



# How teaching the English Revolution (or not) became a landmark debate in German history didactics

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## ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the development of history teaching in West Germany from the 1970s onwards. When in the early 1970s the relevance of history – both as an academic discipline and as a school subject – was challenged, this led to fierce debates as a multitude of new concepts were being developed. One of these was Annette Kuhn’s revolutionary concept of teaching history which immediately came under attack. This debate – and others – had far reaching consequences. At first glance it was a debate about how to model objects like the English Revolution in a way to make them suitable for the history classroom. At second glance, however, this debate revolved around fundamental issues like the role of history in school, the relation between social sciences and didactics, and history’s relevance for today in general. The debate and its eventual outcome are explained within the framework of Bourdieu’s field theory. The study re-examines the consequences of this debate. In discussing alternatives to Kuhn’s approach, it shows how debates forced upon traditional history led historians to readdress the essentials of historical thinking and thus to gain new theoretical strength which resulted in a stronger position for history at universities and schools as well as in history didactics. This resulted in a specific construction and role of *Geschichtsdidaktik* in Germany which helps to explain why there is a difference in comparison to other countries.

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## 1. Introduction

In September 1972, a rather unusual class was given at a *Hauptschule* near Bonn as it was delivered by a university professor. Professor Annette Kuhn (\*1934) gave a course on the English Revolution together with her university students. She started the course with an open discussion on the schoolchildren’s associations with revolution, radical change, and authorities, in which the schoolchildren took an active interest. In her account of the course, Kuhn<sup>1</sup> suggested a connection between the appeal of the topic and the fact that, in 1972, West Germany itself was shaken by revolutionary threats: the Red Army Faction’s (RAF) “May Offensive” had left four people dead and more than 70 people wounded; 11 members

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<sup>1</sup>Annette Kuhn, *Die Englische Revolution* (München: Kösel, 1974), 9.

of the Israeli Olympic team had been killed in the “Munich Massacre”. While today we are left bewildered by these far-fetched connections, it is obvious that the term “revolution” had gained its place in the mainstream of political debates in West Germany. Obviously, it had been propelled to the top of the agenda in schools and in social sciences as well.<sup>2</sup>

When in 1974 Annette Kuhn published the very same unit it sparked a fierce debate with German historian Stephan Skalweit (1914–2003). Skalweit spoke up as a specialist in comparative early modern history, while Annette Kuhn was a professor for *Geschichtsdidaktik* (history didactics).

*Geschichtsdidaktik* does not translate easily and the reasons for it are part of what this essay is about. In English, “didactics” is not a word used very often and, if so, it does not refer to learning but to teaching processes. In German, *Didaktik* is defined as the science of school instruction (*Unterricht*) while *Pädagogik* covers issues of education and upbringing in general (*Erziehung*). *Didaktik* is a word used very frequently in German academic discourse. At German universities, the task of teacher education is usually not assigned to a school of education. Rather, academic disciplines whose domains are also school subjects provide classes for teacher education in this domain. As a consequence, the ties between an academic discipline and the discourse on how to teach it are usually closer than in the English-speaking world. So, obviously, *Geschichtsdidaktik* is a discourse about teaching history. But as we shall see, there is more to it than this.

I shall argue in the following essay that the debate between Kuhn and Skalweit was instrumental in bringing into existence what we today know as *Geschichtsdidaktik*. Examining debates among and within disciplines enables one to understand the way these disciplines have come to be organised within the academic world and the way they create and transmit knowledge. This is because their structure and self-understanding are shaped by these struggles. But how exactly does this shape relate to Annette Kuhn’s position and position-taking? What is the role played by “revolution” as both a buzzword of daily life in the 1960s and a key concept in social sciences? How can we account for the position of *Geschichtsdidaktik* at German universities today?

## 2. Fields of academic discourse

There is a multitude of ways to narrate the history of an academic discipline. I suggest using the concept of a “field of cultural production” by Pierre Bourdieu. He conceives fields like academic discourse as battlegrounds or as structured power relations between individuals and institutions. The agents in a field struggle to gain a dominant position in the field. Dominance allows the successful assertion of one’s views and dispositions as legitimate, thereby creating the *nomos* of the field, i.e. fundamental principles of vision and division. Struggles in a field are always about imposing this *nomos* as the central object around which all debate revolves. The belief in this *nomos* is the *illusio*. It pulls agents out of their indifference and inclines and predisposes them to take action in the field to successfully implement their ideas.<sup>3</sup> This is why the structure of the field is constantly contested. It is not the case that a field exists *despite* these disputes but *because* of them. Controversies do not

<sup>2</sup>This article aims to accommodate ideas that have been developed in Georg Götz, “Geschichtsunterricht als Kritik? Der Streit um die kritische Geschichtsdidaktik und seine Folgen,” *Zeitschrift für Didaktik der Gesellschaftswissenschaften* 9 (Forthcoming 2018) to a Bourdieuan approach.

<sup>3</sup>Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008; repr.), 228.

only structure the field, they *are* the field because, in them, scholars articulate their version of the *nomos* and so take a position. So, the different positions in a field become visible by *position-takings* like literary or artistic works, manifestos, or polemics.<sup>4</sup> For history teaching, the *nomos* revolves around the questions: Why teach history? And what is the right way of teaching it? Anyone who engages in academic discourse in the field of history will have answered these questions and will thus have positioned him or herself.

