

3. CONVERSACIONES
3. Conversations

A SHORT ESSAY IN EGO-HISTORY
WITH SOME PROSPECTS FOR THE
FUTURE, ON DEMAND OF
HISTORIA DE LA EDUCACIÓN

*Un breve ensayo de egohistoria con algunas
perspectivas de futuro, a petición de Historia
de la Educación*

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The label ‘historian of education’

HISTORIA DE LA EDUCACIÓN has asked me a short essay in order to present myself, my work in history of education and my opinion about the state of the art and the future of the history of education in Europe, and more largely in the world – naturally as far as my own research fields are concerned. A questionnaire with some guiding questions has been submitted to me as a historian of education. I shall follow it in my own way. It will therefore be a one-way conversation, because for the reader my distant interviewer continues in this text hiding behind my answers. But it is a frank testimony nevertheless.

Speaking about oneself and one’s own trajectory in life or in society is always a delicate matter, because inevitably one has to indulge in the vanity of an exercise of public self-fashioning – to use the famous concept that Stephen Greenblatt has applied to the Renaissance authors, in particular its educators like my compatriote Erasmus of Rotterdam, the undisputed prince of the self-fashioners. The result of that exercise may not correspond at all to the perception of one’s friends, close colleagues, readers and fellow-countrymen, let alone those in other countries. To give a personal example: my own public and professional image, like that of many other colleagues, has been rather different according to time and space and still varies according to the national audiences. Having started in France as a Dutch

historian of French and Dutch educational institutions, mainly in the eighteenth century and the revolutionary period, I am known in the Netherlands rather as a historian of early modern European mentalities, culture and religion, especially of late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century cultural practices (including education), heavily influenced by the French *Annales* School, whereas my later research has given me a special interest in European overseas history and North American colonial history, far from these two research fields.

All in all, I have slowly floated away from a basically institution-bound and geographically limited history of education towards the much broader field of informal educational and formative practices, and from collective action towards individual performance and self-consciousness. In my scholarly balance between institutions and culture, the scale dips more and more towards culture, and between the two basic conceptions of culture – i.e., culture as an object or a performance, and culture as a social process – it prefers increasingly the process approach. At present, my research turns around problems of memory and forgetting, and of history and heritage as channels of cultural transmission and social education, and it concerns a larger period, until the present day, with an open eye on the future. In fact, all these fields of interest continue overlapping each other and influencing my general evolution as a historian. I do not believe that our public and professional identity is given once for all. It is always a constructed identity, in which the image that others provide of our public identity interferes heavily with our self-perception, inducing us to adapt our targets and to almost unconsciously revise our work every time again. Therefore, a tag like ‘historian of education’ may be a useful institutional label, but it only partially accounts for our scholarly identity, at least for my own.

Of course, the narratives we tell about ourselves are rational, emotional, and partial or partisan constructs. Yet they deliver a personal account of how we see ourselves and what we consider our authentic personal life experience. In the past my own research has very much turned around such problems of perception and of individual and collective identity. Therefore I realize quite well that the following text forcibly gives a distorted image of my life and work. Yet, it will provide the well intentioned reader with some clues for a personal appreciation, if s/he wishes to make one. I see it as a useful exercise in raising consciousness of the weight of the different forms of education, both formal and informal, in anyone’s personal history, and of the personal background of the more global interpretations of education in history we express in our teaching, lectures and publications. And I apologize beforehand for the obvious arrogance of this presentation.

My public identity as a scholar

My public identity, like that of everyone else, is manifold and many-layered. I am a male Dutchman from an inner province of the Netherlands, Catholic by education, and university-trained, and I have worked as a research fellow, a translator from several languages, a teacher, a university dean, and a manager of research programs. I have a very broad academic background but asked who and what I am – that is: how I basically identify myself – I always call myself a



historian. I have neither been educated as an educationalist nor as a historian of education. For four years, from 1977 to 1981, I was a research fellow in the *Histoire de l'éducation* section of the Institut National de Recherche Pédagogique (INRP) in Paris, a governmental research institute on education outside the university system that recently has been transferred to Lyons, with the exception of the history section. But I have never worked in an education department, although many people in our profession who know me think so because an important part of my historical work turns around different forms, themes, and issues of education in history and more generally, I guess, because I am not afraid to develop every now and then broader historical visions on education's place, role, and importance in history. History and education are two domains of cognition which I am accustomed to conjugate in my own way. As a historian, I use to reflect on the historical dimensions of the present, and my personal life makes no exception to that. I am convinced that our current behaviour bears the marks of our personal, family and group experiences, either conscious or unconscious, and that education (or the lack of formal education) plays a huge role in the ways we interact with our fellow humans.

In fact, it is always the interface and the interplay between different dimensions of reality that captivates me in my research: between past and present, between institutions and agency, between conscious and unconscious action, between the intellectual, the spiritual and the collective mentalities, between high and low culture, or, for that matter, between institutional education and self-fashioning. Much of my work is concerned with the interaction or the frictions between such dimensions and the social groups or institutions concerned. The method I use to tackle these questions is what we may call the cultural anthropology of history, because it focuses on human agency, both on the individual level and by social groups (families, social strata, local communities, etc.). In my work I try to develop theories of strategy and tactics, of accommodation or negotiation, or simply of coping with reality by such persons, groups, and eventually even nations. Many historians write mainstream history, the history of power, institutions, strategy, elites, economic evolutions and dominant social trends. It must be said that quite often this kind of history ('history' here to be understood, of course, as history-writing, narrative and historiography, not as a pure reflection of reality, whatever that may be!) is immediately illuminating for our students and for a broader public, because it makes us understand in which direction society as a whole moves forward. We need such master narratives for determining our place in the large and overwhelming spectrum of human history.

Yet in another sense it gives us only an illusion of clarity, because it seldom accounts for what really motivates people to act as they actually do. Take a scholarly discipline that balances on the edge of the 'soft' and the 'hard' approach of science: economics. The present-day economic and financial crisis has taught us that the teachings of many macro-economists, including several famous Nobel Prize winners, about the mathematical dimensions of economy and the rational-choice theory in economic behaviour are at best an illusion: in fact, people act according to parameters of trust and confidence, of past experiences, interpretations of the present, and expectations of the future. All those parameters are so tightly enclosed in bundles of personal, group, or community viewpoints, values, memories, conditions, and interpretations, that the analysis of past

behaviour and the forecast of future agency and cultural or intellectual evolutions are extremely difficult to perform, even with the aid of highly sophisticated scientific methods. A historically reliable insight into social movements always requires a multidimensional and pluridisciplinary approach, at least at the level of the scholar's consciousness of what he is doing in his research.

The same holds for the traditional history of ideas, that has also been at the core of a particular conception of the history of education: the history of educational ideas. The breakdown of the great ideologies in the past century has made us conscious of the fact that ideas have no consistency in themselves and that it does not suffice to locate and study a particular idea or the aggregate ideas of a person, be it one of the greatest educationalists or philosophers, to account for their diffusion throughout later societies or around the world. Rousseau's or Pestalozzi's ideas on childhood, and Spinoza's or Voltaire's pleas for toleration did not fly through the air fecundating or infecting all those who were found on their trajectory. Ideas have only a virtual reality. They exist only in so far as they are embodied in a person's mind, written down in a text, or recorded in audiovisual media or in the cyberspace. They have to be actually appropriated by the individuals and groups themselves, over and over again, in order to be made operational in the social life and cultural context of the community.

However, science and scholarship do pretend to unravel the past for the benefit of the future of our communities and of mankind as a whole. That task accounts for the public legitimacy of the history of education too. This ambition explains the changes intervening constantly in the academic disciplines for their adaptation to the ambitions they profess and their actual tasks. Therefore in economics, for instance, micro-economics make presently a huge comeback, because it accounts much better than macro-economics or econometrics for economic performance as a form of agency on all the levels of society, using a variety of disciplinary alliances, from ethics to social psychology. Similarly, the old history of ideas has gradually been replaced by forms of 'intellectual history' that account much better for the social, cultural and political context of the transmission of knowledge and values, and their effective appropriation, adaptation or rejection.

