incorrectly as having appeared in volume 10 of the *Melbourne Review*.
- 51 Ian Clark/Edward Ryan, Aboriginal Spatial Organization in Far Northwest Victoria—A Reconstruction, in: *South Australian Geographical Journal* 107 (2008), 15–48, 30, 26.
- 52 Luise Hercus, The Marawara Language of Yelta: Interpreting Linguistic Records of the Past, in: *Aboriginal History* 8 (1–2/1984), 56–62, esp. 58–61.

by both evolutionist theories and religious assumptions. All of this demonstrates that early comparative literature, as manifested in the *ACLU*, began as a discipline reliant on colonial sources, assumptions, and misinterpretations.

The fact that the *ACLU* was interested in collecting and publishing these ethnographic materials demonstrates the close relations between early comparative literature, folklore studies, and the emerging discipline of anthropology. Here the would-be inductive and natural scientific focus of the *ACLU* is revealed in another of its programmatic statements, the “Gesetze der vergleichenden Literaturforschung” (“Laws of Comparative Literary Research”), which appeared in 1880. The first of three of these principles demonstrate that in terms of methodology, the interest of the *ACLU* was in the purportedly most ‘primitive’ and organic of materials:

1. Prose is to poetry as mechanism is to organism, as the *posterius* is to the *prius*.
2. Poetry is never to be understood as camouflaged prose, which, as merely studied artistic literature, can also only ever be mere mechanism.
3. The dominant tendency since Dunlop, Benfey and Max Müller, that of a predilection for following prose traditions, is an obsolete point of view. In the first instance one should compare only folksongs, not fairy tales.<sup>53</sup>

The fundamental opposition at work in these principles is that of organism versus mechanism, and we recall here Herbert Spencer’s methodological principle that the “law of organic progress is the law of all progress.” The would-be natural scientific foundation of comparative literature is thus to be found in its allegedly most primordial, elementary, and organic materials. Oral folksongs (*Volkslieder*) are therefore seen to predate the civilizational and mechanistic interventions of prose traditions, which are associated by the editors of the *ACLU* with the tradition of recording fairy tales (*Märchen*). Here writing is seen as a belated form of mere *Kunstpoesie* (literally: artificial poetry). For this reason, the *ACLU*’s editors seek to supersede the earlier work of literary historians such as John Colin Dunlop and of Sanskrit scholars such as Theodor Benfey and Max Müller by propagating a more radical scientism. This scientism’s chief distinction from the comparative philology of Benfey and Müller lay in its claim to be based on a wider range of allegedly more ‘primitive’ and organic materials, including sources from outside of the Indo-European language family.

As evidenced by the *ACLU*, early comparative literature has two main features. First, the editors emphasize an anti-nationalist and would be objective scientism, according to which all languages and cultures of the world should, at least in principle, be treated equally (as we shall see, this proved to be impossible in practice). Second, this scientism was inductive, ethnographic and colonialist in orientation,

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53 Gesetze der vergleichenden Literaturforschung, in: *ACLU* 70 (1880), 149–150.



calling for fieldwork submissions from around the world to create a kind of museum of world literature. One of the roles of this literary museum would be that of ethnographic salvage: preserving so-called ‘primitive’ traditions that were thought to be in danger of extinction through exposure to European modernity, and which promised to reveal the most primordial and elementary aspects of literary composition.<sup>54</sup> These tendencies were by no means exclusive to the *ACLU*; indeed, they can also be found in the works of a leading theorist of literary comparison in this period of the German *Geisteswissenschaften*: Wilhelm Scherer.

### Stadial Change in Scherer

In an article appearing in the *ACLU* in 1877 and entitled “Zur vergleichenden Ästhetik der Lyrik” (“On the Comparative Aesthetics of Lyric Poetry”), Hugo von Meltzl sees Wilhelm Scherer as pointing to the “foundational lines of a most promising subsidiary area of our enormous science of the future, comparative literature.”<sup>55</sup> Meltzl then quotes the following passage from Scherer’s review of Karl Lachmann’s edition of the *Minnesang*:

The project of a historical and comparative poetics must, sooner or later, be ventured. The development of ethnography is already pressing in this direction, though so far it has admittedly paid little attention to this problem [...] If poetics does not want to repeatedly tread the same old worn-out paths, then it goes without saying that its propositions should be deduced from the collected materials that are available, and that it should ascend from simple to complicated formations.<sup>56</sup>

Here Scherer (1841–1886), who is often thought of as the main progenitor of literary positivism in Germany,<sup>57</sup> offers his own version of stadial theory. The notion that poetry might ascend in its development from “simple to complicated formations” suggests an evolutionism similar to that outlined by Spencer. Indeed, a closer examination of Scherer’s works, and especially of his *Poetik* (*Poetics*), published after

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54 On the idea of salvage in early anthropology, cf. Jacob Gruber, *Ethnographic Salvage and the Shaping of Anthropology*, in: *American Anthropologist* 72 (6/1970), 1289–1299.

55 Hugo von Meltzl, *Zur vergleichenden Ästhetik der Lyrik*, in: *ACLU* 2 (1877), 39–41, 39.

56 Wilhelm Scherer, *Des minnesangs frühling* herausgegeben von Karl Lachmann und Moriz Haupt, in: *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 19 (1876), 197–205.

57 For this ‘classical’ view of Scherer, cf. Peter Salm, *Three Modes of Criticism: The Literary Theories of Scherer, Walzel and Staiger*, Cleveland 1968; Wolfgang Kaltenbrunner, *Literary Positivism? Scientific Theories and Methods in the Work of Sainte-Beuve (1804–1869) and Wilhelm Scherer (1841–1886)*, in: *Studium* 3 (2010), 74–88.

his death in 1888 but written during the 1870s and 1880s, reveals an evolutionist differentiation between progressive stages of poetic evolution.

In the *Poetik*, Scherer links the origins of ancient Greek poetry to ritual and performance. The key differentiation that he makes is between “gebundene Rede” (bound speech), which means poetry or song, and “ungebundene Rede” (unbound speech), which means prose:

The dance of the chorus [...] relates to the visual, and the dance steps are the basis of rhythm. The words [...] are bound to the steps of the dance. It is rhythm that first creates that which we call bound speech [...] And in this way, the chorus is the origin of bound speech in general. The fairytale, by contrast, is unbound speech, or narrative in prose.<sup>58</sup>

According to this view, dance, song, and rhythm provide the original context for the emergence of poetry. In its most primordial form, poetry is bound to bodily movements. Prose is already a secondary formation, which occurs after poetry has been unbound or abstracted from the context of bodily performance.

Scherer initially links these developments to the example of the chorus in classical Greek tragedy. But because his *Poetik* makes claims that are meant to be based on contemporary empirical foundations, reconstructions of classical Greek culture do not suffice as scientific evidence. For this reason, and in a move that is typically stadial, Scherer then turns to contemporary so-called ‘primitive’ cultures to substantiate his claims concerning the relation between poetry and dance. For Scherer, the development of early literature unfolds across three stages: the chorus or bound speech is followed by traditional proverbs or sayings (*Sprichwörter*), which later become written fairytales (*Märchen*) recorded in prose or unbound speech. These are, he writes:

the oldest of all [forms of poetry, AN] in existence: the traces of the beginnings of later, more highly developed literatures lead back to these earlier forms, and they can also be found today as they are used by *Naturvölker*.<sup>59</sup>

One of the so-called *Naturvölker* mentioned by Scherer are Aboriginal Australians, whom he sees as still operating at the most ‘primitive’ stage of poetic creation, that of the *Chorlied* or chorus accompanied by dance. He writes:

The oldest reports concerning Germanic poetry, indeed Aryan poetry in general, lead back to this connection between celebratory dance and song. And there are also many unusual examples of these collective dances combined

58 Wilhelm Scherer, *Poetik*, Berlin 1888, 12–13.

59 Scherer, *Poetik*, 10.

with song to be found among *Naturvölker*. I would like to refer to one here, the strangest one known to me, although it is obscene; but in these matters, one is permitted, as in the cases of anatomy and physiology, not to shy away from touching upon filth. It is an Australian dance, reported on by Friedrich Müller. There were similar songs, for example in Greece: the phallic songs τὰ φαλλικά (Arist. Poet. 1449a).

This example displays all the features of a stadial theory of literature. First, a Eurocentric and universal course of poetic development is theorized and applied to all cultures. Second, the allegedly most 'primitive' features of this developmental scale are found in European antiquity (in this case the reference is to Aristotle's *Poetics*) and, via the method of armchair anthropology, in contemporary so-called 'primitive' life. Here Scherer's reference is to Friedrich Müller (1834–1898), a Viennese Sanskrit scholar, comparative philologist, and ethnographer who wrote the ethnographic section of the *Reise der österreichischen Fregatte Novara (Journey of the Austrian Frigate Novara, 1868)*, and who later wrote a standard work on ethnography.<sup>60</sup> In an account filled with the myriad prejudices of Eurocentrism, Müller reports on what he perceives to be a "highly obscene dance" allegedly performed by First Nations Australians.<sup>61</sup> Scherer has, with some plausibility, been referred to as the most influential Germanist of the nineteenth century.<sup>62</sup> It is therefore significant for the history of *Germanistik* that stadial theory, partly derived from colonial sources such as the prejudiced account of Müller, was a foundational aspect of Scherer's methodology.

### Stadial Theory in the *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum*

Was stadial theory also a feature of the *ACLU*? While the answer to this question is yes, the stadial model introduced by the journal's editors seems to have emerged due to both local politics and practical necessity. Indeed, in many ways, the journal's recourse to stadial theory is completely at odds with one of its main theoretical aims: that of treating all literatures of the world equally. In this respect, a methodological problem that beset comparative literature at its origins arguably still characterizes many of the debates in the discipline today. How can we treat all literatures of the

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60 Friedrich Müller, *Allgemeine Ethnographie*, Vienna 1873.

61 Friedrich Müller, *Reise der österreichischen Fregatte Novara um die Erde in den Jahren 1857, 1858, 1859. Anthropologischer Teil. Dritter Abtheilung. Ethnographie*, Vienna 1868, 7.

62 Hans-Harald Müller, Wilhelm Scherer (1841–1886), in: Christoph König/Hans-Harald Müller/Werner Röcke (eds.), *Wissenschaftsgeschichte der Germanistik in Porträts*, Berlin 2000, 80–94, 80.

world equally, while at the same conceding that one's capacity to learn foreign languages and understand other cultures is necessary limited? Choosing to specialize on some languages and cultures and not on others is a necessity for all comparatists. But such choices probably also imply either conscious or unconscious judgements concerning literary value.

In the nineteenth century, stadial theory was one of the models used to make such comparative judgements. The editors of the *ACLU* eventually came up with two stadial distinctions to justify their decision to reduce the scope of the journal to ten literatures of supposedly world rank. At the outset, they maintain that this restriction is simply a practical measure "in the interests of a prudent economy." Moreover, they also concede that "from the comparative-literary standpoint, the importance of one literature at the expense of others ceases completely; – they are all equally important."<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, the practical necessities of running a journal made exclusionary selection processes unavoidable for the editors of the *ACLU*. They then make two distinctions concerning literary value, both of which can be found in the following passage, which addresses those literatures that did make it into the journal's canon of "decaglotism":

The literatures of the Danes, the Norwegians, the Latvians, the Finns, the Estonians, the Basques, the Irish, the Bretons, the Poles, the Czechs, the Slavonic peoples of western central Europe [*Wenden*], the Serbs, the Russians, the Modern Greeks, the Albanians, the Romanians, the Turks, as well as of the remaining smaller tribes [*Volksstämme*] of Europe are either still only literatures of the folk song [*Volksliederlitt.*], or rather, if they are artistic literatures [*Kunstlitteraturen*], then mainly of recent emergence and of thoroughly naturalistic, in the best case *romantic*, coloring. The Hungarian is perhaps the only non-Germanic literary area among the smaller literatures to have fundamentally broken with romanticism and to have ascended towards a true classicism, admittedly through a slow process of around 500 years, but also only recently in its most modern publications, with Petöfi at its peak, who, alongside Goethe, is the greatest and most universal artistic poet [*Kunstlyriker*], at least of this century.<sup>64</sup>

What are the stadial distinctions at work here? First, all national literatures, the editors of the *ACLU* maintain, begin with an oral folktales tradition of collective authorship, referred to as *Volksliederlitteratur* (literatures of the folksong). Later, these folk traditions evolve into artistic literatures (*Kunstlitteraturen*), meaning texts written by individual authors. Second, even within this higher tradition of artistic literatures, there is an evolutionary refinement that involves the taming of romanticism into

63 Hugo Meltzl, Vorläufige Aufgaben der vergleichenden Litteratur. III, in: *ACLU* 24 (1878), 498, 496 (emphasis in the original).

64 Hugo Meltzl, Vorläufige Aufgaben III, 494–495 (emphasis in the original).

a more formally perfect classicism. Goethean classicism (Weimar classicism) is regarded as the model for this supposedly universal evolutionary process. In this passage, Hungarian literature—a literature of political power within the *ACLU*'s local Austro-Hungarian context—is conveniently regarded as having recently ascended to this level classicism. By contrast, other local languages of Transylvania – most notably Romanian and Romani – are excluded from the *ACLU*'s canon of decaglotism, being seen as mere folk traditions. It is for this reason that Anca Parvulescu and Manuela Boatcă associate the *ACLU* not with a cosmopolitan polyglotism but rather with what they call *interglottism*, a descriptor that tracks the internal “linguistic hierarchies” of Transylvania’s complex imperial history.<sup>65</sup>

### Conclusion: The Specter of Literary Value

The case of the *ACLU* reveals how stadial models of comparison and change—derived initially from biology and later adopted by early ethnography and anthropology—were used to bolster the would-be scientific status of a new academic field: comparative literature. In their initial conception of comparative literature, the editors of the *ACLU* aimed for an objective and value-free scientism according to which all literatures of the world would be treated equally, independently of any nationalistic prejudices. Their vision of the field included building a global corpus of literary texts, including those from so-called ‘primitive’ cultures that were expected to disappear when confronted by European modernity. In this respect their vision of the discipline resembled, at times, a colonialist museum organized along the lines of what Jacob Gruber has called “ethnographic salvage.”<sup>66</sup>

Yet as this paper reveals, a purportedly value-free scientism could not withstand the pressures of running the *ACLU*, which was forced—for reasons of space, linguistic expertise, and local politics — to make exclusionary judgements about what to include within its pages. Theories of stadial change thus served as a scientific cloak used to cover over the ideological judgements about literary value that were used to justify the *ACLU*'s eventual canon of “decaglotism.” It is thus no surprise—given the dominance of German and Hungarian in the journal's pages—that the values of Weimar classicism became the yardstick according to which national literatures were granted admission into the journal's canon, and that Hungarian literature was conveniently seen as having recently achieved this distinction of classicism.

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65 Parvulescu and Boatcă write that the *ACLU* “placed Romanian and Romani literatures [...] strictly within the framework of folklore, mirroring colonial and imperial differences” (102). For their discussion of “interglottism,” see 92–93.

66 Cf. Gruber, *Ethnographic Salvage*.

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# Modeling Diversity, Comparability, and Change

## Transformations of Evolutionism and the Comparative Method in French Ethnography After 1900 (Victor Segalen)

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Kirsten Kramer

**Abstract** *This paper examines models and modeling practices that emerge in the context of modern ethnographic-ethnological knowledge production in their relation to historical change. First, its focus is on evolutionist models of knowledge that arise in the 19th century in the context of the “comparative method” and describe cultural diversity in terms of historical change. Second, using Victor Segalen’s Essai sur l’exotisme as an example, it explores the extent to which the gradual replacement of classical evolutionism at the beginning of the 20th century causes the emergence of new comparisons. It is argued that this situation gives rise to significant changes in comparative models and modeling, in which a fundamental historical change takes place that affects the modern formation of knowledge as a whole.*

### Introduction: Ethnographic Knowledge Formation, Modeling, and Change

In the period between the 18th and 20th centuries, an extensive ethnographic and scientific knowledge of the world as well as of the cultural, linguistic, and ethnic diversity of humankind emerges in Europe, which is closely related to the progressive exploration, measuring and appropriation of non-European territories and peoples. In the course of this “politics of world exploration”<sup>1</sup> characterizing modernity, a complex knowledge formation arises in France around 1900, which is marked by the close exchange of ethnographically oriented travel literature, comparative sciences, and academic ethnology. This knowledge formation draws on diverse practices of comparison and associated knowledge models in which foreign territories, societies, and human groups, in their cultural or ethnic variability, are related to each other and to Europe.

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1 On the concept of the “politics of world exploration” cf. Philippe Despoix, *Die Welt vermessen. Dispositive der Entdeckungsreise im Zeitalter der Aufklärung*, Göttingen 2007, 11.

The comparative operations, knowledge models, and modeling practices underlying this knowledge formation are inextricably linked to phenomena and processes of historical change. This connection is revealed, on the one hand, in the way models and modeling practices relate to the empirical world. Models can be understood as media that provide indispensable frames of reference for understanding and knowing the world.<sup>2</sup> They acquire a special epistemic and heuristic value by constituting formalized representations that develop their own ordering patterns and arrangements, which reduce the diversity and complexity of the phenomenal world and thus ensure its intelligibility and meaningfulness. In this perspective, models function as means for structuring and ordering data and information, which enable a basic orientation in the real world. This ordering function characterizes in particular the influential evolutionist model of knowledge, which emerged in the 19th century in the context of the development of the so-called “comparative method” in different disciplines of knowledge (such as biology, linguistics and ethnology) and which essentially seeks to describe and explain the diversity and variability of human modes of existence, life and language forms via processes of stadial change and universal stages of cultural and ethnic development.<sup>3</sup> The evolutionist knowledge model thus provides an overarching heuristic frame of reference that permits us to grasp the close connection established during the 19th century between various sciences, as well as between diverse practices of comparison, manifestations of human diversity, and phenomena of historical change.

On the other hand, in the transition from the 19th to the 20th century, historical change is revealed in the significant transformations of knowledge models and their underlying comparative practices. At the beginning of the 20th century, the critical-productive discussion of the comparative method and its modeling of cultural developments and transformations not only characterizes North American and British anthropology,<sup>4</sup> but also informs the academic debates in France. It is situated, there, within the framework of a specific knowledge formation, which is marked by the comparatively late establishment of anthropology or ethnology as an independent academic discipline. This process of academic “professionalization” is closely linked to the founding of the *Institut d’ethnologie de Paris* at the Sorbonne by Marcel Mauss,

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- 2 For a concise account of models and their functions with respect to knowledge production see in more detail the introduction to the present volume, cf. also Mary S. Morgan, *The World in the Model. How Economists Work and Think*, Cambridge 2012, esp. chap 10, 378–412.
  - 3 On the comparative method and the evolutionist model of stadial change, cf. Devin Griffiths, *The Comparative Method and the History of the Humanities*, in: *History of the Humanities* 2 (2/2017), 473–505; cf. also Angus Nicholl’s contribution in the present volume.
  - 4 On the different denominations of the disciplines prevailing in France, Great Britain and the US cf. James Clifford, *On Ethnographic Surrealism*, in: *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 23 (4/1981), 539–564, 542; on France cf. also Werner Peterman, *Die Geschichte der Ethnologie*, Wuppertal 2004, 796–834.

Paul Rivet, and Lucien Lévi-Bruhl in 1925, at a time when chairs of anthropology had already existed for a generation in the Anglo-American world.<sup>5</sup> The particular situation in France owes much to the critical revision and amplification of the methods and objects of biologically oriented physical anthropology, which held a dominant position in France until 1900 and was increasingly supplemented in the first decades of the 20th century by the ethnographic study of the languages, local customs, and material artifacts of non-European cultures. At the same time, the French field is characterized by the integration of sociological methods and approaches, developed from the 1890s by Émile Durkheim and his disciples.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the institutional establishment of ethnology in France is closely related to the reorganization, carried out during the late 1920s, of the *Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro*, established in 1878. This led to the founding of the *Musée de l'Homme* in 1937, which served as the institutional site where the classification and ordering principles of the “science of man” were established as well as implemented. In addition to Mauss and Rivet, numerous ethnologists of the new generation—such as Alfred Métraux, Marcel Griaule or Maurice Leenhardt—were involved in the formation and development of the *Musée de l'Homme*.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, as Claude Lévi-Strauss emphasized in his survey article “French Sociology” published in 1945,<sup>8</sup> from the 1920s at the latest there was a close exchange between scientific ethnology, sociology and ethnographically influenced literature in France. On the one hand, after returning from fieldwork, numerous ethnologists—such as Métraux, Griaule, or Lévi-Strauss—published, in addition to their scientific studies, ethnographic books with autobiographical or literary traits which were closely interrelated with their ethnological work. These books do not primarily provide an alternative presentation or organization of ethnographic data, but aim at a redefinition of the relationship between observing ethnologist and observed object or even come to suggest—as paradigmatically illustrated by the best-known example, the autobiographical travelogue *Tristes Tropiques* (1955)

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- 5 Cf. Alice L. Conklin, *In the Museum of Man. Race, Anthropology, and Empire in France, 1850–1950*, Ithaca/London 2013, 86–91.
  - 6 On the role the *Institut d'ethnologie* played in the context of the establishment of ethnology as an academic discipline in France, cf. Petermann, *Die Geschichte der Ethnologie*, 813–815; cf. also Clifford, On Ethnographic Surrealism; Irene Albers, *Der diskrete Charme der Anthropologie. Michel Leiris' ethnologische Poetik*, Göttingen 2018, 205–210; on the formation of the discipline in the interplay between physical anthropology, sociology and ethnography, cf. the detailed account in Conklin, *In the Museum of Man*, 58–99.
  - 7 On the importance of the *Musée de l'Homme* with respect to the development and establishment of French ethnology, cf. Clifford, On Ethnographic Surrealism; Conklin, *In the Museum of Man*, 100–144.
  - 8 Cf. Claude Lévi-Strauss, French Sociology, in: Georges Gurvitch/Wilbert Moore (eds.), *Twentieth Century Sociology*, New York 1945, 503–537, with reference to the *Collège de Sociologie*.

by Claude Lévi-Strauss—a complete reorientation of the anthropological project itself, which in the case of Lévi-Strauss was accompanied by fundamental transformations in the approach of structural anthropology.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, as early as 1900, an extensive body of travel literature published by a wide variety of writers (such as Victor Segalen, Blaise Cendrars, Raymond Roussel, Henri Michaux, et al.) began to appear, which in part drew on the French genre of the *voyage philosophique*, but above all on the traditions of European travel writing. The authors and literary travel reports were also often situated in the context of contemporary artistic avant-garde movements, such as abstract art or surrealism, in which new principles of representation and form, oriented toward non-European and “pre-modern” cultures, were developed. Numerous ethnologists such as André Schaeffner, Michel Leiris, and Griaule belonged to or were closely associated with these avant-garde movements.<sup>10</sup>

In contrast to Germany or the Anglo-American world, in France the close exchange between different actors, institutions, ways of writing, and forms of publication gave rise to a practice formation characterized by multiple interconnections,<sup>11</sup> which—because of the interweavings of ethnology, ethnography, and literature—clearly resists the simple juxtaposition of a “scientific culture” and a “literary culture.”<sup>12</sup> Highly complex forms and patterns of comparison-based knowledge production appear, which are marked by a critical-productive discussion of the specific “models” of evolutionary change that underlie 19th-century methods of comparison. At the same time, in the interplay of scientifically and aesthetically grounded comparative practices, they, in turn, also come to develop modeling practices that indicate and initiate processes of historical change which decisively shape the knowledge formation of the first half of the 20th century.

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9 On the publication of “second books” by numerous French ethnologists, cf. the seminal study by Vincent Debaene, *L'adieu au voyage: L'ethnologie française entre science et littérature*, Paris 2010.

10 For a detailed account of the close connections between ethnography and surrealism, which are revealed, in particular, in the temporal continuity of the emergence of the avant-garde movement and the institutionalization of the scientific discipline, as well as in personal collaborations in the context of exhibition or publication projects, cf. notably Clifford, *On Ethnographic Surrealism*; for a critical discussion of Clifford's argument, which focuses in particular on the different attitudes toward French colonialism, cf. Jean Jamin, *L'ethnographie mode d'emploi. De quelques rapports de l'ethnologie avec le malaise dans la civilisation*, in: Jacques Hainard/Roland Kaehr (eds.), *Le mal et la douleur*, Neuchâtel 1986, 45–79.

11 On the implications underlying the term “practice formation,” cf. notably Frank Hillebrandt, *Die Soziologie der Praxis als post-strukturalistischer Materialismus*, in: Hilmar Schäfer (ed.), *Praxistheorie. Ein soziologisches Forschungsprogramm*, Bielefeld 2016, 71–93.

12 For a broad critical revision of the analytical opposition of these two cultures, such as that underlying Bourdieu's type of sociological field analysis, cf. Debaene, *L'adieu au voyage*, 11–42.

Starting from Franz Boas' influential critique of the comparative method, the present chapter will begin by undertaking a brief reconstruction of the discursive field of knowledge production, which in the 19th century characterized the emergence of "comparativism" in various knowledge disciplines of the humanities and sciences and equally marked the scientific as well as the literary reception of the "comparative method" in early 20th-century France. In a further step, the closer implications of this reception will be explored using the example of the *Essai sur l'exotisme* (1904–1919) written by the French writer Victor Segalen. It will be shown that Segalen's programmatic essay does not merely develop an aesthetic response to the encounter between Western and non-Western cultures and peoples, characterized by recourse to ethnographic classifications and categorizations; rather, it also functions as a discursive "intersection point" for different knowledge and comparative practices, whose co-presence points to conflicting models of the experience of linguistic, cultural, and ethnic "diversity." These comparative models paradigmatically reveal a reordering of ethnographic-ethnological knowledge production in modernity, a reordering which—according to the central argument put forward in this article—results from the failure of, or central shifts within, the previously prevailing comparative model of evolutionary change, which cause a significant change of the modern practice formation as a whole.

### **The Evolutionist Model of Change. Ethnology, Ethnography, and the Comparative Method before and after 1900**

In terms of the history of science, the field of ethnographic-ethnological knowledge production during the 19th century is significantly marked by the emergence of the "comparative method," which developed in various individual sciences such as philology, linguistics, biology and anthropology, and which largely defines the self-understanding of Western modernity.<sup>13</sup> The foundation of this method is characterized by a set of basic abstract assumptions, which from the beginning are connected with ideas of historical and evolutionary change. As is demonstrated already in the field of linguistics, comparisons do not primarily aim at typological classifications of the compared objects (*comparata*), but at the reconstruction of their genealogical origins and transformations, for which the idea of temporal development is central.

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13 The emergence of the "comparative method" calls forth a comprehensive historical approach that does not view comparisons as cognitive or hermeneutical operations but as broader cultural practices carried out by historical and social actors and institutions in specific situational contexts; cf. Eleonora Rohland/Kirsten Kramer, Introduction. On "Doing Comparison"—Practices of Comparing, in: Eleonora Rohland et al. (eds.), *Contact, Conquest and Colonization. How Practices of Comparing Shaped Empires and Colonialism around the World*, New York 2020, 1–16; cf. also the introduction to the present volume.

At the same time, the genealogically oriented investigations combine with the search for general deep structures and law-like patterns underlying the changes of individual phenomena traced in the different subfields.<sup>14</sup> These imply a progressive development from the simple to the complex, from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous, which presupposes a process of increasing differentiation and, by way of analogy, comes to closely unite the different fields of investigation of philology, biology, and linguistics.<sup>15</sup>

The central assumptions outlined here, which underlie the notion of broader evolutionist processes and are developed prior to or concurrently with Darwin's theory of natural selection, with which they are nonetheless not identical, can be understood to form the heuristic basis of a complex "model" of historical change that decisively shapes 19th-century scientific thought. As previously mentioned, models are distinguished by a specific organization of data that constitutes their particular "typicality" or representativeness with respect to natural or social objects of the world. Particularly in the form of "small-world accounts," they provide, on the one hand, representations or interpretations of the objects, many of which are closely related to concept-based ways of "theorizing" the world. On the other hand, they are based on rule-guided simplifications and form-based scale reductions, in which intricate social or scientific processes are condensed or "compressed," these ways of compressing guarantee the manageability of a reality that has become too complex to be grasped, and thus permit the operationalization of the models with regard to interventions, manipulations and transformations of the real world.<sup>16</sup> Based on this definition, the forms of analysis and description that emerge in the context of the "comparative method" can be understood as expressions of a fundamental "evolutionist" model of historical change, founded in particular on the simplifying and reductive assumption of a linear progression grounded in causal relations; it not only implies the transition from simple to complex forms of organization, but in many cases simultaneously presupposes—as paradigmatically illustrated by Herbert Spencer's concept of progress—the transfer of organic processes conceived in botany or biology to the realm of social and cultural communities as described in ethnology and anthropology.<sup>17</sup>

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14 On the emergence and the central theoretical premises underlying the comparative method in the humanities and social sciences, cf. the comprehensive overview in Griffiths, *The Comparative Method and the History of the Humanities*.

15 Cf. Angus Nicholls, Max Müller and the Comparative Method, in: *Comparative Critical Studies* 12 (2/2015), 213–234; cf. also Angus Nicholls' contribution in the present volume.

16 On these forms and functions of models, cf. in particular Morgan, *The World in the Model*, 378–412.

17 Cf. Herbert Spencer, *Progress. Its Law and Cause*, in: *Westminster Review* (January–April 1857), 445–485; (446); George W. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, New York 1987; Matei

The particular historical significance that the model acquires within modern ethnology and anthropology emerges most clearly in the context of the fundamental critique formulated by Franz Boas in the article “The Limitations of the Comparative Method” published in 1896, which begins with a definition of the discipline’s position: “Modern anthropology has discovered the fact that human society has grown and developed everywhere in such a manner that its forms, its opinions and its actions have many fundamental traits in common.”<sup>18</sup> Boas’ critique is directed against the notion of historical and cultural change advocated in 19th-century British and German anthropology by Herbert Spencer, Edward Burnett Tylor, John Lubbock, and the followers of Adolf Bastian, which presupposes a uniform human development,<sup>19</sup> and is based on the universalistic assumption that the appearance of similar cultural phenomena (such as rites, linguistic forms, or pictorial designs) conditions the same development of these phenomena in all places of the world.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, as Tylor points out in the first chapter of *Primitive Culture*, he is not concerned with the mere comparative description of genealogical relations between cultures and societies, but with the search for overarching universal “laws” firmly embedded in the psyche and thought of humanity, laws that transcend any idiosyncratic historical circumstance.<sup>21</sup> The teleological stadial model of human evolution associated with these laws explains differences between peoples and societies by different rates of development, assuming that European cultures have developed at a faster speed than non-European peoples and “races,” which are therefore located in earlier evolutionary stages of political, social and technological development. This “classical” evolutionist model is thus based on a specific “economy of time” that contrasts the modern experience of the accelerated historicity of Europeans with “primitive” non-Europeans who—although seen to be “without history”—are paradoxically viewed as representing the common origin of the historical development of both civilizations.<sup>22</sup> The evolutionist model became widespread in the 19th century, including in France. It appears in particular in the context of the

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Candea, *Comparison in Anthropology. The Impossible Method*. Cambridge 2019, notably 64–67; cf. also Angus Nicholls’ contribution in the present volume.

- 18 Franz Boas, The Limitations of the Comparative Method of Anthropology. In: *Science* 103 (4/1896), 901–908, 901.
- 19 On the British tradition, cf. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, 170.
- 20 Cf. Boas, The Limitations of the Comparative Method of Anthropology, 904.
- 21 Cf. Edward B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture. Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art, and Custom*, Cambridge 2010 [1871], 1–22; cf. also Griffiths, The Comparative Method and the History of the Humanities, 484.
- 22 On the figure of the “primitive” as an expression of a modern evolutionist “economy of time,” cf. Erhard Schüttpezel, *Die Moderne im Spiegel des Primitiven. Weltliteratur und Ethnologie (1870–1960)*, München 2005, 392–400; with reference to Fabian who views the figure of the “primitive” less as an empirical object than a “categorical order,” cf. Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other. How Anthropology Makes its Object*, New York 1983, 18; on the modern his-



“physical anthropology” and “racial science” advocated by the physician Paul Broca, which, during the second half of the century, approached the problem of human variability on a scientific and positivist basis within the framework of quantitative craniological and osteological studies. Yet it was also taken up within the broader debates surrounding the “natural history” of humankind, pursued by the influential naturalist and zoologist Quatrefages de Bréau at the *Musée d’Histoire naturelle* during the same period, as well as forming the basis of the neo-Lamarckian assumptions of inferior and superior “races” that underlie the ethnographic studies of Jules Ernest-Théodore Hamy, the founding director of the *Musée de l’Ethnographie du Trocadéro*.<sup>23</sup>

Classical evolutionism displays numerous variations in the context of the “natural history” of humankind. These variations are revealed, for example, in the co-presence of monogenetic and polygenetic models of the origin of mankind, in the simultaneous acceptance or rejection of the continuity of biological and social phenomena, and in the alternating inclusion or denial of the influence of environmental and climatic factors on the development of peoples and “races.”<sup>24</sup> Yet despite these variations, it is a model of comparison that, in the 19th century, is omnipresent in Europe. The viability of this model is based on the use of temporalizing comparisons, which place the peoples, languages or “races” being compared on a universal, hierarchically interpreted scale of progress. Due to the postulation of the assumption of a “uniform” humanity, the normative model can be interpreted as an attempt to deliberately control and tame the abundance and diversity of collected ethnographic data and information discovered in the course of the European “world exploration politics” during the 18th and beginning of the 19th century, by referring back to an overarching standard of comparison. Both the allocation of the compared objects (*comparata*) and the selection of the comparative grounds (*tertia*) thus reveal a tendency to homogenize and discipline the multiplying objects of comparing, thereby assigning a fundamental ordering function to comparison with regard to contemporary ethnographic-ethnological knowledge production.

As paradigmatically illustrated by the critique of the comparative method formulated by Boas, after 1900, the evolutionist model of knowledge and comparison experienced a crisis. This critique, however, does not imply an overcoming of the procedure of comparison itself. Although Boas opposes generalizing comparisons,

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torical “experience of acceleration,” cf. Reinhart Koselleck, *Zeitschichten. Studien zur Historik*, Frankfurt am Main 2000.

23 On the traditions of French anthropology in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, cf. the extensive account provided in Conklin, *In the Museum of Man*, 24–57; Claude Blanckaert, *De la race à l’évolution. Paul Broca et l’anthropologie française, 1850–1900*, Paris 2009; Nélia Dias, *Le Musée d’Ethnographie du Trocadéro (1878–1908). Anthropologie et muséologie en France*, Paris 1991.

24 On these variants, cf. Conklin, *In the Museum of Man*, 42–43; cf. also Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*; H. Lowie, *The History of Ethnological Theory*, New York 1937, chapter 3, 4, and 7.

which combine the deductive assumption of the uniform development of humankind according to universal laws (and according to overarching similarities) with the idea of the superiority of Europeans over non-European peoples and civilizations, he does not abandon comparison completely. Instead, he demands an inductive comparative approach borrowed from history, which is guided by the local environments of singular or particular rites, customs or language forms and their respective geographical distributions.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, he calls for a critical examination of whether and to what extent observed phenomena or peoples can serve at all as adequate *comparata* for ethnological comparisons. For Boas, it is a question of the conditions of possibility of “comparability” itself:

We cannot say that the occurrence of the same phenomenon is always due to the same causes, and that thus it is proved that the human mind obeys the same laws everywhere. We must demand that the causes from which it developed be investigated and that comparisons be restricted to those phenomena which have been proved to be effects of the same causes. [...] In short, before extended comparisons are made, the comparability of the material must be proved.<sup>26</sup>

Subsequently to Boas, the comparative method and the associated evolutionist model experienced a very heterogeneous reception. In the English-speaking world, a major rift developed in the 20th century between empirically oriented American “cultural anthropologists” (such as Ruth Benedict or Margaret Mead) and British “armchair anthropologists.” While the former focus on internal explanation and extensive fieldwork and dismiss evolutionism, British anthropologists such as W.H.R. Rivers or Alfred Radcliffe-Brown follow Tylor’s approach of comparing recorded data, from which more general regularities or patterns of cultural development continue to be derived.<sup>27</sup>

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25 Cf. Boas, *The Limitations of the Comparative Method*, 905: “We have another method, which in many respects is much safer. A detailed study of customs in their bearings to the total culture of the tribe practicing them, and in connection with an investigation of their geographical distribution among neighboring tribes, afford us almost always a means of determining with considerable accuracy the historical causes that led to the formation of the customs in question and to the psychological processes that were at work in their development.” On the foundation of Boas’ “historical” methodology, cf. also Can-dea, *Comparison in Anthropology*, 75–78; Fred Eggan, *Social Anthropology and the Method of Controlled Comparison*, in: *American Anthropologist* 56 (5/1954), 743–763, esp. 749–750; Richard Handler, *The Uses of Incommensurability in Anthropology*, in: *New Literary History* 40 (3/2009), 627–647, esp. 631–33.

26 Boas, *The Limitations of the Comparative Method*, 904.

27 Cf. concisely Griffiths, 485–486.

A more complex situation arises in France, where different institutions, actors, and discourses of knowledge interact after 1900. Here, scientific debates are characterized—in a broader sense than called for by Boas—by a critical testing of the comparability of the objects compared, which equally affects questions concerning the selection and definition of objects (*comparata*) and comparative grounds (*tertia*) in the disciplines of anthropology, sociology, and ethnology, as well as questions about the actors of comparison and the fundamental relation established between observers and observed peoples or communities. While physical anthropology as “racial science” continued to be based on evolutionism and its normative categorizations, significant changes occur in Durkheimian sociology as well as in the subsequent approaches of emerging ethnology and anthropology. Thus Durkheim as well as Lévi-Strauss continue to adhere to the comparative method as well as to the principle of deductive generalization in the founding of sociology and “structural anthropology.”<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, the evolutionary perspective still determines (in increasingly non-linear variants) the research carried out by Mauss and partially also by Rivet.<sup>29</sup> However, these approaches are characterized on the one hand by a redefinition of the general laws, which in Durkheim and Mauss are no longer psychologically but socially based and—in reversing the organic analogy of evolutionism—now identify the organization of society as the model for the classificatory order of the natural world.<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, they are distinguished by the deliberate abandonment or reversal of normative hierarchizations as well as by the use of “symmetrizing” comparative practices. These new comparative practices are based on the creation of a fundamental compatibility between cultural characteristics of the observer and the observed, and in many cases perform an exegetical extension or de facto adoption of local indigenous forms of thought and institutions (such as “totem,” “mana,” “taboo,” or “hau”) into their own ethnological category formations. Moreover, these new methods increasingly enter into productive exchange with the empirical and descriptive techniques of ethnography, which in its analytical and comparative oper-

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28 Cf. Émile Durkheim, *Les règles de la méthode sociologique*, Paris 1907, 169; on Durkheim and Lévi-Strauss, cf. also Griffiths, *The Comparative Method*, 482; Philippe Descola, *Anthropological Comparatisms. Generalisation, Symmetrisation, Bifurcation*, in: Renaud Gagné/Simon Goldhill/Geoffrey E.R. Lloyd (eds.), *Regimes of Comparatism: Frameworks of Comparison in History, Religion and Anthropology*, Leiden/Boston 2019, 402–417, esp. 404–405; the importance of the principle of generalization for comparison is also emphasized by Lévi-Strauss himself, cf. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Anthropologie structurale*, Paris 1958, 34: “Ce n’est pas la comparaison qui fonde la généralisation, mais le contraire.”

29 On Mauss, who, like Durkheim, advocated a functionalist variant of evolutionism, cf. Candea, *Comparison in Anthropology*, 69–70; cf. also Conklin, *In the Museum of Man*, 71–75 (on Mauss), 64–68 (on Rivet).

30 Cf. Petermann, *Die Geschichte der Ethnologie*, 815–819.

ations proves to be interested in the historical particularity of communities rather than in the general laws of their development.<sup>31</sup>

It is important to emphasize that the co-presence of these divergent approaches decisively shape the formation of the French “science of man,” especially in confrontation with physical anthropology (and “race theory”), thereby indicating its intermediate position between natural sciences, humanities and social sciences. This particular position reveals significant transformations undergone by the comparative practices that are employed in the scientific disciplines. While the universalizing comparisons underlying evolutionism or structural anthropology function as mere confirmation of preceding deductive generalizations that do not develop any productivity of their own in terms of the knowledge production associated with them, the situation changes in the context of the newly emerging ethnology. As is illustrated, for example, by Paul Rivet’s Americanist studies, here, new forms of comparative and collaborative “multilevel research” were conceived as early as 1910, which developed from the programmatic interweaving of the disciplines of archaeology, geography, linguistics, physical anthropology and ethnography. In terms of method, these new modes of comparison aimed at a systematic linking of *tertia* from the previously mentioned fields that conferred to the resulting “complex” and “connective” comparisons a fundamentally “productive” or “explorative” potential with regard to new knowledge spaces.<sup>32</sup> The co-presence of different approaches as well as the institutional and discursive combination of various branches of science thus identifies French ethnology after 1900 as a disciplinary site where, through continual redefinitions of *comparata* (cultures, peoples, “races”) as well as through new allocations of (linguistic, physical, social, or environmental) *tertia*, routinized comparative descriptions and unifying explanatory patterns are increasingly put to the test.

This critical and experimental gesture appears even more distinctly in the ethnographical and autobiographical reports presented by ethnologists such as Griaule or Métraux as well as in the travelogues written by literary authors such as Victor Segalen, Blaise Cendrars, and Henri Michaux, in whose comparisons between Europe and various non-European cultures or colonies (belonging to Africa, Latin America, Oceania, or Asia) different “explorative” procedures are employed,

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31 On these symmetrisations, which can be equally found in ethnological studies (for example, by Mauss and Lévi-Strauss) and in ethnographically based works (for example, by Maurice Leenhardt and Marcel Griaule), cf. Descola, *Anthropological Comparatism*, 405–413.

32 On the methodological reflections dedicated to these ‘complex’ comparative practices in the context of Rivet’s Americanist Studies, cf. Conklin, *In the Museum of Man*, 65–68; on Mauss’ “unthought-of comparisons” that come to suspend self-evident cultural hierarchies and to shift habitual perception schemes, cf. Lévi-Strauss, *French Sociology*, 527. On ‘explorative’ comparisons, cf. Ulrike Davy et al., *Grundbegriffe für eine Theorie des Vergleichens. Ein Zwischenbericht. Working Paper 3 des SFB 1288*, Bielefeld 2019, [<http://doi.org/10.4119/unibi/2939563>].

by means of which the “comparability” of cultural phenomena itself turns out to be the central object of continued exploration and investigation.

