

Mourning by History – Ideas of a New Element in Historical Thinking

Jörn Rüsen
Kulturwissenschaftliches Institut, Essen

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Abstract:

Mourning as a mental procedure has not yet been applied to the cultural processes of making sense of the past, i.e. to historical thinking. Jörn Rüsen's essay argues on a theoretical level that mourning and historical thinking have astonishing similarities. He urges that for historical thinking to cope with the traumatic character of experiences in the recent past it should make use of these similarities and become a procedure of mourning. He develops his argument by treating three examples of mourning loss in three different contexts of an intergenerational relationship, of national identity and of mankind as a subject matter of historical thinking. Mourning is the most basic procedure of relating individuals to the past. Every individual needs to relate to the past, but the past is absent in its everyday life and has therefore to be made present for the individuals to be able to define its identity. This is where mourning as a mode of historical thinking is rooted. Taking the holocaust as an example, Rüsen argues that victims as well as culprits suffer from not being able to define their historical identity in an intergenerational context. That is why they need mourning as a means to regain their historical identity rather than trying to forget the past.

History as a basis of nation building is at risk as soon as historical experiences of traumatic character jeopardize the positive self-esteem generated by the collective memory of events legitimizing the system of norms for a given topical culture. Mourning in this context is a cultural practice helping the nation to realize the loss of self-esteem that has been brought about by negative historical experiences. By reclaiming the loss, the nation can be re-established.

But the self is not only part of a nation. It also defines its fundamental political convictions based on the notion of belonging to mankind. Historical experiences that negate the universal validity of the category of mankind by depriving others of their status as human beings destroy the historical foundations of modern society and the continuity of history. The 20th century is loaded with an abundance of this kind of experiences. Mourning these experiences of drastic inhumanity means acknowledging the loss of the “we-ideal” of modern subjectivity and recovering humanity by moving beyond the experience of a break of civilization. Mankind is being re-appropriated in the form of a standard pointing in the direction of an improving civilization.

關鍵詞

歷史思想，追念，精神創傷，認同，世代，國家，人類

摘要

作為一種精神程序，追念仍尚未被應用到給過去一個意義——也就是歷史思想——的文化過程上。本文作者認為，從一種理論的層面來看，追念與歷史思想有驚人的相似點。他從跨代關係、國家認同和人類三個不同的背景，藉處理三個追念所失的例子，來展開有關歷史思想的論點。

追念是將個體與過去連結起來的最基本程序。每一個個體都需要與過去連結。但是，過去並不存在於其日常生活中。因此，為使個人能建立其認同，所以必須將過去變成是現在的 (present)。這正是追念作為一種歷史思想表現方式生根之處。以屠殺猶太人為例，作者認為不論是受害者或是犯罪者，他們在跨代關係的背景下都苦於無法建立他們自己的

歷史認同。因此，這正是他們為何需要以追念為手段來爭回他們的歷史認同，而不是試著忘記過去。

用對大事件的集體追思來合法化一既定文化的規範體系，一旦其所導致的歷史經驗帶有精神創傷特色，就會傷害到絕對的自尊，而作為國家建構基礎的歷史就會陷入困境。在這個背景下，追念是一種文化的實踐，它有助於民族的覺悟，覺悟到因負面歷史經驗而造成的喪失自尊。而藉要求取回所失，可以復興一個國家。

但是，自我不僅是民族的一部份，他的基礎政治信念的界定，乃植基於歸屬人類這個看法。那些歷史經驗一藉由奪取他人作為人類的身份，來否定人類這個範疇的普遍價值一破壞了現代社會的歷史基礎和歷史的連續性。二十世紀裡滿是這樣的經歷。追念這些極端不人道的經歷，代表我們認知到現代自我本位的社會喪失了“我們的”理想 (we-ideal)，和藉由超越這些破壞文明的經驗來重建人道。人類正處於重新採納一種趨向改善文明的形式。

In this paper I would like to present the thesis that historical thinking should become a procedure of mourning as soon as it meets the traumatic character of historical experience of the last century.¹ With this argument I hope to initiate a comparative approach to historical thinking in East and West. In both parts of the world contemporary history presents challenging experiences that demand new modes of historical thinking. In Germany the Holocaust has provoked numerous debates about the possibilities and limits of historical understanding,² and in China, for example, events of the last century could lead to similar debates. To put it very simply: I would like to ask Chinese intellectuals and scholars whether they can agree with me that we need an effective element of mourning in historical thinking in order to meet the specific character of decisive parts of our respective contemporary histories. And if they agree we should work together to find out what this means and how it may be realized: mourning by history.

