Historical Sociology in Germany and the United States: A Failed Transfer (1930-1970)

George Steinmetz

© George Steinmetz (2008)
As Raymond Aron noted in his first book (1935), historical sociology was one of the two main poles of German sociology during the Weimar Republic. At a congress of German university teachers of sociology in 1932 Karl Mannheim recognized what he called the “historical-individualizing” approach as the leading style of sociology at the time (Mannheim 1932a: 9-14). Mannheim acknowledged that in Germany too, “sociology originally developed after the pattern of the generalizing natural sciences,” ignoring “the specifically historical dimension of its subject matter” and therefore being “unable to notice that only superficial components of the social process could be grasped in this fashion.” But in the 1920s, German sociology was “increasingly dominated by the principle of historicism,” which involved treating all social realities as emerging historically and seeking “an ordering principle” within “this all-pervading change” (Mannheim 1952 [1924]: 84, 86). One of German sociology’s key insights was that science itself was historical, “embedded in the stream of social and historical reality” (Mannheim 1932b: 281). There were at least forty historical sociologists in the Weimar Republic by my own count (see Table One), which was more than half of all fulltime or part-time sociology professors in Germany.

All but a handful of the Weimar-era historical sociologists were driven into exile after 1933 (Kruse 2001: 107). Most of them ended up in the United States. Many of the
émigrés continued to advocate a historicized version of sociology, but American sociology did not develop a significant historical subfield until the end of the 1970s. Some historical sociologists returned to West Germany after the war and others reemerged from various sorts of “inner emigration,” but they failed to reestablish historical sociology as a significant part of the discipline. Sociological research in Nazi Germany had been mainly oriented toward the present and the immediate needs of the regime (Klingemann 1996). After 1945, many of the Nazi sociologists were able to remain in academic positions. The discipline’s new leaders, such as René König, now began describing Weimar-era historical sociology as an embarrassing and pre-scientific form of philosophy of history (Kruse 1999b). Historical research was also avoided because it would have called attention to the Nazi past. Nowadays it is said that historical sociology “does not exist” in Germany (Bock 1994: 184), although there are notable exceptions, not the least of which are the contribution to the history of German sociology itself. Unlike the American Sociological Association, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Soziologie does not have a special section for historical sociology. “Historical sociology” has become largely synonymous with work carried out in the English-speaking world according to “Anglo-Saxon” traditions (Spohn 1996).

This condensed narrative presents a series of historical-sociological puzzles. Why was sociology more oriented toward history in Germany than in the United States before 1933? What explains the failure of refugee historical sociologists to transfer their program to the U.S.? Why did historical sociology emerge after the 1970s as a recognized subfield in American sociology? What explains the failure of historical sociology to
What is historical sociology?

We need first to specify the guidelines used in defining “historical sociology.” My own definition is inspired by Weimar-era sociologists such as Alfred Weber, who defended what he called Geschichtssoziologie (“History-Sociology”; A. Weber 1921, 1927, 1931, 1935; von Borch 1955). Alfred Weber rejected the “old historical sociology” (a category that for him included Hegel, Comte, Marx, St. Simon, and Spencer) for its evolutionary and progressivist orientation, observing that “the possibility of such a sociology is nowadays largely rejected” (1931: 285). As heirs of German historicism, historical sociologists typically emphasized that every social object or event was “historically produced” and had to be grasped as a “historical individual” (Oakes 1987), that is, as a unique constellation that cannot be dissolved into transhistorical categories or explained by general laws (Kruse 2001: 106). For Weber we cannot understand or explain the meaning or motor of history in general, universal terms; we can only examine “different types of development” and “concrete configurations of historical change” (Gugolz 1984: 46). Geschichtssoziologie rejected the idea of laws of social change in favor of a view of history as a radically unpredictable and open-ended process (Freyer 1933, 1954). Any historical event had to be analyzed as the contingent “result of the conjunctural effects of an ... often unconnected complex of separate causal facts” (A. Weber 1931: 288). Weber, like many other Weimar-era sociologists, insisted on the distinction between the natural and cultural sciences (or Geisteswissenschaften) and saw
sociology as belonging to the latter (see also Freyer 1926). This implied that sociology necessarily had an interpretive dimension. Weber therefore described his approach not just as historical sociology but also as a form of cultural sociology (*Kultursoziologie*). By equating historical and cultural sociology, Weber was thus insisting that the former could not be based entirely on universal and law-like generalizations or categories.

This definition does not entirely solve the question of what counts as historical sociology. Indeed, the definition of historical sociology is one of the stakes of competition in that subfield. Some self-designated historical sociologists define their project in terms that are almost exactly opposite to the “Weimar” definition, insisting on the importance of general laws (Kiser and Hechter 1991). Thus in one of the widely-read treatments of American sociology, we read that “at no time during the development of sociology has the existence of a system of fundamental, natural laws which govern the behavior of men been seriously questioned” (Hinkle and Hinkle 1954: 9). Similarly in Germany, historical sociologist Franz Oppenheimer (1922-1933) pursued a more evolutionary, law-like, and non-interpretivist approach. The “dogma of rigid sequence in social evolution” was also rejected by one of the few American historical sociologists at this time, Howard P. Becker (1934: 22).

In the broadest sense we can define historical sociology as being focused on social change over time or on the present as a historically constituted constellation. It tries to make sense of its object in theoretical terms rather than simply narrating it, although narration is often central.
The Field of Sociology

This points to the broader question concerning the limits of sociology. One approach would be to limit the category to those employed as sociologists in universities and research centers. But this would make it impossible to include the founders of the German Sociological Association (GSA), all of who came from disciplines other than sociology (Karger 1978: 142). The first university chairs in sociology were only created in the 1920s, and their numbers increased very slowly (von Ferber 1956: 198). The name most frequently mentioned at the meetings of the GSA before 1933 was Max Weber’s, who was “officially” an economist (M. Weber 2005; Kaesler 1984: 36).

