

CAN A NEW HISTORY SAVE EUROPE FROM ITS PAST?

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'Today Europe is trying to achieve self-definition on the basis of its own history', wrote Michel Oriol and Francis Affergan in their study on *Otherness and cultural differences*, a few years ago. Has the time not come, they asked, to look beyond inward-looking conceptions of culture and to build up a universalism that would include cultural differences and not deny them? But the question of 'the other' was posited against the sense of ourselves. Whereas the former question might be put in the context of a timeless quest for a definition of human nature, most modern authors – and not least historians – expected that otherness be seen within specific historical and geographical contexts.¹

The difficulties that have traditionally permeated such attempts are underlined with vengeance in the instance mentioned by Joseph Roth in his *Radetsky March*, which is based on the theme of commending error for history's sake. The protagonist of this work is a Slovene who was ennobled for rescuing the Emperor Franz Joseph at the battle of Solferino. When, years later, in his son's first primer, he read a grotesquely inflated version of that episode, he exclaimed that it was 'a pack of lies'. 'It's for children', his wife replies. 'Captain, you're taking it too seriously', says a friend, 'all historical events are modified for consumption in schools. And quite right, too. Children need examples which they can understand, that impress them. They can learn later what actually occurred.'²

David Lowenthal referred to this episode, exaggerating for emphasis, in his 1994 lecture in Paris on 'historical literacy'. Hyperbole is to one culture what understatement may be to another, but, for the purpose of understanding, the end result need not be different at all.

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In the Brussels symposium, held from 10 to 12 December 1998, entitled 'Towards a pluralist and tolerant approach to teaching history: a range of sources and new didactics', both our distinguished keynote speakers, Hervé Hasquin, history professor and Minister of the Regional Government of Brussels and the historian Marc Ferro, pointed their fingers at such problems. They drew on cases in Belgian and French historiography, namely cases with which they themselves, as a Belgian and a Frenchman respectively, were understandably more familiar.

Noting, after Raymond Aron, that 'history is a human science, not an exact science', Hasquin warned against the nation-state cult, and equally against the identification of religion with nationhood. The former approach he qualified as a 'Jacobin vision of the state and nation-state...[that] often considered differences as suspect', the latter as a trade-mark.

Hasquin took and advocated what might be called a 'revisionist' position, describing the nation-state as 'an intellectual and political invention'. Hasquin was suggesting that the past could be unscrambled and rethought, strongly hinting at a federalist solution.' While defining democracy as the complex over the uniform, he sought to reverse perceptions of Charles V as the 'goodie' and of his son Philip II as the 'baddie', in so far as the son was only implementing what had been set in motion by the father. Invoking a lay, indeed a neutral conception of statehood, he rebuked what he called the satanisation of Joseph II, a 'Belgian' king who in the late 18th century had proclaimed religious tolerance.

But of course history is not and should not be one composed of heroes and villains. One might add that Joseph II was no liberal, but how many liberal monarchs were there then? If we had to identify a 'liberal' it would rather be one of his main critics, a Brussels lawyer, Vonck. If we wanted a conservative critic, upholding custom and privilege, that would probably be another Brussels lawyer, Van der Noot. The crux of the matter was that these two opposition leaders formed an alliance of convenience, which did not last long, to oust Joseph II.³ The context was more complicated still, but stereotyping historical personages, by whatever label, clearly will not help our understanding of history then or now.

The other profound question raised here, one about which there clearly was a divergence of opinion in the shades of discourse during the symposium, concerned the nature not so much of the state as of the nation. To what extent, if at all, could nationhood be universalized or globalised, relativised or neutralized? Were there no longer any identifiable core characteristics, no lowest common denominators, by means of which a particular people or nation cohered in a mainstream sense of belonging, borne in part of shared experiences, with all due respect for minorities and human rights? Were territorial allegiances about to be overtaken by transfrontier spatial planning? In the absence of self-conscious national or communal entities in the general 'mosaic', who would federate with whom?