Trauma and history

In order to make this plausible I will start with a short explanation of what I mean by a traumatic historical experience.³ Experiences of the past that negate or even destroy the possibility of giving them a historical meaning are traumatic. The past gains historical meaning by being related to the cultural orientation of present-day life. The past becomes history when interpreted in a categorical framework of a time concept that relates it to the present, to its needs for understanding its temporal order and to the changes that take place. This interpretation bears the necessity of projecting a future perspective for human activity. History is an interrelationship between past, present and future brought about by an interpretation of the experience of the past. History, therefore, brings past, present and future into a meaningful coherence. This coherence is constituted by principles of historical sense and meaning. Trauma is a certain quality of the experience of the past. Past

¹ A part of this paper is taken from Rüsen 2001a, Liebsch and Rüsen 2001.

² The most fruitful debate took place between Saul Friedländer and Martin Broszat; see Broszat and Friedländer 1988, Rüsen 1997a, 1997b.

³ Rüsen 2001b, 2002.

events are traumatic when they negate and even destroy these principles. Trauma in history breaks the coherence of the fundamental historical interrelationship of past, present, and future. One can generalize from Dan Diner's comment about the Holocaust as a break of civilization⁴ to giving trauma a general meaning as an element of historical experience: it constitutes a 'broken time' in the categorical approach of historical interpretation.⁵

Historical events with a traumatic character confront the historian with a borderline experience. They cannot be held within the realm of objective data, but suggest their own interpretation. Today we think that interpretation is a construction of meaning imposed on the facts by us.⁶ In respect to traumatic experiences we can learn that the historians' work of making sense of the past includes more than only a meaning given afterwards: the facts themselves can destroy or de-construct the meaning of their interpretation. In this case historians do not make sense of the past, but the past conveys senselessness to the historians.

Trauma in history means that the work of the historians proves impossible as long as they fail to find an interpretative answer to this borderline character of the past, which urges them to use the sense criteria of its interpretation in a negative and destructive way.

The first reaction to trauma is silence. But historians have to speak about the past if they do not want to give up their profession. If they fulfill their duty as historians and they make sense of the past, and if this is done without neglecting its traumatic elements, history writing then fulfils the function of de-traumatization.

Obviously, there are different ways of historical de-traumatization (although this is not my point here). Nevertheless, I would like to problematize it in a more fundamental way: Does historical interpretation not distort the specific character of the past in play?

My answer is: Yes, it does as long as there is no attempt to interpret and represent the disturbing experiences of the past including its traumatic ex-

⁴ Diner 1990.

⁵ Cf. my different approaches to this "breaking of time" in history, Rüsen 2001c.

⁶ White 1973, Ankersmit, 1988, 1998.

periences. That does not mean to stop thinking and to keep silent about the horrific senselessness or to move the events from the field of history into the field of myth. It means to look for and to realize a mode of historical thinking that meets the challenge of sense-destructing meaning.

Trauma destroys meaning, and its historical interpretation has to realize this very loss of meaning vis-à-vis what actually has happened. Here is the door, which brings mourning into the work of the historians.⁷

Mourning by history

At first glance history has nothing to do with mourning. Mourning is emotional and related to losses that have recently occurred. History is cognitive and related to a remote past. But this impression is misleading, since history and mourning have something essential in common: Both are procedures of memory and committed to its logic of sense generation.

Mourning is a mental procedure of commemorating somebody or something lost. The loss has the specific character of a loss of oneself with the passing away of a person or something of a high value for oneself. The purpose of this mode of commemoration is to gain back oneself by 'working through' the loss (in the words of Sigmund Freud). Gaining back oneself means to come back to life through the death of the beloved person or object. In a certain way even the lost subject or object comes back: It comes back in the form of the presence of absence, which enlarges the mental horizon of the mourning person by elements of transcendence.

The archaic paradigm for this mental procedure, which, of course, is a procedure of social communication, is the ritual, which transforms the dead person into an ancestor. As ancestors, the dead are given a new form of life, invisible, but very powerful.⁸ This mental individual and social practice can easily be applied to history (astonishingly, this has not been done yet).

I do not think that history today is ancestor worship, but at least it has some logical similarity with it: We should realize that historical thinking itself

⁷ Rüsen, forthcoming.