The category of “sociologist” nonetheless includes at the very least anyone with an academic or research appointment as a sociologist. In the United States this encompasses lecturers and professors at the assistant, associate, and full levels. In Germany this means people employed as an ordinary (ordentlicher), extraordinary (außerordentlicher), or honorary professor (Honorarprofessor), as lecturer (Privatdozenten or Lehrbeauftragten, those filling temporary positions), as or as an emeritus professor (emeriti could continue to teach in the German system; Köttgen 1933). We also need to include Assistenten, who assist professors in research and teaching while they are completing a dissertation or Habilitation thesis, since they were used increasingly over the course of the Weimar Republic with the growing financial crisis and since these positions were “not infrequently the launch pads for academic careers” (Grüttner and Kinas 2007: 130). A case like Norbert Elias, who did not “set his feet on the first secure rung of the academic career ladder” until he was 57 (Mennell 1992: 21), underscores the need for an expansive definition of professional status.
We also need to include non-traditional schools in our German sample, including the technical, commercial, labor union, women’s, and “people’s” colleges (Frauenhochschulen and Volkshochhschulen) and the deutsche Hochschule für Politik in Berlin, founded in 1920, which was a center for political sociology and political science. The importance of including these nontraditional schools is underscored by the Frankfurt Akademie der Arbeit (Academy of Labor), which was founded in 1921 by the historical sociologist, Eugen Rosenstock (Faulenbach 1982). Among its other teachers were Carl Mayer and Arthur Salz. Mayer completed a doctoral thesis in 1929 under the direction of Alfred Weber and Karl Jaspers on the historical sociology of religion and taught at the Frankfurt Academy until the Nazis closed it on April 1, 1933 (Gugolz 1984: 58). He then emigrated to the US and taught for the rest of his career at the New School, returning to Europe only to teach occasionally and to retire. Arthur Salz studied with Georg Simmel and was a friend and colleague of Max and Alfred Weber’s and a member of the latter’s Heidelberg Institute for the Sciences of Society and the State (InSoSta) during the 1920s (Blomert 1999). Another member of the Weberian Heidelberg milieu, Paul Honigsheim, was director of the Cologne Volkshochschule from 1922 until 1933 (Röhrig 1987: 103).

A third example is Julie Meyer (later Meyer-Frank), who earned her Dr. rer. pol. at Erlangen in 1922 with a historical-sociological dissertation on the origins of the Nuremburg patriciate (Meyer 1928) and then became a Lecturer at the Frauen- und Volkshochschule (women’s and people’s university) at Nuremberg. Meyer-Frank emigrated to the US in 1937 and became a professor of sociology at the New School.

Disciplines are dynamic fields, however, not collections of static positions. Their boundaries are constructed and reinforced not just by institutional mechanisms such as
the requirement of specific diplomas but also by insiders granting recognition to some outsiders as members of the field and their refusal to recognize others as belonging. In other words, we also need to count as sociologists anyone who is recognized as such by the group that controls processes of definition. Sociology had already started to cohere as a field in Germany before 1914, as demonstrated by the existence of a “core” group at the first two meetings of the GSA (above all, Max and Alfred Weber, von Wiese, Sombart, Simmel, Oppenheimer, and Tönnies (Kaesler 1984: 37-38). Membership in the GSA was by invitation only, even after 1945. Other signs of participation in sociology include publishing in sociology journals, writing sociology treatises or introductory textbooks, contributing to sociological encyclopedias, collections, and book series, and teaching courses with “sociology” in the title.

The relationship of each writer to the field has to be determined individually. For example, I include as a German sociologist before 1933 Arthur Salz who stopped interacting with sociologists after emigrating to the US in 1934, since he actively participated in the Verein für Sozialpolitik (the precursor of the GSA) and in the early meetings of the GSA (Kaesler 1984: 61). I include Siegfried Kracauer, although he “went largely unnoticed in sociological circles” and was “never really accepted in the scholarly world” of Weimar Germany (Frisby 1986: 161). Yet Kracauer had studied with Simmel and published on him and on other sociological topics (Kracauer 1922; 1998 [1930]). He was not invited to become a member of the German Sociological Society and was never mentioned at their meetings before 1933 (Kaesler 1984: 610-11). Starting in 1952 he conducted sociological research for Lazarsfeld’s Bureau of Applied Social Research (Jay 1975-76: 74; Witte 1987; Kracauer 1952-1953). After the war Kracauer started to be
reviewed and cited in German sociology journals. He was included in a German sociology lexicon in 1959, which noted that his works “had not been sufficiently explored by German sociology until now” (Mierendorff 1959: 280). A student of Adorno’s planned a dissertation on Kracauer as sociologist (Jay 1975-1976: 86, note 144). Nowadays Kracauer is often included in German sociological encyclopedias and collections of “the main works of sociology” (e.g. Kaesler and Vogt 2000: 230-233). Nina Rubinstein is included because her doctoral dissertation on the French aristocracy’s political emigration after 1789 was accepted by Karl Mannheim at Frankfurt in 1933, although both were forced to emigrate before she could defend the thesis (she received her Ph.D. in 1989 and her dissertation was published in 2000; see Raith 1999; Rubinstein 2000).

Sociology was consolidated as a university discipline earlier and expanded more rapidly in the U.S. than in Germany. In the United States there were already 55 fulltime and 372 part-time professors in sociology in 1909 (Bernard 1909: 186). By the mid-1920s there were a thousand sociology professors in the United States (Walther 1927: 1). In Germany at the end of the Weimar Republic there were around 50 fulltime or part-time sociology professors and 140 sociologists overall (Kaesler 1984: 626-628; Lepsius 1983; Wittebur 1991; Fleck 2007: 188). The two countries continued to diverge after 1945. By the 1970s there were about 630 sociology PhD’s being produced each year in the United States, as many as existed in the entire Federal Republic of Germany (Hardin 1977: 39). By 2001 there were 4,903 full-time sociology faculty in the US, almost half in programs
granting PhD’s.¹ In Germany there were about 260 full and associate professors in 1972; this number seems to have declined somewhat since then (Lüschen 1994: 18; Siefer and Abrahams 1994: 285).² The professional organizations also differ enormously. The GSA started in 1909 with 39 members and grew to 207 in 1956, 760 in 1980, 1,300 in 1997, and 1,600 in 2007 (Glatzer 1994: 227). Membership in the American Sociological Association grew from 115 founding members in 1905 to over 1,000 in 1920, 7,500 in 1963, and 14,000 in 2005 (Murphy 2004).

**Exile versus circulation; assimilation versus transfer**

Identifying historical sociologists is even more difficult, since only a few identified themselves as such. I include any sociologist who tries to make theoretical sense of the past, analyze change over time, or interpret the present as historically constituted.

