

BEYOND COMPARISON: *HISTOIRE CROISÉE*  
AND THE CHALLENGE OF REFLEXIVITY<sup>1</sup>

MICHAEL WERNER AND BÉNÉDICTE ZIMMERMANN

ABSTRACT

This article presents, in a programmatic way, the *histoire croisée* approach, its methodological implications and its empirical developments. *Histoire croisée* draws on the debates about comparative history, transfer studies, and connected or shared history that have been carried out in the social sciences in recent years. It invites us to reconsider the interactions between different societies or cultures, erudite disciplines or traditions (more generally, between social and cultural productions). *Histoire croisée* focuses on empirical intercrossings consubstantial with the object of study, as well as on the operations by which researchers themselves cross scales, categories, and viewpoints. The article first shows how this approach differs from purely comparative or transfer studies. It then develops the principles of pragmatic and reflexive induction as a major methodological principle of *histoire croisée*. While underlining the need and the methods of a historicization of both the objects and categories of analysis, it calls for a reconsideration of the way history can combine empirical and reflexive concerns into a dynamic and flexible approach.

I. INTRODUCTION

Over the past twenty years, ideas about the conditions and ways in which socio-historical knowledge is produced have undergone significant changes. Two sets of factors, stemming both from internal developments in the social sciences as well as from the more general political context, have jointly produced their effects. On the political side, the changes that have taken place since 1989, coupled with the expansion and proliferation of spaces of reference and action—globalization, to use the now standard term—have left their mark on research paradigms, bringing new importance to the question of reflexivity. On the intellectual side, the “culturalist turn,” by emphasizing the specificity—indeed, the irreducible nature—of the local has contributed to refining our understanding of the differentiated functioning of societies and cultures, while at the same time bringing about a fragmentation of knowledge, thereby showing it in a relativist

1. This article draws upon arguments first developed in *Annales HSS* 58:1 (January–February 2003), 7-36 and in *De la comparaison à l'histoire croisée*, ed. Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann (Le Genre humain 42) (Paris: Seuil, 2004), 15-49. We extend our warm thanks for their suggestions and comments to Sebastian Conrad, Yves Cohen, Alexandre Escudier, Heidrun Friese, Jean-Yves Grenier, Rainer Maria Kiesow, André Orléan, Jacques Poloni, Jay Rowell, Lucette Valensi, and Peter Wagner, with whom we have discussed various aspects of our *histoire croisée* proposal.

light.<sup>2</sup> The questions resulting from the collapse of colonialism have, moreover, had an impact on the previously dominant position of “Western” social sciences. Suspected of intellectual “imperialism” and strategies of political domination, their universalistic ambition has been weakened.<sup>3</sup> These developments have prompted internal reorganizations within each discipline, as well as new stances regarding the place of the social sciences within the larger apparatus of the production of knowledge.

These shifts raise questions relating directly to research practices, the way sources and the fields themselves are approached. The proposal for *histoire croisée* that we elaborate on herein fits within this general trend. The notion of *histoire croisée*, which has been employed for almost ten years now in the social and human sciences, has given rise to differing usages. In most cases, it refers, in a vague manner, to one or a group of histories associated with the idea of an unspecified crossing or intersection; thus, it tends toward a mere configuration of events that is more or less structured by the crossing metaphor. Sometimes, these usages refer to crossed histories in the plural. However, this common and relatively undifferentiated use should be distinguished from research practices that reflect a more specific approach. In the latter case, *histoire croisée* associates social, cultural, and political formations, generally at the national level, that are assumed to bear relationships to one another.<sup>4</sup> It furthermore engages in an inquiry regarding the very process of intercrossing in practical as well as intellectual terms. The present article aims at clarifying this more specific approach through an exploration of the concept of *histoire croisée* within current theoretical and methodological debates. Once so specified in empirical and theoretical terms, *histoire croisée* can make a useful contribution to most of the human and social-science disciplines.

Three preliminary remarks will guide our examination. First, *histoire croisée* belongs to the family of “relational” approaches that, in the manner of comparative approaches and studies of transfers (most recently of “connected” and “shared history”) examine the links between various historically constituted formations.<sup>5</sup>

2. For a presentation of the problematic in a German research field, see Ute Daniel, *Kompendium Kulturgeschichte: Theorien, Praxis, Schlüsselwörter* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2001).

3. The literature in this area is flourishing. For a recent overview, refer to the dossier “Une histoire à l’échelle globale” in *Annales HSS* 56:1 (2001), 3-123. For an example of a case study, see Daniel Dubuisson, *L’Occident et la religion: Mythes, science et idéologie* (Paris: Editions Complexe, 1998).

4. On this type of usage, see in particular Michael Werner, “Le prisme franco-allemand: à propos d’une histoire croisée des disciplines littéraires,” in *Entre Locarno et Vichy: Les relations culturelles franco-allemandes dans les années 1930*, ed. Hans Manfred Bock, Reinhart Meyer-Kalkus, and Michel Trebitsch (Paris: CNRS-Editions, 1993), I, 303-316; *Le travail et la nation: Histoire croisée de la France et de l’Allemagne*, ed. Bénédicte Zimmermann, Claude Didry, and Peter Wagner (Paris: Editions de la Maison des sciences de l’homme, 1999). For a more complete presentation of the concept of *histoire croisée* applied to problems of transnational history, see Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, “Vergleich, Transfer, Verflechtung: Der Ansatz der *Histoire croisée* und die Herausforderung des Transnationalen,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 28 (2002), 607-636.

5. Our interest in *histoire croisée* first arose through our own practice of comparative methods and transfer studies. The limits that this practice came up against for certain objects of study were the starting point for this reflection. That is why we prefer to discuss *histoire croisée* in relation to comparative history and transfer studies, while considering “connected,” “shared,” and “entangled” histories more as alternatives to these first two approaches, in the same manner as *histoire croisée*, even

But, while these approaches mainly take the perspective of “re-establishment/rehabilitation” of buried reality, the stress laid by *histoire croisée* on a multiplicity of possible viewpoints and the divergences resulting from languages, terminologies, categorizations and conceptualizations, traditions, and disciplinary usages, adds another dimension to the inquiry. In contrast to the mere restitution of an “already there,” *histoire croisée* places emphasis on what, in a self-reflexive process, can be generative of meaning.

Second, *histoire croisée* takes up anew the discussions carried out over recent years regarding comparative approaches, transfers, and, more generally, socio-cultural interactions. In particular, it offers new leads for getting beyond the stalemate in the debate between comparativists and transfer specialists,<sup>6</sup> without diminishing the contributions made by these two approaches on which it draws heavily. It thereby makes it possible to apprehend entirely new phenomena using renewed frameworks of analysis, and insofar as it does so, it presents opportunities for exploring, from a particular angle, more general questions such as those concerning scales, categories of analysis, the relationship between diachrony and synchrony, and regimes of historicity and reflexivity. Third, *histoire croisée* raises the question of its own historicity through a threefold process of historicization: through the object, the categories of analysis, and the relationships between

---

if each of them has particularities. On *Connected History*, see *The Making of the Modern World: Connected Histories, Divergent Paths (1500 to the Present)*, ed. Robert W. Strayer (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989); Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Connected Histories: Notes toward a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia,” *Modern Asian Studies* 31:3 (1997), 735-762; Serge Gruzinski, “Les mondes mêlés de la Monarchie catholique et autres ‘connected histories’,” *Annales HSS* 56:1 (2001), 85-117. The expression “shared history” was originally used to designate the shared history of different ethnic groups and was then extended to the history of gender, before being used in the discussion of “post-colonial studies.” See Ann Laura Stoler and Frederic Cooper, “Between Metropole and Colony. Rethinking a Research Agenda,” in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, ed. Ann Laura Stoler and Frederic Cooper (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), as well as Stewart Hall, “When was the Post-Colonial? Thinking at the Limit,” in *The Post-Colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons*, ed. Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti (London: Routledge, 1996). For the concept of *Entangled History*, see *Jenseits des Eurozentrismus: Postkoloniale Perspektiven in den Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften*, ed. Sebastian Conrad and Shalini Randeria (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2002), as well as Shalini Randeria, “Entangled Histories of Uneven Modernities: Civil Society, Caste Solidarities and Legal Pluralism in Post-Colonial India,” in *Unraveling Ties: From Social Cohesion to New Practices of Connectedness*, ed. Yehuda Elkana et al. (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2002), 284-311.

