

## REVIEW ARTICLE

### The view from the fence

**Frank Ankersmit's lost historical cause: a journey from language to experience**, by Peter Icke, London and New York, Routledge, 2012, 208 pp., £80.00 (hardback), ISBN 978-0-415-80803-3

**Meaning, truth, and reference in historical representation**, by Frank Ankersmit, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 2012, 280 pp., £13.29 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-8014-7773-7

Writing on these two books together has proven far more difficult than I anticipated. This difficulty has not resulted from the fact that there is a rivalry and at times even an open conflict between the positions they occupy – something that must be evident to all who have even cursorily followed the discussion or who were present at the inaugural conference of the International Network for Theory of History in Ghent in 2013, for example. And nor has it come about because I might have somehow perversely desired but been unable to synthesize irreconcilable views or to smooth over the conflict. Instead, it stems from my rather natural but disappointed minimal expectation that the two books could be placed into a productive conversation with each other.

Originally, my intention was to discuss only Peter Icke's *Frank Ankersmit's Lost Historical Cause: A Journey from Language to Experience*. For purposes of a balanced reading, however, I soon decided to give a voice to the 'other side' too, in the form of Frank Ankersmit's *Meaning, Truth, and Reference in Historical Representation*. Since both books appeared in the same year, they do not address each other directly, but this would not, of course, prevent a reading of them – or indeed of their authors more generally – *as if* in conversation. The dilemma I face here is not, then, quite that basic. Instead, the obstacles in the way of constructing any real conversation issue from a radical difference in underlying beliefs.

Since these books seem to repel each other on a fundamental level – while also being quite forcefully directed *at* the wall or fence that divides their respective world views – my goal is simply to try to bring both to an arena where their different ideological positions can best be appreciated and their rationale evaluated. Straddling a fence in this way (even an ideological one) can be a disagreeable experience, however. So it is not, I think, a position to hold for long

if one wishes to avoid discomfort. The positive aspect of the experience – and for me particularly of the exercise that I undertake here – is that by momentarily enduring this kind of irritation, it may be possible to attend to two different views with at least some degree of clarity.

To begin with Icke: There is no question but that Icke's book tackles the core concerns of Ankersmit's work, albeit not always with a pronounced desire to read sympathetically – something that other reviewers and readers have found objectionable. Indeed, Icke's manner of avoiding 'mitigating talk' seems to have given a number of readers justification for dismissing the book rather quickly. Despite the fact that academic discourse is often more deferential, Icke's style does not, to me, warrant the kinds of (mis)readings that his book has already provoked. On the other hand, and especially since no lives would be at stake here even in the event of unclearly expressed views (but would be, as far as I understand it, in the real-world situations of captaining jumbo jets that Icke has earlier been accustomed to), a softer touch on his part would have been possible and might have elicited a better reception. (Having said that, I tend to think that the occasional brusqueness of his arguments has simply offered an easy target and that the ideas themselves would have been equally unwelcome if accompanied by the usual mitigating measures.)

There is also, in my opinion, no denying that Icke's critique of Ankersmit is a substantial one. His point is not merely a matter of showing an inconsistency between the early 'good' Ankersmit and a later existentially rather than historically oriented one. If that were so, then, as the reviews to date have suggested, there would be no reason for so extensive and detailed a critique. On the basis of such simplifying readings, Icke could indeed be seen as focusing on rather petty issues. Consistency of opinion over an intellectual's lifetime should certainly not be the core consideration in evaluating their worth; more importantly, it may not be a desirable goal even for those individuals themselves. But this is not simply a case of an 'early' and a 'later' philosopher. Icke's evaluation of Ankersmit's trajectory does not rest on the idea of a change in direction as much as on a demonstration of how Ankersmit's arguments for narrative constructivism and the imposition of meaning in the creation of history texts and historical metaphors are preemptive of, yet still continue to be reiterated alongside, many of the theoretical moves that he has tried to make in *Sublime Historical Experience* (2005) and, I can now add, since. Despite the rhetorical utility of Ankersmit's 'transition,' Icke does not appear to be motivated by the move 'from language to experience' itself but by an interest in how the competing arguments play out.