⁸ Müller 1987a, 1997: 68ff.

in its very logic follows the logic of mourning at least partly in a formal way: It makes the absent past which is a part of one's own identity, part of present day life.⁹ In fact, only the very past which is important for the people of the present has to become history. This importance of the past can be characterized by its relevance for what is essential for people in their present day life, for their identity. Identity is an issue of historical consciousness. If we realize this, the past in the mental procedures of historical consciousness is essentially related to making people feel that they belong together in a group and are different from others. In respect to the identity of a person or a group the past is not part of the outside world – not external, but an issue related to the internal life of the human subject. The relationship to the past can be compared to the relationship to deceased persons or objects in the mourning process.

When we think about history in this relationship to human subjectivity it becomes obvious that historical consciousness renders the absent past, which is a part of one's own identity, present. And this is exactly what mourning is all about. So in a simple logical argumentation one can say that mourning is constitutive for historical thinking in general and in principle. If those who have died contribute positively to the self-esteem of the people of today (and that is the rule in the context of historical consciousness all over the world) the remembrance of them keeps or makes them alive through their death. In other words, in historical consciousness the dead are still alive. And what makes them alive? What else than mourning?

I think that meta-history has completely overlooked this constitutive role of mourning in the procedures of historical memory. History renders the absence of the past to which the people of the present are related as an element of their own selves present again. That is exactly what happens by mourning: Something (a subject or an object) to which the living person is deeply related as a factor of his or her own self, has passed away. This passing away threatens the identity of the related person or people. They feel left adrift by this passing away and they have to struggle to come back to themselves: and this struggle is the mourning process.

⁹ Ankersmit 2001.

In history we have a similar relationship between past and present: What has passed away is relevant for the self-esteem and the self-understanding of the people of today, and they have come to terms with themselves by making the absent, their passed-away world, present again. The difference between history and mourning lies, of course, in the character of this regaining of oneself. In the case of mourning, the process is full of bitterness and pain. The experienced loss opens a wound in one's mind. History, on the contrary, seems to be a procedure of remembrance, which does not have this hurting element, but it is conceived of as a gain, as taking over a heritage, as bringing about self-esteem. But if the past of which history speaks has this very relevance for identity, can we even think of its passing away as something, which does not hurt? Does it not leave a gap open to be filled by mental activity? I think it is worthwhile considering whether the procedures of historical consciousness are grounded in a mourning-like process. So far, history writing has not been seen in comparison to the process of mourning but understood as having a totally different kind of quality: that of recovering independent facts as if they were things which can be picked up and integrated into the properties of oneself.

So mourning as an issue of meta-history means first of all to acknowledge the fact that there is a basic element of mourning in historical consciousness. It is normally overlooked, since the aspects of inheriting the past and the idea that the past is something, which belongs to us and which we continue and develop, are dominant. But this positive relationship between the past and the present is only possible if the loss has been overcome. Since this loss inevitably and permanently happens over the change of generations, it creates the past in the continuous passing away of the human world. This past has to become history as history writing renders the absent past present again. Since this is a procedure of passing away and of overcoming the pain incited by the loss, it is structurally forgotten in the process of history writing.

The most frequent mode of forgetting is the idea that history is but the basis of interpretation, a kind of raw material, into which we impose our meaning. This is evidently the case in the professional historians' attitude toward history as a reified pre-givenness of the experience of the past. History here is something hidden in the sources to be disclosed by going into the archives and finding out what actually happened in the past.

We have to look beyond this abstract and alienated relationship between the historian as a researcher on the one hand and his or her source materials on the other. We have to analyse the precondition for a meaningful relationship between past and present – called ‘history’. There is a precognitive interrelationship between the past and the present. The past is already present in the topical life procedures, where ‘history’ as a cultural practice takes place. Here, where the past is living in present-day circumstances and conditions of human activity and suffering, mourning as a mode of historical thinking is rooted.

In order to make plausible what mourning means in respect to the historical interpretation of the past, I will analyze three examples of the constitutive interrelationship between past and present: the chain of generations, national identity, and the issue of ‘mankind’ as sense-bearing category of human identity as well as of universal history.

Generation

The chain of generations links the individual features of our own history to the life histories of our ancestors.

It is well known that in the process of individualization and socialization every individual internalises his or her parents’ identity. In the mimetic process of becoming oneself, the image of one’s closest role models is the decisive factor in evolving a self-image with respect to social relations. In fact, the parents already mentally “inhabit” the individual before he or she develops his or her own self, which possibly might may even be an autonomous self in the face of the parents. The drama of this process has been decoded by psychoanalysis as the process of becoming oneself through a mimetic mental “incorporation” of the parents. The constitution of a specific self as well as the construction of a world-accessing individual identity, which accentuates this specific self, depends on whether and how it is possible to mutually grant intergenerational recognition of this development. This kind of recognition in an intergenerational relationship is based on a communicative atmosphere in which subjects open up to each other while granting the other the freedom of his or her otherness.

