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There is no single answer to the question: What is intellectual history? Commenting in the mid-1980s on two recent volumes dedicated to the sub-discipline's methods and perspectives, John Pocock wryly remarked: "I recommend reading them, but after doing so myself, I am persuaded that whatever 'intellectual history' is, and whatever 'the history of ideas' may be, I am not engaged in doing either of them." In the United States, in many respects the heartland of intellectual history, the scholarly community has grappled with the ambiguous relationship of "intellectual history" to "the history of ideas" for almost a century. The term "intellectual history", coined by James Harvey Robinson at the beginning of the twentieth century, was adopted by a variety of scholars who, mostly focussed on a well-defined period of time, either favoured a functionalist conception of ideas as epiphenomenal or preferred a more autonomous yet still contextualist understanding of historical thought. Arthur O. Lovejoy, who co-founded the History of Ideas Club in 1923, advanced the alternative approach, setting out to trace the meanings of essentially unchanging, molecule-like "unit-ideas" from ancient to modern times without any sustained contextualization. Since then, both terms have either been used interchangeably or they have been kept separate to refer to distinct scholarly traditions, usually differentiating between the "external" contextualist approach of "intellectual history" and the "internal" approach of "the history of ideas". The confusion has been compounded by the diversity of attempts to define key analytical terms such as "idea" and "concept".

In the broadest sense, intellectual history has been linked to a variety of scholarly fields. The most important ones are the history of philosophy, the philosophy of history, the history of science, the history of literature, the history of art, discourse history, conceptual history, the history of political thought, the history of ideologies, the history of political cultures (Politische Kulturforschung), the cultural history of politics (Kulturgeschichte des Politischen), the history of intellectuals, the history of mentalities (histoire des mentalités), the history of the book, media history, and visual history. The issue as to where to draw the line between intellectual history and cultural history has been particularly fiercely contested.
Methodological debates on intellectual history have usually been centred on six critical issues. First, the purpose of intellectual history: Should scholars in the field primarily aim to historicize past thought, largely confining themselves to revisiting and reconstituting “archives” of ideas, or should they also discuss topical concerns in a future-oriented “laboratory” of Ideenpolitik, engaging in intellectual history as a way of making politics?[9] Second, and related to the first issue, the existence of perennial questions: Can intellectual historians legitimately explore, without falling into the trap of anachronism, the ways in which thinkers, from Plato to Pareto, dealt with issues that are taken to have a timeless quality and are believed to transcend historical periods? Third, the explanation of intellectual transmutations: How are intellectual historians to account for changing ideas over time? What strategies can they adopt to unravel the complex relationship between intellectual and social change? And how are they to approach the interplay between structure and agency vis-à-vis ideational modifications? Fourth, the interrelation of text and context, often referred to, if somewhat misleadingly, as the inside-outside, or internal-external, relation: How should intellectual historians situate ideas that are traceable in textual utterances, in the discursive web of other texts as well as in the context of social structures, cultural milieus, political systems and institutions? Fifth, the objects of historical inquiry: Should intellectual historians primarily investigate ideas, concepts, ideologies or “languages”? Should they primarily deal with one or two individuals, or should they attend to larger groups of people, perhaps even “collectives of thought”? Should they focus on “great thinkers” and/or “intellectuals” (a notoriously contested term)[10] or should they concentrate on other, potentially less esoteric agents of thought, including the supposedly “inarticulate masses”? Sixth, and related to the former issue, the source-base: Should intellectual historians confine themselves to textual utterances (in the stricter sense of the word) or should they stretch the limits of their field and consult visual and audible material as well – and if so, how?

**Intellectual History: A Field of Elusive Boundaries**

What complicates the mapping of the sub-discipline’s precincts is a bundle of overlapping issues. To begin with, contributions to the field of intellectual history have been made by a wide array of scholars – these hailing from different national traditions, grounded in varying academic subjects, and employing diverse methodological approaches. Moreover, communication between these various scholars has often proven rather limited. For instance, the numerous debates on intellectual history in American academia went largely unnoticed in Germany until very recently.[11] Even the occasional reference to Arthur O. Lovejoy in German works may sometimes do more to obscure American traditions of intellectual history than illuminate them.[12] By contrast, traditions of Geistesgeschichte and Ideengeschichte did find their way into American academia, primarily through the conduit of German émigrés such as Ernst Cassirer, Peter Gay, Felix Gilbert, George Mosse, Fritz Stern and Leo Strauss.