Additional complications arise from the fact that social scientists are themselves historical beings. Shifts in intellectual style are especially likely in the case of the refugee, whose “life history is disrupted” and whose “identity is bound to be in a state of flux” (Kracauer 1969: 83). It is almost impossible for intellectuals to move smoothly from one national field to another. The question of the “failure of theoretical

¹ Survey of Baccalaureate and Graduate Programs in Sociology, 2000-2001, conducted by the American Sociological Association.

transference” (Sutherland 1974) thus needs to be reformulated. We need to ask not just about the ability of a collective intellectual formation to achieve transfer, but also about the degree of continuity or rupture in individual intellectual trajectories. More specifically, we need to pay attention to sociologists who become less historical after emigrating or reemigrating and to those who become more historical. There is no single, unitary form of intellectual or scholarly exile, but a plurality of positions.

A variety of different possible strategies are available to the émigré sociologist, although it is obviously not entirely a question of choice. He can try to convert his existing forms of symbolic capital and habitus to fit the new fields. He may attempt to transform existing fields to match his existing strengths. Others isolate themselves from their new environment, as described by Edward Said (2000: 178): “you draw lines around you and your compatriots.” The exile may try to create an entirely new field, to become a nomothète of a new nomos (Bourdieu 2000: 51), which he can then dominate.

The strategy of intellectual assimilation is illustrated by Ernest Manheim (Karl Mannheim’s cousin), whose 1933 book on the public sphere in the 18th and 19th centuries anticipated Habermas’ more famous study of the same topic (Manheim 1979; Averbeck 2005). Once he arrived in the United States, Manheim’s work became almost entirely focused on the American present (Averbeck 1999; Smith 2005). The assimilation strategy is also suggested by Hans Speier, who had passed his doctoral examination under Karl Mannheim on the topic of Lassalle’s philosophy of history, and whose dissertation, written under Karl Jaspers, was on the young Hegelians (Speier 1989: 6-7). Speier’s book on the German white-collar workers, which he completed in 1933 but published only in 1977, began from the contemporary puzzle of the disjunction between employees’
proletarianized economic condition and their nonproletarian status consciousness. Like much Weimar-era sociology, this book reconstructed the present historically, tracing the ways in which white-collar workers’ ability to reclaim their eroded social esteem relied on the presence of a definitions of social status that were rooted in the 19th century (Speier 1986: 80-82). Speier initially taught at the New School but worked for various wartime agencies beginning in 1942. When he returned to the New School in 1947, it seemed to him to have become “almost provincial,” a “strange oasis of exile” (1986: 21). Speier established a social science division at the Rand Corporation, where he stayed until 1969.

At another extreme, the émigré may react against his new environment by insisting on his original intellectual stance. This may involve efforts to create converts or to find allies, or the refugee may instead adopt the stance of the isolated “stranger,” which Kracauer (1969: 83-84) claimed was the “true mode of existence” of every exile. The first of these approaches is illustrated by refugees such as Hans Gerth, Carl Mayer, Paul Honigsheim, Albert Salomon, and Alexander von Schelting, who tried to create an audience among American sociologists for the “authentic” thought of Max Weber, as against the “de-historicization” of Weber some saw as being promoted by Talcott Parsons (Cahnman 1960: 120). The career of émigré sociologist Werner Cahnman provides an example of resistance to complete intellectual assimilation. Cahnman was classified as a sociologist for the first time when he was hired as a visiting professor at the University of Chicago in 1940 (Maier and Waxman 1983: 6). He became an outspoken advocate of historical sociology, publishing historical articles on the city (Comhaire and Cahnmann 1961; Cahnman 1966); colonialism and racialism (Cahnman 1943); and German Jewry
(Cahnman 1989), and an edited collection on history and sociology (Cahnman and Boskoff 1964). Cahnmann was described as “an important ‘activist’” in a “movement” for the “revitalization of historical sociology” aimed at “overcoming the historical provincialisms still so prevalent in many graduate training programs” in sociology (Holzner 1965: 579-180).

The intermediate strategy is represented by Paul Lazarsfeld, a self-described “European ‘positivist’” (1969: 271). Lazarsfeld’s scientific position originated in Austria, the homeland of logical positivism, but he found numerous allies who helped him promote a presentist, policy-oriented, statistical form of sociology in the US (Pollak 1979; Gemelli 2000). Lazarsfeld was able “finance a whole school of followers, which indigenized the Vienna tradition of social research on U.S. soil” (Etzkorn 1987: 59), and he became a favored intermediary for American foundations in Europe.

The stance of self-encapsulation is exemplified by the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research in exile, especially by Adorno and Horkheimer, even if they were not as fully isolated in the U.S. as they sometimes suggested. As Adorno (1968: 338-339) wrote, “By nature and personal history, I was unsuited for ‘adjustment’ in intellectual matters.” Some émigrés contributed to their own isolation. Paul Honigsheim spent most of his life in the United States after 1938, but his writing appeared in German or in “obscure editions with a limited readership” (Etzkorn 1987: 61; Silbermann and Röhrig 1987: 177-204). Honigsheim cannot really be said to have chosen isolation, however, since he was objectively isolated during the years (1938-1960) he spent at Michigan State University, where he advised only one or two doctoral dissertations (Etzkorn 1987: 59). Gerth was isolated at Wisconsin (N. Gerth 2002), and he left behind some 2,000 pages of
unpublished manuscripts (Bensman, Vidich, and Gerth 1982: xi). Cahnman seems to have been less isolated than Honigsheim and Gerth, even though he spent many years teaching at the historically black Fisk and Atlanta universities, while Gerth was at a top-ranked sociology department and Honigsheim at a mid-level research university. Rather than examining individual-level determinants of strategy and success, however, I want to ask why there was so little interest overall among American sociologists in the historical kinds of sociology being offered by these refugee scholars.

Speier’s comment about the “University in Exile” as a “strange oasis” points to a final strategy, in which the exile “compensates for disorienting loss by creating a new world to rule,” a world “that somewhat resembles an old one left behind forever” (Said 2000: 181). The discussions around “fact and value, science and politics” among the members of the exile community at the New School after the war seemed to some students “fresh and provocative, particularly when contrasted to the increasingly technical and specialized preoccupations of most other American graduate schools” (Rutkoff and Scott 1986: 197).