6. See, in particular, Michel Espagne, “Sur les limites du comparatisme en histoire culturelle,” *Genèses* 17 (1994), 112-121; Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Jürgen Kocka, *Geschichte und Vergleich: Ansätze und Ergebnisse international vergleichender Geschichtsschreibung* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 1996); Christophe Charle, “L’histoire comparée des intellectuels en Europe: Quelques points de méthode et propositions de recherche,” in *Pour une histoire comparée des intellectuels*, ed. Michel Trebitsch and Marie-Christine Granjon (Paris: Editions Complexe, 1998), 39-59; Johannes Paulmann, “Internationaler Vergleich und interkultureller Transfer: Zwei Forschungsansätze zur europäischen Geschichte des 18. bis 20. Jahrhunderts,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 3 (1998), 649-685; Hartmut Kaelble, *Der historische Vergleich: Eine Einführung zum 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 1999); Matthias Middell, “Kulturtransfer und historische Komparatistik, Thesen zu ihrem Verhältnis,” *Comparativ* 10 (2000), 7-41; Michael Werner, “Comparaison et raison,” *Cahiers d’études germaniques* 41 (2001), 9-18; Gabriele Lingelbach, “Erträge und Grenzen zweier Ansätze: Kulturtransfer und Vergleich am Beispiel der französischen und amerikanischen Geschichtswissenschaft während des 19. Jahrhunderts,” in *Die Nation schreiben: Geschichtswissenschaft im internationalen Vergleich*, ed. Christoph Conrad and Sebastian Conrad (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002), 333-359.

researcher and object. It thus provides a toolbox that, over and beyond the historical sciences, can be applied across a number of other disciplines that combine past and present perspectives.<sup>7</sup>

## II. COMPARISON AND THE HISTORICITY OF ITS OBJECTS

Those who engage in the comparative method and attempt to control the effects thereof—whether they work on past or contemporary materials—are aware of a number of difficulties that, while present in diverse situations, all involve the tension between the method and the object. To simplify, these difficulties arise from the fact that, on the one hand, comparison is a cognitive operation that, by its nature, functions in accordance with a principle of binary opposition between differences and similarities and, on the other hand, is applied in the social sciences to empirical subjects that are historically situated and consist of multiple interpenetrating dimensions. The problems of self-monitoring and the continuous readjustment of the process resulting therefrom are not in themselves insurmountable; they are part of the work of comparativists, all of whom deal with this in their own manner.<sup>8</sup> The basic questions nevertheless remain; five of them that underlie the problematic of *histoire croisée* will be addressed more precisely.

(1) The first difficulty concerns the *position of the observer*. From the standpoint of the basic scheme of the cognitive process, the comparative approach assumes a point of view external to the objects that are compared. In addition, to limit optical illusions, the vantage point should ideally be situated at equal distance from the objects so as to produce a symmetrical view. Finally, logical consistency in the comparison implies that the point of observation be stabilized in space and in time. In the area of observation of social and cultural facts, however, such a vantage point, even if it is theoretically imaginable, is impossible to attain in the practice of research. Scholars are always, in one manner or another,

7. *Histoire croisée* is part of a long-standing debate on the relationship between history and social sciences. The debate was initiated at the start of the last century in France by Simiand in “Méthode historique et science sociale,” *Revue de synthèse historique* (1903), 1-22 and 129-157. In Germany, it was led by Simmel and Weber, in particular in the latter’s work on economic history, which, while relying on case studies, reasons on the basis of epistemological considerations. For more recent steps in the debate, see the dossier “Histoire et sciences sociales,” *Annales ESC* 38:6 (1983), and the special edition devoted to the “critical turn” (*Annales ESC* 44:6 [1989]); Jean-Claude Passeron, *Le raisonnement sociologique: L’espace non-poppérien du raisonnement naturel* (Paris: Nathan, 1991); and *L’historicité de l’action publique*, ed. Pascale Laborier and Danny Trom (Paris, PUF [Collection Curapp], 2003).

8. On recent French discussions concerning comparison, see in particular *Stratégies de la comparaison internationale*, ed. Michel Lallement and Jan Spurk (Paris: CNRS-Éditions, 2003); Marcel Detienne, *Comparer l’incomparable* (Paris: Seuil, 2000); *Qui veut prendre la parole*, ed. Marcel Detienne (*Le genre humain*) (Paris: Seuil, 2003); the dossier in *Annales* introduced by Lucette Valensi, “L’exercice de la comparaison au plus proche, à distance: le cas des sociétés plurielles,” *Annales HSS* 57:1 (2002), 27-30; the collective Franco-American work on repertoires of evaluation coordinated by Michèle Lamont and Laurent Thévenot, *Rethinking Comparative Cultural Sociology: Repertoires of Evaluation in France and the United States*, ed. Michèle Lamont and Laurent Thévenot (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 2000); as well as Patrick Hassenteufel, “Deux ou trois choses que je sais d’elle: Remarques à propos d’expériences de comparaisons européennes,” in Curapp, *Les méthodes au concret: Démarches, formes de l’expérience et terrains d’investigation en science politique* (Paris, PUF [Collection Curapp], 2000), 105-124.

engaged in the field of observation. They are involved in the object, if only by language, by the categories and concepts used, by historical experience or by the preexisting bodies of knowledge relied upon. Their position is thus off center. It is also subject to variations in time and is never perfectly stabilized. The question of positioning leads to seeking corrective procedures that would make it possible to account for these dynamics.

(2) The second difficulty is related to the first. It concerns the choice of the *scale of the comparison*. Whether situated—to take but a few examples—at the level of the region, the nation-state, or the civilization, none of these scales is absolutely univocal or generalizable. They are all historically constituted and situated, filled with specific content and thus are difficult to transpose to different frameworks. One need only think, for example, about the problems raised by the concept of civilization, as developed under particular historical conditions, when trying to establish it as a generic basis of comparison.<sup>9</sup> In practice, it is certainly possible to get around this obstacle by integrating into the comparative grid a margin of deviation adapted to each particular case under study. But such deviations may well undermine the relevance of the results, in particular in cases of multi-lateral comparisons that require taking into account a large number of parameters.

(3) In addition, the question of scale exercises indirect influence upon the definition of the *object of the comparison*. Such definition is never neutral, but is instead always marked in advance by a particular representation bringing into play specific historically-constituted categories. Whether dealing with objects that are clear and simple in appearance and thus endowed with a certain degree of obviousness (such as the unemployed, college students, or kinship ties), or more complex configurations (such as the educational system<sup>10</sup> or the relationships between public and private spaces), it can easily be shown that the analytical grids diverge not only on the basis of the scale selected but also as a function of the particularity of the field areas, and the designations and the research traditions on which the scholar relies. This can lead to great distortions; for instance, for one and the same object of study, the scale chosen for one of the entities of the comparison turns out not to be relevant for the other. This raises the problem of the historical and situated constitution of the objects of the comparison. To avoid the trap of presuming naturalness of the objects, it is necessary to pay attention to their historicity, as well as to the traces left by such historicity on their characteristics and their contemporary usages.<sup>11</sup>

9. On comparison of civilizations, see Kaelble, *Der historische Vergleich*, 79-92, as well as Jürgen Osterhammel, *Geschichtswissenschaft jenseits des Nationalstaats: Studien zu Beziehungsgeschichte und Zivilisationsvergleich* (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001). Analogous observations may of course be made with respect to the national and regional levels.