To be sure, there have also been sustained attempts to mediate between the Cambridge School of intellectual history and the German history of concepts (Begriffsgeschichte).[13] Yet, some concessions notwithstanding, the schools’ main protagonists proved fairly reluctant to buy into one another’s analytical
language and tended to stress methodological differences instead.[14] Moreover, despite the great attention that the Cambridge School has received from German historians and political scientists,[15] its approaches have been rarely deployed in German-speaking historical writing and are largely conspicuous by their absence from contemporary history in particular.[16] Ultimately, while attracting the attention of five discussion forums in major Anglo-American journals, Mark Bevir's *Logic of the History of Ideas* – one of the salient books in the last few decades on the method of intellectual history – has barely made an impact in Germany.[17]

Furthermore, it is not only national parochialism[18] but subject-specific deformations (in the sense of *déformations professionnelles*) which have created multiple parallel universes that go by the name of intellectual history or one of its conceptual cognates. The frequently invoked objective of interdisciplinarity – certainly one of the most popular commonplaces of the field – has often bumped up against disciplinary boundaries and institutional barriers. Whether one delves into the writings of philosophers, historians, political scientists, sociologists or literary critics, one will encounter very different notions of intellectual history.[19]

Subject-specific peculiarities feed diverse methodological allegiances, even if there is considerable transdisciplinary crossover. While for obvious reasons hermeneutics still looms large in the differing worlds of intellectual history, still hotly debated are the intricacies of hermeneutical *traditions*, whether in the vein of Wilhelm Dilthey, R.G. Collingwood, Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer or Paul Ricoeur. Some scholars have, for example, revisited Collingwood’s much criticized notion of "re-enactment",[20] while others, informed by "folk-psychological" frameworks of beliefs, desires and intentions, rediscovered empathy as a way of understanding and explaining historical agency.[21]

Intellectual historians have also sought methodological inspiration from philosophers of language: Ludwig Wittgenstein, John Austin, W.V. Quine and Donald Davidson provided vital insights into the production of meaning and suggested imaginative ways of (radical) interpretation that proved beneficial to several exponents of the field. Others, however, have primarily drawn on Karl Mannheim’s sociology of knowledge and his studies on ideologies and styles of thought; or they have been guided by Thomas S. Kuhn’s approach to the history of science, which has set the tone for many works of intellectual history since publication of his *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* in 1962. Clifford Geertz’s *Interpretive Theory of Culture* proved influential from the following decade on, as did Hayden White’s *Tropics of Discourse*, which shed light on the rhetorical and "poetic" nature of (historical) scholarship. Additionally, despite Michel Foucault’s fierce criticism of what he took to be the history of ideas, his discourse analysis and archaeology of knowledge have also entered the intellectual history discussion in certain quarters. By contrast, Niklas Luhmann’s complex reflections on the evolution of ideas and the correlation between semantic traditions and social structures still await historians brave enough to translate his abstract theory into actual practice.[22]

Finally, for better or for worse, programmatic statements and methodological elaborations tend to vary from actual practice. While Arthur O. Lovejoy has become a convenient whipping boy within and beyond the field – because he was
careless or daring enough to posit the timeless existence of "unit-ideas" – the actual products of his scholarship usually received better reviews.[23] Needless to say, as a reaction to the popular Lovejoy bashing, various scholars tried to salvage the philosopher's legacy of searching for historical intelligibility and offered interpretations to which a less idealist audience might be more receptive.[24] By contrast, while Reinhart Koselleck's reflections on the method of Begriffsgeschichte have attracted staunch, if not uncritical, followers within and beyond German academia, their translation into practice prompted some trenchant criticism. The multi-volume encyclopedia of "historical basic concepts" (Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe) seemed, in part, suspiciously close to an "elitist" history of ideas long thought to be dead.