In the event of death, mourning gains emotional depth especially when two different generations are involved, although this depth itself does not imply a decidedly historical relationship. On the contrary, mourning as the experience and the overcoming of a loss is part and parcel of human activities involving grandparents, parents and children. History is originated in the change of generations; but it only develops as a specific time relation if the immediacy of a relationship (like that between parents and children) is extended into a mediated relationship. Temporality acquires a historical dimension only if it connects two time horizons that differ in quality; only under these circumstances does one need to differentiate between one's own time and that of others, between the presence of one's own *Lebenswelt* and the past as a passed *Lebenswelt*. This surely does not imply that this past has passed away in every respect, suggesting that its time relatedness is artificial or secondary in nature. On the contrary, this other time of the past – in its quality of being different and not belonging to one's own *Lebenswelt* – gives it its special, that is its historical, meaning (e.g. as tradition).

Provided that for the inter-generational relationship such a time difference becomes fundamental and that in the eyes of the younger the elder are regarded as belonging to a different time if compared to their own, then this is the starting point of a historical dimension of inter-generational communication. The connectedness of different times, which is called “history”, becomes topical.¹⁰ This history describes a course of time that leads from the time frame of the older generation to the separate time frame of the younger generation. Thus the objectivity of the inter-generational relationship turns into a subjective cultural factor, which plays an essential role in the formation of historical identity.

In traditional societies, the position in the chain of generations determined social status and the legitimacy of a political claim to power.¹¹ In modern societies the binding power of the generational chain, although still playing an important role, has become weaker, especially when it comes to its last link.

¹⁰ A theory of this intergenerational relationship, which could be helpful in developing this dimension, has been suggested by Schneider 1966.

¹¹ This is symbolically represented in the funeral processions of the aristocracy in Roman times. Flaig 1995.

This holds in particular for the realm of the unconscious, where mental dispositions are developed over the course of several generations. These dispositions are experienced as personal fate, a notion that one is tied to for a lifetime and that more often than not is inexplicable. Children serve as “delegates” of their parents,¹² that is the ambitions of the parents are part of the unconscious motive power behind their children’s actions; since these ambitions are neither articulated nor observable, the children are not aware of the situation. The power of such constellations becomes apparent if the parental projection is in striking contradiction to the child’s own aspirations. This can result in mental illness, because these projections – which subconsciously have become part of oneself – cannot be integrated into a coherent self image; the self of such children is torn apart by the parents they still have not come to terms with.¹³

Psychoanalysts have in general neglected the discussion and analysis of such inter-generational constellations in their historical dimension.¹⁴ This is not surprising, since for those involved it is of no immediate importance that the interwoven generations actually represent different time schemes, which on their side are part of a general or shared history. It is even of less importance in cases where this fact remains subconscious. Furthermore, the younger generation usually experiences the legacy of the older generation as part of their *Lebenswelt* and not necessarily as a historical experience they suffer from or have to explain.

Undoubtedly, the process of interpreting relevant, often fate-like inter-generational constellations can lead to a historical self-image. Individuals can break down their own specific times and rearrange them as different histories. In this case those different times are specifically interrelated in a way that can be called historical. This normally applies when an old conflict is at stake. Those who, for the sake of their lives, have to solve this conflict are suffering

¹² Stierlin 1995: 52ff.

¹³ Schneider et al. 1996: 201ff.

¹⁴ See also Schneider et al. 1996, where the specific German experience of an intergenerational break is analysed by combining the approaches of psychoanalysis and history. It seems to me that at least the theoretical concept of their investigation can connect with a theory of historical sense generation. For a very stimulating psychoanalytical theory of the constitution of historical consciousness in the phase of adolescence, see Erdheim 1984: 336ff, 1998.

from the legacy of a time that they distinguish from their own. If this inner mental interweaving spans more than three generations, historicizing becomes inevitable. In this case, to be precise, those at the end of the chain of generations can only find themselves by consciously and concentratedly analyzing the mental burden of the past that they received as they built up their own Selves. Whenever the historicizing of time frames generates conflict, stress, or malfunction (which to a certain extent seems inevitable), the coming-to-terms with generationally-defined time frames takes the form of a rather painstaking effort of remembrance (*Erinnerungsarbeit*).

