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[Draft]

Beyond comparison : *Histoire croisée* and the challenge of reflexivity*

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 made 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 requirement 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 light.¹ The questions resulting from the collapse of colonialism have, moreover, impacted the previously dominant position of the “western” social sciences. Henceforth suspected of intellectual “imperialism” and strategies of political domination, their universalistic ambition has been weakened.² 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 production of knowledge.

These shifts however also raise questions relating directly to research practices, the way sources are approached and the fields themselves. The proposal for *histoire croisée* that we

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¹ - For a presentation of the problematic in a German research field, see Ute Daniel, *Kompendium Kulturgeschichte. Theorien, Praxis, Schlüsselwörter*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 2001.

² - The literature in this area is flourishing. For a recent overview, refer to the dossier “Une histoire à l'échelle globale” in *Annales HSS*, 2001, 56-1, pp. 3-123. For an example of a case study, Daniel Dubuisson, *L'Occident et la religion. Mythes, science et idéologie*, Paris, Ed. Complexe, 1998.

elaborate on herein fit 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 merely tends toward a configuration of events that is more or less structured by the crossing metaphor. Quite often, moreover, these usages refer to crossed histories in the plural. 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.³ It furthermore engages in an inquiry regarding the very process of intercrossing in practical as well as intellectual terms. But these usages have barely begun to become stabilized. The present paper aims at clarifying them through an exploration of the concept within current theoretical and methodological debates. Once so specified in empirical and theoretical terms, *histoire croisée* can make a useful contribution to the tools used by 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 which, in the manner of comparison and studies of transfers, most recently of "Connected" and "Shared History," examine the links, manifested in the social sphere or simply projected, between various historically constituted formations.⁴

³ - On this type of usage, see in particular Michael Werner, "Le prisme franco-allemand: à propos d'une histoire croisée des disciplines littéraires," in Hans Manfred Bock, Reinhart Meyer-Kalkus and Michel Trebitsch (eds.), *Entre Locarno and Vichy. Les relations culturelles franco-allemandes dans les années 1930*, Paris, Ed. du CNRS, 1993, t. I, pp. 303-316; Bénédicte Zimmermann, Claude Didry and Peter Wagner (eds.), *Le travail et la nation. Histoire croisée de la France et de l'Allemagne*, Paris, Ed. de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 1999. For a more complete presentation of the concept of intercrossing history 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*, 2002, 28, pp. 607-636.

⁴ - 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 the reason why we prefer to discuss *histoire croisée* in relation to comparison 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 if each of them have particularities. On *Connected History*, see Robert W. Strayer (ed.), *The Making of the Modern World. Connected Histories, Divergent Paths. (1500 to the Present)*, New York, St. Martins Press, 1989; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, « Connected Histories: Notes toward a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia », *Modern Asian Studies* 31-3, 1997, pp. 735-762; Serge Gruzinski, "Les mondes mêlés de la Monarchie catholique et autres 'connected histories'," *Annales HSS*, 2001, 56-1, pp. 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 put to service in the discussion of *Post-Colonial Studies*. See Ann Laura Stoler and Frederic Cooper, "Between Metropole and Colony. Rethinking a Research Agenda," in *Ibid.* (ed.), *Tensions of Empire. Colonial cultures in a bourgeois world*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1997, as well as Stewart Hall, "When was the Post-Colonial? Thinking at the

But, while these approaches mainly take a 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 an additional dimension to the inquiry. In contrast to mere restitution of an “already there,” *histoire croisée* places emphasis on what, in a self-reflexive process, can be generative of meaning.