The history of education is going through the same disciplinary and academic trajectory as those other disciplines. In the past, history of education has mostly crystallized into some basic scholarly subdisciplines, with more or less mutual links or cohesion, such as the institutional history of schooling, the history of national education policies, the history of educational ideas and methods (pedagogy), and the history of adult education. The rise of such restricted and often compartmentalized varieties of the history of education is comprehensible because of the primary role of history of education as a subject matter and a formative element of teacher training. However, the history of education as a scholarly discipline should not be reduced to such partial approaches of the educational reality. In fact, it has a tremendously important task to perform because history of education in its broadest sense helps us to discover *how* exactly society moves forward, as a community in which individuals on their own or within groups or institutions familiarize themselves with the very broad range of knowledge, methods and skills transmitted or invented by their predecessors, which allow them to become consciously living and acting personalities and performing citizens. Discover how precisely these educational values and practices



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are rooted in historical conditions, experiences, and institutions or institutional contexts, and how they may guide or influence the future ideals and performances of the communities concerned is, I think, the proper object of the history of education.

My own approach focuses therefore not so much on institutions, results, and facts, but on problems and processes, and more specially on forms or manifestations of opposition, autonomy and resistance that account for the effectual appropriation by persons or groups of the educational forms and images, contents and values proposed; on the ways by which the subjects of education and minorities (of whatever kind – the subject of education being always in a minority position towards the educator or the educating authority or institution) manage to make themselves a suitable and acceptable place in society and impose themselves at the other end of the power balance as full-fledged and responsible partners in the social process. Education, both formal and informal, is in my view a privileged instrument in that everyday task of anyone. History of education is in my eyes not so much an institutional discipline as a cultural practice devoted to the analysis of the multifaceted reality of which we are a performing actor. A well-conceived history of education has therefore to encompass the whole range of human ideas, values.

My personal background

It is important for me to tell first something about my personal background, because having been interrogated several times over the years on my personal trajectory as a historian, I realize more and more that the seeds of our personal development, especially the major categories with which we perceive the world around us, our basic approach to reality, and our methods of analysing

and mastering both the society as a whole and our own place within it, are planted in our early years. They owe much to our early experiences and to the education that we consciously or unconsciously have received from our social and cultural environment.

Allow me to quote here how I phrased this feeling (and indeed this intimate conviction) in my keynote lecture on the ISCHE 32-conference on the 'Discovery of Childhood' at Amsterdam in August 2010 (to be published soon in *Paedagogica Historica*):

Even if the child has been the first object of the history of education over time, its primary object is not the child in itself but the way we deal with it. It is about our concern, our commitment, our agency and our image of the child, the young people, the adolescents and the pre-adults. The imaginary of childhood, how children should be, how they should quit their childish age and how we have experienced this by ourselves, is the central focus of our discipline, the history of education, more precisely defined as the history of children's education. Such research aims are packed in the words of scholarship, of philosophy or pedagogy, of anthropology and sociology, and even of cultural sciences – but that is package, not reality. The reality – if I may use that tricky concept – is personal, it is our confrontation with the child we have been and we may unconsciously see or want to discover in the child we study or that we project into our scholarly work. Indeed, in cultural analysis every cultural image refers to forms of sedimentation of physical, visual and mental images and experiences. Properly analyzed, history of education tells us as much about ourselves and our predecessors in this field as about childhood and its equivalents as objects of research. It brings a historian easily to a sense of discovery and, consequently, either to a close personal involvement in his or her research theme and to its emotional appropriation as an element of identity finding in the past, or to a true sense of otherness in the face of a lost world. History of education constantly challenges us to transform our desires of identity by recognizing otherness.

The object of the present text is certainly not to perform the author's psychoanalysis. But if there is one scholarly discipline that requires constant reflection of the scholar on his own position and the genesis of his own ideas, values and practices, it is certainly education, and the history of education makes no exception to this requirement. Therefore I must first deliver some elements of such a reflection on my own personal position. I was born on May 31, 1942, as the eldest of four children in the town of Zutphen in the Eastern Netherlands, during the Second World War, and that fact has very much determined the course of my life and my intellectual orientation. Zutphen is an old Hanseatic city on one of the most picturesque rivers of the Netherlands and it is the historic capital of a former county going back to the ninth century. With the exception of the district destroyed during the war, it has a superbly preserved and lively city center which from the very start of my childhood has influenced my perception of the world around me as drenched with a present modulated by the past. Impressed by the war ruins just in front of my home, where we played as young children in an otherwise historic city, I must have developed early a sense for heritage that was the foundation of my interest in history. The town was delivered from the German occupation by the Canadian army in April 1945 after a fierce battle of two weeks, conquering house by house. We passed the last weeks in the huge safe room of one of the banks of the city center. For many months already there was virtually

nothing left to eat, and my mother was in the very last month of pregnancy of her second child. My brother, now deceased but who has always remained close to me, was born just after the Liberation and bore all his life the marks of this nervously very difficult period. I have no clear memory of the war and the occupation, only the fear of noise which I constantly bear in me due to the terrible bombings of the bridges, the railway station and other targets in the town on September 28 and October 14, 1944, quite near our house. I still cannot stand a noisy surrounding. The war has been very present in the life of my parents – in fact, after my mother's death in 2007, I discovered in the papers she left how much her memories had continued turning around the war events, around the questions of right and wrong behaviour in front of the Nazi occupation, and the need for offering shelter to the persecuted, resisters and Jews alike. As a shopkeeper, my father was surrounded by several Jewish colleagues and before the war my home town had a considerable Jewish community of which virtually nothing was left after the Holocaust.

Family parameters

For my mother, life had been difficult during many years, especially because she was of a very poor background, my maternal grandfather being a peasant's son who had migrated to the city and become a labourer, in care of ten children. He earned his living by delivering throughout the town the bread of the local bread factory. My mother was a very intelligent woman who certainly would have been able to achieve some form of higher education but because of her father's poverty has never been allowed to go beyond the elementary school – the refusal being obvious for economic reasons but also because secondary and higher education was before the Second World War socially limited to the higher social strata. In 1930, at age thirteen, she became a maidservant in a well-to-do family. After her death, I discovered in her last school report that she had added with a pencil the remark 'I would so much have loved going to study'! And we realized how much our own success in that field was for her at the same time a matter of pride and of intense personal regret, in fact a growing regret as she grew older and became more conscious of the cruelties of traditional society towards the underprivileged and the foolish cultural pretensions of the traditional elites. Studying was for my parents the greatest gift they could bestow upon their children, and they spent a lot of energy and money enabling us to achieve a higher status in education than their own.

People of my age are children of scarcity and although we now share the affluency of our consumer societies, our life has at first been marked by the want of essential things. I still am not really a consumer, I conserve things for later, and that habit is also typical of my work as a historian. Perhaps it is the very way in which from the beginning I am accustomed to organize my work. In my first independent piece of scholarly work, the (unpublished) thesis in church history on 'Perfidus Judaeus: The medieval image of the Jew' that I wrote at the end of my first phase of higher education, in theology (1966), the evidence resulted from a long, almost unsystematic search through the wide range of books I devoured. It was only gradually restricted to a problem-oriented theme, equally due to my

reading bulimia – because that is the second characteristic of children from such backgrounds: their initial hunger for everything they discover as wanting in their lives. At the home of one of my aunts, I tried to read by and by the whole encyclopaedia they had bought. I sometimes feel like a squirrel accumulating ideas for research and bits and pieces of historical evidence for themes I develop in my mind but that often are not materialized in research programs or research papers.