To introduce Icke's reading – although it is succinctly summarized already by the book's title and is probably quite well known by now – it should first be emphasized that his core concern is with the disappearance of the historical aspect (that pertaining to historians' representations of the past) from Ankersmit's theorizing, as well as the associated and gradual emergence of the idea of access to 'historical reality' (read: the actual past). Icke sees this

detachment from the historical as a, perhaps unrecognized, change in Ankersmit's own thinking about the past. He writes:

it appears to me that Ankersmit's experiential 'home' is to be found within the embrace of theories of presence and authenticity, of trauma, of testimony, of witnessing, of nostalgia, etc., a habitat which has been growing rapidly over the last two or three decades. The crucial point being that, whatever else it might be that Ankersmit is talking about here, it is *not* strictly speaking history/historical theory; it is not about the past *as* history, which, I argue, can only be produced through modes of textual representationalism broadly construed. (p. 3)

This concern with Ankersmit's failure to focus on history as representation, while still sometimes professing to do so, is the key to appreciating Icke's arguments. (Yet, rather tellingly, one reviewer of Icke's book even mislays the word 'historical' completely when presenting the title.) For me, there are no discernible misrepresentations on Icke's part here. His reading of Ankersmit is competent and meticulously detailed, and the contradictions and discrepancies he points to are textually located. And although this kind of reading makes Icke appear harsh on many points, it should be noted that he is also clear with his praise. He has no doubt of Ankersmit's 'remarkable erudition' or his 'infectious enthusiasm' and 'zest for new ideas,' which make him continually 'provocative and ambitious,' or indeed of his seminal position in the field. So, for him as for so many of us, Ankersmit remains 'an immensely important historical theorist' despite the criticisms leveled. (p. 158)

In carrying out his analysis, Icke presents detailed readings of Ankersmit's work, focusing largely on *Narrative Logic* (1983), *History and Tropology* (1994) and *Sublime Historical Experience* (2005). Icke lays the groundwork for this well, going over the debates that preceded narrative constructivism (for his purposes most significantly the work of Walsh, Dray and Mink) as well as Ankersmit's relation to this. From an intellectual history point of view, one of the many enjoyable moments in Icke's book involves his review of the early reception of Ankersmit's work. A particularly pleasurable passage involves his consideration of C. B. McCullagh's review of *Narrative Logic*; here Icke's subtle humor comes through.

In similarly ironic mode, Icke goes on to give a practical illustration of the relevance of Ankersmit's argument in explaining historical writing as a process. This example should prove pedagogically useful to many historians – at least if the continuing (and seemingly quite regular) appearance of reactionary opinions attacking theories of narrative construction is any indication. Importantly, there is no downplaying of Ankersmit's achievement here. Rather, Icke presents Ankersmit as being too modest regarding his accomplishments. For him, 'Ankersmit's *narrative substance* was the product of a brilliant paradigm shift in thought, which, it would seem, was beyond the compass of those working in the old field of colligatory studies' (p. 21). In the second part of this discussion, however, Icke turns to examining the problems too – 'the negative elements of Ankersmit's often misleading but always idiosyncratic style and structure of

argument' – performing, as he puts it, 'a "dissection" of *Narrative Logic* which, in its sustained critical form, is something to which Ankersmit, as far as I know, has not previously been subjected' (p. 38).

Overall, and in outlining what for him are the weaknesses in Ankersmit's positions, Icke singles out a significant number of unclear and problematic claims and arguments. Even taking into consideration the fact that Icke has – as he readily admits – prefigured his account in terms of the book's plot and hence with the goal of showing the discrepancies and failures in Ankersmit's argumentation, the number of these examples is quite devastating with regard to the claims to philosophical rigour sometimes made by Ankersmit himself. An important thing to realize, however, is that these problems result in large part from the broad range and innovative striving of Ankersmit's work as well as from the complicated position he has assumed between the Anglo-Saxon and continental philosophical traditions. This is, again, something that Icke is careful to remind readers of.