In this respect, it takes up anew the discussions carried out over the past years regarding the comparative approach, 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,⁵ 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 in so doing 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, regimes of historicity and reflexivity. Finally, it raises the question of its own historicity through a threefold process of historicization: through the object, the categories of analysis, and the relationships between researcher and object. It thus provides a toolbox which, over and beyond the historical sciences, can be applied across a number of other disciplines that combine past and present perspectives.⁶

Limit,” in Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti (eds.), *The Post-Colonial Question. Common Skies, Divided Horizons*, London, Routledge, 1996. For the concept of *Entangled History*, see Sebastian Conrad and Shalini Randeria (eds.), *Jenseits des Eurozentrismus. Postkoloniale Perspektiven in den Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften*, Frankfurt, Campus, 2002, as well as Shalini Randeria, “Entangled Histories of Uneven Modernities: Civil Society, Caste Solidarities and Legal pluralism in Post-Colonial India,” in Yehuda Elkana et al., (eds.), *Unraveling Ties. From Social Cohesion to New Practices of Connectedness*, Frankfurt, Campus, 2002, pp. 284-311.

⁵ - See in particular Michel Espagne, “Sur les limites du comparatisme en histoire culturelle,” *Genèses*, 1994, 17, pp. 112-121; Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Jürgen Kocka, *Geschichte und Vergleich. Ansätze und Ergebnisse international vergleichender Geschichtsschreibung*, Frankfurt, Campus, 1996; Christophe Charle, “L’histoire comparée des intellectuels en Europe. Quelques points de méthode and propositions de recherche,” in Michel Trebitsch and Marie-Christine Granjon (eds.), *Pour une histoire comparée des intellectuels*, Paris, Ed. Complexe, 1998, pp. 39-59; Johannes Paulmann, “Internationaler Vergleich und interkultureller Transfer. Zwei Forschungsansätze zur europäischen Geschichte des 18. bis 20. Jahrhunderts,” *Historische Zeitschrift*, 1998, 3, pp. 649-685; Hartmut Kaelble, *Der historische Vergleich. Eine Einführung zum 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, Frankfurt, Campus, 1999; Matthias Middell, “Kulturtransfer und historische Komparatistik, Thesen zu ihrem Verhältnis,” *Comparativ*, 2000, 10, pp. 7-41; Michael Werner, “Comparaison et raison,” *Cahiers d’études germaniques*, 2001, 41, pp. 9-18. Gabriele Lingelbach, “Erträge und Grenzen zweier Ansätze. Kulturtransfer und Vergleich am Beispiel der französischen und amerikanischen Geschichtswissenschaft während des 19. Jahrhunderts,” in Christoph Conrad and Sebastian Conrad (eds.), *Die Nation schreiben. Geschichtswissenschaft im internationalen Vergleich*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002, pp. 333-359.

⁶ - *Histoire croisée* is part of a longstanding 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

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 which, while present in diverse situations, all involve the articulation between the method and the object. To simplify, we shall say they 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, it 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 and parcel of the work of comparativists, each of whom deals with this in his or her own manner.⁷ The basic questions nevertheless remain. For the sake of clarity, those questions that underlie the problematic of *histoire croisée* are outlined below.

(1) The first 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 see clearly and 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. The scholar is always, in one manner or another, engaged in

sociale,” *Revue de synthèse historique*, 1903, pp. 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” in *Annales ESC*, 1983, 38-6, and the special edition devoted to the “critical turn” (*Annales ESC*, 1989, 44-6); Jean-Claude Passeron, *Le raisonnement sociologique. L’espace non-poppérien du raisonnement naturel*, Paris, Nathan, 1991; as well as Pascale Laborier and Danny Trom (eds.), *L’historicité de l’action publique*, Paris, PUF (Collection Curapp), 2003.

