

# FORUM

## Historicism

As the rebuilding of Berlin's eighteenth-century *Stadtschloss* nears completion, *German History* turns its attention to the phenomenon of historicism: to the recreation of historical artefacts and practices (sometimes at astonishing expense). Historicism reached its high point in the nineteenth century, when individuals and communities turned to the medieval period to address some of the challenges of modernization. But the urge to revive extended back into the medieval period itself and continues into the twenty-first century. What motivated and what continues to motivate such recreations? As a theme, historicism provides an opportunity for fruitful dialogue between premodern and modern scholars. It also challenges us as historians to consider the value of revivals, whether produced by Berlin politicians, by Hollywood filmmakers or by medieval re-enactors. What happens—or what should happen—when academic scholarship encounters public representations of the past? Preservation and recreation aid historical imagination and empathy: at their best, they can result in the creation of monuments such as the *Neues Museum* in Berlin, a building restored to its nineteenth-century form in a manner that leaves the violence of its twentieth-century history visible. Historicism may sometimes, however, stand in the way of meeting contemporary needs or seek to erase the more recent past, as the *Palast der Republik* did to the original *Stadtschloss* and as its recreation has done to the GDR building. Beyond these aesthetic and political battles over whether to preserve the diversity of heritage, there are other ways in which historicism is subject to contemporary demands. The complexity of the past may be imagined away, as when 'medieval' is invoked in the political discourse of today as the antipode of modernity, suggesting that the whole of the premodern period formed a monolithic unity. The editors invited **Bettina Bildhauer** (St Andrews), **Stefan Goebel** (Kent), **Stefan Laube** (HU, Berlin), **Sue Marchand** (Louisiana State University) and **Astrid Swenson** (Brunel) to discuss these and other questions.

**1. The nineteenth century was the 'age of historicism', with Gothic revival, Romanticism and the cult of chivalry. Yet late medieval and early modern Europe had frequently employed historicizing forms and terminology, and historicism of course played a prominent part in twentieth-century German history. Moreover, it survives today in the form of 'authentic' tournaments (*Ritterspiele*), medieval markets (*Mittelaltermärkte*) and forms of re-enactment. How far is it possible to conceive of and treat historicism as a single historical phenomenon?**

**Bildhauer:** Ah, a lovely question to start with. And luckily all the examples of historicism given are more precisely about medievalism, the reception/invention/adaptation of the middle ages or elements of medieval culture and history, which I know

something about (I don't use the term historicism). Arguably, the middle ages themselves are the period when medievalism was at its most prominent. Medieval culture, especially secular art, literature and music, was largely dedicated to inventing a glorious past for the present, a time of larger-than-life heroes, of always chivalrous knights, of dragons and saints, of Arthur and Charlemagne. This goes not just for the late middle ages either: even early works such as *Beowulf* or *Waltharius* already hark back to a more glorious past, maybe before Christianization, maybe before the technology of writing affected the stories about these heroes. What we think of as typically medieval has always already been in the imagined past: we have never been medieval. Of course, the medieval did not call that past medieval or even antiquity, just the past. Nevertheless, it is from this store of figures and tales that much of the medievalism since then has drawn its material.

So it is important to pay attention to the differences between medieval medievalism, Romantic medievalism, Nazi medievalism, contemporary medievalism and so on—we wouldn't be historians if we didn't have the urge to historicize. And we wouldn't be historians if we didn't point out the arbitrariness of such periodizations. Actually, even looking at the medievalism of one period together is a departure, in the past decade or so, from the previous research culture that was almost totally dominated by case studies on particular instances of medievalism (one film, one novel, one building, one author). But in present scholarship the time is right for narratives that look at a broader sweep, that look at medievalism over a longer period. Chris Jones (in the new *Cambridge Companion to Medievalism*, and in his and my forthcoming collection *The Middle Ages in the Modern World*) has just argued that in British poetry, where medievalism has been firmly treated as a Victorian phenomenon, there has actually been a resurgence of medievalism in the past decade. In my own work on medieval(ist) film, I have found that the often-perceived current 'boom' in films with medieval topics does not come out of nowhere, but can be set in a broader context: film since its invention has always been interested in medieval settings. Looking at the entire 120 years of cinema together allows us to identify certain traditions of typical representations of the middle ages and of filmic strategies—its critique of writing, of linear time and of individualism—that might not be visible if one focused more narrowly just on contemporary films. Only by investigating medievalism across time can we see such broader continuities—and isn't the challenging of periodization what medievalism is all about?

**Goebel:** I am in two minds about this. On the one hand, I think, historicism could potentially prove a useful category for diachronic comparisons, as Bettina suggests. This is something that has gone out of fashion in our discipline, and that would have the additional benefit of bringing historians of the premodern and the modern periods into a new, hopefully stimulating dialogue with each other—as this forum seeks to do. On the other hand, I am doubtful that historicism in general and medievalism in particular can be understood and should be treated as a single, coherent historical phenomenon. I am not qualified to comment on the period before 1800, but even in the late modern era one can detect at least three distinct formations. Consider the rise, refashioning and rejection of medievalism over the last two hundred years or so. The nineteenth century might be described as the classical age of medievalism. The fact that the term 'medievalism' itself was a product of that age is significant because it lent

historicism a new, self-reflective quality. In the aftermath of the rupture of the First World War, medievalism entered into a second distinctive phase, and here we're talking about a cultural transformation rather than a variation on a theme. Pre-existing medievalist idioms took on novel meanings from the context in which they were newly imbricated after 1914–1918. Prior to that conflict, medievalism had essentially been a discourse of identity, fuelled by cultural despair in the era of industrialization. In the aftermath of the First World War, medievalism transmuted into a discourse of mourning in an age of industrialized carnage; it marked a blending between the cultural memory of a remote past and the existential memory of death in war.

Medievalism, this amalgam of temporal notions, never recovered from the upheavals of the Second World War. Take the opening of the *Totenburg* at Tobruk in Libya [a fortress-style burial ground for the dead of the North African campaign] in 1955. This was perhaps the last, albeit unsuccessful attempt to celebrate or revive the idea of 'chivalry' in postwar Germany. Yet in the new public sphere of the Federal Republic of Germany this kind of language was promptly exposed to ridicule; it seemed a relic of a bygone age. I would argue this has characterized the third phase of medievalism. Medievalist diction and imagery lost the coherence and urgency they had commanded in the early twentieth century. Yes, historicism still exists today, although, I reckon, as an embellishment, as something that adds colour. However, very few people have sought to find meaning in evocations of chivalry or the crusades after 1945. I suspect that this trend has probably been more pronounced in the Federal Republic than in any other postwar European society. True, the great Staufer exhibition of 1977 generated much hype, just as computer games such as *Medieval: Total War* seemed to capture the imagination of young people in the 2000s. Yet, today, medievalism is no longer a serious business but something to be consumed with a pinch of irony.

**Swenson:** I think it is necessary both to pay attention to the specificity of nineteenth-century historicism and to consider the phenomenon beyond the confines of a particular period. To nineteenth-century commentators, their time's relation to the past certainly seemed unique: 'Our era and our era alone, since the beginning of recorded history, has assumed towards the past a quite exceptional attitude', observed Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc in the 1850s. No German writer (at least to my knowledge) captured the pride in the age's historicism quite as sharply as the French architect, but his celebration of the modernity of historicism appears representative: the nineteenth century thirst to analyse the entirety of the past, to classify and compare it was novel indeed and I think we can follow Viollet-le-Duc when he battled against contemporaries who dismissed this new analytical attitude as merely some kind of fashion, or worse to him, a whim or weakness. No other era (speaks the nineteenth-century historian in danger of overemphasising the uniqueness of 'her period') discovered as many unknown pasts. No period before or since resurrected the past with such gusto and confidence, and none turned to history in quite the same way to address the challenges of modernization. While the nineteenth century certainly saw the most dramatic clashes between past and progress, it was also the age most at ease with turning to the past to enable progress.

Yet, regardless of nineteenth-century claims to originality, historicizing forms and terminologies had also frequently been employed in the preceding centuries, as Bettina

shows, and historicism continued to play a prominent part in twentieth-century German and European history, despite all modernist attempts to overcome it for good. I agree with Stefan Goebel that the dominant forms changed but I would emphasize more strongly the coexistence of multiple modes at any given time. I do not think, for example, that historicism has been entirely reduced to irony or commerce after 1945 or that nineteenth-century historicism necessarily lacked self-deprecation or commodification. With regard to the example of the crusades mentioned by Stefan, for instance, in my own research on the uses of crusader heritages in the nineteenth and twentieth century, I see a lot of parallel registers operating at any moment—caricatures poking fun at Wilhelm II for posing as a crusader during his *Orientreise* in 1898 indicate that not everybody took medievalism quite as literally as the Kaiser intended, while Adenauer dressing up as a Teutonic knight in postwar Germany might be a sign that chivalry retained symbolic power in the early Federal Republic. I would argue more generally that the crusades, and other aspects of the middle ages, retained broader political meaning after 1945 as they were invoked to inscribe Germany into the *Abendland* tradition in the postwar years. Political uses did not stop here either: there are many instances of German cultural diplomacy that still draw on this history (for instance by celebrating the multi-lingualism of the Order of St John in Malta as a sort of proto-EU) and of course debates about the relationship of Europe and the Middle East at the moment are afloat with allusion to the crusades.