10. For example, on distortions about the notion “*Privatdozent*” in the history of higher education systems, see Frank Schultheiss, “Un inconscient universitaire fait homme: le *Privatdozent*,” *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 135 (2000), 58-62.

11. It should be pointed out that Marc Bloch, in his programmatic lecture at the Oslo Congress, had already underscored the necessity of historicizing the categories of analysis. The differences arising in research on feudalism due to the use of the French term *tenancier* and the German term *Höriger*, in his view, offer the comparativist an enlightening area of study. Marc Bloch, “Pour une histoire comparée des sociétés européennes,” *Revue de synthèse historique* 4 (1928), reprinted in Marc Bloch, *Mélanges historiques I* (Paris: Editions de l’EHESS, 1963), 16-40, especially 38ff.

(4) This historicization of the objects and problematics may give rise to *conflicts between synchronic and diachronic logics*. The comparative approach assumes a synchronic cross-section or, at the very least, a pause in the flow of time, even where comparativists are also dealing with processes of transformation or comparisons over time. Even in these cases, they must fix the object, freeze it in time, and thus in a sense suspend it. If the scholar delves too deeply into the description of a chronological sequence of events leading to specific changes, it will be difficult to justify why, in the comparative grid—whether explicit or implicit—one element of the process is emphasized and another neglected. The result is a search for balance that in practice turns out to be tenuous and unstable.

(5) An additional difficulty stems from the *interaction among the objects of the comparison*. When societies in contact with one another are studied, it is often noted that the objects and practices are not only in a state of interrelationship but also modify one another reciprocally as a result of their relationship. This is often the case, for instance, in the human and social sciences where disciplines and schools evolve through mutual exchanges; in cultural activities such as literature, music, and the fine arts; and in practical areas, such as advertising, marketing, organizational cultures, or even social policies. Comparative study of areas of contact that are transformed through their mutual interactions requires scholars to reorganize their conceptual framework and rethink their analytical tools.<sup>12</sup>

These five difficulties all relate to the problem of articulation between an essentially synchronic analytical logic and historically constituted objects.<sup>13</sup> The challenges they raise for the scholar require greater consideration of the historical dimension of both the tools and objects of study. Transfer studies, specifically grounded in historical processes, meet this requirement, but they nevertheless pose additional problems.

### III. TRANSFERS AND FRAMES OF REFERENCE

While the comparative method tends to focus on synchrony, inquiry into transfers is clearly situated in a diachronic perspective.<sup>14</sup> Whatever temporal scale is

12. In his introduction to *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Bergen and Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1969), 9-38, Fredrik Barth had already underscored the necessity of taking into account the interaction at the borders from which spread the distinctive traits of the entities under study—here “ethnic groups.” But while assigning to them a determinative role, Barth limits the transformational effects of interactions to the processes of definition and the characteristics of the groups, without calling into question the cohesion of the group or the dichotomizing function of the borders. Although Barth defines ethnicity at the borders, he still conceives of it as structured by the principles of sameness and difference.

13. Jean-Claude Passeron has addressed them as difficulties of the “sociological reasoning” caught between the two extremes of experimentation and historicization. See Passeron, *Le raisonnement sociologique*, esp. 57-88.

14. For a presentation of the transfer approach, see Michel Espagne and Michael Werner, “La construction d’une référence culturelle allemande en France, genèse et histoire,” *Annales ESC* 42:4 (1987), 969-992. For additional work contributed through the study of Germano-British transfers, see *Aneignung und Abwehr: Interkultureller Transfer zwischen Deutschland und Großbritannien im 19. Jahrhundert*, ed. Rudolf Muhs, Johannes Paulmann, and Willibald Steinmetz (Bodenheim: Philo, 1998); for the relationships between America and Europe, see *Transferts culturels et mélanges*:

used, such an inquiry presupposes a process that unfolds over time. In analyzing phenomena of displacement and appropriation, it reconstitutes chains of events. Consequently, inquiry into transfers is not based on an assumption of static units of analysis, but on the study of processes of transformation. As in the case of the comparative method, the contributions of this research approach are obvious and the lines of inquiry opened up have proven fertile, not only at the level of transfers between national and regional cultures, but also in specific areas, such as the relationships between disciplines, artistic practices, the history of writing, and economic history.<sup>15</sup> But although transfer studies offer responses to questions left unanswered by the comparative approach, they also create their own blind spots. Four in particular stand out. For simplicity's sake, we will restrict ourselves to transfers between national units, in the belief that the blind spots we identify are structural problems that affect all areas of research into transfers.

(1) The first problem concerns *frames of reference*. While focusing on transactions between two poles, a transfer implies a fixed frame of reference including points of departure and arrival. Any description and any analysis of transfers presupposes a beginning and an end through which the process under study becomes intelligible and interpretable. In the case of transnational exchanges, these points of departure and arrival are generally located within the national societies and cultures that are in contact. Consequently, the original situation and the situation resulting from the transfer are apprehended through stable national references that are presumed known: for example, "German" or "French" historiography; the particular patterns of urbanization of Great Britain or Russia; and the like.

(2) The fixed nature of the points of departure and arrival is reflected in the *invariability of the categories of analysis*. The categories used to analyze a transfer belong to the differing national perspectives. In other words, not only the *object* of the transfer but the *activities* associated with it as well—translation, for example—are apprehended through concepts elaborated within national traditions. Even when measuring acculturation gaps and/or resistance to acculturation, these phenomena are evaluated in terms of static models. The significance of a transfer is determined on the basis of categories whose historicity and lability must be set aside for the purposes of the investigation.

(3) More generally, both of the above-mentioned difficulties reveal a *reflexivity deficit* due to a lack of control over important self-referential loops. Thus, if on the level of relationships between national units, the initial purpose of a transfer

---

*Amérique / Europe (XVIe-XXe siècles)/Cultural Transfer, America and Europe: 500 Years of Interculturation*, ed. Laurier Turgeon, Denys Delâge, and Réal Ouellet (Sainte-Foy: Les presses de l'université Laval, 1996).

15. For these various examples, see in the order listed Jean-Yves Grenier and Bernard Lepetit, "L'expérience historique: A propos de C.-E. Labrousse," *Annales ESC* 44:6 (1989), 1337-1360; "Le paysage en France et en Allemagne autour de 1800," ed. Élisabeth Décultot and Christian Helmreich, *Revue germanique internationale* 7 (1997); the special section compiled by Frédéric Barbier, "Le commerce culturel entre les nations," *Revue de synthèse* 1:2 (1988), as well as Helga Jeanblanc, *Des Allemands dans l'industrie et le commerce du livre à Paris (1811-1870)* (Paris: CNRS-Editions), 1994; and Sidney Wilfred Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Viking, 1985).

study was to show that borders were more permeable in order to undermine the myth of the homogeneity of national units, the result is that the categories of analysis reintroduce, through a sort of boomerang effect, the national references that were to be put in question. The study of exchanges does lead to a richer approach of the culture of reception: it underlines foreign contributions and helps to historicize the concept of national culture. But the representation itself of this culture is not really called into question. Thus, rather than softening the national grounding of historiographies and human and social-science disciplines, research into transfers paradoxically often leads to strengthening it. More generally, to the extent that the reference points of the analysis are not questioned as such, transfer studies run the risk inherent in any approach that overlooks its self-referential dimension: they only reinforce the prejudices that they seek to undermine.

(4) Last is the issue of *reciprocity and reversibility*. While the project relating to transfers did not lay down a rule on this point right from the start, empirical surveys have generally involved simple linear processes, from one culture or one discipline to another, following a logic of introduction, transmission, and reception. Even in those relatively rare cases of triangular configurations, the object is limited to successive transfers.<sup>16</sup> Quite often, however, a situation is more complex than this, bringing into play movements between various points in at least two and sometimes several directions. Such activities may follow each other in a temporal sequence—in some cases, this is referred to as “re-transfer”<sup>17</sup>—but may also overlap one another, partially or wholly. They may also crisscross and engender a number of specific dynamics through various kinds of interrelationships. All of these cases are resistant to any analysis that merely establishes a relationship between a point of departure and a point of arrival. The study of these different configurations requires devising theoretical frameworks and methodological tools that make it possible to examine phenomena of interaction involving a variety of directions and multiple effects. To our mind, *histoire croisée* with its crossing figure provides a guide to thinking about such configurations.