However, behind all this close reading, the main issue looms large: the obvious point on which Icke and Ankersmit fail to meet concerns the question of experience. This is something that Icke realizes too, but his recognition of their different viewpoints does not produce any sympathy for Ankersmit's formulations. For Ankersmit, what he calls ('sublime') 'historical experience' is essential to the way the world presents itself. Yet, Icke is quite right to point out that what is – logically – at stake is not experience of the past (or indeed experience in any strict sense) but rather 'existential sensation' (p. 3). For him, Ankersmit is mistaken in maintaining that this kind of experience could be provoked by the past or might somehow announce a relation that we have (to have) with it – hence his claim that what Ankersmit is really involved with is in fact some form of memory studies. Even more, he argues that:

when Ankersmit started to confuse and/or break-down the ontological distinction between history and memory [...] – such that he could write a book essentially about memory and existential sensation while believing himself to be writing a book about history and historical theory – he was accordingly bound to generate, within that book, a structurally incoherent argument shot through with ambiguities and internal contradictions. (p. 157)

In spite of the difficulties involved, Ankersmit's insistence on 'experience' is not of course accidental. Indeed, in *Meaning, Truth, and Reference*, Ankersmit reiterates his acknowledgment that where he speaks of 'experience' in relation to Huizinga, Huizinga himself preferred the term 'sensation.' What his choice of the word experience does do – and in his context quite fittingly – is emphasize the presence of history (not the past) or at least historicity in everyday lived experience. And in this very different meaning of 'historical,' the historicity of (many if not all) people's negotiations with the world, 'historical experience' as a general idea makes sense and cannot be overlooked.

At the same time, this is also the key to understanding an important aspect of the relation of Ankersmit's idea of 'historical experience' to the broader debate

about narrative; and hence also to much of his earlier work. It ties in particularly with the idea (largely in Hayden White's writings) that artistic forms, and the poetic more generally, might be useful models for history writing to engage with more consciously. Emphasizing the heightened *experientiality* created by a work of art – or, from a purist standpoint, emphasizing the way that a work of art can more easily engage readers' creative imaginations and lead them to reconceptualize or refigure the content in some (to them) more meaningful way – and then calling for the employment of a similar dynamic in history texts, offers a way of pushing history toward significance for readers. From such a more poetic history, readers might receive a story that has greater impact for them in their daily lives. Now, to claim that this has something to do with the past is clearly a category mistake, unless, that is, one understands the past metaphorically, allowing the term to also signify imaginative and romantic representations of the before-now that people bring to their readings (of histories, but also of everyday objects, buildings, sites, landscapes, and even 'nature'). From this more romantic view of an imaginative engagement with the past, the investment of material remains with meaning is an attractive metaphor.

All of which can in no way deny Icke's critique. The past is still available only as somehow mediated. Or, as Icke quotes from his 'good Ankersmit,' '[n]o representation, no past' (p. 2).

Icke's examination of Ankersmit's overall reading of White is yet another valuable contribution of the book. One of its key 'stories' focuses on Ankersmit's relation to White. Icke proposes that 'the developing "shape" of Ankersmit's new position might be seen to be driven by [...] a compulsion to detach and distance his own work from that of the *spectral* Hayden White' (p. 75). While certainly in no way gentle in showing the purported misrepresentations and misreadings of White that this led Ankersmit to arguably commit, Icke again appears to be justified in his claims. And since there are – at least in my view – so many misreadings of White's ideas out there in the contemporary debates, this kind of comparative and contrastive reading is a crucial one. It is also excellent for the general perception of both Ankersmit and White since their 'takes' on narrative history are so often simply equated. When one reads through Icke's comparison of what Ankersmit attributes to White, particularly in the works that follow *Narrative Logic*, and what White in fact says in the representative examples Icke brings to the table, any desire to read the later Ankersmit and White as making the same claims must surely disappear. There is also ample recognition of the originality of the Ankersmit of *Narrative Logic* in Icke's reading; a point that is often missed when Ankersmit's early position is simply conflated with that of White.

From my 'outsider's' point of view, as from Icke's, Ankersmit appears to be willing to endure substantial theoretical discomfort in order to hold the views that he chooses to hold. Indeed, it could be said that he is at times stuck on top of this same fence that I am professing to describe things from, or more precisely, in fact, that there are moments in his argumentation when he somehow stretches

down to touch the ground on both sides at once. The awkwardness and strain of this kind of move comes across well in Icke's reading.

