On Writing International History: Chaps, Maps and Much More

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ZARA STEINER

The following is an edited text of the 22nd Martin Wight Memorial Lecture delivered at the University of Sussex on 24 October 1996.

International history is a new field with an old pedigree. It was only during the 1970s that the term became institutionalized with the creation of departments, journals, professional bodies and conferences that are the contemporary attributes of adulthood. The development of the field has much to do with our knowledge that the study of international relations had long outgrown both the Rankean emphasis on the foreign policies of the great powers and the focus on 'what one clerk wrote to another', in that time-worn phrase. Its claim to a separate place in the historical firmament is still contested. There are some who argue that the field is little more than a 'bastard child' fostered by the London School of Economics and carried by its graduate students to the New World, ignoring the contributions of historians in the United States as well as those in France, Switzerland and Italy. Others have seen the field as a vast empty plain with undetermined borders and topography. 'International history', Professor Thomas Paterson writes in Diplomatic History, an American journal that proudly keeps its original title, 'is so broad a term that it loses its usefulness'.

In one sense, the development of the field was the necessary and overdue response to the expansion of the diplomatic map, both geographically and in terms of the subjects of international concern and activity. (Though many had already broken out of the narrow confines of diplomatic history as taught in the first half of this century: no one, for example, reading William Langer's Diplomacy of imperialism, required reading at every good American university in the early 1950s, would be likely to accuse Langer of the sins often associated with the older generation of diplomatic historians.) There were a number of specific reasons for the new approach to diplomatic history. On the one hand, there was the felt need to counter the powerful influence of the Annals school

in France, which focused attention on economic and social history, denigrated ‘event history’ and celebrated the victory of scientific history over all other forms of historical inquiry. On the other hand, there were the writings of Fritz Fischer, whose books reopened not just the question of German responsibility for the Great War but the domestic roots of Germany’s prewar policies. This subject became the centre of the Innen-/Aussenpolitik debate which raged through Germany and beyond, prompting a critical examination of the older methods of studying foreign policy along Rankean lines.

There was a third source of influence too, less noted in Britain, but of considerable importance in the United States. There were new developments in the field of international relations, sparked by the writing of E. H. Carr and Hans Morgenthau. The realists’ attack on previous interpretations of how the international system developed and worked opened new vistas to those who were beginning to fear that the whole field of diplomatic history was moribund. Irrespective of the debate about its disciplinary background, the new directions taken by those writing about ‘the science of international politics’ in the late 1950s and 1960s, not only marked an innovative stage in the history of academic international relations but alerted students of foreign affairs to new ways of viewing their subjects. In Britain, the new school of ‘international historians’ directed their attention to the people who made policy rather than to the impersonal forces and structures beloved of the Anarchists. Anyone listening to Donald Cameron Watt’s inaugural lecture at the LSE in 1983 was left in no doubt as to who the enemy was and what battle had to be waged. In fact, the bounds of the field have rapidly expanded and some of the social science tools explicitly banished from paradise have returned to illuminate the interplay between people and their environment in various forms. As Karl Marx wrote in The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte: ‘Men make their own history, but not just as they please. They do not choose the circumstances for themselves, but have to work upon circumstances as they find them, have to fashion the material handed down by the past.’ There is nothing in this quotation that should prove unacceptable to contemporary international historians.

No one would question the dramatic change that has taken place in the field. Personal experience, in this instance, may illustrate the point. When in the early 1960s, I appeared at Cornwall House and asked the kind and helpful librarian, Mr C. H. Fone, whether there were any papers from Foreign Office officials kept in his archives as the Public Record Office had none, he asked what my

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PhD topic was ‘I am studying the contribution of the Foreign Office officials to the making of foreign policy before 1914’, I replied. He shook his head sadly, clearly thinking that only a very green American knowing nothing about Britain would address such a topic. ‘Officials do not make policy,’ he said ‘they carry out the policies of the foreign secretary.’ I persisted, as the young tend to do, and was rewarded when ancient and very dusty cabinet doors were opened and masses of papers, not bound like the handsome volumes of foreign secretaries’ papers, but tied up in pink tape, fell to the floor, accompanied by a box of photographs, marked ‘private’, some of which can be found in my first book. The assumption that foreign policy was not just ‘what one clerk wrote to another’ but what one foreign secretary wrote or said to another was widespread even among those who knew better. Despite the minutes printed in Gooch and Temperley’s British documents on the origins of the war, which first alerted me to the possible advisory role of the Foreign Office, the formidable Dame Lilian Penson—who had done, as women were wont to do in those days, much of the footwork in preparing those volumes—warned me that there might not be enough (the archives being open only until 1902) to form the basis of a PhD thesis. The concept of bureaucratic politics did not yet exist and Donald Cameron Watt’s Personalities and policies had not yet been published.