Hasquin's critical, almost negative position towards the nation state has been taken by other post-war historians, for example Elie Kedourie in his work on nationalism. This, he starts by saying, is a doctrine invented in Europe in the 19th century.⁴ That is a position which contrasts with an earlier, more romantic stance taken by, for example, Ernest Rénan, who saw the nation as 'a soul, a spiritual principle.'⁵

This troubling question, underlying much of the discourse in the symposium, was put in another way by Jean-Pierre Titz, Secretary of the Education Committee of the Council of Europe, when he said that in recent times 'change had upset Europe's notion of itself.' Well may that be so, indeed. Hence the urgency of investigating in what ways, and by what means, an inspiring and credible vision, at once common and diverse, can be secured for the future through past and present. That is tall order.

In the introductory words of Henri Ingberg, Secretary General of the Ministry of Education of the French community of Belgium, 'connections must be established between the various sources to endow them with meaning.' In support, he quoted Fernand Braudel: 'History is the study of the origins of the problems of our times.' Although comprehending the genesis might guide us to the promised land, striking water out of the rock – or more realistically, building steady bridges over running streams – here we may have to go a little beyond that, pointing a finger, several fingers, towards the continent's shared future, as an unfolding pluralist, diverse and democratic reality.

Marc Ferro's address was another cannonade, highlighting problems and pitfalls, without illusion of any easy answers. It was a little bit like trench warfare, advancing and retreating, but then prevention is better than cure, and forewarned is forearmed.

A man of the book as well as of the screen, Ferro is essentially pleading for relevance, authenticity and meaning. He is scorning superficiality, sensationalism and trivialization. This concern is epitomized in his critique of the media man's pretension that there is such a thing as 'history online.' War, as Ferro put it, is not a football match. So, how do you go about writing a European history now, he asked – a question all of us have been asking ourselves as well.

One who tried his hand at that recently, incidentally, is Norman Davies. He also pondered long and deep upon that question and grappled with it. The really viscious quality shared by almost all accounts of 'Western civilization', he wrote, lay in the fact that they presented idealized, and hence essentially false, pictures of past reality. One got the distinct impression that Europe was a world 'inhabited exclusively by Platos and Marie Curies...' But he also stressed that 'historians must tell their tale convincingly, or be ignored.'⁶

Judging by Marc Ferro's classification of historiographical typologies, and by the questions posed in answer to the question of approach we may be constrained to have to try doing it by elimination.

First 'diplomatic' history does not work. Bilateral committees are too preoccupied lest one country take offence at what is said of it in relation to another. All controversial topics would have to be left out leading to a 'history without history.'

Secondly, the one-chapter-each approach was not on either. A century for each of the great powers- the most favourable one to each one of these, naturally – or one historian from each country – the one most sympathetic to it, naturally. That would give 'an impression of objectivity', but of course it was no history, let alone a European one.

Third, you had the attempt to 'denationalize' history. This was a synthetic

history, a parody without passions, without peoples: 'no more passions, no more Frenchmen.' It would pretend that the Great War was not really limited to 1914-18, so presumably, you would not have to signal who had declared it, or who had won it, and so on. The index to the book would leave out the more painful episodes characterizing it.

A fourth suggestion would be to take a frontal approach to taboos and to have those who felt most troubled by aspects or epochs of their own history to tackle them themselves, but one would still have to take all viewpoints into account. Neutral histories that tried not to step on anybody's toes, such as UNESCO's fifteen-volume history of the world, were a waste of time and would not be read.

Fifthly, one could have general histories such as a history of colonization (or, one might usefully add, of Europe). Or histories could be memory-linked, of families, of towns, but these would remain 'closed... sanctified'.