Yet, I think it would be wrong to simply say that Icke and Ankersmit are speaking past each other. This is particularly so, since Icke really does tackle Ankersmit's work head on. Thus, it might be more correct to say that it is mutually excluding world views and beliefs that are getting in the way here (as indeed there are also *within* Ankersmit's extensive oeuvre, as Icke well demonstrates). Yet, neither the 'good' nor the 'lost' Ankersmit of Icke's account claims, I think, or at least intends to claim, that we can *know* the past. The first is, as Icke convincingly points out, a relatively happy advocate of textual meaning-making, whilst the second wants to acknowledge that the non-subjective past and history play a central role in our understandings of the world. The question of whether the role of the past needs to be somehow *meaningful* and *constitutive* is the crucial question regarding this latter attitude. And it seems that the only way of reading Ankersmit *now* is as saying that it does. After all, there is no dispute here about the basic level of history's epistemological standing (he continues to have no problem with his earlier idea of the 'singular true statement'). Hence, 'the past' guides and delimits what historians can say through this generic commitment alone. This debate is thus not (thankfully) about truth and objectivity, but it does appear as if Ankersmit is still trying to find some way or ways in which to ground meaning.

What such a characterization still fails to sufficiently value, however, is that the 'lost' Ankersmit is enchanted, so to speak; he is persuaded by a world that *feels* to be full of mystery. And it is this experience of the world as mysterious that leads him down the path he takes. I do not claim that Icke does not understand this – quite the contrary, this is a crucial component of his thesis – but he does refuse to respect Ankersmit's position as a way of *feeling*, focusing on how it fails to present a coherent way of *thinking* about the past. With their shared emphasis on philosophical rigour, Icke is of course quite right in this. Yet Ankersmit, too, is quite clear about what it is he is after: in *Sublime Historical Experience*, he forcefully insists that we should become 'open, again, to the profound and fascinating mysteries of the past' and 'to rekindle our sensitivity to these mysteries, instead of surrendering to intellectualist fashions from which the reality of the past, its hopes, its catastrophes, its joys and miseries, have so completely been banned' (Ankersmit 2005, 231 and 232; cited in Domanska 2009, 184 and 185<sup>1</sup>).

As to Ankersmit's *Meaning, Truth, and Reference in Historical Representation*: It has to be said – especially after reading Icke – that the book needs to be approached with a firm intention to understand Ankersmit's aims – following the 'principle of charity' as it were. The sense one gets from *Meaning, Truth, and Reference* is that it is aimed at presenting an overview of Ankersmit's thinking as a whole: Ankersmit has opted for a systematic and cohesive account of all the elements that he takes to be essential components of historical writing. Choosing to present this as a single argument inevitably leads to contradictions and

discrepancies, however; if the same ideas had been presented as a series of independent essays, the difficulties might be easier to overlook. Yet, and while there are some problems and sleights-of-hand in the argumentation in *Meaning, Truth, and Reference* that could be pointed out in a like fashion to Icke's reading of Ankersmit's earlier work, I hesitate to focus on these since I have a broader point to make about the book and about Ankersmit's theoretical orientation in general.

The hero of Icke's book – 'the good Ankersmit' – is present here. But at the same time, Icke's 'lost' Ankersmit – the enchanted and romantic one – is perhaps easier to understand. With respect to the latter, this is a book that needs in part to be judged already by its cover. The seventeenth-century landscape painting presented on it presages the book's overall romantic sensibility remarkably well and is something that really should not go unnoticed. Yet, there is no doubt about Ankersmit's continued (albeit unclear) attachment to the 'good,' rational skeptical position too: his other main framing move for the reader is a prefatory quote from Fredric Jameson on the challenge of representation as marking a radical break in the philosophical tradition. With this tension already present from the outset, Ankersmit's intentions involve, I assume, something other than a naive denial of constructivism.

In addition to the framing effected by the cover painting and the quote from Jameson, Ankersmit further prefaces *Meaning, Truth, and Reference* by reminding readers of the 'absolutely basic distinction' that needs to be made between historical research and historical writing (p. x). Yet later, in reiterating his view that this distinction is 'truly unassailable' (p. 62), he makes a rather astonishing claim. He writes: 'I do not know of even one contemporary philosopher of history supporting it' (p. 61); rather, it has, he states, 'lost all its popularity with historical theorists' (p. 60).