In the last three decades, the field of diplomatic history has burst its seams at every level of analysis. This expansion has necessarily affected the writings of both international theorists and international historians. In 1945, and in some circles still today, the study of the international system meant looking at the policies of the major states which were in permanent and regular contact and interaction with one another and the distribution of power among them. One was taught, usually in a chronological sequence (some starting with the first recorded treaty around 3500BC), how these so-called systems operated, evolved and changed until we arrived at the modern states system, the origin of which was dated either at the Peace of Westphalia or in 1815. The focus of enquiry shifted from the concentration on diplomatic institutions and international laws and practices to include the analysis of ideas, above all, the concept of the balance of power in its many forms and roles, which lay behind their evolution. Historians looked at the agreed rules, structures and grammars underlying the practice of international politics—rules which changed, sometimes slowly and over a long period of time, as Harry Hinsley outlined in Power and the pursuit of peace, sometimes more dramatically, as Paul Schroeder claims in his recent book, The transformation of European politics, 1763–1848. According to Schroeder, the international order should not be judged merely as a restraint on states but as an instru-

ment that makes their foreign policies possible. The statesman asks not how he can use the international system to achieve his goals but what kind of goals a workable international system allows him to pursue. How the international order operated in 1919 and in 1945 is being similarly scrutinized, with perhaps, in the former case, a less harsh verdict emerging than has been customary. And, of course, theoretical and historical attention has focused on the post-1945 global structure, the bipolar system, the hegemonic system and the current multipolar system under which we now live. Subsystems have been added to the systemic approach: for instance, the League of Nations and the United Nations have been studied as regimes affecting the behaviour of states and the shape of the international system, and, though the regional subsystem is still in its infancy as an analytic tool, there are studies of these subsystems too, their own rules, institutions and objectives, some of which do not fit easily into the dominant international order. Bernard Lewis, in that extraordinary, short but thought-provoking book, *Islam and the West*, suggests how different and distinct the Islamic experience has been in the past and is at present, and how differently the international order is perceived by the ruling groups in the only partly secularized modern Islamic states. Many are currently prophesying that in the future we will see not a single, all-encompassing global order emerging but rather a series of systems organized regionally, or economically, or culturally, along the lines of what Samuel Huntington has called a 'civilizational' structure.

There has been an assault on the dominant concept of an international system which pays attention only to the political relations between states. Instead of focusing on conceptual constructs defined basically in terms of power, scholars have stressed the importance of international economic systems and investigated the relations between international power and global economic regimes. Such approaches have ranged from the all-embracing theories so distrusted by historians, with their concern for the particular, to the more empirically tested regime structures. Immanuel Wallerstein's view of a capitalist world system lasting some 500 years and now moving into a period of chaos out of which will emerge a new systemic order may be subjected to the same kinds of criticism, from both theorists and historians, as his depiction of the emergence of a 'modern world-system' in the sixteenth century, but it shifts one's attention to different definitions of world order. Robert Keohane's and Joseph Nye's classic works challenged the assumption of the primacy of the state in the international order and called attention to the transnational players in the international

