

# English summaries

## **The Uses of Biography**

G. LEVI

*The essential questions raised in the methodological investigations of contemporary historiography can also be found in biography, e.g. those of its relations with other social sciences, of the relations between norms and behavior and between groups and individuals that constitute them, of the limits of human freedom and rationality, and of scales of analysis. On the basis of a typology and an analysis of the implications of biographies that break with the linear and factual tradition, this article stresses the unexplored complexity of the biographical perspective.*

## **Historical Experience: On C.-E. Labrousse**

J.-Y GRENIER AND B. LEPETIT

*C.-E. Labrousse's two main works, *Esquisse du mouvement des prix et des revenus en France au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (1933) and *La crise de l'économie française à la veille de la Révolution* (1944) have greatly influenced French economic history since 1945, and above all the serial approach. The latter is now manifesting its limits, leading one to reflect anew on its founding works and their interpretation. This article's intention is threefold. Our concern is firstly to show that Labrousse's work was accepted by historians at the cost of a reduction in content and a misunderstanding of its intentions. A rereading, motivated by current investigations, is thus necessary. Secondly, we show how the Labroussian method is akin to an experimental approach imposing precise stages on analysis and supposing a construction of historical facts. It is against these requirements that the coherency and limits of the two books must be judged. That is the goal of the last part of this article where the demonstrative ability of the method developed by Labrousse is analyzed.*

## **Economics and History: Towards a New Alliance ?**

R. BOYER

*The paper is a plea for a new alliance which would build a genuine economic analysis, widely open upon historicity and path dependency and would draw on past major findings in economic history in the spirit of *Annales*. A careful control over the level and subject investigated, a wide conception about the multiplicity of legitimacy and rationality principles would induce a copernician revolution in economic theory: how to build as many models as broad configurations for social relations, technical systems and links from the economic sphere to the other. Memory and oblivion, and a long term view of structural transformations would give coherence to theory and relevance to economic policies.*

***History and Geography: Foundations of Complementarity***

M. RONCAYOLO

*The interest in geography shown by Annales historians such as Febvre, Bloch and Braudel dates back to the very beginning of the journal. But common concerns have dissipated, and geography and history have long since proven their independence from each other. As far as history is concerned, for example, the lessons of geographers most attentive to the complex analysis of processes, like Roger Dion, have been little heeded. And yet today one finds points where geography and history meet up: the relations between nature and culture, and the question of territories (first and foremost perhaps, the city). Concerning such commonly explored questions, the specificity of these disciplines cannot be defined by associating one with time and the other with space, but must rather be defined by their practices and ways of grasping objets.*

***A New Subject: the Study of Organizations***

P. FRIDENSON

*History as expressed through the Annales has not given much importance to decision making at and to institutions. One possible way to understand better these problems is to focus the historical approach on the organizations themselves, in cooperation with various organization sciences. This article surveys four areas where such an approach might be profitable for historians: the analysis of organizations as producers of knowledge and of interrelations; their long-range elements of stability; the paths to innovation; the interconnections between strategy and structure. Organization sciences can thus help historians to overcome the cleavage between economy, society and civilization and to shift their emphasis toward apprenticeship and transformation processes.*

***For a Subjectivist Approach to Social History***

G. NOIRIEL

*The future of social history in France depends upon a renewal of reflexion on the relations between history and sociology since the beginning of the century. The work of Lucien Febvre is the best starting point for such an undertaking. It leads us to give up certain utopian notions of interdisciplinary discourses and revive the "subjectivist" approach in the perspective of a "fullfledged" social history.*

***Analytical and Hermeneutical Dimensions of a Historical Legal History***

J. HOOCK

*The article discusses the methodological problems of a "historical legal history." After a critical analysis of different approaches two cases, the evolution of commercial justice in modern Germany and France, deserve to illustrate an analytical approach to the legal structure of economic and social systems for which pleads the author. In analysing the slow process of differentiation of the complex functions which were significant for the commercial courts in the two countries, it tries to combine the theory of legal temporalities with a historical critique of judicial topics in the construction of a method that would be appropriate to give an account of the mechanisms of adaptation which characterise the historical efficiency of legal practice.*

*Proposals for a Restricted History of Mentalities*

A. BOUREAU

*The history of mentalities is currently poorly defined: after having successfully fulfilled a function of redistributing historical fields and objects, it has had a tendency to adopt a psychologistic aim, claiming to directly reach shared mental phenomena. I propose to restrict the field of the history of mentalities by assigning it the task of making a problematic description of the "collective", defined as the locus of articulation of general regularities and of subjects. This "collective", as I try to show through various examples borrowed from Medieval history, can be detected in discourse in the form of "statements" (verbal, iconic, ritual, etc.) whose structure and use place them at a tangent from the universes of belief that are sporadically and effectively assembled.*

*The World as Representation*

R. CHARTIER

*This article first examines historians' responses to the two challenges successively made to their discipline: that by the victorious social sciences in the 1960's, and that by a return to the political realm, based on the present (late 1980's) philosophy of the subject. After characterizing the changes in historical work (abandoning in its practice the project of a global history, the territorial definition of objects of research and the primacy of social classifications), this article puts forward three proposals, based on a particular field of research that crosses the study of texts, the history of the printed work, and the analysis of practices: (1) to place the notion of "representation" at the center of a re-evaluation of the relationship between social structures and cultural practices, (2) to detect the most socially rooted gaps in the most formal apparatus whether textual or material, and (3) to relate the production of works and the organization of practices to forms of the exercise of power.*

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