When the *nomos* is self-understood, i.e. is not called into question, Bourdieu calls it the *doxa*. A challenge to this *doxa* is *heterodoxy* while a *doxa* turns into *orthodoxy* once it is spelled out (often in response to such challenges). Fields can be part of larger fields; Bourdieu cites the field of literary production within the field of cultural production in this respect. Fields are not shut off from the rest of society but have a permeable boundary the influence of which is to transform the changes in society into field-specific effects.<sup>5</sup>

Note that history teacher education is positioned by its very definition at the cross-section of rivalling influences. I will try to argue that the debate is at the same time an expression of and a tool in the relocation of the field of history teacher education.

### 3. A field that sleeps? Educating history teachers in postwar West Germany

Postwar West Germany had organised teacher education in line with the European tradition<sup>6</sup> in a dual way: regular universities provided training for future teachers at grammar schools (*Gymnasium*) while teacher training colleges (*Pädagogische Hochschule*) provided training for future teachers at other secondary schools (*Hauptschule/Realschule*) or elementary schools (*Grundschule*), with only the latter offering some lectures on teaching history. This practice was based on the assumption that teachers for “minor” secondary schools would require educational training while it would suffice for future *Gymnasium* history teachers to graduate from university as “proper historians”. But even at *Pädagogische Hochschulen*, the respective chairs often held a double designation as “Professor for Era XY and its Didactics” encouraging applications from staff who thought of themselves as historians and of teacher education as a necessary inconvenience.<sup>7</sup> In addition, these colleges trained students for a multitude of subjects, effectively offering similar classroom methods for every subject<sup>8</sup> but ignoring considerations about the how and why of teaching this subject.<sup>9</sup>

The academic discourse was structured correspondingly. On the one hand, it was framed by issues of school education such as the actual classroom; on the other, the authority of “proper” historians was generally accepted. The *nomos* of the field can be seen in a consensus that historians provided the knowledge that history teachers or educators then had to turn into history lessons. The question of what to teach in history classes thus became a

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 231.

<sup>5</sup>Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008; repr.), 131.

<sup>6</sup>Peter Lundgreen, *Die Lehrer an den Schulen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland: 1949–2009* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), 19.

<sup>7</sup>Marko Demantowsky, “Zum Stand der disziplin- und ideengeschichtlichen Forschung in der Geschichtsdidaktik,” in *Transformation und religiöse Erziehung: Kontinuitäten und Brüche der Religionspädagogik 1933 und 1945*, ed. Michael Wermke (Jena: IKS Garamond, 2011), 359–76, 368–9.

<sup>8</sup>Ulrich Mayer, “Neubeginn oder Wiederanfang? Geschichtsdidaktik im Westen Deutschlands,” in *Modernisierung im Umbruch: Geschichtsdidaktik und Geschichtsunterricht nach 1945*, ed. Wolfgang Hasberg and Manfred Seidenfuß (Berlin/Münster: LIT, 2008), 99–113, 108.

<sup>9</sup>Karl-Ernst Jeismann and Bernd Schönemann, *Geschichte amtlich: Lehrpläne und Richtlinien der Bundesländer. Analyse, Vergleich, Kritik* (Frankfurt a.M.: Georg-Eckert-Institut, 1989), 11–12.

question of how to simplify whatever history-as-proper-science was handed down to these teachers. But such questions seldom arose; the *doxa* was not challenged: the focus was simply on “everything that is important” or “all you need to know”, thus justifying whatever had been part of the curriculum for years.<sup>10</sup> A university discourse on teaching history hardly existed as an intellectual endeavour in its own right. It was conceived as ancillary to history as an academic discipline and added some ideas on classroom methods or general ideas of education. We might call it a field that sleeps because there was no *nomos* created from within the field.

However, by the mid-1960s West Germany’s field of education gradually began to change. More and more high school pupils graduated with an exam entitling them to university admission (*Abitur*); the number of students rose as did the number of academic staff. At the end of the decade, new universities were founded, often by upgrading teacher training colleges to full universities. This change in social structure was paralleled by new discourses on education: By the mid-1960s the German educational system had become a focal point of public discussion. From 1963 onwards, the pedagogue Georg Picht published what he perceived as deficits of the West German educational system in a series of articles under the catchy if blatant title *The Catastrophe of German Education* (also made into a successful book a year later).<sup>11</sup> In 1965, Ralf Dahrendorf, in his influential book *Education is a Civil Right*,<sup>12</sup> denounced West Germany’s failure when it came to catching up with advancements in school and university development. These are just two examples of how the West German educational system had turned into a favourite subject of public discussion. Many West Germans considered their country to lag behind substantially in the field of education as compared to the rest of the Western world, and all relevant political forces agreed on the fact that educational policy must become both more scientific and more effective.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, history teaching in schools was still organised in many German *Länder* by curricula passed between 1949 and 1951,<sup>14</sup> making them dated by the mid-1960s.

So, in the mid-1960s, the pressure had risen to answer central questions of teaching history. The *doxa* was called into question. This pressure from outside was perceived inside the field as a necessity to reconsider the foundations of history teaching. However, this invited position-taking from an ever-increasing range of people from within a growing and diversifying scientific community but also from the public. Many debates were initiated, developed, and fought through at the onset of the 1970s.<sup>15</sup> Historians always benefit from such debates as they result in many publications which they can eventually exploit as sources. A closer examination of one of these debates can demonstrate how ideas from outside were used by scholars to challenge the *doxa* in a field, how the *orthodoxy* reacted, and how these developments both resulted in new paradigms and repositioned this field.