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9 Samuel P. Huntington, "The clash of civilizations?*, Foreign Affairs 72: 3, Summer 1993.
order. Susan Strange’s arguments that international affairs have been and are being fundamentally transformed by structural changes in the world economy and the accelerating pace of technological and scientific progress redirect historical attention to the non-political forms of transnational connections. The basic structures of technology, production and finance, partly resulting from the actions of states, will constrain, redirect and rearrange the forms of state and international behaviour. Others are calling attention to the gap between international power relations and economic systems, a framework particularly useful for looking at the interwar period from 1919 to 1939. The opposition between political self-determination and economic interdependence provides yet another level of systemic analysis that can be applied to the past. And William McNeill, always an innovator whatever subject he touches, in reviewing the past histories of polyethnic empires which developed into nation-states and then return to their former polyethnic structures opens a Pandora’s box of new ideas. McNeill looks at the emergence of a new form of world empire, not dominated by a single hegemon but created and maintained by global movements, economic exchanges, migrations and urbanization. In asking international historians to deal with the direct and indirect contacts between societies and peoples, Akira Iriye calls attention to the impact of communications and technology exchange and how individuals and societies in the past have come to accept or resist the spread of cultural objects and ways of life. Being an optimist, he sees in the global spread of certain values an impulse towards internationalism. Pessimists, or some would say realists, see in this spread and resistance to the dominant cultural currents an intensification of the particular, the national, the religious, leading to conflict and war, ‘the clash of civilizations’, rather than to that successful transition from an ethnocentric international order into a global order. In their different ways, both Akira Iriye and the late Christopher Thorne want historians to look at the phenomenon of cultural diffusion and transformation and to explore the relationship between ‘an international power system, a global economic regime and a global cultural outlook’.

The attention paid to transnational structures, movements and agents has naturally led to reconsideration of our concepts of the state. The present revival and spread of nationalism and religion as the basis of nationhood has led theorists and

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historians to question the value of viewing states as 'black boxes' interacting with one another. We all know that the box or the billiard ball is a form of shorthand and that states have always differed from one another in size, power, influence and importance. Under classical theory, certainly since 1815, a distinction has been made between great powers and small, though it was mainly, if not exclusively, the former which were the centre of historical and theoretical attention. It was generally accepted that there were only a limited number of states in the international order and that they shared certain attributes that defined their statehood. Even the 185 members of the United Nations represent a far broader diversity of structures than existed in states of the eighteenth or nineteenth century. The break-up of empires, in 1918–19 and again in 1991, decolonization and the splitting of nation-states along ethnic lines have swollen the number and types of players in the international order and multiplied the connections between them. None of the usual bases for state identity—language, religion, ethnicity, geography, ideology—commands universal assent as a definition of statehood; yet each alone or in combination with others has, in fact, become the basis for statehood. The peacemakers of 1919, when drawing the frontiers of the successor states, worried about the problems of viability; today, as the cases of Slovakia and Bosnia make clear, neither economic nor strategic viability carries such weight as a qualifying criterion for statehood. Moreover, our black boxes, even if restricted to the major players, must intersect on a number of planes. It is a little like multidimensional chess—except that the rules may change according to the board or plane. This multiplication of interaction is not a post-1945 phenomenon, but the awareness of its consequences has become more widespread in this era. To switch the game metaphor, the billiard balls are continually bumping into one another as they are aimed at the pockets. One never hits just one ball. Not only are the moves made by the state multiple and interconnected, but the directions of the moves go both ways: between great powers and small, between hegemons and their dependencies, between centres and peripheries. Indeed, the very term periphery has lost much of its earlier meaning.

It is when one opens the black box that the most radical transformation in what concerns both the social scientist and the international historian has taken place. Historians will continue to speak about France and Germany, the United States and China or the Quai d'Orsay and the Wilhelmstrasse, or any of the national foreign ministries. But we are all aware that these terms, like the black boxes, are only a form of shorthand. Those of us who insist that the study of international history must look at the human beings who are, despite claims to the contrary, at the centre of the black box, the state, the foreign ministry, the international corporation or any other institution engaged in international affairs, enter a dense forest. First, we ask: who are the actors? This may have been a relatively simple question in the eighteenth century; it becomes more complicated with the passage of time. There was a huge jump in the 1920s, when the diplomatic, military, naval, treasury, trade and press officers all operating in the foreign affairs sphere were augmented by bankers, traders, interna-
tional civil servants and health experts, just to mention the most obvious.\textsuperscript{16} During and after the Second World War, came another leap. The multitude of representatives operating even within traditional diplomatic circles has led to rebellions of representative assemblies who refused to pay for those ‘who eat at the international trough at public expense’. Our actors perform in both an internal and an external environment, a point to which we will return. It says much about the radical transformation in the field that international historians ask a whole range of questions which most teachers of diplomatic history would have thought irrelevant to their field. We need to know what roles our actors took, a problem that depends on time and place and situation. We look at the structure of the state in which the actor lives, its political framework and environment, its dominant beliefs, and the extent to which our actors share, contribute to or even create them. It is essential to place our actors, to know something about their assumptions, both spoken and unspoken (how important James Joll’s 1968 inaugural at the LSE has been in recent writing), and their beliefs about the past and present. What are the prevailing social, racial and religious mores of the society into which each actor was born, and how do these affect his or her perceptions or misperceptions of the ‘foreigner’? Much can be learned—and not just about one particular rather idiosyncratic Foreign Office official—from the introduction to an over-long memorandum on a journey through Soviet Russia written by Owen O’Malley in 1942:

...because I have never lived there, have rarely spoken to Russians, am ignorant of their art, science and literature, have made no study of their interminable statistics, and in fact know practically nothing about Russia and the Russians, it does not follow that my superficial impressions are ill founded.

I fully admit my prejudice, for I dislike every avoidable form of governmental interference with private thought and conduct. I wish to make and keep for myself and my children as much money as I properly can; I believe in the utility of a privileged and of an hereditary aristocracy; I enjoy the companionship of persons of condition and breeding; I respect tradition, and I believe in God. Especially I abhor dirt; as nurse used to say, ‘Cleanliness is next to Godliness.’ But just because I was prepared in advance to be disgusted by what I knew to be a dirty, ruthless, communistic, revolutionary and atheistic country, it doesn’t follow that my experiences were without importance. All this story does is to show how far my prejudices were fortified by experience and no more.\textsuperscript{17}

How far do generational factors shape outlooks? Are there any correlations between travel, insularity and policy?\textsuperscript{18} Sir Ivone Kirkpatrick called his autobi-


\textsuperscript{17} Owen O’Malley, memoranda, ms. author’s collection.

ography, published in 1959. The inner circle, after an old Foreign Office joke. 'The Foreign Service was likened to the London Underground Railway,' he writes, 'and it was said that once a man was launched on the Inner Circle (London, Paris, Berlin, Rome) it was impossible to leave the track.' Notice the absence from the list of Washington, DC. We try to identify the elites, institutions and organizations to which our international performers belong and the core ideas which dominate such groups. There may be distinct differences between diplomats, bankers and soil conservationists even within any single country in terms of their professions, backgrounds, and interests and individual experiences abroad which account for the confusions of policy often seen in the international arena. Those of us dealing primarily with politicians and diplomats are highly conscious of the effects of class, education, generation, department and international assignments in the shaping of their perceptions and actions. Theories of bureaucratic politics have been usefully employed both to substantiate and to contradict the assumption that where you sit determines where you stand. No writer today would ignore the professional and administrative setting in which the decision-maker operates. The international historian takes note of what creates the commonalities of views that may transcend or cut across organization, nation and continent—or, indeed, sex and race, the more recently studied determinants of actions in the international sphere.

Particular attention must be given to time and place, to the state of communications and transportation. We place actors and events in a historical time stream, noting the changes that affect our 'placing,' including the historian's own particular perceptions of the past. Even in a more literal sense, place and climate can be of critical importance, particularly in a world without air conditioning. Geneva had its own atmosphere in the interwar period which either stimulated or repelled those who travelled there, by boat and train, for League business. Statesmen are affected by their audiences; Sir John Simon and Anthony Eden during the Manchurian affair said one thing in the League Assembly and another at home. Edvard Beneš, the 'Little Jack Horner' of interwar politics, responded to a world audience in a way that would have been inappropriate in Prague. This historian has often wondered whether there were maps in the rooms of the interwar Quai d'Orsay, as we assume there must have been in the building where General Gamelin, the French Chief of Staff, had his rooms. If they were, were they seen by the man sitting next door? The ignorance of and, I might say, disdain for, certain parts of the globe may be the by-product of geographical ignorance. 'I have lived seventy-eight years without hearing of bloody places like Cambodia,' Winston Churchill complained in 1932. Maps themselves have radically altered, as has the geographical nomenclature of foreign ministry departments. Witness the changed placing of the United States in the British Foreign Office from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century, or how Indo-

China was moved to different regional maps during and after the Second World War. There was a time when 'east of Suez' in the Foreign Office meant the Indian Ocean; Malaya, Singapore and even Australia were sections on the rim of the Indian Ocean or outposts of the Raj. Michael Sherry and Alan Hendrickson have suggested that 'the shifts in spatial thinking of American strategists at the end of World War II played a role in altering their view of the Soviet Union from one of ally to adversary.'