**Texts, Contexts, Meanings and Beliefs: Approaches to Intellectual History**

Much has been written on the Cambridge School of Intellectual History, not least by its leading exponents, who seem to have entered a phase of self-memorialization. With the awe-inspiring eloquence that brought him many admirers, Quentin Skinner has given countless interviews in the last fifteen years, recalling his own intellectual socialization and constructing a compelling narrative of the School's evolution. Apparently it all started in the 1960s. Peter Laslett, a fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, published his pathbreaking edition of John Locke's *Two Treatises of Government* in 1960, an edition which placed the classic firmly in the historical context preceding the Glorious Revolution of 1688, thereby altering the treatises' interpretation for generations to come (they had traditionally been viewed as a celebration of the Revolution).[25] John Pocock published his first methodological inquiries into the history of political thought in 1962 as part of an important series founded and co-edited by Laslett.[26] John Dunn, a fellow of King's College, Cambridge, followed suit with reflections on the "identity" of the history of ideas, which appeared in 1968 and made the case for a fundamental revision of the history of philosophy in general and the history of political thought in particular. Mocking the "bloodlessness" and unhistorical nature of a field preoccupied with Platonic ideas and reified reconstructions of "great books", Dunn argued in favour of a history of thought that rendered thinking a "social activity" and that investigated the question as to what thinkers were "doing" in saying things, that is, when they engaged in "speech acts" (John Austin) in a particular context at a particular time.[27]

Echoing Dunn's plea for a proper historical contextualization of ideas, Skinner published an article in *History & Theory* in 1969 that was to provide intellectual historians with a key reference point in the field's methodological debates.[28] Usually characterized as "iconoclastic"[29], Skinner's article sought to defend the autonomy of ideas against, on the one hand, the Namierite fashion of dismissing world-views as nothing but claptrap with disguised vested interests, and, on the other, Marxist critiques of ideology, which conceived ideas as straightforwardly based on socio-economic structures. More importantly, however, Skinner made a case for historicizing philosophical texts and heaped scorn on various "anachronistic mythologies" that he exposed in the "canonical" practice of intellectual historians. For instance, he criticized the mythology of coherence that he thought to be generated by synoptic profiles of thinkers, this rendering their
thoughts much more consistent than they actually were. Indeed, it is not least the intricate meanderings of Skinner's own work that underline the appositeness of his critique. After all, his recent reflections on "classical republicanism" and a "third concept of liberty" make for an astonishingly straightforward attempt to influence present ways of thinking – quite different from some of his earlier writings, which gained him a reputation for antiquarian scholarship.

What others dismissed as antiquarianism was above all a scathing critique of the convention of approaching "great thinkers" with a particular range of supposedly "abiding questions" (e.g. "Why should I obey the state?") and tapping into "classic texts" as a never-ending source of "dateless wisdom" encased in purportedly "perennial" ideas. By contrast, Skinner heeded Collingwood's advice that questions as well as answers were continually changing and that to understand a text historians had to see it as an attempt to resolve a specific problem. Furthermore, Skinner took from Wittgenstein the view that historians should not seek to unravel the general semantic meanings of words but should rather investigate their concrete linguistic and hermeneutic meanings; that is, historians should explore the specific usages of words in specific contexts and above all the actual point of, and intention behind, their usages in the context of particular language games. To refine his methodological tools, Skinner also drew on Austin's theory of speech acts, which enjoyed immense popularity in the scholarly community of the 1960s and 1970s. In particular, he borrowed that crucial notion of the illocutionary act, which was at the heart of Austin's elaborations on "how to do things with words" and which nicely dovetailed with Wittgenstein's dictum "words are also deeds.

Skinner, to put it differently, urged his colleagues to focus their studies on authorial intentions, i.e. the intended illocutionary force of texts, and he geared historians towards the question as to what thinkers were doing in articulating ideas. Not dissimilar to Koselleck's understanding of concepts, Skinner conceived of ideas as polemical tools and rhetorical weapons purposefully employed in battles of legitimization. He argued that texts in political and social philosophy should primarily be read as "moves" and interventions through which authors supported or criticized, commended or condemned the "actions" of other authors, particular institutions, or certain states of affairs. Potential entrapments in the hermeneutic circle aside, Skinner's intentionalism became the basso continuo running through his methodological articles in the decades to follow, when he had to make himself heard over a polyphonic choir performing variations on William Wimsatt's and Monroe Beardsley's famed theme of the "intentional fallacy" – whether the "composer's" name be Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, or Jacques Derrida.

