WHAT IS HISTORY DIDACTICS?

THE THIRD ROUND

Just like the first one, the second round of this enquiry, in 'Communications 1987, 1' occasioned an appreciable number of laudatory reactions; many of them were accompanied with incitements to pursue this course further. As readers will remember, the upshot of the second round was evidently that history didactics (or historical education) is about 'historical consciousness'. Nearly all contributors used this term - or others identical with it -, directly or indirectly, in French, English and German. So the obvious question to be asked next seemed to be: What is, or what do you mean by, 'historical consciousness'? But here a formidable difficulty presented itself. Would not this question elicit either a spate of very vague and, therefore, unsatisfactory responses or a number of contributions couched in Neohegelian, Frankfurrian, sociological or similar scholarly jargons?

It seemed to me that this would destroy my whole purpose. Perhaps it would be better to approach the subject (which admittedly is a very tricky one) along a more practical line. I know very well that several members of our Society are perfectly able to supply a very scholarly contribution. I don't say either that I will forego their valuable help beforehand, on the contrary. But in order to win the collaboration of as many members of the Society as possible - and this means of all those who never made a special study of the subject - I deemed it preferable to enter this field from the practical side. In this sense I wrote to the members of the Board of the Society and of its Editorial Board, asking them for advice. On the suggestion of my former colleague Marian Langenbach, of Utrecht State University, I finally decided to solicit a practical example, an anecdote, so to speak, or a (very short) 'short story' which would prove that the people concerned in it, showed 'historical consciousness' in some way or other. It might be something that happened in the classroom or when teaching history students, something from a conversation with adults or a piece of reading. I was fully aware that even this is a difficult question but it proved more difficult than I expected.

April 23, 1987, I sent out 29 letters to as many members of the Society, asking them to write a short contribution of the kind described above, with a maximum of fifteen lines. Not every one, to put it mildly, responded before June 1, my ultimate date. On June 2 I sent a friendly reminder, and on June 23 a second one. Five members excused themselves for reasons of ill-health, pressure of work, and so on. One contribution, although promised, was not re-
ceived but this was made good by an unmasked for contribution. It was somewhat disappointing that six members of the Society did not answer at all. Finally, however, my harvest, although not abundant, was satisfactory because I ended with seventeen answers in my possession. I have to thank all those who contributed to this round. First of all, I shall now print these seventeen responses in alphabetical order. I give them as they are written, only correcting some obvious typing errors.

ANSWERS

1. Magne Angvik, Bergen Laererhøjskole, Landas, N. "In my opinion historical consciousness implies using historical knowledge/experience in a present situation. This situation could be critical at the moment and result in decisions concerning the future as in my first example. On the 9th of April 1940 Carl J. Hambro, president of the Norwegian Parliament, was fleeing together with King Haakon, the Government and the Parliament, from German soldiers out of Oslo. In the small town of Elverum he managed to present a proposal handing all formal rights over safety and future of the country from the Parliament to the Government (now on its way to Great Britain) until the Parliament could safely meet again. Thereby he founded the formal constitutional basis for Norwegian resistance throughout the Second World War. A well-known politician showing historical consciousness in a critical situation for the country. The following story exemplifies another part of historical consciousness on a personal level. A grandmother, sitting with a small boy on her knees, tells him how she, six years old, was taken out of a burning house by her mother, and found by her father and older brothers some hours later sitting in the snow. Her mother was found in the ashes with her two younger sisters in her arms. For my grandmother this event changed her life, for me the story created historical consciousness."

haben, denn die Deutschen seien jetzt Marxisten. Paderewski antwortete: sie sind immer Bismarckisten.