A further complication stems from the fact that some of the émigrés returned to Germany permanently or taught there temporarily or occasionally. We need to ask how exile affected the returnees’ stance toward the interrupted project of Weimar-era historical sociology, and how sociologists who had stayed in Germany or those who came of age after Nazism reacted to these returnees and to the program they embodied.
Historical Sociology in Germany: the Disappearing Act

Why was historical sociology more widespread in Germany before 1933 than in other countries? First, we can point to its very specific intellectual sources. German sociology emerged from a national intellectual constellation that was already polarized between historicist and “nomothetic” positions, the latter modeled on the natural sciences. Corresponding to this division, Weimar sociology was split between “historical” and “systematic” approaches, while there was no real analogue to German historicism in the United States.

Another distinctive feature of German sociology between 1900 and 1933 was its pattern of recruitment from other disciplines. The two main disciplines from which early German sociologists were recruited were economics and philosophy, and both were conducive to historical thinking. The historical school of German economics, represented within sociology by Max Weber, Alfred Weber, Werner Sombart, Franz Oppenheimer, and others, differed from its British, Austrian, and American counterparts in emphasizing the historical “individuality” of economic facts. Two key strands of German philosophy shaped Weimar historical sociology. Hegelianism and its Marxist successors emphasized historicity (Freyer 1930), while German phenomenology was opposed to construing the social sciences as natural sciences (Kracauer 1922; Scheler 1926). An additional influence, the “decisionism” associated with Carl Schmitt and already present in Kierkegaard and Troeltsch (1924), worked against ontologies of history as progressive and law-driven, emphasizing instead “the emergent ‘event’ which determines its environment rather than being produced by it” (Kracauer 1969: 143-144).
One might anticipate that history would be the main source of recruitment for historical sociologists. Weimar sociology welcomed historians such as Alfred von Martin, Ernst Grünfeld, Carl Brinkmann, and Andreas Walther. Von Martin wrote a habilitation thesis in history in 1915 and taught history at Frankfurt (1921-1924) and Munich (1924 to 1931) before moving to Göttingen as Professor and Director of the Sociological seminar, when he published *Soziologie der Renaissance* (1932). Ernst Grünfeld came to sociology after writing a habilitation thesis on historical economics and colonial politics (Hagemann and Krohn 1999: 206), and publishing on the history of European imperialism in East Asia (Grünfeld 1913). Grünfeld committed suicide at a desperate moment during his “internal exile” in 1938, after completing a pathbreaking analysis of the sociology of exile or “social peripherialization” (Grünfeld 1939).

Sociologists with backgrounds in history may also overidentify with sociology, overcompensating for their anomalous origins. This path is illustrated by Andreas Walther, who started as a historian, publishing several archivally-based mediaeval histories. In 1927 Walther became ordentlicher Professor of sociology at Hamburg University. He turned into a missionary for quantitative, presentist, American-style sociology, which he defended against charges of “crass positivism” (Walther 1927). In 1928 Walther rejected Siegfried Landshut’s first habilitation thesis on the grounds that the author was an “antisociologist” who “wanted to make sociology regress into a historical discipline” (Wassner 1986: 396). Landshut had criticized the tendency among non-historical sociologists toward “the quantification and calculation of results, the positing of rules and laws, and the demotion of reality to ‘mere raw material for abstractions’,” arguing that there was “no need for a special boundary between the
sociological and the historical problematic” (Nicolaysen 1997: 106; Landshut 1929: 34). As a Jew and a Marxist, Landshut had to emigrate in 1933. Walther was obviously more than a simple opportunist, as suggested by the unpopularity of his “American” position among German sociologists before 1933. He became a Nazi party member in March 1933. Only then did Walther become more prominent in the discipline, as policy-oriented contemporary research came to dominate German sociology. Walther supervised 33 dissertations in Hamburg after 1933 (Wassner 1985: 51). His paradoxical relationship to his own background as a historian speaks against any simple interpretation of openness to historians as being conducive to the historicization of sociology.3

External resources also shaped the balance of power within sociology. During the 1920s left-wing and liberal German politicians supported the establishment of sociology, which was supposedly more republican than older disciplines like history. Sociology was seen as being able to give students a “synthetic orientation toward society.” The liberal Prussian Minister of Education and Cultural Affairs Carl H. Becker argued that the human sciences should conduct “research on the present” that was “simultaneously historical and sociological” (1925: 39). Becker supported the appointment at Leipzig of Hans Freyer, a friend of his from the German youth movement (Muller 1987: 133; Üner 1994:7). The government of Saxony tried to force the right-wing professoriat at Leipzig to hire Marxist and Jewish faculty (Muller 1987: 136-143). Another important external influence during the interwar period and the early Nazi years was the Rockefeller

3 See the comments by Peter Coulmas in Klingemann (1988), which suggest that Walther did not completely abandon his historical orientation during the Nazi period.
foundation, which supported research projects and provided fellowships for German sociologists to visit the United States (Krohn 2000; Fleck 2007).

German sociologists’ view of history as open-ended and unpredictable was reinforced by the massive, ongoing social crisis of the Weimar Republic, and did not simply reflect the so-called “crisis of science.” The extreme contingency of sociopolitical life was difficult to overlook, as the fate of German democracy hovered in the balance, to be decided upon by the seemingly aleatory decisions of voters and parliamentarians and their unpredictable, combined effects (Ermakoff forthcoming). By contrast, the postwar period in West Germany, at least after 1950, was characterized by a comparative stability that encouraged spontaneous sociologies of the social as a quasi-natural object whose repetitive movements could be captured by general laws (Schelsky 1961; Bock 1994; Steinmetz 2005).