Intentionalism is, of course, only one aspect of Skinner's methodology. It is with good reason that his monograph series is called "ideas in context" (more on this in the following section). Skinner argued that historians needed to lay bare the relevant linguistic conventions, such as genres and rhetorical traditions, which a writer must follow to reach his target audience in the market of opinions. For instance, the more broadly a positively evaluative term was taken to be applicable, the wider the range of actions a writer could hope to legitimize. If
historians succeeded in recreating the linguistic context, Skinner claimed, they could eventually "read off" what a writer was doing.[36]

Scrutiny of the linguistic context, however, has featured still more prominently in the work of Skinner's colleague John Pocock. Whether he used the terms "paradigm", "discourse" or "language" (his analytical framework was never geared towards linguistic consistency), Pocock has placed more emphasis than Skinner on the constraining power of language. Indeed, he has been more of a structuralist historian than his supposed alter ego in Cambridge. As he pointed out in a widely read article published in 1987, he was mainly interested in studying "languages in which utterances were performed, rather than the utterances which were performed in them", which meant that the examination of "idioms, rhetorics, specialized vocabularies and grammars" that transcended the writings of one particular author took priority over the production of intellectual biographies so fashionable these days.[37]

Instead of engaging the vast literature of critical assessments of the Cambridge School,[38] I will be using the remainder of this section to discuss, if only very briefly, approaches to intellectual history that have been advanced by two very different scholars: Mark Bevir and Dominick LaCapra. Informed by post-analytic philosophy – and hence no easy read for historians unfamiliar with the philosophical discipline – Bevir's *Logic of the History of Ideas*, published in 1999, provides a normative second-order study of intellectual history and the human sciences in general, exploring key concepts of the field such as tradition, meaning and belief. As Bevir explained in one of the numerous debates on his book, the *Logic* may also be read as an attempt to put the approach of the Cambridge School on a surer philosophical footing.[39] Taking his cue from the philosophical strands of "holism", "postfoundationalism" and "folk psychology", and drawing on philosophies of mind, language and action as developed by Wittgenstein, Quine and Davidson, Bevir maintains that ideas cannot have any innate meanings but possess meaning only in relation to agents, which alone are able to provide the "background theories" that lend meaning to ideas. Therefore, ideas only exist as beliefs, which historians are to ascribe to people while being governed by logical presumptions in favour of sincere, conscious and rational beliefs – "rational" being defined as "consistent". These beliefs are, moreover, part of wider "webs of belief" which arise against the background of intellectual and social traditions. "webs of belief" is one of the *Logic*s pivotal terms, one which Bevir borrows from Quine and Ullian's classic introduction to the study of rational belief,[40] and which is, in fact, at the heart of Bevir's understanding of intellectual history as the history of beliefs.

While some historians may shrug their shoulders, wondering at the necessity to write a dense three-hundred-page account of this conception of intellectual history (let alone hundreds of pages of comments and "replies to critics"), Bevir has doubtless resolved various philosophical problems that marked Skinner's and Pocock's contextualism. It would go beyond the scope of this article to expound Bevir's analytical framework of "weak intentionalism" and "procedural individualism", which relates hermeneutic meanings to the expressed beliefs of individual agents (whether authors or readers) and escapes the typical pitfalls of historical reasoning that either emerge from assumptions of *a priori* intentions
un-mediated through language or that follow from notions of structuralism which imply mind-independent meanings. Suffice it to say that the *Logic* not only offers crucial insights into the generation of meaning and the complex inner workings of "webs of belief", but also provides strategies to explain intellectual change through the exploration of "dilemmas" that are triggered by the (mediated) appropriation of new experiences or forms of reasoning.

If Skinner and Pocock may be said to have offered new methodological avenues and a useful heuristic for intellectual historians, and if Bevir may be credited with providing the field with a sound philosophical basis, then Dominick LaCapra stands out as the master of reflection. He is the great "problematizer", fighting the evils of reductionism. Nothing is simple, everything is complex. LaCapra's goal is to complicate things. One of the most distinguished exponents of the field, he has taught intellectual history at Cornell University for more than four decades. His work is greatly indebted to psychoanalysis, philosophy and literary theory, and is replete with appropriations of Sigmund Freud, Martin Heidegger, Mikhail Bakhtin and Jacques Derrida. It is not always easy, therefore, to follow the circuitous meanderings of his reflections.[41] In this article I will focus on two issues: the relation of text and context, and the practice of reading.