On reflection, I think that my work is as much curiosity-driven, sometimes even serendipitous, as commanded by formal, collective research projects, although the definition of such research programmes benefits of course also from the personal input of curiosity-driven scholars. Anyway, for me curiosity comes first, rationalization and problematization second. Curiosity is, indeed, the major virtue and the first requirement of a true scholar, as the latest science manifesto of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, of which I am an active member, has expressly stated. I think that such an attitude has to counterbalance the factory-like, often anaemic and rather superficial production of scholarship without personal, moral or social involvement that dominates much of our present academic landscape. Present-day programmatic research, as required by the national funding agencies in which of course I am myself bound to participate or by private sponsors, remains of course compulsory for a sound development of scholarship, both in education and in history: scholarship is a matter of the whole research community, and it is only in scholarly interaction that true scholarship emerges and reliable results are defined. Yet in my eyes programmatic funding retains somehow the strongly negative image of limiting one's personal creativity and restricting the prospects offered by one's life experience for the definition of new areas of research that need to be validated as beneficial to the community. For me, such programmatic or thematic restrictions still easily go against the broad academic spirit I want to cherish and to promote, as an all-round historian.

My father came from a typical lower middle-class urban family of the province of Holland, where my Germany-born ancestors had settled at Rotterdam in the eighteenth century, mostly working as wine merchants, liquor dealers or grocers. My father was born at Leiden, the old university town in the province of Holland, but as of old also an important center of woollen industry. From the age of twelve he was trained as a portrait photographer, first at the studio of his uncle after whom I have been named. Later he acted during two decades as a branch manager in portrait studios in many different places of the Netherlands, until he settled independently in my birth town. His profession was relatively protected during the war because of the need for passport photos for identity papers, which did not exist before the German occupation, but it was by pure miracle that he escaped the last raid of the Nazis in my hometown. Like many fellow photographers, my father made double copies of some of the photos for the benefit of the underground resistants who needed false identity papers. Our home was therefore always full of people helping in the studio, the shop and the dark room, but it was a home without books. My father read the newspapers and his professional press but nothing else. I never saw him reading a book. He had typically a visual habitus. His experience of the world went through the eye, and during many evenings he spent a lot of hours retouching with painstaking precision the photo plates, the portraits, or the pictures themselves he had made in his trade. Apart from his work ethic, I have inherited his visual habitus and his

love of the mastery of one's craft. To use the words of Marc Bloch, a historian whom I consider as one of the greatest, this craft is in my case the historians's *métier*, the epistemic way of dealing in theory and practice with the sources and the methods.

Early educational experience and practice

In the Netherlands of the 1940s, the 50s and until the early 60s, elementary education, though entirely funded by the State, was distributed along religious affiliation and strongly marked by confessional adhesion. Catholic boys went to Catholic boys' schools managed by lay teachers but imbued with a rather militant spirit. In my home town Catholics were a minority of about 15%, but for historic reasons they dominated the shopping areas because in a remote past Dutch Catholics, having been kept away by the Protestant state from the administrative employments and the intellectual professions, had found a refuge and a niche in commerce and crafts. As a minority they fostered a combative, emancipatory mentality in town, with a strongly confessionalized worldview, and upon reflection I think that it is this militancy that has been one of the determinants of my historical formation. Indeed, history is in my eyes very much a power play between a plurality of actors on the market place of everyday experience, where a variety of groups continuously design their group identity in interaction between each other, and with a performing strategy in mind. They identify themselves in front of others by negotiating the conditions of their group existence together with that of other groups.

Our early education and indeed our formation as adolescents bore the marks of this confrontational practice. In the 1950s, the history of the Netherlands was taught in several separate school versions, the more so as the Catholics formed by then approximately one third of the population of the country and continued incrementing their part thanks to a high birth rate. To name only the two major versions of that school history practice: first of all there was the predominant Protestant version claiming that the Netherlands were a Calvinist nation, elected by God himself in the late sixteenth-century Revolt against the King of Spain; he had put his chosen nation under the protection of the royal House of Orange; after the revolutionary era, in the nineteenth century, the now secularized Dutch *state* was pervaded by a Protestant offensive claiming, against the Catholics and the liberals, and later on against the socialists too, that the national community really had to be a Protestant *nation*. In fact this discourse intended to stress and impose by education a cultural unity that was not perceived as such by the opponents. Hence the fierce struggle among the political, religious and cultural groups on the subject of elementary education during virtually the whole nineteenth century, until the so-called Pacification Act of 1917 that regulated the school system by accepting and financing with public money the durable confessional divisions.

This idea of the Protestant character of the nation still continues identifying the Netherlands in many foreign eyes, although confessing Protestants actually form a small minority in the country in front of the huge number of people without any church adhesion, a seizable portion of Catholics (without much

church practice either) and a number of Muslims that is still rising through immigration and sometimes even conversion. The other, Catholic version of national history, the one I learned and that formed my basic perception of the country as a nation of discord and stressed the historical oppression of the Catholics by the Protestant heretics of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the need for immediate emancipation, that is, recovering their former, righteous place in the Dutch nation by increasing their level of education, occupying the intellectual professions, and gathering themselves as a true political force, under the guidance of a strong church leadership itself subservient to the authority of the highly worshipped Holy Father and the Vatican in Rome.

We call this system of separate social traditions and church-bound institutions the *verzuiling* (in English *pillarization*), because it refers to the metaphor of a neutral state based upon a plurality of independent pillars (*zuilen*) representing as many ideological positions or persuasions. During the 1960s, under the pressure of changing cultural and social conditions all over the world, the social and institutional dimensions of the pillarized nation started to collapse, and the Catholic Church of the Netherlands, having become a momentous force within the national community, rather quickly liberated itself from the suffocating pressure of the traditional authorities. By this collective movement, it virtually embodied Michel de Certeau's famous 1968 analysis as a *Prise de Parole* – much to the dislike of the Vatican that stroke back by nominating a consistent series of extremely conservative bishops and putting the Catholic University of Nijmegen under control, two measures that in the long run killed the Dutch Catholic Church, now reduced to a small acting minority virtually destitute of clerics and priests.

The 1960s were also the time when the Dutch Catholics wrote and exported their new *Catechism for Adults* (1966). Living from 1966 in France, I have been asked many times to explain for a broad range of audiences, from intellectuals to peasants, and in different countries, from Barcelona to Naples, the Dutch events around the so-called Pastoral Council (1966-70), and the scope and impact of the Dutch Catechism as a useful tool for a new form of religious education compatible with the new spirit of society as a whole. In my foreign French environment, I have experienced how much hope these events created among people looking for liberation from the suffocating cage of traditional values, rituals, morals and practices that imprisoned them, and of the dominant elites that continued to present them as the only way to salvation. It was one of the strongest experiences I have felt and it has contributed heavily to my insights in the way people try to master unwelcome or outdated forms of social and cultural conditioning, by proposing smaller or greater novelties, securing for themselves a honorable exit, and negotiating the imposition of new cultural values or at least conditions for their appropriation. Education seen as an alternative or escape from unwelcome conditioning is one of the strongest issues in that field.

Simultaneously I discovered during my work as an occasional translator for the journal *Concilium* in the 1960s in Paris the works of Michel de Certeau on the practice of religion and culture. Soon after the May 1968 events he became the main interpreter of cultural change and one of the masters of the new forms of cultural analysis. As a student in philosophy and theology I had first been influenced by the existentialists, in particular Merleau-Ponty, and the new French

theology (De Lubac, Teilhard de Chardin, and others), then as a history student in Paris by the leading masters of thought of that period, Claude Lévi-Strauss and Michel Foucault. But I had never been quite happy with the great visions in history of the latter, in particular his strategy hypothesis, because it seemed to come all from the supply-side. It appeared to me as a top-down history in which the lower classes and the minorities could only be unwilling victims, and the demand-side was neglected, even absent. I could not accept this kind of intellectual distortion, Therefore I was immediately seduced by Certeau's stress on culture as practice, and on the tactics of appropriation in everyday life by the very actors, seen from below. After I had met him, his personality and his works have exerted a huge influence on my formation as a historian, because first of all his scholarly work permitted me to join together culture and religion, education and experience, and to construct a single, coherent historical image out of my manifold interests, and secondly he provided me with a framework for the analysis of cultural practice, beginning with education, both formal and informal. In my works I regularly pay him my tribute and recently I had the occasion to write a short biography of him and an appraisal of his work for the international handbook *French historians 1900-2000* published by Philip Daileader and Philip Whalen (Chichester, 2010). With much satisfaction I have discovered that there is at present in Europe, at least outside France, a strong regain of the interest taken in his work, especially in Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands.