But back to the broader questions: how far it is possible to conceive of and treat historicism as a single historical phenomenon feels a bit like Panofsky's *Renaissance and Renascences* reloaded for modern historians. The difference between 'historicism' and 'historicisms' consists for me in the multiplication of pasts and the ensuing creation of ever more specialized disciplines to study the pasts, *vis-à-vis* earlier centuries, and the lack of anxiety about recreating the past *vis-à-vis* more recent times. As foreshadowed by the debate about whether the turning to, and revival of, elements of antique culture at different moments during the middle ages meant that there were many *Renaissances* or only one, using 'historicism' beyond its narrow confines has the disadvantage of blurring specificities and the advantage of highlighting continuities.

The problem of definition is not made easier by the multiple meanings of 'historicism' even during 'the age of historicism', used both to denote a mode of thinking and to describe revivalist practices. But it is this tension between hermeneutical and creative uses that makes this '-ism' so interesting. To think across periods, other terms are also useful: 'medievalism' is more narrow in terms of period; 'revivalism' emphasizes the resurrection aspects; 'heritage' points to the idea of transmission (and represents, for some, the presentist uses of the past or the space in which attitudes to the past are negotiated); 'memory' draws attention not only to forgetting, but also to the tensions between the individual and the collective; *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* reminds us of dark heritages and the work necessary to deal with them. 'Historical culture' is perhaps the broadest, most open-ended expression. Most of these terms are somewhat anachronistic if applied beyond their period of origin, but, as long as they are used reflectively and transparently, they have their merit as they help to discern continuities and changes in different ways. So, yes, I think we should look at the different manifestations of historicism together, but not in order to suggest that historicism is in any way a unified thing. For me the interesting question is why attitudes to the past and to historical situatedness changed, and which competing forms of historicisms existed at any given point and why.

**Laube:** It is virtually impossible to treat historicism as a unified historical phenomenon. In the English-speaking world ‘historicism’ refers chiefly to popular projects of historical remembrance or—with the prefix *new* attached—to an innovative approach to the interpretation of literary texts that considers historical contexts as relevant as the texts themselves (Stephen Greenblatt). But in the German language this category has had a scholarly import since the nineteenth century. The modern discipline of history, with its focus on sources, took off in the first few decades of the nineteenth century, propelled above all by the work of Bertholt Niebuhr and Leopold Ranke. As this new discipline looked back across time it was guided by the key concept of *Historismus*, a method that recognizes the autonomy of the past, systematically liberating it from its status as the mere prehistory of a given present. The underlying premise here is that no era is better or worse than any other; in fact every age is ‘unmittelbar zu Gott’ (immediate to God), as Ranke put it.

Historicism in this sense is closely bound up with the German tradition of the humanities, so it would certainly be worth considering its incorporation—if this hasn’t happened yet—as a Germanism into the English language, simply to avoid misunderstandings. Because ‘historicism’—as a way of referring to the multifaceted popular enthusiasm for history, which also took off in the nineteenth century—means almost the exact opposite of *Historismus*. In historicism, the past is intentionally and energetically geared towards the present. What does this mean? In view of the rupture triggered by a society undergoing rapid change—as a result of population growth and industrialization—there was a need for a social cement, and this contemporaries found not least in historical myths. These myths were kept permanently alive in the collective memory through songs, poems and commemorative events and through memorable imagery, places and objects.

What is striking about these media of remembrance is that they deliberately reduce complexities. This is the only way of preserving historical events or themes so as to make them instantly retrievable. The goal was to familiarize people with historical material that they perceived as increasingly alien, such as narratives about Arminius, Canossa or Luther, to bring people closer to this kind of historical stuff they were beginning to turn away from. This gave rise to virtual conceptions of history, virtual because they function like fictions despite getting their themes from the historical record. They are reminiscent of fairy tales, which were of course never valued as historical documents but in the light of their spiritual content.

If we consider the commemoration of Luther in the nineteenth century, from a present-day perspective we perceive a profound tension between history as remembrance and history as academic pursuit: Luther, hurling his famous ‘Here I stand; I can do no other’ in the Emperor’s face; Luther, hammer in hand, nailing his theses to the door; and Luther sitting with his loved ones in a cosy scene in front of the Christmas tree, not to mention the ever-fresh ink stain in Luther’s room in the Wartburg—all the available sources indicate that none of this is real. While we today cannot be naïve about such popular historical constructions, these Luther myths were anything but arbitrary or spiritless. They translated what was known of the complex figure of Luther from the textual sources into powerful imagery that fitted with contemporary thinking. As *Merkbilder* or striking images intended to make a point, they had to be simultaneously historical and fictitious. No one knew how these scenes played out in detail. So why not inject a bit of drama into them? The alternative would have been to say nothing.

**Marchand:** As the previous respondents have noted, historicism means many things to many people, and as Stefan Laube suggests, there are both popular and scholarly versions, and it carries both positive and negative associations. For scholars it once had a positive inflection—as the antithesis of presentism—but these days, all too often it seems to me, ‘historicism’ is a pejorative term; we see it through the puce-coloured glasses of modern art, of modern architecture, or of Friedrich Meinecke, who made it the (Germanic) beginning of the end of universalist thinking. Recalling my years at Berkeley, I think historicism was largely used as a means of denouncing right-wing historical writing that purported to be objective, and thus failed to be properly critical both of class relations and of ‘high’ political history. It seems to me the term still carries a whiff of this old grapeshot, as well as an antipathy to the nineteenth century, which does, as Astrid suggests, play a central role in this debate. Although this forum suggests that we may be at the point of setting aside our puce-tinted spectacles, it seems to me that we still often indulge in a kind of historicism-bashing, expressing a sort of snobbery about nineteenth-century culture which overlooks the skill, imagination and individuality of its practitioners, and forgets that historicism is the rock upon which we have built our right to exist as professional scholars. Thus in my remarks I will opt for a capacious definition, and opt for some rosier tints, though I am well aware that historicism (whatever it is) can foster some evils, among which I would list quietism, particularism and contempt for one’s contemporaries. I do not think forms of historical play—into which category I would put *Ritterspiele* and re-enactments, history painting and archaizing furniture—at all dangerous, though I must say that it is sobering to reflect on Stefan Goebel’s *Totenburg* example, and Stefan Laube’s fascinating definition of the term (in its popular manifestations) as a form of ‘social cement’ found in the historical myths that were kept permanently alive in the collective memory. But I would argue, still, that most historicism (excluding perhaps monumental architecture, or political propaganda) is not collective, but at base an act of empathy, a longing to understand the otherness of the past, an aesthetic urge to mix things up, an act of modesty, an engagement of the imagination. And, as such, I think we historians need to applaud it, and recognize that without it, we would have no scholarly standing, and no audience to speak to.

My definition of historicism would be: a strong belief that the past is past, and that to understand it (or in art, to recreate its effects) requires us to adopt other forms of thinking than the forms we consider to be those of our own day. This definition appears to put the nineteenth century squarely in its centre—until we consider that Ranke’s catch phrase, to recount history, ‘*wie es eigentlich gewesen (war)*’, is almost certainly a direct translation of a line from Thucydides’ *The Peloponnesian Wars* (1.122). Renaissance philologists such as Lorenzo Valla knew how to separate the Latin of the 4th century CE from that of the medieval period; Reformation thinkers wanted to know, and to document, the actual principles, practices and elocutions of the early church. Renaissance artists were well aware that the Romans made domes in certain ways that had been lost to medieval craftsmen; the ‘quarrel of the ancients and the moderns’ of the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries was all about whether or not modern people could, or should, imitate ancient models, given the gap that had opened (thanks mostly to the advent of the modern sciences) between the two thought-worlds. The Enlightenment swarmed with history writers of various types, including ‘universal’ historians but also nostalgic (one might well say proto-Romantic) aristocrats mourning the

loss of their privileges, and antiquarians (including numismatists and art dealers fearful of forgeries) hell-bent on investigating the peculiarities of Roman costumes, Welsh weapons and Mithraic altarpieces. Neo-classicism, neo-Gothicism (think Strawberry Hill), Egyptomania: they all begin in the eighteenth century, or before. Historicism did not leap, fully formed, from the heads of B.G. Niebuhr, or Leopold von Ranke, though the forms it took after 1815 are more specific in both linguistic and national terms, and more binding for anyone wanting to call herself a true historian. The peculiarities of Germany's nineteenth-century forms have been hugely influential, and well worth the deep analysis accorded to them by John Toews, in his magisterial *Becoming Historical* (2004). But this is not the only form historicism has taken, or might take in the future.