Mourning is a special mode in which this specific historical effort of remembrance can take place. According to the above-mentioned double nature of mourning, we are dealing with both a loss and a gain. When mourning, one suffers from the fact that one's self is lacking something or that one's historical identity is being damaged. But at the same time one regains the lost self by separating oneself from this loss in order to accept it as something that is lost.

What does it mean to talk about loss in the context of a distanced time relation (*im abständigen Zeitverhältnis*) and historical difference? In order to clarify this problem I will focus on an extra-historical time relation in which the subject loses his or her self and has to regain it by a deliberate process of mourning (*Trauerarbeit*). At this point, I particularly have in mind the situation of children who have been deeply insulted by their parents and who have to go through a conscious effort of remembrance in order to come to terms with themselves. In this case it is parental love, necessary for the child to develop its individuality that has been lost. The child cannot help loving the parents, who do not deserve this love. This imbalance might lead to considerable negative effects on the development of the self. The child's love for the beloved person (psychoanalysts prefer talking about "objects" although we are in fact dealing with subjects) is lost as it is, but the child is not conscious and aware of this loss. "Objectively" this loss becomes part of the child's self and has a negative effect on its development. Later on, the individual (if he or she decides to overcome this fatal situation) first must become aware of this loss in order to be able to cope with its negative effects. The individual itself has to experience and realize the fact that it has lost itself by losing the parents because of their insufficient love. In consciously experiencing this loss,

the individual is able to regain the lost parts of its self working its way through this loss and thereby accentuating itself, realizing itself in the face of the loss. This effort of remembrance could be called mourning.¹⁵ The subject has lost itself to a void, to an absent love of the parents, a love that virtually has been reversed. By mourning, the subject gains the capability to perceive, to endure, and to accept the loss as part of its self.

Such an experience of losing and regaining the self can be transferred from the immediacy of an individual development that only spans an individual lifetime to a historical time relationship. What, in this context, could be taken into consideration as the loss one would mourn? On a very abstract level it would have to be the *possibility of inter-generational connecting in the process of developing historical identity*. The identity of a subject becomes historical when it conceives of itself as existing within a time frame that exceeds the boundaries of its own life span.¹⁶ Incidents, developments as well as losses, which date back into a past before one was born and therefore imply the tendency to be extended beyond one's death, are ascribed to one's own subjectivity. (A true Christian, for example, wins his or her historical identity by seeing him or herself related to the time of the life and death of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, and therefore gains a historical identity which (at least in traditional conceptions of Christian faith) projects itself into the future until the end of all times.) It is against this very depth of time that the basis of one's own self is negotiated and by the cultural practice of historical sense generation incorporated over and over again. The categorization of one's self as belonging to a time-exceeding long temporal development grants self-confidence and persistence when confronted with present-day turbulences of transformation, it opens access to resources of legitimacy, it is a cause for hope, and it consoles in case of failure.

Although the image of such an identity-forming time development is built upon wishing, hoping and fearing, it is not a product of fantasy at all. If it existed as pure fantasy in people's minds, nobody would actually care about this "history". Its power as a landmark depends on whether or not those developing their identities by means of history are positive about the real existence of the course of time in which they see themselves historically

¹⁵ Explicit studies include Miller 1982.

¹⁶ Cf. Rüsen 2002.

situated. Against this horizon of reassurance, experiences of loss can be encountered in cases where the identity-forming temporal development is being disrupted or dislocated. In the context of an inter-generational concept of historical identity, this is always the case if one of the links within the chain of generations cannot fit well into a coherent context of reliable affiliations. This being the case, one has to face a broken chain because one of the ancestors by way of his or her acting cannot be counted as member of a community of shared values that actually forms the tie within the community in terms of the self consciousness of its youngest link. The actual connectedness of generations is disturbed; the younger are no longer able to connect to the achievements of the elder; there is no time exceeding common interest and no development the youngest generation could relate to or conceive of as their own historical fundament.

In recent times such serious ruptures in the relationship of generations are most obvious: Not only in case of children and children's children of the generations of culprits of the Nazi regime (and for our context this is also true for other criminal regimes) but also in inter-generational relationships of the victims, serious ruptures can be observed that lead to considerable disorientation and might even result in physical illness.¹⁷ What the individuals are lacking is the possibility to define their own historical identity in an intergenerational context. In such a case we are dealing with a loss that needs mourning rather than simple forgetting or repression. Only through mourning can the loss be understood as such and at the same time the lost elements of one's historical identity be regained.