<sup>10</sup> Joachim Rohlfes, “Geschichtsunterricht und Geschichtsdidaktik 1953–1969,” in *Gesellschaft – Staat – Geschichtsunterricht: Beiträge zu einer Geschichte der Geschichtsdidaktik und des Geschichtsunterrichts von 1500–1980*, ed. Klaus Bergmann and Gerhard Schneider (Düsseldorf: Pädagogischer Verlag Schwann, 1982), 381–414, 410f.

<sup>11</sup> Georg Picht, *Die deutsche Bildungskatastrophe* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch-Verlag, 1965).

<sup>12</sup> Ralf Dahrendorf, *Bildung ist Bürgerrecht: Plädoyer für eine aktive Bildungspolitik* (Hamburg: Nannen-Verlag, 1965).

<sup>13</sup> Heinrich Bodensieck, “Demokratisierungsansprüche im Vorfeld unterrichtlicher Verwirklichung: Neuere Kriterien und Entwürfe für den politisch- und historisch-sozialwissenschaftlichen Unterricht in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland,” *Zeitschrift für Pädagogik* 22, no. 4 (1976): 619–640.

<sup>14</sup> Horst Kuss, “Geschichtsdidaktik und Geschichtsunterricht in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (1945/49–1990). Eine Bilanz, Teil I,” *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 45 (1994): 735–758.

<sup>15</sup> Hans Süßmuth, ed., *Geschichtsdidaktische Positionen. Bestandsaufnahme und Neuorientierung* (Paderborn u.a.: Schöningh, 1980).

## 4. Annette Kuhn's life and ideas

### 4.1. Kuhn's life

Annette Kuhn's promotion to professorship in 1966 can be interpreted as a signal of a university on the move and the result of West Germany's attempt to catch up. At the age of only 32, it also meant she had become the youngest female professor in the Federal Republic.<sup>16</sup> The daughter of German intellectuals, she fled Germany in 1937, returning to West Germany in 1948 to complete her *Abitur* and eventually graduated in history from the University of Munich in 1959 with a PhD thesis on Friedrich Schlegel. It was only in later years that Kuhn learned that both her parents had been Jews and had converted to Catholicism in the 1920s. A symbol of the weak position of history didactics and of didactics in general is the fact that when Kuhn considered applying for the post of a "Professor for Mediaeval and Modern History and its Didactics" at the teacher training college (*Pädagogische Hochschule*) in Bonn, she had heard the term for the first time. She recalls thinking: "What for all saints' sake does didactics mean? I had never heard this word before, and I only associated vague and mostly negative ideas with the concept of a 'teacher training college.'"<sup>17</sup> Despite this insecurity her application was successful.

After her promotion, Kuhn was a newcomer to the field. This might explain her initial reluctance to tackle these questions of history teaching. While she kept publishing on historical issues, it was only in 1971 that she published a first essay on teaching.<sup>18</sup> But what she finally offered in her introduction to teaching history in 1974 was a highly innovative approach.<sup>19</sup>

### 4.2. From Habermas to history teaching

Kuhn derived reasons for teaching history from the schoolchildren's interests in emancipation. It is these interests that the history teacher is supposed to serve. Kuhn adopts the term "interest" from Habermas' essay *Erkenntnis und Interesse*.<sup>20</sup> In this volume, Habermas focuses on what is best described as *Erkenntnisinteresse* or as "epistemological interest", i.e. the particular interest that guides one's acquisition of knowledge. According to Habermas, a critical science can reflect on the conditions of knowledge acquisition, can thus expose structures of dominance and restraint and, in this way, will enable the individual to emancipate from it. Kuhn transforms this into a theory of history learning: "History is the critical reconstruction of the past guided by an epistemological interest in emancipation."<sup>21</sup> This has three consequences for Kuhn:

- a. A constructivist perspective: History is not simply "there" as a body of knowledge. Rather, it is always a retrospective construction. Because this is the case, Kuhn implies,

<sup>16</sup>Thomas Sandkühler, "Interview mit Annette Kuhn," in *Historisches Lernen denken: Gespräche mit Geschichtsdidaktikern der Jahrgänge 1928–1947. Mit einer Dokumentation zum Historikertag 1976*, ed. Thomas Sandkühler (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2014), 164–92, 174.

<sup>17</sup>Annette Kuhn, *Ich trage einen goldenen Stern: Ein Frauenleben in Deutschland* (Berlin: Aufbau, 2003), 135.

<sup>18</sup>Annette Kuhn, "Kann man zum Frieden erziehen? Gedanken zu den Wegen und Irrwegen einer Friedenspädagogik," *Gesellschaft, Staat, Erziehung. Blätter für politische Bildung und Erziehung* 16 (1971): 145–58.

<sup>19</sup>Annette Kuhn, *Einführung in die Didaktik der Geschichte* (München: Kösel, 1974).

<sup>20</sup>Jürgen Habermas, *Erkenntnis und Interesse: Mit einem neuen Nachwort* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1973), first published in 1968. He had published the core ideas of this essay in 1965: Jürgen Habermas, "Erkenntnis und Interesse," in *Technik und Wissenschaft als "Ideologie"*, ed. Jürgen Habermas, 4th ed. (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1970).

<sup>21</sup>Kuhn, *Einführung*, 20.

we might as well reconstruct it in the way we think best, and this is from our particular position both in time and in place.