One of LaCapra's anti-reductionist missions is to counter simplistic strategies of contextualization. Aimed at practices he detects in the work of social and cultural historians, he cautions not to hypostatize the context and render it a "dominant structure saturating the text with a certain meaning". The context itself, he argues, is "a text of sorts".[42] "Meaning", he claims, "is indeed context-bound, but context is not itself bound in any simple or unproblematic way". Instead, he points to the inter-textual qualities of contexts. Moreover, he finds fault with contextualist practices of intellectual historians who use "simple documentary texts" or "simplistic interpretations" thereof in order to constitute a context to which they subject, and make conform, "complex texts".[43] Obviously, LaCapra distinguishes various types of texts: On the one hand there are texts "especially valuable to think with" – that is, complex "worklike" texts which "actively invite continual self-questioning" and are "particularly effective in engaging critical processes", potentially unleashing "transformative forces"; on the other hand, there are texts merely "worth thinking about" – that is, documentary texts which are symptomatic of and perpetuate existing structures of thought (LaCapra speaks of "ideologies").[44] This distinction makes LaCapra a supporter of "canon formation", even though the contours of his "self-questioning" canon never really clarify themselves.

There are not only different kinds of texts, however, but also, and more importantly, different techniques of reading (LaCapra speaks of "protocols"): first, "the denial or repression of reading", which follows from conventional and "self-sufficient research paradigms" and relegates any text to the status of symptomatic documents; second, the synoptic reading, which offers condensed content analyses characterized by paraphrases and concise theme-centred reconstructions of arguments and contexts – a method LaCapra sees exemplified, in its most sophisticated form, in the acclaimed works of Steven E. Aschheim and Martin Jay; third, the deconstructive reading, which eschews synoptic, content-oriented reductionisms, decentres authorial agency, and
uncovers "internal contestations" in texts; fourth, the redemptive reading, which transcends tensions in a harmonizing, neo-Hegelian fashion, and endows even traumatic experiences with meaning; and fifth, the dialogic reading, which combines the reconstruction of texts as "networks of resistances" and a self-critical "dialogic exchange" with them – the method LaCapra has developed, reworked, and tirelessly propagated over the last thirty years. This is the question that LaCapra asks his colleagues to consider when approaching texts. Intellectual history should not only historicize past texts; it should also actively engage and "carry" them into the present as a critical form of "political intervention".

**Journals, Networks and Monograph Series: The Revival of Intellectual History**

In articles on intellectual history it has become something of a commonplace to either bemoan its marginal status or hail its surprising renaissance. In the United States the 1950s are typically viewed as the golden age of this academic field, while the 1970s are usually regarded as its nadir. The rise of social history caused headaches among intellectual historians who often felt attacked and marginalised from the mid-1960s onward. The momentum seemed to shift again in wake of the linguistic and cultural turn that reached the mainstream of American historical writing in the late 1980s. Since then, intellectual history has indeed been gathering force.

A glance at the relevant journals, academic networks and monograph series may be indicative of this revival. To begin with, the annual publication of the *Intellectual History Newsletter*, launched in 1979, at times resembled a collection of notes from the academic underground, and the advance of self-publishing technology did little to dispel the impression of a student newspaper. The *Newsletter* was the platform of the Intellectual History Group founded two years earlier at a conference dedicated to the "tasks and opportunities of American intellectual history". As the editors of the conference volume freely admitted, the gathering was a crisis meeting scheduled in the midst of a siege. The rhetoric used by the editors of the successor journal *Modern Intellectual History* could hardly be more different. In their first editorial from 2004, the editors praised the reemergence of intellectual history as an expanded interdisciplinary enterprise. Published with Cambridge University Press, the trimester journal claims to be the first of its kind, implicitly denying the legacy of its samizdat-like predecessor.

In 2007 the *Intellectual History Review* appeared for the first time, inviting articles on "intellectual work in social, cultural and historical context". While *Modern Intellectual History* is primarily devoted to the period from the mid-seventeenth century to the present, the *Intellectual History Review* rarely publishes anything that post-dates the Enlightenment. Preceded by the newsletter *Intellectual News*, the *Review* also serves as the publishing outlet of the International Society for Intellectual History (ISIH) which was founded in London in 1994. The Society aims to foster and coordinate initiatives of key institutions in the academic field, drawing support from the *Journal of the*
History of Ideas (the 70-year-old American flagship of the discipline) as well as having ties to the Herzog August Library in Wolfenbüttel, Germany. This research centre is not only engaged in organizing conferences on intellectual history and preparing an International Dictionary of Intellectual Historians that was initiated by the ISIH. In cooperation with the German Literature Archive in Marbach and the Foundation of Weimar Classics, it also launched the journal *Zeitschrift für Ideengeschichte* in 2007. In its objective of transcending disciplinary boundaries, the Zeitschrift largely follows the example of its nominal equivalent in the U.S., the *Journal of the History of Ideas*. Yet, as it runs a regular section called "think-image" (Denkbild), it seems more committed than its older sibling to embracing visual history as an integral part of its profile.