The Dutch community as a whole rediscovered in the 1960s and 70s for their country a self-attributed guiding role in modern society, under the image of a tolerant nation, permitting sexual liberty, public homosexuality, drug addiction, euthanasia, desertion from the traditional institutional frames (Church, traditional forms of citizenship, the army), and other practices or values longtimes considered as criminal in most Western nations. The sometimes extreme position of the Dutch in matters of peace and war brought the Americans even to speak of 'Hollanditis' as a disease that had to be eradicated. In the long run, the Dutch reinvented for themselves a 'tradition of tolerance' as an exportable national value. In my interpretation, this 'national value' is a reinvention of tradition in the sense of a new cultural heritage used for the education and the cohesion of the community, as explained in a famous collections of essays edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (*The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge, 1983). In the Dutch case, it marks the transition from a political and social regime of internal oppositions towards a consensual regime of internal loyalties and accommodations, tolerance being the main instrument for the reconciliation of perceived differences and for peaceful coexistence in the global community.

Formative years as a historian

Like many other young Dutch Catholics with a culturally unprivileged background, I went twelve years old to a seminary for my secondary education. That was the Catholic seminary of the archbishopric of Utrecht, in which my home town is situated. But it was also a State recognized *gymnasium* (as a classical high school is called in the Netherlands), and the level of the teachers was rather high, as it was equally on the grand seminaries for philosophy and theology I



attended after having finished secondary school. In fact, these grand seminaries were excellent equivalents of university education, and we exchanged many times with students at Utrecht university located not far from our seminary. In the 1950s and early 60s, for lower middle-class Catholic youngsters as I was, the seminary was still the only conceivable and feasible access to scholarship and science, and hence to a teaching and research job. I must confusely have felt that my ambitions needed absolutely the byway of the seminary for clerical education. A byway, because finally this proved to be the wrong way.

Ten years ago, at the initiative of one of my former fellow-seminarists, we wrote together a memorial book called provocatively *Pubers voor God* ('Adolescents for God', Nijmegen, 2001) assessing not only the happy or sad memories of our common youth but in particular trying to explain how our later personal development as adults with often great responsibilities in society had been prepared and influenced by our seminary experience. I wrote an after-word explaining the particular role that the seminary had played for the social education and cultural emancipation of the unprivileged Catholic youth of those decades, because many of the leading Dutch Catholics of later decades were former seminarists. The work on our book and the many testimonies collected revealed also a real and strong dichotomy among the former pupils, more than forty years after their youth experiences. One part had suffered a lot from the isolation from their families and the very life in a boarding school; still many years later, they had quite often needed psychiatric assistance to overcome that experience – in our case, and contrary to what happened in many other religious institutions as present-day testimonies have revealed, sexual assault had however been rare, at least from the clerical teachers, because the seminary's president was very keen on abuse and sent the perpetrators immediately away. The other part of the former pupils including myself, however, confessed that their memories remained positive, that the community experience had been very formative for their later professions, including leadership, and that they had learned to adjust their private expectations and ambitions to the needs of community life.

Although I have completed the whole clerical educational trajectory and have even been ordained a priest, I discovered quickly that my true vocation was not clerical but devoted to learning, in particular in the humanities. In the meantime, the archbishop, Cardinal Alfrink, had sent me to Paris with a four-year scholarship, for the study of history and in particular the history of spirituality, probably intending to use my services after my study for a professorship at the diocesan seminary. However, due to the institutional changes in the Catholic Church and in particular the vocational crisis of the Dutch clergy in the late 1960s, the seminary was closed soon after my departure and replaced by forms of university training with much less need for new teachers.

By then I had discovered my true intellectual concerns. After a serious discussion with the Cardinal in 1971, I left the service of the archdiocese and found a small job in Paris as a research assistant to the professor who had supervised my Master's thesis on a theme of religious history. That was the late Alphonse Dupront, an influential professor of early modern history at the Sorbonne and research director in the historical anthropology of religion at the *École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales* (EHESS), a rather enigmatic man unknown by the broader public but with a very strong personality and a career at the heart of the

French university system, who has formed for the historical *métier* a long range of famous French historians. I owe him much, both as a professional historian and as an employer. I served him for ten years on a precarious contractual basis, until my return to the Netherlands in 1981, after 1977 however only at a small part-time basis because I had been employed by the Institut National de Recherche Pédagogique (INRP), at the History of Education section created at that very moment by the French ministry of Education for the promotion of this new branch of history in the interest of the global education system in France, under the direction of Pierre Caspard. My task there was rather humble and documentary in nature, but resulted finally in the creation of a major research aid. Because I had been responsible for the confection of a large bibliographic database on popular religion in Dupront's research center at the EHESS, I was asked to conceive, set up, and start at the INRP the confection of a national bibliography on the history of education in France; the first issue was published in 1979 in the brand-new journal of our section called *Histoire de l'éducation*. My successors have continued it on the same basis, adapting only some of its sections to newer insights; at present it still grows and may be consulted on-line.

My job at the INRP and the international orientation I have always fostered for the sake of scholarship made me also ready for an active participation in the equally new International Standing Conference for the History of Education (ISCHE). I was elected member of the executive committee as a representative of France in 1979, left this charge in 1982 after I had returned to the Netherlands, but was reelected in 1985 and served then during three years as secretary general of the ISCHE, a period during which we tried to institutionalize the association, in particular by drafting its statutes and increasing its international coverage outside Europe. In 1981, at the centenary of the Jules Ferry laws instituting the *laïcité*, gratuity and the obligatory character of elementary schooling in France, I organized on behalf of the French ministry of Education and the ISCHE a great international conference at Sèvres, one of the first of ISCHE of which the proceedings were published (*L'offre d'école/The supply of schooling*, Paris, 1983).

As a foreign employee, I could not obtain a regular job in France and had to content myself with a precarious position in the margin of the educational system and the formal research institutions. In fact, that limitation served my personal interest, because my first employer, professor Dupront, deliberately left me much liberty for my own research as I intended to organize it. It permitted me to start a life-long close collaboration with Dominique Julia, at his request (he had been my teacher at the Sorbonne). I consider him to be by far the foremost historian of early modern education in France and the most profound analyst of its cultural conditions, background, implications and results. And I owe him much of my methodological concerns. Our cooperation commenced with the painstaking serial analysis of the social recruitment of some major French boarding schools in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the revolutionary era, in order to test the hypotheses on social inequality and the reproduction of the élites developed by the sociologists Pierre Bourdieu and Raymond Boudon. Beside a series of articles, this research has resulted in our monograph *École et société dans la France d'Ancien Régime* (Paris, 1975) published in the prestigious collection *Cahiers des Annales*, which has exercised a certain influence in the domain of the history of education because of its approach in the terms of the statistical as well as prosopographical social history of that moment.

Because the basic questions of our research turned around the cultural aspects of the social recruitment, our collaboration naturally overflowed the theme of the input of the grammar schools into the related themes of the origin and level of the teachers and of the very culture of education, both the culture *in* education and education seen as a cultural product in itself. Together with Julia, I started a long-term research on the congregation of the French Oratory, the most important and culturally renewing body of secondary school teachers in France during the *Ancien Régime* and into the revolutionary era, and as such the fierce rivals of the Jesuits. Again, this research is based on the very time-consuming prosopographical method, in order to detect the cultural influences on social evolutions and to discover the cultural conditions of school performances. Until now, it has resulted in several learned articles, but the final monograph is still in due course.