- b. A focus on the relevance for the present and for the learner: the starting point for thinking about the past is not the past but the present. And the focus is not whatever some historian thinks is important but the interest of schoolchildren in their emancipation, which is the ultimate and overall learning objective of history teaching. This learning objective has no immediate relation to history.
- c. Criteria for selecting subject matter for actual classes: revolutions become the most appropriate subject matter for history classes as “the issue of violence and how it can be reduced form the central questions which direct us to history”. From this point of view, revolutions gain particular significance as they provide the learners with evidence of the extent to which revolutionary action was successful in reducing violence or to which “emancipation has been realised”.<sup>22</sup>

Subsequently, Kuhn worked out a series of concepts for history units for the classroom exclusively dealing with revolutions. She started off this series with the earliest revolution, the English Revolution. This would be followed by similar volumes on the French and the Industrial Revolutions, and by volumes on other revolutions or rapid historical change by her associates.<sup>23</sup>

### 4.3. Importing concepts from outside

Let us reconsider Kuhn’s concepts in the light of Bourdieu’s field theory before we take a closer look at the way she applies them to the English Revolution. Note just how many new concepts Kuhn imports into history teaching like “emancipation”, “interest”, “revolution”, or “construction”. These concepts, and also the adjective “critical”, were buzzwords of the New Left in Germany. However, their impact was not rooted in their detailed elaboration. Rather, their very vagueness permitted a wide range of associations, and this made them popular. As Behrmann<sup>24</sup> observes, the concept of a “critical pedagogy” became dominant at German universities in the 1970s despite the fact that a programme of critical pedagogy was never successfully worked out and that its parent theory, the “critical theory” of the Frankfurt School, was utterly “unpedagogic”. Another example for the universal appeal of these concepts were the new school curricula for *Gesellschaftslehre* (social sciences) that the state of Hessen issued for secondary schools in 1972.<sup>25</sup> They proclaimed “emancipation” as an overall learning objective. *Gesellschaftslehre* was supposed to replace the traditional subjects civics, history, and geography, something which caused panic among historians and history teachers. Similarly, history as a “construction” surely sounded new to many teachers who had believed that history was about “facts and figures”. A focus on history’s relevance for the present and for the learner is generally accepted today but was not then.<sup>26</sup> In fact, it

<sup>22</sup>Kuhn, *Englische Revolution*, 14.

<sup>23</sup>Annette Kuhn, *Die Französische Revolution* (München: Kösel, 1975); Annette Kuhn, *Industrielle Revolution und gesellschaftlicher Wandel* (München: Kösel, 1977).

<sup>24</sup>Günter C. Behrmann, “Die Erziehung kritischer Kritiker als neues Staatsziel,” in *Die intellektuelle Gründung der Bundesrepublik: Eine Wirkungsgeschichte der Frankfurter Schule*, ed. Clemens Albrecht et al. (Frankfurt a.M.: Campus, 1999), 448–96.

<sup>25</sup>Horst Kuss, “Geschichtsdidaktik und Geschichtsunterricht in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (1945/49–1990). Eine Bilanz, Teil II,” *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 46 (1995): 3–15.

<sup>26</sup>Kuss, “Bilanz, Teil I,” 752.

could be interpreted as a preference for the present over the past, thus seemingly diminishing history's role. Notice also how Kuhn considers the present to be deficient and requiring improvement. Or were there even more implications? It is easy to see that Kuhn's elaborations on schoolchildren's interests were, at least, suggestive of the idea that contemporary society deserved a revolution, especially if, as she states, "the structures we can find in the present time [...] hinder the schoolchildren's personality development" and the "dialectics of experiencing violence and powerlessness forms the basic issue of the present time".<sup>27</sup> So, Kuhn brought concepts from pedagogy, sociology, and from the discourse of the New Left to the field of history teaching. An acceptance of these concepts would not only change history teaching. It would challenge history itself: accepting concepts from other disciplines as basic principles would make history dependent on these disciplines.

## 5. How to teach the English Revolution

Kuhn published her 86-page volume on the English Revolution in 1974. Skalweit's negative review appeared in the October 1975 in the journal *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* (*History in Science and in the Classroom*), the official organ of the German History Teachers' Association VGD. Kuhn replied to Skalweit in the November issue of the same journal and year, triggering a reply by Skalweit in the December issue. In this latest issue the publishers declared the debate finished (thereby providing the last word for Skalweit). The strong commitment to the debate is evident in small things like the fact that Skalweit calls Kuhn's efforts a "booklet"<sup>28</sup> in the first sentence of his review; surely not a nice word from an older colleague. Kuhn retaliated by downsizing Skalweit's critique to "annotations".<sup>29</sup> The following is a presentation of Kuhn's learning arrangements in direct contrast to Skalweit's criticism. Two major points of the discussion will show how Kuhn's assumptions on teaching and learning shaped the structure of this subject in a specific way.

### 5.1. Draft Revolution of 1647 vs Glorious Revolution of 1688/9

For Kuhn, the starting point for selecting the English Revolution for history teaching is the present situation of the school children. In this respect, the English Revolution gains relevance for learning processes "as it provides an opportunity to research forms of non-violent change and democratisation and their origins".<sup>30</sup> She defines "revolution", following contemporary German sociologist Axel Gehring,<sup>31</sup> as a "process of change sustained by a collective and directed at substituting the general contemporary situation by a new, alternative situation". Change, according to Gehring, was taking place in three ways: changes to the social structure; changes to the structure of governance; and changes to the personnel of the governmental system. Kuhn arranged the learning unit accordingly: she suggested the teacher begin with the established structure of governance and end with the struggle

<sup>27</sup>Kuhn, *Englische Revolution*, 13.