There was then an 'experimental' history, on the model. This is an influential school of thought going back to Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre, best epitomized by Fernand Braudel's massive study of Europe and the Mediterranean – a school of thought Ferro himself is close. By means of this approach, as he put it, different findings could be deduced from the same sources, focusing on aspects or problems across time. An approach known best for its insistence on inter-disciplinarity and *la long durée*, the slowly evolving maturation of mentalities and courses of human behaviour in geophysical and socio-economic contexts at least as much as in politico-étatist ones, but probably more so. Hence the tension between ordinary people and society at large, and those 'on top': those who wield power and direct matters, including the 'mass production oriented', opinion-forming peddlers and publicists of 'historical facts'.

Historical novels were another genre of history making not to be discounted, Ferro insisted. These influenced people's knowledge of history or, at any rate, their impressions and perceptions of it. 'Thanks to Alexander Dumas, one goes back to Louis XIII.'

Last but not least, there was the audiovisual. As much of the shooting prac-

tice during the symposium was directed at this target and its various rings, displacing even archives by the overriding importance accorded to it, let me first briefly summarise Marc Ferro's position. I shall then return to elaborate on this leitmotiv in my sizing up of the panel discussions, including interventions from the floor, and of the conclusions of the three workshops held on 11 December 1998.

Essentially, Ferro was critical of the mentalities underpinning the organisation of information and even of education-related systems. At school, subjects were treated separately, and this malaise was carried forward to disciplines at university level, as if one discipline did not relate to/or overlap with another. He calls this the 'imperialism of disciplines'. This, and no less the various mass media, he saw as dented, fractured, discounted.

The press was interested in the news, not in the actual story itself. A newspaper might have a 'history page', but this would not relate to whatever else would be printed in the paper. 'The newspaper destroys history ... it cuts up the past and the present'. The idea of the world portrayed by radio and TV was similarly faulted. What mattered was the scoop as the journalist imagined it, usually some bit of news relating to those who are perceived to wield the power. There was thus 'a hierarchy of sources'. While newspaper pages tended to reproduce the organisation of the state, TV sliced up its programmes by genre: thus, for example the documentary, fiction, cartoons, newsreels, and – separate from these, perhaps once a week – the current affairs programmes, a disconnection between reportage and analysis. One loses one's bearings.

In the West, there tended to be a counterbalance between one interpretation and another – a nationalist versus a socialist or an imperialist one. But in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe there was a monolith. Hence the sudden resurgence of oral history. The oral sources became a counter-history to written history, which was suspect. Therefore, everyone wanted to 'tell his own story' – truth via the microphone. For the media such outpourings were often mistaken for history, but in reality these accounts were more a view of the self than a representation of the past. The opening up of the new archives, especially the Russian ones, has once again induced the media to focus on what they saw as most sensational and 'actual', typically enough in bits and

pieces.

All of the issues raised in the introductory addresses and the speeches by Hervé Hasquin and Marc Ferro were taken up, to a greater or lesser extent by the symposium participants, more specifically in the framework of their own tasks in the project at hand, 'Learning and teaching about the history of Europe in the 20th century', as outlined by its chairman, Claude-Alain Clerc. Students, he said, had little if any clear notion of time, other than post-1989. Teachers were becoming mere co-ordinators. They had to make the best possible use of technological and electronic tools, as well as to engage in more team work. It was to assist in all this, he added, that the project had a five-pronged agenda. Its themes ranged from nationalism and population movements to women, human rights and minorities. There would also be a general European history handbook on 20th century European history to include a section on sources and bibliographies, which would serve both as a teaching aid in the upper forms of secondary school and for a general public as well.

Case studies from various countries had been prepared to help guide and substantiate discussion in the working groups, where specialists on different historical sources were among the participants. In addition, these specialists formed part of a panel or round table in plenary sessions, in the course of which they delivered their respective addresses and parried questions that were put to them. The round table was chaired by Ms Marcella Colle-Michel, vice-chair of the project group, and the sources discussed in this way were mainly these: (1) archives (Mr Kecskemeti and Mr Woloszynski); (2) information technology law (Joseph Cannataci); (3) museums (J. Patrick Greene); (4) oral history (Philip Ingram); (5) cinema (Dominique Chansel); and (6) TV (Bernard Balteau).