Maps are, of course, more than physical constructs. There is the question of 'mental maps', the brilliant term introduced into the literature by Alan Hendrickson. It was said that Henry Kissinger liked to return to Washington between trips abroad, particularly when he was going to different regions, in order to change his 'mental maps' before he proceeded. Policy-makers have certain images of areas or regions, assumptions about their importance and problems which may not be altered by experience or travel. The stories told about visiting dignitaries who found what they expected despite all the efforts made by resident diplomats to enlighten them would fill volumes.

If we go down to yet another level of analysis in dealing with those who participate in the conduct of international affairs, even without entering the worlds of the psycho-biographers, we can learn a great deal from studying the personalities of the men and women. We are writing, as Donald Watt reminded us in his LSE inaugural lecture, about people of flesh and blood and not cardboard figures. Often, for the historian, this is a question of familiarity and empathy with individuals and groups of individuals, though psychologists and social psychologists have much to offer. Portraits of the protagonists emerge from their writings, peers' and subordinates' memoirs, autobiographies and biographies, and, for those still living at the time the historian writes, meetings and interviews. Much can be learned—and here we borrow with profit from the theorists of crisis behaviour—about the conduct of statesmen and officials in critical situations.

Do individuals revert back to previous solutions (particularly where they played a successful part in them) and lose the ability to think anew about the existing situation? It is not only generals who fought the last war. Did Stalin dismiss the warnings of his own agents about German preparations for invasion because they did not fit the picture of German behaviour he had already formulated? Do the shortness of time and the seriousness of the situation trap the decision-maker and foreshorten his vision, in the way so brilliantly brought out by Samuel Williamson's study of the July crisis in Vienna in

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We read the biographies of Stalin and Hitler in the hope of finding insights into personal traits that might explain their policies; and the pursuit of the enigmatic Franklin D. Roosevelt will continue for many years to come.

The student of international history now has a formidable checklist. We are aware, after decades of battle, not all useless, that there can be no division between Innen- and Aussenpolitik and that although the balance might vary from country to country, in every country decision-makers must respond to situations that lie beyond their national borders. Even Americans play in the world sandbox. So we place our actors in both a domestic and an international framework, facing outward as well as inward. No international historian would be content to answer the questions of 'how' and 'why' by looking only at the domestic bases of foreign policy. It is here that the discussions of international systems, economic regimes and cultural interchange become highly relevant. We are still talking about chaps and maps, but we are talking about a great deal more besides.

Indeed, our canvas has expanded almost beyond recognition. Curiously, however, our choice of tools remains surprisingly restricted. In studying the interactions between the domestic and the external, international historians prefer what might be called hard data: archival sources, statistical tables, physical maps. We absorb the material of the economic and financial historian (sometimes inadequately), the military and strategic studies specialist and the student of intelligence operations, the 'missing dimension' of modern diplomacy. We are still uncomfortable, however, with literary sources, for example Proust's celebrated satirical analysis of the Quai d'Orsay, and with sociological and cultural disciplines and their data. Yet we deal repeatedly with changes in international structures, domestic societies and currents of ideas. We look at images, cultural mores, racial and national stereotypes. We know these affect both the policymaker and the policies he or she chooses. Historians, as well as those they write about, are shaped by the societies in which they live and by the timeframes in which they operate or write. Being culture-bound has never stopped an Englishman or a Scotsman from writing about the United States, though the Atlantic Ocean is very large and American society and politics very different from those of the British Isles. The problem becomes even more difficult when handling, in American or European terms, more remote (and not just in the geographical sense) countries and cultures. We are repeatedly warned of our limitations in this respect. Yet self-awareness does not and should not prevent the international historian from dealing with other nations and cultures. He or she, however, will need not just the linguistic ability necessary but also the assistance of the anthropologist, the sociologist and the student of cultural diffusion and transformation.