It was in the circle of scholars surrounding Dominique Julia, in particular with Jacques Revel and Roger Chartier, that we started elaborating a research programme on the social and cultural history of universities, seen from the level of its primary users, i.e. the students, hence from below. It has finally resulted in my PhD dissertation at Tilburg University, entitled *La Société néerlandaise et ses diplômés, 1575-1814. Une recherche sérielle sur le statut des intellectuels à partir des registres universitaires* (Amsterdam & Maarssen, 1981). This was again a statistical and at the same time prosopographical research on the output of the early modern Dutch universities in terms of academic certification. Counting 23,000 graduates and their professional career, partly with the aid of an in-depth biographical (and, for the discovery of long-term family traditions, also genealogical) identification of the 1000-odd students from a particular town, this was a very ambitious enterprise aiming at a better view on the cultural conditions and the social effects of change and continuity in the early modern society, measured at the accessibility, the performances and the individually attained level of higher education. Incidentally, this serial research would have been perfectly fit for a computerized database but we conceived it before the breakthrough of the computer era and the availability of computers and computer time for the common research fellow. Consequently I did everything by hand. Ironically, now that electronic databases are within the reach of everyone, cultural history has mostly turned away from large databases, statistical operations and complicated prosopographies, preferring instead the less time-consuming analysis of symbolic dimensions of the social world... As for myself, I started a more methodological reflection on a new approach of the history of universities inspired by historical anthropology with my essay «La Universidad como espacio de mediación cultural», on the ISCHE conference at Salamanca, published in *Historia de la Educación*, n.º 5 (1986).

The cultural turn

These two personal life experiences, the Catholic seminaries and my job as a historian of education in France, have taught me the importance of what I have called the 'byways' in history of education. By this term I understand the educational trajectories conceived and taken personally by individual men and women in spite of the formal requirements, the readymade educational highways and the available institutions in their society. As *Seitenwege der Autonomie*

(*Byways for autonomy*) this theme has on my suggestion been put on the research agenda of an interdisciplinary conference on personal strategies of education in the early modern era, held in Bielefeld (Germany) in March 2009. An extreme form of a byway in our highly schooled society is self-education, because in the eyes of most of our contemporaries there obviously should be no real need for that. I may refer to the collected essays on *Autodidaxie* published under my direction in *Histoire de l'éducation* in 1996 (n.º 70). But close scrutiny of personal life stories reveals that virtually everybody, not only in the past but even nowadays, includes some form of educational byways in his or her efforts to construct a meaningful life, adapted to his or her personal conditions, desires, and capacities. The real point of interest is to know whether such educational byways change our global perception of the educational world. The second question is to discover whether byways are consciously adopted as a supplement or as an alternative to the education supplied by the global community and its policy-makers. A third question is to know how individual persons justify and legitimate their diverging routes, with what arguments, either narrative or by other means, for instance through their behaviour and its effects.

The opportunity to present our research on the recruitment of the French grammar schools and elite colleges at a seminar of Pierre Bourdieu at the EHESS has marked an important step in my early reflection. Over the years, the proposed theme, 'strategies of professional reconversion', made me think a lot about the relation between the educational routines or strategies of the community and the individual decisions in matters of personal formation, development, and reconversion. It made me wonder whether change has always a community-induced dimension or is forcibly bound to individual decisions, even with the pressure of the community behind. In short, what is the margin left for individual strategy in history? How does a person achieve a successful departure from the pre-established routines and highways s/he is supposed to follow, and how does s/he justify personal decisions to take other routes? How much play does the individual have in history? To use Certeau's distinction: may individual tactics change in final resort the result of community strategies? Is 'poaching' for individually attractive educational opportunities possible and socially rewarding in the forbidden areas of the large field of global education? Because, in my view, that is exactly what history of education may also be about: looking at the changing balance between the formal and the informal, the imposed and the self-chosen forms of education, and being aware of alternative views on the development and achievement of a full and rich personality, with a recognizable impact on the history of his or her epoch and environment. It will be clear that such a research is much more embedded in the categories of cultural history than in those of the established social sciences.

That is, I think, the point where my cultural turn really started. It coincided with a more general move of the French historical profession away from large structures, huge populations, and social realities towards more individualized trajectories, smaller groups, and cultural meanings. More generally speaking, the interest in the new micro-history increased and there was a new awareness of the use of differences of scale in historical narratives, from the global and the national to the local and the personal level. It was a turn from a more social to a more anthropological approach, focussing on agency and meaning instead of objectified

phenomena and social development. In France this turn coincided with and was reinforced by an important change in the field of religious studies – religion being as of old closely related to culture and education. Due to the crisis in church membership and the sense of a growing split between official religion and the popular expressions of the sacred, global church history was by and by replaced in the field of research by ‘popular religion’, an inadequate term but that had the merit to focus on the performers, the believers and the consumers, instead of the ideas, formal liturgies, church policy and the authorities. Popular religion presented therefore all the characteristics of the shift towards another form of historical writing I mentioned above.

This turn has taken different names. At first it was called the history of (collective) mentalities, under the influence of Lucien Febvre and, more in the *sérail* of the historical profession, of historians like Alphonse Dupront, but the problems presented by that label are obvious: what really is a (collective) *mentalité*? How to discover and to measure it? Isn't it quite often a new name for an old commodity: the history of common ideas? Therefore, in the course of time that label has been sooner or later abandoned everywhere for more suitable names, linked not to the historical object itself but to its approach: historical anthropology (as I have proposed it myself in my early Dutch work on this new subdiscipline), and a little bit later ‘new cultural history’, i.e., a cultural history focussing on culture, conceived not as an object or a collection of autonomous objects, but as a social process defining the manifold forms of agency, unraveling their layers of meaning, either social or symbolic, and giving them a global meaning in the community.

The same turn had still to be made in the Netherlands, where the historical profession remained largely enclosed in routines and structures that clearly became outdated. Even the Dutch high priest of history, Johan Huizinga, whose *The Autumn of the Middle Ages* (or *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, 1919), an early manifesto for a new approach in cultural history, had won him a broad international fame as a forerunner, was nearly forgotten in his home country, until the Huizinga revival of the 1980s in the wake of the rise of the new cultural history abroad. Innovation did not come from the general historians but from the social historians, the historians of education and the church historians, who in the 1970s and 80s proved to be much more open to a profound renewal of their respective disciplines. As far as I am concerned, my educational background, my personal research interests and the historical methods I fostered had made me an enthusiastic supporter of a profound renewal. I had written different articles on themes of popular religion in the Netherlands (religious co-existence, pilgrimage, the cult of the saints, prophecy, sorcery, witchcraft, etc.) and on the very definition of this new field of research. The most important ones have been translated into English and collected for my sixtieth birthday by my collaborators under the title *Embodied belief: Ten essays on religious culture in Dutch history* (Hilversum, 2002).

By and by, these articles became known in the Netherlands and in 1979 I was invited to present at the annual meeting of the Association of Church Historians a keynote lecture with a syncretical view on the new religious history in France. This lecture proved to be seminal for my subsequent career. It established my reputation as a historian of mentalities in the Netherlands, and the long, lavishly

annotated article I wrote on the basis of this lecture, published in 1981, continues to be quoted until today. Some years later, in 1983, in the new faculty of history at Rotterdam where a different conception of history was experienced ('societal history', comparable to the *Gesellschaftsgeschichte* that was by then in vogue at Bielefeld), a chair in 'the history of the cultural and mental aspects of preindustrial societies' was created – the very name shows how new and difficult the definition of the field still was. I was proposed as the candidate who would introduce in the Netherlands the *Annales*-style cultural history. I got the chair, due to the support of those who knew my previous work including this article.