3. Elma Collins, Dublin, IR. "A number of friends, all in their fifties and one a historian, were discussing the latest political scandal which had led to the fall of a government and a sudden general election. 'I never remember anything like!', said one, 'Quite unprecedented' agreed another. 'Oh no' protested the historian 'I remember a similar case'. 'You do? What? I can't recall anything like this. When was it?' 'Well' said the historian carefully, 'It was about 1904 or 1905, I think. There was ...' Her friends exploded in frustration. 'But that's before our time. I thought you said you remembered. You can't remember that'. But of course she could, for her historical consciousness gave her access to a much longer past than that of her companions and to an awareness that current events, however sensational, are seldom without precedent."

4. Leo Dalhusen, Leiden State University, NL (I translated this contribution from the original Dutch into English.) "First of all, an example of a 'bad' historical consciousness came to my mind: Chamberlain who in 1938 wanted to be flexible because, according to him, in 1914 an uncompromising attitude had led to World War I. The political leaders of 1945 showed a better historical consciousness when, after World War II, they wanted to impose a less hard peace treaty on Germany than was concluded in Versailles. With regard to the attitude to be taken respecting the ethnic minorities in the Netherlands, the historical consciousness of some people seems to differ from that of others. It bears witness to historical consciousness when people allow themselves to be led by the conviction that Moluccans, Turks, Moroccans and Surinamers have a right to their presence in the Netherlands, and when they are able to give historical reasons for this right. A still more refined historical consciousness is shown by those who account for the different historical backgrounds of these groups. These different historical perspectives cause that each group has a different idea of Dutch society. Was it, seen in this light, an obvious decision when a specialist in Moluccan affairs was appointed top-official for all ethnic minorities?"

5. Ketjo Ello, University of Tampere, SF. "Historical consciousness means an interpretation of the past, an understanding of the present, and an anticipation of the future. It is by investigating the past and explaining past events that we learn to understand the present and present-day society. An understanding of the present makes it possible to anticipate the future - and what is historically possible in the future."

6. Walter Fürnrohr, University of Nuremberg-Erlangen, FRG. "My example does not deal with one single person, it is taken from the public of our Bavar-
ian capital. Beside the staircase of the University of Munich, where in 1943 the Geschwister Scholl were caught while distributing leaflets in which resistance against the NS government was proclaimed, in the light yard of the University there was once an inscription made in stone, coming from the old humanistic tradition: "Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori!". During the post-war reconstruction of the University there was the possibility that this inscription also was reconstructed. But against this an outcry of indignation arose. After a long public discussion a new inscription was fixed (inevitably in Latin): "Mortui vivos monent'. Here the dead represent our whole history, taken into our life of to-day and into our decisions for to-morrow."

7. Nils Gruvberger, Högskolan Jönköping, Jönköping, S. "My best example would be a person who is investigating his family history. You can perfectly well investigate families as a genealogist, but that doesn't exemplify 'historical consciousness'. But when the intention is to find your roots in order to understand your situation of to-day, and use this knowledge when looking forward to future generations, then this person is in possession of 'historical consciousness'. Modern western industrialized societies are often characterized by a loss of history. It now seems to have led to a want of history among young people. It is a seed bed of 'historical consciousness'."

8. Giulio Guderzo, University of Pavia, L. "In 1985-1986, in order to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the end of World War II and to help pupils attending compulsory school (primary and secondary: six to fourteen year-old boys and girls) to approach - in their teachers' company - a kind of history, the contemporary one, which is often not much and not well taught, I organized a program of local photographic exhibitions about the 1915-1945 period in the province of Pavia (in the immediate southern vicinity of Milan: a whole 53,000 boys and girls in the eight forms which were taken into consideration). The exhibitions which were built by pupils with their teachers (and town authorities' help) were seventy-two in number and covered almost the whole provincial area. I still have in my mind the lively memory of the remark which might be heard from pupils' mouth when I went to inaugurate every single exhibition: 'Never had we understood, until now, that our dads too, and our uncles, and our grandparents, and we too were part of History, that we ourselves are History!!"