For the purposes of the general report, points made by members of the round table panel will be incorporated into the conclusions reached by the working groups, source by source, with reference to case studies by way of example where applicable.

The case studies examined by the three working groups in their deliberations, emanated from historian-practitioners in various European countries, including Albania, Armenia, Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Greece, Lithuania,

Malta, Poland, Romania, Scotland, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain and Switzerland.

In the absence of precise guidelines as to what genre of case study was to be submitted, there was a wide variety in responses, with only the Swiss entry consisting of a detailed and systematic appraisal of a case study about a school history project as such. This successful project consisted in a fully-fledged investigation into the building of a dam at Rossens in Fribourg, and all that went into that. Others, such as the Czech and Maltese ones, highlighted topics relating to historic events mainly in national history, which were earmarked in teaching exercises and field trips. Another approach, as in the case of Scotland and Spain, detailed the education and school system in so far as history subjects were concerned at different levels. Some, especially the Austrian one, were rather more on the theoretical side, while still others, as in the case of Slovakia, a personal view as to how European history is best taught was offered. Countries such as Armenia and Albania, the Czech and the Slovak republics and Lithuania, noted the significance of 1989 as a watershed. Efforts were being made to address the historiographical and methodological concerns arising from that. In general this meant a rewriting of history, but the speed and efficiency at which that could be done, for example through the provision of new textbooks, depended on many factors, not least the human and economic resources available.

In at least one eastern European country, many older teachers who had lived through communism and were moulded by it were reluctant to teach post-1989 or even post-1945 European history. In at least two others, problems existed with transport facilities for making the best use of museum visits whereas in another teachers had such low wages that they felt rather unenthusiastic about experimenting with novelty. The same applied for technology and exposure to the Internet or media resources, which in a country such as Spain, for example, were developing on all fronts at a fast pace. In all the European case studies submitted, however, of whatever genre, we find a compulsion to use history as a tool in understanding the fast changing world around us, and at seeking improved means for imparting historical knowledge to the young as an integral part of their education for life. Just to give an idea of this commitment, I have selected a few quotations from the case studies submitted for the Brussels symposium from different parts of Europe which

can be quite diverse:

... I prefer to give lectures in museums, where archives are housed, at historical sites, even in cemeteries. For example, about 80 kilometres north of Prague there is the town and baroque fortress of Terezin. During the Second World War, a Jewish ghetto and a Gestapo prison were there. After the war this fortress served as an internment camp for the Sudeten Germans... Every year I ask my students to attend the Remembrance Day ceremony at the British war cemetery in Prague. After the ceremony, I collect them for a visit to the graves of the Czech legionaries that served in the First World War... (Czech Republic)

There is no statutory national curriculum... There are no nationally defined areas of content. A very high degree of choice is devolved to schools ... Key features of historical understanding should underpin all topics chosen, for example awareness of the nature of evidence, a sense of chronology and historical sequence, awareness of cause and effect, change and continuity, a sense of heritage ... There is a balance between the Scottish, British and European dimensions. (Scotland)

History teaching in Greece is currently undergoing profound changes: new syllabuses, new textbooks, new methods ... There is one textbook per subject per class and they are produced and distributed by the state, which has a monopoly. The authors are selected by the Ministry of Education through competitive examination. As well as relating events, history books contain source texts and pictures which can help the teacher to make the lesson more interesting. Teachers also use maps, slides and so forth. History teachers do not receive any special training. (Greece)