It would be fastidious to present here in more detail the work of the following years, during which I tried to combine in a single conceptual approach cultural history, historical anthropology, the history of education and the history of universities. The synthesis on Dutch culture in the Golden age, seen from the vantage point 1650, that I have written together with the literary historian Marijke Spies in 1999 and that has been translated into English under the title *1650: Hard-Won Unity* (Assen & Basingstoke, 2004), shows not only the scope of our research and the broad range of culture in this new conception, but makes at the same time clear that cultural history has everything to win by a problem-oriented approach. Indeed, our book was structured around some major hypotheses on the character of Dutch society and its moving forces that created a 'Golden Age' (but the term dates from the nineteenth century!). They concern the role of religion, education and the intellectual life, the participatory character of the general culture which we defined as a 'discussion culture', the neutrality of the public space, the importance of the middle groups for a strong social body, and the centrifugal character of the political system. But, coming back to my earlier comments in this text, we showed also the play or leeway in the cultural system that, more than elsewhere in Europe, ensured its profound dynamics because it permitted everyone to take a share in the cultural process, in his or her own way.

At the Erasmus University of Rotterdam, and from 1997 to my formal retirement for reasons of age in 2007 at the Free University of Amsterdam, I worked during many years for the promotion and the establishment in my home country first of the *histoire des mentalités*, then of historical anthropology and the (new) cultural history. Starting from the themes of cultural and religious history, and history of education that were common in the 1980s, like the history of literacy, elementary and secondary schooling and higher education, my interests and that of my graduate students moved toward culture and education in a broader sense: the history of cultural practices and representations, of cultural transfer, social memory, and identity, of urban history as a story of the representation and appropriation of urban space, of the social and cultural history of language and its teaching. My present-day research turns mainly around the transmission of religious experience, religious survival strategies and models of confessional coexistence in early modern Europe and colonial America, and, on a more general methodological level, on heritage, memory and oblivion, including the so-called *lieux de mémoire* and their role in the often short-lived 'communities of memory' that come up over and over again as new forms of community culture and identity-finding, including on the internet.

My latest intervention in this field, in October 2011, was about the digital memorial for the one hundred thousand Dutch Jews exterminated during the

Holocaust that has recently been inaugurated at the Holocaust memorial of Amsterdam. This memorial clearly has a double scope: remembrance of (and mainly inside) the Jewish community, and education towards a healthy balance between memory and oblivion in the wider national community, including the newcomers from other countries. Yet its realization asks us also important questions about our relation with the past and our experience of time: does the past remain a living reality with its own consistency, able to appeal to our responsibilities and provoke us into analyzing the past for its own sake? Or are we doomed to some form of 'presentism' – to quote the theme of an important book on the *régimes d'historicité* by François Hartog (Paris, 2003) – in which only the needs of the present determine in what way we look at the past, either for some form of remembrance (the *histoire-mémoire*) or for actuality-bound heritage-finding (the *histoire-patrimoine*), the two major forms of present-day public management of the past. Such questions should occupy every researcher, especially in the history of education, because education to knowledge, skills and values is basically about transmission from the past, either close by or remote, but always in a time-frame.

From prosopography to biography

Let me go back to the heart of the matter, because research always is about something material, tangible, definite, something which the scholar can appropriate as a subject of his very own self, and – why not? – love as his own baby in order to devote all his attention to a close scrutiny of his object, leaving no single dimension unexplored. Indeed, although an excess of emotional involvement may present some dangers for the clarity of our analysis and our reasoning, *empathy* is, I think, the major virtue of the historian, especially in education. If a historian of education does not work in unison with his research subjects, he will forcibly get off his target. I mean this quite literally: the researcher cooperates with the subjects of his research theme, either in actual present or in the past. Of course, people from the past cannot respond directly to our questions. Yet the historian has to develop an intimate feeling for the correctness of his own hypotheses, analyses and answers, given the particular conditions of the time and place and the characteristics of the social and cultural groups he is working with. That means that every form of research in history of education has always to be performed against the background of a broader general knowledge of, and intimacy with the society concerned.

My former reflections precluded to the transition from a prosopographical towards a more biographical approach, embedded much more in a cultural than in a social conception of education and self-education. Yet, for a historian biography is not a self-evident method of research. Collective biography, or prosopography, often is considered more fashionable since it facilitates precisely that generalization of knowledge which is at the basis of the paradigm of social science. Apart from the general interest of a biographical subject for history at large, such as Erasmus, Rembrandt, Louis XIV, Napoleon or Hitler, which may justify any form of historical research, there are roughly two reasons for privileging individual biography over other forms of narrative: an analytical and a

contextual argument. Biography may give an in-depth analysis of the subject that throws new light on the way the individual intimately shapes his or her feelings, behaviour, or ways of attributing meaning to life in a given community, space or period, or it may permit to enhance the social context of individual lives and therefore to understand better how single persons shape their conditions of life through the interplay with other individuals and with the ways of doing and thinking they share with their group. Ever since twenty years, I have written several biographical studies. But I shall only focus here on the one that is by far the most important, both in my own eyes and in the appreciation of others.

This time I found my subject really by accident, another case of serendipity. Looking for early modern texts to submit for analysis and discussion to the students of my postgraduate seminar in cultural history, I stumbled across two pamphlets printed in Utrecht and Amsterdam respectively, in 1623, which were drafted in the form of a dialogue between their editor – the headmaster of a grammar school who is well known to us – and a virtually unknown fifteen-year old orphan boy, called Evert Willemsz by his patronymic (Evert, son of William), without a family name. They relate the physical sufferings and spiritual, even mystical experiences of the latter in his orphanage during a period of seven months. Since the boy had temporarily lost his hearing and his speech, communication with the bystanders had to adopt a written form. The pamphlets publish the written deposit of these dialogues, called ‘copies’ (i.e. the literal transcription of the notes exchanged among the interlocutors), after certification by the Reformed consistory and the town magistrate. Beside the messages of the boy, they include therefore the way his townspeople and other contemporaries reacted, and his own rejoinders. In other words, a close analysis of the content permits us to grasp the basic form of the cultural process, including the appropriation of the events or their refusal, and the attribution of meaning by the different players involved. Having asked the help of an experienced genealogist, I soon discovered who the boy really was, that he had a name, a career and a family. That was where the theme started to interest me seriously: what was the place of the cultural process in his personal achievement? And what did it tell us about the highways and byways of education? In fact, young Evert Willemsz proved to be a marvelous example of the opportunities that society could present to an early modern adolescent, even an unprivileged one, and that he actually was able to take because of his personality, his social intelligence and the favorable conditions supplied by the context. My research had therefore to focus on both dimensions: his personality and experience on the one side, and the contextual evidence on the other side.

A first account of this research was included in an article of a more general scope, published in *Paedagogica Historica* (vol. 29, n.º 1, 1993) under the title «Enfants saints, enfants prodiges: l’expérience religieuse au passage de l’enfance à l’âge adulte». Subsequently I presented its contents to my colleagues at several occasions before it finally resulted in a full-grown and voluminous book that I consider to be my most important work, *Wegen van Evert Willemsz, een Hollands weeskind op zoek naar zichzelf, 1607-1647* (‘Pathways of Evert Willemsz, a Dutch orphan in search of himself’, Nijmegen, 1995). A slightly revised version has been published in a beautiful, empathic English translation under the title *Fulfilling God’s Mission: The Two Worlds of Dominie Everardus Bogardus 1607-1647* (Leiden

& Boston, 2007). The monograph presents itself as the 'contextual biography' of this gifted but poor and unprivileged boy, Evert Willemsz Bogaert, who later Latinized his name as Bogardus in order to mark his public professional identity as a literate man. Having lost his parents early in his life, he was placed in the town orphanage where a strict Reformed regime was imposed upon the inmates. Since the age of twelve he was apprenticed as a tailor but the intelligent boy wanted more. Searching for his public identity, he violently experienced, after a severe illness, a spiritual conversion of a clear borderline character, that procured him some fame among the stern defenders of a rigorist interpretation of the Reformed creed. The latter were still looking for legitimacy and adherence among the many Dutch who had remained hesitant about their confessional choice in the Post-Reformation era, and they interpreted the events as a divine message in their favour. Indeed, God himself had delivered the boy, a member of their community, from his afflictions and shown his mercy upon his elected people.