**2. Historicism is an apparent paradox: it is about the deliberate preservation or revival of things that do not fit. What drives such preservation or revival? Is historicism merely a product of the deliberate instrumentalization of the past, of its invocation as a source of political and symbolic power? What other confluences of factors call forth intense engagements with historical forms and antecedents at particular moments in time?**

**Swenson:** It is these paradoxes that make historicism so fascinating! Instrumentalizations of the past have certainly been a source of political and symbolic power. However, important questions about the reasons for nationalist, and national-socialist instrumentalizations, that is, the question about the continuities between the two, have to some degree side-lined attention from other drivers in Germany. Elsewhere postcolonial and other forms of critical scholarship have also helped to sharpen awareness of oppressive instrumentalizations. Drawing attention to the abuses of the past remains an important task for scholarship, but we also need to be aware that a range of other motives drove historicism sometimes in parallel and sometimes in overlapping ways. Sue just described some of them wonderfully vividly. Scientific curiosity was a major driver before, during and after the nineteenth century. In a postrevolutionary world 'stranded in the present', to use Peter Fritsche's phrase, turning to different aspects of the past moreover enabled both liberation from the old regime and a way to feel connected. In different ways the culturalization of the sacred and the sacralization of culture spoke to individuals on both sides of the secularization divide. The creative potential also had enormous appeal, especially for the first generation of revivalist architects, artists and scientists who meshed the discovery of the past with the use of new technologies born of the industrial revolution. They often mentioned their desire to create better and bolder than their ancestors.

The pleasures involved in experiencing the past were important for creators and consumers of the past—including the pleasures of gore and horror—as the craze for dungeons and dragons since the late eighteenth century testifies. Sometimes this 'culture of history' (as Billie Melman called it) was escapist, often it was political. But political motives were not limited to the wish to control populations. A number of utopian writers for instance wanted to use the art and creativity of the past to enable the development of socialism. Finally a range of personal motives drove the discovery or resurrection of particular pasts. Boredom, for instance, was at the source of one of the most well-known cases of political instrumentalization of the middle ages. The

reconstruction of Cologne cathedral might never have happened had the Cologne merchant Sulpiz Boisserrée not felt trapped in the ‘parochial circumstances’ of his home town in 1799 and escaped to Paris where his interest in German art history was kindled. On his return he lobbied the world and his dog (the Prussian Crown Prince, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Josef Goerres, for example), to enable the completion of the cathedral, but the political remained mixed with the private. In his diaries he noted that the ‘occupation with the national monuments’ proved a ‘great repose’ to deal with personal grief.

On a more collective level, grief and hope played a crucial part in the turn towards historical monuments during the wars of the twentieth century, when the destruction of buildings allowed written exchanges about death and destruction otherwise often censured, while the fact that some iconic buildings survived bombing raids inspired hope for survival and renewal more generally. Again the cathedral of Cologne is a good example here: the image of the cathedral standing alone among the rubble of the city after 1945 became a much photographed symbol for survival, and its postwar repair, which emphasized the cathedral’s history as a place of pan-European worship, facilitated both local and Allied efforts to reintegrate Germany into Western Europe.

Thus, while I believe it is our job as historians to deconstruct instrumentalizations of the past, it is necessary to take a broad view of motives—not least because we cannot understand why instrumentationizations work if we do not pay attention to the full range of emotions that drive interest in the past.

**Goebel:** Is historicism actually a ‘paradox’? Allow me to take issue with the question. In the nineteenth century, industrial magnates commissioned some of the finest examples of Gothic revival architecture; in the First World War, the exploits of the Teutonic Order were invoked to make sense of mass industrialized slaughter. What might seem to us counter-intuitive or inconsistent, perhaps even absurd, did not appear in the least anachronistic or ‘paradoxical’ to contemporaries. In all my research into medievalism and the First World War, I have almost never come across any substantial criticism of war memorials featuring medieval knights. In one case, a citizen objected vocally, arguing that the chosen design was historically inaccurate: the artist had omitted the knight’s spurs—and that was said without the slightest sense of irony! What I am suggesting is that underlying your question is a (post-)modern engagement with medievalism and other forms of historicism that is more characteristic of the early twenty-first century than any period before circa 1945.

I also think that interpretative terms such as ‘instrumentalization’ or ‘symbolic power’ will probably set us on the wrong path. A lot of research into medievalism, especially in the 1990s, has focused on the aspect of identity politics in nineteenth-century representations of the medieval ‘national’ past and the importance of medieval history for the self-expression of an educated elite. It’s time to go beyond the political and intellectual and explore the grass-roots cultural dimension of historicism. Astrid mentioned that personal grief could trigger an engagement with the remote past. In fact, we need to recognize the emotional investment of ordinary people in medievalism—and its commercial application.

A colleague recently purchased in an online auction a framed print of the official *Kriegswahrzeichen* of Dortmund, the ‘Iron Reinoldus’ (a wooden figure showing the saint



in full armour) unveiled in 1916. The image itself is not rare, but what is intriguing about this object is that someone went to the trouble of having it framed, possibly for display in their ‘best room’ (*gute Stube*). This illustrates what, in a previous ‘Forum’ debate (‘Memory before Modernity’), Mitch Merback called ‘the stubbornly “private” nature of even the most public rites of collective remembrance’. Medievalism could fill a deep-seated emotional need. This is not to deny that figures such as the ‘Iron Reinoldus’ had political function, too; the documents preserved in the archives can be used to shed ample light on this. Even so, we need to make a greater effort to explore the quotidian quality of medievalism and its material culture; we need to go out of the archives and libraries and into the museums and private collections, browse Ebay and ransack junk dealers. That leads me to my second point: the material evidence of bric-a-brac should also encourage us to reflect on the economics of medievalism. There was a veritable market for kitsch objects, and even though the history of consumption is a booming branch of historical research, bridging the gap between the economic and the cultural, it has not had a great impact on our field yet.

**Bildhauer:** For me, the idea of the historicism/medievalism being a paradox is a great way of thinking about it. The middle ages certainly serve as a repository of ‘things that do not fit’. They are modernity’s Other: whatever is not modern is projected onto the premodern. Bruno Latour’s theories of modernity famously analyse the contradiction between the official discourse of modernity—as enlightened, scientific, rational—and what modern people actually think, which often allows for things that science cannot explain yet; even science isn’t as cut-and-dried as Latour makes out. For many modern people, their beliefs still allow for the supernatural or transcendental in religious terms. There is thus what psychiatrists call ‘double bookkeeping’, a distinction between that which one knows one should think and can express in words, and other beliefs one holds but might not even be aware of. Some of the engagement with the middle ages comes from such ideas, that do not fit any explanatory systems, being projected onto the medieval past in order to find an outlet.

But like the previous speakers, and reflecting the current academic resistance to keep writing history as a story of Great Men, of political and military leaders, I struggle with the notion of ‘deliberate instrumentalization’. Deliberateness, implying intentionality, free will, agency, is such a problematic concept. There are as many motives for engaging with whatever one is missing in modernity as there are people doing so, yet few of them can be called ‘deliberate instrumentalization’, which I would associate with states and companies, political and economic interest groups who could be seen as having a deliberate strategy in this area, albeit probably even in this case not one that is consciously spelled out. The respected German company Vorwerk has just released a tool-set called ‘Tweres’, after the Middle High German for ‘dwarves’. Is that a ‘deliberate instrumentalization’ of the middle ages? I doubt the marketing people consciously thought an oblique reference to the middle ages would attract their customers, but they probably did do research that suggests their female target group thought that ‘tweres’ sounded cool, that they liked the translated meaning of the term and maybe even the fact that it comes from medieval German, too. I really like Stefan Goebel’s point that we need to pay more attention to economic interests.

Valentin Groebner has observed a trend that could broadly be described as a move from political to popular medievalism. While the middle ages used to bolster politicians' claims of nationhood by providing origin myths for modern nations in the distant past in ways that could be seen as deliberate, this is harder to claim for the current fashion in Germany for participatory medievalism—fairs, conventions, battles, games, concerts. It is now to some extent driven by commercial interests, but does not seem to have come out of a deliberate strategy on anyone's part. It is as if by force of the fact that everyone has heard about them, the middle ages demand to be understood, claimed and framed as part of history somehow. In Germany, they are currently being claimed back from nationalist appropriations in particular during the Third Reich, and from the subsequent period when they were primarily addressed by academics. They are now becoming palatable again in popular culture, especially as mediated through the form of participatory medievalism that has come to Germany from Britain and the US and thus gives Germans back the middle ages not as a national past, but as an international past.

That is not to say that political players have not tried and do not keep trying to instrumentalize the past, but this currently takes place not so much in the context of German nationality, but in the context of demarcating 'Europe' from 'Islam' by claiming that Islam and the Middle East are somehow stuck in the middle ages. This pattern is probably not deliberate, but it works very effectively to put the West in a position of alleged superiority, as has been very sharply analysed by thinkers such as Kathleen Davis, and there is now an outcry, at least among medievalists on social media, every time a politician uses 'medieval' as a pejorative. We need to remain vigilant and argue against such abuses of the medieval, not just because they denigrate the dead, but also because they deepen political rifts.