Taking a longer historical view, the central puzzle is the disappearance of Weimar historical sociology. Of the 38 identified academic historical sociologists in Germany in 1933, 31 went into exile and three into “inner emigration” (Ernst Grünfeld, Alfred von Martin, and Alfred Weber). Of the four others who stayed in Germany, Brinkmann became a founding member of the SS and a member of the Nazi University Instructors’ League (Klingemann 1986: 137; Remy 2002: 41); Freyer welcomed the “revolution from the right” (1931) and served the Nazi state in various ways, although he never became a party member; Mühlmann and Müller-Armack both joined the party. A handful of refugee sociologists returned to Germany after the war, but historical sociology was unable to regain its earlier centrality. By the mid-1950s the main “schools” in (western) German sociology were formal, ahistorical theory, whose figurehead was Leopold von
Wiese, and empirical, quantitative research on contemporary problems, which was concentrated at Münster and Cologne Universities and at the Sozialforschungstelle Dortmund (Weyer 1984; Schelsky 1959, ch. 3). From the beginning of the 1950s Frankfurt School critical theory emerged as a third, dominated pole, but Horkheimer and Adorno were ambivalent about historical sociology and were also limited in their impact by the vigorous anti-Marxism of the period. By the end of the 1950s, historical sociology seemed to have disappeared altogether, or to have migrated into other disciplines, such as political science and, somewhat later, social history (Steinert 1990: 32). Most Nazi-era quantitative sociologists were able to keep teaching after 1945 or to move into research institutes, despite their collaboration with the murderous regime (Klingemann 1996). A new generation of quantitative German sociologists born between 1926 and 1930 received training in the US, and were described by one of their own, Erwin Scheuch (1990: 42), as “young Turks.” These disciplinary “modernizers” claimed to be wedded to “logical empiricism” or “logical positivism” (Stendenbach 1964: 9; Albert 1956). Their goal was to replace the old-fashioned traditions of “German sociology” with a more “internationalized” (that is, Americanized) sociology “in the Federal Republic of Germany” (Scheuch 1990), one that was “nothing but sociology” (nichts als Soziologie) (König 1958: 7).

Weimar historical sociology was represented by the following list (information from Strauss and Röder 1983; Wittebur 1991; and other sources). Some historical sociologists are not included here because they emigrated before completing a doctoral degree, for example, Reinhart Bendix and Lewis Coser. Nor does this table include any
historical sociologists who received their doctorate in Germany during or after the Nazi period, such as Jürgen Habermas and Guenter Roth.
Table One: Historical Sociologists in the Weimar Republic and their trajectories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Birthplace</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Exile Country</th>
<th>Year of Birth</th>
<th>Year of Death</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bergsträsser, Arnold</td>
<td>Germany, United States, Germany; 1896-1964</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brinkmann, Carl</td>
<td>(1885-1954)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cahnman, Werner</td>
<td>(Germany→United States; 1902-1980)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eberhard, Wolfram</td>
<td>(Germany→China→Germany→Turkey→United States; 1909-1989)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elias, Norbert</td>
<td>(Germany→Paris→England→Germany; 1897-1990)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francis (Franzis), Emerich</td>
<td>(Germany→Austria→England→Canada→United States→Germany; 1906-1976)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freyer, Hans</td>
<td>(1887-1969)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gerth, Hans</td>
<td>(Germany→London→United States; 1908-1978)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grünfeld, Ernst</td>
<td>(1883-1938)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heberle, Rudolf</td>
<td>(Germany→United States, 1896-1991)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heimann, Eduard</td>
<td>(Germany→United States, 1889-1967)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honigsheim, Paul</td>
<td>(Germany→Paris→Panama→United States, 1885-1963)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kantorowicz, Hermann</td>
<td>(Germany→United States→England; 1877-1940)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kracauer, Siegfried</td>
<td>(Germany→Paris→United States; 1889-1966)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landshut, Siegfried</td>
<td>(Germany→Palestine→Germany; 1897-1968)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Löwe (Lowe), Adolph</td>
<td>(Germany→England→United States; 1893-1968)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ernst Manheim</td>
<td>(Germany→London→United States; 1900-2002)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mannheim, Karl</td>
<td>(Germany→England; 1893-1947)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin, Alfred von</td>
<td>(1882-1979)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayer, Carl</td>
<td>(Germany→United States; 1902-1974)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meyer, Julie</td>
<td>(Germany→United States; 1897-1970)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Müller-Armack, Alfred</td>
<td>(1901-1978)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mühlmann, Wilhelm Emil</td>
<td>(1904-1988)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neumann, Franz</td>
<td>(Germany→Great Britain→United States; 1900-1954)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppenheimer, Franz</td>
<td>(Germany→Palestine→United States; 1864-1943)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pappenheim, Fritz</td>
<td>(Germany→Spain→France→United States; 1902-1964)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plessner, Helmuth</td>
<td>(Germany→Netherlands→Germany; 1892-1985)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosenstock-Huessy, Eugen</td>
<td>(Germany→United States; 1888-1873)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubinstein, Nina</td>
<td>(Germany→France→United States; 1908-1996)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rüstow, Alexander</td>
<td>(Germany→Turkey→Germany; 1885-1963)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salomon, Albert</td>
<td>(Germany→Switzerland→United States; 1891-1966)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salomon-Delatour, Gottfried</td>
<td>(Germany→France→United States→Germany; 1892-1964)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salz, Arthur</td>
<td>(Germany→Great Britain→United States; 1881-1963)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheler, Max</td>
<td>(1874-1928)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schelting, Alexander von</td>
<td>(Germany→United States→Switzerland; 1894-1963)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speier, Hans</td>
<td>(Germany→United States; 1905-1990)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tillich, Paul</td>
<td>(Germany→United States; 1886-1965)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weber, Max</td>
<td>(1864-1920)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weber, Alfred</td>
<td>(1868-1958)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wittfogel, Karl</td>
<td>(Germany→England→United States; 1896-1988)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**KEY**

* = refugee after 1933  • = remained in Germany: inner emigration, job loss, or voluntary demission

In parentheses = location of exile and later countries of residence; dates of birth and death.
After 1945, many who had been historical sociologists before 1933 moved into disciplines other than sociology or returned too late to influence the postwar configuration:

- Horkheimer and Adorno, the most influential returnees, both had joint positions in Sociology and Philosophy at Frankfurt. But they stopped working on recognizably historical topics, and in the early 1950s Adorno joined in the ongoing critique of Weimar historical sociology as a form of speculative philosophy (Adorno 1972).

- Von Schelting reemigrated to Switzerland and wrote books on Russian history, but had little influence on German sociology.

- Heimann and Löwe returned only after retirement.

- Ländshut moved back to Hamburg and helped to establish the new department of Political Science (Nicolaysen 1997, ch. 8).

- Cahnman was invited twice to Munich as guest professor and received emeritus status there in 1968, but he did not move back to Germany permanently.