The boy could have been happy with this result and withdraw within the boundaries of ordinary church membership. Yet he wanted more and tried to secure for himself an autonomous position in the religious conflicts of the town. He was supported in that endeavour by the headmaster of the grammar school, who was also an independent believer. His extraordinary pamphlets, the very rare account of what happens in the head of an early modern adolescent boy, constitute the basic material of the first part of my study: the analysis of the boy's tactics in his efforts to build for himself educational 'byways' permitting him to go exactly where he wanted. This needed of course the useful aid of accomplices around him (the matron of the orphanage, the headmaster, some ministers, part of the town council, his brothers at Leiden and in the orphanage, etc.), but he remained always in search of his own final autonomy.

The events allowed him to follow his calling and go to university. But he left the faculty of theology early, followed the byway of a lower clerical position in an African colony, and finally was called for the ministry outside his homeland, in the newly founded town of the West Indies Company on Manhattan: New Amsterdam. He made himself known there as a fierce, even structural opponent to government policy, a loyal defensor of the interests of the colonists (whose fate he started to share at his marriage with a foreign widow, some years later, and his final care for nine children), and as a minister who, though always in conformity with the formal requirements of the supervising Reformed Church in his homeland, went time and again his own way, until his death in a shipwreck at age 40 on the way back to his homeland, where he had to justify himself. It is my contention that he consciously had chosen for a position overseas, where his personal autonomy was much better granted than in his home province of Holland.

It will be clear how this study fits into my previous concerns for the history of education. I have set up my book as a 'contextual biography' because, firstly, it shows that context is essential for the understanding and the in-depth analysis of what happens in an individual life, and secondly it details many other life stories that corroborate the value of the hypotheses I have brought forward in my analysis. Anyway, it shows with surprising clarity the continuous interplay between, on the one hand, the institutional educational environment and clerical conditions, shrewdly used by the boy on his own behalf, and on the other hand

the byways an intelligent user is able to negotiate for himself in a given situation. It shows, thirdly, how important it is for our research, even for a purely biographical study, to perfectly master the structural landscape of a period, its extent, forms and scope: the political, social and educational institutions, the forms of policy-making, the power relation and the forms of powerplay in a given community and from the outside, the general conditions of social change, etc. But it shows also that such general pictures do not suffice for a detailed analysis of the personality of individuals from the past and the events they are involved in. Education, in particular, quite clearly is not limited to schoolways but may be found in virtually all the formative aspects of life, either as a highway or as a byway. In the final analysis, such educational and professional byways even may serve the sake of individual and group autonomy and the interests of the community, enriched by the diversification of opportunities and the plurality of the voices heard in society.

This book has brought together my main fields of interest – education, religious history, culture, and social achievement – and has permitted me to check the heuristic value of some of the main concepts I use – appropriation, negotiation, accommodation, etcetera. Its impact has followed closely my professional career and kept me busy until today. First because the discussions on this case involve some of the major themes and problems in present-day cultural history, such as the questions of the definition of culture as such in a foreign environment where the customary old world definitions are rudely challenged; of the meaning and the scope of adolescent conversion, and of the role of youth experience in the construction of an early modern personality; of acculturation to alien values and the appropriation of new cultural practices in a context of global challenge; of the intercultural interpretation of the encounters in the New World; of the management of the newly discovered forms of black slavery by white Europeans who in principle still rejected slavery for the sake of the Bible (Bogardus took a very personal, apparently hesitant position in this field); of multicultural co-existence and religious toleration; of public and private religion; of formal and informal education, and so on.

But it has also continued to challenge me because its presentation in different disciplinary contexts and the discussion with colleagues from various backgrounds forcibly conducted me to new insights, new hypotheses and new narrative dimensions. One of those occasions was a discussion of the adolescent's story at the University of Mons (Belgium) on the basis of the works of Dr. Boris Cyrulnik who advocates an explanation in terms of resilience from traumatic youth experiences; this was probably the case of this boy deprived from his parents (father, mother and stepfather) who must have died in a plague around his eleventh anniversary at the latest. Another new input was the discovery by a Dutch colleague that the two long but rather clumsy hymns written by the boy about his experience and published by the headmaster in his pamphlets show nevertheless a very precise literary structure, in fact the format used by the rhetoricians, i.e. the local literary associations of which the headmaster was an active member; this leads to the suggestion that school performance or another public presentation was somehow involved in their realization and adds a new dimension to the public character of the events. A third element was the psychoanalytic explanation advanced by a Louvain professor, much more difficult

to realize for a period of time when family relations were not at all similar to those of Freud's society, and for a boy who precisely looked for substitute parents in religion ('God is the father of the orphans', Psalm 68, 6) and in the community of the orphanage (the matron acting as his true mother) and in the town (by the protection of a council member). Yet the important point about all these questions is that our interpretations of the past should remain open to alternative views based on different methods, theories and parameters. A historical narrative never is all-embracing, or exclusive of other interpretations.

The changing field of history of education

History of education clearly has changed over the years, and although as a cultural historian I may not be at the very heart of that discipline, the changes certainly have affected my own way of dealing with education in history too. Let me therefore finish this presentation by a short series of remarks and impressions from a semi-outsider (see also my assessment «Història de l'educació: un balanç de l'evolució historiogràfica», in the Catalan review *Educació i història*, n.º 11, 2008, pp. 158-176).

The first is, of course, that the interdependence between cultural history and history of education goes both ways, though not in the same speed and with the same intensity. Cultural history exists in many forms, though its most current form in Europe still is the one derived from the French *Annales* in its third, culturalized age, beyond the second, sociocultural phase that has inspired my own research of the 1970s on the role of grammar school and university attendance for the advancement of global culture. In the new cultural history, the educational institutions are considered and analyzed as a cultural object in itself. In fact, cultural history has from the start in the 1970s and 80s benefited from the growing culturalisation of the history of education, that has provided the historians with a series of new themes and insights, such as reading culture, school culture, or the culture of the body, of sport and gender. In the long run the institutional and the informal worlds of education themselves have become an research object of symbolic agency. To take only one example: in Germany several research projects around Marian Füssel and others study the early modern university as a symbolic universe, with rituals meant to symbolically represent the particular status of the world of science and learning and rules expressing power relations inside this small universe and with relation to the outer world. In such research programmes, however, the focus is not really upon the educational institution but upon the symbolic universe. Education is then virtually interchangeable for any other dimension of the social reality, and cultural history goes its own way.

Reversely, the history of education needs cultural history badly. One of the main problems of the history of education is in my eyes the absence of a global cohesion of the field. It is shattered over departments of education, psychology, history, sociology, and even philosophy. As I have said earlier in this presentation, when looking at the world of the history of education I see, in fact, at least four major angles of approach or domains of research. They appear to have very few relations between each other and are only held together by the conviction of the

respective scholars that their domain pertains to the label 'history of education', in whatever sense that may be taken. These four domains are the institutional world of schooling (including higher education), informal education (including youth and adult education), educational policies (mainly studied at a national level), and the history of educational ideas and theories (including pedagogy and the philosophy of education). I wonder whether cultural history would be fit (and ready!) to establish more and firmer cross-connections through these fields, because the new cultural history turns much less around fields than around practices, values and symbolic forms of agency that may traverse these domains.