After several rereadings, this attitude led me to think that Ankersmit's 'historical writing' must surely include something more than is generally intended by the term. Not least because Hayden White (e.g. White 2000), Keith Jenkins (e.g. Jenkins 2009) and numerous others do actually make such a distinction between historical research and historical writing. So while I have trouble in seeing how different Ankersmit's understanding of the scope of 'historical writing' can ultimately be, I believe that a sympathetic reading is still in order here. Although he mostly speaks of historical writing without qualifying further, the topics he deals with suggest that his interest is not so much in historical writing as the product of 'doing history' as it is in the psychological processes and experiences involved. Revealingly, I think, there is a moment when (in speaking of White's *Metahistory*) he equates 'the problem of historical writing' with that of 'how historians succeed in making sense of the evidence of the past' (p. 137).

If this reflects his broader intentions (and does not pose an epistemological question only), then it marks a point on which the two positions clearly *do* speak past each other in a fairly concrete way. Ankersmit can be seen to focus on the

historian's emotional orientation toward the past in very broad terms, going far beyond issues of epistemology or even of the discipline of history. For Icke, focus remains exclusively on historical writing in the more straightforward sense.

This difference in the usage of 'historical writing' may make it easier to discern the core supports of the fence that I have attempted to sketch. Ankersmit's explicit romanticism and his emphasis on the reach and continuation of the past into the present (the 'presence' of the past, with certain qualifications) *in the guise of historical writing*, appear to be aimed at drawing attention to (at the very least) historians' practical relations to the past as well as (it seems) to the ideas that people generally tend to have about the past influencing them and to the beliefs that they have about their responsibilities for the past. (While the kind of consequentialist ethic that constructivism relies on is philosophically quite sound, it goes against many typical intuitions about people's relation to the past.)

If Ankersmit were to claim only that there are many discursive, embodied and socially as well as culturally embedded realities and practices that variously structure and condition the possibilities for thought, the objections to his position would surely be less vehement. Further, to do this, there would be no need to hark back to romanticist and seemingly mystical world views; instead, the argument could be reasonably made from the point of view of contemporary readings in phenomenological philosophy, psychology, linguistics, or even, as I see it, the more 'extreme' discursively focused approaches in theory of history as coming from, say, Elizabeth Ermarth or Hayden White.<sup>2</sup> This, after all, is what White said about the matter as early as 1978:

The historian shares with his audience *general notions* of the *forms* that significant human situations *must* take by virtue of his participation in the specific processes of sense-making which identify him as a member of one cultural endowment rather than another. (White 1978, 86)

For Ankersmit to instead take up the anti-linguistic turn banner and posit the far-fetched claim of there being nothing outside language, and to then attack that windmill with rather general romantic notions, seems an unnecessary and less than effective route. Again, it feels as if there must be some deeper motivation for this – perhaps some conviction that *meaning* for a text, for a discourse or, even, for a subject position cannot be 'only' intensional. (The idea of intensional meaning is, I think, a much more limiting one in Ankersmit's interpretation than it is in White's.)

As I read it, *Meaning, Truth, and Reference* appears designed to support precisely such a conviction. Like his associated article in *History and Theory* (Ankersmit 2013), it introduces a further, Heideggerian dimension to the debate, that of 'aspects' of reality. This more elaborate theorization seems constructed largely in order to rescue some idea of a 'contact' between reality and representation. Yet, to all other intents and purposes, it feels unduly complicated and even unnecessary. Things would certainly have been more straightforward if Ankersmit had limited himself to his original (and largely unproblematic<sup>3</sup>) idea

of 'singular true statements' – a baseline for historical accounts, as it were, and a minimal requirement for talking about history writing shared by Hayden White and Keith Jenkins to mention only two other proponents. But that would *not* have released him from his ties to linguistic construction and intensionality and so permit the romantic notion of direct 'access' and, ultimately, some meaning to be derived from the past itself (a 'revelation of Truth' or a 'self-revelation of the world' as Ankersmit puts it in *Meaning, Truth, and Reference*; see, e.g., p. 109 ff.). Hence, it would not have served his purpose here. The mediating layer of the 'presented' or the 'aspect,' however, allows him to formulate a model in which representation effects a linking to reality that is unavailable (because of prior commitments) through propositional statements. As he defines it, the 'presented' is 'an aspect of the world itself' and, by extension, 'representational truth' is '*what the world, or its objects, reveal to us in terms of its aspects*' (p. 107).<sup>4</sup>