- Bergstraesser moved into political science and became increasingly interested in the “third world.” Along with ambiguous relationship to the Nazis this explains his low visibility in postwar German sociology.

- Salomon-Delatour returned to teach at Frankfurt in 1958. During the 1920s Salomon-Delatour had defined sociology as “the interpretation of historical processes,” and in the early 1960s he was still criticizing ahistorical forms of sociology (Stölting 1984: 55; Salomon 1922; Oppenheimer 1964: 350). But by the
time he reestablished himself in Frankfurt there were no allies left (Henning 2006: 50-51, note 8).

- Alfred von Martin had resigned his post at Göttingen when the Nazis came to power, but he stayed in Germany. He resumed teaching at Munich University in 1946 and continued to publish historical work (von Martin 1948, 1951), but his work had little impact on a discipline now fixated on the present.

- The post for a sociology professor at Munich that had been created in 1955 for von Martin was offered in 1958 to Emerich Francis (Franzis). Francis returned from the US, where he had been teaching sociology at Notre Dame. Much of his work before 1933 had been historical, including his first book on the philosopher priest Bernard Bolzano, whose subtitle was “a contribution to the Geistesgeschichte of eastern Central Europe” (Franzis 1933). In a 1951 article published in English, Francis had argued that history and sociology were closely related (Francis 1951). After his return to Germany, however, Francis treated historical questions only cursorily, even in his pioneering theoretical work on nationalism (Francis 1965).

- Wilhelm Mühlmann’s work before the war represented a mix of sociology, ethnology, and history (Mühlmann 1932). During the Nazi period Mühlmann worked on European ethnology, especially in Eastern Europe and Eurasia, with an eye toward Nazi land occupation politics and the assimilation (Umvolkung) of eastern “German” populations, although he was privately critical of the Nazis (Mühlmann 1947). After the war Mühlmann was unable to get an academic post until 1957, at Mainz. In 1960 he was recruited at Heidelberg, where he directed
the new “institute for sociology and ethnology” (Michel 1992; Sigrist and Kößler 1985). The missing discipline was history.

- Barnes and Becker (1938: 921) had called Hans Freyer the leading proponent of a “historical sociology” that differed from the “social evolutionism once so popular.” But Freyer’s cooperation with the Nazis led to his loss of his professorship at Leipzig after the war. He continued to write in the vein of Weimar-era historical sociology (Freyer 1954). Freyer lectured for three years at Münster, from 1953 to 1955, but he was no longer a central player in sociology (Muller 1987; Schäfer 1990).

The question still remains: why was historical sociology not renewed in postwar Germany? Why did those who kept working in historical ways lose their influence, and why did others drift toward less historical approaches? In part, historical research was avoided because it would have led sociologists to examine their own discipline’s involvement with Nazism. German sociology had reoriented itself towards presentist policy research during the Nazi era. Rather than turning this research into material for historical investigation, however, serious research on Nazi-era sociology did not begin until the 1980s. At the first postwar meeting of the German Sociological Association in 1946 Leopold von Wiese insisted that sociology needed to free itself from “speculative historical philosophy”—a codeword for historical sociology. Von Wiese proceeded to describe the Nazi era as a “pest” that had “descended on the people, who were unprepared for it, from the outside, like a sneak attack.” Nazism was a “metaphysical secret that sociology may not touch” (von Wiese 1948: 29). Indeed, it had become almost
impossible to examine any period in the German past without touching on Nazism, since the dominant “exceptionalist” historiographic framework interpreted everything since the Reformation as a step toward the Final Solution (Steinmetz 1997). Moreover, von Wiese himself had done “all kinds of regime-conforming work” right up to the end of 1944, when Cologne University was closed (Derks 2001: 498).

Another opponent of Weimar style historical sociology was Helmut Schelsky (1959), who held a series of key positions in postwar German sociology and academia. Schelsky had joined the SA in 1932 and the Nazi Studentenbund in 1933; in 1938 he joined the Nazi party. In 1941 Schelsky became the assistant to Hans Freyer, who was then heading the German Scientific Institute in Budapest. Shelsky helped Freyer put together dossiers on the “racial” origins and political views of Hungarian professors (Muller 1987: 313; Schäfer 1990: 155). Schelsky (1959: 37) argued that by 1933 Weimar sociology “selbst am Ende war” – that it had reached a stage of terminal decrepitude. This overlooked the fact that most of the sociologists had been actively repressed, rather than reaching a natural end. Schelsky argued that modern “scientific civilization” had created the possibility for a positivist, objectivist, value-free, and quantitative social science by “stabilizing the basic structures of industrial civilization (1959: 136; 1961: 463-465).

While some avoided historical research for fear that it would lead to studies of Nazism, others suggested that historical sociology was itself somehow suspect. Alfred Weber emerged from retirement and initially seemed to become influential again at Heidelberg, but René König, in the widely-read Fischer-Lexikon Soziologie, assimilated Weber to “historical and social philosophers” like Spengler, which were linked to
Nazism. The “development of sociology as a science,” König wrote, required that it
distance itself from work like Alfred Weber’s (König 1958: 151). Georg Lukács, in the
postwar essays that had gone into The Destruction of Reason (1962), had linked the
“German sociological tradition” to Nazism. 

The end of German historical sociology was also hastened by a cluster of factors
we can broadly call Americanization. After 1945, American occupation officials and
foundations helped remake German sociology. Different groups of German sociologists
competed for the allegiance of sociologists working for the US military government,
including Nels Anderson, author of The Hobo (1923). Anderson organized and
coordinated a “Middletown”-style community survey of Darmstadt financed by the US
military government. The Darmstadt Study provided several dozen budding German
social scientists with experience in empirical social survey methods (Weyer 1984: 323-
328; Gerhardt 2007: 232-238; Anderson 1956). The agents of the US occupation and
officers from the Ford and Rockefeller foundations promoted certain German sociologists
and sociological styles and disadvantaged others.