#### IV. AN INQUIRY INTO INTERCROSSINGS

In the literal sense, to cross means “to place or fold crosswise one over the other.”<sup>18</sup> This creates a point of intersection where events may occur that are capable of affecting to various degrees the elements present depending on their resistance, permeability or malleability, and on their environment. The notion of intersection is basic to the very principle of *histoire croisée* that we intend to elaborate here. This centrality of intersections implies four consequences that we wish to highlight.

16. See *Philologiques IV: Transferts culturels triangulaires France – Allemagne – Russie*, ed. Katia Dimitriéva and Michel Espagne (Paris: Editions de la Maison des sciences de l’homme, 1996).

17. Cases of this type form part of the original research agenda on transfers, but they have rarely been followed up by empirical studies.

18. It is only by extension that the term takes on the meaning “to meet in passing, esp. from opposite directions.” *Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield MA: Merriam-Webster, 1983), p. 309.

First, the notion of intersection precludes reasoning in terms of individual entities, considered exclusively in themselves, with no external reference point. *Histoire croisée* breaks with a one-dimensional perspective that simplifies and homogenizes, in favor of a multidimensional approach that acknowledges plurality and the complex configurations that result from it. Accordingly, entities and objects of research are not merely considered in relation to one another but also *through* one another, in terms of relationships, interactions, and circulation. The active and dynamic principle of the intersection is fundamental in contrast to the static framework of a comparative approach that tends to immobilize objects.

Second, referring *histoire croisée* to relational configurations and active principles also requires paying particular attention to the consequences of intercrossing. The view that something occurs within the crossing process is a basic assumption of *histoire croisée*, which deals with the crossings as well as with their effects and repercussions. The approach does not limit itself to an analysis of the point of intersection or a moment of contact, it takes into account more broadly the processes that may result therefrom, as suggested moreover by the term “history” in the designation *histoire croisée*.

Third, to cross is also to crisscross, to interweave, that is, to cross over several times at a tempo that may be staggered. This process-oriented dimension is a fundamental aspect of inquiry into any intercrossings. It points toward an analysis of resistances, inertias, modifications—in trajectory, form, and content—and new combinations that can both result from and develop themselves in the process of crossing. Such transformations are moreover not necessarily limited to elements in contact: they may also affect their local or remote environment and manifest themselves at a deferred moment.

This brings us to the fourth point: the entities, persons, practices, or objects that are intertwined with, or affected by, the crossing process, do not necessarily remain intact and identical in form.<sup>19</sup> Their transformations are tied to the active as well as the interactive nature of their coming into contact. Such transformations are usually based on reciprocity (both elements are affected by their coming into contact), but may also derive from asymmetry (the elements are not affected in the same manner). In this respect, intercrossing can be distinguished from intermixing. The latter emphasizes the specificity of the product of hybridization (the interbred) and brings us beyond the original elements, the previously identified constitutive entities of the convergence.<sup>20</sup> In contrast, *histoire croisée* is concerned as much with the novel and original elements produced by the intercrossing as with the way in which it affects each of the “intercrossed” parties, which are assumed to remain identifiable, even if in altered form. This is another hallmark of *histoire croisée*.

To investigate relational configurations that are active and asymmetrical, as well as the labile and evolving nature of things and situations, to scrutinize not only novelty but also change, is one of the aims of *histoire croisée*. Instead of an

19. On the philosophical foundations of a discussion on transformations brought about by coming into contact with the Other, see in particular Michael Theunissen, *The Other: Studies in the Social Ontology of Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, and Buber* [1965] (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984).

20. On intermixing, see Serge Gruzinski, *La pensée métisse* (Paris: Fayard, 1999), especially 33-57.

analytical model—which would result in a static view of things—our aim is on the contrary to articulate various dimensions and place them into movement; this requires a toolbox that, while integrating the well-tested methodological contributions of the comparative approach and transfer studies, makes it possible to apprehend in a more satisfactory way the complexity of a composite and plural world in motion, and thereby the fundamental question of change. The failure to achieve this is a weak if not blind spot within comparative, and to some extent transfer, approaches.<sup>21</sup>

The relational, interactive, and process-oriented dimensions of *histoire croisée* lead to a multiplicity of possible intercrossings. We shall not seek here to enumerate all of them or to propose a typology. We shall restrict ourselves to identifying four broad families based on the object and its operator. The intercrossing that without doubt most immediately comes to mind is that which is intrinsically related to the object of research (1). But intercrossing may also occur in viewpoints or ways of looking at the object (2). It may likewise be envisaged in terms of the relationship between the observer and the object, thereby implicating issues of reflexivity (3). If we identify these empirical and reflexive dimensions for heuristic purposes, the various types of intersections that result nevertheless interweave with one another. Intercrossing never presents itself as an “already given” that need only be observed and recorded. It requires an active observer to construct it and only in a to-and-fro movement between researcher and object do the empirical and reflexive dimensions of *histoire croisée* jointly take shape. Intercrossing thus appears as a structuring cognitive activity that, through various acts of framing, shapes a space of understanding. By such means, a cognitive process articulating object, observer, and environment is carried out. The intercrossing of spatial and temporal scales, which can be both inherent in the object as well as the result of a theoretical and methodological choice, is a particularly revealing example of this interweaving of the empirical and reflexive dimensions (4).

(1) *Intercrossings intrinsic to the object.* Intercrossings in this case have an empirical grounding and constitute the object of research. A particular crossing, together with the analysis of its component elements and the manner in which it operates, as well as its results and consequences, stands in the center of the study. In practice, it is often extremely difficult to dissociate these various aspects and to isolate them accurately because crossings and intercrossings can never be reduced to linear schemas or simple causalities. Depending on the circumstances, one or the other of these aspects is placed at the center of the analysis depending on the entry point selected in the process. The emphasis can be placed on the historical dimension constituting the intersecting elements and the history of the intercrossing

21. To the extent that they are concerned with transformations, transfer studies do in fact deal with certain aspects of change, but limitation to transfers alone does not make it possible to account for radical change where new things, categories, practices, or institutions arise for the first time. In other words, in many cases transfers take part in the change, but understanding of the latter is not generally exhausted by the former. The same applies to *connected history*, which certainly takes into consideration certain aspects of change, but hardly makes possible analysis of change as such.

itself.<sup>22</sup> The inquiry thus focuses on moments and phenomena preceding the intercrossing as well as on its modalities. But it is also possible to concentrate on what happens afterwards, on the results and processes more or less directly brought about by the intercrossing.<sup>23</sup> Regardless of the point of departure chosen, intercrossing functions as the basic matrix for construction of the object that, depending on the circumstances, will be more or less closely connected to analyses of the moments preceding or subsequent to the points of intersection properly speaking. In this respect, we are dealing with novel objects of research that the methodologies of comparative and transfer studies generally have difficulty grasping.

(2) *The intercrossing of points of view.* Here we are dealing in the area of intersecting fields, objects, and scales, that is, the area of things that the *researcher* crosses, whereas the previous intersections occur without his or her direct intervention (even if the mere fact of identifying an object as coming within the scope of *histoire croisée* is itself a significant act of intervention on the part of the researcher). In contrast to the preceding type of intersection that the scholar may try to describe or to understand, while not necessarily being familiar with all of the details, some of which will always remain beyond his or her control, this second type of intercrossing implies a structuring, voluntary intellectual action, through which are defined the contours not only of the object of study but of the line of inquiry as well. This raises the question of the construction of the object both from an empirical as well as from an epistemological standpoint. Thus, for example, a study of the reception of Tacitus's *Germania* in Europe between the fifteenth and the twentieth centuries can reveal instances of historical intersections—the circulation of arguments and their reinterpretation according to national contexts—but it may also place emphasis on the necessity of crossing different national receptions to create a research topic of a Europe-wide dimension.