In France, the crisis of the comparative method and the shifts in the classical evolutionist model thus produce—according to the central argument advanced in this paper—new comparative models and modeling practices, which mark significant displacements, overlaps or interferences of competing knowledge practices (for example from the fields of natural history, biology, psychology, etc.). These new comparative models emerge from ethnology and ethnographic literature, as well as from the interplay between museums, academic research, and artistic practice. They form multiple “cohabitations”<sup>33</sup> that come to explore the zones of comparability of different communities, ethnicities or environments that were already called for by Boas. Ultimately, in their interplay, they enable and produce a historical change of models of human diversity, which would not be formulable without the scientific method of comparison—and which will be paradigmatically pursued in the following, using the example of the theoretical definition of exoticism proposed by Victor Segalen.

### **Modeling Diversity: Victor Segalen’s *Essai sur l’exotisme***

The complex conditions of ethnographic-ethnological model-building, which in France shape the discussion of the evolutionist comparative model of cultural change and human diversity within the practice formation of modernity, can be traced in a paradigmatic and condensed form in Victor Segalen’s *Essai sur l’exotisme*. Segalen was a French naval physician, archaeologist, and writer. He undertook extensive travels to Tahiti, Java, Djibouti, China, and Japan, among other places, and is now considered one of the most important French travel writers of the first half of the 20th century. The programmatic *Essai*, which is a collection of fragmentary reflections and excerpts from a wide variety of literary, philosophical, and scientific texts, as well as sketches and notes, was written between 1904 and 1919. Although it presents itself as a contribution to an “aesthetics of diversity,” it is by no means limited to the paradigm of the arts and literature but can be read as a comprehensive comparative model of human variability that refers both to the comparative knowledge practices and models of the 19th century and to the beginnings of ethnology in the 20th century.

The heuristic starting point for the programmatic definition of the concept of exoticism, which is specified in a series of loosely linked comments and reflections, is its etymological meaning:

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33 Cf. Philippe Descola, *Par delà nature et culture*, Paris 2005, 11.

Définition du préfixe *Exo* dans sa plus grande généralisation possible. Tout ce qui est “en dehors” de l’ensemble de nos faits de conscience actuels, quotidiens – tout ce qui n’est pas notre “Tonalité mentale” coutumière –<sup>34</sup>

Definition of the prefix *Exo* in the most general sense possible. Everything that lies “outside” the sum total of our current, conscious everyday events, everything that does not belong to our usual “Mental Tonality.”<sup>35</sup>

Exoticism presents itself here as a comparative constellation that relates the self to that which is situated “outside” its horizon of experience. Accordingly, it is a comparative figuration that replaces temporal comparisons with comparisons that are primarily spatial, therefore lacking a temporal index in the definition of “diversity.” Even if, at the beginning of the *Essai*, a parallelism in the treatment of time and space is postulated,<sup>36</sup> and an equal status of the foundation of exoticism in both dimensions of experience is suggested,<sup>37</sup> it is primarily the topological relation of exteriority that grounds exoticism. In this way, Segalen’s approach reveals that the temporal orientation underlying the evolutionist model of the comparative method is already clearly dismissed in the basic definition of “diversity.”

Notwithstanding the extension of the semantic range of meanings attached to the term, which is associated in the text with a wide variety of scientific, philosophical, and literary authors and movements,<sup>38</sup> the essay continues to identify exoticism as a comparative model of knowledge that has its fixed place within the ethnographic-ethnological formation of knowledge based on comparisons of Europe with distant, non-European cultures, peoples, and languages. Exoticism also critically engages with premises and implications inherent in the comparative method and its underlying evolutionist model. The grounding of the concept within this configuration of knowledge is attested, in particular, by the repeated argumentative shift from the basic topological constellation to topographical configurations, which, despite the polemical rejection of descriptions of “diversity” on the basis of its manifes-

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34 The French text is quoted according to the following edition: Victor Segalen, *Essai sur l'exotisme*, in: Victor Segalen, *Oeuvres*, vol. 2, ed. by Christian Doumet/Adrien Cavallaro/Andrea Schellino, Paris 2020, 701–802, see 705.

35 The English translation is from Victor Segalen, *Essay on Exoticism. An Aesthetics of Diversity*, transl. and ed. by Yaël Rachel Schlick, Durham/London 2002, 37.

36 Cf. Segalen, *Essai sur l'exotisme*, 747 [Essay on Exoticism, 13].

37 Segalen, *Essai sur l'exotisme*, 714: “L'exotisme n'est pas seulement donné dans l'espace, mais également en fonction du temps” cf. Segalen, *Essay on Exoticism*, 18: “Exoticism does not only exist in space, but is equally dependent on time.”

38 Cf. notably Charles Forsdick, *Defining the Exotic. Exoticism as an Approach to Radical Diversity*, in: Charles Forsdick (ed.), *Victor Segalen and the Aesthetics of Diversity: Journeys between Cultures*, Oxford 2000, 23–57.

tations “in climates, fauna, and flora,”<sup>39</sup> identifies geography to be the fundamental paradigm and the measuring of the topographical world by longitude and latitude as the methodological starting point for defining exoticism:

Bref, j'étudierai ici l'Exotisme Géographique –  
Deux grandes directives, selon que l'on se meut sur les méridiens ou sur les parallèles ; selon que l'on marche d'un des pôles vers l'équateur, ou bien que l'on progresse selon les parallèles – Je nommerai le premier l'Exotisme géographique en Latitude ; le second, l'exotisme géographique en Longitude. Si l'on monte ou descend, c'est l'exotisme en altitude.<sup>40</sup>

In brief, I will examine geographic exoticism here.

Two main trajectories, depending on whether one moves along the meridians or the parallels; depending on whether one moves from one of the poles toward the equator or along the parallels. I will call the first geographical Exoticism in latitude and the second geographical Exoticism in longitude. If one climbs or descends, it is an exoticism in altitude.<sup>41</sup>

In light of this geographical definition of exoticism based on the trajectories of travel expeditions, it seems consequent that the essay repeatedly refers to various paradigms of travel literature, ranging from Marco Polo to 19th-century colonial literature, and identifies the figure of the traveler to be the prototype of the “exot.”<sup>42</sup> The text thus anticipates that travel and exploration narratives by European explorers such as Mungo Park, James Cook, Louis-Antoine de Bougainville, or Richard Burton, both before and after the advent of empirical fieldwork, with their central tropes would provide an important model for the writing projects of ethnographers and ethnologists (such as Lévi-Strauss or Griaule).<sup>43</sup> Even if fieldwork cannot be fully identified with voyages, it is the irreducible singularity of the traveler's experience that guarantees the perception of the ethnographic particularity and difference of the peoples and civilizations observed, which cannot be grasped through the deductive generalizations of the comparative method of anthropology. Implicitly, the *Essai* also shows that the travel reports by explorers of the 18th and 19th centuries such as Cook, Bougainville, or Humboldt, with their empirical comparisons, played a decisive role in the production and dissemination of scientific knowledge about foreign geographical territories and cultures, which emerged in the context of

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39 Segalen, *Essai sur l'exotisme*, 762 [Essay on Exoticism, 66].

40 Segalen, *Essai sur l'exotisme*, 763.

41 Segalen, *Essay on Exoticism*, 66.

42 Cf. Segalen, *Essai sur l'exotisme*, 715 [Essay on Exoticism, 20].

43 Cf. Debaene, *L'adieu au voyage*, 25 (on Lévi-Strauss), 207 (on Griaule).

Europe's "politics of world exploration."<sup>44</sup> Although the comparative descriptions of non-European landscapes and their indigenous inhabitants contained in these travel reports are in many cases firmly rooted in the classification systems of natural history,<sup>45</sup> they in turn supply important empirical evidence and data for the disciplines of geography, natural history, and anthropology, thus endowing comparative practices with a genuinely productive potential that contributes significantly to the expansion and transformation of existing scientific ordering systems.

In Segalen's essay, however, travel literature by no means provides a heuristic ethnographic model of knowledge that, by means of productive ethnographic comparisons and in opposition to the abstract generalizations of the comparative method as well as the evolutionist model of cultural development, permits us to grasp human diversity in its respective geographical, cultural, and ethnic singularity. Rather, the genre forms the object of an eminently critical examination, which refers not only to different literary forms, but also to the concepts of knowledge on which these are based. Thus the author—in explicitly confronting the writing practices of contemporary representatives of colonial literature such as the publicist, writer and colonial official Paul Bonnetain and the journalist and author Jean Ajalbert—<sup>46</sup> subjects these forms of travel literature to a methodical "purification procedure" or "exorcism,"<sup>47</sup> which, from a xenophilic perspective, targets the falsification of the traveler's claim to truth, referring primarily to the

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44 On the importance of world travels and scientific travel reports with regard to the production of a comprehensive knowledge of the world, cf. Walter Erhart's contribution in the present volume.

45 Cf. Kirsten Kramer, *Between Nature and Culture. Comparing, Natural History, and Anthropology in Modern French Travel Narratives Around 1800* (François-René de Chateaubriand), in: Eleonora Rohland et al. (eds.), *Contact, Conquest, and Colonization: How Practices of Comparing Shaped Empires and Colonialism around the World*, London/New York 2021, 199–224.

46 Cf. Segalen, *Essai sur l'exotisme*, 713 n. 26; on Segalen's critical discussion of colonial literature, cf. Forsdick, *Defining the Exotic*.

47 In a similar vein, Forsdick describes Segalen's method as a "reiterated act of negation and expiation, as if the only viable approach to exoticism is through cultural and semantic exorcism" (*Defining the Exotic*, 27).—"Exorcistic" purification procedures that bear xenophobic or xenophilic traits are part of the fixed repertoire of forms of reception of travelogues, which are also themselves part of the purification procedure; cf. Schüttpelz, *Die Moderne im Spiegel des Primitiven*, 332–334; with reference to Michael Harbsmeier, *Spontaneous Ethnographies. Towards a Social History of Travellers' Tales*, in: *MESS (Mediterranean Ethnological Summer School 1994/95)*, Ljubljana 1995, S. 23–39; as well as to Bruno Latour's use of the term "purification" in the context of the definition of modernity, cf. Bruno Latour, *Wir sind nie modern gewesen. Versuch einer symmetrischen Anthropologie*, Frankfurt am Main 2008; Segalen's case represents the "xenophilic" variant of exorcism, which is directed against the existence of the traveler's prejudices and the potential suppression of foreign claims to truth.



selection of *comparata* in the areas of flora and fauna and the physiognomy of the peoples observed. These *comparata* are not products of an empirical observation of singular phenomena, but represent recurring descriptive patterns that have detached themselves from the traveler's sense-based experience:

Avant tout, déblayer le terrain. Jeter par-dessus bord tout ce que contient de mésusé et de rance ce mot d'exotisme. Le dépouiller de tous ses oripeaux : le palmier et le chameau ; casque de colonial, peaux noires et soleil jaune ; et du même coup se débarrasser de tous ceux qui les employèrent avec une faconde niaise. Il ne s'agira donc ni des Bonnetain, ni des Ajalbert [...].<sup>48</sup>

Clear the field first of all. Throw overboard everything misused or rancid contained in the word exoticism. Strip it of all its cheap finery: palm tree and camel; tropical helmet; black skins and yellow sun; and, at the same time, get rid of all those who used it with an inane loquaciousness. My study will not be about the Bonnetains or Ajalberts of this world [...].<sup>49</sup>

Consequently, in Segalen's view, the comparative descriptions of landscapes and human groups in colonial travel literature<sup>50</sup> are characterized by the stereotypical repetition of recurring *comparata*; they are based on a routinization of comparative operations that leads to the mere return of the same and thus does not unfold the productive epistemological potential inherent in the comparative practices underlying the scientific travel reports of the 18th and 19th centuries. Instead, much like the generalizing comparisons of evolutionist anthropology, it merely provides confirmation of what is already known on the basis of prior assumptions and readings.

The specific historical context in which this critique is located is even more evident in the polemical rejection of "tropical exoticism" and the trope of "torrid skies."<sup>51</sup> These terms refer to descriptions of geographical heat distribution known since antiquity, which divide the Earth into different meteorological zones and, from the 18th and 19th centuries onwards, are closely associated with scientific approaches to climate theory, which in turn are often related to deterministic environmentalist

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48 Segalen, *Essai sur l'exotisme*, 713.

49 Segalen, *Essay on Exoticism*, 18.

50 The term "littérature coloniale" in Segalen refers to the literature written by members belonging to the social groups inhabiting the colonies, cf. Segalen, *Essai sur l'exotisme*, 728 [*Essay on Exoticism*, 35]; on this sociological understanding of the term, which is still common in recent literary studies and differs from the approach to the "exotic" variant based on the representation of the foreign, cf. Jean-Marc Moura, *La littérature coloniale: une théorie ambiguë et contradictoire*, in: Jean-Marc Moura (ed.), *L'Europe littéraire et l'ailleurs*, Paris 1989, 107–124.

51 Cf. Segalen, *Essai sur l'exotisme*, 747 [*Essay on Exoticism*, 13].

assumptions.<sup>52</sup> Since the end of the 18th century, such climate-theoretical considerations, prominently represented by the Baron de Montesquieu and Esquiard de la Borde, have shaped in particular physical anthropology and the creation of a “doctrine of race” associated with it, which combines with the division of humanity into a “natural” hierarchy of distinct and stable “races,” the formation of which is not solely attributed to hereditary characteristics, but in many cases also to divergent environmental influences.<sup>53</sup> The essay thus locates colonial literature in the broader context of 19th-century “racial science,” which is repeatedly invoked in the text in explicit references to Arthur de Gobineau’s *Essai sur l’inégalité des races humaines* (1853–55),<sup>54</sup> and whose comparisons of human groups, especially within physical anthropology, are closely linked to the stadial theory of evolutionism. For Segalen, the genre of colonial literature thus does not represent a counter-model to the normative anthropological comparativism of the 19th century. On the contrary, it proves to be a subtle continuation of the theoretical premises on which this is based.

A similar polemic against the traditional paradigm of 19th-century travel literature is directed in Segalen’s text against the Romantic authors Francois-René de Chateaubriand and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, as well as against contemporary writers such as Pierre Loti.<sup>55</sup> However, it is now no longer primarily concerned with the selection of the objects of comparison, but rather refers to their classification on the basis of the *tertia* chosen in each case, as the author points out with reference to the writer Maurice de Guérin, who also belongs to the Romantic era:

Ainsi, Maurice de G[uérin] s’est d’abord pénétré de la Nature, puis il s’en est totalement retiré. Cependant que ses contemporains, Romantiques, “n’ont fait de la nature que le corollaire de leur moi, et n’en ont rendu que des aspects particuliers”. Tels Loti et tous les (“touristes impressionistes”).<sup>56</sup>

Similarly, Maurice de Guérin first gained a complete understanding of Nature, then completely retreated from it. His Romantic contemporaries, meanwhile,

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52 On zonal theories of heat distribution on Earth and on the historical development of climate theory, cf. Franz Mauelshagen, *Climate as a Scientific Paradigm: Early History of Climatology to 1800*, in: Sam White/Christian Pfister/Franz Mauelshagen (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Climate History*. Basingstoke 2018, [https://dx.doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-43020-5\_36].

53 On the situation in the early 19th century, cf. Conklin, *In the Museum of Man*, 22–23; cf. also George W. Stocking, *French Anthropology in 1800*, in: George W. Stocking (ed.), *Race, Culture, and Evolution. Essays in the History of Anthropology*, Chicago, 1982, 13–41; on later environmentalist approaches in the context of physical anthropology, cf. also Conklin, *In the Museum of Man*, 30–31.

54 Cf. Segalen, *Essai sur l’exotisme*, 767, 773 [Essay sur exoticism, 69].

55 Cf. Segalen, *Essai sur l’exotisme*, 726 [Essay on Exoticism, 33].

56 Segalen, *Essai sur l’exotisme*, 725.

“only understood nature as the corollary to their own selves, and described only some of its particular features.” So it is with the Lotis and all “impressionistic tourists.”<sup>57</sup>

The first allusion here is to the type of description of landscapes, peoples and cultures in America, the Orient, or on islands of the Indian Ocean characteristic of Chateaubriand and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, in which Europe functions both as an implicit object of comparison (*comparatum*) and as a central standard of comparison (*tertium*), against which the evaluation of non-European nature is measured,<sup>58</sup> regardless of whether it is conceived as an extra-societal ideal state or as a place of countercultural savagery and barbarism.

Segalen's rejection is thus directed against a practice of comparison that does not focus on the description and literary recording of the ethnographic and geographic diversity found in the observed territories and peoples, but rather measures the foreign and unknown against the standard of the known. Such modes of comparison, in Segalen's view, thus pursue a strategy of appropriation or assimilation that, ultimately, causes the singularity and difference of non-European peoples, languages, and cultures to disappear.

It is no coincidence that this polemic anticipates the main features of the post-colonial critique of comparison that emerged toward the end of the 20th century and was largely fueled by the asymmetrical power relations that existed between the (Western) agents of comparison and the (non-Western) objects of comparison.<sup>59</sup> As suggested in recent scholarship,<sup>60</sup> the essay's critique of the literary appropriation or assimilation of the foreign can indeed be linked to “colonial exoticism” as advocated, for instance, by the authors Marius and Ary Leblond, explicitly mentioned in the text,<sup>61</sup> as well as to the related discussion of French colonialism in New Imperialism. Since the beginning of the 19th century, French colonial policy has pursued the “doctrine of assimilation,” which, based on the principle of the “equality” of all

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57 Segalen, *Essay on exoticism*, 32.

58 In this, Romantic travel literature follows the earlier European world travel literature of François Lafitau, Georg Forster, or Louis-Antoine de Bougainville, in which the newly discovered foreign worlds were also described and compared in terms of European norms and cultural standards; see Walter Erhart's contribution in the present volume.

59 On the postcolonial critique of comparison, see Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan, *Why Compare?*, in: *New Literary History* 40 (3/2009), 453–471; Pheng Chea, *Grounds of Comparison*, in: *diacritics* 29 (4/1999), 3–18.

60 Cf. Forsdick, *Defining the Exotic*, 41–42.

61 Cf. Segalen, *Essay sur l'exotisme*, 728; the cousins were contemporary French writers who drew on colonial themes and “racial issues” in their novels and were in direct exchange with Segalen (cf. *Essai sur l'exotisme*, 727 n. 43).

people promoted ever since the French Revolution, propagates the affiliation of the colonies as an integral, if noncontiguous, part of the mother country.<sup>62</sup> In the course of the 19th century, this colonial policy was increasingly criticized by representatives of scientific evolutionism and “racial theorists,” with reference to the different developmental rates between peoples or nations, and led, in 1900, to the “policy of association” explicitly mentioned by Segalen.<sup>63</sup> It was, however, based on a universalistic thinking, which also presumed the superiority and exemplarity of French culture, and in this respect significantly shared the basic assumptions of contemporary evolutionist and “racial theories.” The essay, consequently, engages in an eminently critical examination of universalizing and normative comparative practices, revealing that neither the colonial nor the romantic variants of travel literature can serve as a viable realization of an aesthetic that aims to represent the irreducible cultural and ethnic “diversity” and difference of non-European peoples and cultures. Both variants of travel writing are unable to provide ethnographic counter-models to the normative and generalizing anthropological comparisons inherent in the comparative method and the evolutionist models associated with it, but, on the contrary, appear to insistently affirm the simplifications, hierarchizations, and standardizations that underlie them.

Segalen, in turn, counters the literary practices of ethnographic comparison outlined above, which negate the cultural difference and uniqueness of the foreign cultures and peoples observed, by offering his own exoticist model of knowledge and comparison, which is of central importance with regard to scientific model-building in the field of ethnographic-ethnological knowledge production in modernity. This model is not only based on the selection of empirical objects (*comparata*) and their allocation through specific comparative grounds (*tertia*), but also includes the actors of ethnographic comparison and the particular relationship they bear to the milieu they observe. The implications of the model are tangible in the gesture of a renewed critical discussion of the travel writer Pierre Loti and other contemporary “exoticist” authors:

[...] pourquoi *tout simplement*, en vérité, ne pas prendre le contre-pied de ceux-là dont je me défends? Pourquoi ne pas tenter la *contre-épreuve*? Ils ont dit ce qu'ils ont vu, ce qu'ils ont senti en présence des *choses* et des gens inattendus dont ils allaient chercher le choc. Ont-ils révélé ce que ces choses et ces gens pensaient en eux-mêmes et d'eux ? Car il y a peut-être, du voyageur au spectacle, un autre choc en retour dont vibre ce qu'il voit. Par son intervention, parfois si malencontreuse, si aventurière, [...] est-ce qu'il ne vas pas perturber le champ d'équilibre établi depuis des siècles? Est-

62 Cf. Raymond F. Betts, *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Policy 1890–1914*, New York 1961.

63 Cf. Segalen, *Essai sur l'exotisme*, 728 [Essay on Exoticism, 35].

ce qu'il ne se manifesterà pas autour de lui, en raison de son attitude, soit hostile, soit recueillie, des défiances ou des attirances?...Tout cela, réaction non plus du milieu sur le Voyageur, mais du Voyageur sur le milieu vivant [...].<sup>64</sup>

Why actually should I not simply take the opposing view from those views I am defending myself against? Why not strive to counter-prove their findings? They expressed what they saw, what they felt in the presence of unexpected things and people from which and from whom they sought to experience a shock. Did they reveal what those things and those people themselves thought and what they thought of them? For there is perhaps another shock, from the traveler to the object of his gaze, which rebounds and makes what he sees vibrate. Will not his very intervention—at times so inopportune and venturesome [...]—disturb the equilibrium established centuries ago? Will he not, by reason of his attitude—whether hostile or meditative—arouse mistrust or attraction?... I attempted to express all that, the effect that the traveler has on the living milieu rather than the milieu's effect on the traveler [...].<sup>65</sup>

Segalen identifies the ethnographer's gaze on the foreign environment to be an indirect intervention or influence on the observed milieu, which causes a change in the object of investigation. This change takes the form of a "shock from the traveler to the object of his gaze," a "choc de retour," which also has an impact on the traveler's own experience and perception of the observed persons and environments. The author formulates here fundamental reflections on the dynamic exchange between the subject and the object of ethnographic observation that initiate a new thinking of exoticism. Just like the previously quoted rejection of stereotyped objects of comparison, which take on a life of their own as opposed to sensory perception, Segalen's critical interventions clearly relate to the contemporary distinction between "armchair anthropology" and empirical field practice, which was the subject of numerous scholarly debates in France as early as 1910. The key protagonists in these debates were Mauss and Durkheim's students on the one hand, and ethnographers such as Arnold van Gennep or Marcel Delafosse, and later André Métraux, on the other.<sup>66</sup> In a systematic form these debates are also taken up by Bronislaw Malinowski in the introduction to his seminal study *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922), where they culminate in methodological considerations on the importance of "participant observation," which identifies the observer as part of the everyday life of the observed

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64 Segalen, *Essai sur l'exotisme*, 709–710.

65 Segalen, *Essay on Exoticism*, 14.

66 On these debates, cf. in detail Conklin, *In the Museum of Man*, 76–85.

peoples and their environment and is seen as indispensable for the adequate ethnographic recording of the “native’s point of view.”<sup>67</sup>

The quoted passage from the *Essai sur l'exotisme* not only anticipates these methodological reflections but also outlines the complex constellation of ethnographic comparison that, from the beginning of the 20th century, was based primarily on a comparison of one’s own perception of the foreign (the comparison of Europe with foreign cultures and peoples done from the European perspective) with forms of a foreign perception of the foreign (the comparison of “primitive” cultures with Europe done from the non-European perspective). It is this constellation that gives rise to the model of “inverse” or “reversible” ethnography,<sup>68</sup> which fundamentally shapes the ethnological-ethnographic formation of knowledge and practice in modernity and produces multiple “symmetrizing” practices of comparison and translation. These practices lead Mauss, Lévi Strauss and other French ethnologists to adopt local indigenous forms of thought and integrate them into their own categorization systems, thereby revealing that the European *comparatum* can no longer claim the status of an implicit but overarching standard of comparison (*tertium*). These thinkers are led to take their starting points from ethnographic observations established within the framework of fieldwork and the mutual exchange between the observed object and the observing subject implied in the field situation.<sup>69</sup>

It is interesting to observe that in Segalen’s work this comparative constellation is situated in a different historical context: it appears to be founded in a theoretical approach which, in the *Essai sur l'exotisme*, replaces the explanatory models of 19th-century folk psychology with a theoretical concept that is taken from individual psychology. This approach is provided by Jules Gaultier’s study *Le Bovarysme. La psychologie dans l'oeuvre de Flaubert* (1892), which describes “bovarysme” as “la faculté départie à l’homme de se concevoir autrement qu’il n’est”<sup>70</sup> and, in referring to ideas derived from the evolutionary theory of natural selection, explicitly identifies it as the mark of an advanced stage of human development.<sup>71</sup> In the *Essai sur l'exotisme*, it is the subject’s stepping out of his own self, as described by Gaultier, the ability to adopt a point of view of observation external to himself, which enables him to perceive himself as

67 Cf. Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific. An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea*, London 2002 [1922], 19.

68 Cf. on the definition of the approach of “inverse” or “reversible” ethnography: Schüttpelz, *Die Moderne im Spiegel des Primitiven*; cf. also Fritz Kramer, *Der rote Fes. Über Besessenheit und Kunst in Afrika*, Frankfurt am Main 1987.

69 Cf. Descola, *Anthropological Comparatims*, 407–408.

70 Cf. Jules de Gaultier, *Le Bovarysme. La psychologie dans l'oeuvre de Flaubert*, Paris 1902, 39; cf. also Segalen, *Essai sur l'exotisme*, 714–715 [Essay on Exoticism, 19].

71 Cf. J. Haas, Gaultier, Jules de. *Le Bovarysme*, in: *Zeitschrift für französische Sprache und Literatur* 26 (1904), 238–244.

different from what he is, and thus to make that approximation of his own and the others' perception of the foreign, which provides the model for the significant "inversion" of perspectives that is constitutive for modern ethnology. In contrast to the previously mentioned ethnologists, in Segalen's case, consequently, it is not empirical ethnography that performs the historical replacement of the asymmetrical comparisons and hierarchizations inherent in evolutionist anthropology and the comparative method; rather, the overcoming of the ethnological model of evolutionism presupposes a theoretical concept that, paradoxically, is itself based on fundamental evolutionist assumptions, which are developed within the framework of a theory grounded in individual psychology, but also come to be applied to the analysis of the progress of humanity as a whole. It is, therefore, no surprise that in the further scientific and philosophical definition of exoticism as a comparative knowledge model in its own right, Segalen does not only draw on a whole series of abstract theoretical models—such as Kant's transcendental schematism or Schopenhauer's "law of representation" —<sup>72</sup> which are characterized by rigorous methodological generalizations, as they also underlie the comparative method. At the same time, he also himself has recourse to the organic model of development inherent in evolutionist stadial theory, which is now no longer related to the historical change of peoples and cultures, but—in a characteristic metaphorical turn—is applied to the methodical foundation of the concept of exoticism itself, which in the future will develop like a biological seed ("develop freely [...] like a purified seed") and thus paradoxically locates itself in an imaginary, organologically based evolutionary line of progress.<sup>73</sup>

The definition of exoticism thus reveals a complex foundation characterized by the significant co-presence of competing literary, scientific, and philosophical models of knowledge in the description of human diversity. While the discussion of the literary models of travel literature is marked by the author's decisive opposition to routinized ethnographic comparative practices, behind which still appear the normative and universalistic assumptions inherent in the comparative method and the evolutionist models associated with it, the foundation of the methodological approach to exoticism makes it clear that the same universalist deep structures and law-like patterns also underlie the author's own conception of science and knowledge production. In the *Essai sur l'exotisme*, particularizing and generalizing categorizations of cultural phenomena thus do not constitute a contradiction, but on the contrary are marked by complex interferences, syntheses, and convergences, which are constitutive for the beginnings of the modern knowledge formation.

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72 Segalen, *Essai sur l'exotisme*, 714 [Essay on Exoticism, 19].

73 Segalen, *Essai sur l'exotisme*, 714 [Essay on Exoticism, 19].

## Conclusion: Comparison and Change

Segalen's programmatic definition of exoticism thus paradigmatically points to a threshold situation in the history of knowledge: on the one hand, it provides a complex comparative model of knowledge that is characterized by the replacement of temporalizing comparisons by predominantly spatial comparisons and thus reveals a transformation of comparative practices that clearly indicates the gradual failure of stadial evolutionism. The systematic description of exoticism thus illustrates that, in the French discourses from 1900 onwards, ethnographic, and ethnological descriptions of foreign cultures or human groups are increasingly disconnected from those concepts of civilizational change that, in the 19th century, served as the basis and guarantor of the comparative method and normative descriptions of human diversity and variability. On the other hand, the definition of exoticism documents that it is precisely the crisis of the comparative method and the gradual dismissal of the evolutionist model of historical change that in turn brings about a significant change which affects the modern knowledge formation of the 20th century as a whole. The programmatic essay documents the emergence of various models and practices of modeling that, around 1900, are situated in the interplay of competing and often contradictory heuristic combinatorics or "cohabitations" of approaches, equally involving scientific, philosophical, and psychological as well as literary practices of knowledge and comparison. At the same time, exoticism provides the setting for a new kind of modeling of ethnographic-ethnological knowledge that no longer emphasizes similarities and differences between European and non-European cultures, peoples, languages, or environments, but focuses above all on the different forms and types of categorizing and classifying these. It appears to be less concerned with comparing peoples and cultures than with the comparison of different scientific and literary models of comparing, in which the historical and epistemological conditions of comparison themselves move to the center of ethnographic and ethnological descriptions. Consequently, it is the extensive exploring of the "comparability" of the compared cultures and the reflection on competing models of knowledge that increasingly form the focus of these descriptions. Precisely in overcoming the evolutionist model of cultural change, French ethnography thus marks the beginning of a new, reflexive type of modeling practice that both indicates and operates the significant historical change in the modern formation of knowledge itself.

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# World Political Change

## Three Storytelling Practices

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Mathias Albert/Thomas Müller

**Abstract** *This chapter explores how actors make sense of world political change. It understands change as a significant difference over time and emphasises the importance of narratives: It is through narratives that actors highlight differences between the past, present and future and imbue these differences with political significance. The chapter distinguishes three storytelling practices through which actors craft such narratives: periodization, historical regularities and future worlds. Studying three episodes of actors trying to make sense of world political change in the past 50 years, it shows that these storytelling practices are often used in combination and, moreover, are closely intertwined with practices of theorising and modelling what world politics is and how it works.*

### Introduction: World Political Change and Its Narration<sup>1</sup>

To observers from outside the academic field of International Relations (IR), the end of the Cold War, the wars in the Middle East and the “war on terror,” or the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the rise of China to the status of a global power—to name but a few examples—might appear to be clear indicators that significant change is occurring in world politics. Against this background, such observers might be quite surprised to learn that one of the most influential theoretical paradigms in IR for many years, namely political realism in its different versions (most notably as “classical” political realism, or as structural realism), has been built on assumptions that basically see very little change at all happening in world politics. This is the case because international politics is considered either to reflect basic assumptions about human nature, constituting an ongoing Hobbesian power struggle, as in classical

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter has been written in the context of the project “Comparing Power in Times of World Political Change, 1970–2020” in the DFG-funded Collaborative Research Centre “Practices of Comparing” at Bielefeld University. We would like to thank Dorothee Grünholz and Nike Retzmann, as well as the audience at the Midterm conference for their very helpful feedback.

realism, or to reflect an anarchic structure of the international system of states, as in structural realism.<sup>2</sup> What happens is variation in power constellations and distribution, but not “systemic” change. Similar underlying motives can be found in narratives (which in fact reflect specific philosophies of history) of “hegemonic cycles” or of the “rise and fall of great powers.”<sup>3</sup> The dominant power or hegemon of the day may change, but not the social context described by the presence of one.<sup>4</sup>

These introductory remarks already illustrate one of the most important and most tricky issues in analyzing change in world politics: it all depends on context; that is, the implicit or explicit parameters of the (boundaries of the) relevant system, realm, or structural level that is taken to represent world politics. Of course, if world politics is seen as nothing but a power struggle between polities, then in this abstract sense not much has changed: the Peloponnesian War could easily and legitimately be compared to the Falklands War, and that is indeed not uncommon in practices of comparing in both political discourse and academic debates (again, mainly in the field of International Relations). However, the point to be made in this contribution is that if one does not take the comfortable position of remote historical-philosophical deliberation, the tracing of processes of change in world politics requires tracing which narratives of change not only represent, but also actually constitute such change. These narratives, to reiterate a point just made, however, not only constitute change in what otherwise would constitute a fixed realm of “world politics,” with historically “stable” boundaries, but always also participate in remaking that realm.

In the present chapter, we first highlight why it is actually so difficult to make sense of “world political change.” As a global historian put it, history cannot be simply compiled, “it has first to be thought.”<sup>5</sup> The same applies to world political change. What counts as world political change depends on how actors theorize and model world politics and the changes that happen within it.<sup>6</sup> In this sense, the next sec-

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2 On classical realism, cf. Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations. The Struggle for Power and Peace*, New York 1948; on structural realism, cf. Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, New York 1979.

3 On hegemonic cycles: Charles P. Kindleberger, *The World in Depression 1929–1939*, Berkeley, Cal. 1973; on the rise and fall of great powers: Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers. Economic Change and Military Conflict 1500–2000*, New York 1987.

4 For an overview of discussions about change in International Relations, Sociology and History: cf. Mathias Albert/Tobias Werron (eds.), *What in the World? Understanding Global Social Change*, Bristol 2021.

5 Jürgen Osterhammel, Weltgeschichte. Ein Propädeutikum, in: *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 56 (9/2005), 452–479, see 453 (our translation).

6 We understand *theorizing* as the development of sets of concepts and principles that serve as frameworks for thinking about and analyzing phenomena, and *modeling* as the development of abstract (and usually partial) representations of phenomena that serve as tools for investigating them. For a discussion of the interplay between theorizing and model-

tion will briefly explore some of the underlying issues involved in identifying system boundaries, in thinking in terms of historical periods, and in identifying breakpoint versus evolutionary change that not only constitute analytical and theoretical challenges in IR, but are also—implicitly or explicitly—always present in narratives of change employed by actors in world politics. Secondly, we unpack the storytelling practices that produce such narratives in the following two sections. We first distinguish three storytelling practices, each with a distinct way of relating and comparing past, present and future: periodization, historical laws /regularities, and future worlds. Using three episodes from the transatlantic world of the past half-century as an example, we then illustrate how actors trying to make sense of world political change combine these storytelling practices, and highlight how the storytelling practices are intertwined with practices of theorizing and modeling.

### **“World Political Change”: A Change of What Exactly?**

This chapter starts from the assumption that there is change going on in world politics. In fact, and in marked contrast to the various approaches mentioned above (which would deny that change can ever take place in world politics on a fundamental level), it subscribes to the view that the fact *that* change is taking place is in no need of explanation whatsoever. However, what does require a theoretical social-scientific explanation is how even temporary forms of order can emerge in an ocean of individual actions and communication—rather than devolving through some kind of “social entropy.” In more practical analytical terms, the focus then would be on how different kinds of change are related to each other.

On an abstract level, it seems possible to say that change in world politics can be (and has been) understood and described in two ideal-typical ways: on the one hand, change can occur in the form of a chain of event-related, or “breakpoint” changes. In this case, change is described through crystallization points—that is, events that both signify and constitute change. These events can be of different kinds, and while most of them are *dated* events, they are quite flexible when it comes to determining their actual duration in time (one could, for example, argue whether the French Revolution needs to be dated as occurring in the year 1789, or as a multi-year event, or on the specific day of 14 July 1789).<sup>7</sup> As Barry Buzan and George Lawson have shown,

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ing, cf. Margaret Morrison/Mary S. Morgan, *Models as Mediating Instruments*, cf. Mary S. Morgan/Margaret Morrison (eds.), *Models as Mediators: Perspectives on Natural and Social Sciences*, Cambridge 1999, 10–37.

7 On the extension of historical events, cf. William H. Sewell, Jr., *Historical Events as Transformations of Structures: Inventing Revolution at the Bastille*, in: *Theory & Society* 25 (6/1996), 841–881.

this approach of understanding change in world politics has over time led to the privileging of a specific number of “benchmark dates” that together have condensed into forming a dominant narrative of change in world politics, at least in the field of IR:<sup>8</sup> despite many references to historical continuities before that, the almost mythical “starting point” of international relations/world politics is 1648, with some very important transformative things then happening in 1815 and 1914/18 as well as in 1939/45.<sup>9</sup> Another significant benchmark date is 1989, while the jury is still out on how most notably 2001 (9/11 and the “war on terror”) or 2022 (Russia’s invasion of Ukraine) will fare in this respect.

While this is of course a gross caricature of a specific ideal-typical way of understanding change in world politics, far more nuanced and analytically rich versions of which can be found in individual analyses, it does capture quite well how this kind of change is not only understood, but also narrated—that is, with an explicit reference to specific outstanding dates and events.

The second ideal-typical approach involves an understanding of change in world politics in terms of processual change. While processual change might exhibit specific important dates and events as markers of change, it cannot be reduced to the latter. What constitutes relevant processes of change arguably describes a field that is wider and more variable than the “standard” background story of benchmark date-related change in IR, ranging from processes of international organization (in the sense of organizing), through global governance (in the sense of quasi-governing), to international legalization, constitutionalization, or contestation, etc.

The important point to be made here is that as ideal types for understanding and narrating change in world politics, breakpoint and processual change can be combined in a variety of ways that are established in and through specific storytelling practices both in politics and in academic analysis.<sup>10</sup> In this chapter, we are primarily interested in how, in storytelling practices in politics, change is described through comparisons, and how the aforementioned ideal types are recombined in different instances. We focus on the *reflexive dimension* of change—that is, how actors identify and frame certain developments as *relevant* processes of change. Change can be

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8 Barry Buzan/George Lawson, Rethinking Benchmark Dates in International Relations, in: *European Journal of International Relations* 20 (2/2014), 437–462.

9 Such benchmark dates are also discussed at lengths in History, especially in debates about the periodization of epochs. Cf. Antje Flüchter, *Überlegungen zur Sinnhaftigkeit und den Problemen von Periodisierungen aus vergleichstheoretischer Perspektive* [unpublished chapter manuscript], Bielefeld 2023.

10 For the sake of completeness, it should be mentioned that conceptually both ideal types can be combined elegantly if change is understood in terms of (social) systemic evolution, which is a fully processual account of change, yet can account for “benchmark dates” in terms of highly visible selections or, more abstractly, systemic tipping points.

defined as a “significant difference” between two points in time.<sup>11</sup> When actors tell stories of change, they thus—implicitly or explicitly—engage in comparisons: which processes of change are relevant and which are not? How does the present differ from the past, or the future from the present? The *comparata* and *tertia* that the actors use in their comparisons are informed by the ways in which they theorize and model world politics. They are underpinned by, and at the same time provide, insights into what—for the actors—world politics “is” (as historically contingent form). This, as alluded to above, is the case because these practices of comparing invariably—explicitly or implicitly—refer to, and thus at least co-establish, what world politics “is” in terms of its relevant system boundaries. These relevant system boundaries could, for example, be identified in functional terms (i.e. in terms of the “relevant” powers, the relative importance of economic vs. political or legal factors, etc.). They could also be identified in geographical terms (most notably in terms of a specific regional order). Needless to say, they could also be identified through a mix of such terms.<sup>12</sup>

While it is not a necessity, we expect that most practices of comparing expressed in the storytelling practices of actors would also include elements of historical comparison. This historical comparison would usually (but neither necessarily nor exclusively) entail a specific kind of comparison of present with past and/or future orders, although what *kind of order* is used as a *comparatum* is an empirically open question (it could be anything from a “liberal world order” to the order of an idealized imperial past, etc.).

In the following, we seek to demonstrate that these storytelling practices are not completely arbitrary. Rather, in world politics a relatively limited set of such practices is very prominent.

## Common Storytelling Practices

Narratives can be understood as forms of discourse that create a meaningful sequential order of events.<sup>13</sup> They become narratives of change when the sequence is

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11 Cf. Theodore Schatzki, *Social Change in a Material World*, London 2019, 15.

12 On the definition of a system of world politics, cf. Mathias Albert, *A Theory of World Politics*, Cambridge 2016.

13 Linus Hagström/Karl Gustafsson, Narrative Power: How Storytelling Shapes East Asian International Politics, in: *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 32 (4/2019), 387–406, see 390; cf. Albrecht Koschorke, *Fact and Fiction: Elements of a General Theory of Narrative*, Berlin 2018; and, with regard to the relation between narratives and comparisons, cf. Kirsten Kramer et al., *Vergleichen und Erzählen. Zur Verflechtung zweier Kulturtechniken. Working Paper des SFB 1288 Nr. 4*, Bielefeld 2020; cf. Martin Carrier et al. (eds.), *Narratives and Comparisons: Adversaries or Allies in Understanding Science?*, Bielefeld 2021.



framed in terms of a significant difference over time. Narratives of change thus invariably involve comparisons between times: they might relate a past to the present, a present to the future, the past to the future, or, in one token, past, present, and future. What makes a significant difference over time is often subject to debate. Narratives of change in this sense are selective: they highlight some variations over time, rather than others, and they imbue these variations with meaning by framing them as politically relevant.

Politics is ultimately always about decisions that need to be taken in the *present*. Narratives of change inform contemporary (foreign) policy debates and decisions by relating the present to a past and/or to a future. In an abstract sense, here the past always takes the form of “lessons learned,” and the future the form of some future state of affairs. In an equally abstract sense, one could say that these narratives of change constitute the ongoing practice of relating, in Koselleck’s sense, a “space of experiences” (“Erfahrungsraum”) to a “horizon of expectation” (“Erwartungshorizont”).<sup>14</sup> Of course, and put in even more abstract Luhmannian terms, such relating practices are always centred on the present. Ultimately, they can never be about past or future presents, but they select from, and then relate between, a multitude of present pasts and present futures.<sup>15</sup>

This selection and relation could, in principle, be done in many ways. However, we argue that it is possible to identify at least three different storytelling practices that are prominently used in political (as well as academic) debates about world politics. Each storytelling practice involves a particular way of comparing the past, present and future:

- Firstly, *periodization*: the emphasis here is very much on breaking points (and thus quite close to a general understanding and framing of change as breakpoint change, as alluded to above). Breaking points end old and begin “new eras,” and the future is characterized precisely by *not* being the same as, or even only a mere continuation of, the past.<sup>16</sup>
- Secondly, the invocation of *historical “laws”* or *“regularities”*: the emphasis here is on recurring historical patterns, such as the “rise and fall of great powers,” which hold lessons for contemporary politics in order to repeat past successes or avoid past mistakes. The difference between invoking “regularities” and “laws” might

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14 Reinhart Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft. Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeit*, Frankfurt am Main 1989, 349–374.

15 Niklas Luhmann, *Beobachtungen der Moderne*, Opladen 1992, 129–147.

16 For a discussion of periodization as a practice of making sense of change, cf. Angelika Epple, Periodization in Global History: The Productive Power of Comparing, in: Mathias Albert/Tobias Werron (eds.), *What in the World? Understanding Global Social Change*, Bristol 2021, 43–61.

often appear to be gradual, yet it might also be categorical, particularly when the laws referred to are connected to religious/eschatological motives.