The second remark concerns the role of the national and international associations for the history of education. Associations of scholars are very important, especially in the history of education because this is a field of research that has no real inner consistency. From the very beginning, our international association ISCHE, for instance, has brought together scholars from very different disciplinary backgrounds: education, history, psychology, sociology, etc. We should not underestimate the differences between the methods and even the theoretical foundations of such disciplines. But ISCHE has been and still is a most important forum for the encounter of different, diverging, or even opposing thematic or methodological approaches and national research traditions. Just like the national associations, ISCHE should be collectively favoured as a global platform permitting to discuss common themes and confront each other's methods, and, by the way, gradually bring through such confrontations all the national research traditions on the same high level. Competency is excellent for raising each other's ambition! The ISCHE working groups are already the real places where working together is realized.

Yet there clearly is a problem in this field. We must recognize that there exists an evident tension between the national domain and the international area in the history of education. Suffice it to have a look at the articles published by the different history of education journals, including the most international of all, *Paedagogica Historica*. Virtually all research remains limited within national boundaries, even if the theme obviously is international or transnational in character; comparative research remains very scarce, and international research designs are virtually non-existent, with the obvious exception of articles on theory. Some of the domains mentioned above appear as so dominated by national approaches and national idiosyncrasies that the authors apparently never even think about international comparisons, let alone a transnational research design. Therefore, authors from virtually all the nations need huge efforts to overcome these limits. This might be really worthwhile, simply because education is about culture, and because both the process of culture and its realisations reveal themselves most clearly in confrontation with others.

In a certain sense, the necessary but ruthless nationalisation of the educational systems throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has deprived history of education of much of its international dimension, reducing it mainly to the domain of the history of ideas. International textbooks focus therefore much more on easy cross-cultural features (ideas, mentalities, global institutions) than on educational practices and social realities, their interchange and interaction and their global evolution. That applies similarly to the history of higher education, one of the first themes to have emerged in our field: at its beginning in the

seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the history of universities could be considered as one of the true domains of international scholarship, but at the end of the twentieth century, in spite of the strong commitment of the European Rectors Conference at Geneva, it has needed much time and many efforts to unite an international team of scholars who have worked for more than twenty years on a single four-volume handbook on the *History of the University in Europe*.

There are of course very simple and legitimate reasons for such national or even local limitations, such as the area of competency of the author, the always very tight schedules of academic work, the conditions for the research programmes sponsored by the university or the funding agency, the obvious limitations of national or regional educational systems, and so on. Yet, many themes, even bound to national culture, gain clarification by a larger vision and a broader, international approach. I would therefore make a strong plea for an international or transnational view whenever possible. Obviously, this will also strengthen the position of the history of education in the academic world, which policy makers of science and scholarship consider now too often – though wrongly – as a national hobby of some local scholars without a strong international impact.

This appeal on internationalization certainly is not meant as an unconditional plea for an unconsidered Anglicization of the history of education. In my view, all research needs discussion and control by others, colleagues as well as scholars from neighbouring disciplines, or just concerned and competent outsiders. Such debates ask for a regular publication of the results of research in an accessible language. For the present that *lingua franca* is in the Northern part of the World mostly English, it may be Spanish or French elsewhere, even Chinese in a far future. A *lingua franca* is a useful instrument for diffusion but it is not really an adequate tool for developing new and subtle idioms able to account for cultural innovations or evolutions. I am absolutely in favour of a more empirical and less hard-headed approach of the publication languages of our discipline. I would even advocate the systematic use of several languages in every national journal of the history of education: that would perhaps made them more attractive for a public outside their geographical territory and would certainly enhance the cross-fertilization of research.

This applies still more to the reviewing process of books and publications in the journals of our domain. National areas are often so reduced that there is only a couple of reviewers available for a given theme – and in the international domain it is barely better, considering the repeated return of the same names under the book reviews. Scarcity becomes easily the mother of intellectual incest. In quite a lot of countries obviously it is ‘not done’ to really discuss and criticize a publication by a close colleague or a hierarchical superior. While it will be difficult to change this cultural habit in the short run, systematic reviewing by a scholar from another area and in another language might at the same time overcome this barrier, internationalize the national traditions, and make plurilinguism an essential tool for the internal enhancement and the external promotion of our discipline. It would, in my opinion, also be an essential tool for the integration of the upcoming research traditions of the nations outside Europe, in particular in Latin America and still more in Africa, and for a reduction of Europeocentrism and Anglo-American hegemony in our field of research.

Some years ago, I had the honour and the pleasure to chair a committee of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences about the problem of 'the language of science' in the Netherlands, at a moment when the minister of Education threatened to Anglicize by law the whole higher education and university system (a menace that has been suspended but not yet entirely annulled). After much debate and some appropriate research we agreed on the formula 'In Dutch, unless...', that means: the normal language of scholarship in the Netherlands should be Dutch, unless there are obvious reasons to choose another language, such as English for real and effective international communication in most disciplines, but in some others German, French, Spanish or even Italian, not to speak of the formally recognized regional languages, such as Frisian in the North of the Netherlands.

Yet, not all research needs international verification or diffusion, and I find it properly inadequate to impose for the publications of a whole field of science a single *lingua franca* and an international publication scheme in barely accessible journals. First, because this deprives the population involved in fact of the results of research that concerns them in the very first place and that has most often been paid with the taxpayer's money; second, because it remains utterly important for any country and any language to be able expressing itself properly in the domain of science and scholarship; and third, because much local research really does not merit to be internationally inflated.

Is history of education fit for the future? Has it body enough to affront the changes to come? There are some huge challenges, one of them being the still largely unknown evolution of the opportunities created by the digital revolution and the methods and channels of diffusion through the internet. The other is the gradual decrease of history of education as a autonomous discipline in many countries. Chairs are suppressed, and through its integration into other existing disciplines history of education is menaced to virtually disappear as such. Declining economic perspectives and institutional or disciplinary reorganisations are just some of the reasons for this evolution. There are two other factors which I consider much more essential.

The first fundamental problem for the future of the history of education is the gradual decline of the historical factor als an explanatory element in learning and higher education. Genetical explanations are not any longer fashionable. Scholarly disciplines consider themselves less and less bound to the history of their subject matter. In their eyes, analysis of the present largely suffices. Still more, the internationalisation of their discipline works against its historical dimension because countries are supposed to have been much more different from each other in the past, which opposes comparatism. This evolution, manifest in many European countries, starting with the suppression of vacant chairs in the history of education but equally of those in the history of other disciplines (economics, law, natural sciences, medicine, etc.), is in my view closely linked with the changing relation to the category of time in the consciousness of many of our contemporaries. It is the result of 'presentism', as defined by François Hartog. While it will be virtually impossible for any of us, including for our discipline as an international community, to change in the short run the global experience of time by our contemporaries, we may at least reflect upon this vital problem menacing the very existence of our discipline, try together with the victims in

other disciplines to explain properly its impact, and confront the policymakers with its dangers on the theoretical level and for the foundations of the scientific evolution as a whole.

The other problem, related to the first one, is the current decline of the idea of perfectibility of man and society. Seen in a broad cultural perspective, the very basis of education is the idea of the perfectibility of man, and it is no coincidence that education as a practice legitimized by philosophy and behavioral sciences, and as a scholarly discipline, came up simultaneously with the rise of this idea from the eighteenth century onwards. At present, the idea of social perfectibility is clearly in crisis, at least in the Western world. It seems outdated to many liberals, who prefer a purely individualistic organization of society with a minimum of political involvement in collective provisions or social services. Presentism, the denial of the time factor, may then achieve the isolation of education from its historical roots, in which as an essential form of transmission of values, skills and knowledge it is forcibly embedded. Again, such broad evolutions cannot be mastered or canceled by single scholars. Yet, as a community, the historians of education have the duty to care for the foundations of their work. Therefore I close these observations with a serious plea for a profound analysis by all of us, at best together in our associations, of the intellectual, moral, and political conditions for the conservation and the development of history of education in the future.