A final reason for the decline of historical sociology was the overall stabilization
of socioeconomic turbulence that was codified in Konrad Adenauer’s phrase “no
experiments” and which has been analyzed using the concept of Atlantic Fordism. The
macroeconomic moderation of cyclical turbulence and the welfare state’s buffering of the
impact of unemployment and other misfortunes lent surface plausibility to positivist
models of the social as a regularized, predictable machine (Steinmetz 2007a).
The United States: Historical sociology as a well-structured subfield

There was some interest in historical topics and epistemologies among American sociologists before 1914, but this largely disappeared after WWI. Many of the founders of US sociology came from fields like the natural sciences and economics. A telling example of the desire differentiate sociology from history in the initial period is Albion Small, founder of Chicago’s sociology department. Small had studied history and historical economics at Berlin and Leipzig from 1879 to 1881. His own work was not historical, however, but was oriented instead toward discovering the “typical” meaning of practice in “typical” situations (Small 1905). Robert Park and Ernest Burgess (1921: 11), began their *Introduction to the Science of Sociology* (1924) by locating sociology firmly on the side of the natural sciences. If sociology was concerned at all with history, they argued, it was with the parts of history from which it was possible to “arrive at natural laws and generalizations in regard to human nature and society, irrespective of time and place” (1924: 11). Similar statements could be culled from the writings of nearly all of the American sociologists of the founding generations, with a few exceptions like Charles Cooley (Steinmetz 2006) and Harry Barnes.

The piecemeal emergence of historical sensibilities in American sociology was due partly to the influx of central European exiles and immigrants. The earliest native-born American historical sociologists were often linked to members of this exile group or had studied in Germany. Howard P. Becker had studied with Scheler and Honigsheim in Cologne in 1926-1927 and had written a Chicago sociology dissertation on secularization in ancient Greek cities (Becker 1930). Becker criticized sociologists’ “crippling neglect” of history. Like the German historical sociologists, he rejected the “dogma of rigid
sequence in social evolution” and universal and teleological philosophies of history (Becker 1934: 20, 22). Barnes and Becker (1938: 760) wrote that the “sociologist should not approach his data with the intention of forcing them, willy-nilly, into a Procrustean bed of ‘timeless’ categories that are a priori generalizable.” Preferable, they argued, were Weberian ideal types firmly rooted in “the granite of history” and “constructed through knowledge of the non-comparable … particularities of human behavior in those epochs,” while remaining “transportable between certain points of the historical terrain” (Barnes and Becker 1938: 763). The main sources for their rejection of evolutionism and ahistorical concepts were Max and Alfred Weber, Heinrich Rickert, and Hans Freyer (Barnes and Becker 1938: p. 777). Barnes and Becker concluded that “American historical sociology is just beginning to get under way”, and that “it has every prospect of a brilliant future” (Ibid.: 790). Becker and Barnes were among the lone advocates of historical sociology prior to the influx of German sociologists (Maus 1962: 158-159).

C. Wright Mills was an early advocate of historical sociology who was connected to a German refugee, Hans Gerth, a student of Karl Mannheim who had written a dissertation on “the social historical situation of the bourgeois intelligentsia at the turn of the 18th century” (Gerth 1976). Gerth consistently criticized the ahistoricism of U.S. sociology (Gerth 1959). In The Sociological Imagination, Mills argued that “all sociology worth of the name is ‘historical sociology’” and that “the social sciences are themselves historical disciplines” (1959: 146). Showing his debt to German neo-historicism and to Hans Gerth, Mills argued that “any given society is to be understood in terms of the specific period in which it exists” (Ibid.). There is, Mills continued, “no ‘law’ stated by any social scientist that is trans-historical. ... The only meaning of ‘social laws’ or even of
‘social regularities’ is such ‘principia media’ as we may discover, or if you wish, construct, for a social structure within an historically specific era. We do not know any universal principles of historical change; the mechanisms of change we do know vary with the social structure we are examining” (Ibid.: 149-150).

Other pioneers of historical sociology were connected to German scholarship and refugees. Barrington Moore, Jr., a founder of American historical sociology, worked as a policy analyst for the Office of Strategic Studies during World War II with Franz Neumann and Herbert Marcuse. Reinhart Bendix left Germany in 1938 at the age of 22 and began his studies in the United States, writing a master’s thesis in 1943 at Chicago on “The Rise and Acceptance of German Sociology.” Refugee Lewis Coser completed his studies in France and in the US and earning his Ph.D. from Columbia University in 1954. Coser wrote historical studies of the sociology of intellectuals and refugee scholars in America, and translated and introduced Halbwachs’ book on collective memory (Halbwachs 1992). Günther Roth, who emigrated to the US in 1953, published an important early historical sociology of the German social democrats in imperial Germany (Roth 1963) and a number of additional books on Max Weber. It is thus at least partly accurate to say that present-day American or “Anglo-American” historical sociology has roots “in the German cultural space” (Kruse 1999a: 192).

Starting in the mid-1970s larger numbers of US-based sociologists began working in historical ways, writing dissertations on historical topics, and paying attention to historians’ problematiques, concepts, and vocabulary (Steinmetz 2005). During the 1980s there was an attempt to reconfigure historical sociology along the lines of a qualitative positivism, modeling historical explanation on multiple regression analysis. Starting in
the second half of the 1980s sociology departments began hiring historical sociologists. Comparative historical sociology now became a fairly well-structured subfield within the field of sociology, albeit a smallish one.

Scientific fields are often characterized by a proliferation of subfields. One criterion of the difference between field and subfield is that all of the subfield’s members also participate in the environing field and have to pass through the same gate-keeping procedures as all of its members. But the subfield may revise or invert the values placed on different sorts of activities in the broader field. In the subfield of political theory within American political science, for example, the prevailing views of “value-freedom” and normativity and of the hierarchy of empirical and theoretical work are directly opposite the dominant views of the same matters within the discipline as a whole. The creation of a subfield may protect a rare plant like poetry, political theory, or historical sociology, but it may also immunize the rest of the field against the subfield’s heterodox messages (Mihic, Engelmann, and Wingrove 2005).

Historical sociology is nowadays a well-structured subfield with specific stakes and forms of symbolic capital, specific journals, awards, and meetings. It is a divided between an autonomous pole and a heteronomous one, that is, between a pole that is more dependent on the status criteria of the environing field of sociology and one that speaks more exclusively to other historical sociologists and to allies outside the discipline, especially in history.
**Toward an Explanation**

In explaining the variable presence and strength of historical sociology there seem to be five factors *internal* to sociology and academia and two that are *external* to science. It is unclear, however, whether any of these factors is a *necessary* condition. Some factors are completely unique to a given historical situation, such as the putative associations between historical sociology and Nazism in immediate postwar Germany.