We prefer working with written sources. It is even with some hesitation that we make use of the invaluable oral history projects. One still has to convince colleagues that interviews provide material that no document can yield and often of a more important kind, or that the document itself becomes richer or more informative through being placed within the context provided by oral material. The hierarchy of influence can look entirely different when viewed from the inside. We eagerly welcome the previously undiscovered dispatch or the new list of figures, despite our knowledge of its limitations, but are highly critical of the practitioner’s oral testimony, which may be more revealing and more accurate. The international historian, moreover, rightly insists that research conducted in any one archive or in any one country alone is inadmissible. American historians have been sharply criticized, unfairly in many instances, for viewing the world solely from Washington and using only American sources. However important may be the sense of exceptionalism and the importance of domestic politics in the shaping of American foreign policy, the answers to even basic questions cannot be provided from the national or presidential archives alone. But the Americans are not the only culprits; similar complaints can be made about British, French or German historians as we all know. As the archives so clearly show, international history is never a one-way street. Arrows always go in many directions, and the problem of balance and priority is ineluctable, as David Reynolds has argued so perceptively in assessing European contributions to American Cold War policies. There is a risk, for instance, when relying on the British archives in order to correct the Washington-centred perspective of so many American writers on the origins of the Cold War, of exaggerating the initiatory role of Ernest Bevin and the British influence on American policy. Henry Luce would have been horrified, an American historian has commented, to learn the extent to which the junior partner choreographed the American century. We use foreign archives to correct national bias, to measure influence, impact and effect, to monitor perception and misperception and even to learn what cannot be found in the archives at home. Historians will find a more detailed analysis of congressional attitudes towards Europe in 1941 in the British Ministry of Information files at the Public Record Office at Kew than in President Roosevelt’s papers at Hyde Park.

Reliance on multiarchival research brings its own problems; there is what I would like to call the ‘Rashomon effect’ with different participants telling a different story. The Briand-Stresemann meeting at Thuiry is only the best-known example. There are, moreover, always more archives. Franz Knipping’s monu-

25 See Sally Marks, ‘The world according to Washington’, Diplomatic History 11: 3, Summer 1987;
mental study of Franco-German relations does not take in the British archives though British policy was central to both nations. Jan Jacobson’s much quoted and highly useful essay ‘Is there a new international history of the 1920s?’, was criticized for dealing exclusively with the history of Western Europe and the United States, and for omitting references to the major international economic and business histories of the period. Of archives there is no end. In this respect, we are all linguistically inadequate and dependent on one another. No international historian can possibly be an island to him or herself. Nor is any interpretation free of the bias attached to the necessarily selected archives which the historian uses. This is the price the modern and contemporary historian pays for the expansion of the diplomatic map and for the globalization of our interests.

In other ways, too, our tools have remained less ambitious than our aims. Having been an advocate of both ‘lumping’ and ‘splitting’, John Gaddis has now added a new category, ‘humping’ (interdisciplinary interaction) to his recommendations for the historian. We can use, far more than we have done, the findings and tools of other disciplines without losing sight of our own particular purpose. The difficult relationship between international relations and international history departments in many countries requires no comment here. International historians, partly because of the origins of the field, have been reluctant to use systemic theories and systemic analysis in our assumption that history relates to the particular and the individual, the contingent and the exceptional. We are suspicious of general theories concerning historical processes and view attempts to reduce the relations between highly complex and inconsistent human beings to formulae and games with considerable scepticism. Yet the work of John Gaddis, Akira Iriye, Paul Kennedy and Paul Schroeder clearly shows how historians can use systemic approaches to illuminate the process of change in the history of international relations. The long peace, an interpretative essay employing international relations concepts, has altered the way many of our students perceive the Cold War. It is a welcome perspective on an infinitely complex subject. Much can be learned from studying recurring patterns in international history even when we may insist on the distinctions between different eras of history. Those who study the origins of particular wars can learn from those who look into the causes of war as a recurring phenomenon. There are intermediate social science approaches, as distinct from more general syntheses, of considerable empirical utility. Gaines Post Jr has applied deterrence theory to a detailed