Nation

Historical thinking as displayed *against the national horizon* generates genealogies, which become horizontally related to each other and form a general dimension of belonging to each other. At the same time they lose their functions as defining factors of temporal sequences. Thus the focus becomes more abstract. Objectively given facts like the natural change of generations are turned into a historical process for which no natural substrate exists anymore. The nation

¹⁷ Wardi 1997.

is a specific modern communication community, defining itself by means of historical symbols, which serve to mark the territory of political membership. This is brought about by means of a collective political determination to submit to a system of rules, whose legitimacy is based on a historically mediated consciousness of belonging together internally and being demarcated externally.

The family of a lineage, which situates itself in an inter-generational temporal order, develops into a more abstract (de-naturalizing) community culturally defined by its common history. Subjectively this can be brought about by a value system that is deliberately kept in power. However, belonging together gains an objective dimension where the image of ethnic belonging comes into play. "National Ethnicity" is defined by a common understanding of "we ourselves", very close to nature but at the same time in a secondary, hypostasising way. Nature is the result of re-naturalising. The community of shared values – originally dominating the modern nation building process – creates for itself a substrate similar to nature by transferring these processes to a variety of historical situations. Regardless of all the meta-historical (natural) attributes ascribed to an ethnicity, it can de facto only be defined in historical terms. What is relevant for a sense of belonging to a nation is a collective memory, which creates this feeling of belonging.¹⁸ The particular kind of history that keeps collective memory alive is defined by events and developments which legitimate and explain the system of norms and values of a topical national culture, thus identifying it as effective and commonly accepted.

The content of this history consists of foundational facts, which constitute the national belonging as well as of common achievements of civilization (at least post festum in the collective memory) setting the basis for a positive common self-esteem. From the depth of the past where foundations and developments took shape, a far-reaching future perspective is made plausible and designed to stimulate actions; thus guaranteeing the existence of a collective self through change over time.

¹⁸ The literature on this topic is immense. For the German case, see Giesen 1991, 1993, 1999. Assmann 1993.

If experiences that jeopardize this positive self-esteem enter the historical perspective, the notion of belonging together as a nation is at risk in its very essence. This is the case because the belonging together as a nation is grounded on the basic conviction that the temporal connectedness of past and future depends on the continuity of value-laden community-building categories (the national “culture” or “civilization”). Collective action which does not correspond with the norm or even goes so far as to essentially question it, such as genocide of the “other” in which the self is negatively reflected, shakes the very foundations of this construction of national belonging. The community, so to speak, loses itself in those incidents of its history, which question the validity and existence of those norms and values that keep it together. As a rule such incidents of one’s own history are being repressed, forgotten, or seen as “outside” or ‘beyond’ one’s own sphere, as a problem of other collectives. This does not necessarily imply their disappearance from the mental economy of a nation; rather, they continue to exist in the realm of the unconscious as disturbances, which have to be taken care of by special activities and practices of communicating, repressing, and postponing. The victims buried in the historical ground of the collective cannot come to rest.

Such disturbing experiences are – for internal as well as for external reasons – unavoidable. Looking at them from the “outside”, they take the effect of a challenge as long as the history of the victims is kept alive in the self-image of “others”, who prevent one’s own historical consciousness from forgetting. Looking at them from the “inside”, the disturbing historical experience is on the one hand accentuated by those whose ethos renders forgetting difficult or even impossible, but on the other hand also by those who are unbearably suffering from feelings of repulsion.

Mourning through history can be understood as a cultural practice which subjectively realizes an (objective) loss of one’s own self-esteem that has thus been brought about by negative historical experiences. At the same time, this cultural practice refers to the fact that the collective self, the nation, in a new (transformed) way, can be re-established by reclaiming the loss. This mode of mourning, of course, differs from the mourning for an individual or for a close family member. If one takes the personal form of mourning as a model,

one has to reject mourning as a cultural practice of collective memory.¹⁹ But mourning always has a social dimension, and there is no reason for not extending this dimension to all spheres where identity-building is at stake. The establishment of a national day of mourning in a national context²⁰ might serve as an example. It indicates that national belonging can result in a collective will to mourn and at the same time it illustrates that rituals and ceremonies follow a political logic which differs considerably from individual mourning.²¹

However, mourning as a cultural practice does usually not take place as a consequence of a historical loss of the self, but mostly as a loss (for example of lives during war) that is experienced and can be explained in terms of assuring the collective's self-esteem: the dead died for their fatherland and therefore their death has a national meaning and conforms with the historical perspective of one's own national identity.²² In this case, there is no loss of the "we ourselves", but there is the chance to transfer individually suffered losses into a collective gain. This is the case because the "we ourselves" has not been lost, but has rather been proven effective in the act of self-sacrifice.²³