Students also benefit when they are taken to visit various places of interest that are directly connected with the war, such as monuments, the war rooms and the War Museum, where they find a wealth of primary source material. Students learn how the Maltese must have felt towards the Axis powers, who were causing so much distress to the population. But students realise that things have changed. With few exceptions the countries of Europe have now learned to live in peace as one big family... Teachers stress the importance of democracy and tolerance. Students are made aware that divergence of opinion is not something wrong; in fact it could be very healthy once we know how to respect each other's opinion and agree that we are different. (Malta)

Lutz Niethammer, a German historian, wrote as a motto to his introduction on oral history: "A democratic future needs a past where the silent majority in history is audible." At the Department of Social and Economic History at the University of Vienna, we have been working for more than fifteen years now at developing didactic-methodological concepts of teaching history... that try to combine structural approaches – such as the history of family structures, the history of industrialisation, the history of labour – with methods of everyday life history, such as oral history... When [students] return to their school, they learn to analyse the interviews critically and write a short account of the topic or the person they have interviewed. (Austria)

... I have to deal with several changes of borders, nationalities, currencies and laws ... [S]tudents want to observe things from the point of view of the ordinary person ... I think that in teaching any historical topic emotional identification with the situation and survival of the ordinary person stimulates the student's awareness of historical events and a reflection on prejudice that is based on tolerance ... History allows us to show students that if the victories and losses of the nation and the state and the meaning of the historical person is not measured by a respect for life, freedom, humility before order, justice and respect for the weak, the result can be tragic. In my history lessons ... I emphasise the three pillars on which European civilisation was established. These three pillars are Greek wisdom, Roman law and Christian morality. (Slovak Republic)

These case studies thus range from the general to the particular, the profound humanistic posture to a camouflaged nationalistic one, the technical, the methodological and pedagogical, to respect for history as a discipline concerned with truth, being and understanding. To a greater or a lesser extent, these submissions contributed to the formulation of the reflections and recommendations made by the working groups, which were then further debated in plenary sessions.

I shall now deal with the source themes used above, incorporating ideas, suggestions and counter-suggestions generally with reference to each category. It is clear however that there is scope for cross-referencing and cross-fertilisation in the uses that can be made of these sources, both in the writing and in the teaching of European history, as well in relation to other disciplines.

Archives

In the first place the archives themselves, *qua* sources, had to be contextualised and seen for what they generally were: records of the various organs and departments of the state, created largely in the process of public administration, often having political overtones. Authenticity was not the equivalent of veracity. One had to look at archives organically, not piecemeal. Although not intended as a means for informing posterity, archives helped organise the collective memory of the state and of the nation.

Archives could be deceitful as in the case of Soviet tribunals. Sources therefore still have to be confronted with empirical evidence, possibly from ar-

chives other than state ones. Information can be missing or eliminated from archives. It was important that the public be alerted to such things. Polish archives showed that evidence could be planted in order to incriminate the innocent and exculpate the guilty. This manipulation was discovered, for example, in matters relating to collaboration with the secret services.

As for *les années noires*, some wondered whether such events were better recorded or better forgotten. For research and pedagogical purposes, it would be advisable if archivists, librarians and curators could facilitate access to documents and activities in specialised institutions. It was important that the history teacher be involved in and abreast of specialised research. Original sources, such as newspapers, photographs, post cards and letters, impressed students and it would be helpful if these could be used even in class.

An educational service could be established to act as an intermediary between the teachers and the archival source. Documentation on European themes, such as freedom of the press and censorship, could be put together with a view to fostering a European conscience.