The *Zeitschrift für Ideengeschichte* no doubt testifies to the rise of a multifaceted intellectual history in German academia. Its profile is both thematically and methodologically broader than the two journals that previously defined the field in terms of academic periodicals: the *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, founded in 1923, which has usually been preoccupied with literary criticism, whereas the *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte*, founded in 1948 and associated with the Society for Intellectual History (Gesellschaft für Geistesgeschichte), has been mainly concerned with the history of religion, Jewish intellectual history, and studies informed by Hans-Joachim Schoeps' *Zeitgeist* approach (which tried to capture the "spirit of the age"), even though the journal's purview has certainly expanded in recent years.

That intellectual history has gained a more prominent position in the field of German academia may also be gleaned from the attention drawn to it by Germany's premier journals of historical scholarship. Both the *Historische Zeitschrift* and *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* – the latter of which has traditionally been rather sceptical towards the ethereal sub-discipline – have been discussing new approaches to intellectual history in the last ten years. Additionally, prompted by the recent publication of important studies on the subject, the British periodical *German History* recently devoted a discussion forum to new perspectives on the intellectual history of West Germany. More remarkable still is the new monograph series *Ordnungssysteme*, which is geared towards a methodological renewal of *Ideengeschichte* and focusses on the interplay between intellectual, political and social phenomena. It is not committed to any unitary approach, but leaves it largely to its authors to pursue new avenues. While some of them have followed the increasingly popular trend of intellectual biographies, others have successfully combined intellectual history with Pierre Bourdieu's methodological toolkit, or have deployed Ludwik Fleck's conceptual framework, which revolves around "styles" and "collectives of thought" (Denkstile and Denkkollektive).

The *Ordnungssysteme* series has provided a publishing outlet for the Tübingen-based "Westernization" project as well as for a major research programme on "approaches to a new intellectual history". The programme comprised thirty-one projects and was funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG) between 1997 and 2003. Taking its cue from Max Weber's oft-quoted notion of ideas and world views as a "moving force" (Weichensteller)
behind interests and social action, the programme placed much emphasis on
the question of the social impact and diffusion of ideas – ideas being loosely
defined as "imagined formations" (gedachte Ordnungen) of a social and political
order. The authors’ effort to anchor ideas in concrete socio-cultural milieus is
comparable to the "social history of American thought" advanced by Merle Curti
from the 1940s onward and to the "social history of ideas" discussed in
America by Peter Gay and Robert Darnton from the late 1960s on. Bourdieu
has featured less prominently in American intellectual history, though, despite
attempts at transdisciplinary and transnational mediation by historians like Roger
Chartier, whose own reflections on the circulation of texts, the practice of
reading, and the production of representations have been widely discussed in
the U.S. While, in terms of methodology, the international impact of both the
monograph series and the collaborative research programme may appear rather
limited, they are a clear milestone in the development of the sub-discipline in
Germany, where its reputation had long been tainted by (at times fairly
stereotypical) notions of Friedrich Meinecke’s Ideengeschichte or Wilhelm
Dilthey’s and Ernst Cassirer’s Geistesgeschichte.

Tackling ideas in their historical contexts rather than treating them as
free-floating and disembodied entities marked by a timeless quality – this also
lies at the heart of the monograph series Ideas in Context, launched by
Cambridge University Press in 1984. The Ideas in Context series is sometimes
seen as exerting a defining influence on the entire field of British intellectual
history – and beyond. The series’ first volume was largely an Anglo-American
cooproduction and derived from a series of lectures given at the Johns Hopkins
University in Baltimore, a hub of intellectual history in the United States.
Johns Hopkins is not only home to major exponents of the so-called Cambridge
School (geographically somewhat counterintuitive), but also the cradle of its
intellectually rather distant relatives: the Journal of the History of Ideas and the
still older History of Ideas Club. The series has hitherto launched more than
ninety monographs, amounting to a total sales figure of over 170,000 copies.
This figure has, moreover, been far exceeded by the sales success of the
student-oriented series Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought,
which has complemented the renowned monograph series since 1988,
introducing classic and not-so-classic texts in political philosophy to the English-
speaking mass market of higher education.