The first and most obvious internal factor is purely intellectual, and concerns the presence or absence of ideas supportive of a historical sociology. The inherited intellectual culture of Weimar Germany presented sociology with an unimaginably rich body of reflections on historicity and the human sciences. Postwar American sociology profited greatly from the influx of these same currents.

A second factor, one that I have not been able to examine here, is Marxist culture. Marxism was a crucial intellectual precondition for historical sociology in Weimar Germany and again in the US during the 1970s. Marxism could play both a promoting role with respect to historical sociology, as a contributor of historical ways of thinking, and a negative role, to the extent that history is associated with Marxism and Marxism is seen as overly reductionist, static, and transhistorically generalizing (e.g. von Below 1926).

The third internal factor relates to the structure of the field of sociology. Sociology has been unusually open to newcomers and outsiders. Where this leads to the recruitment of historians or historically-minded scholars from other disciplines, such openness may contribute to historical sociology.
Fourth, where there is a well-defined subfield, as in contemporary American sociology, historical sociology may be better protected from the pressures of the field as a whole. The existence of a “heteronomous” pole of historical sociologists who emulate the dominant research protocols and epistemologies of the discipline may paradoxically shield the autonomous pole of the subfield from scrutiny, allowing its members to engage in cross-disciplinary and transdisciplinary “travelling” and communication with external fields (Steinmetz 2007b).

A fifth factor that has sometimes been conducive to historical sociology is the existence of institutions dedicated to interdisciplinarity or transdisciplinarity, such as the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research (Wiggershaus 1994), the Heidelberg InSoSta (Blomert 1999), the Leipzig Institute for Cultural and Universal History before 1933 (Diesener 1993), the New School for Social Research (Rutkoff and Scott 1986), and the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales.

Two external mechanisms also seem to have influenced historical sociology. German state officials in Prussia and Saxony during the Weimar period sometimes promoted historical sociology, while US occupation forces after 1945 and foundations tended to back nonhistorical forms of sociology. Historians of American social science have shown how the Rockefeller foundation and federal funding agencies promoted present-oriented, problem-solving research packaged in positivist and usually quantitative formats (Ross 1991), even if this was less true of their priorities in postwar German political science (Plé 2001: 206-207).

A final external factor refers to the macrohistorical constellation. Highly stabilized socioeconomic conditions, like the “thirty glorious years” of postwar Fordism,
may erode sociologists’ spontaneous attraction to historical modes of thinking. By contrast, socio-historical crises may encourage more historical modes of thinking, even if they do not lead directly to historical intellectual work, which always has more or less autonomy from the temporal powers and general social trends. Society-wide crises may erode the relative autonomy of fields, but they may also shape the intellectual contexts of academic fields. Crises confer greater spontaneous plausibility on historical ways of viewing the social, and this may filter indirectly into the fields of sociology and other social and human science disciplines. Hans Freyer (1930: 106) and Karl Mannheim (1932a) suggested that sociology itself emerged as a response to society-wide crisis. It may be no coincidence that the two great eras of the efflorescence of historical sociology, namely the 1920s in Germany and the 1970s in the United States, were periods of intense generalized crisis and great uncertainty about the future. This was felt immediately among academics through intensified competition for a limited number of jobs. Fields other than sociology saw a rise in historical approaches during the same period. Literary criticism, for example, turned away from the New Criticism and the ahistorical, text-bound version of deconstruction that prevailed in the US gave way to the “new historicism,” which led literary scholars into the historical archives. As socioeconomic conditions for academics became more stabilized in the 1990s, the new historicism declined as a leading paradigm.

Does this mean that those who favor historical sociology should hope for crisis? Should they expect that a macrosocial crisis will strengthen the historical orientation of social scientists? Hoping for crisis would certainly be a mistake, and not for ethical and political reasons alone. I have tried to identify some of the causal mechanisms
responsible for two remarkable waves of historical sociology and for one remarkable
decline thereof. Crisis and its converse, social stabilization, have appeared as important
mechanisms in each of these cases. But we should also recall that the 1930s in the United
States was also a period of intense crisis but one that did not lead to a wave of historicism
in sociology. Nor was there a significant increase in historical sociology in West
Germany during the prolonged crisis of the 1970s and 1980s. Historical explanation is
not the same thing as historical prediction. Social forecasting is impossible, except for
very short-term projections into the immediate future. If there is one valid generalization
about sociohistorical life, is that historical events are complexly overdetermined by an
ever-shifting array of causal mechanisms, some of which are themselves quite specific to
a given time and place.

REFERENCES

Adorno, Theodor. 1972. « Zur gegenwärtigen Stellung der empirischen Sozialforschung
in Deutschland (1951/52) », in Gesammelte Schriften, vol. 8. Frankfurt am Main:
Suhrkamp: 478-493.
Adorno, Theodor. 1968. « Scientific Experiences of a European Scholar in America »,
Perspectives in American History 2: 338-370.
analytischen Soziologie für die soziologische Erkenntnis.” Kölner Zeitschrift für


al. (eds.), *Remaking Modernity: Politics, Processes and History in Sociology.*


Von Borch. 1955. « Grundlagen der Geschichtssoziologie », in Alfred Weber et al.,


Walther, Andreas. 1927. _Soziologie und Sozialwissenschaften in Amerika._ Karlsruhe:
Verlag G. Braun.

Wassner, Rainer. 1985. _Andreas Walther und die Soziologie in Hamburg. Dokumente,
Materialien, Reflexionen._ Hamburg: Institut für Soziologie der Universität
Hamburg.

Wassner, Rainer. 1986. « Andreas Walther und das Seminar für Soziologie in Hamburg
zwischen 1926 und 1945. Ein wissenschaftsbiographischer Umriss », in Sven
Papcke (ed.), _Ordnung und Theorie: Beiträge zur Geschichte der Soziologie in

Weber, Alfred. 1921. « Prinzipelles zur Kultursoziologie », _Archiv für
Sozialwissenschaften und Sozialpolitik_ 47: 1-49.


uitgeversmaatschappij, n.v.

Piper.

Weber, Max. 2005. « Science, profession et vocation ». traduit de l'allemand par Isabelle
Kalinowski. Marseille : Agone éditeur. [note to editors : I cannot get the French
translation of this text, Science as a Vocation ; can you ?]