**Marchand:** What drives preservation or revival? Like Stefan Goebel and Bettina, I suspect that most often, those who seek preservation or revival do not have conscious or instrumental motives, but feel unsettled or displaced by things modern. (Of course one can find exceptions in the Nazis' instrumental use of the Germanic past, for example—which by the way Hitler didn't like, and which proved dysfunctional with respect to architecture, as well as to weapons production.) Sometimes even when preservation is meant to lead to a certain end, it can backfire. This was, for example, the case in the Austro-Hungarian Empire's attempts in the nineteenth century to encourage preservation of provincial monuments or the use of local, 'national' styles for new buildings. Intended to create a sense of the polyphonic beauty of the empire united, this effort simply strengthened the nationalities' hatred of the 'baroque' centre. But for the most part, I believe that people look to and revel in the pastness of the past as a means to indulge and strengthen their powers of empathy and imagination, or to relieve boredom, as in Astrid's wonderful invocation of Sulpiz Boisserée. What do we say to our children when we take them to Colonial Williamsburg, or the Renaissance fair? This is how people used to live, kids; think about what it would be like to live your daily life without electricity, or anti-biotics or zippers! To get them to think about a past without Facebook that wasn't simply 'stupid' but had its own means of communication (and of shaming) is to ask them to stretch their brains and to empathize with others, even in a slightly gimmicky and not entirely authentic way. And we surely all believe that is a good thing.

Of course there are dangers in *too much* empathy: in life, that of thinking the present is morally bankrupt and/or an aesthetic wasteland; in art, of crude imitation of past models. Those who overindulge in historical empathy (sometimes slipping into nostalgia) typically overstate the past's grandeur, and the present's flaws. But I would argue that nostalgia, or curmudgeonliness, is a natural part of the aging process. Older people who have given up trying to shape the world are often inclined to it, and balance out the younger people, who, at least since the nineteenth century, have tended in utopian, or dystopian, directions. Naturally this makes for inter-generational conflict, but perhaps the juxtaposition of nostalgia and fantasy also has kept modern society from throwing everything into the dustbin on the one hand, or giving up all hope on the other. We must have a balance! Without people to remind us that the present isn't the only interesting thing to know about, that today's incorruptible gurus are strikingly reminiscent of the ones arrested for sollicitation last year, and that recent art isn't the only art (or music, or literature) worth admiring, in its own terms if not in ours, what would the humanities be? Could we even be historians without believing the indispensability of historical empathy? I don't think so.

**Laube:** There are a fair number of ambivalent or paradoxical things about historicism. On the one hand it is the result of the dramatic historical transformation ushered in by modernity, while on the other it freezes the era on which it focuses as if it were a solid block of time. In historicism the middle ages are devoid of development, of a before and after; it is entirely irrelevant whether we beam ourselves back from the present to the eighth or the fourteenth century. In the absence of population explosion, urbanization, industrialization, digitalization and so on there would be no historicism as a static platform of alterity. It is from the gap between past and present, which is perceived as ever wider, that the reconstruction or vitalization of past realities gets its appeal: we slip into costumes no longer our own, we consume foods no longer commonly eaten, play unfamiliar music with archaic instruments and practice peculiar dance moves. What is happening here is that people are using all their senses to get closer to a past reality through play, leisure time activities, the experience of community and amusement. Conflicts may arise if we remain external observers, in other words if we refuse to join in and—with support from the categories we learnt in the history department—cannot resist wagging our academic fingers. Many of those in Germany who are interested in history seem, without being aware of it, to have come under Ranke's influence, repeating like a mantra that history must be committed to the truth or properly documented.

And we do have to face the question of how far historicism ought to go. Is it acceptable to invent histories? The 2003 film about Luther starring Joseph Fiennes in the lead role depicts an event entirely absent from the sources: a crippled girl walks after Luther prays for her. Hollywood conjures up a powerful image and quite a few of those whose knowledge of Luther comes solely from this film believe he was also a miraculous healer. This is probably a case of historicism going too far. On the other hand, it is striking that this film was shot on location. A revitalized history in the sense of historicism requires not just visual media in keeping with the times but also authentic material cultures. From the beginning of the nineteenth century the then-new antiquarian and historical societies set themselves the task of preserving these cultures, which were intended to provide

a firm anchorage for a society on the move to a new era. Amateur history enthusiasts dedicated themselves to collecting with an unprecedented passion. This obsession with collecting was to lead directly to the founding of museums, of which many still exist, such as the Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nuremberg. Ruptures opened up within a single human lifetime. Individuals' present experience increasingly clashed with what they had known in the past, in other words, there was a divergence between the realm of experience and the horizon of expectation (Reinhart Koselleck's definition of the *Sattelzeit*). Many people would have lost their bearings without the continuities provided with the aid of historical objects, which helped plug the gaps in the present with historical cement. Alfred Lichtwark, a famous promoter of museums in 1920s Hamburg, once stated that there is a particular need for the collector during periods of transition between two worlds, as soon as the objects of the declining world have been abandoned.

**3. What, beyond the study of a community's relationship with its own imagined pasts, can the examination of historicism offer the historian? How, for example, might historicism open up our understanding of civic cultures in German history; how might setting it within international frames sharpen our understanding of its presentation in German contexts?**

**Goebel:** Post-1800 historicism was intimately linked to the rise of nationalism, but at the same time, it was a pan-European phenomenon. Sir Walter Scott's historical novels translated well into German, while Richard Wagner's operas had enthusiastic followers in Edwardian Britain. In my view, comparative and transnational approaches (they are really two sides of the same coin) are essential in order to understand not only national idiosyncrasies but also cultural convergences. The cult of Kaiser Barbarossa in Imperial Germany or the evocations of the Teutonic Order during the Weimar Republic will seem less 'special' when studied in their European context.

While works that focus on a single nation still abound, I can think of a number of successful examples of comparative studies that have thrown national peculiarities into sharper relief, such as Charlotte Tacke's exploration of the public image of Arminius and Vercingetorix in Imperial Germany and the French Third Republic respectively. To be sure, comparative history has an intrinsic tendency to concentrate on national peculiarities. Nevertheless, medievalism as a *tertium comparationis* can reveal striking cultural convergences between European nations, too. In both Germany and Britain, the survivors of the First World War found comfort in an imagery that connected the dead of 1914–1918 to wars and battles dating back to the middle ages such as Agincourt or Tannenberg. Medievalism as a mode of war remembrance allowed the bereaved to cope with their grief by imagining their loved ones as chivalrous knights rather than bloodthirsty killers, and the war as a crusade rather than a slaughter. Medievalism suggested hope of redemption through tradition; it entwined intimate responses with cultural ones. Such imaginative fusions of recent and remote events went beyond simply appropriating the past in an effort to authenticate the present or to bolster a sense of community and belonging by means of invented traditions. In other words, medievalism can be an avenue into the study of national identities as well as the history of emotions.

To stress the commonality of medievalism in Europe is not to reject culture-specific responses. On the contrary, we need to distinguish carefully between class-cultural, milieu-specific, religious, regional and national variants of the medievalist discourse. The vitality of local societies and the plurality of agency facilitated the emergence of many different medievalisms. I would argue that the diversities within the national communities could often be as strong as the divergences between the nations. In my own research on Britain and Germany in the early twentieth century, I have found that Scots and East Friesians (proud of their respective freedom and shaped by iconophobia), Anglo-Catholics and German Roman Catholics (both open to religious spiritualism and ornamentalism), or British public-school boys and German *Gymnasium* pupils (equally imbued with classical and chivalrous feats) had a great deal in common. To some extent, they shared more with each other than with their fellow countrymen.

**Swenson:** I couldn't agree more with the case for comparative and transnational history (and the links between the two) that Stefan Goebel just made. Although much research on the transnational nature of historicism still needs to be done, it is becoming ever more apparent how strongly the development of historicism was linked across borders in intellectual, economic, artistic and political terms. Even the most iconic national monuments were made through transnational exchanges. One can see this wherever one looks: German historicism influenced the frescoes of the Houses of Parliament in London via a Roman detour; international financial contributions from the Baltic to Mexico helped to complete the cathedral of Cologne; this in turn spurred the French to restore Notre-Dame cathedral in Paris. And these examples are only the tip of the iceberg.

While post-1800 historicism was incontestably linked to the rise of nationalism, it was at the same time shaped by, and contributed to, the growing connectedness of the world. Exchange and emulation were important drivers, but so were competition and disappropriation. As ideas about the historic achievements of a community became increasingly linked with concepts of civilization during the age of imperialism, historicism also shaped the development of the international sphere, equally underpinning visions of dominance and of universalism. Without looking across borders we can understand neither the emergence, transformation and contestation of historicism in general nor its specific manifestations. The discussion of the previous questions has already highlighted that historicism can offer the historian many insights beyond the study of a community's relationship with its own imagined past, as fascinating as this is. We have already talked about the history of emotions. Historicism can also open, among other things, a window into a community's relationship with science, religion and art, into attitudes to common goods, practices of inclusion and exclusion, the strength and purpose of the state and of civic culture, and ideas about the local, the national and global. None of these areas can be understood purely through national history.