**Spaces and Emotions: Some Future Perspectives on Intellectual History**

While in the British system of higher education it has become increasingly
common, though still not very popular, to work out in minute detail what one's
own university will hopefully look like twenty years from now, I will resist the
temptation to formulate any full-fledged schemes for the future of a
sub-discipline. Instead, I will use this brief conclusion to sketch out two areas of
investigation that may hold some promise for intellectual historians: spatial
history and the history of emotions.

Intellectual history, I submit, would benefit from a more sustained attempt to
engage recent debates on spatial history. Many significant studies have been
published on the history of geographical imaginations – investigations, for example, of "the West", "the East", "Europe" and "Central Europe" – some of them with an eye to the spatialization of political thought and the deployment of spatial images in political discourse. Intellectual historians, however, have rarely sought advice on methodological issues from colleagues in the Geography Department or from sociologists with a focus on spatial theory, such as Henri Lefebvre.\[76\] The booming field of cultural and human geography has a lot to offer to intellectual historians who may find valuable inspiration in the studies of John A. Agnew, Denis Cosgrove, Stephen Daniels, James S. Duncan, Derek Gregory, David Harvey, Doreen Massey and Yi-Fu Tuan.\[77\] A transfer of knowledge from geographers to intellectual historians could, among other things, help broaden the source-base of the field, providing the necessary tools to read and deconstruct historical maps. Despite the criticism his approach has attracted in recent years, Brian Harley’s reflections on the deconstruction of maps still offer a suitable starting point.\[78\]

Furthermore, I believe that intellectual history might profit from recent discussions on the history of emotions. In this respect A. Dirk Moses’ study on *German Intellectuals and the Nazi Past* is of particular interest. Moses postulates a binary opposition within the "emotional and intellectual economy" of what he calls the "45ers" – that "key generation of postwar German intellectual history" which has received much attention in recent scholarship. Moses identifies two political languages in the discourse of "45ers": "integrative republicanism" and "redemptive republicanism". Without going into detail here, let it suffice to say that he relates this political dualism to distinct patterns of emotional reactions to the Nazi past, such as particular kinds of "stigma management", ways of coping with the "moral contamination" of Germany, and a variety of "displacement strategies".\[79\] While there are problems with Moses’ central argument,\[80\] he has shown a suggestive way of taking on the enormous challenge of explaining political beliefs.\[81\]

Despite the efforts of Bevir and LaCapra, intellectual historians have been wary of resorting to psychological patterns of explanation; and some of the tendencies of psychohistory that evolved in the 1970s certainly give pause for thought.\[82\] However, there is something unsatisfying about a kind of intellectual history that keeps a close eye on discourses while defying any sustained consideration of the psychological workings of the mind, which are, after all, part of the complex relationship between thought and language. No wonder that Lucien Febvre’s notion of the "mental equipment" (*outilage mental*) was not confined to linguistic structures but also comprised structures of affectivity – emotions, in other words.\[83\] To get a grip on emotions, intellectual historians may find William M. Reddy’s concept of "emotives" useful, which he modelled on Austin’s speech-act theory and set in the context of Quine and Davidson’s interpretive framework of translation.\[84\] If one’s dissatisfaction with the linguistic turn is even greater, one might wish to explore the physical dimension of emotions – that is, their "habitualization" and "materialization" in "bodily techniques" and practices.\[85\] Whatever approach one chooses, it seems vital to conceive communicative spaces of the past not merely as constituted by the limits of what could be thought, said and done\[86\] but as defined by the limits of
what could be felt – at a particular time, in a particular place.\[87]\]

If nothing else, the plethora of approaches to intellectual history testify to the very elusiveness of the field. It is probably easier to say what today's intellectual history is not, or at least ought not to be, than to make any definitive statement about its precincts. Gone are the days when intellectual historians tackled monstrous beasts such as "the German mind" or "the American character"; and they no longer chase the Hegelian World Spirit (\textit{Weltgeist}) or pursue purportedly unchanging, metaphysically pure ideas in their journey through time. The hikes from one towering mountaintop to the other – to evoke Friedrich Meinecke's oft-quoted metaphor\[88]\ – have largely fallen out of fashion. Overall, the source-base has become broader, the methodology used has become more sophisticated, and the questions asked have become more specific. It also seems as if intellectual historians have become more amenable to methods and issues of transnational history – as have so many other groupings in the historical community.\[89]\ These observations of scholarly progress may sound Whiggish, but it is hard to deny that today's intellectual history looks much different from some of its ancestors.\[90]\ It goes without saying, of course, that there still exist largely unexplored shores: Many intellectual historians still shy away from drawing on images, sounds or built environments to create a fuller picture of intellectual landscapes.\[91]\ If more do so in future, the boundaries of the academic field will become even fuzzier than they already are. Go for it!