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study of the politics of appeasement between 1934 and 1937.\textsuperscript{32} James Richardson's *Crisis diplomacy: the great powers since the mid-nineteenth century*, written by a political scientist, will be of considerable use to historians.\textsuperscript{33} Paul Lauren's collection of essays, *Diplomacy*, illustrates how successful and productive the collaboration between theorists and historians can be.\textsuperscript{34} We still need an analysis of peacemaking in 1919 and 1944–5 that would make use of social relations tools to judge how far the outcomes can be seen as the consequences of structural factors or of the particular personalities of the men engaged in the peacemaking process. Even in my own area of special interest, we still lack a comparative study of the behaviour of the diplomatic elites in the interwar period that makes use of bureaucratic politics theories. These are all instances where 'bumping' would pay off. General theories, systemic approaches and social science tools of analysis need not do violence to our belief in historical time streams and the importance of the particular.

There is, moreover, a strong reluctance to look at the work of sociologists and cultural anthropologists, though many of us owe debts to the works of the late Ernest Gellner, Anthony Giddens and others. Though we speak of the importance of ethos and cultures in shaping the perceptions and misperceptions of the actors on the international stage, we shut ourselves off from sources of possible assistance. We are beginning to think about elite behaviour and to chart shifts in official and public feelings. Michael Howard, in his book review entitled 'Oh, what an unlovely war' in *Encounter*, was one of the first to point to the lacunae in existing studies of the origins of war in 1914 and provided early guidelines for the exploration of how a generation was taught to think about war.\textsuperscript{35} We have a highly innovative study of French public opinion on the outbreak of the 'Great War', a similar study for the Munich period and a brilliant exposition of French opinion in 1940.\textsuperscript{36} There are no equivalents for Britain. Much of the work done on European public opinion in the interwar years has ignored the theoretical studies on opinion-forming elites, patterns of mass behaviour, and diffusion of ideas and cultures, many of which are central to our understanding of the period. One of the results of our reluctance to use 'soft data' is the persistence of gaps in our knowledge. There is no study in depth of the sea-change in British opinion between September 1938 and August 1939.


\textsuperscript{33} James Richardson, *Crisis diplomacy: the great powers since the mid-nineteenth century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).


\textsuperscript{35} Michael Howard 'Let us forget. Oh, what an unlovely war', *Encounter* 12: 1, January 1964.

though every historical work on the subject refers to the phenomenon. Our knowledge of German public opinion in 1939 is still curiously limited; even Wolfram Wette's exceptionally fine chapter in *Germany and the Second World War* depends heavily on William L. Shirer's diary entries and Marlis Steinert's still exceptional *Hitler's Krieg und die Deutschen*, first published in 1970.17

When we turn to the questions of national characteristics and cultural distinctions and impacts, we are only at the start of our journey. We are rightly timid about characterizing elites, nations and cultures; yet these concepts are central to our understanding of the 'people' with whom we deal. Curiously enough, we feel more at ease in dealing with individuals—Hitler, Stalin and Mussolini, or Chamberlain and Daladier—than in writing about Germans, Russians, Britons or French. Yet we must deal in such generalized terms if we are to write international history at all, and we are always making assumptions about group and national behaviour. It is a journalist, Ian Buruma, in *Wages of guilt*, who has tackled the memories of the Second World War in Germany and Japan, a subject of critical importance for the postwar period.18 International historians dislike writing about national identities yet we constantly do so. We could be far more sophisticated in the ways we use these concepts if our range of reference went beyond the marked frontiers of our subject. Important studies of cultural and technological diffusion have been written in the past. Existing studies of the American cultural and technological impact on Europe and Latin America, first for the 1920s and more recently for the post-1945 period, have opened new paths of research. Ariel Dorfman, a Chilean, in two pioneering if much disputed works, *How to read Donald Duck* and *The empire's new clothes: what the Lone Ranger, Bahar and other innocent heroes do to our minds*, provided a powerful indictment of so-called American cultural imperialism.19 Others have shown how dominant cultural influences have been blocked, resisted or diffused. Christopher Thorne was convinced that such examinations of cultural interactions within particular places and in specific periods of time would throw new light on international processes. There is much to be learned from this approach in discussing the concept of Europe, or the emergence of a dominant American global culture, or a series of conflicting 'civilizational identities'. 'Islam is a powerful but still an undirected force in politics,' Bernard Lewis concludes. 'As a possible factor in international politics, the present prognosis is not favourable.'40