Basically, the construction of the object, which may be envisaged in a Weberian perspective as the adoption of one or more particular points of view on the object,<sup>24</sup> is already the result of various acts of crossing. To the extent that it may evolve in the course of the inquiry, the chosen vantage point implies new intersections. Scholars are in fact led to account for the way in which their own choices do or do not integrate other perspectives, to cross different potential points of view, and if necessary to engage in a process of translation or balanc-

22. See, for instance, the research by Sebastian Conrad on the making of Japanese history through the confluence between local tradition and importation of European national historiography. Sebastian Conrad, "La constitution de l'histoire japonaise: Histoire comparée, transferts, interactions transnationales," in Werner and Zimmermann, ed., *De la comparaison à l'histoire croisée*, 53-72. "National" historiographies generated during the period of colonialism may likewise be analyzed in terms of intercrossing. See, for example, Romila Thapar, "La quête d'une tradition historique: l'Inde ancienne," *Annales HSS* 53:2 (1998), 347-359.

23. This is true of the study carried out by Kapil Raj on the effects of the intercrossing between Indian and English methods in the birth of British cartography at the beginning of the nineteenth century, which thus no longer appears as an authentically "English" creation, but as the result of an interaction between two distinct traditions that mutually nourished one another. Kapil Raj, "Connexions, croisements, circulations: Le détour de la cartographie britannique par l'Inde, XVIIIe- XIXe siècles," in Werner and Zimmermann, ed., *De la comparaison à l'histoire croisée*, 73-98.

24. The expression "point of view" is used here not in a subjective sense, but in the literal meaning of point of observation that determines an angle of view. Max Weber, *On the Methodology of the Social Sciences*. (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1949), 81ff.

ing of the approaches resulting from the specific vantage points. These various points of view are also socially structured, reflecting particular positions in competition or power struggles.<sup>25</sup> Consequently, variation among them also means, in empirical terms, the scholar's taking into account differing social viewpoints: of the governors and the governed, workers and employers, and so on. What matters here is less the reflexive element inherent in any work involving intellectual positioning than the technical processes of intercrossing as a whole that inform it. By this is meant, for example, the ways of managing the articulation between several possible vantage points as well as the numerous links between these viewpoints to the extent that they are acknowledged to be historically constituted. In this respect, the framing of the object and the positioning of the researcher involve a "double hermeneutic,"<sup>26</sup> in which objects and points of view are created through intercrossing interactions.

(3) *The relations between observer and object.* Once one begins to reason in terms of a cognitive approach, the question of the relationship between the researcher and the object necessarily arises and in a sense becomes inherent to the two preceding types of intercrossing. The question concerns, first and foremost, the way in which the preliminary stages of the inquiry shape the object and conversely the way in which the characteristics of the object influence the parameters of the inquiry. The question of the intercrossing relations between the observer and the object is especially pertinent where the researcher is required to work with a language, concepts, and categories that are not part of his or her sphere of socialization.<sup>27</sup> In the case of comparisons and transfer studies, this gives rise to an asymmetry in the relationships between researchers and their various field areas or sources. It would seem evident that a researcher trained in France<sup>28</sup> involved in a Franco-Germanic research project could not deal with both sides in a symmetrical manner, if only by reason of the impact of the mastery of the subtleties of language and of categories entailed, and more broadly because of his or her own placement within French society. It would be both futile and naive to try to free oneself once and for all from this problem arising in any scientific inquiry.<sup>29</sup> One may nevertheless attempt to limit its effects by

25. Pierre Bourdieu placed great emphasis on this point in his work as a whole. See in particular *Choses dites* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1987), 155ff.

26. In the sense used by Anthony Giddens, in *New Rules of Sociological Method* (London: Hutchinson, 1974).

27. This question has been treated in particular by Jocelyne Dakhli, "'La culture nébuleuse' ou l'Islam à l'épreuve de la comparaison," *Annales HSS* 56 :6 (2001), 1177-1199, here 1186ff.

28. We know well the complexity of this type of designation, especially to the extent that courses of study are increasingly interconnected and provide forms of integration that blur the various assignments to categories of membership.

29. This problem is particularly acute in the social sciences where inquiries are subject to an ongoing tension between procedures designed to be objective and descriptive, on the one hand, and a normative and prescriptive dimension, on the other, resulting from the fact that the researcher is also a social being. However, many studies have shown that this problem also exists in the hard sciences. See, in particular, Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar, *Laboratory Life: The Social Construction of Scientific Facts* (London: Sage, 1979); Barry Barnes, David Bloor, and John Henry, *Scientific Knowledge: A Sociological Analysis* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1996); Dominique Pestre, "Pour une histoire sociale et culturelle des sciences: Nouvelles définitions, nouveaux objets, nouvelles pratiques," *Annales HSS* 3 (1995), 487-522, with a description of the state of research and numerous bibliographical references.

trying to objectify the multivarious relationships to the object—keeping in mind that such objectification will always remain incomplete—in order better to control the biases that might be introduced into the results of the inquiry. The way the researcher takes hold of the object, the object’s resistance, the presuppositions implied by the researcher’s choices, or even the way in which the relationship between researcher and object may change in the course of the inquiry—for example, through a redefinition of the inquiry or a readjustment of its methodology and analytical categories—these are all aspects of a reflexive process in which the position of the researcher and the definition of the object are susceptible to evolving in which the respective shifts in each are a product of specific interactions. The space of understanding opened up by the inquiry does not exist a priori, but is created in the dynamic intercrossing relationships between both. Thus, the empirical and reflexive dimensions are simultaneously configured.

(4) *The crossing of scales.* The question of scale offers an opportunity to illustrate the way in which the empirical and reflexivity can be articulated within a perspective of *histoire croisée*. Such an approach raises the problem of spatial and temporal units of analysis, and of choosing them depending on the object and the adopted point of view. To approach the question of scale both as a dimension intrinsic to the object and as a cognitive and methodological option chosen by the researcher implies a break with a logic of pre-existing scales to be used “off the shelf,” as is often the case for national studies or for the major dates in the chronology of politics that are relied on as natural frameworks of analysis, defined independently of the object.

The problem of scale has already been the subject of much discussion. It has been raised in particular in terms of the relationship between the micro and macro levels and explored for instance in Italian *microstoria*, the French *multiscopique* approach, as well as the German *Alltagsgeschichte*. Despite their particularities,<sup>30</sup> all three approaches have in common the idea that the level of scale is primarily a matter of the researcher’s choice of level of analysis. Thus, *microstoria* adopts the micro level to show how it can enrich and advance the categories traditionally used in macro analysis.<sup>31</sup> Its most radical followers go so far as to bring all phenomena down to a micro scale by means of an underlying assumption according to which the micro level engenders the macro.<sup>32</sup> The proposal for *multiscopique* approaches developed in France for its part aims to avoid such a dichotomous perspective, by conceiving of the variation of scales (*jeu d’échelles*) as a change of focus to vary points of view on the past. By means of this principle, the local comes to be a “particular modulation” of the global and, at the same time, a “different” version of macro-social realities.<sup>33</sup> Finally,

30. For the positioning of the *multiscopique* approach in relation to *microstoria*, see, in particular, Paul-André Rosental, “Construire le macro par le micro: Fredrik Barth et la microstoria,” in *Jeux d’échelles: La micro-analyse à l’expérience*, dir. Jacques Revel (Paris, Editions de l’EHESS/Gallimard/Seuil, 1996), 141-159.