As Stefan Goebel has just said, the transnational and comparative analyses reveal that similarities and differences of opinion don't necessarily map onto national borders. This is not to say that national differences do not matter. In the end, it is only by setting the German (or any other national) situation within an international framework that we can gain an understanding of distinctiveness, or lack thereof. The

question of the relationship between historicism and civic cultures that you raise is a good example for this. The distribution of historical associations mentioned by Stefan Laube above, for instance, maps very neatly onto more general patterns of civic engagement in nineteenth-century Germany, as it does elsewhere in Europe. Yet, for a long time, attitudes have mostly been analysed within national frameworks or through asymmetric comparisons. More than in neighbouring countries, approaches to historicism, heritage and, particularly, *Heimat* in nineteenth-century Germany have been read in terms of their later development during the Third Reich. Arguments have largely been framed by larger assumptions of a German *Sonderweg* versus a European modernity, either highlighting the unique racist nature of Germany or drawing attention to the existence of preservation movements abroad to show the modernity of 'homeland protection' (*Heimatschutz*). But both positions are one-sided. Rejecting the idea of a German special path by drawing attention to the fact that similar forms of historicism and preservation movements were founded at the same time elsewhere in Europe and the United States means letting the *Sonderweg* return through the back door by assuming that British, French or American ways were progressive and therefore any similarities between German and other preservation movements must confirm the idea of German modernity. The existence of preservation movements in other countries, however, does not necessarily make *Heimatschutz* less *völkisch*. Yet, racist elements were also not unique to Germany. One therefore needs to ask different questions to explain the divergent paths in the twentieth century. Can the difference be attributed to the slightly less leftist nature of the German preservation movement during the nineteenth century? To its greater ability to federate? To the lower number of women in leadership positions? Or did the differences only emerge as a result of the nationalization of preservation during the First World War? It is not always easy to establish which differences matter, but as Marc Bloch observed a long time ago, if comparison does not always give us a straight answer at least it prevents us from running into impasses following local 'pseudo-causes'.

**Laube:** Historicism has become a self-evident component of civic culture and media society, fuelled to a significant degree by the rhythm of round-number commemoration days. The public culture of remembrance has become virtually inconceivable without the practice of anniversaries, and the approach of a round-number anniversary automatically triggers a welter of activity in the culture and tourism industries (exhibitions, books, films, costume events, and so on). There is a tendency here to emphasize an epochal founding figure; through the lens of the round number, the myth of the men who make history seems to enjoy a never-ending renaissance. Serious scholarship undoubtedly benefits from the anniversary as well. Without the opportunity provided by an anniversary and the attendant inflow of money, Lucas Cranach the Younger would never have been more than a sketchy figure overshadowed by his world-famous father. I have no doubt that the sharing of history via anniversaries will remain a powerful engine of historicism into the foreseeable future, though we are now seeing unmistakable signs of oversaturation. As a result, certain prominent dates such as the 200th anniversary of Bismarck's birth are unable to elicit a great deal of media attention. But that the entire media industry remains fixated on round-number anniversaries is evident in a calendar that has sold very well among journalists and lists only

newsworthy anniversaries of this kind—from 1 January to 31 December. A significant portion of media reports on history can be traced back to this calendar.

I'm still sceptical, however, about the idea that such historical initiatives can influence political consciousness in any comprehensive sense. In 2017 Germany will be mesmerized by the Luther anniversary. The whole world will be looking at Germany—this, at least, is the hope harboured by the many masters of ceremonies who have been preparing for this event for years, despite a global population of just seventy million nominal Lutherans. Still, there are more than two billion Christians and 400 million Protestants. But will Greeks and Italians, if we look only within the boundaries of the EU, warm to this historical event? Parliamentarians in Berlin seem electrified: 'The Bundestag declares'—to quote the emphatic opening words of a parliamentary resolution drawn up by all the parties in the Bundestag (with the exception of *Die Linke*) at the beginning of the Luther decade on 18 June 2009. With the momentum of historical developments, the resolution goes on: 'As a key event in the history of Christian Europe the Reformation fostered a view of the human being significantly influenced by a new Christian notion of freedom. The Reformation was important in the development of personal responsibility and individuals' capacity to make up their own minds on matters of conscience. This was key to the Enlightenment, the development of human rights and democracy'. From this perspective Luther's work is a crucial component of modernity, a foundation stone of our era that underpins human rights, freedom of religion and conscience. A very different dimension comes to the fore if we dive deep into the past and try to understand the figure of the reformer in his own terms. Then we often find ourselves confronted with a disconcerting Luther, a man haunted by apparitions of the devil, a man who—not without a certain sense of pleasure, incidentally—supposed himself to be living at the end of all times and who wrongly predicted the end of the world on three occasions. 'Luther is quite different from us'—Thomas Nipperdey's dictum on the occasion of Luther's 1983 anniversary has lost none of its validity. So every nation has its 'holy cow', whose holiness consists of a process of present-oriented selection.

In England this holy cow is the Magna Carta, in France the Revolution, in the United States the Declaration of Independence, in Italy the Renaissance. It's hard to shake off the feeling that Germany has set out to rid itself of its inferiority complexes when it comes to historical remembrance, to finally join the ranks of the major nations on an equal footing, true to the motto: 'We are a normal country like any other'.

Historicism in the sense of the playful, multi-sensual and didactic mediation of history is anything but a specifically German phenomenon. These ways of bringing history to life flourish in every country, particularly in those that can look back on a successful nation-building process—some earlier, others later: the Netherlands, France, Spain, Switzerland, England, Poland, and so on. The transmission of history, which is simultaneously a form of remembrance of myths, provides a space for the manifestation of coherent continuities, a collective heroic biography as it were, in which everything has its meaningful place. Anyone who has ever visited Ireland's heritage sites soon realizes that the popular presentation of history in Germany has long been a cramped affair lacking in levity and any penchant for historical speculation. Germany's sense of itself as being on the right side of history was deeply shaken during the twentieth century, when German history was utterly derailed, creating numerous taboo areas.

Epoch-spanning narratives could gain traction here only hemmed in by caveats, doubts and footnotes. This has only very recently begun to change, in significant part through the rise of a new generation.

In line with Stefan Goebel's remarks, I think that nowadays historical commemorations are justified only if they are placed consistently within a European or global framework. We have to be cautious at a time when nationalist movements are burgeoning in many EU countries. Commemorative events run the risk of being overly national, of merely reinforcing boundaries and perpetuating clichés. I sometimes have the impression that a culture of forgetting would do more to foster international understanding than permanent remembering, which all too easily strays into a form of national stereotyping. To this day the Tannenberg/Grunwald complex can cause trouble between Germany and Poland. While we have no reason to fear that the 'Amselfeld' element will dominate the Luther anniversary, I think it highly unlikely that the associated festivities will culminate in fruitful attempts to grapple with the truly pressing political problems with which Germany will find itself confronted in 2017. And these problems certainly do not include the need to create a tradition with reference to an event 500 years in the past that has been instrumentalized or abused for national ends. In the context of the immigration of refugees from Muslim regions, the politics of history faces quite different challenges. What we need to do is read history and tradition afresh, looking for points of interreligious and intercultural contact over the past 1500 years. The 'Near East' (*Naher Osten*) gets its name from the fact that it is so close to Europe. And our picture of those from the eastern German territories, or from the islands of German culture in east-central Europe, who lost their homeland immediately after the Second World War also appears in a completely new comparative light against the background of current political events.

**Bildhauer:** This question addresses what our ideas of the middle ages tell us about the present. I think the ways in which the middle ages are constructed today is shaped by the needs of the present, in particular the modern/premodern distinction. What makes medievalism so distinctive among recourses to other historical periods is that it is so clearly not modern, that the not-modern and the premodern are conflated. Therefore it serves *ex negativo* as a very clear mirror for the present (or for whichever postmedieval period's medievalism we are looking it): however we represent the middle ages, it is what we think we are *not*, but perhaps would *like* to be—or what we think we *are*, but perhaps do not *want* to be.

Again, most of us seem to be thinking along similar lines here, as are many of our colleagues, in emphasizing that transnational and comparative studies are the most promising and urgent area for further academic research. When I tried to write about medievalism in 'German' film, it made absolutely no sense to see this in isolation from the films from other countries that influenced German filmmakers and shaped the expectations of German audiences, from the films that native Germans continued to make abroad, or from the international reception of German films—most films are international collaborations in one way or another. Just as medieval culture was part of a global context, so is modern medievalism, and so should medievalism studies be. We medievalists are slowly realizing that medieval German, Persian, Arabic and Latin writing, for example, were much more closely connected than we thought, and medievalism



studies need to look further beyond Europe and the West, too. Analyses of American and Australian medievalism indicate how much there is to learn from comparative studies, and much more work needs to be done on non-Western medievalism.

**Marchand:** Perhaps one way we can sharpen our understanding of historicism is to recognize that this mode of thinking is not exclusively a German affliction or invention. I have been doing some work on the history of history writing in the eighteenth century, a subject which has made me keenly aware of just how hard it is to get past presumptions I imbibed long ago about the Germans' 'invention' of modern history and its philological sidekick, historicizing source criticism. The presumption that history lacked critical depth before B.G. Niebuhr and the Germans got there belongs to a suite of other silly contentions about the shallowness of the French (and Scottish) Enlightenments on the one hand, and the feebleness of the German *Aufklärung* on the other. In any event, we modernists (these hangups were never, to my knowledge, shared by early modernists, and have been shown to be false by Donald Kelley and Anthony Grafton, among others) projected our linguistic and national specialties backwards, and never learnt, or dismissed facts such as that the (only) book that disrupted Kant's famous daily walk was Rousseau's *Emile*, and that Gibbon became so much at home in Franco-Swiss culture and ideas that for some time he wrote in French. We have horribly understated the impact on German historicism of Montesquieu and the *Académie des Inscriptions*, of French, British and Italian antiquarianism, and of Swiss and Dutch national histories. We have also, at least until recently, failed to recognize that a very great deal of historicizing was powerfully linked to biblical exegesis, and especially to Protestant attempts to understand the 'authentic' language and culture of the ancient Israelites. Understanding the Old Testament as a kind of simplified folk poetry—its miracles and improbabilities the product of God speaking differently to a primitive people—was something Giambattista Vico and the British Hebraist Robert Lowth suggested before Herder got there. And Herder, as we know, built outward very broadly from this paradigm, in large part for religious reasons; but he did not give up on universal history, a subject on which Ranke lectured until 1834, and came back to (rather embarrassingly) in his old age. To understand historicism itself as a cosmopolitan phenomenon, originating (at least in this form!) in the eighteenth rather than the nineteenth century, but with roots that run much further back into humanity's tree, might help us further integrate the German Enlightenment into its broader European ecosystem.