weder die sieben Weltwunder der Antike noch die Massenproduktion des Fabrik-
systems oder die Eroberung des Kosmos gegeben hätte (Geschichtsbild); zweitens
den Studierenden systematisch zu helfen, Denk- und Arbeitsweisen zu erwerben,
urn die Dynamik historischer Prozesse in ihrer gesetzmässigen Determiniertheit
tüberschauen und zu werten (Fähigkeiten); und - schliesslich und vor allem
- drittens darum, die weltanschauliche Einsicht zu vermitteln dass Arbeit die
Spezifik der Gattung Mensch ist (Geschichtsbewusstsein). Letzteres manifestiert
sich als aus geschichtlicher Erkenntnis gewachsener, bejahter und praktizierter
Motivationskomplex zum eigenen - geschichtsgestaltenden - Wirksamwerden
mit dem Ziel, die produktive Aneignung der Natur (Arbeit) unter immer mensch-
würdigeren gesellschaftlichen Bedingungen zu fördern."

10. Greddy Huisman, Groningen State, NL. "A primary school teacher was
narrating fascinating stories of William the Silent, his life, his work, his import-
ance for our people. But also, dramatically, of his death. The class listened
breathlessly to the drama of Delft in 1584. With the exception of one pupil.
He snorted conceitedly and said: 'Much ado about nothing! The man would
have been dead by now for a long time anyhow'."

11. Evert Janssen Perlo, University of Amsterdam, NL. "The most immediate
and authentic form of consciousness being that in our mind, I may present
- as an answer to Piet Fontaine's question - some moments of the development
of my own awareness of history, i.e. of living in and being present at an especi-
ally historical situation. These moments have to do with what we, Dutchmen,
call 'the German occupation'. After the bombardment of Rotterdam (the part
of the town where I lived was spared) and the capitulation of the 'Fortress
Holland' (the heavily fortified western part of the country), German soldiers
had their encampments c.a. on the borders of a green promenade, the 'Staten-
singel', near our home, I still remember my sensation - that of a boy, twelve
years old - at the sight of these soldierly activities: that this was indeed
not quite real, like looking at and at the same time playing in a movie-produc-
tion. A kind of 'alienation'? During the five years of 'the occupation' and
of my classical education at the 'Gymnasium Erasmianum' of Rotterdam (the
schoolbuilding itself was occupied by the 'Kriegsmarine'), I was - at some
moment or other, it may have been in the third form (of the six) - keenly
aware of the two 'levels' in my own existence as a human and conscious being:
the level of the daily routine of school life and that of the other great
and dramatic developments in the War, i.e. in History. As to the 'reading'
(i.e. the laborious decipherment and translation of Latin and Greek texts, which
for the greater part had to do with ancient history, Caesar, Livius, Tacitus, Xenophon, Herodotus and (semihistorical?) Homer. I don't remember that at any moment any teacher told us that, in the work of these authors, we were confronted with a form of historical information. Or that any teacher just hinted at the discrepancy or tension between the two kinds of history with which and in which we were living: the one in the books and the other which we were following, from day to day, in the newspapers (or, possibly, by listening to the BBC) and experiencing in what happened to ourselves, to our family, house, town, country and the 'world'. Towards the end of the war, when I was some morning busy with an 'illegal' (though not too important) activity which had, of course, its danger, of which I was quite conscious and which gave me an extremely unpleasant sensation, I had the keen awareness: in the future people will read about these things in books. How very nice, I thought, it will be only to have to read about these things!"

12. Raphael de Keyser, Catholic University of Louvain, B. "A pupil, aged seventeen, was taught about the American Civil War at a technical school. She had to memorize the causes, its progress and its effects. She piled up one fact after another, and one concept after another, without understanding anything about the underlying problems. About a year later, she watched, with great interest, the serial 'North and South' on television. After having seen a few episodes she wondered whether the serial had anything to do with the history topic she once studied at school, the American Civil War. At once she related the thrilling story on the screen to her dull school knowledge. She suddenly understood that the American Civil War was an armed conflict between two civilizations, with the accent on the problem of the oppression of the blacks. She also referred spontaneously to situations in present-day American society (for instance, to the slaughter in a New York subway) and the Belgian problems with immigrant workers (their demands to have the vote). I presume that the way she spontaneously associated problems of the past with situations of to-day is a clear example of historical consciousness."