Footnotes

1. ↑ This article is based on research conducted as a Feodor Lynen Research Fellow at Saint Louis University, Missouri, U.S.A. I am indebted to Frank Lorenz Müller (St Andrews) for his comments and to the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation for the award of the fellowship.
6. ↑ A similar ambiguity has marked the usage of the terms \textit{Geistesgeschichte} and \textit{Ideengeschichte}.
9. ↑ I borrow the distinction between "the archive" and "the laboratory" from Herfried Münkler, Politische Ideengeschichte, in: id. (ed.), Politikwissenschaft. Ein Grundkurs, Reinbek bei Hamburg 2003, pp. 103-131, here pp. 103-104; for a similar approach that distinguishes between "the archive" and "the arsenal", see Marcus Llanque, Politische Ideengeschichte. Ein Gewebe politischer Diskurse, München/Wien 2008, pp. 1-3; see also Marcus Llanque, Geschichte politischen Denkens oder

10. ↑ For the most plausible suggestion as to how to define an "intellectual" see Stefan Collini, Absent Minds. Intellectuals in Britain, Oxford 2006.


16. ↑ The Cambridge School has, of course, most extensively published on early modern history, but its approaches are principally not limited to this period.


19. ↑ For an account of the multifaceted nature of the field, which is littered with names of key figures, see the book by the former editor of the Journal of the History of Ideas Donald R. Kelley, The Descent of Ideas. The History of Intellectual History, Aldershot 2002; see also Dorschel, Ideengeschichte.


43. LaCapra, Reading Exemplars, p. 117.
44. ↑ LaCapra, Canons, Texts, and Contexts, pp. 24-25; see also id., Rethinking Intellectual History and Reading Texts, in: LaCapra/Kaplan (eds.), Modern European Intellectual History, also in: LaCapra, Rethinking Intellectual History – Texts, Contexts, Language, pp. 23-71, here pp. 29-33.


46. ↑ LaCapra, History, Reading, and Critical Theory, p. 67.

47. ↑ LaCapra, Rethinking Intellectual History and Reading Texts, p. 63; see also id., Canons, Texts, and Contexts, pp. 32-41.


61. ↑ See, for instance, Marcus M. Payk, Der Geist der Demokratie. Intellektuelle Orientierungsversuche im Feuilleton der frühen Bundesrepublik: Karl Korn und Peter de Mendelssohn, München 2008.

62. ↑ See above all the model study by Morten Reitmayer, Elite. Sozialgeschichte einer politisch-gesellschaftlichen Idee in der frühen Bundesrepublik, München 2009; for a helpful introduction to Bourdieu that may be of interest to intellectual historians see Olaf Blaschke/Lutz Raphael, Im Kampf...


70. † For an attempt to familiarize an American audience with French approaches to intellectual history, from the days of Lucien Febvre onward, see Roger Chartier, Intellectual History or Sociocultural History? The French Trajectories, in: LaCapra/Kaplan (eds.), Modern European Intellectual History, pp. 13-46.


See, for instance, the appraisals in: Richard Whatmore/Brian Young (eds.), Palgrave Advances in Intellectual History, Basingstoke/New York 2006.

73. † Rorty/Shneewind/Skinner (eds.), Philosophy in History.


75. † See the useful article by CUP executive director Richard Fisher, "How To Do Things With Books". Quentin Skinner and the Dissemination of Ideas, in: History of European Ideas 35 (2009), pp. 276-280, here pp. 278-280. Given that about 960,000 copies of the Cambridge Texts series had been sold by 2008, it is likely that the one million threshold has been passed by now.


77. † See most recently the useful introductions to spatial theorists in: Phil Hubbard/Rob Kitchin/Gill Valentine (eds.), Key Thinkers on Space and Place, Los Angeles 2004; and the reader by Phil Hubbard/Rob Kitchin/Gill Valentine (eds.), Key Texts in Human Geography, Los Angeles 2008; see also the literature referred to in my article: Riccardo Bajav, Was bringt der "Spatial Turn" der...


79. ↑ Moses, German Intellectuals, pp. 5, 12, 28-29, 31-37, 51.


Recommended Reading