**4. Architecture is perhaps where historicism is most clearly legible today. Is preservation—*Denkmalpflege*—a form of historicism? How far should we distinguish between this and the material reconstruction of remote and idealized pasts embodied in projects such as the Dresden *Frauenkirche* or the Berlin *Stadtschloss*?**

**Marchand:** Of course *Denkmalpflege* is a form of historicism! It is indeed a key form—though we should be sure that here we mean the preservation and/or reconstruction of old monuments to their original look (not necessarily use) rather than the erection of new monuments to memorialize past events. We should be aware that ever since the birth of the historic preservation movement (which might well lie in

unexpected places, such as early modern debates over renovations at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, or over the laying out of new streets in Rome), there have been arguments about what it is that preservation is recreating: the evolution of the building over time, which would mean in the case of a Gothic church, restoring both medieval windows and the baroque altarpiece added later, or the recreation of the original Gothic whole, stripping away the baroque altarpiece. Both forms can be understood as historicist, just with different historical reference points. I would argue that the Dresden *Frauenkirche* is really a historicist project, as the idea was to recreate the baroque church as designed by Georg Bähr, inside and out. The Berlin *Stadtschloss* is not, as the idea is to recreate only the façade, and to fill the interior with an entirely different and emphatically modern design. Both projects have political meanings of course, as is more often the case for architecture (which is a much more public and expensive form of expression than is, for example, interior design.) The Dresden project celebrates the collapse of Communism; it is also the case that the GDR government deliberately left the rubble on the site of the church (while rebuilding the Zwinger and the Semper Opera) for more than four decades to signal its contempt for religion and as a reminder of Allied cruelty—and an answer to the Coventry cathedral monument. Thus the rebuilding of the *Frauenkirche*, undertaken by private groups rather than directly by the city or state, may also be taken symbolically to represent the desire to heal the East–West divide, and (possibly) the will of some supporters to revive Saxony’s Christian identity. I must say that I liked the rubble field better than I like the rebuilt church, but that is simply a matter of taste: I prefer romantic ruins to baroque-frosted puddings. Both sites engage my imagination, whereas a modern monument in place of the church would not have the same effect. I remain completely amazed that the Berliners have, after decades of debate, opted to undertake the *Schloss* project, despite the fact that the idea of returning the Hohenzollern palace to the symbolic centre of town (and the site of now destroyed *Palast der Republik*) sticks in the craw of many former Ossies. I can only explain this by way of the Will to Tourism, the desire to have a place for the buses to unload visitors for a full day of museum-going in a kind of *Kaiserwilhemsland*. This isn’t historicism: it’s capitalism. On the other hand, I think the half-historicism of the rebuilt *Neues Museum*, which recreates the nineteenth-century space but leaves the building’s (and German history’s) ‘wounds’ in place, is spectacularly successful, so I will withhold judgment on the empathetic and aesthetic power of the *Schloss* until the project is complete.

**Laube:** Nowhere does history act so immovably, so manifestly and to such long-term effect as in authentic historical architecture. *Denkmalpflege*, intended to preserve historical remnants that would otherwise be lost, is indispensable to any historically aware society. The kind of destruction carried out in the late 1950s even in the West—such as the demolition of the *Anhalter Bahnhof* and *Völkerkundemuseum* in Berlin, whose structures were still intact despite extensive war damage—has become unthinkable. Having said that, a balance must be struck, on a case by case basis, between preserving the past and meeting the needs of a given present. When it comes to the everyday life of society, historicism has the advantage that, as a rule, it is related to specific occasions and acts on a temporary basis—that which is staged is put away again later—while *Denkmalpflege* intervenes enduringly in the urban infrastructure and sometimes impedes residents’ freedom of movement. *Denkmalpflege* becomes ideological custodianship when

the staff of the Federal Ministry of Finance, whose offices are located in the huge building that formerly housed Göring's Reich Ministry of Aviation on Wilhelmsstraße, are condemned to stare at bricks and granite. Here the *mise en scène* of fascistoid monumentality in a converted building takes priority over the creation of courtyard recreational islands that would inevitably entail the planting of trees.

Another example: it would appear to have been imperative that Berlin's Friedrichstraße be modernized on the basis of photographs from the 1920s. Hans Stimmann, *Senatsbaudirektor* just after German unification, made sure that no building exceeded the Berlin eaves height of twenty-two metres. In the area where Friedrichstraße crosses 'Unter den Linden', the houses are so close together that there is no room for cycle tracks. Rather than pursuing the illusion that the Swinging 1920s can be brought back to life with the help of a frozen snapshot of that era, in a district featuring a university, museums and a library, a part of the city in which a huge number of people get around on two wheels, the city should have created public spaces that cater for current lifestyles. *Denkmaltpflege* becomes presumptuous and unworldly when it clings to historical imagery while ignoring present-day needs.

I agree with the thrust of Sue's comments on the reconstruction of the *Frauenkirche* in Dresden and the Berlin *Schloss*. At the risk of hyperbole, we might add that even these historical reconstructions are concerned with the preservation or augmentation of the original structures. Scattered fragments from the time of the building's original construction adorn the church on the Elbe just as they will embellish the residence on the Spree. There is also common ground between the two buildings in that both help resolve the planning problem of a vacuum that must be filled. Nonetheless there are profound differences between them. As a result of the devastating bombing raids, Dresden lost its urban architectural identity, and in the shape of the *Frauenkirche* it lost that eye-catching element so central to any historical scene. Canaletto's *vedute* set the standard here. Warsaw too was robbed of its identity-creating architecture during the Second World War. In the Polish capital architects achieved something great through historical reconstruction: the authentic resurrection of a ruined historic old town. The preservationists even managed to endow the façades with a patina that gives every visitor a sense of strolling through centuries-old lanes. A markedly different picture emerges with respect to the reconstruction of the Berlin *Schloss*. The symbolic value of the Hohenzollern castle to the Berlin cityscape is not nearly as high as in the case of the reconstructions of the Dresden *Frauenkirche* and Warsaw's old town. And here we are seeing the emergence of a hybrid, a baroque shell enveloping a highly modern museum. It is very hard to argue with sceptics who claim that the interior space and outer skin will never fit together. It would have been more honest to build to a design that, with the aid of historical references such as dome and cubature, radiated contemporary architecture both inside and out. Such designs did in fact exist but there was never any chance of their being implemented because Berlin politicians—why do they always have the final word when it comes to aesthetic matters?—wanted a kind of doll's house from the outset.

**Bildhauer:** Medievalism takes many forms, material and immaterial, but it's true that nothing quite gives you the feeling of being in the middle ages as much as walking in or around the remnants of medieval buildings, Gothic cathedrals or hunched houses,

and being able to touch them. Of course these are no longer medieval but part of the present, and no amount of preservation rather than reconstruction can change that. Although conservation techniques are increasingly sophisticated, they always alter the historical work and *are* in that way reconstructions. But then so does doing nothing and thereby allowing the constant alteration work done by decay, by the steady dulling of colour or softening of edges over time. I am fascinated by the ways in which authenticity effects are achieved, and by what constitutes the impression that something is medieval: the fact that crumbly bare stone seems more authentic than the brightly coloured, brand new façade that buildings had in the middle ages. Film stage designers are masters at creating a medieval look that meets contemporary expectations, which seem to demand either a glossy exuberance of splendour and royal riches, or a universal brownness and dirtiness, as if the whole world was sepia-tinted and constantly rain-swept in the tenth century. These in turn shape our expectations of actual medieval buildings, which are often used as film sets and altered in the process. I was sorely disappointed that Worms cathedral looked far less impressive in real life than in Fritz Lang's 1924 *Nibelungen* film.

Stefan Laube makes a great case for the imperative to balance the needs of the present and those of the past when dealing with historical architecture. While I am always frustrated when I visit a medieval church and am given no information to tell me which elements are Gothic and which neo-Gothic, it is also a pleasure to see layers of time and alterations accumulate on a living building that is in use, not an 'original' somehow outside time. There is no original. And it's curiously apt that the reconstruction of the *Stadtschloss* seems to be doomed not to achieve its final form for the foreseeable future, but remain a work in progress, just like medieval cathedrals were.