⁷ - On recent French discussions concerning comparison, see in particular Michel Lallement and Jan Spurk, *Stratégies de la comparaison internationale*, Paris, CNRS Editions, 2003; Marcel Detienne, *Comparer l’incomparable*, Paris, Seuil, 2000; Id. (ed.), *Qui veut prendre la parole*, Paris, Seuil (*Le genre humain*), 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*, 2002, 57-1, pp. 27-30 and pp. 31-157 for articles in the dossier; the collective Franco-American work on repertoires of evaluation coordinated by Michèle Lamont and Laurent Thévenot (ed.), *Rethinking comparative cultural sociology. Repertoires of evaluation in France and the United States*, Cambridge, 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, pp. 105-124.

the field of observation. He or she is involved in the object, if only by language, by the categories and concepts used, by historical experience or the preexisting bodies of knowledge relied on. His or her 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 regional level, 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 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 level of comparison.⁸ 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 multilateral comparisons that require taking into account a large number of parameters.

(3) In addition, the question of scales exercises indirect effects upon the definition of the *object of the comparison*. This choice 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 system⁹ 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, the designations and the research traditions on which the scholar relies. This can lead to great distortions: first, where for one and the same object of study, the scale chosen for one of the entities of the comparison turns out not to be necessarily

⁸ - On comparison of civilizations, see Hartmut Kaelble, *Der historische Vergleich, op. cit.*, pp. 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.

⁹ - 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 le recherches en sciences sociales*, 2000, 135, pp.58-62.

relevant for the other; further, in terms of the identification itself of the entities on which distinct categorical relations and scientific perspectives come to bear. This raises the problem of the historical and situated constitution of the objects of the comparison. To avoid the trap of the presumed naturalness of the objects, it often becomes necessary to question their historicity, as well as the traces left by such historicity on their characteristics and their contemporary usages.¹⁰

(4) The historicization of the objects and problematics however 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 transformation processes or might make 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 which in practice turns out to be tenuous and unstable.

(5) An additional difficulty stems from the *interaction between 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 under the effect 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 fine arts, as well as in practical areas, such as advertising, marketing, organizational cultures or even social policies. Comparative study of these areas of contact that are transformed through their mutual interaction requires scholars to reorganize their conceptual framework and rethink their analytical tools.¹¹

¹⁰ - It should be pointed out that Marc Bloch, in his programmatic lecture at the Oslo Congress, 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 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*, 1928, 4, republished in Marc Bloch, *Mélanges historiques I*, Paris, Ed. de l'EHESS, 1963, pp. 16-40, especially pp. 38 ff.

¹¹ - In his seminal work serving as the introduction to *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries. The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, Bergen / Oslo, Universitetsforlaget, 1969, pp. 9-38, Fredrik Barth had already underscored the necessity of taking into account the interaction at the borders from which the distinctive traits of the entities in question – here “ethnic groups” – were defined. But all the while assigning to them a determinative role, Barth limits the transformational effects of the interaction to the processes of definition and the characteristics of the groups, and in no way calls into questions the cohesion of the group and now the border in the dichotomizing function. While ethnicity is defined at the borders, it is, in Barth’s view, always structured by the principles of sameness and difference.

The various points noted above all relate to the problem of articulation between an essentially synchronic analytical logic and historically constituted objects.¹² The challenges they raise for the scholar require first of all greater consideration of the historical dimension. Transfer studies, specifically grounded in historical processes, meet this requirement, while nevertheless posing additional problems.

Transfers and frames of reference

While the comparative method tends to focus on synchrony, inquiry into transfers is clearly situated in a diachronic perspective.¹³ Whatever temporal scale is used, such an inquiry presupposes a process that unfolds over time. In analyzing phenomena of displacement and acquisition, it reconstitutes chains of events. Consequently, it is not based on an assumption of stable units of analysis, but on the study of transformation processes. As in the case of comparison, the contributions of this research trend have been clear 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 relationships between disciplines, artistic practices, the history of writing and economic history.¹⁴ But although they offer responses to questions left unanswered by comparativism, transfer studies also create their own blind spots. For simplicity's sake, we will restrict ourselves to transfers between national units, while keeping in mind that these are structural problems that affect all areas of research into transfers.