13. Henrik Skovgaard Nielsen, Studienlektor Valeensbaek Statsskole, Albertslund, DK. "A few years ago I took my class to an agricultural open-air museum in the suburbs of Copenhagen. The students went around on their own. Inside one of the farms I met a group of girls who usually were very silent and did not take much interest in the lessons. Now they were very preoccupied with what they saw, especially they wondered about the small chairs and tables and the very small beds. They had bumped their heads into the very low doorframes several times. These experiences showed them a lot about living conditions compared to their own. E.g. people simply were smaller two hundred
years ago, because of their nutrition, their hard work, and so on. My evaluation of the visit consisted of a 'diary'. The students had to write a week's 'diary' in a young girl's or boy's life in that time. The group of 'silent girls' wrote the best diary in the class; they had really tried to imagine what life was like then, and in what ways it was different from theirs. In this case historical consciousness was demonstrated by means of emphatical reconstruction based on and inspired by concrete evidence."

14. Susan Parkes, University of Dublin, IRL. "During a short course in the history of education which I give to the one year post-graduate student teachers I was describing the organization of the monitorial school system in the nineteenth century including the layout of the schoolroom and the use of the gallery lesson. One of the students, a non-historian, came to tell me that he himself had taught in such a gallery in an old rural National School in the south of Ireland in the 1960s. He had realised with pleasure for the first time that his own life was indeed 'history' and had an importance of its own. History to him had previously been seen as political events in a book that had happened to other people. For him 'history' had taken on a new meaning. For me the challenge of teaching history is an acceptance of the fact that we are history and are responsible not only for 'the past' but for the future. We make history. This challenge is for me the essential part of history teaching."

15. Bob Schnucker, North East Missouri State University, Kirksville, Missouri, USA. "In order to fully understand my example, some background information will be required. After covering the background material on our unit concerning the U.S. constitution, I divide the class into two groups. They are given the hypothetical situation that the school is writing a 'constitution' and they are to develop the section dealing with students' rights and responsibilities. Each student's contributions are to be recognized. One year there was a great deal of commotion from one group. Among the rather vocal statements was, 'Rex, you can't do that!'. I went to the group to find out what the problem was. One of the group members said that Rex wanted a Lazy-boy chair in each classroom just for his use. I told him to put it down and consider other possibilities. Later when the groups were dissolved we got to Rex's request. After listening to students criticize Rex for an idea that was 'dumb' and 'selfish' among other complaints, I finally let Rex defend his choice. One must remember that Rex did not have a reputation as a serious student. While I can't remember Rex's exact comments, it went something like this: 'Why not? He (teacher) said we could put down what we want and that's what I want. Do you think them guys writing the Constitution didn't put stuff in there to help them?'. Rex was the first student to begin to understand at least a part of what our group work was trying to accomplish."
Bob Schnucker approached his graduate history class with the problem I posed and asked them to give responses. The teachers that responded were teaching in small rural oriented high schools in the northeast quadrant of Missouri. It was the feeling of the class that the teaching of history was at a low ebb and the voluntary examples of historical consciousness come only from the brighter students and then not often. I include two of the responses here as they were given in writing. 1. "Having talked about the farm problems faced during the depression (of the 1930s) it suddenly dawned on a student to ask: 'Aren't the farm programs used today in trying to cut down on production similar to those used during the depression?'. - While covering several different amendments to the Constitution one student implied that 'he now knew what taking the 5th amendment meant, because several people questioned in the Iran-Contra affair chose to take 5th to protect themselves'. 2. From the study of the Roman Empire many students realize that welfare programs and care of the unemployed is a problem that all governments must deal with. - The failure of the Triple Alliance and the Triple Entente by 1914 seems to point to failures by NATO, SEATO and the Warsaw Pact after World War II. - From the study of Progressive Legislation of the 1890-1900 students realize that citizens can change government. - After the study of the Enlightenment students realize that the American Constitution was the result of an evolutionary process.