31. See, in particular, Carlo Ginzburg and Carlo Poni, “La micro-histoire,” *Le débat*, no. 17 (1989), 133-136; Giovanni Levi, *Le pouvoir au village: La carrière d’un exorciste dans le Piémont du XVIIIe siècle* [1985] (Paris: Gallimard, 1989).

32. Maurizio Gribaudi, “Échelle, pertinence, configuration,” in *Jeux d’échelles*, 113-139.

33. Jacques Revel, “Micro-analyse et construction du social,” in *Jeux d’échelles*, 15-36, here 26.

*Alltagsgeschichte* bases its choice of the micro and criticism of the macro on an anthropology of social relationships.<sup>34</sup> However, by treating the question of scale as exclusively a matter of theoretical and methodological choice, *microstoria*, the *multiscopique* approach, and *Alltagsgeschichte* do not really deal with the problem of the empirical articulation and matching of different scales to the level of the object itself. Scale, however, is as much a matter of the concrete situations particular to the objects studied as it is of intellectual choice.

As a general rule, empirical objects relate to several scales at the same time and are not amenable to a single focal length. This is the case, for example, of the make-up of the category of the unemployed in Germany between 1890 and 1927.<sup>35</sup> Constructors of this category act, simultaneously or successively, on different levels: municipal, national, even international, in such a manner that these varying scales are in part constituted through one another. These scales could not be reduced to an external explicatory factor but rather are an integral part of the analysis. Thus, from a spatial point of view, the scales refer back to the multiple settings, logics, and interactions to which the objects of analysis relate.<sup>36</sup> From a temporal perspective, they raise the question of the time frames of both observer and object and of their interferences at the confluence between the empirical and methodology. The focus brought to bear on their couplings and articulations makes it possible to account for interactions that are part of complex phenomena that cannot be reduced to linear models.

The transnational scale provides a good illustration of this double aspect. Within a *histoire croisée* perspective, the transnational cannot simply be considered as a supplementary level of analysis to be added to the local, regional, and national levels according to a logic of a change in focus. On the contrary, it is apprehended as a level that exists in interaction with the others, producing its own logics with feedback effects upon other space-structuring logics. Far from being limited to a macroscopic reduction, the study of the transnational level reveals a network of dynamic interrelations whose components are in part defined through the links they maintain among themselves and the articulations structuring their positions.<sup>37</sup> Viewed from this perspective, *histoire croisée* can open up promising lines of inquiry for the writing of a history of Europe that is not reduced to the sum of the histories of member states or their political relations, but takes into account the diversity of transactions, negotiations, and reinterpretations played out in different settings around a great variety of objects that, combined, contribute to shaping a European history “à géométrie variable.”

34. *Histoire du quotidien*, ed. Alf Lüdtke [1989] (Paris: Editions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 1994); *Sozialgeschichte, Alltagsgeschichte, Mikro-Historie*, ed. Winfried Schulze (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994); *Mikrogeschichte Makrogeschichte: komplementär oder inkommensurabel?*, ed. Jürgen Schlumbohm (Göttingen: Wallstein, 1999).

35. Bénédicte Zimmermann, *La constitution du chômage en Allemagne: Entre professions et territoires* (Paris: Editions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 2001).

36. Martina Löw underlines in her sociology of space this relational and labile dimension of spaces composed of objects and individuals that move beyond the systems of geographical, institutional, political, economic and social coordinates that aim to stabilize spaces by establishing boundaries. Martina Löw, *Raumsoziologie* (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp Verlag, 2001).

37. For additional developments on the relationships between *histoire croisée* and the transnational dimension, see Werner and Zimmermann, “Vergleich, Transfer, Verflechtung,” 628ff.

An approach based on intercrossings argues in favor of going beyond reasoning in terms of micro versus macro, emphasizing instead their inextricable interconnections. The notion of scale does not refer to the micro or the macro level, but rather to the various spaces within which are rooted the interactions making up the process analyzed. In other words, the relevant scales are those that are constructed or brought into play in the very situations under study. They are spatial as well as temporal, and their variations are not solely dependent on the researcher, but also result from the protagonists in the situations under study. Intercrossing is thus obviously an aspect of both the realm of the object of study and the realm of the procedures of research related to the researcher's choices. In its most demanding version, *histoire croisée* aims to establish connections between both of these realms.

#### V. HISTORICIZING CATEGORIES

Connecting the empirical object to the research procedure opens the central question of categories and categorization. Given the pitfalls of asymmetric comparisons—postulating a similarity between categories on the basis of a simple semantic equivalent, without questioning the often divergent practices encompassed by them—or negative comparisons—evaluating a society based on the absence of a category chosen because of its relevance to the initial environment of the researcher—great care is called for in assessing the analytical impact of the categories used. Such care can be exercised through systematic attention to the categories in use, in the dual sense of categories of action and of analysis.<sup>38</sup>

While any form of reasoning proceeds by categorization, such categorization often remains implicit, even if any comparative research should theoretically explicate the categories referred to. To know whereof and whence one is speaking: this twofold issue is central to *histoire croisée*. Since categories are both the product of an intellectual construction and the basis for action, they unavoidably pose the question of the relationship between knowledge and action, both in the situations studied and in terms of the protocols of inquiry. The focus upon them clears a potential path to bring together the empirical and reflexivity.

This focus on categories is not so much aimed at categories in themselves as at their various constitutive elements and how they fit together. These elements are subject to variations and fluctuations over time and space. To get beyond the essentialism of categories implies reasoning in terms of situated processes of categorization—with the process referring back to the temporal and spatial interactions that make up the category. Categories such as “landscape,” for example—the same could be shown for “unemployment,” “culture,” “old age,” “sickness,” “workers,” “white collar managers,” and so on—are historically dated and partially structured by the hypotheses that helped to form them. With respect to “landscape” and its equivalents—always rough approximations in other languages and cultures—such formation has been progressive and has brought into

38. For an example of such work on categories, see, in particular, *L'enquête sur les catégories: De Durkheim à Sacks*, ed. Bernard Fradin, Louis Quééré, and Jean Widmer (Raisons pratiques, 5) (Paris: Editions de l'EHESS, 1994); see also the special section “Hommage à Bernard Lepetit: L'usage des catégories,” *Annales* 52:5 (1997), 963-1038.

play, within each national entity, a multiplicity of categorial schemes particular to the various groups, places, and individuals involved in the process: artists, botanical associations, local beautification leagues and societies, neighborhood associations, and so on. Only a situated approach enables elucidation of the specific issues of categorization, which, while no longer perceptible, still contribute to shaping cultural heritage practices that are currently prevalent in France and Germany, for instance.<sup>39</sup> A process-oriented approach thus makes it possible to grasp more fully the implications of categorial delineations, in particular through examination of their various more or less stabilized components. Reference to categorization therefore involves reasoning not in an abstract and general fashion, but in association with the study of the interpretive schemes and generalization procedures that lead to the institution of a generic category.<sup>40</sup> Such a categorial approach makes it possible, thanks to the introduction of a diachronic dimension, to avoid the influence of implicit and reductive cultural models.

It raises the issue of historicization and the way in which *histoire croisée* relates to the field of history. Initiated at the beginning of the nineteenth century, reinforced by the successive crises of different currents of positivism, and accelerated by the calling into question of scientific objectivism,<sup>41</sup> historicization today is an inescapable dimension of the production of knowledge about human societies. It concerns all of the social sciences, even those, like economics, that tend to view themselves above all as sciences of the present. Considered from the perspective taken here, historicization means articulating the essential aspect of reflexivity and the multiple time frames that enter into the construction of an object to the extent that it is envisaged as a production situated in time and space. *Histoire croisée* plays a role in this undertaking by opening up lines of inquiry that encourage a rethinking, in historical time, of the relationships among observation, the object of study, and the analytical instruments used. Further, the reference to history is justified by the attention given to the process of constituting both the objects and the categories of analysis. Here too, it is not so much the temporal dimension in itself as the incidence of a plurality of temporalities involved in the identification and construction of the objects that is in question. This reliance on history thus encompasses a substratum common to those disciplines that, in one respect or another, are confronted with the historicity of their materials and tools. Finally, the term “history” also refers to the narrative component of any empirical

39. See Danny Trom, “La production politique du paysage: Éléments pour une interprétation des pratiques ordinaires de patrimonialisation de la nature en Allemagne et en France” (Doctoral thesis, Institut d’études politiques, Paris, 1996).