Sources which are neither in manuscript nor in printed form should be sought and brought to light because these may also be said to become in their own way archival. Among such sources could be included memories in stone such as epitaphs in cemeteries or inscriptions in palaces, what one architect has called 'history on marble.' This is a novel archaeology of modernity which, like local and oral history, would have the advantage of presence and visibility, invoking as much a sense of time as of place. Another source which could be better cultivated and accessed is print journalism in its various expressions from editorial content to setting styles and photographs to cartoons. That would include letters sent to newspapers or reviews of letters about which stories are then written. These could be significant enough to change history and have sometimes done so - whether they be forgeries such as the Zinoviev letter in the British electoral campaign of 1924, or an appeal for justice as called for by Emile Zola in the Dreyfus Affair in France, spanning the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. Print journalism has thus been shown as a means of exercising a tremendous influence on public opinion, increasingly so in the 20th century because of greater literacy and improved technology. Such sources too could be seen as archival, with care-

fully selected specimen of 'history in the making' as useful tools for history teaching, and indeed for case studies.

Information Technology

While information technology (IT) opened new and exciting venues for the transmission of communications and data of all kinds, there were laws and conventions on intellectual property rights which needed to be respected, and which preferably should be harmonised throughout Europe. IT would mean that traditional sources of knowledge may disappear in the near future. Data protection laws, in place in twenty-two European countries, held that personal data must be stored only for a limited period - in accordance with European Convention No. 108 (1981) and EU Directive 96 (1995) with effect from October 1998. Could such data perhaps be locked up and preserved? CD-Roms and online networks meant that sources, for example museums, could be accessed from home, not limiting 'the public' to those physically visiting a site. E-mail meant that many transactions would increasingly leave no trace for a future historian to record and to consult.

Although national legislation sometimes permitted material to be used for educational purposes this was not always the case when permission was required from rights holders. There existed an international Federation of Reproduction Rights Associations which was quite active in some countries such as Norway. As the Berne and the Universal copyright conventions protected information for up to seventy-five years after the author's death, rights for 20th century often had to be negotiated in advance and were quite costly. Video and even tape-recorded materials would cease to be oral or private the moment they were recorded or in any way publicised for commercial or even educational use.

Clearly while IT did open up a world of possibilities, excessive controls or fees even in the educational domain could be exorbitant or stultifying, rendering legal safeguards a hindrance as much as a help for the diffusion of knowledge. On the other hand, authors' works were often abused, as in the ongoing photocopying of books, without the slightest compensation to the author. From an educational point of view this could mean that students

would never really buy or read a book as such, limiting themselves to photocopies of a chapter or to a push button mechanism for ready made answers.

Museums

Museums contained the raw materials of history, and increasingly, were explaining and organising contents more didactically. Through exhibitions and other activities, museums could reach out to the general public, not just schoolchildren. The range of themes and exhibits had expanded widely from art and natural history to rock concerts and football clubs, thus democratising various aspects and angles of history in the 20th century. Industry museums had cropped up in Britain, Germany and elsewhere. Environment was increasingly important in so-called eco-museums dealing with the culture of people and places. Museums focusing on the story of a nation, such as the House of History Museum in Germany were still few in number. In Britain so far there were no such museums. Many small museums helped foster a sense of rediscovery, awareness and identity in the locality or region, although local pride sometimes took over. Migration history could also feature as the subject of a museum, not only in Europe. Participants felt that visits to museums should be more frequent and better structured, evoking inter-disciplinarity and providing feedback from students.

To be effective as historical sources, museums had to be integrated into the teaching and learning process. These were multi-sensory and activity-based, giving students authentic experience that could strengthen other learning methodologies. Preparation for such visits was necessary, in consultation with the curators, as these would then give pupils a holistic appreciation of the topic under study, developing cognitive and effective skills in ways not really available through other source-media. They were ideal for the imaginative reconstruction of the past, for work related to subjects such as drama and technology, and as a motivational factor conducive to individual learning, for instance through the application of modern technology. Museums should be 'partners' in education, especially history: a place for resources and experiences. They should be more school-friendly, or schools could have their own museums.