17. Erwin Vladár, National Pedagogical Institute, Budapest, H. "In der Reifeprüfung gab der Kandidat schöne Antworten auf dem Gebiet der Geschichte. Er wurde darum von Prüfungsvorsitzenden gelobt. Dieser fragte: 'In Ihrem Vortrag haben Sie mehrmals gesprochen von 'wir, Ungarn' und das 'ungarische Volk' erwähnt. Was meinen Sie, was bedeutet Ihnen das Wort 'Ungar'? Der Kandidat antwortete: 'Darüber habe ich noch nie nachgedacht. Ich weiss es nicht recht. Ich bin anders als Andere...'. 'Trotzdem, was bedeutet das, Ungar'? 'Unsere
Vergangenheit und auch die Gegenwart ... Dass wir uns so ungefähr in der Mitte von Europa befinden, ... die Entwicklung und den Wohlstand und auch die Himmelsrichtungen betrachtend. Offen in dieser und jener Richtung. Wir geben und bekommen, aber irgendwie bleiben wir doch immer dasselbe ... Ja, Andere sind eben anders, wir sind halt so ... Ihnen ist es so gut, uns so. Es ist schwer zu verstehen, dass sie anders sind, da wir auch gleich sind. Sie sind auch aus Europa, wir auch, da wir auch gleich sind. Nein, ich bin nicht stolz darauf ... aber trotzdem bin ich stolz darauf ... Und da ist auch wahr, dass wir immer anders sein werden, wir sind ein sozialistisches Volk und trotzdem bleiben wir das Gleiche und das ist gut so ... Aber, Herr Vorsitzender, wir denken nur wenig daran, dass wir Ungarn sind, wenn man wegen etwas Anderes daran denken muss, ... und das ist gut so ...

CONCLUSIONS

1. Of the seventeen participants to this round five, when mentioning an historical example, referred to World War II. This is by far the largest single subject. It has no direct bearing on our theme but it shows what is still on people's minds.

2. A few examples of a lack of historical consciousness were given. Huismann quoted a pupil who was not prepared to give a place to 'dead people', however important they may have been. Schörken mentioned a father who possessed some elementary historical knowledge but no historical consciousness. A very alarming example is given by Janssen who writes of teachers who, while handling historical texts, only saw them as linguistic material; at the same time they used this material without any awareness that there might be some relationship to the great historical events of those days.

3. There were also some instances of a vague historical consciousness. Angvik cites the moment when he, as a six year-old, awakened to historical consciousness. In Vladar's student we witness the slow birth of a first inkling of it. The finest example is, in my opinion, given by Janssen: 'this was indeed not quite real, like looking at and at the same time playing in a movie-production'.

4. A good example of a still limited historical consciousness is that of Schnucker's Rex; he surely was aware that the statesmen who wrote the American Constitution were people with a life of their own and with personal interests; his awareness, however, remained limited to the strictly personal sphere.

5. Historical consciousness may originate from a personal encounter with actual history. Here I must again refer to Janssen but also to Angvik who sensed that his grandmother had a history of her own.
6. More often historical consciousness is awakened by an encounter with concrete historical evidence. This is already present in the example given by Fürnrohr but still more in that of Guderzo. Somewhat similar to this is the experience of the girl cited by De Keyser; here, as in other examples, the difference between 'history in books' and history presented in a more spectacular way stands out very clearly. Nielsen too narrates how otherwise uninterested girls became thrilled by the subject when, for instance, they 'bumped their heads into very low doorways'. Parkes' teacher for whom 'history' assumed a new meaning had previously only seen it 'as political events in a book'.