**Goebel:** In the nineteenth century, the preservation or reconstruction of historical buildings was a key component of historicism and nation-building in Germany. The restoration of the Marienburg in East Prussia, the reconstruction of the Haut-Kœnigsbourg in the Alsace, and the completion of Cologne cathedral are cases in point. The Second World War severed the link between historicism and built heritage conservation. The war's legacy posed a twofold challenge: not only had medievalism lost its power to generate meaning, but *Denkmalpflege* itself now had to decide what to do with the ruined neo-medieval buildings.

West Berlin's Kaiser *Wilhelm-Gedächtniskirche* illustrates the inherent ambiguity of neo-medieval ruins. The church had been built in neo-Romanesque style and was richly adorned with mosaics; it was an architectural style which had caused some debate in Imperial Germany. As a consequence of the air raids on Berlin, the medievalist kitsch of the 1890s became an unintentional monument and was raised to the level of high art. In the eyes of the artist Alexander Calder, ruination had transformed the church into one of the finest abstract sculptures of the world. This was a memorial of a frozen apocalypse, but it was aesthetically appealing all the same. The local population, too, grew fond of their ruin, which for them carried multiple meanings ranging from war-time suffering to eventual survival—but the original historicism no longer had any purchase. The ruined tower was left standing despite the reservations of the architect of the new *Gedächtniskirche*, Egon Eiermann. When the new foundation stone was laid in 1959, the surviving tower of the old church was characterized as a symbol of transitoriness.

The ruined neo-Romanesque structure *vis-à-vis* Eiermann's modernist building pointed to a historical rupture. The medievalist past had become a foreign country.

The 1980s witnessed a number of spectacular attempts to revive the match between *Denkmalfpflege* and historicism: the reconstruction *ex nihilo* of the *Knochenhaueramtshaus* in Hildesheim, the completion of the *Ostzeile* on Frankfurt's Römerberg, or the construction of the *Nikolai Viertel* in East Berlin, to name just a few prominent examples. But did this postmodern historicism have the same deadly earnestness it had a hundred years earlier?

**Swenson:** I wonder whether historicism is really most visible in architecture today? Is it not in hermeneutical terms that historicism left its most visible marks, by imbuing western thought with the belief that all ideas are located in a specific historical context rather than being absolute?

However, as it is so wonderfully nineteenth-century of all of you to affirm Jacob Burckhardt's belief in the primacy of architecture and Georg Dehio's differentiation between conservation and restoration, I will run with it! Writing at the turn of the twentieth century, Dehio even went so far as to call *Denkmalfpflege* historicism's 'rightful daughter' and restoration its 'illegitimate child'. The vividness of the imagery helps explain how through propaganda and campaigning, especially during the so-called *Heidelberger Schloßstreit*—a quarrel about the potential restoration of the castle of Heidelberg around 1900 that mobilized national and international opinion—Dehio and other anti-restorationists changed public opinion lastingly. Few artistic practices have been vilified so eloquently. Henceforth 'conservation' has appeared to be the antithesis of 'restoration'. The language used to criticize reconstructions of remote and idealized pasts has not changed much since the early twentieth century, and neither has the virulence of debates. But the polarization between conservation—true, scientific, honest, legitimate and modern—and reconstruction—false, deceitful, illegitimate, destructive, nostalgic and reactionary—is a false dichotomy. It negates the modernity and the scientific drive of the nineteenth-century restorationist movement, which openly acknowledged its inventive nature. It also masks the fact that the lines between restoration and conservation often remained blurred after the anti-restorationist turn. The commemoration of the *Heidelberger Schloßstreit* as the birthday of the modern conservation movement in Germany by subsequent generations of *Denkmalfpfleger* often leads one to forget that postwar reconstruction involved restoration, that is, historicist rebuilding on a much larger scale than during the 'age of historicism'.

What then of the post-Communist era reconstructions such as the *Frauenkirche* in Dresden, the Berlin *Humboldtforum*, or the remarkable *Kolumba* in Cologne? This era seems, by the way, itself to be coming to a close. On some level these reconstructions do indeed seem anachronistic in the way they have privileged a nineteenth-century idea of restoration over the, by now, standard preservation of the status quo. But, as stated above, the history of conservation is far from linear. Moreover, while the demolition of the *Palast der Republik* in Berlin raises problematic questions about the erasure of the GDR past and the silencing of a strong opposition against the Prussification of the Federal Republic, the reconstruction of the *Frauenkirche* and the transformation of the ruined church of St Kolumba into a diocesan art museum combine restorationist and conservationist thought. Neither building tries to pretend to be new, as both keep temporalities and narratives visibly separate in the architectural fabric.

Like the others in the forum, I have personal aesthetic preferences. However, when it comes to the right ways to deal with historic architecture, I am a pluralist. My reactions to the results of interventions depend a bit on which hat I have on: as a student whose main training as an undergraduate was in medieval architectural history, I want as many traces as possible to be preserved for their source value (damn Viollet-le-Duc . . .). As a historian of the modern period, I am fascinated by what destructions, rebuildings and alterations tell us about the moment of intervention. There are only ever three choices, as the first postwar issue of *Die Kunstpflege* in 1947 succinctly put it: ‘reconstruction or new construction, to preserve or to relinquish, pious revival or bold redesign’. What seems interesting to me are the reasons why one solution is chosen over another in particular cases and the passions these choices raise! And I think plurality is good. Wouldn’t it be terribly monotonous if all solutions were the same? Finally, as a contemporary and a citizen, I am with Stefan Laube in thinking that the needs of the past, present and future must be taken into account together. What ultimately matters most to me is whether the treatment of a building, that is, an area in the city, can help to construct a society that values democracy, peace, equality, diversity and that helps to increase the wellbeing of its citizens. And this is not solely decided by architectural form but by processes of debate and decision-making.

**5. Can historicism do any more than encourage a superficial understanding of what it represents? Can medievalism, for example, really allow the middle ages to ‘speak back’ from the margins and bring medieval history and historians into a productive dialogue with modern?**

**Laube:** The middle ages have a particularly hard time gaining recognition as a legitimate theme for German public remembrance. The term itself expresses a certain awkwardness, referring as it does to an intermediate, in other words fairly insignificant period of time between classical antiquity and innovative modernity. Tellingly, the media often refer to the Dark Ages (*Dunkles Mittelalter*) in an attempt to convey conditions diametrically opposed to our civilizational level. When the so-called ISIS disseminated its execution videos, many in the West were quick to agree that we are dealing here with a perverted organization from the *Dunkles Mittelalter*. And yet members of ISIS use the latest technologies to deal with the media, and the term ‘Dark Ages’ fails to recognize the fact that there was a highly fruitful exchange in trade, science and culture between East and West during the high middle ages in particular.

Anyone who compares historicism with the discipline of history will find that they are often like chalk and cheese. The writing of thick books devoid of pictures is traditionally the business of historians—Ranke, Droysen and Treitschke in the nineteenth century and Nipperdey, Wehler and Osterhammel in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. You almost get the feeling that historians are afraid of pictures, perceiving them as mere uninvited guests that detract attention away from their arguments. Historicism in the sense of popular remembrance, meanwhile, is image-friendly and operates in spaces and material cultures; texts are at most a bonus. Historicism seems forced to perform a permanent balancing act: it proclaims its authenticity while at the same time meeting mythical needs. The problematic relationship between the discipline of history and historicism is notably evident in Heinz Schilling’s biography of Luther. This author

vociferously rejects the idea that he contributes to Luther mythology in any way, yet at the same time he has no choice but to fortify this mythology, committed as he is to the traditional genre of a *vita*, adding one more description of Luther's life to the many that exist already.

Historicism has one goal above all else: it aims to familiarize people with historical materials, to visualize them, to impart them to as many people as possible. The level of the *mise en scène* is so alluring because it creates space for suggestions of authenticity that function to satisfy human beings' historical longings. Everything that drew on the depths of the past and was capable of establishing continuity or bestowing a sense of orientation seemed to be legitimate in nineteenth-century public discourse—history was the pre-eminent interpretative force at the time and it was imperative to use it to remember on a regular basis, through the medium of easily remembered imagery and figures. Today, however, it seems to have become common practice to preserve historical pasts, at least in a material and performative sense, when they have already ceased to be a component of one's own perception of the world. The associated events have become elements of leisure time and folkloric fairs. They no longer help provide the individual with an ideological compass as they still did in the nineteenth century. Instead it is the touristic aspects of city marketing that dominate. Visitors are after events and entertainment; they want experiences that contrast with everyday life. Many people would appear to be well satisfied if they can turn up at the office wearing Luther-themed socks inscribed with 'Here I stand; I can do no other.'

**Bildhauer:** This question goes with the third: what can our ideas about the middle ages actually tell us about the middle ages? In some senses, not much. The needs and preconceptions of the present will never allow a transparent window into the past.

However, I sense at the heart of this question a distinction between 'medievalism' and 'medieval history and historians', that is between the academy and the rest of the world. This elitism—that people in History departments somehow have a unique access to the past that others don't—is something that needs to be broken down, and medievalism studies have been at the forefront of doing so. Somebody trying to fashion an outfit for a medieval convention with medieval techniques might arrive at insights about medieval crafts that are no less valuable than those gleaned by the archival research more typical of academics. It's admirable and important that professional historians have higher standards of evidence and providing the information needed to retrace the evidence, but there is still a value in academic involvement in practical research. Professional historians in the twentieth century have simply spent much more time and (often public) money on investigating the past than amateurs, but perhaps this is changing in the twenty-first century, with research becoming a less dominant part of academic jobs and amateurs now taking on serious commitments of time and money—one only needs to look at the price of chainmail to see that.