Oral History

Oral history may be a vital source of information through a wide variety of possibilities ranging from the recollections of grandparents to those of returned migrants or repatriated refugees, through folk legends and lullabies, proverbs and idioms or songs and dance customs, prayers or rituals, food recipes and drinking habits. It has been described as a voice for those who may not have had one in traditional history. They can also serve as a social function in educating young people and developing social skills, such as awareness of others, exploring and discussing, listening and responding. Interviewing for oral history can break down barriers through empathy and it can dismantle stereotypes. The observation of body language and tone of voice in interviews can be instructive.

Being accessible does not make it easy, however. It exposes the practitioner to the full range of problems encountered by a detective or a historian. Some issues and recollections are better avoided. There has to be respect for the witness in what and how questions are asked. Leading questions and preconceptions must be avoided. Before embarking on an oral history exercise, students should be given a broad background; they should have the big picture of events painted to them so that they may be able to contextualise evidence, and to identify what is not plausible. They would need help in knowing what evidence to accept or reject, and in formulating a coherent, structured and meaningful narrative.

The relevance of oral history is generally limited to a time span of some sixty years and one had to be aware of the falsification of memory. It was a good source for social history - such as how people lived - and for uncovering 'hidden', non-documented history. Students would have to familiarise themselves with the period or area in order to be able to ask supplementary questions, but there could be some logistical problems relating to age or safety about which parents should be informed.

Learning outcomes should include the ability to evaluate, interpret, compare and draw valid conclusions, while in the affective domain the skills of social communication, empathy and the appreciation of values rank highly. Within clearly defined limits and with adequate preparation, oral history as a source

has significant potential.

Not altogether unrelated to oral history was local history, which also attracted some interest, although it was not catered for specifically in the panel discussion. Interviews can also be helpful in local history, which can be a microcosm encapsulating the larger world. Local and regional histories were mentioned by a number of participants as potentially ideal starters for historical investigation and understanding, not only at the primary school level.

Local history could offer a wide range of sources at close and even intimate quarters in one's surroundings. In particular, places of remembrance could induce an appreciation of heritage and patrimony in a local or even a national sphere. However, students should try not to be inward-looking but to see the links beyond the locality's frontiers.

In some cases historic sites in a locality, the Menin Gate in Ypres for instance, could evoke a meaning that well transcends the local and even the national. It might be worth noting here that the motto of the International Union of Local Authorities is precisely 'think globally, act locally.' That would not be a bad starting point for local history enthusiasts, inducing comparative insights for a broader understanding of human experience in time - by means of what is immediately visible, tangible and intelligible from their own daily surroundings.

Cinema

All the working groups discussed audiovisuals, especially cinema, in some depth. To a lesser extent they also discussed television. This discussion was prompted by the excerpts from films shown and analysed briefly during the round table discussion - the fiction film vis-à-vis the historical documentary, the use or abuse of music or images and the messages seen in context, as in the case of Franco-German fraternising scenes shot in 1930 or so.

The panel expert invited contributions for a project in which he was involved to select and document 100 fiction films of this century relating to themes being covered by this project. Such a film catalogue however would have to be

accompanied by specific explanations and commentaries. These would be indispensable as teaching aids. There were categories of film which had to be identified and defined - informative, historical fiction, documentaries including newsreels.

One had to be able to detect bias or prejudice, for which a degree of 'visual literacy' was necessary. Some participants felt that excerpts from films, rather than entire films, would be more useful for teaching purposes, although that would also depend on the type of film. Students might be attentive to details, missing out on the more crucial aspects. Moreover film was only one source among others, which could be used to complement teaching.

Reading the image was a quality that needed cultivating and training. Montage, even if based on historical footage, could be just as misleading as in a fiction film, if not more, depending on how well and how truthfully the image was done.