40. Alain Desrosières accounts for these generalization procedures in the case of statistic categorization. Alain Desrosières, *La politique des grands nombres: Histoire de la raison statistique* (Paris: La Découverte, 1993). For a case study, see also Danny Trom and Bénédicte Zimmermann, “Cadres et institution des problèmes publics: les cas du chômage et du paysage,” in *Les formes de l’action collective: Mobilisation dans des arènes publiques*, ed. Daniel Cefaï and Danny Trom (Raisons pratiques, 12) (Paris: Editions de l’EHESS, 2001), 281-315.

41. See Ian Hacking, *Representing and Intervening: Introductory Topics in the Philosophy of Natural Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983); Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, “The Image of Objectivity,” *Representations* 40 (1992), 81-128; for the cultural sciences, see Michael Lackner and Michael Werner, *Der Cultural Turn in den Humanwissenschaften: Area Studies im Auf- oder Abwind des Kulturalismus?* (Bad Homburg, Werner Reimers Stiftung, 1999).

social science. Such narration can be carried out in the present, to describe a situation, or be applied to the past, to make intelligible certain essential aspects of the object of study.<sup>42</sup>

Being process-oriented, *histoire croisée* is an open approach that takes into account, from an internal point of view, variations in its components and, from an external point of view, its specificity with respect to other possible forms of history. It can be likened to a history of problems and queries (*histoire problème*) that attempts to avoid the dual essentialism of an objectivation through facts—regarded as directly accessible to the observer—and a reification of structures—that by tautological reasoning predetermines the results of the inquiry. In opposition to an essentialist perspective, the idea of intercrossing identifies first an interaction that—and this is one of its decisive characteristics—modifies the elements that are interacting. In this sense, it points towards a “second-degree” history.

#### VI. PRAGMATIC INDUCTION

But how does one study or objectify various forms of intercrossing, situated in time and space? The example of scales has provided an opportunity to formulate a few suggestions, which should now be developed in further detail. Emphasizing the need to start with the object of research and its concrete situation leads to an inductive and pragmatic approach. From an epistemological standpoint, any production of sociohistorical knowledge does indeed combine inductive and deductive procedures, but in varying proportions.<sup>43</sup> In the case of the comparative method, where the deductive aspect is often significant, national issues, pre-existing and crystallized in a language and in specific categories of analysis, pose a risk of partly prefiguring the results. *Histoire croisée* cannot escape the weight of such pre-established national formatting, but its inductive orientation aims to limit these effects through an investigative mechanism in which the objects, categories, and analytical schemes are adjusted in the course of research. This is illustrated by a study carried out by Nicolas Mariot and Jay Rowell on visits of sovereigns in France and Germany on the eve of the First World War, a study that aims to test the transposition of a research theme and an inquiry protocol from one country to another.<sup>44</sup> By illustrating an asymmetry in the situations, pointing out significant differences in the various ways of conceiving and categorizing public action or the relations between center and periphery, the test led them to revise the initial hypothesis and to reformulate the categories structuring it. The principle of induction invoked here thus refers to a process of production of knowledge in which the various elements are defined

42. See Alban Bensa, “De la micro-histoire vers une anthropologie critique,” in Revel, ed., *Jeux d'échelles*, 37-70; Kultur, soziale Praxis, Text: Die Krise der ethnographischen Repräsentation, ed. Eberhard Berg and Martin Fuchs (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1993); Danny Trom, “Situationnisme méthodologique et histoire: une approche par induction triangulaire,” in Laborier and Trom, ed., *L'historicité de l'action publique*.

43. For a recent discussion of the question, see Hilary Putnam, *Renewing Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), *passim*.

44. Nicolas Mariot and Jay Rowell, “Une comparaison asymétrique: Visites de souveraineté et construction nationale en France et en Allemagne à la veille de la Première Guerre mondiale,” in Werner and Zimmermann, ed., *De la comparaison à l'histoire croisée*, 181-211.

and, if necessary, repositioned in relation to one another. Its pragmatic nature should furthermore make it possible to restrict the temptation of *a priori* constructions and get around the trap of essentialism and its overly static categories.

Pragmatic induction thus implies starting from the object of study and the situations in which it is embedded, according to one or more points of view—previously defined, it is true, but subject to continual readjustments in the course of empirical investigation. Reliance on specific situations makes it possible to escape the “convenient and lazy usage of context”<sup>45</sup> by rejecting its generic and pre-established nature and integrating a reflection on the principles governing its definition. Such a lazy usage is replaced by an analysis of the manner in which individuals actually connect themselves to the world, the specific construction of the world and the elements of context produced by this activity in each particular case, and finally the uses arising from such construction. By focusing on specific situations, it is thus possible to get away from the external, often artificial, nature of the context in order to make it an integral part of the analysis. Just as in the case of scales, the definition of the context is not the prerogative of the researcher. It also involves reference points that are specific to the objects and activities under study. Thus, *histoire croisée* integrates into the operation of contextualization carried out by the researcher the referential dimension of the objects and practices analyzed, taking into account both the variety of situations in which the relationships to the context are structured and the effect that the study of such situations exerts on the analytical procedures.<sup>46</sup> Pragmatic induction does not thereby imply confining the analysis to a micro level or limiting it to a juxtaposition of situations, to the detriment of any form of generalization. But generalization in such cases is carried out through a combination of these various situations.<sup>47</sup> The emergence, for example, of common forms of concert organization in nineteenth-century Europe can thus be studied from highly varied local constellations and through the concrete practices of the relevant actors. Institutions, such as concert societies, or generic figures, such as the impresario or the concert agent, arise in a multiplicity of configurations according to logics that cannot be reduced to a process of linear evolution, which some would like to subsume into a progressive commercialization or a generalized differentiation of functions related to the organization of concerts. Their main features are much more defined through the interaction of the expectations and strategies, some-

45. Responding to criticism made by Jacques Revel, “Micro-analyse et construction du social,” in Revel, ed., *Jeux d’échelles*, 15-36, here 25.

46. Passeron (*Le raisonnement sociologique*, esp. 85-88 and 368-370) has gone furthest in the analysis of the challenge posed by the construction of the context, in particular with respect to the comparative method, without, however, advancing concrete methodological proposals. *Histoire croisée*, for its part, proposes to link two levels of construction of context, that of the analytical operations carried out by the researcher and that of the situations of action analyzed.

47. Under a procedure closed to the combinative ethnography founded by Isabelle Baszanger and Nicolas Dodier on the establishment of an “ethnographic jurisprudence.” Isabelle Baszanger and Nicolas Dodier, “Totalisation et altérité dans l’enquête ethnographique,” *Revue française de sociologie* 38 (1997), 37-66. For an attempt at a transposition into history, see Zimmermann, *La constitution du chômage*. On the relation between case study and generalization, see *Penser par cas*, ed. Jean-Claude Passeron and Jacques Revel (Paris: EHESS, 2005)

times contradictory, of actors to which they respond while at the same time structuring them.<sup>48</sup>

Similarly, pragmatic induction does not imply restricting oneself to short-action time-frames without regard for the long term. On the contrary, the long term of the structures is combined with the short junctures of action, in an analysis of social activity based on the study of the dynamic relationships between action and structure. From this perspective, the activity of individuals appears as both structured and structuring,<sup>49</sup> in a relationship of reciprocal relations between structures and action. However, such structuring is not so much determined by the necessity of an irreversible process as by the intercrossing in the course of action of constraints and resources that are in part structurally given and in part tied to the contingency of the situations.<sup>50</sup> Thus, for example, most of our institutions stem from a dual grounding, both within a structurally long history that affects their logic and functioning, and in singular contexts of action that played a decisive role in bringing them about and transforming them.<sup>51</sup> The perspective of a social pragmatics makes it possible to think in terms of the interdependence of these two dimensions through the identification of the slides and lags occurring in the course of the action that enable moments of institutional innovation. Mindful of both short-term contexts of action and the long-term structural conditions that make it possible, such an approach opens up new perspectives for analyzing change and stability at the same time.