<sup>28</sup>Stephan Skalweit, "Die historische Einordnung der Englischen Revolution," *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 26, no. 10 (1975): 629–635.

<sup>29</sup>Annette Kuhn, "Die Englische Revolution in fachdidaktischer und fachwissenschaftlicher Sicht: Eine Erwiderung auf die Anmerkungen von S. Skalweit," *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 26, no. 11 (1975): 696–701.

<sup>30</sup>Kuhn, *Englische Revolution*, 13.

<sup>31</sup>Axel Gehring, "Zur Theorie der Revolution: Versuch einer soziologischen Präzisierung," *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* 23, no. 4 (1971): 673–686.

for power of the different social groups.<sup>32</sup> She provided five sections: (1) the Stuarts' conception of rule; (2) the emergence of parliamentary rights in England between 1640–2; (3) a core section on the English Civil War 1642–9, comprising three subsections on the interests of the population, the importance of the economic situation, and the war aims of the different factions; (4) an evaluation of the achievements and failures of the English Revolution; and (5) the significance of the English Revolution “for us today”. Obviously, Kuhn chose to exclude all events after 1650. Why would she do that? Kuhn argued from a perspective on learning potential for democratisation: in this perspective, “the year 1688 marks a definitive step backwards in comparison with the parliamentary achievements of 1642 and the draft constitution of 1647”. Kuhn’s focus was on “democratic movements, especially the Levellers”<sup>33</sup> and, even if such movements ultimately failed, on their “emancipatory demands”<sup>34</sup> In contrast, the Glorious Revolution of 1688/9 was a “reactionary process as is generally known” which “does not match our didactical interest”,<sup>35</sup> something she reaffirmed in her reply to Skalweit.<sup>36</sup>

This was met with severe criticism by Skalweit. Skalweit attacked Kuhn’s focus on the era 1604–50 at the expense of the Glorious Revolution of 1688/9: “When it comes to the development of the modern constitutional state, it was not the revolution of 1642 but the ‘Glorious Revolution’ of 1689 that established a tradition.”<sup>37</sup> Skalweit highlighted the significance of the constitutional state for the European political tradition. He also favoured the use of the word “revolution” similar to the way it had been used in 1688/9. Contemporaries had called these events a “re-volution” because they considered it to be a return to a former state of affairs. Skalweit’s point of reference here is historiography which not only advises us on what is important but also on the use of words.

## 5.2. Economic and social vs political and religious factors

Kuhn’s decision on how to teach the causes of the English Revolution seems arbitrary. She admitted that the controversy over the significance of economic and social factors in comparison to political-religious motives was still ongoing, stated that a solution to “this old dispute” could not be expected anyway, and decided on the “priority of the economic and social factors”<sup>38</sup> for the teaching process.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, she turned to the “younger social history”, especially to Christopher Hill, Lawrence Stone, and Perez Zagorin<sup>40</sup> because they focused on economic and social causes, or, as Kuhn put it, they would not examine “a struggle for freedom but, rather, for the economic and social conditions of freedom”.<sup>41</sup> This is why older accounts of the English Revolution (the “Whig history”) could be ignored. Note however, that her decision-making was in line with left-wing interpretations of history even if she did not provide reasons for her focus on economic and social factors.

<sup>32</sup>Kuhn, *Englische Revolution*, 14.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 16.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 15.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 16.

<sup>36</sup>Kuhn, “Erwiderung auf Skalweit,” 697.

<sup>37</sup>Skalweit, “Historische Einordnung,” 629.

<sup>38</sup>Kuhn, *Englische Revolution*, 60.

<sup>39</sup>Later she provided alternative views but only as additional “teacher information”. Ibid., 60.

<sup>40</sup>Christopher Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1964); Lawrence Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558–1641* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965); Perez Zagorin, “The Social Interpretation of the English Revolution,” *Journal of Economic History* 19, no. 3 (1959): 376–401.

<sup>41</sup>Kuhn, *Englische Revolution*, 17.



In Skalweit's view, social historians had been unable to provide evidence for long-term social change as a cause for the revolution. While the political roots of the revolution, i.e. legal and constitutional issues, could be detected, tendencies of social development must remain hypothetical.<sup>42</sup> But his major criticism was that Kuhn omitted the religious background of the English Revolution. According to him, the constitutional conflict had been intertwined with a religious conflict affecting all political struggles; a defining feature of the era: "the 17th century is the last century in which political history is still mainly church history".<sup>43</sup> Neither did Skalweit<sup>44</sup> fail to point out that Kuhn's idea of the Puritans as proponents of a "republican constitution"<sup>45</sup> was grossly misleading. Kuhn's didactical interests tipped the balance not only in favour of a specific school of historians but also in favour of ignoring the religious element in history. Obviously, she could not reconcile the paramount role of religion with a concept of revolution derived from modern social science.