- Thirdly, stories about *future worlds*: stories about the future can be told in various ways: through the anticipation—e.g., in the form of foresight or forecasting practices—of what a specific future or range of possible futures will look like, through utopian or dystopian novels, or through normative arguments about how world politics should be practiced or organized in the future. In political debates, the anticipatory and normative dimensions will more often than not be woven together.
- While these three ideal-typical storytelling practices can sometimes be found in almost pure form, very often they are combined with each other. Quite probably, the more elaborate and complex the narrative, the less likely it is that a focus on only one of these ideal types can be found.

If change means a significant difference *over time*, this raises the question of both the analytically useful and the practically “real” temporal *scope* of the narratives and their underlying storytelling practices that is worth considering when one is interested in analyzing their role in world political change. Remembering the basic (temporal) reference structure of the narratives in question seems of utmost importance in this respect: the temporal horizon of references to the past and the future is, in principle, completely open. It can extend to a significant event that happened a week ago or to lessons learned during thousands of years of oppression; it can pertain to questions of how to deal with some issues over the coming winter months as much as to the issue of how to fulfill the holy destiny of the motherland.

In any case, in the storytelling practices of political actors, these references will invariably be related to a present that is necessarily defined as being the time horizon of what could be called “political actionability.” Politics is about managing change—that is, decisions about how to react to, but also foster and (re)shape, change. While this might be done in the form of an important decision taken by a single head of government in any given hour of the day, it might also be done by taking a few years in a bureaucracy in order to draft a plan extending quite some time into the future. In all cases, however, the actors need to “create a convincing ‘story’ of the future development of the phenomena at stake”<sup>17</sup> in order to garner the political support necessary for putting into action their proposed reactions to the change. What makes stories convincing depends on the repertoire of prevalent stories, but also on the fit between stories and commonly accepted empirical information—e.g., statistics—about the development debated. As the actors want to influence contemporary political decisions, one can expect the stories that the

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17 Jens Beckert, *Imagined Futures: Fictional Expectations in the Economy*, in: *Theory and Society*, 42 (3/2013), 219–240, see 224.

actors tell to be stories that not only highlight world political change but also present it as world political change *amenable to contemporary political decisions*. That being said, of course what can be changed, and the associated time horizons, are themselves subject to shifting narratives. Thus, for example, even only a couple of decades ago few would have dared to tell stories about stratigraphy sequences (i.e., the “Anthropocene”) as a relevant temporal reference point for change to be affected by contemporary political decisions.

### Three episodes

In the following, we use three episodes to explore how actors use these storytelling practices to identify and interpret processes of change in world politics. While the three episodes relate to different phases of world political change, our aim is neither to identify changes in the storytelling practices over time, nor to track a shift in narratives, e.g., from bipolar to multipolar visions of world politics. Rather, our aim is twofold: firstly, we want to show that while world political change can be, and has been, identified and interpreted in very different ways, storytelling practices always play a key role. We therefore selected three episodes that are instances of actors trying to make sense of world political change but that differ in key respects: in the modes that the actors chose, as well as in the understandings of world politics underpinning these modes (see table 1). Yet, despite these differences, all three episodes involve combinations of the three storytelling practices that we have outlined above.

Secondly, we want to tease out the interplay between storytelling practices and other practices that produce knowledge about phenomena such as world politics. To make their stories more convincing, actors often use storytelling practices in conjunction with other practices such as theorizing and modeling<sup>18</sup>—whether the realist way of theorizing that we mentioned in the introduction, or economic forecasting, or other kinds of trend projections. These practices help actors to relate past, present and future and thus underpin the storytelling practices. However, the storytelling practices also shape how actors theorize and model how world politics effects changes.

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18 This interplay has been emphasized especially by scholars studying the formation of expectations in economies. Cf. Mary S. Morgan, What if? Models, Fact and Fiction in Economics, in: *Journal of the British Academy* 2 (2014), 231–268; cf. Jens Beckert/Richard Bronk (eds.), *Uncertain Futures: Imaginaries, Narratives and Calculation in the Economy*, Oxford 2018.

Tab. 1: *The three episodes*

	Episode 1	Episode 2	Episode 3
Actor	a political scientist	analysts from an investment bank	EU institutions
Mode	a scholarly essay on foreign policy strategy	an economic forecast	a foresight process
A change of what?	world politics understood as a realm of power politics and order management	the world economy and more specifically its pecking order (with world politics being treated as a realm of governance shaped by the rise and fall of groups of states)	the world, with world politics as a crucial dimension (and understood as a realm of interdependence, global governance and power politics)
Storytelling practices	periodization + historical regularities	future worlds + historical regularities	future worlds + periodization
Relation to theorizing and modeling	classical realist theory of world politics as basis of narrative	future story is both the product and interpretation of statistical modeling	stories of future worlds (only) in part based on statistical modeling

### Episode 1: a scholar diagnosing the advent of political multipolarity

In 1968, Henry Kissinger, then a political scientist at Harvard University, published an essay on “Central Issues of American Foreign Policy” in which he argued that world politics was undergoing profound change and that US foreign policy had to adapt to this change.<sup>19</sup> Soon afterwards, Kissinger became one of the principal architects of US foreign policy. From January 1969 to November 1975, Kissinger served as National Security Advisor in the Nixon administration, and from September 1973 to January 1977 as Secretary of State in the Nixon and then Ford administrations.<sup>20</sup>

For Kissinger, the key change reshaping world politics was the advent of political multipolarity. He combined two storytelling practices—periodization and historical

19 Henry Kissinger, Central Issues of American Foreign Policy, in: Louis J. Smith/David H. Herschler (eds.), *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume I: Foundations of Foreign Policy, 1969–1972*, Washington 2003, 21–48.

20 For two recent political biographies, cf. Bernd Greiner, *Henry Kissinger: Wächter des Imperiums*, München 2020; cf. Thomas Schwartz, *Henry Kissinger and American Power: A Political Biography*, New York 2020.

laws—to substantiate this interpretation. The essay proclaimed the beginning of a new era: “The international system which produced stability for a century collapsed under the impact of two world wars. The age of the superpowers, which temporarily replaced it, is nearing its end.”<sup>21</sup> Kissinger thus told a story of world politics structured into periods with distinct features: a long period of stability in the 19th century, followed by a period of sustained crisis in the first half of the 20th century, followed by a period of military bipolarity in the 1950s and 1960s, followed by a new period of political multipolarity from the 1970s onwards. This periodization foregrounds two characteristics of world politics: firstly, the degree of stability of international order, and secondly, changes in the distribution of power. These were the characteristics that were central to Kissinger’s theoretical approach to world politics. His scholarly work was grounded in (classical) realist theorizing which conceived of world politics as a struggle over power whose dynamic stemmed from the rise and fall of powerful states and which was to some degree manageable through skillful balance-of-power politics. In his PhD dissertation Kissinger had studied exactly that: how the five great powers of the early 19th century had succeeded in creating an international order that proved to be stable for a whole century.<sup>22</sup> The essay in this sense told a familiar story, but with a new twist: the argument that a new period was beginning that required a rethinking of balance-of-power politics.

The essay assumed, without openly discussing it, a continuity in international order: as in the 19th century, the stability of international order depended on the skillful management of the balance of power. For Kissinger, “there can be no stability without equilibrium.”<sup>23</sup> However, he drafted the essay not as an argument about historical continuities. Rather, he stressed that the practices of the past had to be adapted because world politics had changed. Put differently: besides periodization, the essay also involved the storytelling practice of postulating historical regularities. But the periodization qualified these continuities. Each period had its own characteristics. To be viable, balance-of-power politics had to be adapted to these characteristics.

This meant that neither the balance-of-power politics of the 19th century nor the transatlantic US “hegemony”<sup>24</sup> of the 1950s and 1960s were good models for the order management needed for the new phase of world politics. The world had changed too much. The conditions enabling the balance-of-power politics of the 19th century—in particular “stable technology,” a “multiplicity of major powers,” “limited domestic

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21 Kissinger, *Central Issues*, 21.

22 Cf. Henry Kissinger, *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh and the Problems of Peace 1812–22*, London 1957.

23 Kissinger, *Central Issues*, 46.

24 Kissinger, *Central Issues*, 31.

claims” and adjustable borders—were “gone forever.”<sup>25</sup> Nuclear weapons had ended the traditional understanding of the balance of power. Decolonization raised new political questions, potentially affecting the “moral balance of the world.”<sup>26</sup> Europe’s economic power was growing, ending the transatlantic US hegemony and making the world more multipolar. The upshot for Kissinger was that the US had to develop a new conception of order, one based “on political multipolarity even though overwhelming military strength will remain with the two superpowers.”<sup>27</sup> Without such a conception, he warned, “stability will prove elusive.”<sup>28</sup>

Kissinger’s essay is thus an example of how the storytelling practices of periodization and historical regularities are combined to update a model of how world politics works—more specifically, how a stable international order can be created and maintained. This model is not formalized—or, for that matter, grounded in statistical analysis—but is rather a guide for foreign policy distilled from past experience through historical research and in need of revision when world politics changes in significant ways, with “significant” meaning—for a realist such as Kissinger—ways that affect the practice of balance-of-power politics.

The Nixon and Ford administrations pursued a foreign policy that was in line with Kissinger’s narrative.<sup>29</sup> They sought to stabilize military bipolarity through nuclear arms control negotiations, with the US and the Soviet Union concluding the SALT I treaty in 1972 and afterwards working on a follow-up agreement. The US, moreover, adapted to the emerging political multipolarity. It improved its relations with China. Besides, it supported the formation of the Group of Seven (G7)—which comprised Canada, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, and the US—as the new informal steering group for the world economy after the collapse of the hegemonic Bretton Woods system.

## Episode 2: an investment bank pointing to the rise of the BRICs

The second episode is a report published by the investment bank Goldman Sachs. In November 2001, the Goldman Sachs analyst Jim O’Neill published a report on changes in the world economy, highlighting the rise of four “large emerging market economies” which he termed the “BRIC”: Brazil, Russia, India and China.<sup>30</sup> In

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25 Kissinger, *Central Issues*, 24.

26 Kissinger, *Central Issues*, 38.

27 Kissinger, *Central Issues*, 24–25.

28 Kissinger, *Central Issues*, 24.

29 Cf. Greiner, *Wächter des Imperiums and Schwartz, Henry Kissinger and American Power*, München 2020.

30 Jim O’Neill, *Building Better Global Economic BRICs* (Goldman Sachs Global Economics Paper No. 66), New York et al. 2001.

October 2003, Goldman Sachs issued another report on the BRICs, this time written by Dominic Wilson and Roopa Purushothaman, which presented a forecast of the rise of the four states until the year 2050.<sup>31</sup> With these reports, Goldman Sachs created the narrative of the rise of the BRICs, which gained political prominence in the following years.<sup>32</sup>

We focus on the second report, which combined the two storytelling practices of a future story and historical regularities. The Goldman Sachs analysts were interested in investment opportunities. They did not engage in a broad discussion of world political changes, but more narrowly gauged the changing importance of different economies. They projected a profound change in the pecking order of the world economy: “in less than 40 years, the BRICs economies together could be larger than the G6 in US dollar terms”.<sup>33</sup> As this quote illustrates, the report framed its story of the future in terms of one grouping of states, the BRICs, overtaking another one, the G6. Both groupings were analytical constructs, rather than actually existing political groupings, with G6 used as label for the six “developed economies with GDP currently over US \$ 1 trillion”<sup>34</sup>: the US, Japan, the UK, Germany, France and Italy (Canada, as the seventh G7 member, was not included because its GDP was below this threshold). The story had both an individual and a collective dimension: individually, the BRIC states were expected to overtake several of the G6 states, with only two of the G6—the US and Japan—still being “among the six largest economies”<sup>35</sup> in terms of GDP by 2050. Collectively, the BRICs were expected to supersede the G6 as the leading grouping, again in terms of GDP, in the world economy by 2040.

What underpinned this narrative was formal modeling. The two analysts developed a model of economic growth, defined as GDP growth, that presupposed three key elements: employment, capital stock, and technical progress.<sup>36</sup> They then used the model to project current trends into the future, thus calculating GDP growth rates and GDP figures for the BRIC and G6 states up until 2050. The narrative was in this sense the interpretation of the results of the modeling. The narrative, though, was not simply the product of the modeling. Rather, the interplay was more itera-

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31 Dominic Wilson/Roopa Purushothaman, *Dreaming With BRICs: The Path to 2050* (Goldman Sachs Global Economic Papers No. 99), New York et al. 2003.

32 The label BRICS – the BRIC plus South Africa—became central to the narrative of “rising powers.” Cf. Ayse Zarakol, “Rise of the Rest”: As Hype and Reality, in: *International Relations* 33 (2/2019), 213–228.

33 Wilson/Purushothaman, *Dreaming With BRICs*, 1. For a practice-theoretical approach to pecking orders in world politics, see Vincent Pouliot, *International Pecking Orders: The Politics and Practice of Multilateral Diplomacy*, Cambridge 2016.

34 Wilson/Purushothaman, *Dreaming With BRICs*, 3.

35 Wilson/Purushothaman, *Dreaming With BRICs*, 1.

36 Cf. Wilson/Purushothaman, *Dreaming With BRICs*, 7.

tive: the first report crafted a narrative of the rise of the BRIC that then informed the modeling of the second report, which in turn gave more substance to the narrative.

Why trust the model? The report acknowledged that long-term projections involved a “great deal of uncertainty.”<sup>37</sup> This implied that they could turn out to be wrong, as had for instance been the case with the prediction that Japan would supersede the US as the world’s biggest economy. To give their model credibility, the two analysts applied it to the past, calculating growth rates for a set of eleven developed and developing countries from 1960 to 2000. They then compared the projected growth rates with the actual GDP figures. The results, they argued, were “generally encouraging,” with the projected growth rates being “surprisingly close to the actual outcomes.”<sup>38</sup> The model, in short, was good because it was able to predict the past.

This argument hinged on an implicit, yet crucial assumption: the future would be like the past. Some states would rise, others would decline. But the underlying mechanisms—in particular the factors for economic growth—would remain the same. And because they would remain the same, the changes in the pecking order could be predicted. The story about the future was based on a story about historical regularities. It was these historical regularities that made possible the prediction of historical change.

The reports focused on the world economy, but they also spelled out the implications for world politics. Notably, the Goldman Sachs analysts proposed to change the membership of the G7 to make it more reflective of the changing world economy and more capable of governing it.<sup>39</sup> This proposal did not gain political traction. Rather than reforming the G7, the world’s biggest economies decided to supplement it with the Group of Twenty (G20) as the new informal steering committee for the world economy in the wake of the Global Economic Crisis of 2007–2008. All four BRIC states are members of the G20, as are the G7 states.<sup>40</sup> The G6 vs. BRIC rivalry that the Goldman Sachs report insinuated still remains a possibility, though.<sup>41</sup> The G7 has continued to act as a political group. The BRIC states in parallel constituted themselves as a political group as well. Mirroring the G7’s practice, they met for a summit in 2009 and, after co-opting South Africa, have organized annual BRICS summits since 2010.

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37 Wilson/Purushothaman, *Dreaming With BRICs*, 6.

38 Wilson/Purushothaman, *Dreaming With BRICs*, 12.

39 Cf. O’Neill, *Building Better Global Economic BRICs*, 10–11.

40 For a discussion of the transition, cf. Andrew F. Cooper, *The G20 as an Improvised Crisis Committee and/or a Contested Steering Committee for the World*, in: *International Affairs* 86 (3/2010), 741–757.

41 For the evolution of the three groups—the G7, G20 and BRICS—cf. Peter Hajnal, *Whither the G7 and G20?*, in: *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 28 (2/2022), 127–143; cf. Oliver Stritzel, *The BRICS and the Future of Global Order*, 2nd Edition, Lanham/MD 2020.



### Episode 3: an international organization anticipating world political change

The third episode focuses on the foresight practices of the European Union (EU). Since 2010, the EU has established an inter-institutional foresight process to anticipate future opportunities and challenges.<sup>42</sup> The process is named the “European Strategy and Policy Analysis System” (ESPAS) and involves four key institutions: Commission, Parliament, Council, and the EU’s diplomatic division, the European External Action Service. The main output is the ESPAS “Global Trends” report. The initial report, published in 2012, was written by an EU think tank, the European Union Institute for Security Studies.<sup>43</sup> The ESPAS process has since then produced two further reports, one published in 2015,<sup>44</sup> one in 2019.<sup>45</sup> ESPAS covers all policy fields that the EU deals with, and assumes that many of the trends that affect these policy fields have a global dimension. It is geared towards identifying the trends that matter most in the next 10 to 20 years and teasing out their implications for the ways in which the EU can govern the policy fields and position itself in world politics.

The “Global Trends” reports accordingly tell stories of future worlds—or, more precisely, stories about multiple, parallel processes of change and the futures these processes of change make more or less likely. The reports are informed by a broad understanding of “global trends” which encompasses various processes of change and which is not limited to world politics (which the reports treat as a realm of interdependence, global governance and power politics). Given the global nature of the trends, though, they are portrayed as affecting world politics and, in particular, the role of the EU in world politics.

The 2015 report for instance highlighted five “key global trends” and three “global revolutions.”<sup>46</sup> The five trends were: a richer humanity with more inequalities; a “more vulnerable process of globalization led by an ‘economic G3’” (the US, China and the EU); an industrial and technological transformation; a “growing nexus of climate change, energy and competition for resources”; and more volatile world politics characterized by “changing power, interdependence and fragile multilateralism”. The interplay of these trends, the report posited, fueled an “economic and

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42 For a discussion of the history of ESPAS, cf. Eamonn Noonan, *Foresight Within the EU Institutions: The ESPAS Analysis So Far* (European Parliamentary Research Service Briefing), Brussels 2020.

43 European Union Institute for Strategic Studies, *Global Trends 2030: Citizens in an Interconnected and Polycentric World*, Paris 2012.

44 Cf. ESPAS, *Global Trends to 2030: Can the EU Meet the Challenges Ahead*, Brussels 2015.

45 Cf. ESPAS, *Global Trends to 2030: Challenges and Choices for Europe*, Brussels 2019.

46 Cf. ESPAS, *Challenges Ahead*, 15–48 (for the five global trends), 49–76 (for the three revolutions).

technological” and a “social and democratic” as well as a “geopolitical” revolution.<sup>47</sup> The 2019 report drew on a different conceptual language to discuss the changes, identifying seven “mega-trends”, seven “catalysts” and seven “game-changers.”<sup>48</sup> The overall message, though, was the same: the world was changing in profound ways and the EU had to take the right decisions to remain capable of shaping its own fate. The mega-trends and catalysts outlined the possible futures, while the game-changers captured the key political questions that “will determine the future”<sup>49</sup>—that is, the levers through which the EU could influence the processes of change.

With regard to the relation between storytelling and modeling, the ESPAS reports sit apart from both Kissinger’s essay and the Goldman Sachs forecast. The latter have a coherent theory—of what makes international orders stable, of what makes economies grow—that informs their storytelling. In contrast, the ESPAS reports are more eclectic in their approach. Moreover, Kissinger’s storytelling did not rely on statistical trend analysis whereas the Goldman Sachs analysts based their whole narrative on it. The ESPAS reports sit somewhere in the middle. They included statistical forecasts, usually visualized in the form of graphs, to substantiate the discussions of issues such as population growth, GDP growth, and climate change. However, such modeling was used only for some trends, and the reports relied on the conceptual languages mentioned above rather than on formal modeling to map and analyze the interplay of the various processes of change.

Relatedly, the ESPAS reports turned not to historical regularities but to periodization to tease out the implications of the trends. The 2015 report framed the geopolitical revolution as the end of an era: “Asia’s rise looks set to continue and the roughly two centuries of global dominance by the European continent and the United States are drawing to a close.”<sup>50</sup> The 2019 report continued this theme, albeit with a different time frame: “Many analysts have already proclaimed the advent of multipolarity. They are overhasty: in fact, we are only just beginning to transit out of the post 1990 unipolar system.”<sup>51</sup> While acknowledging the “uncertainty of the geopolitical future,”<sup>52</sup> the report stressed that traditional realist-style analysis was inadequate to grasp the implications of the changing distribution of power because the nature of power was changing as well. What was emerging, the report argued,

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47 The quotes are from the section titles, cf. the table of contents of ESPAS, *Challenges Ahead*.

48 Cf. the table of contents of ESPAS, *Challenges and Choices*.

49 ESPAS, *Challenges and Choices*, 6.

50 ESPAS, *Challenges Ahead*, 8.

51 ESPAS, *Challenges and Choices*, 19.

52 ESPAS, *Challenges and Choices*, 19.

was not a multipolar world but a “poly-nodal” one: an interconnected and interdependent world in which the power of states will depend not just on their military and economic resources but on their “relational influence”: their ability to leverage relationships with state and non-state actors to form and steer coalitions that can tackle global problems.<sup>53</sup>

ESPAS is designed as a deliberation process “for developing a foresight thinking culture” among the EU institutions,<sup>54</sup> thus contributing to a shared understanding of world political change. It provides a frame for the debate about the EU’s best strategy for its future external action. In line with the reports’ message that the EU faces adverse trends—such as a decline in its relative power and a weakening of the multilateral framework favored by the EU for tackling global problems—the notion of “strategic autonomy” has become central to this debate.<sup>55</sup> The notion underscores the goal of the EU—to be a powerful actor in world politics capable of mastering its own fate—but also hints at the problem at the heart of the debate: the question of how the EU can be more autonomous and at the same time foster the open, interdependent and multilateral system that fits to its aims and endows it with relational power.

## Conclusion

When studying world political change—or, for that matter, other forms of historical change—researchers can postulate their own yardsticks for what counts as relevant change. Alternatively, they can explore the yardsticks that practitioners (the “actors” and “storytellers”) use, implicitly or explicitly, to make sense of how the world in which they live is evolving. We argue that this reflective dimension of change—the ways in which practitioners make sense of change—is crucial for understanding how actors deal with change. Change may take place without the actors affected being aware of it. But to become a social or political issue, actors have to designate some difference(s) over time as a process of change that is relevant in some regards. In other words, they have to make temporal comparisons, highlighting differences over time, and to imbue these comparisons with meaning. In this chapter, we have teased out three storytelling practices through which they do this: periodization, historical regularities, and future worlds.

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53 ESPAS, Challenges and Choices, 19.

54 Cf. Hervé Delphin, *Above the Fog and the Fury: EU Strategic Policy Planning and the EU’s Future in Times of Global Uncertainty*, in: *European Foreign Affairs Review* 26 (1/2021), 35–54, see 50.

55 Cf. Delphin, *Above the Fog and the Fury*, 44–48.

Exploring the storytelling practices that actors use to make sense of change provides deeper insights into several aspects of change. Firstly, it makes visible the contingency of processes of change. How these processes unfold often depends on how actors react to them, and these reactions in turn are shaped by the narratives that are told about them. The storytelling practices thus help to reconstruct why change unfolded in certain ways rather than others. Secondly, as practice theory emphasizes, there is a simultaneity of change and stability. By differentiating the three storytelling practices, it becomes possible to delve into how actors grapple with this simultaneity and relate continuities to changes. The three episodes highlight some of the options: changes that end continuities, changes amidst continuities, and continuities enabling the forecasting of changes. Thirdly, the episodes reveal how the actors draw on theories and modeling to reduce the uncertainty of the future, thus giving substance to their narratives. Kissinger's essay was grounded in a theory of recurring problems of order management, while the Goldman Sachs and ESPAS reports mobilized statistical trend analysis to forecast changes into the future. At the same time, the episodes also show that this reduction of uncertainty about the future was only possible because the actors were certain about the past. However, just as it is possible to tell different stories about the future, so it is possible to tell different stories about the past. Making sense of change is a process with two open ends in need of interpretation and narration: the past as much as the future.

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# “Models of the World”—“Talking about Change”?

## Practices of Comparing in Texts about History, States, the Economy of Salvation and Health

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**Abstract** *This article describes concepts of change and the relation between change, models, and practices of comparing in premodern times: how did people conceptualize change if they thought of the world and nature as not controllable and regulable? I will analyze two kinds of models and how change was conceptualized in them: first, I look into models that explained the world and its history (Four Empires of Daniel) or the Rise and Fall of Empires (Giovanni Botero). However, change did not only happen on such a large scale. In the second part, I look into the interaction between individual actors and religious and medical-advice literature. The result of my analysis is that change was thinkable in premodern times—both in terms of betterment on an individual level, and in the model of the rise and fall of empires. However, this change was never indefinite; it always happened within the framing given by the models. These results can serve as a tool to historicize modern understanding of change; new ways to conceptualize change are necessary after Anthropocene research has proved that growth cannot continue unchecked and the human scope of action regarding our world is limited.*

### Introduction

Models accompany the current media and the current news: on the pandemic, the Ukraine war, inflation, gas prices, etc. In politics and economics, as well as in the social and natural sciences, models are often used to predict possible future developments and thus make planning possible. These kinds of models are built on the modern idea of an open future and the idea that humans have the power to control and to regulate our world and its manifold elements.<sup>2</sup> In premodern times the

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1 This contribution draws on research conducted in the context of the Collaborative Research Center “Practices of Comparing. Ordering and Changing the World” (SFB 1288). I would also like to thank Cornelia Aust, Kirsten Kramer and Malte Wittmaack for the critical discussion of the text.

2 Cf. the introduction to this volume with more references about the concept of modeling.



conception of time and the world was different. Of course, there were different kind of changes as well as profound transformations in the premodern era. But whereas our modern world is characterized by change and transformation, change did not structure the premodern worldview. Winfried Schulze claimed even that early-modern actors lacked the language to describe change and transformations.<sup>3</sup> This is said to have changed in Latin Christianity<sup>4</sup> in the 18th century with the early Enlightenment and the popularization of ideas of the so-called scientific revolution, when the ideas of progress and an open future are said to have taken root. The many methodological and epistemological problems regarding caesurae and periodizations like those just described are not to be discussed here;<sup>5</sup> in fact, the following is explicitly about models and change in the premodern world before concepts like progress or change became ubiquitous and structured or even determined people's views of time and history. Change, as well as modeling, gained a new character in modern times, probably in the course of the eighteenth century. In order to know what concretely changed about how people processed and anticipated transformation, however, we need to understand the intrinsic logic they applied.<sup>6</sup> Therefore in this article I ask

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- 3 Winfried Schulze, Wahrnehmungsmodi von Veränderung in der Frühen Neuzeit, in: *Mitteilungen Sonderforschungsbereich 573: Pluralisierung und Autorität in der frühen Neuzeit*. 15.–17. Jahrhundert, 2005, 16–25, [<https://epub.ub.uni-muenchen.de/13584/> – 6.10.2022].
- 4 “Europe” is a difficult term. Its use does not usually encompass every region that geographically belongs to our modern geographic understanding of Europe, and certainly not all the religious and ethnic groups living in it. For premodern times, the term Latin Christendom seems more precise. It covers the areas that were Catholic and not Orthodox before the Reformation and that still formed a more intensive area of communication after the Reformation than on the other side of this border, cf. Hillard von Thiessen, *Das Zeitalter der Ambiguität. Vom Umgang mit Werten und Normen in der Frühen Neuzeit*, Cologne 2021. By no means is this meant to imply a homogeneity of this Latin Christianity.
- 5 Cf. about the construction of periodization and its limits related to practices of comparing Antje Flüchter, Überlegungen zur Sinnhaftigkeit und den Probleme von Periodisierungen aus vergleichstheoretischer Perspektive, in: *Mittelalter – Frühe Neuzeit – Vormoderne – Überlegungen zu Periodisierung aus der Perspektive der Bielefelder Vormoderne*, Bielefeld 2024 (in progress); about the narratives of periodization today in international politics, cf. Albert/Müller in this volume.
- 6 William H. Seweel stated accordingly: “No account of change will be judged deep, satisfying, rich, or persuasive unless it is based on a prior analysis of synchronic relations”; William H. Sewell Jr., *Logics of History. Social Theory and Social Transformation*, Chicago 2005, 185. The concept of intrinsic logic (Eigenlogik) used here is an appropriation of the demand for an ontological turn or a symmetrization of historical research as it was risen by Carolin Arni; cf. Caroline Arni, Nach der Kultur. Anthropologische Potentiale für eine rekursive Geschichtsschreibung, in: *Historische Anthropologie* 26 (2/2018), 117–280; Caroline Arni/Simon Teuscher (eds.), Editorial. Symmetrische Anthropologie, symmetrische Geschichte, in: *Historische Anthropologie* 28 (1/2020), 5–8.

what kind of logic models in premodern times followed, and how premodern actors understood, explained and processed change without the modern concepts of growth and progress and thus without modern teleological-progress thinking.

People in the premodern era, like people in modern times, needed a framework into which they could integrate and thus explain their experience; a worldview into which to situate their knowledge, their new experiences and their interpretation of the world. This article understands such frameworks as models. Hence an early-modern model is, following Willard McCarty, rather a "representation of something for purpose of study" and less "a design for realizing something new."<sup>7</sup> Moreover, following Herbert Stachowiak, the model concept used in this article serves to produce cognition.<sup>8</sup> Stachowiak explained that cognition functions through models and with models: "Every human encounter with the world requires, a 'model' as a medium."<sup>9</sup> In this sense, models as an idea of how the world functions provoke the transfer of knowledge between model and reality. The model is a certain idea of how things are in the world and how these things are entangled. Models explain the world, emphasizing individual elements as parameters of the model and neglecting others. Following this concept, the connection between models and practices of comparing is obvious. Comparing is not a neutral procedure; the results are not *per se* objective, but rather the choice of comparative criteria (*tertia*) structures the units to be compared (*comparata*) and also the results.<sup>10</sup> The same can be observed regarding models: the parameters of the models emphasize chosen aspects of what is perceived or represented by the model. Moreover, the parameters of the models

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- 7 Willard McCarty, Modelling, in: Willard McCarty, *Humanities Computing*, Basingstoke 2014, 24; cf. Silke Schwandt, Introduction, in: Silke Schwandt (ed.), *Digital Methods in the Humanities. Challenges, Ideas, Perspectives*, Bielefeld 2021, 10–12.
- 8 Here lies an important difference between the concepts of model and order. While I understand models as a means of perception and cognition, order in early-modern discourse is a normative concept that presents how things should be.
- 9 "Jegliche menschliche Weltbegegnung überhaupt bedarf des Mediums 'Modell'; cf. Herbert Stachowiak, *Allgemeine Modelltheorie*, Vienna/New York 1973, 56; In this sense, Stachowiak understands Ranke's World History, Hölderlin's Hyperion, and also Newton's particle mechanics as models. Cf. about Stachowiak's theory in English: Barbara E. Hof, The Cybernetic "General Model Theory." Unifying Science or Epistemic Change?, in: *Perspectives on Science* 26, (1/2018), 76–96.
- 10 Angelika Epple/Walter Erhart, Practices of Comparing. A New Research Agenda between Typological and Historical Approaches, in: Angelika Epple/Walter Erhart/Johannes Grave (eds.), *Practices of Comparing. Towards a New Understanding of a Fundamental Human Practice*, Bielefeld 2020, 137–172; Angelika Epple/Antje Flüchter/Thomas Müller, *Praktiken des Vergleichens: Modi und Formationen. Ein Bericht von unterwegs. Workingpaper des SFB 1288 No. 6*, Bielefeld 2020, URL: <https://doi.org/10.4119/unibi/2943010>; Ulrike Davy/Antje Flüchter (eds.), Concepts of Equality: Why, Who, What For?, in: Ulrike Davy/Antje Flüchter (eds.) *Imagining Unequals, Imagining Equals. Concepts of Equality in History and Law*, Bielefeld 2022, 11–30.

are often the result of comparative practices. Thus, models offer a promising perspective to study the relation and interplay between practices of comparing and transformation processes in more detail.

This article aims to explore the relationship between models and practices of comparing in the premodern period and their significance for the way change could be imagined, thematized and productively processed. The article starts from the thesis that the structure of models was decisive for whether the world and human action in it, and thus history, was seen as regulable and controllable. The structure of models determines whether change was feasible and could be planned or whether events and transformations emerged or just happened. Did early-modern models serve as instruments to describe change, to look for general rules or laws of change or even to motivate change? Or did they constitute the framework for understanding the world and one's own position in it and thus limit the degree to which change could be imagined and talked about? I will answer these questions with a focus on the practices of comparing, their structure, and the modes used—meaning the chosen arrangement of the criteria of the practice of comparing. The term *mode* is used to relate form (shaping of the elements of comparing, structure) and function (belittling, construction of certain spaces, establishment of power asymmetries, enabling or initiating change) to each other.<sup>11</sup>

Change needs to be scaled, from small rather individual or concrete changes to more fundamental processes of change that imply social, cultural or historical changes. This paper will start with models explaining and shaping the world on a very general level; that is, on a meso or macro level.<sup>12</sup> This includes models of world history and models of the social and political world. Two models of this kind will be analyzed—a model of world history as described in the narrative of the Four Empires of Daniel (1.) and the model of state and society underlying the comparative work by Giovanni Botero (2).

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11 We have developed a typology of different modes in the SFB, for example temporal comparisons that elaborate the temporal difference between *comparata* and possibly underlay it with a normative value, quantitative comparisons in the context of modern statistics, scandalizing comparisons that criticize a state or phenomenon through the comparison. We assume that the choice of modes is co-determinant for the outcome of the comparison, cf. Angelika Epple/Antje Flüchter/Thomas Müller, *Praktiken des Vergleichens: Modi und Formationen. Ein Bericht von unterwegs. Workingpaper des SFB 1288 No. 6*, Bielefeld 2020, URL: <https://doi.org/10.4119/unibi/2943010>; Willibald Steinmetz, *Empörende Vergleiche im Politischen Raum: Formen, Strategien, Geschichte*, in: Heidrun Kämper/Albrecht Plewnia (eds.), *Sprache in Politik und Gesellschaft*, Berlin/Boston 2022, 73–97.

12 In the SFB1288 we understand “meso” and “macro” levels as heuristic concepts, cf. Thomas Müller/Leopold Ringel/Tobias Werron, *In der Mitte liegt die Kraft: Eine praxistheoretische Perspektive auf die “Mesoebene”*, SFB 1288 Workingpaper 8, Bielefeld 2020, URL: <https://doi.org/10.4119/unibi/2945010>.

However, change does not only happen on a meso or macro level; therefore, in a second part, the relation between change and models will be analyzed by focusing on the interrelation between concrete individual actions and overarching models—specifically by analyzing advice literature regarding health and manuals of confession. In the first part the models representing the world are related to concrete texts and can be located on the meso level; the models referred to in the second part are rather abstract interpretations of fundamental aspects of the world, specifically the early-modern understanding of the human body and of the economy of salvation. These models are less concretely tangible; rather, their contents and rules, and the changes thereof, can be deduced in texts and practices that refer to them.

## The Prophet Daniel and the Four Empires

Humans invent or build myths, narratives, or models to explain and understand their world. The early-modern understanding of history for example consisted of manifold stories, used often as different devices (*exempla*) to teach something; as models in the sense explained above, they help or even enable cognition. Narratives about history, however, were never solely built on a single comprehensive history or story. This was the time before the concept of a history as a collective singular (Koselleck) was formed.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, before the eighteenth century narratives existed that condensed and gained an overarching explanatory potential. Thus, they provided a larger frame for these histories in the plural. Some of them even became hegemonic in explaining the world and its history. These histories functioned as models; they represented the shared understanding of human history and helped to make sense of the tide of events. One general line of these kinds of models was that history, in the sense of humankind living on earth, started with the creation of the world and will end with a day of judgement. Between creation and the end of the world different eras and kingdoms or empires were often assumed. A very important model for structuring the time between creation and the end of the world was the concept of world history as it was represented in the doctrine of the Four Empires, based on different prophecies by the Old Testament Prophet Daniel. These passages from the Old Testament became an almost hegemonic model of world history due to their exegesis by the church father Jerome (347–420).<sup>14</sup>

13 Reinhart Koselleck, *Geschichte V. Die Herausbildung des modernen Geschichtsbegriffs*, in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe 2*, Stuttgart 1975, 617–691; Reinhart Koselleck/Michaela Richter, Introduction and Prefaces to the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, in: *Contributions to the History of Concepts 6* (1/2011), 1–37.

14 "In Danielelem" was probably written by church father Jerome in 407, i.e., between his commentaries on the Minor Prophets and the commentary on Isaiah, cf. Régis Courtray, *Der Danielkommentar des Hieronymus*, in: Katharina Bracht/David S. du Toit (eds.), *Die Geschichte*

The first prophecy was a dream Daniel had about four animals, rising from the sea (Dan 7, 1–8). In Daniel's second prophecy, he interpreted one of emperor Nebuchadnezzar's dreams about a statue, made out of five different metals (Dan 2, 31–35). Both stories were interpreted as referring to four world-dominating kings or empires that followed each other, the last of which would be destroyed at the end of time. Daniel's first dream about the four animals continued with the appearance of an old, very impressive man, who took rulership from the animals and held court. His judgement was followed by the eternal reign of his son (Dan 7, 9–14). The finale can easily be understood from a Christian perspective as the Judgement Day and the following eternal reign of Jesus Christ, whereas the four kingdoms or empires were interpreted by Jerome as the structure of the time between the creation of the world and its end.

Jerome thus created, through his exegesis of Daniel's prophecies, a model that presents a sequential arrangement of Four Empires from creation up to the day of the Final Judgement. The Four Empires model was constructed using comparisons; the differences between the empires were contoured by several *tertia*: In Daniel's dream there were various animals (lion with eagle wings, bear, panther with wings, an unknown animal with gigantic iron teeth and ten horns) and they differed in their "awfulness," the last one being "the most terrible to behold." The different types of metal out of which the statue consisted in the second dream invited the audience to compare, too. The statue's parts were made of gold, silver, and bronze, with one leg made out of iron, the other out of clay. In this case, one might argue that a devaluation of the successive empires may be implied with the declining quality of the metal—and downfall stories were quite common at that time. But the *tertia* used in both biblical texts did not suggest any direct temporal relations.

The model of the Four Empires thus described a sequence, but did not refer to a process of change or to its cause. The biblical text did not disclose how the succession from one empire to the next came about. One empire followed the other and the line of empires would end on the day of the Last Judgement and be initiated directly by God as the active changer.

It is significant that the empires were not arranged in an evolutionary or civilizational development structure. There was an echo of a temporal reference through the Roman tradition Jerome integrated in his exegesis; that is, a kind of teleological implication beyond the sheer fact of succession. In the Roman tradition, the empires of the Babylonians, Medes and Persians, Greeks and finally Romans followed

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*der Daniel-Auslegung in Judentum, Christentum und Islam*, Berlin/New York 2007, 123–150. Mark A. Lotito highlights the importance of Hippolytus of Rome (+ about 236) as Jerome's predecessor in the interpretation of the Books of Daniel, cf. Mark A. Lotito, *The Fourth Monarchy and the Translatio Imperii*, in: Mark A. Lotito (ed.), *The Reformation of Historical Thought*, Boston 2019, 34–83, see 39.

one another, as the educated reader knew. Unlike the Judeo-Christian doctrine of the Four Empires, history in some Roman tradition had a *telos*, an ultimate purpose, namely the Roman Empire. History led to the Roman Empire, the best and greatest of all empires.<sup>15</sup> In Jerome's model of history, he thus integrated Roman narratives and at the same time wrote its worldly *telos* out of history, transferring the *telos* of history into the hereafter, the afterworld. Thus, the temporalized progressive way of comparing—that is, the integrating of the compared entity into a teleological development like progress—did not first develop in the context of enlightened thinking as is so often highlighted, but rather there had been comparable notions of comparing and progress beforehand, one of them fading away in the transition from late antiquity to early Christian thinking.

The model of the Four Empires had a long-standing impact. It took on a special significance in the idea of the *translatio imperii*, according to which after the fall of the last empire, i.e., the Roman Empire, it continued to exist in the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation—or rather, its essence was transferred.<sup>16</sup> Consequently, the Four Empires were still present in early-modern legal scholarship (*Reichspublizistik*) in the 17th century.<sup>17</sup> Many state theoretical discussions referred to the so-called *translatio imperii*-concept and thus explicitly and implicitly to the Four Empire model, from discussions about the emperor's claim to world domination to the

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- 15 Cf. Matthias Schloßberger, *Geschichtsphilosophie*, Berlin 2013; in ancient thought, however, this teleological and civilizational interpretation of history is only one possibility among many. Cyclical models were more common, cf. Uwe Walter, *Periodisierung*, in: Hubert Cancik/Helmut Schneider (eds.), *Der neue Pauly. Enzyklopädie der Antike*, Stuttgart 2000, 575–582. About the temporalizing modes of comparing, refer also to the results of Raimund Schulz's project in the SFB 1288 *Practices of Comparing: Comparison in Ethnographic Thought in Antiquity—The Roman Period to Late Antiquity (1<sup>st</sup>–7th Century A.D.)*.
- 16 Cf. Gertrude Lübbecke-Wolff, *Die Bedeutung der Lehre von den vier Weltreichen für das Staatsrecht des Römisch-Deutschen Reichs*, in: *Der Staat* 23 (3/1984), 369–389; Michael Stolleis, *Geschichte des öffentlichen Rechts in Deutschland Band 1. Reichspublizistik und Policywissenschaft 1600 bis 1800*, München 1988, 151–159. Gertrude Lübbecke-Wolff still sees Hegel's idea of the four world empires—Oriental, Greek, Roman and Germanic—as being influenced by Daniel's world empire theory, but points out in the footnote that this connection has hardly been considered in Hegel studies so far, cf. Lübbecke-Wolff, *Die Bedeutung der Lehre von den vier Weltreichen*, 388, also footnote 102.
- 17 Among others: Dietrich Reinkingk (1590–1664), Hermann Conring (1606–1681), Samuel Pufendorf (1632–1694). Beside state theory the Four Empire doctrine provided protestant universal history with a fundamental model, for example in Christoph Cellarius's work. After the 17th century, the concept of a fifth monarchy was reintroduced via Christian ideas of the millennium, cf. Lotito, *The Fourth Monarchy and the Translatio Imperii*; William A. Green, *Periodization in European and World History*, in: *Journal of World History* 3 (1/1992), 13–53; Arno Seifert, "VERZEITLICHUNG". Zur Kritik einer neueren Frühneuezeitkategorie, in: *Zeitschrift für historische Forschung* 10 (4/1983), 447–477.

question of what form of government the Holy Roman Empire had. The question regarding the form of government was the reason that the model of Four Empires was able to provide a legal basis for the early-modern Holy Roman Empire.<sup>18</sup> Certainly, the significance of practices of comparing regarding the Four Empires in early legal scholarship (*Reichspublizistik*) can be explored by further research.<sup>19</sup> However, unlike in the medieval discourse building on the Four Empire doctrine in early-modern legal scholarship, a certain reference to change can be detected. Gertrude Lübbecke-Wolff argues that the discussions based on the Four Empire doctrine, whether the Holy Roman Empire was a monarchy or not, were important for the processes of development of constitutional law or at least for the discourse about it.<sup>20</sup>

To conclude: when analyzing the model of world history based on the Four Empire doctrine, change is relevant. It is embedded in the Christian history of salvation, and it entails the succession of worldly kingdoms and thus human history, integrating a Roman narrative into Judeo-Christian tradition. Thus, a sequence or a chronology is described. However, it does not imply progress, in the sense that the kingdoms built on each other. A history of decay could be implied, but it was not central. Accordingly, the comparisons between the empires remained vague. With the integration into the state-theoretical discourse around the *translatio imperii* concept, the emphasis shifted: the sequence of the earlier empires was only mentioned, but not elaborated upon. The model therefore certainly had a significance for the consolidation of the discourses around state formation, but primarily in the sense of delineating the divine space of this process and thus legitimizing the institution of the empire.