This is an exciting time to be an international historian. It may be our golden age, when there are still papers in archives, new archives are opening and some statesmen are still willing to speak to us. We have learned to look through the telescope from both ends and to use the microscope as well. Historians have

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17 Wolfgang Wette, 'Ideology, propaganda and internal politics as preconditions of the war policy of the Third Reich', in Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt, ed. (Freiberg im Bräsigau), *Germany and the Second World War*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 11.
19 See Emily Rosenberg, 'Walking the borders', *Diplomatic History* 14: 3, 1990, p. 569.
broadened their focus not only to look at the foreign policies of other nations but also to assess their place in the larger dynamics of the international system. They have looked beyond the state to the transnational institutions and global movements that have affected the modes of international behaviour in the past as they do in the present. At the same time, international historians have narrowed their focus to study how national actors operate within the constraints of their domestic situations and the limits of their own personalities and experiences. The array of topics still to be investigated appears infinite and the tools at our command—if we are prepared to use them—bewildering in their diversity. It may be an over-rich menu, but few would welcome a return to the narrower confines of traditional diplomatic history.

What is our view if we sit at the desk of the international historian? We still need texts, storylines, a narrative core. These need not be linear, though the subjects of enquiry must be placed within an historical timestream. We still require studies of national foreign policies, what Paul Schroeder calls, somewhat disparagingly, unit-level explanations, and portraits of the people involved. Multinational studies based on research in the archives of different countries remain the building blocks of international history. If our field continues to focus on actors and nations, we will have to learn to walk along borders that are not defined only by nationality and geography. In crossing them, it must be remembered that the locations of centre and periphery change depending on subject, time and place. And we require, even those of us who are most archive-bound, those few people who circumvent the globe in their mind’s eye and see the transnational movements that cannot be discussed within the conventional context of diplomatic history. It may take the insights of an unusual writer such as William McNeill to link the outbreak of the Second World War with the population explosion of the twentieth century; how sorry I would have been not to have read his book. Nor can we ignore those looking backwards from the present, as international historians are cautioned not to do, and who find or create patterns that illuminate the past and open up ways to see the present and the future.

There is, above all, a real need to write to communicate, and not just with other international historians. This may be a cry of despair, coming from one who has read too many recently published books on the interwar period and who has begun to wonder whether she understands her own language, to say nothing of others. Most of us write history because we enjoy resurrecting the past. It would be nice if our readers knew it. Writing about the interwar period is not a happy experience. Even in the Third Reich, however, there were millions of people for whom life was rich and fulfilling. ‘We loved to laugh, to play jokes. Until the war, you know, it wasn’t all so earnest,’ Albert Speer’s private secretary told Gitta Sereny.44 Speer speaks of the sheer joy and the excite-

ment of being in Hitler's presence. He was not alone. Over that 'wonderful hot summer of 1940' many felt it was a time of 'rapture'. The international historian must try to convey the richness of the cast and canvas. High style goes a long way; the flash of irony or humour will remind our reader that not only are our characters human, but so are we.

What of the study of international history as a guide to the future? Given our recent experience, as well as my professional bias, I belong firmly in the world of the sceptics. I like Professor Gaddis' image of the car mirror. If you only look backwards, you will certainly land in the ditch but it helps to know where one has come from and who else is on the road. I have come to share, though I have not convinced many of my Cambridge colleagues, the views of Ernest May and Richard Neustadt that by teaching men and women involved in policymaking to think in time streams and to place people and policies, institutions and events in their historical frameworks, one can marginally improve their future ability to differentiate between available options. All statesmen use historical analogies, some with disastrous consequences; many appeal to history for vindication. Some, like Lloyd George, Winston Churchill and Charles de Gaulle, have prejudged the historical verdict by writing their own histories. The international historian may question the validity of the historical analogy used, or show, as has been so effectively done, how self-serving and distorting these highly influential accounts have been. Yet, once such reservations are expressed, one remembers that there is no single narrative with a monopoly on the truth nor any time-tested formula to be offered for the future. Unfortunately.