### 5.3. Positions and dispositions on teaching history

Skalweit did not just react to what he perceived was an incorrect account of one of his favourite subjects. What was at stake for him was not only history teaching but history as a discipline. Skalweit defended this discipline and its methods, most ideally realised in historicism. He claimed that history was supposed to show the identity of past eras by exploring their difference to today:

History has to prove the identity of past eras also in their dissimilarity. History not only has to show what makes a specific subject matter contemporary and exemplary but also what makes it unfamiliar and unique for modern eyes. This is the only way in which the subject matter's distinctive historical individuality can be understood from today's perspective.<sup>46</sup>

In his response to Kuhn's reply, Skalweit denied that Kuhn acted out of any "historical interest"<sup>47</sup> but that she only used the English Revolution as mere subject for demonstrating her pedagogical concept, and that consequently it could be substituted with any other subject matter. Skalweit claimed to have found the reason for what he believed were inaccuracies in Kuhn's pedagogical starting point: the fact that emancipation structured the historical subject matter<sup>48</sup> obstructed an analysis of the English Revolution that would meet the demands of history. Skalweit accused Kuhn of constructing an "ahistorical", "indifferent", "abstract" representation of a past "full of clichés".<sup>49</sup> In other words, Skalweit accused Kuhn of not being historical enough.

Skalweit spelt out historiographical *orthodoxy*, according to which historians like him were in charge of presenting a "correct" account of history. It then fell to teachers to communicate this account to their respective learners. This is why Skalweit did not even bother to present the reader with a definition of history learning, let alone with advice on how to deal with the English Revolution in class. Rather he began his review by claiming he could not

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<sup>42</sup>Skalweit, "Historische Einordnung," 631–2.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 634.

<sup>44</sup>Stephan Skalweit, "Stellungnahme zur Erwiderung von A. Kuhn," *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 26, no. 12 (1975): 771–773.

<sup>45</sup>Kuhn, "Erwiderung auf Skalweit," 698.

<sup>46</sup>Skalweit, "Historische Einordnung," 634.

<sup>47</sup>Skalweit, "Stellungnahme zur Erwiderung," 773.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>Skalweit, "Historische Einordnung," 633.

be held responsible for any “didactical purposes” and by insisting he wanted to discuss the book’s “scientific substance” only.<sup>50</sup> Skalweit failed to deliver any ideas on history *teaching*.

Kuhn, on the other hand, tried to structure history teaching through principles derived from pedagogy. She imported principles from outside rivalling the *orthodoxy*; we might call it a *heterodoxical* approach. Pedagogy gave her a very explicit idea of teaching. For Kuhn, the relevance of the English Revolution for history classes lay in its quality as an example of democratisation. If schoolchildren knew the steps of this path they would be able to pursue their interest in emancipation. Consequently, a concept of emancipation directed the way she selected the actual content of her learning unit. Kuhn claimed a right to override findings of historians when it was justified by correct didactical assumptions. It was from this perspective that she cut off the narration on the English Revolution after 1649 and ignored the issue of religion. It was also from this perspective that she employed contemporary definitions of revolution. Notice how Kuhn preferred a sociological definition of the term “revolution” (published in Germany’s most distinguished sociological journal, the *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*) over a definition from any historian, which would have been easy to pick. In this way, Kuhn imposed a blueprint of revolutionary development from contemporary sociological theory on the English Revolution and used it to structure the subject matter for the classroom. But Kuhn does not bring these assumptions into a fertile interplay with history as a discipline. Kuhn turns history into a storage room from which one might fetch items as your interests or those of your schoolchildren demand. We might conclude that Kuhn did not really deliver ideas on *history teaching*.

Thus, this debate can be seen as a process of renegotiating the *nomos* of a field of history teaching. The implicit consensus of those engaging in the field, the *doxa*, had ceased to be self-evident. The views on history teaching presented here were two rival and incommensurable versions of the *doxa*. Kuhn’s adaptation of contemporary social theory, however, alarmed historians because history as an academic discipline was confronted by more challenges from social sciences.

## 6. Fear of sociology

At the beginning of the 1970s, the number of history students at German universities declined.<sup>51</sup> History was challenged by a newcomer among the disciplines: sociology. After 1945, sociology’s place had been at the very fringes of academic life in West Germany. Between 1960 and 1981 this changed fundamentally. The number of sociology staff at universities rose four times more than the number of total academic staff; the number of students in sociology rose three times more than the number of students in all subjects.<sup>52</sup> Sociology at that time was widely associated with critical theory and the Frankfurt School, helped by the fact that it had been the major of 1968 student leaders Rudi Dutschke and Daniel Cohn-Bendit. Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and Jürgen Habermas (albeit along with Ralf Dahrendorf) dominated sociology’s public image in West Germany at that

<sup>50</sup>*ibid.*, 629.

<sup>51</sup>Thomas Nipperdey, “Über Relevanz,” in *Gesellschaft, Kultur, Theorie: Gesammelte Aufsätze zur neueren Geschichte*, ed. Thomas Nipperdey (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1976), 12–32, 12.

<sup>52</sup>Ludger Viehoff, “Zur Entwicklung der Soziologie an den Hochschulen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1960–1981,” *Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 13, no. 3 (1984): 264–272.

time. Historians like Golo Mann<sup>53</sup> considered it necessary to warn students against switching from history to sociology. I have detailed above the profound influence of Habermas in Kuhn's writings.

Questions regarding the meaning and purpose of history were felt to be more urgent than ever. The desperation among historians was summed up by the mottos of the biannual meetings of the Association of German Historians: in 1970 *Why Still History?*<sup>54</sup>; in 1972 *Living Without History?*<sup>55</sup> Many scholars expressed doubts about the future of the academic discipline. In the same year, Hans Süssmuth edited a volume of contemporary essays on teaching history under the title *No Future for Teaching History?*<sup>56</sup> The enemy seemed to be already within the gates as *Sozialgeschichte* (social history) blossomed and welcomed sociology as a new inspiration to historiography.<sup>57</sup> Historians had started to feel irrelevant.