### **Giovanni Botero—An early Comparatist who build a Model of Rise and Fall of Empires and Rulers?**

Models such as the one presented based on the Four Empire doctrine provided the framing of human history; they were a cornerstone of a European-Christian worldview over a long period of time. This worldview in turn provided the framework for

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18 Particularly evident in Melchior Goldast (1578–1635), Melchior Goldast, *Politica Imperialia, sive Discursus Politici, Acta Pvblica, et Tractatus Generales de [...]*, Frankfurt 1614; cf about this dispute: Stolleis, *Geschichte des öffentlichen Rechts in Deutschland*, 213.

19 It can be assumed, however, that the discussions hardly compare the different empires, but rather the question of what the concept of empire means and what significance it has precisely for the form of government of the Holy Roman Empire.

20 She discusses this primarily using the example of Dietrich Reinkingk: Theodor von Reinkingk, *Tractatus de regimine seculari et ecclesiastico*, 1641; cf. Lübbecke-Wolff, *Die Bedeutung der Lehre von den vier Weltreichen*, 381.

models of more concrete phenomena, for example states<sup>21</sup> or territories. The depiction of the Four Empires already related the formation of epochs to kingdoms and thus to political history. The changing success of rulers and the rise and fall of empires were always present in premodern times, and they represent a form of change or even transformation. But how was such a kind of change treated in the models? How was it related to practices of comparing?

One model of states and ruling systems was created by Giovanni Botero (1544–1617).<sup>22</sup> For a long time, he was known primarily as Machiavelli's Catholic opponent because of his book *Della Ragion di Stato* (1589).<sup>23</sup> In the meantime, however, research has increasingly turned to his *Universal account* or *Relazzioni universali di tutto il mondo* (1591), an early comparative description of states and countries. Authors describing and comparing states since the early 18th century argued according to the narratives of growth and progress, their comparative practices located the states on a hierarchy of civilizations.<sup>24</sup> Botero's text was written about 200 years earlier, and therefore it is a promising example for our question of how models were built and how they described change before the establishment of modern concepts of time, history, and progress. Still, Botero is not the first who described countries comparatively; there are the works by Sebastian Münster, Francesco Sansovino and

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21 Most of all in the German discourse it was discussed for a long time whether *Staat* (state) is an appropriate term for the premodern rulership, cf. about the German discussion with many references, and how to translate it into an English discourse: Antje Flüchter, Structures on the Move. Appropriating Technologies of Governance in a Transcultural Encounter, in: Antje Flüchter/Susan Richter (eds.), *Structures on the Move. Technologies of Governance in Transcultural Encounter*, Berlin/Heidelberg 2012, 1–27. In the following a premodern state is referred to, long before the existence of the modern state.

22 Originally educated by the Jesuits, he fell out with them in 1581, but remained connected to the papal court, cf. Sina Rauschenbach, *Giovanni Botero. Theatrum Principvm*, [<http://www.theatra.de/reperitorium/ed000182.pdf>].

23 Contemporaneously the work received much attention. It was reprinted several times in Italian, and in 1596 it was translated into German: Giovanni Botero, *Ioannis Boteri Gründlicher Bericht von Anordnung ultur Policeyen vnd Regiments*, Strasbourg 1596. The following remarks refer to this German edition.

Generally, most of the analyzed sources in this article will be in German, originally written in German as well as translated into German. The premodern European discourse is entangled, but not homogeneous. The fact that the study concentrates on one language makes it easier to trace continuities as well as breaks in the development of thoughts, and also of individual concepts.

24 Cf. Willibald Steinmetz who elaborates explicitly on the relevance of comparisons in texts describing states understanding them as a prehistory of rankings, Willibald Steinmetz, *Macht–Leistung–Kultur: Staatenvergleiche vom 17. Bis ins frühe 20. Jahrhundert*, in: *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* 73 (1/2021), 75–112.



Heinrich Rantzau.<sup>25</sup> However, Botero described and compared his material in a much more systematic way; therefore he is considered one of the first comparatists. Francisco Bethencourt declared, “what Botero managed to establish with his volume was a completely new comparative framework of political thought, which defined the pattern for the next centuries, a breakthrough that has not been sufficiently acknowledged.”<sup>26</sup>

In the following, I outline how Botero’s comparative approach formed a model of states and countries. To compare state and rulers, Botero chose *tertia*, and by doing this he formed a model of what aspects were important and what aspects could be neglected in estimating and comparing countries and states. Since Botero’s descriptions are among the most important state descriptions of early-modern Europe, his selection of *tertia* can be said to have long-term significance for the conceptualizing and evaluating of countries and ruling systems.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, the practices of comparing were shaped by the chosen modes. I will ask after the relation between the chosen modes and the conception of change. At first sight Botero’s model seems to be built to characterize and evaluate the described entities without a relation to political transformation or improvement. This impression changes if one relates Botero’s comparative model to his other work, *The Reason of State* (1589), as I do in a second step, because in *The Reason of State* change and transformations play a greater role than in his comparative and compiling works. Relating the two works to each other promises to provide information about the conceptualization of change and transformation before the triumph of Enlightenment thinking about progress and development, and about the language Botero provided to describe political and historical change.

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25 Cf. Mohammed Rassem and Justin Stagl collected texts describing countries from late 15th to early 19th century, Mohammed Rassem/Justin Stagl (eds.), *Geschichte der Staatsbeschreibung. Ausgewählte Quellentexte 1456–1813*, Berlin 1994.

26 Francisco Bethencourt, European Expansion and the New Order of Knowledge, in: John J. Martin/Albert R. Ascoli (eds.), *The Renaissance World*, London/New York 2007, 118–139, see 136.

27 Botero’s state descriptions are among the most important state descriptions of early modern Europe, cf. Rauschenbach, *Giovanni Botero. Theatrum Principvm*.

## Botero's comparative work

In the universal account, Botero compiled information about countries and states all over the world known in his time.<sup>28</sup> Two volumes were translated into German and achieved considerable impact in the German discourse.<sup>29</sup> In one volume, published in 1596, he compared different "Landschafften, Stätten und Völkern" (regions, places, and peoples), i.e., a geographical-ethnographic comparison. The title of the other volume, also published in 1596, announces that Botero compared therein the princes and rulers of the world.<sup>30</sup> However, the text hardly deals with specific rulers; it is rather about the specific office of the ruler as King of Poland, Grand Duke of Moscow, Pope, etc.

Botero developed a complex and multileveled model for the evaluation and characterization of the compared entities, but no ranking in the modern sense.<sup>31</sup> This can be already noted if we look at the formal structure of the analyzed books.

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- 28 This is an important difference from state descriptions of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which often only evaluate independent non-European countries, e.g., Julius August Remer, *Lehrbuch der Staatskunde der vornehmsten Europäischen Staaten*, 1786; cf. Steinmetz, *Macht–Leistung–Kultur*, 88. The non-European world of states was more clearly considered by Renger, cf. Volker Bauer, *Global Benchmarks of Princely Rule in the Early Eighteenth Century? Transcultural Comparison in the Political Series of the German Publisher Renger (1704–1718)*, in: Eleonora Rohland et al. (eds.), *Contact, Conquest and Colonization. How Practices of Comparing Shaped Empires and Colonialism around the World*, New York 2020, 110–131.
- 29 In each of his four volumes, he chose different focal points for his comparative perspective. In his third book Botero discussed the important religions of the world known to him, and in his fourth book the spread of Christianity in the world. It is precisely on these two books, which have not been translated into German, that the view of Botero as a propagator of a counter-reformational worldview is based, cf. Joan-Pau Rubiés, *Comparing Cultures in the Early Modern World: Hierarchies, Genealogies and the Idea of European Modernity*, in: Renaud Gagné/Silmon Goldhill/Geoffrey E.R. Lloyd (eds.), *Regimes of Comparatism. Frameworks of Comparison in History, Religion and Anthropology*, Leiden/Boston 2019, 116–176, see 125–135. Also, for the question of when comparisons of religions first became possible, the third part was too little considered in the research, probably not at least because it was clearly less translated into other languages.
- 30 Giovanni Botero, *Allgemeine Weltbeschreibung*, Cologne 1596; Giovanni Botero, *Theatrum, oder Schawspiegel: Darin[n] alle Fürsten der Welt, so Kräfte vnd [und] Reichthumb halben namhafte seind, vorgestellt werden*, Cologne 1596. To a certain extent, then, Botero switches between comparing nations and states, cf. on the relationship between the two genres Steinmetz, *Macht–Leistung–Kultur*, 81.
- 31 About the nature and the history of rankings as a practice of comparing, cf. to Leopold Ringel/Tobias Werron, *Where do Rankings come from? A historical-sociological Perspective on the History of Modern Rankings*, in: Angelika Epple/Walter Erhart/Johannes Grave (eds.), *Practices of Comparing. Towards a New Understanding of a Fundamental Human Practice*, Bielefeld 2020, 137–172.

Fig. 1: Giovanni Botero, *Allgemeine Weltbeschreibung*.

**Kurtzer Inhalt des andern Theils.**

<b>In der Vorrede.</b>		Empfungen und Enderungen der Königreiche auß Siam und Pegu. 46.a.
<b>S</b> Von Ursachen der Herrschafft / von einem neuen 1500den Jahr und Etwas. 42.b.49.a.	Von der gezeigten Menge der Leuthe. 42.b.49.a.	Von dem König auß Gallien / vnd dessen Gewalt. 50.a. b.
Von der Zapfereit. 42.b.49.a.	Von dem Christen Mager. 51.a.	Von dem König auß Persien. 51.b.
Von Ortzeigheit eines jeden Driftes. 42.b.49.a.	Von der Persien Regiment / Gewalt / vnd iren be- nachbarten Fürsten. 57.b.59.a.	Von dem König auß Ciopon / vnd seinem Regiment. 60.a.b.
Von dem Anlaß vnd Auitung. 42.b.49.a.		
<b>Im Ersten Buch des andern Theils.</b>		<b>Im dritten Buch des andern Theils.</b>
<b>V</b> On Europa. 1.a.	Von Frankreich vnd seiner Fürstenthail / Gewalt vnd vermögen. 1.b.3.b.	<b>V</b> On Africa. 61.a.
Von England vnd dessen Gewalt / Ertzen vñ Formen. 7.a.8.b.10.8.	Das Königreich Schweden. 11.b.	Von des Persen Jan Keiserthumb / seinem Re- giment / Vermögen / Gewalt / vnd vmbgeben- den Fürsten. 61.b.61.b.64.a.64.b.
Von dem Könige auß Schweden / vnd seinem Reich- thumb / Macht / vnd angrenzenden Län- dern. 13.a.14.b.15.a.	Von dem Polnischen König / vnd seinem Reichthum vnd Regiment. 16.a.17.b.	Von dem Armenestapa. 66.a.
Von der Polnischen Ertze / Macht / vnd benachbarten Fürsten. 18.b.11.a.	Von dem Christen Herzog auß Moskauen. 21.a.	Von dem Persischen Ertzen / vnd Gewalt. 67.a.70.a.b.
Von dem Christen Herzog auß Moskauen. 21.a.	Von der Moskauen Regiment / Reichthumb / Macht vñ benachbarten Fürsten. 23.a.24.b.25.a.	<b>Im vierden Buch des andern Theils.</b>
Von dem Persischen Reich / vnd dessen Macht vnd vermögen. 25.b.29.b.	Von dem Russischen Reich. 31.a.	<b>V</b> On dem Christen Tartaren seinem Reichthumb / Regiment / Macht / vermögen / vnd benach- barten Fürsten. 72.a.73.a.b.76.b.
		Von dem Tartarischen König auß Hispanien / seinen Ertzen oder Herrschafften in Europa / samt sei- nem Regiment / Gewalt / vnd benachbarten Für- sten. 79.a.82.a.84.a.
<b>Im andern Buch des andern Theils.</b>		Von der Neuen Welt. 85.a.
<b>V</b> On Asia. 84.b.	Von dem Christen Chien der Tartaren / dessen Reichthumb / Gewalt / Macht / vñ Regiment. 85.a.	Von den Ostindien. 86.a.
Von dem König auß China. 89.b.	Von dem König auß Siam. 91.a.91.b.91.c.	Von den Ertzen vñ Herrschafften des Africa vñ Ethiopen. 87.a.
Von der Chinesen Regiment / Macht / vermögen / vnd benachbarten Fürsten. 91.a.91.b.91.c.	Von dem König auß Siam / dessen Reichthumb / Macht / Ertzen vñ benachbarten Fürsten. 94.a.	Von den Herrschafften vñ Ertzen in Asia. 88.a.
Von dem König auß Siam / dessen Reichthumb / Macht / Ertzen vñ benachbarten Fürsten. 94.a.	94.b.94.c.	Von dem Gewalt vnd Macht der Portugaisier. 89.b.
		Von dem ostindien Indien. 89.a.
		Von Dabß in Ostien. 89.b.

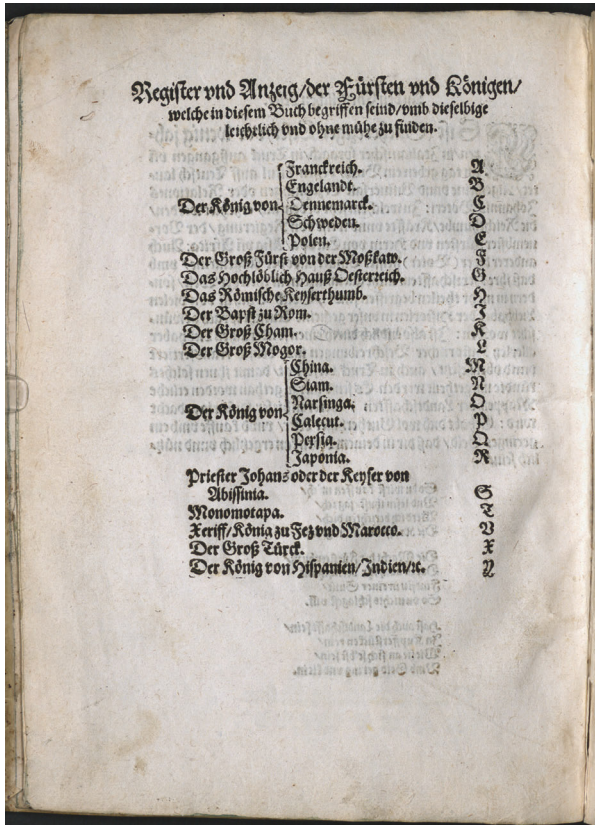
Ende des Innhalts vom andern Theil.

The work on countries begins with a chapter on Europe, followed by Asia and Africa. This may be understood as ordered by relevance or worth. However, the content of the fourth chapter speaks against such an interpretation. Here, different territories are summarized, but it remains unclear why they are brought together in one chapter: the king of Spain and the Grand Turk have in common that their empires cover more than one continent. But in the same part of the book, we also find the descriptions of the New World, the estates of some countries and smaller dominions in Asia, Africa, Ethiopia and Portugal, the outermost India, and finally the

Pope. Similarly, the structure of the texts about states and rulers does not present an obvious order or hierarchy.<sup>32</sup>

That is, Botero did not shape a clear hierarchy of countries or rulers with European states on top.

Fig. 2: Giovanni Botero, *Theatrum*.



Botero compared countries mainly according to the following *tertia*:<sup>33</sup> First location or geography, also mentioning rivers and cities; Second fertility, for exam-

32 It starts again with European rulers (A-I) and then shifts to non-European ones (K-U). However, the list ends with the Great Turk (X) and the Spanish king (Z). The European part starts with kings, followed by the Grand Duke of Moscow and the House of Austria, then the Roman Emperor and finally the Pope.

33 Botero oriented his structure towards the *ordo naturalis* of premodern geographical writings; for this reference I thank Kirsten Kramer.

ple details of trade goods, animals, plants, and other raw materials; third numbers, complexion, character, sometimes religion of the population;<sup>34</sup> and fourth, arts and inventions. The latter *tertium*, art and invention, is since the 17th century often used as an indication or proof of European superiority; however, that is not the case with Botero. In the book comparing rulers a further *tertium* is the form of governance.

The parallel structure established a model of statehood for the evaluation of countries that favors certain *tertia* as relevant, while omitting others.<sup>35</sup> Then again, Botero did not apply the *tertia* systematically. The countries are compared in terms of fertility, size, numbers of soldiers etc., but the *tertia* have a different position and weighting depending on the country. The description of the *comparata* thus did not establish a stable hierarchy and certainly did not present stages of civilization. Botero emphasized more particularly positive or negative characteristics, but did not execute the comparison, leaving the evaluation to the reader's comparing.

Some kind of hierarchy is formulated in the book comparing the countries:

Europe, if one considers its size and wants to compare it with the other parts of the world, is the smallest of all. [...] But if one looks at it and considers what kind of people live in it, how intelligent and sensible they are, and how rich, fertile and excellent the country is in itself, then it is not less to be esteemed nor less to be respected than Asia, but surpasses Africa by far.<sup>36</sup>

Nevertheless, the most highly esteemed continent is Asia: the continent itself is the largest and noblest part of the world.<sup>37</sup> Significant for these early-modern practices of comparing is the incoherence of the *tertia*: regarding Europe, the continent is assessed as great because of its people, their intelligence, and the fertility of the countries in this continent. Regarding Asia as a continent the *tertium* is quite

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34 In some of these aspect Botero's description is close to later description in the context of mercantilism or cameralism; his description also resembles early statistical texts that are still descriptive rather than using tablets and numbers.

35 For later comparisons of states ceremonial ranking is considered an important criterion, cf. Andreas Pecar/Thomas Biskup, Die Klassifikation der Staatenwelt im langen achtzehnten Jahrhundert, in: Andreas Pecar/Thomas Biskup (eds.), *Die Klassifikation der Staatenwelt im langen achtzehnten Jahrhundert*, Berlin/Boston 2021, 1–16, see 6–7, but this *tertium* does not play a relevant role in Botero's order.

36 "Europa so man es seiner grösse halben betrachtet/und gegen die andre Theile der Welt halten vnnd vergleichen will/ist das kleineste unter allen. [...] Wann man aber anschawet und bedencket/was für Völcker darinnen wohnen/wie verständig und sinnreiche sie sind/und wie reich/fruchtbar und vortrefflich das Land für sich selber ist: so ist es nicht weniger zu schetzen noch geringen zu achten/ als Asia: ubertrifft aber Africam bey weitem," Botero, *Weltbeschreibung*, 1 (author's translation).

37 "Asia ist das grösseste und edelste Theil der gantzen Welt," Botero, *Weltbeschreibung*, 158.

different, based on salvation history: "then in it God, the Lord, planted paradise/created man/established circumcision/gave the law/performed other many remarkable miracles."<sup>38</sup> The text contains building blocks, which in later times fixed hierarchies that located Europe at the top, but does not establish such a clear hierarchy itself.

A similar picture emerges in the comparative book on rulers: one of the *tertia* used here is the form of government, a *tertium* that was and is often chosen to build a hierarchy in the ethnographic context. Botero did not give this *tertium* the same relevance in all description of the countries. Sometimes the form of government (*Regierung*) gets a special subchapter.<sup>39</sup> For the European kings first explained (part A: France, part B: England, part C: Denmark and part D: Sweden) there is no such subchapter. These European kingdoms appear rather as the *universal comparatum*, as a "normal" form of government.<sup>40</sup> The first explanatory subchapter about the form of government appears with the Kingdom of Poland, which differs from the *universal comparatum* with its elective monarchy and its republic-like form of government.<sup>41</sup>

Relating to hierarchies of governance since the 18th century the term "despotic" is important. Botero described the Grandduke of Mosovy as despotic,<sup>42</sup> as he also, interestingly, described Prester John.<sup>43</sup> The king of China could keep his despotic way of ruling because he had no nobility and the subjects worshipped him not only

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38 Asia ultur most noble part ultur world, "dann es hat Gott der Herr in demselbigen das Paradies gepflantzet/den Menschen erschaffen/die Beschneydung eyngesetzt/das Gesetz geben/ and andre viel merckliche Wunderwercke gethan." Botero, *Weltbeschreibung*, 158 (author's translation).

39 Botero, *Theatrum*. This volume is not paginated, but the kingdoms are listed with letters.

40 The Roman emperor and the pope represent an interesting special case, cf. Botero, *Theatrum*, part H & I. Both forms of rule do not correspond to the universal *comparatum* of monarchy, but their peculiarities of rule are dealt with rather in the historical outline. In the history of the Roman Empire, Botero reflected the idea of *ulturellen imperii* without, however, explicitly relating to the Four Empires doctrine. The outline begins with the Roman Empire under Trajan, the title Roman Emperor had then passed to the Frankish king Charles. The later electors (Kurfürsten) are also mentioned, together with the year 1002, but this particularity is not further elaborated. The structure of the texts hinders to compare the emperor and the pope with the states in terms of their form of government.

41 "Polen wird beinahe wie ein Republ. Regieret/denn die vom Adel erwählten einen König/vnnd geben ihm solche macht als inen gut bedunkt," Botero, *Theatrum*, part E.

42 "Der Großfürst regieret seine Vnderthanen auff gut Despotisch/oder Herrisch/denn er thut mit jnen wie es ihn beliebt. [...] Auff das niemandt mehr wisse dann er seind keine Schulen, darin mehr gelehrt werde dann lesen vnnd schreiben: so jemandts mehr lehren wollte/dann die Euangelia vnnd die Legenden der Heiligen/oder die Homelias von S. Johans Christostomus /wurde in verdacht kommen vnd gestrafft werden." Botero, *Theatrum*, part F.

43 Prester John is perhaps the worst in his despotic way of governing, because he treats his subjects like serfs, "als ob sie Leibeygen weren." Botero, *Theatrum*, part S.

as a king but also as a god.<sup>44</sup> That is a characterization that we find in the later China image quite often, as well as in the concept of oriental despotism used later on in the European discourse.<sup>45</sup> However, Botero's ascription of despotism should not too easily be equated with the later label "oriental despotism". In Botero's comparison of countries, China is regarded as most noteworthy (*namhafftigste*) regions in the whole world.<sup>46</sup> This estimation of Chinese governance corresponds with the premodern concept of *gute policey* rather than *oriental despotism*. Thus, Botero is certainly important for the genealogy of the concept of oriental despotism, but the use of the attribute *despotic* in his works is not a criterion for a clear normative hierarchy of the described states.<sup>47</sup>

Moreover, a hierarchy can be built by executed practices of comparing, but Botero more often used superlatives to describe a given country than he compared countries directly: Italy, his homeland, is virtually incomparable.<sup>48</sup> Normandy is the most fertile and richest territory in France.<sup>49</sup> The Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation surpasses all other territories in Europe in terms of mines for gold,

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44 "Die Regierung von China ist gantz despotisch oder herrsch. In gantz China ist kein ander Herr dann der König/wissen nit was ein Grave/Marggraff/oder Hertzog sey. Ihm allein vnd keinem andern wirt Tribut gegeben. Er gibt alle Magistratus auch Adelthumb. Gibt inen auch vnderhalt/vnd thun nichts gewichtigs ohne sein wissen. Die Vnderthanen gehorchen ihm/nit allein als iren König/ sondern ehren in als einen Gott: In jeglicher Landschaft ein gülden Bild/das mit ein Tuch bedeckt wirt/aussgenommen die New Monden/wirt alsdan entdeckt vnd besucht von den Magistraten/die beugen ihre Knie für dem Bild/als ein König selbst. Der König wirt nit allein geehret sondern auch seine Amptleut/auch werden die Richter also geehret/daß keiner sie anspricht/es sitze dann auff seine Knie." Botero, *Theatrum*, part M.

45 Cf. Joan-Pau Rubiés, *Oriental Despotism and European Orientalism*. Botero to Montesquieu, in: *Journal of Early Modern History* 9 (2/2005), 109–180; Peer Vries, *State, Economy and the Great Divergence. Great Britain and China, 1680s to 1850s*, London 2015, 10–18.

46 This is because in China were no useless troublemakers, "keinen umschweflenden vnützen Müssiggenger," Botero, *Weltbeschreibung*, 166; but also because the government puts much more effort into governing, rewarding the good and punishing the bad ("Kein Nation wirdt bald gefunden/welche an die Regierungen grössern fleyß anwenden/auff die Policey besser achtung gibet/unnd das Gute so wol belohnet/als das Böse straffet." Botero, *Weltbeschreibung*, 167.

47 Botero used the term despotic above all alongside other attributes regarding the form of state, cf. Rubiés, *Oriental Despotism and European Orientalism*, see 124–132, as well as the article by the same author in this volume.

48 "Italie oder Welschlandes: welches wir zum vberfluß nur kurtz durchlauffen wöllen/dieweil es zuvor von andern gantz fleissiglichen beschrieben worden; und das umb so vil deste mehr/dieweil kein Land unter der Sonnen liegt/das besser aller Welt bekannt/vnd von den Außlendischen mehr besucht vnd gebraucht werde/ als eben dieses," Botero, *Weltbeschreibung*, 45.

49 "Normandey/ist die vberflüssigste unnd reichste Landschaft in gantzem Franckreich," Botero, *Weltbeschreibung*, 34.

silver and ore.<sup>50</sup> The use of superlatives is not limited to Europe: Mexico (under Spanish rule) is the most beautiful, remarkable and civic country in the whole New World.<sup>51</sup> The term *civic* (*bürgerlich*) has to be understood in the sense of the possibilities for a pleasant life and not in the sense of the civilization paradigm. However, the most superlatives are used for Asia: Cambaya, for example, one of the city-states on the Western coast of India, is the most fertile and richest in the world because of its abundance of rice, cereals, pulses, sugar, oxen, and other domestic animals, and also silk.<sup>52</sup> The majority of the superlatives used by Botero do not indicate an absolute hierarchy; they also rarely hint at incommensurability. The text offered the reader options to compare, but without an explicitly mentioned *comparatum* the comparison is not executed.

Having considered the comparative structure and the *tertia* used by the author, the question arises as to the modes used while comparing to classify the model built by Botero. Mostly we find simple qualifying examples: one country is better, simpler, more fertile—or more often, a superlative is used: the most fertile, biggest, etc. Quantitative modes are quite common in modern comparisons, statistics or rankings. Botero, however, used many numerical practices of comparing, most of all regarding the number of armed forces, the taxes, or the number of villages.<sup>53</sup> These numbers do not indicate a quantitative type of comparing, they are not the result of systematic counting and measuring, and maybe even more importantly they are not meant as a basis for political actions, not intended to stimulate change.<sup>54</sup> Numbers in Botero's work can be understood as symbolic, like in travelogues before the 18th century, the main source for Botero.<sup>55</sup> As we are looking for a language to describe change, it is much more relevant that Botero does not use temporalizing com-

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50 "Teutschland ist auch reich von Bergwerck von Gold/Silber vnd allerley Ertz/vnnd vbertrifft darmit alle andere Landschaftten von Europa," Botero, *Theatrum*, part H.

51 "Landschafft/so in der gantzen Newen Welt zu finden," Botero, *Weltbeschreibung*, 263.

52 Cf. Botero, *Theatrum*, part L.

53 The number of villages is mentioned in many individual comparisons; for example, the Grand Mogor's country has 60,000 villages, while the Netherlands have 32,000, and France only 27,000; cf. Mughal empire in Botero, *Theatrum*, part L.

54 Planned economic policy did not exist until the 20<sup>th</sup> century according to Wolfgang Reinhard, *Geschichte der Staatsgewalt. Eine vergleichende Verfassungsgeschichte Europas von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, München 2002, 336. Comprehensive censuses, however, as the basis of political measures began in the late 17th century with political arithmetic in England, and are taken up by Leibniz and Vauban, Lars Behrisch, "POLITISCHE ZÄHLEN": Statistik und die Rationalisierung der Herrschaft im späten Ancien Régime, in: *Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung* 31 (4/2004), 551–777, see 557; Lars Behrisch, Patriotic Zahlen: Statistik als Messlatte staatlichen Erfolgs im 18. Jahrhundert, in: Andreas Pecar/Thomas Biskup (eds.), *Die Klassifikation der Staatenwelt im langen achtzehnten Jahrhundert*, Boston/Berlin 2021, 117–132.

55 This applies in travelogues to the number of soldiers as well as to the number of concubines, which are often cited, especially for Islamic states; cf. Antje Flüchter, *Die Vielfalt der*



parisons in a progressive sense<sup>56</sup>—that is, comparing in a way that orders the *comparata* by putting them in a progressive line, as is most often done in the context of a civilization or modernization paradigm. Rulers, institutions, natural circumstances etc. of different eras are compared by Botero synchronously; the comparisons do not indicate any kind of civilizational stages.

### Relating Botero's model to concepts and language of change

The *Universal account*, thus, was written like an offer to compare, but did not hierarchize the compared entities in a systematic way. The situation is different in Botero's text about The Reason of State, *Della ragion di Stato* (1589) or in the German translation *Gründlicher Bericht von Anordnung guter Policeyen vnd Regiments* (1596). Here Botero referred again to different states and gave information about their characteristics, policies etc. But this text is quite differently structured from the *Universal Account*; most of all there is a hierarchy of the described entities in *The Reason of State*. Botero distinguished between three kinds of states according to their size and power: there are the small and weak states that often have to ask their neighbors for help; the medium-sized ones that can protect themselves, for example Bohemia and Venice; and finally the large and powerful states that excelled over the surrounding ones, for example those ruled by the Turkish emperors and the Spanish kings.<sup>57</sup> The goal of this book was to teach the intended reader, a ruler or somebody central in the government of a country, either to maintain his country in one of the mentioned groups or to move up to a higher, more powerful one. Botero stated that the aim of his book was “to impart the knowledge of how to establish, maintain and extend a state.” In other words, the aim of this text was change; it gave instruction on how to enable, reinforce or prevent change, often in the sense of expansion.<sup>58</sup> And this aim was also the reason the text was received with much interest and translated into other languages. In the German translation the translator, Lazarus Zetzner, explained that he

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*Bilder und die eine Wahrheit. Die Staatlichkeit Indiens in der deutschsprachigen Wahrnehmung (1500–1700)*, Affalterbach 2020, 190, 260–266.

56 One of the few modes of comparing that can be identified as temporal concerns China: Botero explains that although China was the first to invent the printing press and guns, both inventions were only brought to perfection and excellence in Europe; cf. Botero, *Weltbeschreibung*, 167.

57 Botero, *Gründlicher Bericht*, 3.

58 “Der Bericht und Unterweysung von Herrn Stand Regiment/begreiffet in sich vnd lehret/die erkanntnuß und wissenschaft der Mitteln/durch welche ein Herrschaft kann Aufgerichtet/Erhalten/vnd Erweitert werden,” Botero, *Gründlicher Bericht*, 1.

started working on Botero's book because of its usefulness for the improvement of the fatherland, its administration, and its reputation.<sup>59</sup>

Botero aimed at promoting change in the sense of a country's rise or to prevent the country's fall.<sup>60</sup> In this context past events became important for his line of reasoning. Therefore, Botero's model gained a temporal dimension that was missing in the *Universal Account*. Botero wrote: "In the histories one sees, as it were, before one's eyes/the beginning/the middle and the end/samples of the causes of the rise and fall of all the empires/kingdoms and states." The function of history, or rather histories in the plural, in Botero's work is thus quite classically that of the *magistra vitae*, giving examples for the reader to learn for his own plans and actions. The manifold stories were not integrated into one grand or collective world interpretation in the sense of a teleology, but rather positioned various states and their changes in a dynamic, not temporalized premodern model of past and presence; a model that functioned in a framing like the analyzed Four Empires of Daniel. The temporal dimension was short-term and did not encompass a large or overarching time period. Botero explained that in histories as well as stories "the life of the world as a whole and in all its parts is presented to us. And [...] the histories are the greatest and farthest theatre [*schawplatz*]/than anyone could create."<sup>61</sup> His model is formed by comparing these *exempla* or histories. Unlike the *Universal account*, Botero prompted his readers in *The Reason of State* to compare directly,<sup>62</sup> to learn statesmanship through practices of comparing.<sup>63</sup>

In the following many hundreds of pages, examples from the past and present of Europe and the world were presented and compared as factors for a state's improvement or the failure of such an endeavor. These descriptions can be understood as a search for a best practice of governance. Unsurprisingly, the ruler plays a major role in the well-being and growth of a country. Virtue and foresight are crucial, but also prudence and bravery; the latter being understood as "two firm pillars/on

59 Cf. dedication in: Botero, *Gründlicher Bericht*; cf. about Zentzner and its print shop as a cultural hub in its time: Rita Sturlese, Lazar Zetzner, «Bibliopola Argentinensis». Alchimie und Lullismus in Straßburg an den Anfängen der Moderne, in: *Sudhoffs Archiv für Geschichte der Medizin und der Naturwissenschaften* 75 (2/1991), 140–162.

60 Here Botero is part as the long tradition of the "Rise and Fall" narrative, starting with Aristotle and Polybios, in the enlightened era continued by authors like Gibbons and Montesquieu, and today by others like Paul Kennedy.

61 Botero, *Gründlicher Bericht*, 67 (author's translation).

62 However, the *Universal account* is explicitly not just a description of countries and rulers, but a "compendium historiae generalis & particularis," cf. Botero, An den Leser (To the reader), in: Botero, *Weltbeschreibung*, unnumbered. The *universal account* seems like a collection of materials for the *Reason of State*.

63 "Welcher Unterscheid nicht nur vnnd für sich selber/sondern durch gegen einander haltung vnnd vergleichung der vmbgelegenen vnd anstossenden Herrschaften zu verstehen ist," Botero, *Gründlicher Bericht*, 2–3.

which every regiment should be founded and fortified.”<sup>64</sup> Here Botero remained entirely within the model presented in classic princely mirrors and differed from later state descriptions.<sup>65</sup>

Astonishing is the special relevance Botero gave the subjects and their acting for the maintenance and growth of a state. Almost anticipating physiocratic ideas, Botero saw the number of subjects as an important factor: the more subjects, the more powerful an empire.<sup>66</sup> The subjects are tackled in a quite large number of chapters. Central and particular is Botero’s emphasis that rulers need the respect of their subjects. The emphasis Botero put on the subjects’ agency is different from the often-discussed central premodern demand that rule should secure the common good.<sup>67</sup> The importance that Botero attributed to the subjects has been given far too little attention so far;<sup>68</sup> it separates Botero from later, more ruler-centered theories of the state and is more a precursor study of modern historiography on a dialectical concept of rule; that is, he seems to understand rule as a process of negotiation between authority and subjects.<sup>69</sup> Interestingly the subjects’ agency was mostly explored regarding non-European countries. Non-European countries and their ruling systems appeared in Botero’s writing sometimes as a downright model for the European

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- 64 “Zwey feste Pfyler/auff welche billich ein jedes Regiment sol gegründet und befestigt werden,” Botero, *Gründlicher Bericht*, 61 (author’s translation).
- 65 Thomas Biskup and Andreas Pecar emphasize that in the 18<sup>th</sup> century the description had been demoralized and had shifted from individual doing to universal laws and that, in addition, the acting had become demoralized, cf. Andreas Pecar/Thomas Biskup, *Die Klassifikation der Staatenwelt im langen achtzehnten Jahrhundert*, see 4.
- 66 Cf. Justus Nipperdey’s elaboration on Botero’s systematization of the population theory, Justus Nipperdey, *Die Erfindung der Bevölkerungspolitik. Staat, Politische Theorie und Population in der Frühen Neuzeit*, Göttingen 2012, 65.
- 67 Hobbes and Pufendorf, for example, linked the obedience of subjects to the protective services of the state, but did not describe this as active actions by the subjects, cf. Oliver Hidalgo, *Klassische Staatstheorien*, in: Rüdiger Voigt (ed.), *Handbuch Staat*, Wiesbaden 2018, 189–198, see 194.
- 68 Typical of this is how Wolfgang Reinhard treated Botero’s thinking about the reason of state; he focuses on the demands on the prince, Reinhard, *Geschichte der Staatsgewalt*, 108.
- 69 Important discussions on rule and government as negotiation in the early 2000s: André Holenstein et. al. (eds.), *Empowering Interactions. Political Cultures and the Emergence of the State in Europe, 1300–1900*, Farnham 2009; Achim Landwehr, *Policey im Alltag. Die Implementation Frühneuzeitlicher Polizeyordnungen in Leonberg. Studien zu Polizey und Polizeywissenschaft*, Frankfurt am Main 2000; Stefan Brakensiek/Heide Wunder (eds.), *Ergebene Diener ihrer Herren? Herrschaftsvermittlung im alten Europa*, Cologne/Weimar/Vienna 2005; about the transcultural context: Antje Flüchter, *Structures on the Move. Appropriating Technologies of Governance in a Transcultural Encounter*, in: Antje Flüchter/Susan Richter (eds.), *Structures on the Move*, Berlin/Heidelberg 2012, 1–27; cf. also currently a collective review on the treatment of the topic in English: Annemieke Romein, *Early modern state formation or gute Policey? The good order of the community*, in: *The Seventeenth Century* 37 (6/2022), 1031–1056.

readers and rulers: "The power of the prince of Japonia is not situated in the ordinary income/or in the good will of the people/but in the authority and great regard."<sup>70</sup> The ruler needed the obedience of the subjects, and this obedience "is founded and fortified on the excellence of the virtues of a prince and lord."<sup>71</sup> Such an obedience has to be earned by the ruler and cannot simply be enforced.<sup>72</sup>

Moreover, rule, and the subjects' relation to the ruler and his governance, were also seen in a religious framing. Botero understands religion as, "the foundation and right fundament of every state and regiment."<sup>73</sup> Because all authority comes from God, without God's grace and favor nothing can be obtained without him,<sup>74</sup> not least the obedience of the subjects, which also comes from God.<sup>75</sup>

70 "Die Macht des Fürsten von Japonia ist nit gelegen im ordinari Einkommen/oder im guten Willen des Volcks/sondern in der autoritet vnd grosses ansehen," Botero, *Theatrum*, part R (author's translation). The universal account also presents various ideas of how a ruler achieves respect and worship, for example, worshiping like a god in China, but also suppressing all foreign contact and educational opportunity in Russia. Botero, *Theatrum*, part F, part M.

71 Botero, *Gründlicher Bericht*, 24.

72 For example, the Grand Turk's way of ruling is described as exemplary; he increased people and power in many ways: "He accepts and raises all the people from whence they come, and whatever faith they have, and gives them a dwelling," Botero, *Gründlicher Bericht*, 266. The Ottoman Empire is also cited as a good example of how to integrate new subjects into one's empire. An important point here are the freedoms granted to the Janissaries, cf. Botero, *Gründlicher Bericht*, 163, 316.

The line of Botero's reasoning was similar regarding warfare, central to the expansion of a territory, unlike in modern military comparisons; cf. Thomas Müller, Practices of Comparing. A New Research Agenda between Typological and Historical Approaches, in: Angelika Epple/Walter Erhart/Johannes Grave (eds.), *Practices of Comparing. Towards a New Understanding of a Fundamental Human Practice*, Bielefeld 2020, 329–347. Whereas Thomas Biskup and Andreas Pecar refer, for the 19<sup>th</sup> century regarding the important *tertium* of the military, to the size of the troop contingents that could be deployed; cf. Pecar/Biskup, *Die Klassifikation der Staatenwelt im langen achtzehnten Jahrhundert*, 1–16. Botero hardly described weapons and equipment, but above all refers to the soldiers' morale and discipline. These virtues far exceed the importance of knowledge of how to wage war and military might as such, "Kunst vnd wissenschaft/gute Kriegsleute zu machen: Gutte Kriegsleute aber sind diese/welche gehorsam/vnd darbey auch tapffer und mannlich sind," Botero, *Gründlicher Bericht*, 292.

73 He claims that the Habsburgians as well as the Carolingians were only so successful because they were so God-fearing, cf. Botero, *Gründlicher Bericht*, 112.

74 Cf. Botero, *Gründlicher Bericht*, 113.

75 Cf. Botero, *Gründlicher Bericht*, 110. While in other respects foreign as well as non-Christian rulers and countries can serve as role models, in the case of religion it is not surprising that Christianity is clearly the best religion for a good and successful rule: because the rulers of Christendom "subjugate not only the bodies and goods of their subjects as far as they are able, but also their minds and hearts, together with their consciences." Botero, *Gründlicher Bericht*, 115/115v. However, it must be noted that in this passage Botero does not consider Christianity explicitly as the best and true religion per se, but rather as the most functionally

But how did the structure and modes of the analyzed practices of comparing relate to the intended improvement or change of a state system? Most of the comparisons Botero executed in *The Reason of State* were qualitative in a rather simple sense. Countries and the way of governance were mostly better or worse, bigger, or smaller, very similar to his formulation in the universal account. For the question of this paper, the spatial and temporal modes of comparing are of particular interest. There are space-oriented comparisons; in particular the character of the subjects was related to their geographical position.<sup>76</sup> The people from noon and midnight are compared, i.e., southern and northern folk.<sup>77</sup> These practices of comparing were embedded in the model of climate theory, a model that promises little room for dynamism and change.<sup>78</sup> However, one must not give too much weight to the importance of the climate model in Botero's work. It is one parameter among others. Besides the climate, for Botero decisive for the nature of man are education—a rather dynamic *tertium*—and also age and luck, the latter neither static nor controllable.<sup>79</sup>

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appropriate. Moreover, and in the perspective of colonial history, it is also interesting that Botero considered religion to be very important for successful colonies; this time, however, with the ambiguous formulation: successful are the places where “the word of God can be heard purely and loudly/freely and unhindered” and then he mentions Guadeloupe and Compostella, Botero, *Gründlicher Bericht*, 391 (author's translation).

76 Cf. Botero, *Weltbeschreibung*, 69–74.

77 Botero compared the septentrional peoples and the meridional bodies: “Those are simple-minded and sincere agitators/these are vicious, secret and devious: those have a heart like a lion/these a sense like a fox; those are slow/and steady in their endeavours /these impetuous and reckless/those are merry and cheerful/these melancholic: those are devoted to wine/these to fornication.” Botero, *Weltbeschreibung*, 70v (author's translation).