If Ankersmit had presented his later arguments together with an admission that he had recanted on the core ideas of constructivism, much of the kind of critique that he has received could possibly have been avoided. (That is the potential upside of admitting discontinuity in one's thinking.) As the situation stands now, however, he appears to be presenting his more romantic views about experience as fitting into his earlier framework and as solutions to the crucial problems that narrative constructivism has shown historians face. To me, as to Icke, such an allegedly theoretically sound presentation of ideas of access to past reality is precipitate and has the (unintended, I continue to hope) consequence of furnishing a new generation of theorists and historians with the illusion of a suddenly postproblematic disciplinary context. A context, furthermore, where the theoretical discussions of the past half century and more can simply be dismissed by reference to their excessive linguistic preoccupations – as if constructivism was indeed merely about narrative form and language rather than more fundamentally about the inevitable constructedness of any *meaning*.

Yet, having said that, it may well be indicative of a shift away from narrative constructivist thinking toward a more romantic approach to the world in general that the reviewers of Icke's book have so far taken the strategy employed by Ankersmit in their stride. Indeed, it seems that very few readers overall have much objected to the conflation of personal experiences of reality and the past with formulations of historical knowledge concerning parts of the past that 'we' (or, to be precise, the historians constructing such formulations) have had no subjective access to.<sup>5</sup> This 'transition from language to experience' is certainly presented by Ankersmit himself very early on as hopefully offering a 'new world,' a new framework and sensibility within which the issue of representation will no longer be the critical one (see Domanska 2009). Even in *Meaning, Truth, and Reference*, Ankersmit's embracing of historical experience is manifest in the way that the past is always and unrelentingly present:

The past – *and I do really have in mind here a past stretching out to the very roots of our civilization* – is as such not an entity that only historians come across in their academic researches but a companion permanently closer to us

than even our parents, our wives and husbands, or our most intimate friends. It is our second self, and all of our life is a continuous fight with history. (p. 217, my emphasis)

Ankersmit's interest is not just in a subjectively experienced past, then, and hence some charge of mysticism seems justified. His reliance on a continuity between history and the kind of past that is our 'second self' could be labeled 'existential' but in a particular and currently philosophically unfashionable sense. Decidedly, this is not the view of existential phenomenology that moves from a recognition of the contingency of meaning to a leap of faith. In that view, faith is no longer of a romantic, foundational kind. Given his sometime acceptance of scepticism, however, Ankersmit's decision about where to go *from* there (after facing undecidability) might also be described as a 'hedonist' one. After facing the aporetic moment which he (I think) still recognizes, his choice seems to be to deny the need for making a leap at all and instead to go with his gut, to be sensitive to how he *feels* in relation to the traces of the past that impose on his daily existence.

By way of concluding: I think that Icke's book constitutes essential reading for anyone who desires to understand Ankersmit's work in the context of constructivist theory. The problems he outlines in Ankersmit's thought – and especially in that of the 'mystical, mythical and arguably not even historical Ankersmit of *Sublime Historical Experience*' (p. 6) – are certainly useful in helping more critical and, one might say, explicitly rationalizing theorists to come to grips with the rather esoteric issues involved in historians' sometime existential sensibilities regarding the past. Even if it appears that no acceptance of the opposing world view can be reached by either side, simply understanding the other's arguments, claims, desires, and emotional investments seems to be a useful goal – even if that understanding then continues (perhaps unavoidably) to result in refusals of the other's position.

Although the 'very good (even excellent) Frank Ankersmit of an enduring kind' (p. 1) of Icke's theoretically rigorous reading is quite understandably the one of narrative substances, the Ankersmit who seems likely to have the greater impact on theorizing history today is the one who has redirected attention to the emotive investments and romantic aspirations of the historian. This is not so much a result of the arguments he presents as of the fact that the desire for a contact with the past – what I would describe in terms of the historian's 'phenomenological yearning' – plays such a crucial role in perpetuating the project of history – however problematic it remains to *theoretically* defend or indeed even envision any satisfaction of that yearning. To accept that this romantic belief underlying many historians' practices is somehow capable of overriding the theoretical problems involved in representation would certainly mark a move to the 'new world' that Ankersmit champions.