History as a school subject was also challenged at the onset of the 1970s. In 1972, the federal state of Hessen presented guidelines for teaching *Gesellschaftslehre* (social sciences) in its secondary schools. This subject was newly introduced and was supposed to combine the established subjects civics, history, and geography. This meant that history as a school subject in its own right would be abandoned, posing the threat of a massive reduction of the historians' influence. As other federal states considered whether to follow suit, these guidelines were met with massive resistance by the association of German History Teachers, the Association of German Historians, and the majority of historians.<sup>58</sup> Against the backdrop of these developments, Kuhn's didactics were not viewed in isolation but seemed to be one more sociological nail in the coffin of history. Not only were "they" outnumbering historians at university, "they" were also planning to take over school education and, in the guise of Annette Kuhn, even tried to define how to teach and learn history.

## 7. New paradigms

Leading historians agreed on the idea that history had to show a reaction and this reaction could only come from reflections on the fundamentals of history, as Jörn Rüsen remembers.<sup>59</sup> The result was the development of two concepts: *Geschichtsbewusstsein* and Rüsen's own concept of *Historik*.

While the conferences in 1970 and 1972 painted the future of history in dark colours, the conference of 1976 marked the "first time that a historians' conference had attempted to discuss didactics of history as part of a historical science and not of pedagogy".<sup>60</sup> It was at this conference that Karl-Ernst Jeismann (1925–2012), at that time professor at the teacher

<sup>53</sup>Golo Mann, "Ohne Geschichte leben?," *Die Zeit*, October 13, 1972, 57, <http://www.zeit.de/1972/41/ohne-geschichte-leben/komplettansicht> (accessed February 15, 2017).

<sup>54</sup>Reinhart Koselleck, "Wozu noch Historie?," *Historische Zeitschrift* 212, no. 1 (1971): 1–18.

<sup>55</sup>Mann, "Ohne Geschichte leben?."

<sup>56</sup>Hans Süssmuth, ed., *Geschichtsunterricht ohne Zukunft? Zum Diskussionsstand der Geschichtsdidaktik in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Klett, 1976).

<sup>57</sup>Its advent was epitomised by the foundation of the journal *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* [History and Society] in 1975. To many historians, its subtitle *Zeitschrift für Historische Sozialwissenschaft* [Journal for Historical Social Science] reduced history to a minor subject of social sciences.

<sup>58</sup>Thomas Nipperdey, "Relevanz," 12.

<sup>59</sup>Thomas Sandkühler, "Interview mit Jörn Rüsen," in *Historisches Lernen denken: Gespräche mit Geschichtsdidaktikern der Jahrgänge 1928–1947. Mit einer Dokumentation zum Historikertag 1976*, ed. Thomas Sandkühler (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2014), 251–92, 264.

<sup>60</sup>Gerda v. Staehr, "Rezension von 'Geschichtswissenschaft: Didaktik, Forschung, Theorie,'" *Geschichtsdidaktik* 2, no. 4 (1977): 357–360.

training college in Münster, provided a presentation on *Geschichtsdidaktik*. Jeismann stated that *Geschichtsdidaktik* explores the way history is conceived or imagined in the present and how this *Geschichtsbewusstsein* (historical consciousness) was internally structured, was changing over time, and was used by different groups in society for different ends. *Geschichtsdidaktik*, according to him, also sets out to influence, or even to create, this consciousness.<sup>61</sup> This definition had severe implications: on the one hand, history didactics were no longer regarded as a mere “how-to” for teaching at secondary schools. Rather, the classroom became just one of many areas in which historical consciousness is present, could be researched, or should be created. It opened a wide field of research for history didactics from public history to the politics of memory, from museums to historical novels. Didactics thus attained a much wider scope than simply teaching at schools. But because *historical* consciousness was at stake, it was exclusively the task of *history and its didactics* to describe and assess these processes.

Jörn Rüsen (\*1938) brought together the worlds of history teaching and of historical theory. He had studied history to become a teacher but had completed a PhD on famed German historical methodologist Johann Gustav Droysen (1808–84). For Rüsen, historiography is just a special case of what humans do all the time, only that it is fostered by scientific rules and methods. Rüsen famously calls this process the “disciplinary matrix” of history, a connection between the conditions of the life-world that shape interests, perspectives of interpretation, rules of historical research, and forms of writing history.<sup>62</sup> According to Rüsen, every endeavour in historical thinking progresses through these steps and thus creates a narration that provides orientation in the life-world. But these steps cannot only be interpreted as a historical methodology but also as a learning process and this is very much what historical learning *is*, according to Rüsen. Rüsen later elaborated this in great detail but, already here, his concept incorporated an epistemological interest but without Habermas’ bias. For Rüsen the historical method is central to historical thinking, and historical thinking and historical learning form two sides of the same coin. Consequently, the discipline history should be charged with researching processes of historical learning. The reason why both Jeismann and Rüsen seemed attractive is evident: both provided a definition of historical learning from a historical point of view and can thus be used to reaffirm that history learning should be defined by no one but experts.<sup>63</sup>

So, from the end of the 1970s onwards, German history didactics has revolved around concepts of historical consciousness, historical thinking, and narrativity. Rüsen’s approach can easily be detected in the Förderung und Entwicklung von reflektiertem Geschichtsbewusstsein (FUER) model of historical competencies<sup>64</sup> and has also been adopted by scholars from the English-speaking world.<sup>65</sup> *Geschichtsbewusstsein* as a concept

<sup>61</sup>Karl-Ernst Jeismann, “Didaktik der Geschichte. Die Wissenschaft vom Zustand, Funktion und Veränderung geschichtlicher Vorstellungen im Selbstverständnis der Gegenwart,” in *Geschichtswissenschaft: Didaktik, Forschung, Theorie*, ed. Erich Kosthorst (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977), 9–33, 12.