78 In the quoted passages the relationality of climate/geography and human nature is rather static. Then again, the ascription of peoples to climatic zones is different from in later texts: like in antique or enlightened concepts, the best people are those who live between both extremes. In Botero's text, the temperate peoples who were the most understanding and best to govern were the Assyrians, Medes, Persians, Turks, Greeks, Romans, and Spaniards; cf. Botero, *Weltbeschreibung*, 70. The decisive players in the later history of expansion, England and the Netherlands, are in his work still more likely to be among the northern peoples, bold but not very wise. With Botero's climate model, the later narratives of European or eternal superiority would not have been constructed so easily. Climate theory is a concept known since antiquity; it became new relevance with Montesquieu's work, cf. Antonello Gerbi, *The Dispute of the New World. The History of a Polemic. 1750–1900*, London 2010, explicitly about Botero, see 40. Eleonora Rohland has linked the climate theory to environmental history, cf. Eleonora Rohland, *Entangled Histories and the Environment? Socio-Environmental Transformations in the Caribbean 1500–1800*, Trier 2021. Interestingly, research did engage more in climate theory regarding the New World than regarding Asia.

79 Botero, *Weltbeschreibung*, 69 v.

In our modern perception change and development are closely connected with a temporal dimension. Since the 18th century the hierarchy of territories and cultures were presented in temporalized, often progressive comparison; i.e. the *comparata* are classified in terms of teleological civilization thinking.<sup>80</sup> In Botero's *The Reason of State* there are examples from different time periods, as the reference to history suggested, but the comparisons relating the countries to each other were not temporalized and maybe even not clearly temporal. That is, the modern reader assigns the *comparata* to different periods; however, time and a temporal sequence or difference were not explicit in the text.<sup>81</sup> There might be a timely difference between the contemporary states and their chosen *comparata*, but the comparisons are not temporalized. There are no stages of development, only the three states, the three groups of differently powerful states. Therefore, the temporal dimension refers to one of the described countries and to the respective circle of possible rise and fall, and not to an overarching concept of time or history.

If one looks at these factors, modeling on a basic level is possible with the data Botero's text provided. One could form, out of the given information, the best practice for the ruler's relation to his subjects, for the expansion of a territory; one could weigh the respective importance of individual factors. But an important difference from modern modeling must be emphasized. Botero was aiming for best practice of government, was aiming for means to improve and empower a country, but all the instruments he was looking for and describing are part of the known strategies, and are embedded in a rather static model of statehood and economy. Early-modern rule was legitimized by its reason, like justice, caritas, to protect the subject, and not so much by an aim for future development. Only in the late 18th century did the idea of regulating and investing something to change the country and its outcome arise in political discourse.<sup>82</sup> Consequently, Botero was not looking for new solutions or even innovation. Rather, he explicitly warns against the introduction of innovations because it inconveniences the subjects and endangers prestige and reputation, the most important assets of a ruler.<sup>83</sup> Here again, examples from the past

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80 Willibald Steinmetz et. al., Temporal Comparisons: Evaluating the World through Historical Time, in: *Time&Society* 30 (4/2021), 1–15.

81 Botero compared with examples from the Roman and Greek history, with Alexander the Great or the Gymnosophisten, as some Indian groups were called in antique sources. These examples have the same position as the Turkish sultan who is quote often mentioned as a positive example.

82 Stil seminal: Gottfried Niedhart, Aufgeklärter Absolutismus oder Rationalisierung der Herrschaft, in: *Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung* 6 (2/1979), 199–211, see 201; more over: Reinhard, *Geschichte der Staatsgewalt*, 339.

83 "Nichts ist häßlicher und feindsäliger in einem Regiment/vnnd welches die Vnterthanen mehr belästige: als wann man Newerungen eynführt/vnnd es nicht leßt bleiben bey

and present are used to support the problematic nature of innovations. The temporal mixture of the comparative examples, Saul from the Old Testament, the Roman emperor Tiberius, and also Louis XI of France, show the assumed simultaneity or timelessness of the comparison.<sup>84</sup>

Typically for the contemporary state theory, Botero assumed clear limits to the possible growth of states. For one, he explains, like an early Malthus, that the amount of people in the world cannot grow indefinitely because the earth does not provide unlimited food.<sup>85</sup> Botero used the example of cities to illustrate the unmediated limitation of growth. He mentioned the classic causes, namely pestilence, wars, and also inflation. At least as important, however, are the limits that God sets, the limits to growth, and also the limits to the power to act and regulate through good governance.<sup>86</sup> The effectiveness of the other factors is also traced back to God. The rise and fall of a territory lie in God's eternal providence. Therefore, princes should "humble themselves against the Divine Majesty with all their heart/recognize that he received his kingdom from him/and that the obedience of the subjects comes from him alone."<sup>87</sup> Botero emphasized that "God the Lord who governs all things/would have it so/and therefore thus decrees and send it."<sup>88</sup>

To summarize, early-modern authors could talk about the change of empires, cities and populations; it could be planned for, maybe even—in a very broad sense—modeled for prognostic reasons with the given data. But all this thinking

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dem/darauff die Alten ihr Reputation vnd Ansehen gegründet vnnnd befestiget hatten." Botero, *Gründlicher Bericht*, 89.

84 Cf. Botero, *Gründlicher Bericht*, 89v–90v.

85 Botero, *Gründlicher Bericht*, 434, esp. 436v: "Dann die Früchte der Erden darvon die Menschen ihr Nahrung haben müssen/können kein grössere anzahl ernehren."

86 One must therefore ask: "welches dann die Mittel seyen/deren sich die ewige Vorsehung Gottes gebrauchen thut/in dem sie auß wenigem viel machet /und den das viel ist gewisse ziel und schrancken stecket/daß es nicht weiter kommen kann." Botero, *Gründlicher Bericht*, 432–433.

87 Princes should "gegen die Göttliche Majestat von gantzem Hertzen demütigen/erkennen dass er sein Reich von von ihme empfangen/vnd daß der Unterthanen Gehorsame alleine von ihm her komme," Botero, *Gründlicher Bericht*, 110v (author's translation); cf. also references in footnote 73, Botero, *Gründlicher Bericht*, 112. These formulations show, among other things, that the secularization of Latin Europe, which had already been postulated for this period, was rather a depoliticization of ecclesiastical rule, while secular rule was virtually even more sacralized and integrated into sacral contexts; cf. the remarks by Sita Steckel: Sita Steckel, Dante on Differentiation. A View on Differentiation Theory and Historical Secularities from the European Past, in: Monika Wohlrab-Sahr/Daniel Witte/Christoph Kleine (eds.), *Differentiation Theory and the Sociology of Religion and Secularity* (Zeitschrift für Soziologie), (forthcoming); similar already Reinhard, *Geschichte der Staatsgewalt*, 108.

88 "Diweil Gott der Herr der alle ding regirete/es also haben wölle/vnd deshalb also verordnet vnd schiecke. Daß solches wahr seye / daran zweifelt niemand," Botero, *Gründlicher Bericht*, 432–433.

and planning happened within the model of rise and fall and not in a model of possible permanent and open progress. The growth or decline of states was not conceptualized as open but as limited. Botero's work is all about change in the sense of rise and fall, growth and expansion of states, growth of population, better armies, more pious citizens; this is actually about an increase in quality in a known structure, in the traditional model. In Botero's text and in his time, there was a language for change, but change as rise and fall within a set framework and not as open progress and growth; there is no language for fundamental social or political change, for "real" transformations. This result alone may not be so different from today, if one regards realistic concepts of change in international history.<sup>89</sup> The difference in discussing changes in states and territories in the sense of political history was that it was not exclusively within the control of the rulers or the people. They—rulers and subjects—were relevant, but as much because of their virtues as because of their strategic planning. However, there are other factors like climate, enough food and most of all God that could always outdo human actors and their strategies. This is on the one hand quite foreign to a modern mind; however, it might help to understand current problems which in the Anthropocene are already or will be beyond the human and political scope of action to solve. Looking into early-modern political thought proves that now is not the first time that human actors have had to handle situations that were mostly beyond their reach.

In Botero's model of governance, action lies most of all with the individual, and more in his behaving than in his planning. What the prince can do above all is to improve himself to live virtuously. As Hans-Otto Mühleisen put it, "The anthropological premises of freedom of education and the resulting purposefulness of man, become conditions for an autonomous and just design of the state."<sup>90</sup>

### **Early-modern Advice Literature—Demands to Change in Order to save Body and Soul**

Regarding change, Botero as well as mirrors for princes before the 18th century referred to the individual ruler rather than looking for abstract rules and regularities of development. Building on this result, the last and shortest part of this article asks about interaction between individual actors and models. For that aim two advisory texts will be analyzed, one regarding health and a long life, and the other a confessional manual; these texts demand that the reader changes his lifestyle to save

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89 Cf. Albert/Müller in this volume.

90 Hans-Otto Mühleisen, Gerechtigkeitsvorstellungen in „Fürstenspiegeln“ der Frühen Neuzeit, in: Herfried Münkler/Marcus Llanque (eds.), *Konzeptionen der Gerechtigkeit. Kulturvergleich, Ideengeschichte, Moderne Debatte*, Baden-Baden 1999, 81–101, see 99.



his body and his soul. The analyzed texts demand changes by referring to more abstract models, the early-modern understanding of the human body and the Christian economy of salvation. These models are less concretely tangible; rather, their contents and rules and the changes they are concerned with can be deduced in texts and practices that refer to them.

The view of the individual may at first be disconcerting, since we tend to locate the discovery and emergence of the individual in modernity, even though this is repeatedly discussed from a premodern perspective.<sup>91</sup> Consequently early-modern Christian society is understood as clearly socially differentiated (*ständische Gesellschaft*), based on birth, but it is also assumed that people acted and were addressed in terms of collectives rather than in terms of individual needs or goals. Such historiographic models of premodern societies structure our perception in such a way that we easily neglect change on the individual level or as an individual aim.

In the following, I explore how models influenced the change of individual actors. The exemplary source basis for the following considerations comes from early-modern speculum or advice literature. The metaphor of a mirror already implies that the texts from this genre invite readers to make comparisons between the image and its reflection, or to compare themselves to the known model;<sup>92</sup> the ideal derives in the analyzed texts from the humoral-pathological model, or the religious model built upon the doctrine of salvation and Christian lifestyle. Advice literature aimed at improvement, and advised action to achieve individual change. The advice literature negotiates between concrete practices and general norms or models, thus they describe possible and desirable interactions between micro and meso or even macro level.<sup>93</sup> These practices of comparing were asymmetrical, because the norma-

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91 Individuality has long been assigned to modernity; with Jacob Burkhardt, the individual was invented in the Renaissance. Many medievalists resisted this, cf. the profound considerations on modern and premodern individuality: Aaron J. Gurjewitsch, *Das Individuum im Europäischen Mittelalter* München 1994.; Franz-Josef Arlinghaus, *Conceptualising Pre-Modern and Modern Individuality. Some Theoretical Considerations*, in: Franz-Josef Arlinghaus (ed.), *Forms of Individuality and Literacy in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods*, Turnhout 2015, 1–46.

92 Borries explains the late medieval speculum literature as a “characteristic description of an ideal image [...] whose appeal is raised by the simultaneous depiction of the image (as a distorting mirror)” [original quote in German], Ekkehard Borries, *Schwesternspiegel im 15. Jahrhundert. Gattungskonstitution – Editionen – Untersuchungen*, Berlin/New York 2009, 390.

93 Cf. about the relation between concrete comparing on the micro level and superordinated norms: Angelika Epple, *Doing Comparisons. Ein praxeologischer Zugang zur Geschichte der Globalisierung/en*, in: Angelika Epple/Walter Erhart (eds.), *Die Welt beobachten. Praktiken des Vergleichens*, Frankfurt am Main/New York 2015, 161–199, see 165. In the SFB 1288 we use the terms micro, meso and macro in a heuristic way, cf. Müller/Ringel/Werron, *In der Mitte liegt die Kraft*. Practice theory was developed to criticize large-scale explanations and theories,

tive model and the individual acting or being is not at the same level; the norm is set like a *universal comparatum* and situated on the meso or even macro level.<sup>94</sup>

The premodern health teachings of humorism assumed that the different humors in the body—black bile, yellow bile, phlegm, and blood—had to be in balance. If that was the case the complexion had the right state; that is, the body was healthy. This model included many influencing factors: the seeds of the parents, the position of the stars at birth, climate, and other natural factors. Moreover, due to this model the body was understood as much more fluent than in modern medicine. The body was "constantly changing, absorbing and excreting, flowing, sweating, being bled, cupped and purged" as Ulinka Rublack phrases it.<sup>95</sup> Hippocratic medicine and many advice literatures suggested therefore various possibilities of improvement when the humors and everything had become too unstable; especially bloodletting and inducing vomiting and diarrhea.

Practices of comparing were a central tool in many health books to explain and advise—a model of a functioning—that is, healthy and balanced—body was compared with an ill and deranged one: this can be shown exemplarily in a German translation of the *Discorsi della vita sobria* (discourse on the temperate life) by Luigi Cornaro (1467–1565), a Venetian nobleman, humanist and doctor. Cornaro claimed to reveal the secrets of a long life. His ideas had a quite longstanding impact; maybe because of the timeless interest in lengthening one's life and postponing death. The text was published in German a good 150 years after the Italian original, but before that there were many translations and the text was referred to until recently:<sup>96</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche mentioned it in the *Gotterdammerung* and the text is still referred to in modern handbooks about age and aging.<sup>97</sup>

Cornaro compared the lifestyles of a healthy, moderate-living man with the one who gives in to bad habit, feasting and boozing: "a sober/moderate/and orderly life: that this has a very great power/to restore and maintain health/as an intemperate

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cf. Theodore Schatzki, Practice theory as flat ontology, in: Gert Spaargaren/Don Weenink/Machiel Lamers (eds.), *Practice Theory and Research*, London 2016, 28–42. In our third funding period, we in the SFB 1288 want to look explicitly into the potential of practice theory for larger processes like historical change.

94 In German this is rather an "abgleichen" than a "vergleichen."

95 Ulinka Rublack, Fluxes. The Early Modern Body and the Emotions, in: *History Workshop Journal* 53 (2002), 1–16, see 2; also cf. Barbara Duden, *The Woman beneath the Skin. A Doctor's Patients in Eighteenth-Century Germany*, Cambridge/Massachusetts 1991.

96 Steven Shapin characterizes the text as "one of the most long-lasting and influential works of practical medical advice," Steven Shapin, Was Luigi Cornaro a dietary expert?, in: *Journal of the history of medicine and allied sciences* 73 (2/2018), 135–149. esp. 135, 138.

97 For example Michael Fuchs (ed.), *Handbuch Alter und Altern. Anthropologie—Kultur—Ethik*, Berlin 2021, 92, 99.

and disorderly life would have a great power/to ruin and corrupt the same.”<sup>98</sup> This comparison implies the demand that the reader should change his or her life. This practice of comparing can thus be assigned to didactic comparative practices that intend to lead to changing the reader. These comparisons are much more explicitly directed towards a change, towards a change elicited by acting, than Botero’s state-theoretical ones. As consequences of both lifestyles, an early death at 40 or a long and fulfilled life into one’s 80s are forcefully pictured.<sup>99</sup>

There are different *tertia* to compare the ill and the healthy body as well as to compare different lifestyles. Clearly Cornaro compared in order to encourage readers to change their behavior or to highlight their habits. The dietary regime is one center of his comparative reasoning. Cornaro referred both to antique references and to his individual experience, to explain how to reduce one’s food drastically and how to choose better food.<sup>100</sup> The diet is important—a calm and balanced life even more; that is, “lifestyle” served as another *tertium* with many subordinated *tertia* indicated as “balanced, sober” etc. Cornaro suggested for example less activity, and also moderation in passion.<sup>101</sup> Strictly speaking, Cornaro demanded a change in lifestyle, but he did not refer to a new lifestyle like modern advice literature with new dietary regimes every month. Cornaro rather described a return to the good old order of the model, namely the harmony of the humors. He wrote: “and so the life of our body is dependent on the harmony and proportion of the humors and elements: so, it is no wonder/that we must keep it in order by a certain guideline.”<sup>102</sup>

However, Cornaro’s advice is not only about humors, diet, and lifestyle, so as to have a long-lived life; ultimately the lifestyle should also correspond to Christian doctrine. The humoral-pathological understanding of the body was in early-modern times intertwined with religious factors and the framework of salvation. All efforts to prolong life were limited to the hour of death as set by God. And gluttony, the

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98 Luigi Cornaro, *Eines venetianischen Edelmanns, Consilia und Mittel, über hundert Jahr in vollkommener Gesundheit*, Leipzig 1707, 8. Moreover he criticized the common world view that embraces rather the opposite: “hält man Völlerey für eine freye und herrliche Sache; ein nüchternes Leben aber für etwas niederträchtiges und verächtliches,” Cornaro, *Consilia und Mittel*, 4.

99 “Denn jenes Leben erhält die Menschen bey guter Gesundheit/die eine übele Complexion haben/ und steinalt sind/dieses aber wirffet auch diejenigen darnieder/die in der Blüte ihres Alters sind/und eine gantz vollkommene Complexion haben/und hält sie eine lange Zeit unter der Gewalt der Krankheiten,” Luigi Cornaro, *Consilia und Mittel*, 9–10.

100 Cornaro, *Eines venetianischen Edelmanns*, esp. 124–131, 146–1

101 culturell shall beware of “allzugroßer Hitze/Kälte/Ermüdung/vielen Wachen/vnd Excess im ehelichen Wercke: wie auch für einer Wohnung in ungesunder Lufft/für Winden/vnd für Sonnenhitze,” cf. Cornaro, *Consilia und Mittel*, 15.

102 Cornaro, *Consilia und Mittel*, 24 (author’s translation); and he went on: “Die Ordnung macht ja die Künste und Wissenschaften leichter; sie macht/daß eine Armee überwindet; sie behält und bestätigt die Königreiche/Städte und Geschlechter im Frieden.”

habit Cornaro criticizes most, is one of the seven mortal sins, whereas moderation is pleasing to God. The reference to God might have been necessary in such medical texts to avoid clerical censure; nevertheless the spiritual framing does not seem to be merely superficial. Health and religion were closely connected, as is most obvious in the Christus-medicus motive.<sup>103</sup>

Therefore, this chapter concludes by addressing Christian doctrine directly: probably the most widespread call for change in premodern Christian Europe is the call to return to a godly lifestyle. In addition to the large and effective general appeals to change one's life (e.g., flagellants, and also in the context of crusades), the ubiquitous practice of penance and confession is especially important here. The last source that will be analyzed is therefore the manual of confession *Nützliche Beichtbüchlein* by Johann Fabri (1504–1558), a Dominican controversialist and preacher at the cathedral in Augsburg.

Confession has a central role in the Catholic model of faith and salvation: the fear of one's own fate in the afterlife, after death, has increased ever since the invention of the purgatory in the High Middle Ages.<sup>104</sup> In late-medieval penitential sermons, the tortures in purgatory were described in drastic terms. People wanted to avoid these punishments as much as possible and instead enjoy heavenly bliss. Penance and confession practices functioned through a multifaceted comparison, a self-comparison, between oneself as a sinner and as a good Christian after absolution.<sup>105</sup>

Johann Fabri described the goal of repentance and confession as "through a true confession/healing repentance/and good intercession to improve one's life/to make oneself beautiful again to God in heaven for eternal blessedness."<sup>106</sup> Fabri also explains how the sinner compares his sin and guilt with his contrition and repentance, and if it is comparable, if it weighs the same on God's scale, salvation by Jesus's merits is possible.<sup>107</sup>

To further the idea of confession, further comparisons are offered to the repentant, mostly sinners who have been forgiven: the prodigal son, Mary Magdalena, and the criminal crucified beside Jesus. All traditional elements of a premodern confession manual encourage or even demand that the readers compare their own lives

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103 Cf. Hubertus Lutterbach, *Der Christus Medicus und die Sancti Medici. Das wechselvolle Verhältnis zweier Grundmotive christlicher Frömmigkeit zwischen Spätantike und Früher Neuzeit*, in: *Saeculum. Jahrbuch für Universalgeschichte* 47 (2/1996), 239–281.

104 Still seminal: Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, Chicago 1986.

105 Cf. Maximilian Benz in this volume.

106 Johann Fabri, *Ein nützlich Beichtbüchlein. Wie der Mensch sich seiner Sünd erinnern, vnd die bekennen soll*, 1563, unnumbered.

107 "Also vergleicht der sündler/durch die würdige frucht der Buß/die schuld durch das verdienst Jhesu Christi/ohn welches kein mensch ann ledig werde seiner sünd." Johann Fabri, *Ein Nützlich Beichtbüchlein*. In this phrase the meaning of "comparing" is close to "balancing."

with the ideal of a good Christian or their own actions with those described as deadly sins.<sup>108</sup> Moreover, Fabri compares different ways to gain help: “He who does not trust God in all his needs, but in his sickness or abominable state seeks help outside of God, than with magic, warriors’ art, or fortune telling.”<sup>109</sup> Here again we see the close connection between the religious and the medical field in premodern Latin Christianity.

The whole confessional process is therefore a comparative practice in which every section and every topic of the manual “helps” to compare one’s own life, thinking and being with good and evil images. The practice of comparing in the context of penitence and confession is even more didactic than in the advice literature concerning bodily health. The demand to change is directly addressed, there is a language for change, and the habits as well as the practices that needed to be changed could be identified via comparing. The demand to change is virtually inscribed in the structure of these didactic practices of comparing. The examples from advice literature show very clearly what Franz Arlinghaus postulated on a more abstract level, namely that premodern comparisons tend to compare with the better, while modern comparisons relate the known to the other.<sup>110</sup>

## Conclusion

### Premodern models and practices of comparing

The connection between premodern models and comparative practices has been clearly explicated. Models are formed through comparative practices, whether through the comparison of different units of time, as indicated in Daniel’s prophecies, or through the much more concrete comparing of countries and rulers by Giovanni Botero. Moreover, regarding the connection between practices of comparing and the analyzed case studies, certain modes of comparing were significant for the underlying concept of change: The *tertia* that Botero used formed the basic pattern for his model of the rise and fall of countries and states. The mode of comparison was primarily a qualitative one, in the simple sense of more or less, and in some cases better, such as in the sense of more fertility. This is rather typical for

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108 Fabri’s confessional mirror, similar to many confessional mirrors, contains the ten commandments, the seven deadly sins, the seven sacraments and different ways in which one can sin with one’s five senses.

109 “Wer Got nit vertrawet in allen seinen nöten/sondern in seiner krankhait oder widerwertigkeit ausserhalb Gott hülf sucht/als mit zauberey/schwarterkunst/warsagerei,” Johann Fabri, *Ein Nutzlich Beichtbüchlein*, in the context of the description of the first of the ten commandments.

110 Arlinghaus, *Conceptualising Pre-Modern and Modern Individuality*, 26.

early-modern times, which compared to the modern way of comparing rarely used numbers, and even less so in a quantitative or statistical manner, but rather in a symbolic way. The goal of Botero's model was the rise of a territory, but this took place without a temporal indexing by the *tertia* or the comparative structure. The developmental pattern of rise and fall is not underpinned by a teleology; ancient and contemporary, European and non-European examples can therefore be juxtaposed and compared without temporal localization.

In the case of the analyzed advice literature, models in a more abstract sense (economy of salvation; discourse about the human body) were compared with individual or concrete action. These comparative practices challenge readers to change their behavior or their lifestyle; they can therefore be understood as a didactic mode of comparing. The temporal factor is present (in the sense of before and after), but it is not integrated into a larger time or developmental line that goes beyond the life of the individual reader.

### Conceptualizing change in the frame of premodern models

In the context of advice literature, i.e., in the interplay of concrete and individual action and the abstract model, change was possible and doable; there was a language for change. However, this change always takes place at the micro level and relates to concrete actors. The models addressed were provided ideals and, in this respect, could be used as action-guiding manuals for concrete change. Understood in this way, change is part of the models of an economy of salvation or the physiology of the human body, but only within the model and in the practices in which the models are embedded. They cannot be understood as a transformation of the parameters of the model itself.

The understanding of change in models described in the first part of the essay is similar: in the models built on the doctrine of the Four Empires by Daniel, on the one hand, change is only implied in the sense of the succession of the four empires. These successions happened or emerged; contemporary actors had no part in them, no active influence on the succession or duration of the ages. In Botero's work, on the other hand, there is certainly the possibility of humans shaping change. In *The Reason of State*, rise and fall are related to many factors, but are also in the hands of the ruler. Comparative practices that guide action, as in the advice literature, were not explicitly formulated, but could be deduced. *The Reason of State* explicitly addressed rulers. Thus, this change could be shaped by powerful actors, but not indefinitely. The space for growth was limited; it was not a modern, unlimited understanding of growth, nor was there an underlying Enlightenment idea of ever-advancing improvement. At the same time, change in Botero's work was not drawn as a simple zero-sum game.

In the premodern era, change was thus a topic one could talk about, and there was usually also space for action and agency imagined to pursue change at the individual level, and also for transformation at the state level. But the change, and even more, the transformation that was possible in the models described differs fundamentally from the modern understanding of change in three aspects:

First, it is limited; Botero mentioned these limits, but even in *The Economy of Salvation* a believer cannot become God, and no one lives forever even on the best diet. Above all, the possibilities for influencing or even initiating change were limited. In this model, as Koselleck already noted for the understanding of the time period before the 18th century, a prognosis is possible, but not an open future. In addition, the texts analyzed here mainly describe principles that bring about change, but hardly make any forecasts—forecasts could be developed from them, but they were only part of the model to a very limited extent. However, we should be careful to see here a fundamental difference from modern models. The open future may be part of modern thinking, but modern models also do not have an open future outside the parameters of the model; they only deliver forecasts.

But modern models usually assume a large scope of action for actors or institutions; this is clearly, but still gradually and not absolutely, different in premodern models. In premodern models, human beings acted, but they were not the only actors, nor were the actors only limited by social, political, etc. structures, as we understand them nowadays. There was another important actor in almost all the models described, and that was God. God as an actor was the real game changer and change agent and He was the only one not bound by the rules of the model. Botero said this explicitly, in the theological-derived Four Empire doctrine as well as in the practice of confession and salvation-seeking; God's changing power was obvious, but also the medicine of the period studied had always to admit that it ultimately could not work against God's will, that ultimately healing, recovery, or death were already divinely predetermined. It was not so much the processes of transformation and change that were limited, but man as an agent of action was capped and limited in his ability to initiate change. This should not just be brushed aside as premodern irrationality or a phenomenon of religious thinking but should be taken seriously as an immensely important aspect of the premodern understanding of change, as the intrinsic logic of premodern change.

### **Comparing and models beyond the idea of European superiority**

The third important difference is the premodern understanding of the world and the assumed relationship between Europe and the non-European world. The analyzed authors were European authors; of course they thought Eurocentrically, but not in the same way we define Eurocentrism today. Their comparative practices rather favored what Jürgen Osterhammel called an inclusive Eurocentric comparison, and

this is a kind of counterpart of modern exclusive Eurocentrism.<sup>111</sup> Typical for pre-modern times was a kind of Eurocentrism that included the compared countries in one's own world, perceived them as comparable. This is a perspective that Osterhammel claims for the early Enlightenment, but it can be applied to large parts of European premodernity.

The Four Empires of Daniel and especially Botero's description of the world worked without a clear hierarchy of world regions. Admittedly Botero's models characterized Europe as somehow better, and for Botero Italy was the greatest country of all; but other passages emphasized the even greater greatness of China or Cambaia in India, or praised the Turkish emperor for the way he dealt with subjugated peoples. There was no clear hierarchy and no clear Western superiority to be found in these comparisons. Europe was not yet the universal *comparatum*, as Chakrabarty criticized for later centuries.<sup>112</sup> Certainly Botero and other authors of the early-modern period had not a more mature ethos of comparison than modern Europeans. Rather, the lack of or at least limited character of European superiority displayed in these comparisons also points to a still-limited "real" superiority on a global scale. Especially regarding the Empires of the East, there was little more than the belief of Europeans in Christianity as the only true religion that enabled them to feel better. This conviction, however, did not translate into political, economic, or military power and European dominance.

### Understanding change in premodern, modern, and postmodern times

The understanding that can be gained from the connection between change, models, and comparative practices in the premodern era, i.e., before the mid-18th century with the emerging ideas of progress, scientificity, and the feasibility of history, not only enables us to take a more differentiated view of this earlier epoch; these considerations also enable us to historicize modernity and its concepts of change, its models and modeling. Modern options of change and concepts of progress, which were conceptualized infinitely, have been relativized or questioned many times by the sciences. Nevertheless, outside of science and even subliminal within it, such narratives often continue to be carried along quasi-naturally, comparable to a macrostructure in the sense of an interpretation of the world. The same applies to the belief in technological change and the human feasibility of history, such as

111 Jürgen Osterhammel, *Die Entzauberung Asiens. Europa und die asiatischen Reiche im 18. Jahrhundert*, München 1998, 400; cf. the discussion on this: Christian Windler, *Interkulturelle Diplomatie in der Sattelzeit. vom inklusiven Eurozentrismus zur »zivilisierenden« Ausgrenzung*, in: Hillard von Thiesen/Christian Windler (eds.), *Akteure der Außenbeziehungen. Netzwerke und Interkulturalität im historischen Wandel*, Cologne/Vienna/Weimar 2010, 445–470.

112 Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton 2000.



the availability of the earth. Much research on the Anthropocene has shown us once again how these models are not only inaccurate, but also dangerous in the long run.<sup>113</sup> They lead us to believe in possibilities for action that we do not have. The tableau of our current hegemonic ways of thinking can thus be expanded by knowing that different ways of thinking were common before the 18th century. Thinking and modeling change as limited and without omnipotent humans was possible; perhaps such premodern ways of thinking will inspire us to also rethink our understanding of processes of change, the limits of change and its feasibility.

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113 Cf. Frank Adloff/Sighard Neckel, Einleitung, in: Frank Adloff/Sighard Neckel (eds.), *Gesellschaftstheorie im Anthropozän*, Frankfurt am Main 2020, 7–19; Eleonora Rohland, *The Anthropocene, Modelling Socio-Environmental Transformations in the Americas, and a New Interdisciplinarity, Interdisciplinarity. The Zif's Blog*, 2020, URL: <https://zif.hypotheses.org/604>.

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# Rethinking the Model and Modeling

## Through Comparative Practices in Late Medieval Piety<sup>1</sup>

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Maximilian Benz

**Abstract** *In this paper, modeling is used as a historiographic technique to fill gaps in historical semantics and to describe historical change. The aim is to understand how the treatise “De imitatione Christi”, written by Thomas a Kempis, was received. In order to reconstruct the model that mediated between the general whole of the underlying concept and the individual case of action, the recourse to practices of comparing is instructive. Changes in the conception of “imitatio Christi” can be described in this way, although from a historical perspective no semantics or concepts are available for the initiated changes. Of essential importance is the transition of a self-comparison with Christ to a process of ethical subjectivity, which can also be reconstructed as a practice of comparing, but in which the structure of comparison has changed significantly.*

The cultural technique of modeling can be understood as a practice that correlates theoretical assumptions about concrete contexts and situations, for example conceptions of the world, with specific actions.<sup>2</sup> The model occupies a place between the general whole of the underlying concept and the individual case of action. To put it in another way: it enables mediation and orientation between the concept and the way of acting. Models do not necessarily have to be made explicit. They can belong to the latent pool of knowledge of certain *communities of practice* that is actualized in habitually performed operations. It is therefore a worthwhile task of historical research to examine the latent, implicit, but culturally effective historical model formations. Consequently, changes in the practice of modeling make it possible to detect historical change.

Especially if one wants to sketch out a contingency-sensitive theory of historical change, it is necessary to heuristically assume semantic and conceptual gaps in the

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1 This contribution was written as part of my Heisenberg project funded by the German Research Foundation. A modified German version of this text appeared in the first issue of the new international yearbook on religious knowledge and German literature of the late Middle Ages and early modern period *Pietas litterata* 1 (2023), 46–75.

2 For the underlying concept of “modeling” see the introduction to this volume, esp. XX–YY.



historical process. Change occurs precisely where contemporaries are initially unable to grasp this very change because the new is incommensurable with the old. For this reason, it can often be observed that change has not been adequately described at the historical level. Historiographical reconstruction, in turn, faces the danger of measuring the historically older according to the categories of a later, transformed cultural entity and thus arguing teleologically. This happens especially often when the *tertium* of the comparison comes from the cultural context of the younger *comparatum*: the comparison is asymmetrical.

Here, “the decidedly symmetrical view”<sup>3</sup> plays an essential role, which attempts to avoid the asymmetry: we are trying not to categorically order the historically older according to the categories of a later,<sup>4</sup> transformed cultural entity, but we first compare two historical situations with each other, considering the “allelopoietic”—this expression alludes to the mutual constructedness—moment of productive reciprocity in the historiographical arrangement.<sup>5</sup> Thus, history is not always already previous history, but fundamentally complementary history.<sup>6</sup> Following methodologically developed questions, units on the “meso level,” for example certain practice formations, are compared with each other on the basis of *tertia*, which, if possible, originate from the meta level; wherever recourse to the object level cannot be avoided, this must be reflected. It is precisely the reconstruction of implicit models that can lead to symmetrical comparisons in the sense of complementary history. The implicit models abstract from the semantics of the historical sources and must be explicated using methodologically reflected concepts.

In the following case study, I will take a closer look at late medieval piety and the connected self-concepts that cannot be captured in theological systems. Rather, the effect of medieval piety can be described by implicit models of the self-concept. But how does one methodically ascertain these historically unexplained models? One must proceed case by case. In order to be able to reconstruct the model, it is first necessary to refer to theories that come from cultural analysis, for example, and make

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3 Cf. Anita Traninger, *Disputation, Deklamation, Dialog. Medien und Gattungen europäischer Wissenschaftsverhandlungen zwischen Scholastik und Humanismus*, Stuttgart 2012, 13.

4 Differentiated approaches are currently being developed for a “symmetrical historiography,” cf. for example: Caroline Arni/Simon Teuscher (eds.), *Symmetrische Anthropologie, symmetrische Geschichte* (Historische Anthropologie, 28), Wien/Köln/Weimar 2020, esp. 5–8. In this approach, however, the reference to the present plays a dominant role.

5 In this sense, aspects of transformation theory can also be made fruitful for the question of historical change, cf. Hartmut Böhme et al., *Transformation. Ein Konzept zur Erforschung kulturellen Wandels*, Paderborn 2011.

6 From here, the complementary history approach can also be distinguished from Foucault’s genealogy, which I do below. The approach of complementary history is further elaborated in a monograph I am currently writing: *Konturen des Selbst in der christlichen Reform an der Schwelle zur Neuzeit*.

it possible to describe self-concepts on this side of historical terminology. These theories—here the “aesthetics of existence” developed by Michel Foucault—are then modified regarding a historical case from the late Middle Ages—the reception of a widespread tract of *Devotio Moderna*—and used to create a model of self-concepts. In this specific case, however, comparative practices will prove to be particularly fruitful. Not only can the reception of the treatise be described through comparative practices; it is through the changes in comparative practices that the emergent new can be grasped.

Self-concepts are an example of models that mediate between concepts and actions. As is well known, far-reaching changes took place here in the late Middle Ages, which of course must be considered in a larger historical process. In the context of individuals’ self-fashioning, it is of course worth recalling Michel Foucault’s thoughts on the “aesthetics of existence,” which can be grasped in works that appeared between 1980 and 1984, particularly *L’Usage des plaisirs* and *Le Souci de soi*—volume two and three of his *Histoire de la sexualité*<sup>7</sup>—but which are also apparent in numerous smaller writings and interviews. Questions about the genealogy of the self and the history of subjectivity directly address the connection of an aesthetics of existence with an art of living that mediates between the “external formability of the subject” and the “internal formability of the self.”<sup>8</sup>

In these contexts, Foucault’s reflections should not be understood as a monolithic entity, but as cases affected by the specific movement of argumentation. While before the posthumous publication of the fourth volume of the *Histoire de la sexualité*, *Les Aveux de la chair*,<sup>9</sup> it might have seemed as if Christianity contrasted fundamentally with the ancient art of living and its ethos<sup>10</sup>—even though antiquity offered “no concrete alternatives, but placeholders or signs for the fundamental formability and transformability of self-references”<sup>11</sup>—the contrastive approach is increasingly

7 Cf. Michel Foucault, *L’usage des plaisirs*, Paris 1984; Michel Foucault, *Le souci de soi*, Paris 1984.

8 Cf. Martin Saar, Die Form des Lebens. Künste und Techniken des Selbst beim späten Foucault, in: Daniel Defert/François Lagrange (eds.), *Michel Foucault. Ästhetik der Existenz. Schriften zur Lebenskunst*, Frankfurt am Main 2007, 321–343; cf., also in the sense of an “analytical philosophy of politics,” Daniele Lorenzini, *Éthique et Politique de Soi. Foucault, Hadot, Cavell et les Techniques de l’Ordinaire*, Paris 2015.

9 Michel Foucault, *Les aveux de la chair*, Paris 2018.

10 Cf. Clemens Kammler/Gerhard Plumpe, Antikes Ethos und postmoderne Lebenskunst. Michel Foucaults Studien zur Geschichte der Sexualität, in: *Philosophische Rundschau* 34 (1987), 186–194.

11 Cf. Martin Saar, Die Form des Lebens, 331: “[...] keine konkreten Alternativen, sondern Platzhalter oder Zeichen für die grundsätzliche Gestaltbarkeit und Transformierbarkeit von Selbstbezügen”; cf., on the late Foucault, Paul Veyne, The Final Foucault and his Ethics, in: Arnold I. Davidson (ed.), *Foucault and his Interlocutors*, Chicago/London 1997, 225–233.

marginalized, or at least it is changing. In order to grasp the relationship more precisely, it is worthwhile to first describe the respective segments in terms of complementary history, but by starting from analytical parameters that arise from historiographical interest.

For my argument, it is of particular importance that in Foucault the question of subjectivity is connected to ethics. In this context, the works of Pierre Hadot deserve special attention. Hadot, instead of reconstructing a philosophical system, has focused on the “way of life” of the philosophizing individual himself: “La vraie philosophie est donc, dans l’Antiquité, exercice spirituel.”<sup>12</sup> Although it is important to keep in mind the differences between Hadot and Foucault,<sup>13</sup> the question of the “aesthetics of existence” thus appears as a variation of the *manière de vivre*, the *mode de vie*: “The element of attitude or ethos that is related to morality is always an expression of self-relation, of positioning oneself as who one is and as who one may and should act as.”<sup>14</sup> In this case ethics and aesthetics—the latter understood as the shaping of life—are brought close together.

Especially *Les Aveux de la chair*—a work that was published posthumously but written before volumes two and three of the *Histoire de la sexualité* and which revolves around penitential practice, virginity, and marriage—promise clarification in historiographical terms, for these prove the continuity of Christian norms and modes of subjectivation with ancient ethics.<sup>15</sup> Of no importance for my reconstruction are Foucault’s critical points on the present. From his critical perspective these techniques suggested that he could ask: “Mais la vie de tout individu ne pourrait-elle pas

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12 Pierre Hadot, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*, Paris 1987, 51 (the relevant section of the *Exercices spirituels* from which the quotation is taken was first published in: *Annuaire de la Ve Sectio’ de l’École Pratique des Hautes Études* 84 [1977], 27–70, which Foucault referred to in the preface to *L’Usage des plaisirs* and in *Le Souci de soi*); cf. Arnold I. Davidson/Frédéric Worms (eds.), *Pierre Hadot. L’enseignement des antiques, l’enseignement des modernes*, Paris 2010; Werner Beierwaltes, Nachruf auf Pierre Hadot, in: *Jahrbuch der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* 2010, München 2011, 173–176.

13 Cf. esp. Hadot, *Exercices spirituels*, 229–233; Pierre Hadot, Überlegungen zum Begriff “Selbstkultur,” in: François Ewald/Bernhard Waldenfels (eds.), *Spiele der Wahrheit. Michel Foucaults Denken*, Frankfurt am Main 1991, 219–227; Arnold I. Davidson, Ethics as Ascetics. Foucault, the History of Ethics, and Ancient Thought, in: Gary Gutting (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, Cambridge 2003, 123–148.

14 Cf. Saar, Die Form des Lebens, 328: “Das Element der Haltung oder des *Ethos* einer Moral ist immer Ausdruck einer Selbstbeziehung, eines Sich-selbst-Positionierens als der, der man ist und als der man handeln darf und soll.”

15 Cf. Karsten Schubert, Die christlichen Wurzeln der Kritik. Wie Foucaults Analysen der Kirchenväter neues Licht auf die Debatte um Macht und Freiheit werfen, in: *Zeitschrift für philosophische Literatur* 7 (2/2019), 60–71, see 67.

être une œuvre d'art?"<sup>16</sup> I will also leave undecided whether a critical potential is inherent in the act of speaking the truth about oneself that is crucial for the Christian penitential ritual.<sup>17</sup>

What is important is that the dichotomous dissociation between a pagan ethos of the art of living and the Christian law,<sup>18</sup> which was identified in the past, cannot be sustained.<sup>19</sup> However, in *Les Aveux de la chair* Foucault, on the one hand, clearly draws on late antiquity. On the other, he declares the question of "how to govern" to be "one of the fundamental questions of the fifteenth or sixteenth century."<sup>20</sup> Therefore, the question of the aesthetics of existence, understood as a "practice- and exercise-mediated approach to truth,"<sup>21</sup> seems to overlook a fundamental historical constellation. And this is not about the vanity of the medievalist who complains that Foucault, who with regard to the Middle Ages had considered above all the effect of the Fourth Council of the Lateran, also jumps from antiquity to Descartes' meditations in another context.<sup>22</sup>

If one assumes a long historical process in which subjectivity can be understood as an effect of self-techniques,<sup>23</sup> which in a power-critical perspective can be comprehended as different from systems and laws and which can be grasped within the framework of forms of life, one can once again pose the question of what an aesthetics of existence means before the age of an emphatic understanding of art and in the

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16 Michel Foucault, À propos de la généalogie de l'éthique. Un aperçu du travail en cours, in: Daniel Defert/François Ewald (eds.), *Dits et Écrits II: 1976–1988*, Paris 2001, 1202–1230, see 1211.

17 Cf. Schubert, *Die christlichen Wurzeln der Kritik*, 69.

18 Cf. Kammler/Plumpe, *Antikes Ethos und postmoderne Lebenskunst*, 191: "Die antike, im Ethos der Polis vor allem garantierte Balance von Selbst und Sozialität ist zerbrochen; das Selbst wird von den kodifizierenden oder normalisierenden Instanzen der Religion oder des Staats absorbiert, 'Selbstbeherrschung' durch Abrichtung, 'Selbstsorge' durch Expertokratie ersetzt."

19 Niki Kasumi Clements, Foucault's Christianities, in: *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 89 (2021), 1–40, see 16: "The arts of living in antiquity rely on the critical ability of subjects to actively conduct themselves instead of being subjected to others. But this signals a continuity more than a break: Foucault does not oppose 'pagan ethics' to 'Christian morality'—indeed his interest in the former stems from his recognition of the dialectical development of these histories."