(1) The first problem concerns *frames of reference*. All the while focusing on transactions between two poles, a transfer implies a fixed frame of reference including a point

¹² - They have already been presented as difficulties particular to "sociological reasoning" caught between the two extremes of experimentation and historicization by Jean-Claude Passeron, *op. cit.*, esp. pp. 57-88.

¹³ - 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*, 1987, 42-4, pp. 969-992. For additional work contributed through the study of Germano-British transfers, see Rudolf Muhs, Johannes Paulmann and Willibald Steinmetz (eds.), *Aneignung und Abwehr. Interkultureller Transfer zwischen Deutschland und Großbritannien im 19. Jahrhundert*, Bodenheim, Philo, 1998; for the relationships between America and Europe, see Laurier Turgeon, Denys Delâge and Réal Ouellet (eds.), *Transferts culturels et métissages. Amérique / Europe (XVIIe-XXe siècles)*, Laval, Presses universitaires, 1996.

¹⁴ - 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*, 1989, 44-6, pp. 1337-1360; Élisabeth Décultot and Christian Helmreich (eds.), "Le paysage en France et en Allemagne autour de 1800," *Revue germanique internationale*, 1997, 7; the special section compiled by Frédéric Barbier, "Le commerce culturel entre les nations," *Revue de synthèse*, 1988, 1-2, as well as Helga Jeanblanc, *Des Allemands dans l'industrie et le commerce du livre à Paris (1811-1870)*, Paris, Ed. du CNRS, 1994; and lastly Sidney Wilfred Mintz, *Sweetness and Power. The Place of Sugar in Modern History*, New York, Viking, 1985.

of departure and arrival. Any description, 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 placed 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 urbanisation of Great Britain or Russia, etc.

(2) The fixed nature of the points of departure and arrival is reflected in the *invariability of the categories of analysis*. Thus, it can be noted that, as in the case of frames of reference, the categories used to analyze the 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 disciplinary traditions. Even when measuring acculturation gaps and/or resistance to acculturation, these phenomena are evaluated in terms of static models. The significance of the deviation is determined on the basis of categories whose historicity and lability are 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 the self-referential loops. Thus, if on the level of relationships between national units, the initial purpose of the transfer studies was to show that borders were more permeable and undermine the myth of the homogeneity of national units, the result is that the categories of analysis used reintroduce, through a sort of boomerang effect, the national references that were to be put in perspective. The study of exchanges does lead to a richer approach towards the receiving culture: it underlines the 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 convey.

(4) Lastly, there 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.¹⁵ Quite often, however, the situation is more complex, 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”¹⁶ – but may also overlap one another, partially or wholly, being understood that perfect simultaneity is not possible. 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, the crossing figure provides a guide to thinking about such configurations.

An inquiry into intercrossings

In the literal sense, to cross means “to place or fold crosswise one over the other.”¹⁷ 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 an intersection is basic to the very principle of *histoire croisée* that we intend to elaborate here. This implies a series of consequences:

- The notion of an intersection first of all precludes reasoning in terms of individual entities, considered exclusively in themselves, with no external reference point. It 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 each other but also through one another, in terms of relationships, interactions and

¹⁵ - See Katia Dimitriéva and Michel Espagne (eds.), *Philologiques IV. Transferts triangulaires France – Allemagne - Russie*, Paris, Ed. de la Maison des sciences de l’homme, 1996.

¹⁶ - Cases of this type form part of the original research agenda on transfers, but they have hardly been followed up by empirical studies.

¹⁷ - 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.

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.

- Applying *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*. This approach applies both to the crossings as such as well as to their effects and repercussions. It is not limited to an analysis of the point of intersection or a moment of contact, but rather takes into account more broadly the processes that may result therefrom, as suggested moreover by the term “history” in the designation *histoire croisée*.

- To cross is also to crisscross, to interweave, i.e. to cross over several times at a tempo that may be staggered. This (at least partly) process-oriented element is the third fundamental aspect of an inquiry into the phenomenon of intercrossing. It points towards an analysis of resistances, inertias, modifications – in trajectory, form, 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.