A number of films were brought up in the discussion as useful sources for history teaching. These included *Heimat*, a film on German public opinion during the Nazi period; the recent BBC film made with the help of a consultant historian, *The Nazis* and the film *Shoah*; and Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's list*. There was *Bread and chocolate*, an Italian film about migrant workers in Switzerland; the pacifist film *La Grande Illusion*, made in 1937; and a pro-Franco film to contrast with Spanish films in the 1980s about the same period. You had the strong Wajda films about Poland under Soviet communism, particularly *Man of Marble*, or indeed about France, such as *Danton*. There was *The Battleship Potemkin* on Russia; *Platoon* on Vietnam; or even recently *Saving Private Ryan*, on appreciation of war suffering and how to deal with it. *Braveheart*, starring Mel Gibson, was a shot in the arm for Scottish nationalism. And there are several others of this kind usually dating as far back as the 1920s and 1930s.

In some cases, students made their own films. In some of the larger upper secondary schools in France, for example, film clubs were very active. A survey conducted at a Rome university found that documentaries were preferred, but ultimately the teachers would use whatever they could lay their hands on.

Television

The series *Jours de Guerre* on Belgian TV, which used 500 witnesses, cost 1.5 million Belgian francs and had an audience of some 200 000 people for over five years, was discussed by its director, Bernard Balteau of *Radio télévision belge francophone* (RTBF). Most of the viewers were over forty-five years old. Another series, *Les Années Belges*, meant to attract a younger (and in fact, it turned out, a rather smaller) audience, has been running for three years, similarly based on first hand evidence accounts.

One problem is the cost, because of the high payment for rights to archives such as Movietone News. People were interested in a history which they themselves had lived or recalled. An Austrian series on Europe between the wars was so well received that some teachers were using it instead of textbooks.

The problem with films, as opposed to books, was that whereas in the former you had run-on, non-stop images, in the latter you had to construct your own images. The mental processes involved were different. Nor was the scope the same because for a book one asked if it was good history, whereas for a film one asked if it was a good production. Here again, the values involved were different.

Although we had some discussion on textbooks, there was only very slight and passing reference to the possible role of theatre. This was a very European source, however. Perhaps it was not yet caught in the grip of technology and the electronic media. Theatre retains a direct human contact and appeal.

Conclusions

Summing up, this symposium showed how different and innovative sources, or traditional sources used in an innovative way, could sustain and enrich our historical understanding and the portrayal of Europe. These sources can serve as props and aids, but beyond that we have to 'paint the big picture' - credibly, convincingly, tolerantly, steering carefully between Scylla and Charybdis.

Can a new history save Europe from its past? The real issue historians face, said Lowenthal, 'is how objective truth can be produced by deeply subjective people.'⁷

Supported however by a rich and increasingly accessible plurality of information and learning sources from across this continent; with insight, diligence, perseverance, tolerance and team work as European countries move ever closer to each other not just economically and politically but also culturally and as a new millennium dawns upon us, we trust and believe that the Council of Europe can rise to the challenge of wearing a multi-coloured coat proudly, consensually, thereby liberating European history from old-time national prerogatives and *raisons d'État*.

Notes

¹ Michel Oriol and Francis Affergan, 'Otherness and Differences' in Carmel Camilleri (ed.), *Difference and Culture in Europe* (Council Of Europe Press, 1995), pp.16-17.

² David Lowenthal, 'Towards Historical Literacy' in Sophie Jeleff (ed.), *History and its Interpretations* (Council of Europe Publishing, 1997), p.48.

³ For an outline history, see Franz Hayt and Denise Galloy, *La Belgique des Tribus Gauloises a l' état Federale*, (De Boeck, Brussels, 1997) pp.84-87.

⁴ See, for example, Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism* (London, 1971).

⁵ Ernest Rénan, 'Qu'est-ce qu'une Nation?', written in 1882, in H.Psichari (ed.) *Ceuvres Completes de Ernest Rénan*, (Paris, 1947-1961), i. p.903.

⁶ See Norman Davies, *Europe: a History* (Oxford, 1996). See also the review of it by Neal Ascherson, *London Review of Books*, vol.19, No. 4, 20 February 1997, pp.7-8.

⁷ David Lowenthal, *op.cit.*, p.45.