20 Michel Foucault, Qu'est-ce que la Critique (*Critique et Aufklärung*) in: *Bulletin de la Société française de Philosophie* 84.2 (1990), 35–63 (with discussion), 37: "Comment gouverner, je crois cela a été une des questions fondamentales de ce qui s'est passé au xv<sup>e</sup> ou xvi<sup>e</sup> au siècle."

21 Cf. Saar, *Die Form des Lebens*, 342.

22 Cf. Michel Foucault, L'éthique du souci de soi comme pratique de la liberté, in: Daniel Defert/François Ewald, *Dits et Écrits II: 1976–1988*, 1527–1548, see 1541–1542.

23 Cf. Christian Moser, *Buchgestützte Subjektivität. Literarische Formen der Selbstsorge und der Selbsttherapeutik von Platon bis Montaigne*, Tübingen 2006.

context of a Christian *ordo*.<sup>24</sup> In this way, an alterity of art comes into view that does not assume a categorical difference between aesthetics and ethics, but rather understands art in the sense of the medieval *ars* as a complex of case-related effective rules that are appropriated in a longer process. Regarding the aesthetics of existence, this means an *ars vivendi*—Greek: τέχνη του βίου—that forms technologies of the self beyond mere norm fulfillment and following of rules.

It is likely due to the dominance of secular self-descriptions of modernity that, in contrast to the normative character of Christian ethics, the genuinely Christian art of living receives little attention in scholarship.<sup>25</sup> Yet it plays an important role for the practice of piety up to the present moment, especially in an interdenominational perspective. In 2008, Peter Bubmann and Bernhard Sill published a volume on the “Christian Art of Living” that was aimed at the practice of piety. In the introduction they define the Christian Art of Living as a “stylish appropriation” (Christian Schwindt) of the reality of Christ and as a form of discipleship.<sup>26</sup>

With Bubmann’s and Sill’s emphasis of the *imitatio Christi* (the succession of Christ) in the context of the art of living the Foucauldian framework of an aesthetics of existence seems to have been overcome. This impression, however, is deceptive. For if one follows the consequences of philosophy as a way of life that Pierre Hadot emphasizes—“constant self-examination, meditation, focus on the presence of conscious life, inward withdrawal for the sake of inner freedom and self-knowledge”<sup>27</sup>—then the contrast with Christian practices of piety, and especially with

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24 Clements, Foucault’s Christianities, 25: “Foucault—in *Confessions of Flesh* and in his lectures, interviews, and monographs from the 1970s and 1980s—frames Christianity both as continuous with the ancient world and as importantly inaugurating mechanisms and technologies that will come to define modern subjectivity—notably through regimes of truth and forms of governmentality predicated on obedience and confession, on individuation and totalization, on desire and law.” This reconstruction has meanwhile been criticized especially with regard to Foucault’s interpretation of Augustine and Cassian, cf. Herman Westerink, *The Subject of Desire and the Hermeneutics of Thoughts. Foucault’s Reading of Augustine and Cassian*, in: *Foucault Studies* 33 (2022), 24–47.

25 Cf. the following important exceptions: Juliusz Domański, *La Philosophie, Théorie ou Manière de vivre? Les controverses de l’Antiquité à la Renaissance*, Freiburg/Switzerland 1996; Pierre Hadot, *Qu’est-ce que la Philosophie antique?*, Paris 1995, 379–407; John Cottingham, *Philosophy and Self-improvement. Continuity and Change in Philosophy’s Self-conception from the Classical to the Early-modern Era*, in: Michael Chase et al. (eds.), *Philosophy as a Way of Life. Ancients and Moderns*, Malden 2013, 148–166.

26 Cf. Peter Bubmann/Bernhard Sill (eds.), *Christliche Lebenskunst*, Regensburg 2008, 9–22, see 15: “[...] als ‘stilvolle Aneignung’ (Christian Schwindt) der Wirklichkeit Christi und als Form von Nachfolge.”

27 Cf. Beierwaltes, Nachruf auf Pierre Hadot, 175: “[...] ständige Selbstprüfung, Meditation, Konzentration auf die Gegenwart bewussten Lebens, Rückgang ins Innere um der inneren Freiheit und der Selbsterkenntnis willen.”

forms of late medieval piety that emerge literally on the threshold to modernity, is lost (this is not a contingent event, as the historical context that can be associated with Neoplatonism clearly shows).

Although the imperative of the *imitatio Christi* is undisputed in its significance for Christianity, there are a variety of different opinions about what this significance contains. To begin with, there is a range of widely divergent answers to the question of how the relationship of *imitatio* understood as “imitation” and the commandment to follow Christ should be defined.<sup>28</sup> Accordingly, Julia Weitbrecht was able to state that scholarship uses the term *imitatio* “unspecifically.”<sup>29</sup> There are good reasons for this claim: “imitation” has recently been identified as a comprehensive cultural principle of the Middle Ages.<sup>30</sup> I argue, however, that the concept depends on a specific constellation that promises to shed light on historically specific model formations.

In order to reconstruct the implicit models, we must resort to the structure of the *imitatio Christi*: in certain contexts, this can be grasped as a comparative practice.<sup>31</sup> It is important to emphasize that not every form of *imitatio Christi* can be described as a comparative practice. If we look at the diversity of legends, for which typological comparisons<sup>32</sup> have a special significance in principle, and therein also only at the possibilities of narrating martyrdoms, a considerable breadth becomes apparent: witnessing and martyrdom are originally closely linked, but gradually diverge, and can eventually be brought back together in new ways.<sup>33</sup> In this context the *imitatio Christi* can initially be understood in terms of a subsumption<sup>34</sup> that means, on this side of comparative structures, the fulfillment of various criteria with recourse to different traditions. To the extent that the respective subsumption appears to be disputed, however, implicit as well as explicit comparative practices can move in here as well.<sup>35</sup>

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28 Cf. Hans Jürgen Milchner, *Nachfolge Jesu und Imitatio Christi. Die theologische Entfaltung der Nachfolgethematik seit den Anfängen der Christenheit bis in die Zeit der devotio moderna – unter besonderer Berücksichtigung religionspädagogischer Ansätze*, Münster 2004.

29 Cf. Julia Weitbrecht, “Imitatio” und Imitabilität. Zur Medialität von Legende und Legenden-spiel, in: *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur (PBB)* 134 (2012), 204–220, see 205.

30 Cf. Andreas Büttner et al. (eds.), *Nachahmen im Mittelalter. Dimensionen – Mechanismen – Funktionen*, Köln et al. 2018.

31 This is only one facet of the importance of comparative practices for pious self-constitution. Cf. in this volume the contribution of Antje Flüchter, esp. on “manuals of confession” XX–YY.

32 Cf. Volker Bohn (ed.), *Typologie*, Frankfurt am Main 1988.

33 Cf. Julia Weitbrecht et al., *Legendarisches Erzählen. Optionen und Modelle in Spätantike und Mittelalter*, Berlin 2019, esp. 112–113.

34 Cf. Ulrike Davy et al., *Grundbegriffe für eine Theorie des Vergleichens. Ein Zwischenbericht. Working Paper 3 des SFB 1288*, Bielefeld 2019, see 19–23, [<http://doi.org/10.4119/unibi/2939563>].

35 Cf. Weitbrecht, *Legendarisches Erzählen*, 115–136.

Fundamentally important in the context of legends is the comparison between Christ and the saint, which can become a sign of the saint himself: This is particularly clear in the example of St. Francis.<sup>36</sup> The manifold comparative practices finally culminate in the assertion of a *conformitas* between Francis and Christ, which is broadly elaborated by Bartholomew of Pisa in the compendium *De conformitate vitae beati Francisci ad vitam Domini Iesu nostri Redemptoris*.<sup>37</sup> For the comparison between Christ and a saint, for example, by a hagiographer, we propose the concept of external comparison (“heterosynkrisis”), in order to distinguish from it practices of comparing the self with Christ or saints (“homosynkrisis”).<sup>38</sup> If one is interested in the significance of the imperative of the *imitatio Christi* for a genuinely Christian art of living, these connections play a role in the sense of more general reception theory,<sup>39</sup> if, for example, the believing recipient sees himself prompted by the legend to engage in a self-comparison with the saint and, indirectly or directly, also with Christ. However, this represents—to the persistent suggestion of the saint as *imitabile*, which proceeds from André Jolles’s definition of the legend as a “simple form”<sup>40</sup>—just one possible perspective of reception, since the life and death of the saint also qualify him as an *intercessor*, whom one does not necessarily follow, but whom one invokes in distress.<sup>41</sup>

In distinction from comparisons with others (‘heterosynkrisis’) like the one between Francis and Christ, the self-comparisons with Christ or saints (‘homosynkrisis’) have consequences for one’s own way of life and can be part of a Christian art of living. Basically, beyond the legends, all genres of ‘fideal’ narrative—neither ‘fictional’ nor ‘factual’ texts that are ‘believed’ by their readers<sup>42</sup>—come into play here,

36 Cf. Krijn Pansters, *Imitatio imitationis*. In the Footsteps of the Imitation of Christ in Early Franciscan Texts, in: Volker Leppin (ed.), *Schaffen und Nachahmen. Kreative Prozesse im Mittelalter*, Berlin/Boston 2021, 373–389.

37 On this treatise, which has hardly been studied so far, cf. Carolly Erickson, Bartholomew of Pisa, Francis Exalted: *De conformitate*, in: *Medieval Studies* 34 (1972), 253–274.

38 “Hetero-” and “homosynkrisis” are to be located in the same cultural framework and are therefore away from the “Self-Other problematic,” that has been criticized from a postcolonial perspective, cf. Haun Saussy, *Axes of Comparison*, in: Rita Felski/Susan Stanford Friedman (eds.), *Comparison. Theories, Approaches, Uses*, Baltimore 2013, 64–76, see 69.

39 Cf. Peter Strohschneider, *Weltabschied. Christusnachfolge und die Kraft der Legende*, in: *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift* 60 (2010), 143–163.

40 Cf. André Jolles, *Simple Forms*, trans. by Peter J. Schwartz, London/New York 2017, see 19–48 (german original: Jolles, André, *Einfache Formen. Legende, Sage, Mythe, Rätsel, Spruch, Kasus, Memorabile, Märchen, Witz*, Tübingen 1968, see 23–61).

41 Cf. Daniela Blum, *Intercessio*, nicht nur *imitatio*. Konzepte der Nachahmung Christi in hagiographischen Texten des 13. Jahrhunderts, in: Volker Leppin (ed.), *Schaffen und Nachahmen*, 407–421.

42 Cf. Elke Koch, *Fideales Erzählen*, in: *Poetica* 51 (2020), 85–118, esp. 102: “Worauf es beim fidealen Erzählen ankommt, ist deshalb nicht die Wahrheitsliebe der Äußerungsinstanz, sondern

which not only aim at speech or cult acts, but lead to the formation of a certain *habitus* in the sense of a Christian art of living. The binding to codified norms is, of course, preserved here—albeit in an intricate way.

With a ‘homosynkrisis’ understood in this way, however, one is still quite far away from self-techniques, which could be understood in such a way that subjects develop the principles of their actions from within themselves in a thoroughly experimental way, and thus, in a more comprehensive sense, one could speak of an aesthetics of existence. This, however, changes significantly, on the one hand, in genuinely mystical discourses,<sup>43</sup> which cannot be dealt with here, and on the other hand in the context of the *Devotio moderna*, without having to use the usual anachronistic labels: ‘reformers before the Reformation, educators before the Renaissance, pious ascetics before Catholic Reform, democrats before the Revolution, laity before bourgeois piets.’<sup>44</sup> Following in particular the theses of Anton G. Weiler on new possibilities of self-constitution,<sup>45</sup> in the following one treatise of Thomas a Kempis will be consulted in order to understand in a broader sense in what ‘la formation d’un habitus nouveau selon les codes de la *Devotio Moderna*’<sup>46</sup> is based.

The *Devotio moderna* is a movement of piety with a critical attitude towards institutions.<sup>47</sup> It originated with the son of a patrician, Geert Groote from Devent, and it was further consolidated as an organization by his student Florens Radewijns, who founded the first house of the ‘Brothers of the Common Life.’ In addition to the friars’ convents, communities of sisters were also established. Finally, Radewijns also founded the Convent of Windesheim (canons regular), which was quickly joined by numerous convents. The Windesheim congregation, founded in 1395, played a significant role in the 15th-century reform. An essential aspect of the devotional prac-

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ihre Überzeugung in der Haltung des Glaubens. Glaube ist eine Haltung, die wie Intentionen oder Gedanken keinen symptomatischen Ausdruck findet, sondern durch Handlungen (Sprechhandlungen, Kulthandlungen, Lebensführung) mitgeteilt werden muss.”

43 Cf., for the meaning of *imitatio Christi* in mystical texts post Eckhart: Lydia Wegener, *Der “Frankfurter” / “Theologia deutsch.” Spielräume und Grenzen des Sagbaren*, Berlin/Boston 2016.

44 John Van Engen, *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life. The Devotio Moderna and the World of the Later Middle Ages*, Philadelphia 2008, 3.

45 Cf. Anton G. Weiler, Recent Historiography on the Modern Devotion. Some Debated Questions, in: *Archief voor de geschiedenis van de Katholieke Kerk in Nederland* 26 (1984), 161–179, see 173–176; Anton G. Weiler, La construction du soi dans les milieux de la devotio moderna, in: Jean-Marie Cauchie (ed.), *La dévotion moderne dans les pays bourguignons et rhénans des origines à la fin du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Neuchâtel 1989, 9–16; Anton G. Weiler, De constructieve van het zelf bij Geert Grote, in: Werner Verbeke et al. (eds.), *Serta Devota in memoriam Guillelmi Lourdaux, Part 1: Devotio Windeshemensis*, Leiden 1992, 225–240.

46 Weiler, La construction, 11.

47 Cf. van Engen, *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life*; Werner Williams-Krapp, *Die Literatur des 15. und frühen 16. Jahrhunderts. Teilband 1: Modelle literarischer Interessenbildung*, Berlin/Boston 2020, 457–503.



tice was daily meditation, with the life and suffering of Jesus as a central theme. This created a connection to the Franciscan *Meditationes vitae Christi* that was widespread in the Middle Ages.

For the question of an art of living that is based on the *imitatio Christi* and can be summarized under the rubric of an aesthetics of existence, the most widely handed-down treatise of Thomas a Kempis on the *Imitatio Christi* is a relevant source. It consists of four treatises likely completed around 1427. They were initially titled after the incipit of the first chapter of the first book *Qui sequitur me*, before the designation *De imitatione Christi*, which is still common today, became established.<sup>48</sup> Their sequence is based on the preserved autograph (Brussels, KBR, Ms. 5855–61, 1441) and is still a matter of discussion.<sup>49</sup> In any case, the entire treatise is programmatically open<sup>50</sup> and has been handed down in a variety of selections and sequences. To understand the importance of the treatise for a Christian art of living, it is helpful to rethink the receptive model along the lines of comparative practices.

To anticipate my central thesis: Thomas a Kempis's treatise fleshes out processes of reflection within the Christian *ordo* that configure a self that can be understood as a moral subject. The individual human being forms principles of its own actions that refer to Christian revelation but are simultaneously formed within itself. In this comparative structure, which I would like to call 'autosynkrisis', as opposed to 'homosynkrisis', Christ is no longer a *comparatum* with which the individual human being compares itself regarding the respective *tertium comparationis*; rather, an ideal formed in relation to the situation makes up the *comparatum*. I will deal mainly with the first two books of the treatise and, for reasons of space, leave out the last two books, which are also characterized by a different literary communication situation.<sup>51</sup>

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48 Cf. Rudolf Th. M. van Dijk, Askese oder Mystik? Der entscheidende Rang des "Buches der inneren Tröstung" in der "Nachfolge Christi" des Thomas a Kempis, in: Ulrike Bodemann/Nikolaus Staubach (eds.), *Aus dem Winkel in die Welt. Die Bücher des Thomas von Kempen und ihre Schicksale*, Frankfurt am Main et al. 2006, 173–187, see 176.

49 For example, one has suggested a mystagogical orientation of the treatise: cf. van Dijk, *Askese oder Mystik?* This question deserves a renewed discussion against the background of the deviating order, which historically quickly became established, especially since it was objected that the integral mystagogical dynamics is emphasized precisely in the Jesuit reception, cf. Reinhard Gruhl, *Thomas Kempensis redivivus. Neuzeitlich-lateinische Bearbeitungen der Imitatio Christi* (Sebastian Castellio, Thomas Mezler, Sebastian Sailer, Claude d'Arvisenet), in: Achim Aurnhammer/Johann Anselm Steiger (eds.), *Christus als Held und seine heroische Nachfolge. Zur Imitatio Christi in der Frühen Neuzeit*, Berlin/Boston 2020, 61–82, esp. 66.

50 Cf. Ulrike Treusch, "De imitatione Christi." Nachahmung in christlicher Frömmigkeit im Spannungsfeld von Kompilation und Neuschöpfung, in: Leppin (ed.), *Schaffen und Nachahmen*, 391–405.

51 Cf. Inigo Bocken, The Language of the Layman. The Meaning of the Imitatio Christi for a Theory of Spirituality, in: *Studies in Spirituality* 15 (2005), 217–249, see 227–228.

In the autograph manuscript, which places the book on the Eucharist at the end, the treatise begins with a reference to John 8:12:

Qui sequitur me non ambulat in tenebris: dicit Dominus. Haec sunt verba Christi quibus admonemur, quatenus vitam eius et mores imitemur: si velimus veraciter illuminari, et ab omni caecitate cordis liberari. Summum igitur studium nostrum sit: in vita Iesu Christi meditari. Doctrina Christi omnes doctrinas sanctorum praecellit; et qui spiritum haberet: absconditum ibi manna inveniret. Sed contingit quod multi ex frequenti auditu evangelii parvum desiderium sentiunt: quia spiritum Christi non habent. Qui autem vult plene et sapide Christi verba intellegere: oportet ut totam vitam suam illi studeat conformare. (1,1; p. 5, line 7–p. 6, line 2)<sup>52</sup>

‘He that followeth Me, walketh not in darkness,’ saith the Lord. These are the words of Christ, by which we are admonished how we ought to imitate His life and manners, if we will be truly enlightened, and be delivered from all blindness of heart. Let therefore our chiefest endeavour be, to meditate upon the life of Jesus Christ. The doctrine of Christ exceedeth all the doctrines of holy men; and he that hath the Spirit, will find therein an hidden manna. But it falleth out, that many who often hear the Gospel of Christ, are yet but little affected, because they are void of the Spirit of Christ. But whosoever would fully and feelingly understand the words of Christ, must endeavour to conform his life wholly to the life of Christ.<sup>53</sup>

The treatise programmatically refers to the *imitatio vitae et morum Christi* that can be achieved by means of meditation. The details of what this form of the *imitatio* looks like, however, are not revealed; rather, Christ is set apart from the saints and, as I understand it, a hidden stock of knowledge, the *absconditum manna*, is mentioned, which is, however, relevant for salvation. The phrase refers to Rev 2:17; the ‘secret and non-public gift of salvation’<sup>54</sup> is here given a decidedly hermeneutical twist: the mere, albeit consistent reception of the revelation is not sufficient and has to be accompanied by a ‘special spirit.’ This spirit is reflected in a special ‘formation of life’, the principles of which are not mentioned at this point. In what follows they are merely distinguished from theological speculation.

*Spiritus, meditatio, conformatio*—these are terms that at first sight do not strike us as particularly surprising in the context of the *imitatio Christi*. Yet in combination with the *absconditum manna* they acquire an additional meaning that becomes clear with respect to the saints, whose teachings are distinguished from those of Christ.

52 The Latin text is quoted according to the following text edition: Thomas Hermeken a Kempis, *Opera omnia*, ed. by Michael Pohl, vol. 2, Freiburg 1904.

53 The English translation is from Thomas à Kempis, *The imitation of Christ*, London 2008.

54 Cf. Klaus Berger, *Die Apokalypse des Johannes. Kommentar* (vol. 1), Freiburg et al. 2017, 314–315.

Thomas refers to them again in chapter 18; it is one of the rare places where a semantics of comparison becomes explicit:

Intuere sanctorum patrum vivida exempla, in quibus vera perfectio refulsit et religio: et videbis quam modicum sit, et paene nihil quod nos agimus. Heu quid est vita nostra; si illis fuerit comparata? Sancti et amici Christi, Domino servierunt in fame et siti, in frigore et nuditate; in labore et fatigatione, in vigiliis et ieiuniis, in orationibus et meditationibus sanctis: in persecutionibus et obprobriis multis. O quam multas et graves tribulationes passi sunt, apostoli, martyres, confessores virgines: et reliqui omnes, qui Christi vestigia voluerunt sequi. (I,18; p. 29, line 27–p. 30, line 12)

Consider the lively examples of the holy Fathers, in whom true perfection and religion shined; and thou shalt see how little it is, and almost nothing, which we do now in these days. Alas! what is our lift, if it be compared to them! The Saints and friends of Christ served the Lord in hunger and thirst, in cold and nakedness, in labour and weariness, in watchings and fastings, in prayer and holy meditations, in many persecutions and reproaches. O how many and grievous tribulations suffered the Apostles, Martyrs, Confessors, Virgins and all the rest that endeavoured to follow the steps of Christ!

The life of the holy fathers offers in the biographical form a point of orientation from which to reach perfection (*perfectio*) by means of a form (of life) that is transcendently bound back (*religio*). Contrary to what this a rare occurrence of comparative semantics seems to suggest at first glance,<sup>55</sup> the intended receptive connection to Thomas's *Imitatio Christi* cannot be reconstructed as a form of self-comparison that is in some way limited to the saints; rather, it can be concluded that the form of 'homosynkrisis', i.e., the comparison of one's own self with the saints as *comparata*, remains limited to an exhortative function.

If following the *vestigia Christi* is the matter at stake, such self-comparison is not sufficient. For the situations in which the individual human being is placed and in which it must make decisions are so complex and manifold that a comparison with stages of Christ's or the saints' lives and sufferings, as much as they exist in different versions, does not advance the matter. Meditation and asceticism become individual, situational practices:

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55 Cf. Walter Erhart, et al., Ähnlich, Anders, Einzigartig. Sich selbst Vergleichen und die Historisierung des autobiographischen Schreiben, in: Walter Erhart et al. (eds.), *Sich selbst vergleichen. Zur Relationalität autobiographischen Schreibens vom 12. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart*, Bielefeld 2020, 11–52, see 27–28.

Non possunt omnes habere unum exercitium: sed aliud isti aliud illi magis deservit. Etiam pro temporis congruentia diversa placent exercitia [...]. (I,19; p. 34, lines 14–18)

All cannot use one kind of spiritual exercise, but one is more useful for this person, another for that. According to the seasonableness of times also, divers exercises are fitting [...].

While it remains true that in Thomas the search for the right, salvific life does not lead to the ‘self’ but to Jesus (II,7), it is not a matter of directly imitating life and suffering but of generating in oneself the competency to act, to form the self into a moral subject within the Christian framework. ‘Homosynkrisis’ is replaced by ‘autosynkrisis.’

The rubra of each chapter serve as *tertia comparationis*, through which the individual human being no longer compares itself to Christ himself, but to an emergent *comparatum*, an ideal derived from the teachings of Christ, and it thus constitutes itself as a subject. The focus lies not on meditating on the life and suffering of Christ, but on a general teaching of wisdom which can partly remain entirely in the inner world. Only a few pages after the issue of the programmatic imperative of the *imitatio Christi* is discussed, one recognizes what it means with respect to ‘autosynkrisis’:

Non est credendum omni verbo nec instinctui: sed caute et longanimiter res est secundum Deum ponderanda. Pro dolor saepe malum facilius quam bonum de alio creditur et dicitur: ita infirmi sumus. Sed perfecti viri non facile credunt omni enarranti; quia sciunt infirmitatem humanam ad malum proclivam: et in verbis satis labilem. (I,4; p. 11, lines 21–29)

We must not give ear to every saying or suggestion, but ought warily and leisurely to ponder things according to the will of God. But alas; such is our weakness, that we often rather believe and speak evil of others than good. Those that are perfect men do not easily give credit to every thing one tells them; for they know that human frailty is prone to evil, and very subject to fail in words.

One can rightly ask what the quoted has to do with an *imitatio Christi*. In passages like these, the usually expected opposition between ‘la clarté de la Sagesse et les ténèbres de ce monde’<sup>56</sup> is cancelled out to the extent that inner-worldly action is no longer committed to strict renunciation of the world. In addition, the significance of the

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56 Weiler, *La construction*, 16.

individual appears to be revalued in the initiated processes of consideration, since self-constitution certainly appears as a ‘résultat de l’effort personnel.’<sup>57</sup>

In our opinion, the fact that these shifts in emphasis have not yet been sufficiently appreciated by researchers is primarily because one can speak of a conceptual gap with respect to the historical situation. Thomas’s treatise, whose overall structure and consequences cannot be discussed here, has no concept for what exactly it means: *rem secundum Deum pondere*, i.e., to examine (each and) everything before God, or as the translation says: ‘to ponder things according to the will of God.’ Here there is a warning against false counsel (*verbum*) and a decisive connection to the complex of *discretio spirituum*—the discernment of spirits in the realm of religious experience—(*instinctus*), which experiences an increase in significance in the late Middle Ages<sup>58</sup> and is relevant to questions of subjectivity.<sup>59</sup>

It appears that this process can be reconceptualized as the model of ‘autosynkrisis’, which on this side of the sacramental order and of penance<sup>60</sup> decidedly practices subjectivity in everyday life ‘as critical self-reflection of a foreign and inwardly effective power (evil) and continuous self-transformation (truth).’<sup>61</sup>

If one assumes that the concepts of *imitatio Christi*, which were modified in the late Middle Ages, stimulated practices of self-comparison among the recipients, the reception of Thomas a Kempis’s treatise *De imitatione Christi*, which has not yet been sufficiently clarified, can not only be understood in terms of the construction of a corresponding *habitus*, but can also be specified according to autoreflexive comparative structures that show ways to a Christian life in the everyday world: the meditation on Christ’s life and suffering is replaced by generally reflexive processes that, in the confrontation with revelation but also with forms of a topically organized com-

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57 Weiler, *La construction*, 16.

58 Cf. François Dingjan, *Discretio. Les origines patristiques et monastiques de la doctrine sur la prudence chez saint Thomas d’Aquin*, Assen 1967; Günter Switek, *Discretio spirituum*. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Spiritualität, in: *Theologie und Philosophie* 47 (1972), 36–76; Cornelius Roth, *Discretio spirituum. Kriterien geistlicher Unterscheidung bei Johannes Gerson*, Würzburg 2001; Stefan Podlech, *Discretio. Zur Hermeneutik der religiösen Erfahrung bei Dionysius dem Kartäuser*, Salzburg 2002, esp. 121–314 (*imitatio Christi*); Wendy Love Anderson, *The Discernment of Spirits. Assessing Visions and Visionaries in the Late Middle Ages*, Tübingen 2011.

59 Cf. Niklaus Largier, *Rhetorik des Begehrens*. Die “Unterscheidung der Geister” als Paradigma mittelalterlicher Subjektivität, in: Martin Baisch et al. (eds.), *Inszenierungen von Subjektivität in der Literatur des Mittelalters*, Königstein 2005, 249–270, see 261–266.

60 Cf. Maximilian von Habsburg, *Catholic and Protestant Translations of the Imitatio Christi, 1425–1650. From Late Medieval Classic to Early Modern Bestseller*, Farnham et al. 2011, 16–17.

61 Cf. Schubert, *Die christlichen Wurzeln der Kritik*, 70: “[...] als kritische Selbstreflexion von fremder und innerlich wirkender Macht (Böses) und kontinuierlicher Selbsttransformation (Wahrheit).”

mon sense,<sup>62</sup> situationally reveal an ideal with which the respective subject compares himself. Moral subjectivity and divine grace are thereby conceived as a connection, without this being specifically justified: *Fac quod in te est: et Deus aderit bonae voluntati tuae* (I,7; p. 14, lines 17–18; cf. IV,12; p. 125, line 1).

Thus, the phrase *facere quod in se est*, originating from the nominalistic doctrine of grace, also reverberates—probably via Jan van Ruusbroec—in Thomas a Kempis—there, however, ‘as proof of a God-turned, meritorious existence or, in a more general perspective, for the synergism of human striving for virtue and divine grant of grace’<sup>63</sup>—bypassing the complex theological contexts of justification. The abbreviations, together with the transition from an argumentative to an exhortative style, which—as also later in Geiler of Kaysersberg<sup>64</sup>—turns the *facere quod in se est* into a *fac quod in te est*, leading to an accentuation of human self-responsibility, which brings the theological framing to a limit.

At these points, the treatise not only reaches beyond the usual framework of *imitatio Christi*, but also reveals a tension with the notorious imperative to abandon oneself (*se relinquere*, II,11): these autosynkritical practices bring to the fore an ethical subject that forms principles of action within itself while living in the world; that is, it follows Christ in its own way. In the Christian context, a model of ‘aesthetics of existence’ emerges, which is situated on this side of ecclesiastical institutions and sacraments. It carries meaning with respect to the everyday lives not only of religious, but also of semi-religious and lay people based on meditative practices that are ‘essentiellement recherche d’une éthique personnelle’ and can no longer be understood as ‘une morale comme obéissance à un système de règles’.<sup>65</sup>

The theological preconditions for Thomas a Kempis’s modifications are to be found not only in the realm of Christology, but also in Christian anthropology in the late medieval context, which is fundamentally negative, but nevertheless allows for ‘possibilities of moral self-responsibility.’<sup>66</sup> Deficiency and agency arise out of each other: especially as far as self-care is concerned, the devotees differ significantly

62 Cf. Udo Friedrich, *Die Rhetorik der Gewohnheit. Zur Habitualisierung des Wissens in der Vormoderne*, Zurich 2021.

63 Wegener, *Der “Frankfurter”*, 261: “[...] als Ausweis eines gottzugewandten, verdienstlichen Daseins bzw. in allgemeinerer Perspektive für den Synergismus von menschlichem Tugendstreben und göttlicher Gnadenzuwendung.”

64 Cf. E. J. Dempsey Douglass, *Justification in Late Medieval Preaching. A Study of John Geiler of Kaysersberg*, Leiden et al. 1989 [first printed in 1966], 142; cf. Dorothea Klein, *Geistliche Diätetik. Erziehung zur Selbstsorge in Predigten Bertholds von Regensburg und Johannes Geilers von Kaysersberg*, in: Tobias Bulang/Regina Toepfer (eds.), *Heil und Heilung. Die Kultur der Selbstsorge in der Kunst und Literatur des Mittelalters*, Heidelberg 2020, 129–145.

65 Michel Foucault, *Une esthétique de l’existence*, in: Daniel Defert/François Ewald (eds.), *Dits et Écrits II*, 1549–1554, see 1550–1551.

66 Wegener, *Der “Frankfurter”*, 303: “Möglichkeiten moralischer Eigenverantwortlichkeit.”

from Groenendaal's mystical circles, by which they are nevertheless theologically influenced.<sup>67</sup>

It should be emphasized that the developments described are not a mere previous history of moral subjectivity in modernity, but rather a complementary history, even if 'something new' emerges here: it is precisely not a matter of identifying a special beginning, even a 'discovery' of something in the area of *Devotio moderna* from the modern point of view, but rather of describing, with a view to the historical situation, how moral subjectivity emerged within the framework of the Christian *ordo*, starting from a text that was not uniformly conceived, that in the tradition of the Rapiaries integrated about 1,200 biblical quotations and allusions as well as passages from various authors (e. g. Augustine, Jerome, Bernard of Clairvaux, Bonaventure, David of Augsburg, Ludolf of Saxony, Henry Suso)<sup>68</sup> and that took up scholastic concepts.<sup>69</sup> The complementary-historical approach reflects this historical constellation in a historically adequate manner—that is, in view of the semantic and conceptual gaps through which emergent processes remain latent and which are not only related to the programmatic departure from a theoretical language in the service of *praxis pietatis*,<sup>70</sup> but are also explained by the fact that the emergent new is often incommensurable with the old. In the sense of complementary history, it can also be about the fact that the text was later taken up in various ways and that in these contexts what initially remained latent then became manifest.

In the following, I would like to show regarding a selected constellation that what remains latent regarding the aesthetics of existence in Thomas could become manifest. In principle, there would be many examples here up to our present. But regional and temporal segments must be considered in their own context. The reception of the treatise *De imitatione Christi* persists and is in many ways part of a contemporary culture of piety, especially in Catholic reform movements and in independent church circles. Mediated through these, the process of reflection initiated by the treatise also becomes part of a popular culture, for in the question *What would Jesus do?*<sup>71</sup> it appears even today on book covers, buttons, bracelets, T-shirts, etc., and can still be described in form as an 'autosynkrisis'. It is precisely in the subjunctive

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67 For a corresponding dispute between Jan van Ruusbroec and Geert Grote cf. Anne Bollmann, *The Influence of the Devotio moderna in Northern Germany*, in: Elizabeth Andersen (ed.), *A Companion to Mysticism and Devotion in Northern Germany in the Late Middle Ages*, Leiden/Boston 2014, 231–259, see 233–234.

68 Cf. Williams-Krapp, *Die Literatur des 15. und frühen 16. Jahrhunderts*, 471.

69 Cf. Charles M.A. Caspers, *Thomas van Kempen en de communie. Een situering van het vierde (oorspronkelijk derde) boek van De imitatione Christi in de geschiedenis van de vroomheid*, in: *Ons Geestelijk Erf* 77 (2003), 93–124.

70 Cf. Bocken, *The Language of the Layman*, 229.

71 Cf. Daniel Shore, *WWJD? and the History of Imitatio Christi*, in: Daniel Shore (ed.), *Cyberformalism. Histories of Linguistic Forms in the Digital Archive*, Baltimore 2018, 130–153.

would that the autosynkritical moment can be recognized, because the question is not what Jesus did according to Scripture, in order to then compare one's own behavior with that of Jesus; rather, the aim is an *ad hoc* and hypothetical *comparatum*, with which one compares oneself.

The tract's paths of reception, the model it contains, and the self-practices triggered by this very model, however, not only lead to the modern era, but can be traced back to each of the various groups in the early modern period.<sup>72</sup> It had a special effect on Ignatius of Loyola, who read Thomas's treatise in Manresa—a reading with consequences: the strong focus on interiorization led Ignatius to abandon his tough external penitential exercises,<sup>73</sup> and Thomas' *Imitatio Christi* also turned out to be an essential prerequisite for Ignatius' *Exercitia spiritualia*, the *Spiritual Exercises*.

In his recently published book *Spaces of Reform. Art and Art of Living of the Jesuits in Rome, 1580–1700*, Steffen Zierholz has made an argument for a genuinely 'Jesuit aesthetic of existence or art of living,' focusing on the 'use of images, prayer books, confessionals, relics, or spaces such as chapels and hermitages.'<sup>74</sup> Zierholz points to sculpture as a 'metaphor of self-fashioning' and thus builds a bridge from Jesuit techniques of self-fashioning within the framework of an aesthetics of existence to genuine artistic practices. To present an example, Zierholz refers to the commemorative publication for the centenary of the Jesuit Order—*Imago primi saeculi Societatis Iesu* (Antwerp 1640)—whose chapter on the *institutio iuventutis* is decorated with an emblem designed by Philip Fruytiers and engraved by Cornelis Galle, showing a sculptor working on a sculpture. In the background are a secularly dressed figure and Christ. The ideal of *christoformitas* is cited, which is differentiated in terms of process into *purgatio* (purgation), *illuminatio* (illumination), and *unio* (union): The inner man—even if an outer formation is represented here—is successively rebuilt according to Christ; the work on him presupposes a constant comparison. But here, too, a tension remains between the subscriptio of Gal. 4:19—'Donec formetur CHRISTVS in vobis' ('until Christ is formed in you')—and the representation itself, because the processual logic coming precisely from the exegetical tradition is balanced by a certain inherent right of all sculptures. The latent comparative structure of the treatise is transferred to the pedagogical context, and it becomes manifest there, although self-comparison is replaced by comparison of others from the perspective of the pedagogue. In the *Imitatio Christi* of Thomas a Kempis, one

72 Cf. von Habsburg, *Catholic and Protestant Translations*.

73 Cf. Christian V. Witt, Von der *Imitatio Christi* zur Societas Jesu. Christusnachfolge bei Ignatius von Loyola, in: Achim Aurnhammer/Johann Anselm Steiger (eds.), *Christus als Held und seine heroische Nachfolge. Zur imitatio Christi in der Frühen Neuzeit*, Berlin/Boston 2020, 113–128, see 119.

74 Cf. Steffen Zierholz, *Räume der Reform. Kunst und Lebenskunst der Jesuiten in Rom, 1580–1700*, Berlin 2019, 17.



can recognize a movement that, according to the autograph version, leads to the union with God that takes place in the Eucharist; however, the books are handed down in different arrangements and in part also individually and then in continuing alliances, so that here, too, these parts can claim a certain right of their own—just as the different sculptures do.

Regarding the prerequisites of this genuinely Jesuit aesthetic of Christian existence, i.e., the oscillation between artistic imitation and moral imperative, Zierholz refers in particular to Neoplatonism, including its forms of appropriation in patristics. With regard to the *Devotio moderna*, not only is the emergence of the human ability to shape one's self, which remains in latency but is nevertheless effective, to be placed side by side with this; it is also to be asked on what basis an emphatic discourse on art is integrated into the contexts of the aesthetics of existence in the Jesuit context. As Andreas Kablitz has shown in his critique of Hans Blumenberg's *Legitimität der Neuzeit (Legitimacy of the Modern Era)*, the subject's immanent possibilities could thrive once the idea of the perfection of nature was abandoned: genuinely theological knowledge represents an essential prerequisite in this context, especially Thomistic psychology and the re-accentuations of *natura humana* developed in it, which result in a complex way from the connection between Aristotelian anthropology and the Christian narrative of revelation. Here, too, a negative anthropology, in particular the deficient nature of man, offers the precondition for an inner-worldly scope for perfection.<sup>75</sup>

Aesthetics of existence and the promise of artistic activity thus fundamentally result from inner-Christian, genuinely late medieval conditions. Historical change does not occur in a purposeful way, but originates from specific problems, whereby the approaches to solutions lead to voids, reassignments, and shifts that produce, strictly within the Christian *ordo*, subjects who develop the principles of their actions within themselves and whose activity can contribute to the 'improvement of a substantially deficient nature.'

Taking their cues from the experience of crisis not only within spirituality, but also with respect to the conception of the world in the 14th and 15th century, reforms are developing. They try to deal with an identified deficiency in proven concepts; in the case of Thomas a Kempis, the *imitatio Christi* remains significant as a concept, but it is largely modified when rendered operational. The new emphases that are the cause of historical change remain latent on the surface of the text and only unfold their effects in a model that must be located on the side of reception. This new model can be reconstructed in the historiographical analysis if it takes recourse to comparative practices. In the Jesuit reception, the model is lifted out of latency and

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75 Cf. Andreas Kablitz, *Ist die Neuzeit legitim? Der Ursprung des neuzeitlichen Naturverständnisses und die italienische Literatur des 14. Jahrhunderts (Dante – Boccaccio)*, Basel 2018, esp. 157–158.

becomes manifest in the exchange with an emphatic art discourse that goes back to reconsiderations of the *natura* concept in the late Middle Ages.

A theory that makes this change comprehensible must start from conceptual gaps that can be closed by way of a reconstruction of models. The groundbreaking novelty of this approach lies in the detection of the initially implicit, latent model and the formulation of reception processes based on comparative practices. What we grasp in this way is not the autumn of the Middle Ages or the dawn of modern times, but the development of ethical subjectivity, which on the one hand may still be effective in Christian discourse today, but on the other hand can hardly claim any more validity in secular contexts.

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# Grounds for Comparison

## Investigating Before-and-after Satellite Images

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Daniel Eschkötter

**Abstract** *Whether being confronted with war crimes, natural disasters or catastrophic climate change, a type of image or image comparison frequently makes its appearance in addressing and visualizing these conflicts, crises, crimes or catastrophes: before-and-after satellite images. They have become an integral part of our media ecosystem and visual culture, especially with regard to the visualization of change and the presentation of evidence of change. With special emphasis on visual investigations dealing with the war crimes in Bucha, Ukraine, this article traces discourses and practices working with satellite images and examines the technical and medial preconditions for before-and-after image comparisons.*

### February 28 2022 / March 19 2022

On April 4 2022 (updated April 6) The New York Times published a story about the killings of civilians in the Ukrainian town of Bucha, on the western outskirts of Kiev, under the headline (on the Times website) “Satellite images show bodies lay in Bucha for weeks, despite Russian claims.”<sup>1</sup> After a short lead, above the byline and the written article, the website shows a satellite image with annotations and markings, identifying bodies on a street. A play button and a time code feature prominently as well, indicating that the image serves as a placeholder for a clip, running for 1:07 minutes. The clip is arranged in a split screen: moving images shot from a car, presumably with a mobile phone, on the left, satellite images on the right. The two sides, featuring the two different types or orders of images, are synchronized and annotated. Whenever the car and camera on the left move past a body on the street the footage is

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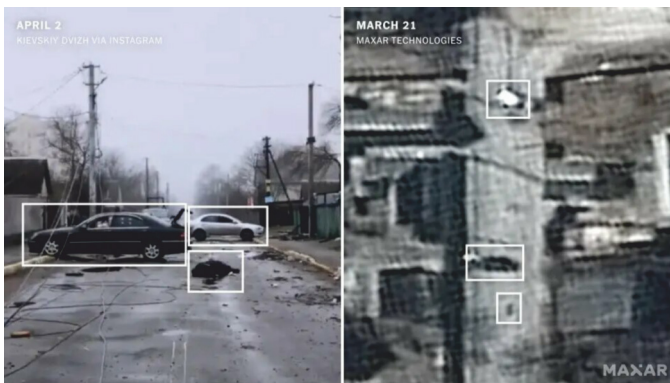
1 Malachy Browne/David Botti/Haley Willis, Dead Lay Out in Bucha for Weeks, Refuting Russian Claim, Satellite Images Show, The New York Times online, 4.4.2022, [https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/04/world/europe/bucha-ukraine-bodies.html, last accessed: May 14, 2023]. Cf. also a similar analysis at the BBC: Art. Reality Check and BBC Monitoring, BBC News, Bucha killings: Satellite image of bodies site contradicts Russian claims, bbc.com, 5.4.2022, [https://www.bbc.com/news/60981238, last accessed: May 14, 2023].



halted, the bodies are simultaneously highlighted with white squares on both sides, and the right-hand side of screen zooms in on the (otherwise static) satellite image, utilizing the image as a map showing where the car (or the camera and its operator) as well as the bodies shot in passing can be located.