- And this brings us to the fourth point: the entities, persons, practices or objects that are intertwined, or affected by the crossing process, do not necessarily remain intact and identical in form.¹⁸ 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.¹⁹ 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 the *histoire croisée*.

¹⁸ - 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*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1984 [1965].

¹⁹ - On intermixing, see Serge Gruzinski, *La pensée métisse*, Paris, Fayard, 1999, especially pp. 33-57.

To investigate relational configurations that are active and dissymmetrical, as well as the labile and evolving nature of things and situations, to scrutinize not only novelty but also change, this is one of the aims of *histoire croisée*. Instead of an analytical model – which would result in a static view of things when our aim is on the contrary to articulate them and place them into movement – it provides an opportunity to develop 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, a weak if not blind spot within comparative approaches and to some extent transfers.²⁰

This relational, interactive and process-oriented acceptance of *histoire croisée* leads 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 be only 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, is shaping 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).

²⁰ - 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.

(1) Intercrossings intrinsic to the object

Intercrossings in this case have an empirical grounding and constitute the object of research, which is therefore conflated, in whole or in part, with a particular crossing, together with the study of its component elements and the manner in which it operates, of its results and consequences. In practice, it is often extremely difficult to dissociate these various aspects and isolate them accurately because the 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 itself.²¹ 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.²² Regardless of the point of departure chosen, intercrossing functions as the basic matrix for construction of the object which, depending on the circumstances, will be more or less closely connected to analysis of the moments preceding or subsequent to the points of intersection properly speaking. In this connection, 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, i.e. 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. For simplicity's sake, let us nevertheless maintain this distinction for the time being. In contrast to the preceding type of intersection that the scholar may try to describe or to understand, while

²¹ -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 (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 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*, 1998, 53-2, pp. 347-359.

²² - 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 19th century, which thus no longer appears as an authentically “English” creation, but 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, XVIII^e- XIX^e siècles,” in Werner and Zimmermann (eds.), *op.cit.*, pp. 73-98.

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 an epistemological standpoint. Thus, for example, a study of the reception of Tacitus' *Germania* in Europe between the 15th and the 20th 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,²³ is already the result of various acts of crossing. And to the extent that it may evolve in the course of the inquiry, the vantage point taken implies new intersections. The scholar is in fact led to account for the way in which his own choice does or does not integrate other perspectives, to cross different potential points of view, and if necessary engage in a process of translation or balancing 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.²⁴ 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, etc. 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,"²⁵ in which objects and points of view are created through intercrossing interactions.

²³ - The expression "point of view" is used here not in a subjective sense, but in the literal meaning of point of observation which determines an angle of view. Max Weber, *On the methodology of the social sciences*, Glencoe, Ill, Free Press, 1949, pp. 81 ff.

²⁴ - Pierre Bourdieu placed great emphasis on this point in his work as a whole. See in particular *Choses dites*, Paris, Ed. de Minuit, 1987, pp. 155 ff.

²⁵ - In the sense used by Anthony Giddens, in *New Rules of Sociological Method*, London, Hutchinson, 1974.

(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. Underlying any intellectual undertaking, 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 sphere of socialization.²⁶ In the case of comparisons and transfer studies, this gives rise to an asymmetry in the relationships between the researcher and his or her various field areas or sources. It would seem evident that a researcher trained in France²⁷ 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 naïve to try to free oneself once and for all from this problem arising in any scientific inquiry.²⁸ One may nevertheless attempt to limit its effects by 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 the methodology and analytical categories – these are all aspects of a reflexive process in which the position of the

²⁶ - This question has been treated in particular by Jocelyne Dakhlia, “‘La culture nébuleuse’ ou l’Islam à l’épreuve de la comparaison,” *Annales HSS*, 2001, 56-6, pp. 1177-1199, here pp. 1186 ff.

²⁷ - 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.