Collective mourning is a different story if it really deals with the loss of a value community, of the "we ourselves", as the consequence of historical experience. That is where the category of mourning begins to take effect. The loss is something substantial and re-gaining is only possible by integrating negative experiences into one's own history. The "we ourselves" is not only confirmed but transformed in this painstaking mental process (e.g. painstaking in respect to fierce public debates). Examples of such mourning are rare;

¹⁹ This is the position of Micha Brumlik in his various works dealing with the question if and how far collective mourning can be an adequate response to the holocaust, see Brumlik 1993: 197-203. Following Brumlik, every public political ritual of mourning the holocaust is necessarily doomed to failure. By on the one hand asking for such rituals and on the other hand proving them impossible, he refers to a problem of collective mourning, which requires new modes of mourning. See also Brumlik 1988: 111-119.

²⁰ For the German case, see Hausen 1997, Schellack 1990: 297-305, 340-345.

²¹ I do not mean to say that such national days of mourning already signify adequate practices of public and collective mourning. They only point to the fact that collective-specific historical mourning might be possible.

²² See Winter 1995.

²³ See Koselleck, Jeismann 1994.

as far as I know no convincing paradigm exists. Nevertheless, in the face of the historical experience of nationalism that Europe and the world went through there should be no doubt that the ability for collective mourning has to be developed if one attempts to deal with national identity in a way that conforms to historical experiences.

Mankind

The broadest dimension of belonging so far is indicated by the *category of mankind*. Historically it becomes materialized in universal histories. Here the world is explained in totality and one's own existence as a human being is the central criterion of establishing one's self image and developing social relations. Mankind as such a centre of self-assessment is normative as well as empirically determined. In archaic societies, the normative quality of mankind is confined to the group of people one feels related to, to one's own "culture". It is defined ethnocentrically, so that the "others", living beyond the boundaries of one's own world, are not regarded as humans but as people of inferior quality.²⁴ In a long-term cultural process this ethnocentrism is gradually overcome by extending the content of belonging to the species of *Homo sapiens* as a whole (this process is not specific for occidental culture alone although it has been dominated by it).

Cultural belonging in the sense of mankind as a whole claims universality, which again might result in ambivalence.²⁵ It implies changing perspectives on being different from others as well as the possibility of overestimating one's own (and therefore always particular) belonging, going so far as to assume that one's own culture represents mankind as such. However, in both cases the "we ourselves" of the collective gains a new and prominent characteristic: it is based on the universality of human existence as pivotal value and most importantly as cultural regulator of political and social living conditions. The pathos of universalism runs through the history of modern identity-building and nowadays belongs to the central topoi of political rhetoric regarding the internal structure and outside relationships of modern societies.

²⁴ See Müller 1987b: 268ff, 1997: 50, 97, etc.

²⁵ See Rüsen 1998.

In the context of modern collective belonging the self is part of mankind and defines its fundamental political convictions based on the notion of belonging to mankind. Historically this change of belonging is made plausible by referring it to the genesis of one's own community. A new fundamental criterion of legitimising political power and of organising democratic participation is thus introduced by the notion of human rights.

If this criterion of mankind is violated or negated, the achievements of modern political culture are at stake. What had long been the basis of the political and social recognition of the other, the universalised notion of equality as the heart of human self esteem, is suddenly completely terminated and with great fanfare withdrawn from public discourse, and as a consequence, the kind of self-esteem as related to the quality of being human put into question. A historical experience which negates the universal validity of the category of mankind by depriving others of their status as human beings goes to the very heart of the individual's own identity based on the category of mankind. If this negation is executed physically, it effectively destroys the individual's own self in its universalistic historical dimension. Under these conditions, to say the least, the persuading power of the criterion of mankind as a historical experience and assertion is fundamentally being weakened. Such a historical experience results in the loss of the self. It deprives civilized modern societies of their historical foundations and cannot possibly be integrated into the course of time in which past and future are seen as being held together by the unbroken validity of humanness as a normative value. It destroys the continuity of a history in which civil subjectivity has inscribed its own universal norms.

The historical self in its capacity of belonging to mankind is lost if a group of humans fundamentally denies another group the values related to mankind and on this ground legitimises and conducts genocide. This historical loss of the self as part of mankind is particularly drastic, if (like in our, the German, case) this negation of the mankind criterion takes place in the context of one's *own* (particular) history; since in this case it did not occur outside but inside one's own genesis (although – strictly speaking – with regard to the mankind aspect of modern historical thinking the notion of outside ceases to exist).