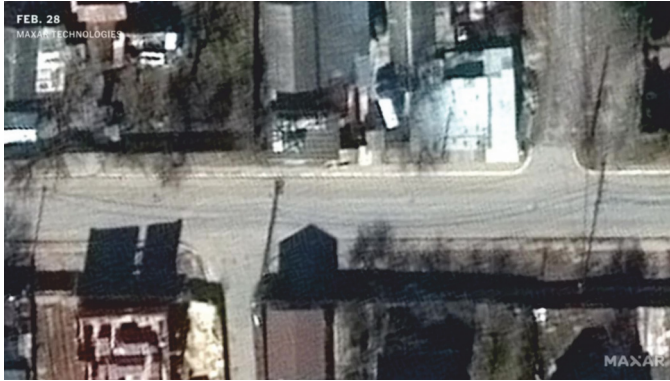
In the course of the short article, which mainly serves as an extended annotation or interpretation of the images shown, three other instances of image presentation involving three other types of image constellations are utilized: one is an extract from a map of Bucha (not commissioned by or attributed to any commercial map provider), relating it to Kiev, placing it in the whole of Ukraine and highlighting, with red marks, the site of a mass grave and the short stretch of Yablonska Street where twelve bodies can be seen in the footage referenced above. The other two again contain satellite images, the second of which is another split-screen presentation of the aforementioned ground-level cell-phone footage (attributed to “Kievskiy Dvzh via Instagram”, shot by a local council member on April 1) with a satellite image (attributed to Maxar Technologies) (Fig. 1). The first is a short clip or GIF, formatted as an mp4-video file (Fig. 2 & 3). It features a loop of two satellite images of the same stretch of street, from the same angle, morphing one image taken on February 28 2022 and one on March 19 2022 into one another with a digital fade. At first, on February 28, the street is empty. Then, on March 19, seven white squares mark bodies on the street, in the same image that served as quasi-thumbnail for the opening clip of the article, albeit not being featured in it.

*Fig. 1: Synchronization of mobile-phone camera and satellite footage*



Source: nytimes.com

Fig. 2: “Before” image



Source: nytimes.com

Fig. 3: “After” image



Source: nytimes.com

What the short clip or animation presents is thus a condensed comparison of two moments in time, separated by almost three weeks. First there was nothing—at least nothing worthy of annotations and analysis. Then there were bodies. The article presents this juxtaposition, this simple comparison of two images of the same street in order to investigate and ultimately refute or disprove claims by Russian officials at the Ministry of Defense as well as media outlets that denied Russian responsibility for the killing of civilians by stating that the bodies only appeared on the streets after the Russian troops had retreated at the end of March 2022.

As the article points out, and as the second of the two images as well as the synchronization with the video footage from April 1 show, the bodies can be made out in the satellite footage from March 19, when Russian troops still were occupying the town.

While being part of the larger focus of the NYT on the war in Ukraine, the article does not belong to the section with regular reporting also featured in the print edition, with the war coverage conducted mainly or traditionally on the ground. It was published by a special branch or group of NYT reporting, launched in 2017, The New York Times Visual Investigations team. The Visual Investigations team conducts its reporting mostly on the basis of data and media, often gathered via publicly available sources, and publishes the results as hybrids of text, video, maps, graphics, and images. With both the mixed-media source material and the mixed-media output, the work of the Visual Investigations unit could be considered to exemplify a shift in investigative reporting of human-rights violations and state-sanctioned violence, and in war reporting in general, which can be observed in publications and media organizations around the world.<sup>2</sup> The visual investigations at the NYT have their predecessors perhaps less in the methods of traditional investigative journalism and more in the investigative departments or crisis-monitoring units of the non-governmental organizations and agencies they sometimes cooperate with—human-rights NGOs like Amnesty International, for which some of their contributors have also worked previously.

“To confirm when the bodies appeared, and when the civilians were likely killed, the Visual Investigations team at The Times conducted a before-and-after analysis of satellite imagery,” the article states. My article aims to examine this specific practice of visual investigations, and especially of “before-and-after analysis of satellite imagery”; this *dispositive*<sup>3</sup> of before-and-after satellite images that has become a visual trope of change and disaster in itself, with images that become metonymies for catastrophic events—albeit usually without depicting the events themselves. Whether examining the atrocities of Bucha, the attacks on Mariupol,<sup>4</sup>

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2 Starting with investigations into chemical attacks in the Syrian war, other main areas of interest of the New York Times Visual Investigations team were state-sanctioned and especially police violence, and also mass shootings, the riots at the Capitol, and the Beirut port explosion. Cf. [<https://www.nytimes.com/spotlight/visual-investigations>, last accessed: May 14, 2023].

3 I am treating this “tool” as a *dispositive*—a set of practices, discourses and technologies that implies specific modes of spectatorship, structures of gazes and arrangements of power and knowledge. Cf. Michel Foucault, *The Confession of the Flesh. A conversation with Alain Grosrichard et al.*, in: Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge. Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*, ed. by Colin Gordon, New York 1980, 194–228.

4 Various stages and events of the shelling of Mariupol have been reconstructed and investigated by multiple investigative reporting teams and non-governmental agencies, often using

or the destruction of cultural sites in Ukraine<sup>5</sup> or mosques in Xinjiang, to name but a few examples, or covering wild fires, floods or other disasters around the globe, similar types of images or image comparisons are frequently employed in addressing these conflicts, crises, crimes, and catastrophes. They have become an integral part of our contemporary media ecosystem, especially with regard to the representation and visualization of (evidence of) drastic, often violent change.<sup>6</sup>

This essay aims to trace discourses and practices dealing with—or even relying on—before-and-after-images as, in the words on the United States Geological Survey website, a “powerful tool”<sup>7</sup> for rendering change and transformations visible, as well as for providing evidence of human-rights violations. First, this essay will present a short phenomenology of *before-and-after* satellite images. In a second step it will discuss a few key technical traits and terms that are consequential for the discussion of before-and-after *satellite* images—remote sensing and ground truth—concluding with a few remarks about their implications for, and possible links between, practices of investigation and comparison that might be or become part of a broader theory of triangulation.

Working on and with satellite images raises significant questions that affect theories of media and theories and practices of comparison alike: aesthetic questions of perception, since change or transformations are visualized in the case of before-and-after images on the basis of sensing operations that go beyond human perception and need to be remediated, realigned, and recalibrated (a problem which is reflected in current theoretical discourses on an aesthetics beyond perception that in-

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before-and-after satellite images. Cf. Kai Biermann et al., Die Schlacht um Mariupol, in: *ZEIT ONLINE*, 28.4.2022, URL: <https://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2022-04/krieg-ukraine-mariupol-schlacht-rekonstruktion> [last accessed: May 14, 2023].

- 5 Cf. Art. Agence France-Presse, Before-and-after satellite imagery will track Ukraine cultural damage, UN says, in: *The Guardian*, 27.10.2022, [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/oct/27/before-and-after-satellite-imagery-will-track-ukraine-cultural-damage-un-says>, last accessed: May 14, 2023].
- 6 As condensed micro-narratives and visual metonymies, before-and-after satellite images could also be discussed in the context of other visual practices where similar types of temporal image comparisons or comparative image designs feature prominently: medical diagnostic and monitoring practices for example on the one hand, or advertisements for dietary supplements, workout routines, home- and self-makeovers and other viral clickbait on the other.
- 7 Quote on the website of The United States Geological Survey, URL: <https://www.usgs.gov/products/multimedia-gallery/before-after-images> [last accessed: May 14, 2023]. The USGS and its Earth Resources Observation and Science Center (EROS) makes ample use of this trope and tool for educational purposes, with before-and-after “Spot the Change” quizzes and a virtual remote-sensing classroom. Cf. [<https://eros.usgs.gov/remotesensing-classroom>, last accessed: May 14, 2023].

volves various modes of sensing and sense-making).<sup>8</sup> It also involves political-epistemological questions of order, because the order of human rights (at least in the image-activist approach), if not the political global order in the 21st century, is linked to or entangled with the order of images (Lisa Parks and James Schwoch call this the “satellitization” of global security);<sup>9</sup> this even often relies on the tasking of satellites and the *ordering* of images (quite literally, from image databases like Maxar’s “20-year, 110+-petabyte high-resolution satellite-imagery library”).<sup>10</sup>

In many instances before-and-after satellite images may have become almost emblems of drastic global transformations and conflicts and a kind of visual trope in political, journalistic and educational contexts.<sup>11</sup> In the case of catastrophic climate change, before-and-after images can be considered not only as key visual aids and agents in the visualization of change but also as having been constitutive in producing it as an object of knowledge itself: as has often been pointed out, the emergence of a new formation of knowledge, like the idea of the anthropocene, can be linked closely not only to the computerization of climate data<sup>12</sup> but also to the monitoring and visualization of changes on the surface of the earth over time by means of remote sensing, satellite imagery and data and image juxtaposition or superimposition.<sup>13</sup>

Although environmental and human-rights causes, environmental violence, and violence directed at people are often interlinked, having established an emergent conception of rights and an international-relations discourse under the label “environmental security” that aims to take into account these entanglements, the following remarks will focus on the pivotal function of before-and-after image comparisons in the field of human-rights causes, state-crime investigations, and im-

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8 Cf. Matthew Fuller/Eyal Weizman, *Investigative Aesthetics. Conflicts and Commons in the Politics of Truth*, London/New York 2021.

9 Lisa Parks/James Schwoch, Introduction, in: Lisa Parks/James Schwoch (eds.), *Down to Earth. Satellite Technologies, Industries, and Cultures*, New Brunswick/New Jersey/London 2012, 1–16, see 4. The architecture theorist and activist Andrew Herscher even claims, that “satellite images *produce* those objects [of Human Rights and International Relations discourse] [...] as visual forms.” Andrew Herscher, *Surveillant Witnessing. Satellite Imagery and the Visual Politics of Human Rights*, in: *Public Culture* 26 (3/2014) (74), 469–500, see 476.

10 Cf. Christina Geller, *Introducing Maxar ARD: Accelerating the Pixel-To-Answer Workflow with Analysis-Ready Data*, 2.2.2021, [<https://blog.maxar.com/earth-intelligence/2021/introducing-maxar-ard-accelerating-the-pixel-to-answer-workflow-with-analysis-ready-data>, last accessed: May 14, 2023].

11 Cf. Laura Kurgan, *Close Up at a Distance: Mapping, Technology and Politics*, New York 2013, 22–23.

12 Cf. Paul N. Edwards, *A Vast Machine: Computer Models, Climate Data, and the Politics of Global Warming*, Cambridge, Massachusetts 2010, 357–396.

13 Cf. Jennifer Gabrys, *Program Earth. Environmental Sensing Technology and the Making of a Computational Planet*, Minneapolis 2016, see especially 116.

age activism. The technical specificities involved in “sensing” and visualizing climate “events” (or rather, events over the *longue durée*) do not only affect the images produced (as translations of different wavelengths across the electromagnetic spectrum into images). The role of models and predictions in climate science, and the recursive structure of data, images and models in remote sensing, where remotely gathered data is fed into models that determine the application and calibration of remote sensors, also affect the temporality of these processes and distinguish them from forensic operations: the generating of models of a changing climate and the earth’s surface is not only closely linked to remote sensing of the surface that challenges the notion of human perception; it also generates images of the projected future (of the planet) by constantly reassessing and recalibrating the images of the present through a process governed by machine learning.<sup>14</sup>

The visual investigations concerned with human-rights violations and state violence, on the other hand, differ somewhat in their approach, although they also rely on satellite images produced or captured by, in some cases, the same sensors, the same satellites, and the same corporations. While also relying on computer models, stitching, alignments, filters, and pattern recognition, they mostly seem to follow a model of visual evidence that is closely linked to the epistemic logic of the “evidential [in other translations: conjectural] paradigm,”<sup>15</sup> as Carlo Ginzburg famously called the epistemic formation emerging around 1900 and hinging on the reading of symptoms, details, tracks, and traces. Investigative practices that are—and produce knowledge that is—“indirect, based on signs and scraps of evidence, conjectural”<sup>16</sup> follow a specific forensic temporality and translation: the collection and analysis of remainders of past events in the present in order to turn them into evidence, to “make them speak.”<sup>17</sup>

So before addressing some of these media specificities of satellite imagery and before-and-after images in human-rights discourses as well as contemporary non-

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14 Abelardo Gil-Fournier and Jussi Parikka point out that this increasingly holds true for any sort of data gathering by means of (remote) sensors. Cf. Abelardo Gil-Fournier/Jussi Parikka, *Ground Truth to Fake Geographies. Machine Vision and Learning in Visual Practices*, in: *AI & Society* 36 (2021), 1253–1262, see 1259.

15 Carlo Ginzburg, *Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm*, in: Carlo Ginzburg: *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*, Baltimore/London 1989, 96–125.

16 Carlo Ginzburg, Morelli, Freud and Sherlock Holmes. *Clues and Scientific Method*, in: *History Workshop* 9 (1980), 5–36, see 16.

17 Eyal Weizman, *Forensic Architecture. Violence at the Threshold of Detectability*, New York 2017, 98: “Forensic speech is traditionally undertaken as a relation between three elements: an object or a building ‘made to speak,’ an expert who functions as the translator from the language of objects to that of people, and the forum or assembly in which such claims can be made.”

governmental forensic or “counter-forensic” contexts,<sup>18</sup> I am going to attempt a very brief phenomenology of these types of before-and-after satellite images and how they involve and challenge practices and temporalities of comparison.

### ***Before-and-After Satellite Images***

The NYT visual investigation of the killings in Bucha features several of the key elements that transform a simple presentation of two images of the same location into a comparative configuration, a forensic device, a dispositive for the production of truth and knowledge, or even a narrative of war crimes. Apart from the scene they show, the images contain primary information like a logo with the name of the company providing them (“MAXAR”), as well as information that has been added to the images inconspicuously (the dates of their acquisition and the full name of the company, “MAXAR TECHNOLOGIES”) and in order to highlight the objects of the investigation (the white squares with the annotation “BODIES”). Yet the central element or target of a criminal investigations, in this case of war crimes relating to the killings in Bucha, remains invisible in the satellite images. The spectators, operators, and investigators missed them. Or rather, the satellite operated by the US-company Maxar Technologies did. And even if it did not, we might not have been able to see the perpetrators anyway, due to the maximum resolution of commercially available satellites images (Maxar’s Worldview-3 satellite has a resolution of 31cm per Pixel, which is as high as it gets in commercial applications and commercially available satellite images).<sup>19</sup>

What the NYT article presents instead is a short montage, a micro-movie, comprised of only two images. Although the formatting of the clip allows for a seamless and smooth transition between the two images and moments in time, the real target of the article is what happened in between—the time lapse and gap between the two instances, the two images—a gap that “might also be considered as a reservoir of imagined images and possible histories.”<sup>20</sup> Forensic investigations and operations

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18 Thomas Keenan reevaluates the use of the term by the artist and theorist Alan Sekula in order to refer to investigative and political practices that challenge government-sanctioned forensic accounts by employing similar methods and technologies. Cf. Thomas Keenan, Counter-forensics and Photography, in: *Grey Room* 55 (2014), 58–77.

19 The limited resolution of publicly available satellite images, the “threshold of detectability” (of individual humans, and also holes in roofs as the result of drone strikes, for example) is a key issue for non-governmental investigations, cf. Weizman, *Forensic Architecture*, 20–30.

20 Eyal Weizman/Ines Weizman, *Before and After. Documenting the Architecture of Disaster*, Moskow 2014, 12.

aim to close or rather fill the gap with stories and histories of traces,<sup>21</sup> often supplemented by other media and “material witnesses.”<sup>22</sup>

If comparative viewing has the capacity to make the invisible visible; and if, as art historian Falk Wolf states,<sup>23</sup> an invisible third appears between the compared images due to the fantasy and imagination of the spectator, as occurs in a dialectic montage,<sup>24</sup> the forensic operation of filling the gap can be considered as closely related to or even as a specific mode of practice of comparative viewing. Fantasy and imagination, the *Einbildungskraft* of the spectator, may well be of less importance in the case of before-and-after images than detection, deduction, and synchronization, but within and from the gap, an invisible third makes its appearance nevertheless: the event, which is referenced by absences or appearances, tracks and traces. It is a structural ambiguity or openness that seems to stand in stark contrast to the discourse of evidence and self-evidence that is often associated with this type of satellite imagery and which is part of their journalistic appeal.

In their essay on before-and-after images Eyal and Ines Weizman pick up and retrace the temporal logic of this gap in before-and-after images to its earliest exponents in photography and to the latency of photochemical exposure and development:

The history of before-and-after images is as old as the history of photography. Indeed, they emerged from the limitations of the early photographic process. The few dozen seconds required for the exposure of a mid-19th-century photograph was too long a duration to record moving figures and abrupt events. The result was that most often people were missing from the image; only buildings and other elements of the urban fabric were registered. To capture an event, two photographs were necessary. The technique was thus useful in representing the consequences of urban conflicts, revolutionary action and large-scale urban reconstructions. Because the event was registered only through changes in the environment, those studying the result of vio-

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- 21 Cf. Simon Rothöhler, *Medien der Forensik*, Bielefeld 2021, 178. Eyal and Ines Weizman especially highlight the spatial and architectural dimension of this operation: “In before-and-after photographs, the event—whether natural, manmade or an entanglement of them both—is missing. Instead, it is captured in the transformation of space, thus calling for an architectural analysis. This spatial interpretation is called upon to fill the gap between the two images with a narrative [...]” Weizman/Weizman, *Before and After*, 6.
- 22 In her study Susan Schuppli takes the legal term “material witness” literally and turns it in an “operative concept in its own right: material as witness.” Cf. Susan Schuppli, *Material Witness. Media, Forensics, Evidence*, Cambridge/Massachusetts 2020, 39.
- 23 Falk Wolf, Demonstration: Einleitung, in: Lena Bader/Martin Gaier/Falk Wolf (eds.), *Vergleichendes Sehen*, München 2010, 263–271, see 267.
- 24 Cf. Weizman, *Forensic Architecture*, 98.



lence needed to shift their attention from the figure (the individual or action) to the ground (the urban fabric or landscape).<sup>25</sup>

Not only is the temporality of the gap an irreducible part or conundrum of the deployment of satellites for intelligence and image gathering, since their infrastructural condition is bound to the circumnavigation of the planet,<sup>26</sup> but satellite images are also affected by a different sort of latency that is nevertheless specific to their mediality: a latency that is the effect not of photochemical inscription and development but of the accessing and processing of data:

The satellite image has an altogether different tense. [...] [It] is encoded with time coordinates that index the moment of its acquisition, but since most satellite image data is simply archived in huge supercomputers, its tense is one of latency. Satellites are constantly and quietly scanning the earth, but much of what they register is never seen or known. The satellite image is not really produced, then, until it is sorted, rendered, and put into circulation, [...]. Satellite image data only becomes a document of the 'real' and an index of the 'historical' if there is reason to suspect it has relevance to current affairs. Unless the satellite image is selected and displayed, it remains dormant.<sup>27</sup>

Satellite images gathered through remote sensing (or at least, the kind of satellite images that are later considered and turned into documents or evidence) belong, in other words, to an order of images that, paradoxically, indicate "eventness" and "the real" and are (though not only in that regard) closely aligned or at least associated with the discourses concerning other technologies and images of surveillance. Although, because of the aforementioned technical restrictions and infrastructural conditions, commercial satellites are not particularly functional for real-time surveillance, satellite images are often charged, at least in popular culture, with the "surveillant omniscience"<sup>28</sup> and power of a super-gaze from orbit.<sup>29</sup> And as seen in the claims of

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25 Weizman/Weizman, *Before and After*, 6–7.

26 Cf. Weizman/Weizman, *Before and After*, 8.

27 Lisa Parks, *Cultures in Orbit. Satellites and the Televisual*, Durham 2005, 91.

28 Thomas Y. Levin, Rhetoric of the Temporal Index. Surveillant Narration and the Cinema of "Real Time," in: Thomas Y. Levin/Ursula Frohne/Peter Weibel (eds.), *CTRL [SPACE]. Rhetorics of Surveillance from Bentham to Big Brother*, Cambridge/Massachusetts 2002, 578–593, see 590.

29 This trope not only persists in popular paranoia thrillers (like Tony Scott's *Enemy of the State* from 1998), but also makes an appearance in programmatic texts about remote sensing in human-rights causes as well. Cf. for example Lars Bromley, *Eye in The Sky. Monitoring Human Rights Abuses Using Geospatial Technology*, in: *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* 10 (1/2009), 159–168. (Lars Bromley served as a project director

Maxar Technologies regarding their archive above, this trope of a synchronic omniscience indexing “the real” corresponds with a related omniscience indexing the “historical,” as Parks put it:

Archives of satellite image data thus create the potential for *diachronic omniscience*—vision through time—because they enable views of the past (and future with computer modeling) to be generated in the present that have never been known to exist at all, much less seen. Our understanding of the temporality of the satellite image should be derived through the process of its selection, display, and circulation rather than formed at the instant of its acquisition.<sup>30</sup>

Human-rights-related satellite imaging thus involves the emergence of what in his influential essay Andrew Herscher calls “surveillant witnessing”: a “hybrid visual practice that has emerged at the intersection of satellite surveillance and human rights witnessing”,<sup>31</sup> where human-rights concerns and military concerns become entangled (as in the discourse of “humanitarian interventions”) and where, in many scholars’ accounts, “distant observation, objectivity, and truth”<sup>32</sup> tend to be conflated.

Before-and-after satellite images as a specific way of arranging and presenting satellite images are, of course, affected, in a constitutive way, by the same latency attributed by Parks to satellite images in general. Andrew Herscher describes a common posteriority problem affecting the construction of before-and-after-satellite sequences by referring to the example of “The Eyes on Darfur” campaign, one of the first prominent human-rights investigations operating extensively, if not exclusively, with satellite images. In a study of what the American Association for the Advancement of Science referred to as an “ethnic cleansing campaign” in Darfur, South Sudan, the Geospatial Technologies and Human Rights Project, initiated by the AAAS in 2006, collected satellite images of villages in Darfur, one pair for each village, and since the aforementioned archiving of imaging satellite data makes it

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for the AAAS Geospatial Technologies and Human Rights Project and is now Head of Analysis for Humanitarian Missions at United Nations Institute for Training & Research.)

30 Parks, *Cultures in Orbit*, 91. Not only does Lisa Parks allude to the role of computer models and machine learning in remote sensing and the analysis of data gathered by satellites, here resulting in a different kind of temporal structure where the image of the present becomes the baseline for the prediction of the future (of the planet); she also points towards an ethics of working with or reading satellite images, and to the necessity of satellite literacy, where the infra-structural preconditions of the images produced and distributed are made transparent or legible.

31 Herscher, *Surveillant Witnessing*, 473.

32 Parks, *Cultures in Orbit*, 81.

possible to access data collected months earlier and generate images from it, the “before images” were actually accessed *after* the “after images” to provide a “baseline for comparison.”<sup>33</sup> The baseline function indicates and guarantees that there is a clear order of the *comparata*, guiding the comparison closely. What it does not guarantee is a blue and open sky to go along with it, in order to acquire usable images—“open skies” are of course not only an atmospheric and meteorological precondition for remote viewing, but also the namesake of the treaty that enables aerial surveillance flights among the participating countries.

The “before” image, the before-state, is implicitly invested with the notion of normality or the ordinary in order to show the differences, disturbances, destruction or death that the event in between will have caused, even though it is, naturally, often accessed “after the event” as well.<sup>34</sup> The image of the empty and undisturbed Yablonska Street in Bucha on February 28 2022 seemingly has no other purpose (and can therefore only be seen for half a second in the mp4 clip) than serving as a ground or baseline for the bodies to be highlighted.

While a genealogical approach like Herscher’s that focuses on the determining structure of the (neo-imperial) gaze of satellites and their deploying countries and corporations highlights the power-knowledge arrangements involved in these operations, the structure of the mode of analysis and representation that governs the forensic operation tends to fade from view. While I certainly follow most of the aforementioned takes on human-rights-related remote-sensing discourses in their calls for caution, satellite literacy, and image data transparency, I would add that here literacy involves not only the genealogy of technology, the transparency about the processing of data and generating of images and the chains of operations, but also the comparative premises involved. Not only does this point towards an ethics of data gathering, processing, and presentation, which in contemporary non-governmental forensic practices are linked to terms like “open verification” or “investigative commons,”<sup>35</sup> but, one could argue, these concerns also align with the implications of an epistemology and ethics of comparing.

As the term indicates, before-and-after images are a necessary part of an operation of temporal comparison: not only do they invite or demand comparative viewing, they direct it and thereby direct the gaze in a different manner, also directing the comparative process through this logic of the baseline as a construction of eventlessness, a ground for comparison. According to Falk Wolf, the status of comparative viewing in general oscillates between that of a medium of knowledge and its production and that of presentation and representation.<sup>36</sup> This also holds true for before-

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33 Herscher, *Surveillant Witnessing*, 488.

34 Herscher, *Surveillant Witnessing*, 488.

35 Cf. Fuller/Weizman, *Investigative Aesthetics*, 195–212.

36 Wolf, *Einleitung*, 264.

and-after images and their viewing, as a specific type of temporal comparison,<sup>37</sup> or rather visual spatio-temporal comparison that then needs to be verbalized, annotated, and framed. Here the act of comparing is a pretext and text alike, a function as well as a form of the image.

## Remote-sensing Human-rights Violations

With the inauguration of the AAAS Geospatial Technologies and Human Rights Project in 2005, a practice came into prominent view that can be dated back only a few years and was made possible on the basis of a broader set of technological advancements, and also geopolitical and legal changes, that also affected the situation. With the passing of the Land Remote Sensing Policy Act of 1992, revitalizing the Landsat program while at the same time enabling the licensing of private remote-sensing space systems, the United States initiated a change or tweak in policy and practice that was in other parts of the world already in effect after the end of the Cold War (and even before, for example in France, with SPOT, the Satellite Pour l'Observation de la Terre, launched in 1986):<sup>38</sup> a privatization and commercialization of satellite companies and technologies, and, in part, declassification of satellite images from the Cold War, that pointed towards their relevance and prevalence.<sup>39</sup> But more specifically, these commercialization and advancements opened up the possibility of a new era of visual activism and distant witnessing, and of the remote sensing of human-rights violations, effectively turning, as the Weizmans put it hyperbolically, “the entire planet into a site of forensic investigation.”<sup>40</sup>

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37 Regarding the structure, elements, and variations of temporal comparisons in general cf. Kirill Postoutenko/Zoltán B. Simon/Willibald Steinmetz, Temporal Comparisons: Evaluating the World Through Historical Time, in: *Time & Society* 30 (4/2021), 447–461.

38 Cf. Parks, *Cultures in Orbit*, 79–80.

39 Perhaps not coincidentally it is also precisely the era of advent of a related type of image, the era of what the German critic and filmmaker Harun Farocki famously called “operational images,” to lay the emphasis on systems of machine vision and the automation of perception, which employ images as mere operative functions in broader networks of surveillance, tracking, identification, observation, and analysis. And the data-gathering apparatuses that are satellites, are, of course, very much integral parts of such networks. Cf. Harun Farocki, Phantom Images, in: *Public* 29 (2004), 12–22.

40 Weizman/Weizman, *Before and After*, 16. It needs to be added that one major aspect of early criticism of the expansion and direction of satellite witnessing was—and still is—that it is only in theory that the entire planet is witness-surveilled in that manner; in practice it is rather specific regions, often in the Middle East and Global South, that are identified as “areas of interest” (AOI) and crisis. Cf. Delf Rothe/David Shim, Sensing the Ground. On the Global Politics of Satellite-Based Activism, in: *Review of International Studies* 44 (3/2018), 414–437, see 424–425.

Early “landmark” cases where satellite imagery was quoted as evidence for the production of Weapons of Mass Destruction (Iraq 2003), human-rights violations, war crimes or even genocide (Bosnia-Herzegovina 1995,<sup>41</sup> Kosovo 1999)<sup>42</sup> still point towards a large discrepancy or asymmetries with regard to the retrieval and readability of such images.<sup>43</sup> However, their application beyond military intelligence and state-actor communication lead to the emergence, if not of an entirely new mode of comparing images and comparative viewing (before-and-after satellite images had their precursors in photographic military aerial reconnaissance), then of a new practice and prominence: the deployment of before-and-after satellite images as visual evidence in cases of human-rights violations and war crimes.

The genealogy and geopolitics of these remote-viewing or -monitoring practices are certainly worthy of scrutiny, at least from the perspective of visual-scholars among others (most of the scholarly attention devoted to satellite imagery in human-rights contexts stems from cultural studies and media studies as well as critical geography).<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, the way the technology works is far from self-evident, since the production of evidence relies on complex technical operations and mediatizations, as the term “remote sensing” indicates. Lisa Parks defines “remote sensing” as a “televisual practice that has been articulated with military and scientific uses of satellites to monitor, historicize, and visualize events on Earth.”<sup>45</sup> Whereas Parks focuses on the televisuality of it, the general understanding of remote sensing is much broader and not only exclusively focused on visual practices and presentations, since it comprises any sort of “acquisition of information about an object, place, or phenomenon on the Earth’s surface by means of distant observation”<sup>46</sup> and by employing various media and methods of data gathering through sensors. A digital camera system is but one of many different types of sensor, and signals sensed may also be acoustic, or existing in many regions of the electromagnetic spectrum beyond the optical. And the information, the data acquired, then needs to be processed before questions of legibility, of expert annotations and analysis can even arise. This processing involves techniques which, for example, naturalize the standard false color of satellite images, enhance contrast, remove distortions, perform orthogonal rectification etc.: “The satellite gathers data—we see an image.”<sup>47</sup>

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41 Analyzed at length in Parks, *Cultures in Orbit*, 77–107.

42 Cf. Kurgan, *Close Up at a Distance*, 113–127.

43 Cf. Kurgan, *Close Up at a Distance*, 24–30.

44 Cf. Boris Michel, Forensische Blicke und Praktiken kritischer Geovisualisierung. Ein Besprechungssessay, in: *ACME. An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies* 16 (4/2017), 687–712.

45 Parks, *Cultures in Orbit*, 77.

46 Rothe/Shim, *Sensing the Ground*, 414.

47 Kurgan, *Close Up at a Distance*, 118. —This complex process is often part of the “service” of the image provider and satellite operator: Maxar Technologies, for example, offer and advertise “Analysis-Ready Data” (ARD), cf. Geller, *Introducing Maxar ARD*.

With the afore mentioned accessibility of satellite images produced out of data gathered remotely with increasingly higher resolution for the general public and for non-governmental agents, investigators, and researchers, the human rights movement transformed from an “advocacy based practice to an investigative practice,”<sup>48</sup> while at the same time changing the focus from human victims and perpetrators to the crime scenes, from acts to their environmental or architectural traces. Remotely sensed satellite images thus became a prime object and discourse in a practice that is today ubiquitous and far-reaching, but also often scrupulous and aware of its loaded history: the crowd sourcing of forensic methods for the investigation of state-sanctioned violence or criminal neglect as pinpointed by the NYTimes Visual Investigations team.<sup>49</sup>

The infrastructure and mediality of remotely sensed data translated into satellite images tend to disappear behind the images themselves, which in turn often become emblems not only of the catastrophes and events they (do not) depict, but also of the investigative endeavor. Making satellite images “legible” by annotating them and comparing them to a baseline is, of course, only one—albeit crucial—step in the investigative process. From the beginning, The New York Times Visual Investigation team, and the company Maxar and the images obtained through their WorldView3-satellite system and made commercially available through various resellers and platforms, could well have functioned as an entry point to write at length about the development, distribution, use and issues of satellite imagery, tracing the various iterations, transformations, mergers and acquisitions of a company like Maxar and the history and various stages of the NYT’s work with satellite images before the launch of the Visual Investigations team, and also tracing the steps involved in investigative work with satellite images in more detail. Apart from the comparison of dates and locations and the cross-referencing and geolocation through other means and with other media which the Visual Investigations team frequently performs, this also includes details omitted from the short article: the date and platform of acquisition as well as the date of retrieval; the filters that need to be set in order to find or generate an image; the post-production and altering process to prepare the image for analysis and whether it was done by the image provider (Maxar’s “Analysis-Ready Data”) or data journalists, establishing the grounds for the comparative process.<sup>50</sup>

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48 Weizman/Weizman, *Before and After*, 19.

49 Eyal Weizman’s own activist research collective, Forensic Architecture, itself an agent in the aforementioned shift, lists to date more than 90 investigations on their website, and remote sensing features more or less prominently in a quarter of them, together with related methods like geolocating and others from critical geography and archeology. Cf. [<https://forensic-architecture.org/methodology/remote-sensing>, last accessed: May 14, 2023].

50 Procedural transparency and literacy in this regard could allow for a more effective countering of conspiratorial narratives doubting or denying the veracity of images and investiga-

## Ground Truth: Triangulations

While it may be a practice-theoretical commonplace that the grounding from which some takes on human-rights-related remote sensing may profit can be found in the practices and discourses themselves,<sup>51</sup> the relation between “remote” and “ground”, “grounding” and “sensing” is far from uncomplicated or stable. In the environmental sciences, archeology, and geography, and also in forensic architectural analysis<sup>52</sup> and other fields ‘ground truth’ traditionally refers to information gathered *in situ*, on location, on the actual ground, thereby allowing for the aforementioned referencing and calibration of remotely sensed data: “Ground truths emerge on location; they are local, specific, and situated so as to be able to offer a grounding for the network of technologies of sense and location.”<sup>53</sup> But as Abelardo Gil-Fournier and Jussi Parikka, highlighting the “relational dimension” of the concept,<sup>54</sup> also point out, it would be misleading to assume a strict dichotomy between “ground” and “remote” that might entail or suggest other powerful and problematic dichotomies like “analogue” and “digital” (in this case with the assumption: analogue ground — digital data). The authors also point out that “ground” has increasingly become a category also referring to various states of aggregation of data that often also take the form of images, and that “ground truth is read from a mass of images, instead of comparatively off the [physical] ground”:<sup>55</sup>

Ground truth is actually a broader term for knowledge verification and calibration that circulates in diverse contexts and practices. In other words, ground

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tions while often and increasingly working—or pretending to work—with the same open-source methods. For counter-forensic strategies dealing with “dark epistemology” cf. Eyal Weizman, *Open Verification*, in: e-flux Architecture, *Becoming Digital*, June 2019, [<https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/becoming-digital/248062/open-verification/>, last accessed: May 14, 2023]. In the case of the NYT Bucha investigation, for example, a common thread on social media or in pro-Russian media coverage was to point out that seemingly no Maxar image of that location was available for the dates referenced by the NYT, ignoring that for the image acquisition, a wider angle range than the preset (a wider off-nadir) had to be entered. Cf. the analysis and instructions of the activist group Volksverpetzer, Philip Kreißel, *So könnt Ihr die Satelliten-Bilder-Beweise zu Butscha selbst überprüfen*, 10.4.2022, [<https://www.volksverpetzer.de/ukraine/satelliten-bilder-butscha/>, last accessed: May 14, 2023].

- 51 Cf. the practice-theoretical criticism of accounts like Herscher’s in James R. Walker, *Remote Sensing for International Human Rights Advocacy: Critiques and Responses*, in: *Journal of Human Rights* 19 (2/2020), 183–200.
- 52 Cf. [<https://forensic-architecture.org/methodology/ground-truth/>, last accessed: May 14, 2023].
- 53 Gil-Fournier/Parikka, *Ground Truth to Fake Geographies*, 1254.
- 54 Gil-Fournier/Parikka, *Ground Truth to Fake Geographies*, 1257.
- 55 Gil-Fournier/Parikka, *Ground Truth to Fake Geographies*, 1254.

truth surfaces as an operation where sets of material traces are distinguished as registers of information. If the detective recognizes and operationalizes the material arrangement of a footprint, the dust on a shoe or the ash of a cigarette as clues indicative of a potential event, in a similar way ground truth encapsulates a set of filtered objects to be mobilized as data.<sup>56</sup>

In that sense “ground truth” is not a practice of comparison in and of itself, but rather—again following the analogies with Ginzburg’s detective and evidential paradigm—established by alignments or operations of matching. Nevertheless, ground truths become a media prerequisite for the practice of image comparison. They are an integral part of a set of practices that are involved to prepare quasi-stable or temporarily stable *comparata* that in turn allow for an image comparison or comparative viewing to take place and be staged in order to demonstrate and visualize change. In that sense the triangle of *comparata* and *tertium* has a pretext that can also be described as an operation of triangulation, as the term is used in social sciences as well as investigative and data-research contexts;<sup>57</sup> and thinking about the proceduality of comparing certainly also involves paying attention to such pretexts.

In the NYT visual investigations of Bucha, as in many other similar investigations, producing a “stable” ground for satellite-image comparisons involves, as we have seen, an operation involving anchoring images with maps, and satellite footage with videos, hence cross-referencing and synchronizing data with data, images with other images (visible in the side-by-side or split-screen clip arrangement), “rendering data into readable, comparable forms.”<sup>58</sup> Grounding the truth in this sense is not an operation that requires the proverbial “boots on the ground,” since the ground, was never unmediated to begin with—and not only in the case of these investigations. It reveals itself as a task where data literacy, satellite literacy, and comparison literacy become one ground, one endeavor. Grounds for contemporary image comparisons are legion, and they are matters of concern and urgency. Satellite images and their before-and-after comparisons demonstrate that every act of comparing requires complex and hybrid grounding and alignment operations that sometimes almost seem to become obscured by the spectacular surface of before-and-after images (which may well hold true for all kinds of everyday comparisons or quasi-comparisons that operate on the basis of preprocessed data). But the ground is contested. And even if it appears stable, it is moving and shifting constantly. And

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56 Gil-Fournier/Parikka, *Ground Truth to Fake Geographies*, 1256.

57 Cf. Paulette Rothbauer, *Triangulation*, in: Lisa Given, *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*, Los Angeles 2008, 892–894.

58 Monica M. Brannon, *Standardized Spaces. Satellite Imagery in the Age of Big Data*, in: *Configurations*, 21 (3/2013), 271–299, see 272.



whether observed remotely or closely, we should be well aware of the processes that are involved in producing this appearance.

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Fig. 1–3 from: browne, Malachy/botti, David/willis, Haley, Dead Lay Out in Bucha for Weeks, Refuting Russian Claim, Satellite Images Show, *The New York Times* online, 4.4.2022, URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/04/world/europe/bucha-ukraine-bodies.html> [last accessed: May 14, 2023].

Original sources: Satellite images by Maxar Technologies. Video footage by Kievskiy Dvizh via Instagram.

# A Contingency-sensitive Theory of Global Change

## Practices of Comparing as the Driving Force of Globalization/s

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Angelika Epple

**Abstract** *Subsequent to the demise of modernization theory, the assumption of a historical telos has become obsolete. The uncertainty, the contingency of future events, and the unintended side effects of human behavior seem to give evidence that history has no direction. This paper objects to the above view in three respects. Firstly, by arguing that practice theory can integrate the inconsistencies between the intentionality of human action and the contingency of historical events. Secondly, the paper shows that such an approach has the potential to lead to a new understanding of global change as a contradictory process. Given the contradictory nature of global change, the paper's conclusion reveals that certain practices prove to be particularly suited to intensify global change: the practices of comparison.*

The *Song of the Insufficiency of Human Struggling* opens the third act of Berthold Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera*. When drafting the play, Brecht adapted a translation of John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*, an 18th-century English ballad opera, prepared by his then partner Elisabeth Hauptmann. Complete with the music composed by Kurt Weill, *The Threepenny Opera* became the biggest success, as regards theatrical productions, during the Weimar Republic—the Nazis made sure to ban any public performances of the play as early as 1933. Nevertheless, Brecht's ballad opera gained significant international recognition, resulting in translations into numerous languages and worldwide productions rerunning the musical up to the present day.<sup>1</sup>

The theatrical opera features a critique of the capitalist system from the point of view of a socialist. And the *Song of the Insufficiency* sarcastically questions the morality of all people. What's more, it ironizes the possibility of humans planning their future—its basic assumption expressing an attitude to life common to many people in the interwar period as well as today: in modern times, one can no longer derive

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1 Bertolt Brecht/Ralph Manheim/John Willett, *The Threepenny Opera*, London 2015, liv, lxxxii–lxxxvii.

the *horizon of expectation*, as Reinhart Koselleck put it, from the preceding *space of experiences*. Hence, the future is uncertain.<sup>2</sup> The song's irony aims at the ambivalence people have to deal with in uncertain times. On the one hand, plans, however good they may be, always seem to go astray—leading to the conclusion that human efforts to plan are never effective. At the same time, when people encounter uncertainty, the desire to control the future grows. Then again, how is this to succeed when empirical observation seems to suggest that actions in the present have no calculable influence on the future?

This view raises some questions, fundamental for the theory of history: is the future completely indeterminate—that is, causally unrelated to what people do? And does it follow that historical change is mere chance? There is another question behind this: if one denies the influence of actions in the present on the future, then one questions alike whether the effects of actions can be traced back to the intentions behind these actions, i.e., to the intentions of the person acting.

Since the triumph of the then-new social history in the 1960s, historians have ceased to assume that they can derive history from the actions of central actors or the great men of the time. Historical changes have been explained differently. In the tradition of Marxist conceptions of history, social history has held class antagonisms or social inequality to be the engine of historical change.<sup>3</sup> Modernization theory instead introduced the concept of social differentiation and assumed that the path to modernity corresponded to certain regularities.<sup>4</sup> This idea found an echo in Shmuel Eisenstadt's *multiple modernities*.<sup>5</sup> In turn, the classical theory of modernization incurred censure by exponents of the dependency theory. They identified the global capitalist division of labor as the reason for the exclusion of the Global South from social development.<sup>6</sup> With the emergence of global history, another line of argumentation came up, dispensing with individual actors as historically relevant variables and taking a fundamentally skeptical position about the explicability

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2 Reinhart Koselleck, "'Space of Experience' and 'Horizon of Expectation': Two Historical Categories," in: Reinhart Koselleck (ed.), *Futures Past. On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Columbia 2004, 255–276.

3 One of the best examples of the triumphant march of social history since the 1960s is the iconic work of Eric Hobsbawm, starting with *The Age of Revolution. Europe 1789–1848*, London 1962, followed by *Labouring Men. Studies in the History of Labour*, London 1964 and many other books such as *The Age of Empire*, London 1987 and *The Age of Extremes. The Short History of the Twentieth Century*, London 1994.

4 Cf. Talcott Parsons, *Action Theory and the Human Condition*, New York/London 1989; Seymour Martin Lipset, *American Exceptionalism. A Double-Edged Sword*, New York/London 1996.

5 Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, *Multiple Modernities*, in: *Daedalus*, 129 (1/2000), 1–29, URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20027613> [last accessed May 14, 2023].