²⁸ - 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 it also is posed 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*, 1995, 3, pp. 487-522, with a description of the state of the research and numerous bibliographical references.

researcher and the definition of the object are susceptible to evolving and 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 scales offers an opportunity to illustrate the way in which empiry and reflexivity can be articulated within a perspective of *histoire croisée*. Such 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 scales 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 scales 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 specificities,²⁹ all three approaches have in common to deal with scales primarily as a problem 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.³⁰ Its most radical followers go so far as bringing all phenomena down to a micro scale by means of an underlying assumption according to which the micro level engenders the macro.³¹ The proposal for "*multiscopique*" approaches developed in France for their part aim 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"

²⁹ - 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 Jacques Revel (dir.), *Jeux d'échelles. La micro-analyse à l'expérience*, Paris, Ed. de l'EHESS / Gallimard / Seuil, 1996, pp. 141-159.

³⁰ - See in particular Carlo Ginzburg and Carlo Poni, "La micro-histoire," *Le débat*, 1989, N°17, pp. 133-136; Giovanni Levi, *Le pouvoir au village. La carrière d'un exorciste dans le Piémont du XVIIe siècle*, Paris, Gallimard, 1989 [1985].

³¹ - Maurizio Gribaudi, "Échelle, pertinence, configuration," in *Jeux d'échelles, op. cit.*, pp. 113-139.

of the global and, at the same time, a "different" version of macro-social realities.³² Finally, *Alltagsgeschichte* bases its choice of the micro and criticism of the macro on an anthropology of social relationships.³³ However, by treating the question of scales 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. Scales however are as much a matter of intellectual choice as they are brought about by the concrete situations particular to the objects studied.

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 1927.³⁴ Its makers act, simultaneously or successively, on different levels: municipal, national, even international, in such a manner that these varying scales are in part constituted through each other. 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.³⁵ 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 empiry and methodology. The focus brought to bear on their couplings and articulations make 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 along 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

³² - Jacques Revel, « Micro-analyse et construction du social », in *Jeux d'échelles...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 15-36, here p. 26.

³³ - Alf Lütke (dir.), *Histoire du quotidien*, Paris, Ed. de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 1994 [1989]; Winfried Schulze (ed.), *Sozialgeschichte, Alltagsgeschichte, Mikro-Historie*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994; Jürgen Schlumbohm (ed.), *Mikrogeschichte - Makrogeschichte: komplementär oder inkommensurabel?*, Göttingen, Wallstein, 1999.

³⁴ - Bénédicte Zimmermann, *La constitution du chômage en Allemagne. Entre professions et territoires*, Paris, Ed. de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 2001.

³⁵ - 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, 2001.

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.³⁶ 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 which, combined, contribute to shaping a European history "à géométrie variable."

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 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 research procedures related to the researcher's choices. In its most demanding version, *histoire croisée* aims to establish connections between both of these realms.

Historicizing categories

Connecting the empirical object to the the research procedures opens the central question of categories and categorization. Given the pitfalls of dissymmetric 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, indeed, for analytical impact of the categories used. Such care can be exercised through systematic attention to the categories used, in the dual sense of categories of action and of analysis.³⁷

³⁶ - For additional developments on the relationships between *histoire croisée* and the transnational dimension, see Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, "Vergleich, Transfer, Verflechtung..." *op. cit.*, pp. 628 ff.

³⁷ - For an example of such work on categories, see in particular Bernard Fradin, Louis Quéré and Jean Widmer (eds.), *L'enquête sur les catégories. De Durkheim à Sacks*, Paris, Ed. de l'EHESS, 1994 (Raisons pratiques, 5); see also the special section "Hommage à Bernard Lepetit. L'usage des catégories," *Annales*, 1997, 52-5, pp. 963-1038.

While any form of reasoning proceeds by categorization, such categorization often remains implicit, even if any comparative research should theoretically explicate the categories used. 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 inquiry protocol. The focus upon them clears a potential path to bring together empiry and reflexivity.