<sup>62</sup>In Kosthorst, *Geschichtswissenschaft*, 55.

<sup>63</sup>But von Borries also notes something else: the concept of *Geschichtsbewusstsein* could prevail because it no longer forced scholars to make a definite decision on which approach to history was correct. Rather, such debates could be turned into objects of research themselves. One might add that *Geschichtsbewusstsein* could encompass a very wide range of possible meanings which made it easy to cover up existing deficits or disagreements among historians.

<sup>64</sup>Waltraud Schreiber et al., eds., *Historisches Denken: Ein Kompetenz-Strukturmodell*, 2nd ed. (Neuried: Ars Una, 2006).

<sup>65</sup>Peter Seixas, “A History/Memory Matrix for History Education,” *Public History Weekly* 2016, no. 6 (2016). <https://doi.org/10.1515/phw-2016-5370>.

was even deemed “indispensable” by Kuss.<sup>66</sup> Bodo von Borries concludes: “This school [i.e. Jeismann and Rösen] – which initially had been met with scepticism from both the left [...] and the conservative side – gained universal acceptance.”<sup>67</sup>

On the one hand, historians lost territory: the field of history had to abandon its control over questions of history teaching and it was no longer possible for historians to define what should be taught in schools. Interventions like Skalweit’s from 1975 were no longer possible. But by accepting a new subfield – *Geschichtsdidaktik* – and its semi-autonomy, the field of history managed to successfully exclude pedagogy from these questions. *Geschichtsdidaktik* but not pedagogy provided content and methods of history education. *Geschichtsdidaktik* remained attached to history in a theoretical way, but it was also institutionally connected to history. Universities attached chairs of *Geschichtsdidaktik* to schools of history but not to schools of education or pedagogy. Thus, the difference between the way history teaching is organised in the US and in Germany has its origin in the debates of the 1970s, and the fact that it is so different makes it so hard to translate *Geschichtsdidaktik* into English.

Kuhn had stated that the new science of teaching history, by which she meant her approach, had taken the guise of a paradigm shift and that her approach presented a new paradigm.<sup>68</sup> This is both right and wrong. A new paradigm has emerged but, ironically, it was not what Kuhn had envisaged. Kuhn, who had reaffirmed her position on the English Revolution in 1980,<sup>69</sup> became increasingly interested in women’s history around the same time,<sup>70</sup> effectively leaving the field of history didactics. In the face of the irrelevance of the concepts of “emancipation” and “interest” to history teaching today this might be considered a defeat. But on the other hand, many ideas promoted by her have gained ground, were promoted by other scholars as well, or could tie in with ideas from Jeismann or Rösen (e.g. a focus on the relevance for the present and for the learner or history as a construction<sup>71</sup>).

The plans to abandon history as a school subject never materialised, partly because the conservative opposition increased. In fact, history has managed to maintain its position in schools. But ever since then, possible combinations of history with civics or political science in school instruction have been met with fierce resistance. By the end of the 1970s the interest in history had increased to an extent that even led some historians to look back on the 1980s as an era of a “history boom”.<sup>72</sup> In 1970, few would have guessed.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

<sup>66</sup>Kuss, “Bilanz, Teil I,” 756.

<sup>67</sup>Bodo v. Borries, “Von der Curriculumdebatte um 1970 zur Kompetenzdebatte um 2005,” in *Kompetenzen historischen Denkens: Ein Strukturmodell als Beitrag zur Kompetenzorientierung in der Geschichtsdidaktik*, ed. Waltraud Schreiber, Andreas Körber and Alexander Schöner (Neuried: Ars Una, 2007), 317–33, 323.

<sup>68</sup>Annette Kuhn, “Geschichtsdidaktik in emanzipatorischer Absicht. Versuch einer kritischen Überprüfung,” in *Geschichtsdidaktische Positionen. Bestandsaufnahme und Neuorientierung*, ed. Hans Süßmuth (Paderborn u.a.: Schöningh, 1980), 49–81, 50–3.

<sup>69</sup>*ibid.*, 67.

<sup>70</sup>In 2006, she was awarded the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany for her work on women’s history.

<sup>71</sup>Kuss, “Bilanz, Teil I,” 752.

<sup>72</sup>Marko Demantowsky, “Geschichtskultur und Erinnerungskultur. Zwei Konzeptionen des einen Gegenstandes,” *Geschichte, Politik und ihre Didaktik* 33, nos 1/2 (2005): 11–20; Jörn Rösen, “Was ist Geschichtskultur? Überlegungen zu einer neuen Art, über Geschichte nachzudenken,” in *Historische Faszination: Geschichtskultur heute*, ed. Klaus Fußmann, Heinrich T. Grütter and Jörn Rösen (Köln: Böhlau, 1994), 3–26, 3.

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