6 Andre Gunder Frank (ed.), *The World System. Five hundred years or five thousand?*, London/New York 1994.

of historical processes; with this, it was not people's intentions or the historical *telos* that came to the fore as the actual trigger of historical change, but the contingency of historical events.<sup>7</sup> By way of example, the discussion of why Europe and Asia took such different paths regarding their economic development since the late 18th century comes to mind. In Kenneth Pomeranz's view, it was neither dissimilar social structures nor certain activities of key players at that time that caused the disparity, but the fact that resources happened to be available in a particular place near early industrial centers. Admittedly, this—in my view untenable—position did not go unchallenged.<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless, it is worth asking whether intentions and actions have to make way as driving forces of historical change. Is it contingency or unintended side-effects of human actions that actually drive historical evolution now?

In this essay, I counter this assumption in three ways: first, practice theory may encompass the intentionality of human action and the contingency of historical events. Second, such an encompassing approach may lead to a new understanding of global change as a contradictory process. While not without direction, the worldwide process is not geared to make progress towards a particular goal, such as a just, modern, or prosperous society. And third, due to the contradictory nature of global change, specific practices prove particularly suited to the intensification of global change: the practices of comparing.

Later on, I will explain these theses in more detail. However, in a first step, I will outline in this article why the theory of history should do without historical *telos*, why historical conceptions should understand the intentionality of human action as the starting point of historical change, and why such theoretical approaches should nevertheless take into account the contingency of historical events (1). Subsequently, I will substantiate why our understanding of global change should rate the worldwide trends as a directed singular process without neglecting the manifold manifestations and underlying, sometimes even counteracting, sub-processes. Instead of speaking of *global change*—the term emphasizing the singular—I prefer to use the term *globalization/s*. Moreover, I will clarify in this article the interplay between the singularity of the specifically directed development and the plurality on the phenomenological level (2). The force that drives globalization/s is an inherent dialectic of increasing convergence with simultaneously intensifying divergence. This article's line of argument identifies comparative practices as a central stimulus for this dialectic (3). Why comparative practices? The reason, so my argument goes, lies

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7 Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence. China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy*, Princeton 2021.

8 Cf. for instance, Peer Vries, *State, Economy and the Great Divergence. Great Britain and China, 1680s–1850s*, London 2015; Kaveh Yazdani, *India, Modernity and the Great Divergence. Mysore ad Gujarat (17th to 19th century)*, Leiden 2017.

in a structural analogy between globalization dynamics and comparative practices. Comparing, organized as a triadic process negotiating similarity (convergence) and difference (divergence), fosters the dialectics of globalization.

## The Theory of History Without *Telos*, Yet Not Without a Direction

With the European Enlightenment of the 18th century and the emergence of historical science as an independent discipline in the 19th century in Germany and other European countries, religiously based teleology lost importance when it came to discussing the course of time.<sup>9</sup> The notion that history has a goal has been controversial ever since; nevertheless, it continues to shape numerous conceptions of history to this day. By way of example, I will address—with the utmost brevity—the Marxist position, which holds to a secular *telos* of history and may represent such a conception paradigmatically.

### The *Telos* of History, or the Necessity of a Natural Law

Karl Marx's conception of the theory of history finds an echo in Berthold Brecht's stanzas, referred to at the beginning of this article, insofar as they suggest that the deliberate striving for a better future is meaningless. "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness."<sup>10</sup> The historical materialism of Marx and Engels combined Hegel's notion of a dialectical dynamic in history with Feuerbach's view that economic conditions shaped human consciousness. The driving force of historical change was thus identified: in historical materialism, history is made in the course of the negation of production conditions and class struggle. A Marxist-based theory of historical change is, therefore, initially simple. There is a subject (the class), a spelled-out dynamic (the dialectics), and a *telos* of history (the society without social inequality). The interpretation earns historical plausibility when recurring to the historical development of human society featuring the steps from slavery to the

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9 In his seminal contribution "multiple modernities," Shmuel Eisenstadt argues, on the one hand, against simple theories of secularization. On the other hand, he underlines the importance of religion for the specific dynamics of European-American modernity. Cf. Eisenstadt, *Multiple Modernities*, 1, 20–22, 22.

10 Karl Marx, Preface, in: Karl Marx (ed.), *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Moscow 1970, 19–27.

oppression of the working class to socialism. Marxism sees history as a history of progress.<sup>11</sup>

The Marxist conception of history goes well with the assumption that human striving is futile (or the *Song of the Insufficiency of Human Struggling*). In contrast to other progress-oriented theories of history, conceptualized by liberal or enlightenment thinkers since the 18th century, and due to historical materialism, the intentionality of human action does not play a role in the Marxist theory of history. At a second glance, it is this aspect that complicates things when it comes to the Marxist theory of history. The rejection of the plannability of the future stands out as fundamental in the *Threepenny Opera*: “Aye, make yourself a plan. They need you at the top! Then make yourself a second plan. Then let the whole thing drop.”<sup>12</sup> Why, then, is there still progress in history?

Class struggle, as the driving force of progress, is neither an individualized phenomenon nor tied to the individual's intentions. Rather, the respective specific mode of production generates its own negation and thus drives history forward. At one point, Marx speaks of the “necessity of a natural process.”<sup>13</sup> Admittedly, other passages in Marx's works acknowledge the importance of the intentionality of the individual. For example, in the *Theses on Feuerbach*, he notes that it is important to go one step further than interpreting the world, as philosophers had done, and to change it.<sup>14</sup> After all, without the intentionality of human action and the notion of being able to influence the future, such a thesis would be meaningless. However, it is predominantly true that Marxism or historical materialism allows the individual action of human actors to recede into the background. At the same time, Marxism maintains that history is a teleological process—merely and simply despite any intentions and in the form of natural law.

Marxist theory of history significantly impacted major social-historical conceptions of history in the 20th century.<sup>15</sup> However, theories of history with a completely different focus also adhered to the idea of history as a teleological process. In the field of historiography, in addition to the social history deeply rooted in the Marxist tradition, the sociologically based theory of modernization became a concept often

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11 For a more profound insight into the significance of the historical dimension in Karl Marx's work, cf. Enzo Traverso, *Marxism*, in Chiel van den Akker (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Theory of History*, London/New York 2022, 34–49.

12 Brecht/Manheim/Willet, *The Threepenny Opera*, 62.

13 Bernhard Schütz, *Fortschritt und Arbeitszeit. Ein Vergleich der Ansichten von Marx, Keynes und der Sozialdemokratie*, in: *momentum quarterly* 3 (4/2014), 259–269, 262

14 Karl Marx/Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*, London 2010, 5: “Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.”

15 Eric Hobsbawm's books were so influential in academia that his death marked an epochal turning point in historiography. Cf. J.H. Arnold/M. Hilton/J. Rüger (eds.), *History after Hobsbawm. Writing the Past for the Twenty-First Century*, Oxford 2018.



implicit in interpretations of historical developments. The dependency theory, advocated by Latin American and European sociologists and economists, combined Marxist beliefs with a reversal of some of the arguments of modernization theory, and remained wedded to teleological historiography—through its negation.<sup>16</sup>

### Beyond the Telos: Contingency as a Stimulus in Global Change

Since the 1970s, both the Marxist and the modernization-theoretical or other progress-focused conceptions of history have increasingly been countered by the argument that history is precisely not a teleological process. Such argumentation finds support in the proverbial everyday experience that things never turn out the way one expects. When perceptions of processes address technical or moral progress, secularization, or the increase in freedom or prosperity, all of these notions, so the objections go, are premised on ideology and fail to derive their insights empirically from history, or are *ex post facto* interpretations without any predictive value. As a result, in the last 20 years, *contingency* has become a key concept for those who see history as a non-directed process.<sup>17</sup> Globalization histories predominantly oriented toward economic path dependencies gave way to more skeptical globalization histories.<sup>18</sup>

The different ways of arguing became particularly well known in the *Great Divergence* debate triggered by Kenneth Pomeranz about 20 years ago. The term *Great Divergence*, coined by Samuel Huntington, refers to the divergence of the economic development in Asia and Europe that began to emerge in 1800. Pomeranz believed he could prove the cause was a coincidence: coal resources in an infrastructurally suitable location in England versus coal resources in an infrastructurally poor area in the Yangtze River Delta in China. Still, global historians such as Ian Morris seized on the argument that the coincidence of geographical location was the historically significant factor;<sup>19</sup> a thesis that—not least given the current development of the global economy—certainly has to be considered outdated today.<sup>20</sup>

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- 16 Patrick Manning/Barry K. Gills (eds.), *Andre Gunder Frank and global development: visions, remembrances, and explorations*, London 2013.
- 17 Cf., for instance, Alon Confino, Contingency, the Essence of History, in Alon Confino (ed.), *Foundational Pasts. The Holocaust as Historical Understanding*, Cambridge 2011, 97–117.
- 18 Jan De Vries, Reflections on Doing Global History, in Maxine Berg (ed.), *Writing the History of the Global. Challenges for the 21st Century*, Oxford 2013, 32–48; Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence. China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy*, Princeton 2000; Kenneth Pomeranz, Ten Years after. Responses and Reconsiderations, in: *Historically Speaking* 12 (4/2011), 20–25.
- 19 Ian Morris, *War! What Is It Good For? Conflict and the Progress of Civilization from Primates to Robots*, London 2014.
- 20 Jack A. Goldstone, Why understanding the timing of divergence matters, in: *Journal of Global History* 16 (2/2021), 309–314; Victor Court, A Reassessment of the Great Divergence

Nevertheless, that point of view concerning the driving force of historical change is interesting. According to the argumentation, historical change would, at best, be an unintended consequence of human action. In terms of historical theory, a trenchant formulation of the insight would read as follows: deliberate, i.e., intentional human actions do not provide the groundwork for historical change; history has no *telos*; the future is always uncertain. I would like to allege that immoderately attaching importance to contingency and abandoning intentionality as a trigger of historical change leads to a diminution of causality in the theory of history.<sup>21</sup>

### The problematic Diminution of Causality in the Theory of History, and the Significance of Intentionality

The negation of purposiveness in history, the emphasis on the contingency of historical change, and the abandonment of intentionality as the mainspring of history—these notions hit upon something. Still, in doing so, they conceal something else. Yes, there is no way to explain historical change exclusively in terms of intentional human actions; yes, intentions have unintended consequences that can be very effective historically; yes, history has no *telos* providing the leverage point for dealing exhaustively with the subject of historical change. The future is uncertain and prognostic reliability is poor. Nonetheless, even if there is no *telos* in history, it does not necessarily follow that change results from contingent and non-intended events alone. Indeed, there is another objection: given that history has no *telos*, that does not mean global change has no direction. Here the particular significance of the term globalization/s comes into play, since it points to unity in diversity. I will come back to this shortly.

At this point, I would like to emphasize first that we should hold on to the idea that history has a direction. Only by doing so are we able to assess processes meaningfully. If history has no direction, we could indeed show which factors were necessary preconditions for a particular development—for example, the coal deposits in England for the increasing use of steam engines. However, we cannot explain why that specific factor initiated the process of industrialization. Suppose we want to

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Debate: towards a Reconciliation of apparently Distinct Determinants, in: *European Review of Economic History* 24 (4/2020), 633–674; Roman Studer, *The Great Divergence Reconsidered. Europe, India, and the Rise to Global Economic Power*, Cambridge 2015.

21 Kim Sterelny gives a different answer to why the relevance of causality as a constitutive factor for explaining historical developments dwindles in historiography. He argues against a comprehensive claim that history is nothing but contingency. To that end, he suggests it may be productive to distinguish between robust and fragile historical trajectories. Kim Sterelny, Contingency and History, in: *Philosophy of Science* 83 (4/2016), 521–539.

interpret and explain developments as historical processes. In that case, it is imperative to understand why events or actions provoked (intentionally) by people have been oriented in a specific direction and thus initiated or advanced a process. One of the major challenges in historiography is to discern past actions and find a cogent description of their relations. Johann Gustav Droysen, one of the founders of historiography—once a German branch of science, today a worldwide and renowned discipline in academia—noted:

“[...] An interaction that is considered a business today qualifies as a part of history after one generation if it was important enough. How does a business become history? Where do we get the measure for ranking business dealings as history?”<sup>22</sup>

These “business dealings,”—that is, the actions of the contemporaries—are the basis of history. According to Droysen, the task of the historian is to find the “measure” to recognize them as affecting history.

History is therefore tied to the concept of action and, with the concept of action, to the intentionality of human actors—also evident in the overuse of the term *unintended side effects* or, as Wolfgang Reinhardt puts it, the unintended consequences. The term alone suggests that these effects derive from a main effect, i.e., they are not autonomously conceivable. Intentionality was, is, and will be the cause of action, regardless of any effects. In contrast, those who, like Kenneth Pomeranz, rely on contingency as the primary driver of change do not cut the surface with their explanation of historical change. The availability of coal is indeed fundamental for the beginning of industrialization, but the link to historical change is loose. There were undoubtedly coal deposits in other regions of the world. Still, no process like industrialization were triggered there. After all, people in England coming up with the idea of using coal to fire their steam engines turned the means into a lucrative business. The decisive point here is that the actions of the inventors, technicians, workers, and merchants involved were not aimed at initiating any such thing as industrialization. Instead, the beginning of this development, as well as the process itself, has been identified by historians in retrospect. Many coincidences were necessary to make that process possible. Thus, adhering to the notion of intentionality is not tantamount to objecting to the importance of contingency when it comes to historical change. Rather, acknowledging the significance of intentions opens up the possibility of recognizing the interplay of different factors more accurately.<sup>23</sup> Any

22 Johann Gustav Droysen, *Grundriss der Historik*, Leipzig 1868, 4, [https://www.deutschestextarchiv.de/book/show/droysen\_historik\_1868, last accessed March 25, 2023].

23 Victor Court argues with respect to the “Great” or the “Little Divergence” that three components influenced each other: “biogeography, culture-institutions, and contingency-conjuncture.” Cf. Victor Court, *A Reassessment of the Great Divergence Debate*, 633–674.

authors writing global history will have to find answers to how a discipline bent on emphasizing contingency and the complex character of events nevertheless arrives at macro-level analyses and interpretations when conceptualizing their historical narrative.<sup>24</sup> Thus, I would like to emphasize that if we deem actions one of the key elements of our considerations when mapping out the theory of history, that does not imply that we have to deny the significance of contingent constellations or unintended consequences. The respective approach merely sees the driving force for change not so much in contingencies but in intentions.

While indicating that historical causality is solely based on human intentional-ity, we must avoid adopting a deterministic perspective. One cannot safely assume what effects a human action will have; hence, the context of action will hardly ever be the same. Influences are infinitely diverse. Therefore, the course of events is always contingent; it is imperative to take unintended side effects of human action into account. And yet, we should hold to the causal connection between intentional action and historical change. How do we accomplish that?

How can we make both intentional human action and the accompanying unintentional side effects productive for a theory of historical change, and precisely not play them off against each other?

All things considered, what we need is to formulate a contingency-sensitive theory of global historical change.<sup>25</sup> On the one hand, such a theory should do justice to the imponderability of developments, and, on the other hand, it should have more to offer than a description of past events and coincidental constellations. To this end, we must answer some key questions. How can we use intentional human actions and unintended consequences productively to explain historical change without pitting them against each other? Can we combine the notion of the contingency and uncertainty of future events, the assumption of the inadequacy of human efforts, and the idea of history as a directed but unpredictable process? Is it possible to understand history as a process comprising phases or even epochs<sup>26</sup> while acknowledging the inherent anarchy, inadequacy, and heterogeneity in human actions? The goal should

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24 Georg Ferguson-Cradler, Fisheries' collapse and the making of a global event, 1950s–1970s, in: *Journal of Global History*, 13 (3/2018), 399–424, esp. 423.

25 Wolfgang Knöbl, *Die Kontingenz der Moderne. Wege in Europa, Asien und Amerika*, Frankfurt am Main/New York 2007.

26 This is a classical discussion among historians. It has gained momentum, however, when it comes to global history. Cf., for instance, Frederick Cooper, *Modernity*, in Frederick Cooper (ed.), *Colonialism in Question. Theory, Knowledge, History*, Berkeley 2005, 113–149; Helge Jordheim, *Against Periodization. Koselleck's Theory of Multiple Temporalities*, in: *History and Theory* 51 (2/2012), 151–171; Thomas Maissen, *Defining epochs in global history—Can we write a History-in-common without shared concepts?*, in: Thomas Maissen/Barbara Mittler (eds.), *Why China did not have a Renaissance—and why that matters. An interdisciplinary Dialogue*, Berlin/Boston 2018, 25–34.

be to reconcile the uncertainty of any future with a theory of history oriented toward causes of global historical change. What does all that mean for the connection between intentionality and historical change?

### Practices Mediate between Human Intentionality and the Contingency of Change

Since individual actions are inconceivable without intentionality and intentions do not determine the effects of actions, a theory of history must avoid formulating a direct, derivative relation between historical change and the intentionality of individual actions. Instead, such a theory must mediate individual actions, the contingency of effects, and overarching change. It is precisely at this point that the Bielefeld comparative research comes in.<sup>27</sup>

The starting assumption of the Bielefeld comparative research is that applying practice theory allows for mediation between (global) historical change and the actions of actors, between the contingency of circumstances and the unintended consequences. Practices are socially shared, and shape individual actions without determining them. Additionally, practices are always dynamic since each particular action can change the practice to some degree. In critical engagement with the practice-theoretical considerations of Theodore Schatzki, Andreas Reckwitz, and Pierre Bourdieu,<sup>28</sup> the Bielefeld comparative research assumes that different practices can overlap, influence each other, change, and solidify into practice formations.<sup>29</sup> The solidification of practice formations facilitates diffusion; that is, the disentangling of some practice from a specific (historical or local) context and its embedding in a new one.<sup>30</sup> For example, around the year 1800, world travelers discussed climatic

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27 Angelika Epple/Walter Erhart, Practices of Comparing. A New Research Agenda Between Typological and Historical Approaches, in: Angelika Epple/Walter Erhart/Johannes Grave (eds.), *Practices of Comparing. Towards a New Understanding of a Fundamental Human Practice*, Bielefeld 2020, 11–38.

28 Theodore R. Schatzki, *Social Practices. A Wittgensteinian Approach to Human Activity and the Social*, Cambridge 1996; Andreas Reckwitz, Grundelemente einer Theorie sozialer Praktiken. Eine sozialtheoretische Perspektive, in: *Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 32 (4/2003), 282–301; Theodore R. Schatzki/Karin Knorr-Cetina/Eike Savigny (eds.), *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory*, London 2001; Johannes Grave, Vergleichen als Praxis. Vorüberlegungen zu einer praxistheoretisch orientierten Untersuchung von Vergleichen, in: Angelika Epple/Walter Erhart (eds.), *Die Welt beobachten. Praktiken des Vergleichens*, Frankfurt am Main 2015, 135–159.

29 Angelika Epple/Antje Flüchter/Thomas Müller, *Praktiken des Vergleichens: Modi und Formationen. Ein Bericht von unterwegs, Working Paper des SFB 1288 No. 6*, Bielefeld 2020, [[https://pub.uni-bielefeld.de/download/2943010/2943628/WorkingPaper6\\_SFB1288.pdf](https://pub.uni-bielefeld.de/download/2943010/2943628/WorkingPaper6_SFB1288.pdf)].

30 Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society. Outline of the Theory of Structuration*, Cambridge 1984; Anthony Giddens, *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory. An Analysis of the writ-*

conditions in the Americas in an early-modern manner in relation to the character traits of the inhabitants and thought of them by comparing them with Europe. This way of comparing, which solidified into a practice formation that inseparably intertwines climate and character traits, still characterized comparative practices at the end of the 19th century, when supposed racial differences were scientifically researched.

It is not only solidified practice formations that facilitate the spread of practices to other (world) regions. So-called “communities of practice”<sup>31</sup> do the same. According to our definition, “*communities of practice*” comprise actors who share practices and reinforce the practices’ reach, influence, or structure-forming power. The actors do not have to meet in person or be aware that they share practices to be part of a community. *Communities of practice* do not necessarily have knowledge of themselves.<sup>32</sup> Rather, practices shared by many actors exist because of the tacit understanding that something is done in a certain way.<sup>33</sup> Doing things this way, therefore, often feels “natural” to actors and is not experienced as the result of social practices. The concepts *communities of practice* and *practice formation* are key for understanding the transition from an individual setting to practices shared by a specific community to universalized comparing practices.

To take up this example again, discourses on race could spread so well because the international scientific community supported the approach, and because they

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*ings of Marx, Durkheim and Max Weber*, Cambridge 1971; Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, Cambridge 1990.

- 31 Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice. Learning, Meaning and Identity*, Cambridge 1998.
- 32 Karl Marx distinguishes between a “class in itself” and a “class for itself.” People of the latter category share more than the same living and labor conditions; they recognize their shared interests as a class and become class-conscious. One can easily apply this distinction to communities of practice. The communities do not have to be aware of the fact that they use the same practices. However, such “tacit knowledge” can become explicit. In that case, a community would become a “community of practice for itself.” Think, for instance, of organizations like the Times Higher Education (THE) that run world university rankings. Cf. Jelena Brankovic, Leopold Ringel, Tobias Werron, How Rankings Produce Competition: The Case of Global University Rankings, in: *Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 47 (4/2008), 270–288.
- 33 In some cases, sources give deep insights into how practices came into existence. See, for instance, Johannes Nagel, Johannes/Tobias Werron, The Civilizing Force of National Competition. U.S. Nationalist Reasoning in the Mid-to-Late Nineteenth Century, in: Daniela Ruß/James Stafford (eds.), *Competition in World Politics: Knowledge, Strategies and Institutions*, 2021, 107–131. In most cases, sources do not allow for such insights because actors adapt and transform comparing practices without expressively saying so. The politics or ethics of comparison go unrecognized. Cf. Zhang Longxi, Crossroads, Distant Killing, and Translation: On the Ethics and Politics of Comparison, in: Rita Felski/Stanford Friedman (eds.), *Comparison: Theories, Approaches, Uses*, Baltimore 2013, 46–63.

could overlap with existing practices of differentiating groups of people in local contexts.<sup>34</sup> Social or religious differences were reinterpreted and extended by a practice of comparing oriented at race as a key reference point. These reinterpretations reverberated back into the international community of race experts. A good example of such reciprocal effects is Fernando Ortíz's 1906 study of Afro-Cuban religion.<sup>35</sup> Influenced by the racial discourses of his time (globally established comparative practices), such as those prominently advocated by the Italian scholar Cesare Lombroso, Ortíz combined Social Darwinist arguments with anthropological observations in early 20th-century Cuba (reference to the local context). While Lombroso's theories experienced a revival in Nazi ideology (local development into a racist ideology), in subsequent years, Ortíz left the Social Darwinist components behind and developed a particularly culturalist conception of social differences (local reinterpretation).

In the late 1930s, Ortíz coined the term "transculturación."<sup>36</sup> The concept is based on the notion of the equivalence of culturally different characteristics. Indeed, it is still an important reference point in cultural studies today (reverberating with a global discourse).<sup>37</sup> This concept completely overcomes any argumentation based on biology or social Darwinism. They make way for the neutral, non-judgmental concept of cultural difference. Eventually, the concept expanded the thought space even in the global scientific discourse and thus changed academic thinking sustainably. In this example, the direct connection becomes evident between the change in the global discourse (changed understanding of cultural differences) and the intentionality of an individual (Ortíz's intention to argue against racism). What additional discursive or social effects, what further experiences, discussions, encounters, and constellations played into this change? And what counter-discourses came across? All of this and much more is undetermined and, to a large extent, shaped by coincidences.

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34 Julian Gärtner/Malin S. Wilckens (eds.), *Racializing Humankind: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Practices of 'Race' and Racism*, Cologne 2022.

35 Fernando Ortíz, *Hampa afro-cubana. Los negros brujos (apuntes para un estudio de etnología criminal)*. Con una carta prólogo del Dr. C. Lombroso. Con 48 figuras dibujos por Gustavino, Madrid 1906.

36 Fernando Ortíz, Los factores humanos de la cubanidad, in: *Revista Bimestre Cubana* 14 (2/1940), 161–86; Fernando Ortíz, *El contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y del azúcar (advertencia de sus contrastes agrarios, económicos, históricos y sociales, su etnografía y su transculturación)*, La Habana 1940.

37 Consuelo Naranjo Orovio, Consuelo, A Network of Networks. Fernando Ortíz, Crossroad between Cultures, in: Fernando Ortíz, *HAU Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 11 (1/2021), 52–66; Mark Stein, The Location of Transculture, in: Frank Schulze-Engler, Sissy Helff (eds.), *Transcultural English Studies. Theories, Fictions, Realities*, Leiden/Boston 2008, 249–266; Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes. Travel and Transculturation*, London/New York 1992.

The interaction of contingency and intentionality is not only apparent when it comes to racial discourses. Consider professional war observers in the 19th century, world travelers, or medical experts: all their observations or insights and the knowledge they generated came into being because they wanted to classify supposedly new worlds.<sup>38</sup> In all these examples, it becomes clear that practices of comparing were a particularly suitable means to fulfill this intention. With the help of comparisons, observers intentionally related world regions and actors, some of which had no previous contact at all. The fact that they changed perceptions and communications of the world society at once may have far exceeded their intentions.

A practice-theoretical approach makes it possible to describe this interplay of intention and contingency and to find the underlying causes that have set free the dynamics while avoiding getting caught in the pitfalls of teleological historiography. In a theory of history grounded in practice theory, contingency comes into play at several points: first, at the level of individual action, which is always already integrated into social practices, but not determined by them. Rarely can one establish with certainty the causes when a person behaves differently than has been customary in the past. Second, at the transition from particular practices to a comprehensive practice formation. In a practice formation, different practices are interwoven and transformed into a comparatively stable order. For example, one can hardly date with precision when the connection between race, climate, and religion, which characterized the early studies of Fernando Ortíz, became detached. Third, contingency finally comes into play when different practices or practice formations overlap. Some practices are not adopted by certain actors; some get changed, merge into other practices, or overlap with already established ones to form new ones. The diverse Cuban society that distinguished between many hues of skin colors in different mixtures in the 19th century developed the utopian idea that racial differences should not matter. This view, forcefully articulated by national hero José Martí in *Nuestra América* in 1891, could not prevent Cuban society from evolving into a dichotomously ordered society of supposedly Black and White inhabitants. Comparative practices, as they had been imported from U.S. society during the Spanish-American War of 1898, prevailed within only one decade. At last, this historical development provoked Fernando Ortíz to begin his anthropological studies. At any point in time, things could have turned out differently. Impressed by the non-white Cuban generals, the U.S. soldiers could have brought a different comparative practice back to their homeland. Understanding exactly why Black-and-White comparisons became hegemonic instead, how and why they gradually took hold in the Afro-Cuban

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38 Johannes Nagel, Globalization, Progress, and Race in Military Reformers. World Observations after 1865, in: *American Studies* 66 (4/2021), 651–677; Niko Rohé, European medical experts in wars of ‘others’: the Greco-Turkish War of 1897, in: *European Review of History/Revue européenne d’histoire* 26 (2/2019), 163–177.



*communities of practice* as well, and how other ideas nonetheless lived on and continually subversively challenged this dichotomy, is something that needs to be explored in greater detail in the future.<sup>39</sup>

I want to emphasize that practice theory effectively mediates between intentionality as the mainspring of directed action, the contingency of circumstances, and the unintended consequences at both micro and meso levels (*individual action/practice formation and communities of practice*). By and large, this is a decisive step towards a contingency-sensitive theory of global historical change. The next step is to address how a theory may formulate an understanding of global change in its unity and multiplicity—and as a directed process, but not oriented towards a concrete goal.

### Unity and Diversity in global change: Globalization/s

Global change is a term that leaves open whether it refers to isolated processes tied together on the grounds of their worldwide effects or whether it denotes a historical process, i.e., an observable development over a longer time. Conversely, *globalization* is clearly a term that claims there is global change over a longer period that certain properties can characterize. However, the term is often problematized in regard to inheriting the legacy of modernization theory or carrying a teleological burden. In fact, the term *globalization* partakes of a problem it shares with any process term: it claims that there are changes that can be grouped under the umbrella of a specific process term based on the similarity of their characteristics. The same is true of terms like *enlightenment*, *industrialization*, and *secularization*. Eventually, *globalization* as a process term sets a new benchmark insofar as the term's core meaning points to the assumption that geographical expansion is increasing and that the process encompasses the whole world from a certain point on. At first glance, this description is indeed reminiscent of the concept of modernization—which, for one thing, asserts the spread of modernity and, for another, presents the term *modernity* as morally charged with values such as freedom and human dignity. Although the term *globalization* seems to abstain from any moral claims, it implies that the world is becoming more and more similar. Globalization invokes the connotation of increasing compression of time and space and appears as a process of convergence.

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39 Cf. Angela Gutierrez, *The Difference between Protest and War is the Person Comparing: Racism in the Early Republic in Cuba*, forthcoming 2023.

Critical voices frequently tried to problematize this view, with good reasons.<sup>40</sup> Criticism of the concept is as old as the concept itself. Interestingly, the emergence of criticism did not prevent the concept from spreading, either in academia or among the general public. As unsatisfactory as the concept of globalization may be—fathomed as an increasing compression of time and space or as a process of convergence—it refers to an everyday experience. The perception of the world's interdependence, which is undeniably a characteristic of our world today, is supported by the daily experience that actions in one place actually have, or at least could have, effects on other corners of the world. Admittedly, the same holds true even for such distant times as the 16th century: for example, when Inca Garcilaso, a native of South America, exchanged ideas with European Jesuits about whether comparisons between worlds were to be considered as somewhat helpful or rather as disastrous.<sup>41</sup> However, the scope is different today. It is misleading if today, against the backdrop of the return of geopolitics, amongst other things evident in the Ukraine war, some voices spread the assertion that globalization has ended.<sup>42</sup> We know that crop failure in Ukraine is one of the causes of famine in Africa. Globalization has not come to its end, nor will it terminate at any point soon in the foreseeable future.

Still, convergence is an essential facet of globalization, but by no means the only one. After all, the differences between and even within societies, cultures, world regions, and economies stand out and seem more fundamental than we thought for a long time. Globalization is, therefore, a contradictory process combining convergence and divergence. While all parts of the world have apparently moved closer together, and connectivity is increasing, at the same time one finds worldwide profound asymmetries accompanied by processes of exclusion and disconnection. The

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40 Cynthia Ghorra-Gobin, *Mondialisation Et Globalisation*, in: *Géococonfluences*, (2017), [<http://geoconfluences.ens-lyon.fr/informations-scientifiques/a-la-une/notion-a-la-une/mondialisation-globalisation>, last accessed May 29, 2023]; Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History*, Berkeley 2005; Arjun Appadurai, *Public worlds 1. Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Minneapolis 1996; Jerry H. Bentley, *Theories of World History Since the Enlightenment*, in: Jerry H. Bentley (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of World History*, Oxford 2012.

41 Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, *Primera Parte de los Comentarios Reales*, Lisbon 1609. The author's name is the pseudonym of Gómez Suárez de Figueroa, the son of a female descendant of a Peruvian aristocratic family and a Spanish colonial officer. Even though the Incans featured patrilineal inheritance, he chose to link his authorship to the Peruvian aristocracy. Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink, *De l'usage de la comparaison dans les écrits des Jésuites sur les Amériques*, in M. A. Bernier/C. Donato/H.-J. Lüsebrink (eds.), *Jesuit Accounts of the Colonial Americas: Inter-cultural Transfers, Intellectual Disputes, and Textualities*, Toronto 2014, 418–436.

42 Cf., for instance, the article *At Davos, the end of globalization is on everyone's mind*. The US-China trade war and the race for subsidies are fueling global fragmentation, the central theme of the 53rd World Economic Forum in Switzerland, in: *Le Monde*, January 21, 2023.

perspective from which someone looks at globalization seems to be the cause when contemporaries experience simultaneous but contradictory processes: connectedness and disconnectedness mean different things to a young person in Bielefeld, a white female diplomat at the UN in New York, or a male student in Grozny. Beyond each individual's horizon of experience, globalization is best described as a dialectical movement of increasing convergence and evolving divergence, advancing unification and spreading fragmentation, growing global commonalities, and deepening local differences.

What follows for an approach grounded in a theory of history? How is it that unification and fragmentation coincide? What preconditions do we need when we aim to bring together various individual perspectives and the comprehensive worldviews of communities? Globalization is not abstract; human actors and non-human environments drive it. When debaters pondering on the *Great Divergence* claimed—in short—that it is the resources that lead to the fundamental differences between Asian and European development, I would disagree: when it comes to economic globalization, it is always people who trade, sell, and exchange, and thus set globalizing processes in motion. Just as objects do not constitute comparison, resources are not the primary cause of globalization. Admittedly, objects play a central role in comparisons, and resources significantly affect globalization. However, comparisons and globalization have another aspect in common: both are the persistently contradictory outcome of social practices applied by sundry actors in concrete local contexts. Suppose we understand globalization as an outcome of different social practices. In that case, globalization becomes ambiguous and contingent, a process that points in different directions and calls for a descriptive term in the plural. When it comes to emphasizing that historical change has a direction, although currently spanning the simultaneous increase of convergence and divergence, a theory of historical change should, reasonably, use the term globalization/s.

The admission that we find a worldwide process of increasing interdependence at the heart of globalization/s does not imply a teleological perspective, nor a disregard for the diversity of local experiences, nor the neglect of missing links in global networks, nor the omission of counter-movements. Disconnectedness and resistance are integral components of a global history of globalization/s.

To sum up: Globalization/s are the result of social practices. They produce convergence and divergence in equal measure. Globalization/s reveal a dialectical process with three poles: two entities converge (for example, the racial conceptions of the U.S. and Cuban societies in the aftermath of the 1898 war) and by doing so bring forth divergence from the previous state or other entities, resulting in the third pole. At the same time, they create a new incentive for convergence (communities of practice join the dichotomous notion) and divergence (subversive comparative practices try to overcome it).

## The Structural Analogy between Comparative Practices and Globalization Dynamics

Markedly, when understanding globalization/s as a dialectic process serves as the springboard of our considerations, a structural analogy to comparative practices catches the eye: comparative practices negotiate similarities and differences regarding a *tertium comparationis*. Comparative practices are thus based on a triadic movement.<sup>43</sup> And the process of globalization/s gains momentum when the interplay of convergence and distinction comes about, continually generating more and more nuances of both, along with fresh grounds for convergence and new lines of distinction. Therefore, comparative practices are predestined to fuel the dialectics of globalization/s. Both globalization/s and comparative practices are based on dynamic structures featuring three poles. While globalizing dialectics produces convergence and divergence, comparative practices solidify and dynamize similarity and difference.

How exactly does the triadic structure of comparisons translate into a dialectical process with globalizing power? As explained above, some interventions misleadingly assume that the term *globalization/s* connotes the increasing convergence of the world. In contrast, comparing as a practice is said to emphasize divergence; or, more precisely: comparing does exclusively emphasize the identification of differences—a fundamental misunderstanding insofar as actors, when poised to compare, assume categorical similarity concerning the entities they want to compare.<sup>44</sup> The assumption of similarities in the entities to be compared is the very starting point of every act of comparing. In the next step, actors relate differences and similarities to a *tertium comparationis*. Differences thus do not appear until the second step. And even in that step, they are not to be confused with the epistemic goal. Eventually, the act of comparing is a matter of relating resemblances to differences based on the assumption of existing similarities. However, we find that the underlying categorical assumption of similarities is usually ignored and, as a kind of implicit knowledge, tacitly assumed. Yet therein precisely lies an influential force deployed by actors undertaking comparisons. It is the actors who make entities comparable in the first place. In order for them to make entities comparable, they must—it bears repeating—presuppose similarities. Comparing is an activity an actor puts into practice within a specific historical context. For a start, comparing is based on an inherent

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43 For deeper insights into how practices of comparing work, cf. Ulrike Davy/Antje Flüchter (eds.), *Imagining Unequals, Imagining Equals. Concepts of Equality in History and Law*, Bielefeld 2022; Willibald Steinmetz (ed.), *The Force of Comparison: A New Perspective on Modern European History and the Contemporary World*, New York/Oxford 2019.

44 It is not mandatory to proceed in this way. When drawing comparisons, it's possible to come up with a new category.

mental operation relating the entities of comparison with respect to the *tertium comparationis*. What's more, comparing also sets a dynamic within the comparing context in motion.

A brief example may illustrate the thesis: in order to compare the faith of people deported from Africa to the Americas and inhabitants of the Americas, contemporaries in sixteenth-century Europe presupposed that the groups could be attributed or denied faith (assumption of similarity).<sup>45</sup> In the next step, they specified differences and resemblances. If one follows the argumentation of contemporary Christians, Africans were heretics—that is, apostates from the faith. According to the argumentation of the lettered Christians, it was tenable to enslave heretics. However, the inhabitants of the Americas had not yet had the opportunity to encounter the Christian faith. Therefore, one should stay clear of classifying them as heretics and, consequently, refrain from enslaving them.

The comparative context in which the actor becomes enmeshed when drawing comparisons disappears behind the supposedly neutral practice of comparing. A comparison may indicate similarities (“It holds true for both Africans and Americans: they are infidels”). Mainly, however, comparative practices aim at elaborating differences between entities that may fall into the same category (assumption of similarity; e.g. “all entities possess the property that one can meaningfully speak about them encountering the Christian faith”) and proving the differences evident (“A has fallen away from faith; B does not know the Christian God”). Those who argue in this way emphasize the differences between these two groups, and simultaneously imply that the group to whom they, the comparators, belong is different again from the two groups being compared. Such a grouping can trigger different dynamics: a person included with the group of heretics, for example, may try to escape the attribution to free himself from slavery. *Limpieza de sangre*, i.e., “blood purity,” was a classification created during the Spanish Reconquista in the 15th century to prevent people with ancestors of Jewish or Muslim faith from becoming civil servants in the Spanish Empire. In the course of the conquest of the Americas, this classification was reinterpreted. Since Amerindians had not been classified as heretics, they would in theory have had the opportunity to prove “blood purity”. However, their disastrous living conditions hardly changed.<sup>46</sup> To accomplish convergence regard-

45 In the so-called Valladolid debate (1550–1551), Las Casas and Sepulveda go back to Aristotle and discuss the distinction between what Aristotle called “natural slaves” and people that have been enslaved during war times. For a more profound elaboration, cf. Angelika Epplé, Comparing Europe and the Americas, in: Willibald Steinmetz (ed.), *The Force of Comparison. A new perspective on modern European history and the contemporary world*, New York/Oxford 2019, 137–163.

46 Alin Helg, *Slave but not Citizen. Free People of Color and Blood Purity in Colonial Spanish American Legislation*, 2017, 76–99, esp. 93; Angelika Epplé, *Inventing White Beauty and Fighting Black Slavery. How Blumenbach, Humboldt, and Arango y Parreño Con-*

ing the characteristics attributed to the other group, a process is thus set in motion. At the same time, the privileged group will try to reinforce the differences and make the other group's transition from *enslaved* to *free* more difficult. I will come back to this below.

Power relations characterize the context of comparing practices, and comparing does all too often stabilize both. Whoever brings forth the comparison sets the standard. As early as 1609, Inca Garcilaso clairvoyantly called all comparisons “odioso,” i.e., hateful.<sup>47</sup> In colonial relations, comparative practices are an instrument of domination—particularly evident with the introduction of numerical comparisons in population statistics. Against the backdrop of the revolution in Haiti, measures were in demand to ensure enslaved Africans wouldn't threaten the white minority. The potential transition from the group of enslaved Africans to the group of free Africans increasingly appeared to pose a threat to white elites. Discursive and numerical comparative practices legitimized relations of violence and domination. The underlying rationale was that using statistics could safeguard more effectively that Blacks never outnumbered Whites in the population.<sup>48</sup>

In the Caribbean, legitimizing and maintaining power relations were closely linked to comparative practices. Especially the argumentation used to justify the inhumane working conditions of enslaved Africans shines a light on the particular circumstances. As it happened, the region saw the implementation of a comparative practice that had been practiced in Europe for centuries: African people were better able to cope with the specific climatic conditions than the elites from Europe. Brought into effect again, the above-mentioned practice formation cited the established comparative relation of climate, gender, and origin/race. Elements of early-modern humorism, medical argumentations from antiquity, and contemporary gender-specific stereotypes overlapped with the contemporary political and economic situation in the Caribbean.

In colonial contexts, we can observe that differences draw the most attention, and discern that the subversive power of the similarity assumption gets relegated to the background. However, when people—often especially in relations of oppression—emphasize an underlying assumption of similarity (we are all human) or similarities despite existing differences (the differences within a group are greater than

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tributed to Cuban Race Comparisons in the Long Nineteenth Century, in: Epple, Angelika/ Erhart, Walter/Grave, Johannes (eds.), *Practices of Comparing. Towards a New Understanding of a Fundamental Human Practice*, Bielefeld 2020, 294–328.

47 Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, *Primera Parte de los Comentarios Reales*, 56.

48 Francisco de Arango y Parreño, a Cuban economist, enslaver, and friend of Wilhelm von Humboldt, repeatedly pointed out that he saw the ratio of enslaved and free People of Color to Whites as crucial for preventing rebellions. Cf., for example, Rafael Arango, *Obras completas* 2, 1889 (1832), 339.

those between groups), it becomes clear that comparing bears the potential to question existing power relations.<sup>49</sup>

Comparative practices are an instrument of domination in colonial contexts and, therefore, as in the example of the Americas, are usually embedded in global relations. However, non-colonial comparative practices are also particularly likely to produce globalizing effects. Numerous studies in the social sciences show how comparative practices have incited globalizing effects within various segments of society—the arms race during the Cold War and university rankings are just two catchy examples.<sup>50</sup> Studies in diverse fields ranging from historiography to literary studies to sociology and political science have shown that comparative practices play a significant role in global change.<sup>51</sup>

Although there may be other practices to which globalizing effects are attributed, we can safely assume that comparative practices are centrally involved in the processes of globalization. Comparative practices put similarities, resemblances, and differences into relation and set processes in motion such as as, for one, drawing distinctions or bringing about convergence and, for another, accomplishing connectedness or establishing disconnectedness. Hence, they fuel—often in a contradictory way—globalization/s.

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49 Stephanie Zehnle, Between 'Cannibals' and 'Natural Freemasons': The (Anti)Colonial History of Comparing Freemasonry to African Secret Societies, in: Eleonora Rohland et al. (eds.), *Contact, Conquest and Colonization. How Practices of Comparing Shaped Empires and Colonialism around the World*, New York/London 2021, 312–331.

50 Thomas Müller, The Politicisation of Comparisons. The East-West Dispute over Military Force Comparisons in the Cold War, in: Angelika Epple/Walter Erhart/Johannes Grave (eds.), *Practices of Comparing. Towards a New Understanding of a Fundamental Human Practice*, Bielefeld 2020, 329–347; Bettina Heintz/Tobias Werron, Wie ist Globalisierung möglich? Zur Entstehung globaler Vergleichs-horizonte am Beispiel von Wissenschaft und Sport, in: *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* 63 (2011), 359–394; Wendy Nelson Espeland/Michael Sauder, Rankings and Reactivity. How Public Measures Recreate Social Worlds, in: *American Journal of Sociology* 113 (1/2007), 1–40.

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