#### VII. REFLEXIVITY

As illustrated by the example of scales, such pragmatic induction is also reflexive. This is one of the points that distinguishes *histoire croisée* from both comparativism—which, ideally, postulates the existence of an external point of view making it possible both to construct comparable objects and to apply to them common analytical questionnaires—and transfer studies—which, in most cases, do not question their implicit frames of reference. Nevertheless we will not delve into the reflexivity issue debated for more than a century now in the social sciences.<sup>52</sup> By way of example, we shall limit ourselves to pointing out a few instances in which *histoire croisée* can contribute to meeting the challenge posed by reflexivity. Both pragmatic induction and the procedures for historicization

48. See *Concerts et publics: Mutations de la vie musicale 1789–1914: France, Allemagne, Grande-Bretagne*, ed. Hans-Erich Bödeker, Patrice Veit, and Michael Werner (Paris: Editions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 2002).

49. See, in particular, on this point, Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Cambridge, Eng: Polity Press, 1984).

50. For a reinterpretation of the notion of structure in terms of schemas and resources, and thoughts on its integration into a theory of action and a problematic of change, see William H. Sewell, "A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency and Transformation," *American Journal of Sociology* 98:1 (1992), 1-29.

51. For an illustration of this dual grounding, see Paul-André Rosental, *L'intelligence démographique: Sciences et politiques des populations en France (1930–1960)* (Paris, Odile Jacob, 2003).

52. For the nineteenth century, the main reference remains Droysen's *Historik*, as well as Dilthey's project for a critique of historical reason. For more recent debates on reflexivity in the social sciences and its relationship to theories of modernity, see, in particular, Anthony Giddens, *Consequences of Modernity* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1990); Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens, and Scott Lash, *Reflexive Modernization* (Oxford, Polity Press, 1994).

inherent within *histoire croisée* generate forms of reflexivity. Tied to logics of action, pragmatic induction leads to a readjustment of the principles and the logic of the inquiry while it is being conducted. As for historicization, it elucidates the relationship between various spatio-temporal scales and different regimes of historicity and positions of observation that are themselves historically situated.

A *histoire croisée* of disciplines helps to illustrate certain aspects of the reflexivity issue. Depending on whether one treats the interpenetrations between German and American historiographies after 1945 from a “German,” “American,” or “French” point of view, one obtains perspectives, and thus interpretations, that are quite different. The emigration and exile of German historians to the United States, the re-importation into Germany after 1950 of originally “German” theories having been in the meantime acclimated and “Americanized” (this was the case with broad aspects of Weberian sociology), coupled with reception theories such as at the Chicago School, caused considerable interweaving that requires re-evaluation of the viewpoints from which the various interpretations have been developed. Commonly used terms, such as “German sociology,” became fluid, difficult to use without caution, not to mention complex notions such as *Historismus* and its translations as historicism, *historicisme*, *istorismo*, and so on, each of which relates to different perceptions, traditions, and methodologies.<sup>53</sup> Consequently, the scholar today is likely to look upon his or her own concepts and analytical instruments as the result of a complex process of intercrossing in which national and disciplinary traditions have been amalgamated in varying configurations, and to reintroduce the corresponding viewpoints into the inquiry. The aim of *histoire croisée* is to shed light on this thick fabric of interweavings. In so doing, it does not withdraw into a space of relativist indecisiveness or infinite speculative relationships.<sup>54</sup> On the contrary, it aims to utilize the intercrossing of perspectives and shifts in points of view in order to study specific knowledge effects. Starting from the divergences among various possible viewpoints, by bringing out their differences and the way in which, historically, they emerge, often in an interdependent manner, *histoire croisée* makes it possible to recompose these elements.<sup>55</sup> The reflexivity to which it leads is not empty formalism, but is rather a relational field that generates meaning.

53. On the epistemological implications of this question, see Alexandre Escudier, “Epistémologies croisées? L'impossible lecture des théoriciens allemands de l'histoire en France autour de 1900,” in Werner and Zimmermann, *De la comparaison à l'histoire croisée*, ed., 139-177. For a presentation of the problem in the context of a German discussion, see Otto Gerhard Oexle, *Geschichtswissenschaft im Zeichen des Historismus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996).

54. On the problem of historical relativism, see Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth, and History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982); Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 349ff. Finally, on the history of the idea of historical relativity, see Reinhart Koselleck, “Geschichte,” in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, ed. Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1972-1997), vol. 2 (1979), 647-717, here 695-701 and Koselleck, *L'expérience de l'histoire* (Paris: Gallimard/Seuil, 1997), 75-81.

55. The grounding in the dynamic of social activities makes it possible to place *histoire croisée* within the debate over constructionism. On the one hand, all of the objects of *histoire croisée*, as well as the categories capable of describing them and the problematics to which they relate, are assumed to be socially constructed. But, on the other hand, this does not mean that they are all placed on the same level and that their respective positions are irrelevant. Quite to the contrary, we advance the

Neither does *histoire croisée* result in a logic of infinite historical regression. Historicization should not be confused with a contextualization that requires delving further and further into historical investigation, so as to arrive at a more detailed representation of the past and its relationship to the present. On the contrary, it is constructed and circumscribed in relation to an object and a problematic, making possible the identification of the relevant temporalities and thus a delimitation of the process of historicization. Once this has been made clear, it becomes possible to examine anew the relationships between diachrony and synchrony, which remain difficult to coordinate, with respect both to comparison and transfer studies. One of the contributions of *histoire croisée* is that it makes possible the articulation of both of these dimensions, whereas comparison favors the implementation of a synchronic reasoning, and transfer studies tend toward an analysis of diachronic processes. Crossed history, in contrast, enables the synchronic and diachronic registers to be constantly rearranged in relation to each other.

Intercrossing, as has been shown, affects both the research object and research procedures. It functions as an active principle in which the dynamics of the inquiry unfold in accordance with a logic of interactions where the various elements are constituted in relation to or through one another. Consideration of this aspect of active inclusion and both its constitutive and transformational effects is at the heart of *histoire croisée*. It involves mobile grounding processes that link not only the observer to the object but also objects among themselves. The elements of the space of understanding thus configured—in which the observer is personally engaged—are not fixed, but are instead defined on the basis of their dynamic interrelationships. The result is a process of permanent adjustment that simultaneously concerns the respective positions of the elements and the processes of their coming into being.

Over and beyond these distinctive traits that stem from the concept of intercrossing, *histoire croisée* also results in the rethinking of the fundamental tension between the logical operations involved in producing knowledge and the historicity of both the object and the approach produced by such knowledge. As noted earlier, with respect to questions such as the choice of scales, construction of context, and processes of categorization, *histoire croisée* engages in a to-and-fro movement between the two poles of the inquiry and the object. By systematically questioning the relationships between these two poles, it seeks—in choosing its fields—to respond to the question of the historical grounding of knowledge produced by the social sciences. The epistemological challenge of course remains, and shall continue to remain. But the implementation of the research agenda of *histoire croisée* as outlined in this article leads to the opening of new lines of inquiry capable of changing the conditions under which intellectual experience is carried out.

*Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris*

---

hypothesis that the configuration of the intercrossing and the intellectual operation corresponding thereto lead to a logic that produces meaning on the basis of semantic interactions between situated positions. Viewed from this perspective, intercrossing appears as a social construction that produces specific forms of knowledge. See Ian Hacking, *The Social Construction of What?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), especially 36-59.