But this consideration of 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 that lead to a break with the intangibility of categories so as to take into account their lability. 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, etc. – 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 play, within each national entity, a multiplicity of categorization schemes particular to the various groups, places and individuals involved in the process: artists, botanical associations, local beautification leagues and societies, neighborhood associations, etc. Only a situated approach enables elucidation of the specific categorization issues, which, while no longer perceptible, still contribute to shaping cultural heritage practices that are currently prevalent in France and Germany for instance.³⁸ A process-oriented approach thus makes it possible to grasp more fully the implications of categorical delineations, in particular through examination of the 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 interpretative schemes and generalization procedures that lead to the institution of a generic category.³⁹ Such a

³⁸ - 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.

³⁹ - 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

categorical approach makes possible, thanks to the introduction of a diachronic dimension, to avoid the influence of implicate 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 19th century, reinforced by the successive crises of different currents of positivism, and accelerated by the calling into question of scientific objectivism,⁴⁰ 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 the 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 allowing a rethinking, in historical time, of the relationships between 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, as well as to the genesis of the configurations of analysis and action. Here too, it is not so much the temporal dimension in itself as the incidence of a multitude of temporalities on the identification of the objects and the construction of the hypotheses 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, descriptive and comprehensive component of any empirical 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.⁴¹

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

cas du chômage et du paysage,” in Daniel Cefaï and Danny Trom (eds.), *Les formes de l'action collective. Mobilisation dans des arènes publiques*, Paris, Ed. de l'EHESS, 2001, pp. 281-315 (Raisons pratiques, 12).

⁴⁰ - See Ian Hacking, *Representing and Intervening. Introductory Topics in the Philosophy of Natural Sciences*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1983; Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, “The Image of Objectivity,” *Representations*, 1992, 40, pp. 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.

⁴¹ - See Alban Bensa, “De la micro-histoire vers une anthropologie critique,” in Jacques Revel (ed.), *Jeux d'échelles*, op.cit., pp. 37-70; Eberhard Berg and Martin Fuchs (eds.), *Kultur, soziale Praxis, Text. Die Krise der ethnographischen Repräsentation*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1993; Danny Trom, “Situationnisme méthodologique et histoire: une approche par induction triangulaire,” in Pascale Laborier and Danny Trom (eds.), *L'historicité de l'action publique*, op. cit.

view, its specificity with respect to other potential 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 which then – and this is one of its decisive characteristics – modifies the elements that are interacting. In this sense, it points towards a “second degree” history.

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 the concrete situations leads to an inductive and pragmatic approach. From an epistemological standpoint, any production of socio-historical knowledge does indeed combine inductive and deductive procedures, but in varying proportions.⁴² 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, as 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, which aims to test the transposition of a research theme and an inquiry protocol from one country to another.⁴³ By illustrating a dissymmetry 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 lead them to revising the initial hypothesis and reformulating the categories structuring it. The principle of induction invoked here thus refers to a process of production of knowledge where the various elements are defined and, if necessary, repositioned in relation to one another. Its pragmatic nature should furthermore

⁴² - For a recent discussion of the question, see Hilary Putnam, *Renewing Philosophy*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1992, *passim*.

⁴³ 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 (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 181-211.

make it possible to restrict the temptation of *a priori* constructions and get around the trap of essentialism of overly static categories.

Pragmatic induction thus implies starting from the object of study and the situations in which it is involved and manifests itself, based on 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"⁴⁴ by rejecting its generic and pre-established nature and integrating a reflection on the principles governing its definition. This 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 the choice 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.⁴⁵ 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 case is carried out through a combination of these various situations.⁴⁶ The emergence, for example, of common forms of concert organization in 19th 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

⁴⁴ - Responding to criticism made by Jacques Revel, "Micro-analyse et construction du social," in Jacques Revel (ed.), *Jeux d'échelles, op. cit.*, pp. 15-36, here p. 25.