7. That a first form of historical consciousness may come as a kind of sudden revelation is proved by several anecdotes. Guderzo's young visitors of historical exhibitions seem to have experienced this: 'Never had we understood, until now ...'. It is also implied in Nielsen's account of the 'conversion' of the 'silent girls'. Parkes' teacher has an historical experience 'for the first time'. But the most conspicuous example is that of De Keyser's student girl where words like 'suddenly', 'spontaneously' and 'at once' abound.

8. Historical consciousness implies the ability to make practical use of historical knowledge. This is what Hambro does in Angvik's entry. Dalhuisen too gives several instances of this but also of a wrong use of historical knowledge. To be in the possession of historical knowledge does clearly not mean being able to take the right decisions. The pedagogical side of historical consciousness is strongly stressed by Henseke when he speaks of 'geschichtsgestaltetes Wirksamwerden' with the goal of realizing always better social conditions; he even calls historical consciousness a 'Motivationskomplex'.

9. Historical consciousness also means being able to associate the present with the past. We find this in Collins' entry. Here it is the historian who succeeds in doing this; her non-historical friends were unable to make the link. The student girl in De Keyser's entry proved able to refer to present-day situations from an historical point of view. The same applies to Nielsen's 'silent girls' who 'really tried to imagine in what ways (the life of historical persons) was different from theirs'. Schnucker's high school teachers supplied some telling examples too. The Polish peasant woman of Centkowski is a very curious example of relating the present to the past. We may, however, not dismiss this out of hand as only comical. I am convinced that multitudes of uneducated people handle history in this way.

10. Historical consciousness evidently implies an awareness of living in a structured time sequence of past, present and future; Schörken speaks here of 'drei historische Zeitebenen'. That this is a highly important thing is brought
out by the fact that it is mentioned no less than seven times, by Elio, Fünnrohr, Gruvberger, Henseke, Parkes, Schörken and Vladár. I must restrict myself here to the entries by Elio and Fünnrohr. The last one says that 'the dead represent our whole history, taken into our life of to-day and into our decisions of to-morrow'. Elio is still more analytical: 'It is by investigating the past and explaining past events' that we obtain 'an understanding of the present' which, in its turn, 'makes it possible to anticipate the future'.

10. Albeit in dispersed order, the entries mention a substantial number of items that may be considered as elements of historical consciousness.

a. An awareness of being part of history: 'We ourselves are part of History!' (Guderzo); 'we are history' (Parkes). Nielsen says this insight may be won 'by means of empathatical reconstruction'.

b. A sense of continuity: 'Wir sind (jetzt) ein sozialistisches Volk und trotzdem bleiben wir das Gleiche (wiefrüher).

c. A realization that historical periods differ from one another: 'People were smaller two hundred years ago' (Nielsen).

d. The awareness that the level of personal life differs from the historical level, or, in other words, that not everything is 'history': 'the two levels in my own existence (during World War II)' (Janssen).

e. The notion that 'historical consciousness' is not the same thing as 'historical knowledge': 'Geschichtsbewusstsein aus geschichtlicher Erkenntnis erwachsen' (Henseke).

f. The awareness that one's personal memory is different from historical memory. The findings of the family genealogist do not necessarily lead to 'historical consciousness' (Gruvberger).

g. A vague sketch of scholarly definitions can be described in a number of contributions. Schörken: 'In der Lage sein, Verknüpfungen, Zusammenhänge, Bezüge, Interpretationen aufzuweisen'; Elio: 'Interpretation - understanding - anticipation'; Dalhuisen: 'to be able to give historical reasons, and to account for different historical backgrounds'.

WHAT NEXT

In my judgment this is a very satisfying result. For the prosecution of this enquiry several ways are open to us. We might try to arrive at scholarly definitions but this would, perhaps, be somewhat premature. We might try to work out some of the items given above, for instance what is meant by anticipating the future. We might also start to collect additional material, for example by determining the factors (the 'historical agents') that occasion historical consciousness. First of all, I shall have to consult the two Boards. However, suggestions and contributions by members are always welcome.

Piet F.M.Fontaine
Amsterdam NL