**Goebel:** I wonder whether one can really draw a hard and fast line between the academic study of the medieval past and popular medievalism, between scholarly history and cultural memory? First of all, historians have never been immune to the historical preoccupations of their societies, but, more importantly, they themselves have often helped fuel popular medievalism. Public engagement between academic and public

history is not a new thing: Professional historians have had an impact on middlebrow medievalism in manifold ways. They have penned best-selling biographies of medieval kings, advised publishers of school textbooks, and helped with curating exhibitions and so on. For instance, in the Weimar Republic, history professors were consulted in the competition for the national war memorial that was to be set up at the place most central to Germany on either historical or geographical grounds. Historical scholarship met popular representations of the past when academics of the University of Bonn acted as experts on behalf of the Rhineland's bid to house that new national monument, arguing that the region had been the very centre of medieval Germany. Scholars involved in commemorative activities managed to give an air of academic credibility or modern scientific scholarship (*Wissenschaftlichkeit*) to narratives of continuity that were, in the main, speculative, eclectic and ambiguous. Superficiality does not just creep in from the margins.

The study of historicisms would be a great platform for medievalist and modern historians and classicists to meet. There has been a lot of emphasis on interdisciplinarity in our subject for some time now. That is certainly a laudable development, but there is the danger that we neglect intra-disciplinary dialogue. Reading Elizabeth Vandiver's fascinating monograph on classical representations in poetry of the First World War made me aware of the need for more collaborative work. War poetry was saturated with allusions to the ancient world. While evocations and reworkings of Troy or Thermopylae are easily spotted, other references are so extremely subtle (for example, imitations of metrical styles) that they would probably escape most modern historians. At the same time, a deep knowledge of the social and cultural history of the First World War is required to contextualize these findings. I suspect that the study of classicism or 'Classical Presences' (the title of a stimulating book series) is dominated by classicists, while medievalists have often been in the vanguard of medievalism studies. It may be that '-isms' are a less useful category for fostering a dialogue across historical disciplines, and that cultural memory could prove a more useful and integrative organizing concept.

**Swenson:** Historicism does indeed do more than encourage a superficial understanding of what it represents! It gives all the manifold insights into the revivalist period mentioned above. I also think that the imaginative and embodied encounter via historicism and especially medievalism (be it through restored buildings, re-enactments, historical novels, films or computer games) does often lead to the wish to learn more about 'the real' middle ages. It certainly did this for me growing up. But does it actually matter if it does not? Is an encounter necessarily superficial if it is not *wissenschaftlich*? Although nineteenth-century historicism itself bequeathed us the search for 'true' knowledge, it was also imaginative and saw value in emotional or creative experiences. Might this precedent not soothe anxiety about superficiality?

Anxious or not, there is no way to avoid the interventions of historicism. Sources have been irrevocably transformed by historicist (and other) interventions. It might be most apparent in the built environment, where architectural layers have been removed while others have been added. But even where they are not physically altered, the moving of objects, the framing of editions, the ordering of archives have all altered the interpretative framework. Medievalism and historicism thus offer above all a broader



object lesson on how contemporary concerns and questions shape any interpretation of the past. But the tension between ‘reality’ and ‘imagination’ also poses another question for me. Imagination, immersion and embodiment still clearly matter today for many—as they did during the nineteenth century. Why this is the case seems an interesting question in itself. Maybe one should take some inspiration from the age of historicism and take imagination, emotion and senses more seriously to understand where the desire for immersion comes from and how it has changed over time. Rather than getting all worked up about immersion as superficial, we should perhaps consider more how historians can meaningfully communicate how the intellectual and sensorial world of the past was fundamentally different.

**Marchand:** I think history often speaks to all of us, amateurs and professionals, best when he feel we understand how it was lived. What was it like to be Marie Antoinette, or to inhabit the slave quarters at Oak Alley Plantation, just down the road from me in Louisiana? In fact, for many years, recreated plantation houses did not take tour groups to slave quarters, surely because the tour operators were uninterested in offering visitors the opportunity to empathize with the slaves. Of course some historical recreations, and some history paintings, are better than others, better not just because more archaeologically accurate or detailed, but better because they give us a deep feeling for past life-worlds. Sometimes they remind us that the people in the past were like us—I’m thinking of Lawrence Alma-Tadema’s powerful *The Death of the First Born*, which shows an Egyptian Pharaoh and his wife grieving over their dead son’s body. Or, sometimes they tell us that the past was a different country—that it was normal for Romans to believe the prophecies of people who were professional inspectors of animal entrails, as Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, and, more recently, the ‘Rome’ mini-series showed.

Can history ‘speak back’? I am really very worried about Stefan Laube’s comment that it cannot, and that at least for the general public, historical experience has been reduced to the buying of Luther socks. Perhaps the thick, picture-less books of which he writes (I am guilty of writing one myself) are partly to blame for this—though I would argue that the research imperative and the high cost of picture permissions means that many of us can do no other. We should also remember Stefan Goebel’s excellent point that professional historians have often contributed to ‘middlebrow’ history as well as to the production of specialized books. All my undergraduate teaching, for example, is dedicated to the proposition that history continues to speak to us, all the time. And I think most of us understand, implicitly if not explicitly, Schiller’s insistence that philosophical abstractions do not warm the heart; but poetry and imaginative ‘play’ do, and prepare us for empathy, and deeper forms of thought. But, beyond the classroom, today we are perhaps too hesitant to make the case that we can help channel the past—the legacy of professional modesty! In future, it might be wise for us to embrace imagination, and especially forms of historical imagination, more openly, and with more confidence that we can bridge the socks and the books, and participate in a wider community that is both creative and scholarly.

We might also be setting the bar too high for what constitutes ‘speaking back’, or looking in the wrong places to find evidence of it. I think those who have tried to construct a faux Gothic apse for a Wagnerian stage set would say that the past does speak back: this is harder to do than one thought! How did they do it, without duct tape, one

wonders next? I think virtually all architects, artists and writers (not to speak of historians) who study the works of their forebears (and who doesn't?) also feel they must innovate and/or speak to their own times as well; the good ones have always felt, as Harold Bloom argued many years ago, 'the anxiety of influence'. Some thereby do violence to what the past was actually like, consciously or not, while others may capture that sense of the uncanny that allows us to escape the prison of presentism. The good ones separate bad or senseless historicizing from meaningful historicizing—an example would be Gottfried Semper, who exulted in neo-Renaissance styles, in large part because they opposed an architectural language of Napoleonic Empire (or courtly baroque) with the language of the (idealized) Florentine Republic, with its emphasis on the republican participation in the affairs of state. Semper loved the Greeks, but not mindless neo-classicism; he liked the medieval court at the 1851 Exhibition, but not the Gothicizing piano. And aren't we glad he indulged his historicizing imagination?

Did the medievalizing of the pre-Raphaelites allow the middle ages to speak back, to take a slightly different example? Yes, of course it did! It provoked the retranslating of Dante and the study of medieval paints and tapestry designs; but we should not lose sight of the fact that all these things took patience as well as imagination, a faculty which, when untutored, cannot go beyond itself. What I am most concerned about today is precisely this lack of patience, and contempt for older skills, whether humanistic, artistic or mechanical. In this high-tech age, we are so thoroughly deskilling ourselves that soon no one will be able to understand what it was like to mix one's own paints, to carve Gothic furniture or to read texts in Old Avestan, all skills the nineteenth century revived in order to extend its capacities for both empathy and innovation. Can we no longer appreciate Gerôme (and simply denounce his 'orientalizing' subject matter) because we can't empathize with his remarkable technical skills? Do universities dispense with philologists who can read Avestan because students find it just too hard to learn this language, and specialize in contemporary film instead? One remarkable classicist I know who writes on the classical tradition (and Stefan Goebel is right that it is mostly classicists who do this) tells me that he wrote his juvenile love poetry in Latin, and thus can hear poetic metre in nineteenth-century works in ways that certainly escape me. Will any of our students be able to do these things? If we are to preserve the richness of our means of engaging with the past, we are also going to need to defend the conservation of some of the past's methods, and forms of craftsmanship. We need to hang on to a kind of slow historicism, in which patience and the cultivation of specialized skills teach us how to listen to the past, if we hope to do more than project our hopes, or, as the discussion above about ISIS suggests, our fears, backwards in time.

Historicism, in short, seems to me something we should cultivate rather than condemn. In a culture that seems to idolize the self and selfishness, utility and speed, we ought to promote the virtues of understanding and appreciating, rather than simply judging and condemning, the thought-worlds of the past. The decline in enrolments that we have experienced in this utilitarian and STEM-crazed century might be addressed, at least in part, by engaging the pleasures of the imagination and defending the ethical implications of empathy, as well as cultivating the skills necessary to make historical empathy rich and meaningful. Set free the owl of Minerva! We need historicism now, more than ever.