⁴⁵ - Jean-Claude Passeron (*op.cit.*, esp. pp. 85-88 and 368-370) has gone farthest 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.

⁴⁶ - 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*, 1997, 38, pp. 37-66. For an attempt at a transposition into history, see Bénédicte Zimmermann, *La constitution du chômage, op. cit.* On the relation between case study and generalization see Jean-Claude Passeron and Jacques Revel (eds), *Penser par cas*, Paris, EHESS, 2005

agent, arise in fact 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, sometimes contradictory, of actors to which they respond while at the same time structuring them.⁴⁷ Similarly, pragmatic induction does not imply restricting oneself to short action time frames without regard for the long term. On the contrary, the long time of the structures is combined to 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,⁴⁸ in a relationship of reciprocal interferences between structures and action. However, such structuring is not so much determined by the necessity of an irreversible process as by the intercrossing within action of constraints and resources that are in part structurally given and in part tied to the contingency of the situations.⁴⁹ Thus, for example, most of our institutions stem from a dual grounding, both within a structurally long history that impacts their logic and functioning and in singular contexts of action that play a decisive role in bringing them about and transforming them.⁵⁰ 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 and enabling moments of institutional innovation. Mindful of both short-term contexts of action and the structural conditions that make it possible, such an approach opens up new perspectives for analyzing change and stability at the same time.

⁴⁷ - See Hans-Erich Bödeker, Patrice Veit and Michael Werner (eds.), *Concerts et publics. Mutations de la vie musicale 1789-1914: France, Allemagne, Grande-Bretagne*, Paris, Ed. de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 2002.

⁴⁸ - See in particular on this point Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society. Outline of the Theory of Structuration*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1984.

⁴⁹ - 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*, 1992, Vol. 98, N°1, pp. 1-29.

⁵⁰ - 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.

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.⁵¹ By way of an 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 associated 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.

The *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 in the meantime been 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," become fluid, difficult to use without caution, not to mention complex notions such as *Historismus* and its translations as historicism, *historicisme*, *istorismo*, etc., each of which relates to different perceptions, traditions and methodologies.⁵² Consequently, the scholar today is likely to look upon his or

⁵¹ - For the 19th 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.

⁵² - On the epistemological implications of the question, see Alexandre Escudier, "Epistémologies croisées? L'impossible lecture des théoriciens allemands de l'histoire en France autour de 1900," in Werner and Zimmermann, (eds.) *op. cit.*, pp. 139-177. For a presentation of the problem in the context of a German

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 specular relationships. On the contrary, it aims to utilize the intercrossing of perspectives and shifts in points of view in order to produce specific knowledge effects. Starting from the divergences between 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.⁵³ The reflexivity to which it leads is not empty formalism, but rather a relational field that generates meaning.

While it does not lead to historical relativism⁵⁴, neither does *histoire croisée* result in a logic of infinite historical regression. Historicization should not be confused here with a contextualization 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 towards an analysis of

discussion, see Otto Gerhard Oexle, *Geschichtswissenschaft im Zeichen des Historismus*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996.

⁵³ - 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 crossed history, 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 hypothesis that the configuration of the cross and the intellectual operation corresponding thereto lead to a logic that precisely on the basis of semantic interactions between situated positions, produces meaning. Viewed from this perspective, crossing is among the social constructions that produces specific forms of knowledge. See Ian Hacking, *The Social Construction of What?*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1999, especially pp. 36-59.

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

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 procedures. It functions as an active principle in which the dynamics of the inquiry unfolds in accordance with a logic of interactions where the various elements are constituted in relation to or through each other. 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 linking 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 stemming from the concept of intercrossing, *histoire croisée* also results in the rethinking of the fundamental tension between logical operations of production of 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 outlined leads to the opening of new lines of inquiry capable of changing the conditions under which intellectual experience is carried out.