The crucial thing to recognize, however, is that this choice regarding focus – regarding what, ultimately, to make of history – also leads Icke and Ankersmit to very different orientations toward the future. Icke's aligns with that of

'deconstruction,' the project being to lead readers to a theoretical position from which to choose their values rather than to blindly accept received wisdom. Ankersmit's is that of many historians: that 'we' might somehow glean a deeper insight from the past, whether by receiving 'the groanings' of past civilizations or, as he suggests now in *Meaning, Truth, and Reference*, because '[w]e experience the truly great events of the West's history before obtaining cognitive access to them, and we experience them since they weigh upon us like a heavy burden from which we can find no relief' (p. 232). Recognizing these quite different consequences can hopefully temper some of the underlying desires.

Even if some kind of panoramic overview might be had from atop this particular fence, then, it will necessarily remain divided. If you turn fully toward the romantics' side, you see those who are preoccupied by the continuity of sensation, sensibilities and presence. If you look toward the rationalist one, the view is of those who consider their understanding and emotions as contingent and largely malleable, perhaps moving more freely. Look in any direction between these and the overall picture is split by the fence, and the relation between the sides is up for grabs. Some may imagine that the two sides can constitute a harmonious outlook when viewed together, others will experience them as complementing and questioning each other in interesting ways, and yet others will see them as radically different or even mutually hostile. In whatever way one conceives of this relation, however, the fence is an integral part of the constitution of the overviews themselves, much in the way that a field can only exist as a poppy field or a pasture by way of the definition given by a limit, preventing one from being overtaken by the other.

Yet, as with any fence, attempts at straddling this one are likely to prove uncomfortable in the long run and there will soon be a temptation to occupy a position on the ground. To me, as regards sound argumentation, the side that is more occupiable, the one that can best provide a firm footing, is the constructivist one – even if it has perhaps by now become somewhat lacklustre and familiar. It may be, however, that current 'historical' sensibilities will lead many to favor the more adventurous option. Either way, to venture into the field (whether of academic history writing or of 'experience'), one has to first jump off the fence.

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## Notes

1. It is worth noting that in her essay on Ankersmit's shift 'from narrative to experience,' Ewa Domanska has insightfully collected the core of Ankersmit's ideological motivation for 'sublime historical experience' on these two pages (Domanska 2009, 184 and 185).
2. Or, to take things into another currently popular direction: the argument could also be made from the point of view of attributing agency to objects and structures so as not to so easily miss their impact on our actions. To me, all these options could provide less mystical-sounding ways of presenting largely the same ideas. There are *things* that are not language, at least not in an articulated way, that impact and infringe on our possibilities. And a lot (if not indeed all) of these things are of the past when 'past' is not understood in strictly academic historical terms.
3. Unproblematic, that is, *pace* philosophers of history such as Jonathan Gorman, who quite correctly note that the relation of language to reality is problematic at every level but who do not consider that since narrative constructivists are not focused on historical research but on historical *writing*, this kind of agreement makes good practical sense for them.
4. For a detailed argument against this more complex construction by Ankersmit, see, for example, Jouni-Matti Kuukkanen's *Postnarrativist Philosophy of Historiography* (Palgrave forthcoming). The difficulty with this particular model of representation is that it seems to attribute some immanent meaning to the 'presented': if it is not the representation that provides (intensional) meaning, how can any 'presented' ever become individuated? Ankersmit's example of the picture of a person's profile could equally well be the 'presented' or 'aspect' of a haircut from the side (cf. Ankersmit, *Meaning, Truth, and Reference in Historical Representation*, 69 ff.).
5. Or at least I have not come across many such objections in discussions or in print. For an examination of this tendency in Ankersmit and in the present discourse on history more generally, see Pihlainen (2014), particularly regarding a confusion between actual experience of the world and a heightened sense of experientiality created by aesthetic constructs, like history.

## References

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