The 20th century is loaded with an abundance of such experiences. In the context of a culture that understands itself as related to mankind, the holo-

caust can only be separated from other crimes against mankind at the cost of its specific quality as a historical experience.

What does it mean to face these experiences? First and above all, it means to realize that so far culturally dominant criterions of sense generation have lost their validity for the historical discourse.²⁶ But a loss is not a sell out. (Selling out the criteria of sense-making in historical discourse on the grounds of deconstructing ideology would mean the cultural suicide of modern subjectivity – a subjectivity that relies on the category of equality as the basis of mutual esteem in human relations.) Acknowledging a loss without selling out the lost – this leads in a compelling way back to the topic of mourning by history. At this point, we are talking about historical mourning in the sense of mankind confronted with the historical experience of drastic inhumanity. In this case mourning could lead to the recovery of one's self overcoming the lack of a connectedness with others that in effect is essential for the self. Mourning would have to consist of *acknowledging the lost*. This implies two things: First to admit that mankind as a normative concept is lost or absent in historical experience, and second to accept that whatever has been lost remains one's own (or better still: remains one's own in a new and different way).

What does this mean for the mankind criterion of historical identity? Mankind in the sense of the "We-ideal" of modern subjectivity is deprived of its historical significance, which had so far been regarded as part and parcel of one's own culture (or civilization). It dies as a consequence of the historical experience of crimes against mankind, which are in effect crimes against the self (or better: its mental disposition). The self as defined in relation to mankind dies. Post-modernity has drawn a melancholic conclusion from this: It is no longer interested in the mankind orientation of modern subjectivity.²⁷

²⁶ This is how I read Dan Diner's thesis of the "break of civilization", see Diner 1986a, 1986b, 1987, 1990: esp. 111ff.

²⁷ Karlheinz Bohrer brilliantly characterizes the "attraction" of "melancholic rhetoric" in human sciences as "a popular resting place where due to the discourse on modernity that failed to move beyond the early stages, a frightened scientific community in the meantime gathers strength for new quasi-teleological design/ideas...", see Bohrer 1996: 40. He heroically holds "no future" (*Zukunftslosigkeit*) against the hopes for the future by a radical (and fortunately only) poetic farewell. The question is how far his interpreting repetition and affirmation against all historical thinking can be

Thus, it renders the subject of modern societies disoriented and incapable of acting exactly at the point where its real life context – in terms of political, social, economic and ecological issues – is characterized by its objective universality: in its demand for human rights, for equality as a regulating category of social conditions in the globalizing process of capitalism and in the global endangering of natural resources of human life.

In contrast to such a melancholy, mourning would be a cultural achievement. The subject could recover its own human dimension by moving beyond the deadly experience of a break of civilization. This way of mourning would not include incorporating this experience into culture, but would regard it as an effective stimulus to accentuate the validity of a mankind orientation passionately, yet in a disciplined and patient manner.

What do we mean by mankind re-appropriated by mourning, what do we mean by mankind that is present in its absence? Mankind is no longer a naturally justified value foundation of human action per se. In a historical discourse based on mourning, mankind has literally become u-topian because it has lost its fixed and steadfast position in people's *Lebenswelt*. As a consequence of its dislocation it no longer can be taken as a plan for a world to be created (for that would correspond to death invocation and the designed world would be a phantom/ghost). As utopia it would have an effusive, literally meta-physical status, beyond the reality of a civilized world. It would stand as the yardstick for its criticism, a disturbing factor of insufficiency with respect to the achievements of civilization.

But what do we mean by *presence* in its absence? Is it more than a silhouette, an image of what could be, but unfortunately (because humans are disposed as they are) is not? In its absence, the notion of mankind could be no more than an “*as if*” of human world understanding and self-understanding. It could but take the effect of a mental driving force for human action, as a regulative concept for something that cannot be obtained but can be put into practice. It would not be transcendently (as empirically based meta-physics) but transcendingly effective as a value-loaded medium of sense definitions

read as a desperate attempt to delay this farewell real-historically. It corresponds with the title of his book in which mourning categorically takes precedence over melancholy (without being justified by objective reasons in his explanations).

that stimulates action serving as a guiding principle in the process of defining an aim. One could speak of fiction in the sense of a reality-bearing “as if”. As lost, mankind is being re-appropriated in the form of a standard pointing in the direction of an improving civilization; and the fact that this has not yet been achieved urges man into action. The loss of reliable and valid norms is re-gained as disturbance leads to criticism, utopia, and the motivation to keep one’s own world moving in a direction indebted to these norms.

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