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A RETRIEVAL OF HISTORICISM:  
FRANK ANKERSMIT'S PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY AND POLITICS

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ABSTRACT

Frank Ankersmit is often perceived as a postmodern thinker, as a European Hayden White, or as an author whose work in political philosophy can safely be ignored by those interested only in his philosophy of history. Although none of these perceptions is entirely wrong, they are of little help in understanding the nature of Ankersmit's work and the sources on which it draws. Specifically, they do not elucidate the extent to which Ankersmit raises questions different from White's, finds himself inspired by continental European traditions, responds to specifically Dutch concerns, and is as active as a public intellectual as he has been prolific in philosophy of history. In order to propose a more comprehensive and balanced interpretation of Ankersmit's work, this article offers a contextual reading based largely on Dutch-language sources, some of which are unknown even in the Netherlands. The thesis advanced is that Ankersmit draws consistently on nineteenth-century German historicism as interpreted by Friedrich Meinecke and advocated by his Groningen teacher, Ernst Kossmann. Without forcing each and every element of Ankersmit's oeuvre into a historicist mold, the article demonstrates that some of its most salient aspects can profitably be read as attempts at translating and modifying historicist key notions into late twentieth-century categories. Also, without creating a father myth of the sort that White helped create around his teacher William Bossenbrook, the article argues that Ankersmit at crucial moments in his intellectual trajectory draws on texts and authors central to Kossmann's research interests.

*Keywords:* Frank Ankersmit, Ernst Kossmann, Johan Huizinga, historicism, representation, narrativism

## INTRODUCTION

Frank Ankersmit is often perceived as an archetypical “postmodernist” philosopher of history.<sup>1</sup> More specifically, he is often read, if not as a “European Hayden White,”<sup>2</sup> then at least as a historical theorist whose reflections on the historian’s language, the perspectival nature of historical interpretation, and the impossibility of historical representations being true or false in a correspondence sense of the word continue the antifoundationalist program inaugurated by White’s *Metahistory* (1973).<sup>3</sup> Also, for understandable reasons, the secondary literature on Ankersmit relies heavily on his English-language books and articles, despite the fact that the majority of his publications have appeared in Dutch.<sup>4</sup> Finally, for an author whose bibliography includes such titles as *Aesthetic Politics* (1996) and *Political Representation* (2002), it is remarkable that commentators have often focused rather exclusively on his philosophy of history, thereby implying or suggesting that his historical theory can safely be separated from his political theory.<sup>5</sup>

If we propose a different reading of Ankersmit’s oeuvre, we do so not because the postmodern label would be inappropriate. Apart from the fact that Ankersmit in the late 1980s self-consciously identified as a postmodernist,<sup>6</sup> his work unde-

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<sup>1</sup>. For example, John H. Zammito, “Ankersmit’s Postmodernist Historiography: The Hyperbole of ‘Opacity,’” *History and Theory* 37, no. 3 (1998), 330-346; Keith Jenkins, *Why History? Ethics and Postmodernism* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 154-155; Heikki Saari, “On Ankersmit’s Postmodernist Theory of Historical Narrativity,” *Rethinking History* 9, no. 1 (2005), 5-21; Callum G. Brown, *Postmodernism for Historians* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 147.

<sup>2</sup>. Peter Icke, *Frank Ankersmit’s Lost Historical Cause* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 1.

<sup>3</sup>. For example, Kalle Pihlainen, “Narrative Objectivity versus Fiction: On the Ontology of Historical Narratives,” *Rethinking History* 2, no. 1 (1998), 7-22; Ján Haluška and Juraj Šuch, “Naratívny konštruktivizmus Haydena Whita a Franka Ankersmita,” *Organon F* 18 (2011), 556-559; Ewa Domańska, “Frank Ankersmit: From Narrative to Experience,” *Rethinking History* 13, no. 2 (2009), 175-196. Other examples, in less specialized studies, include Anton Froeyman, “Virtues of Historiography,” *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 6, no. 3 (2012), 415-431; Rolf Torstendahl, *The Rise and Propagation of Historical Professionalism* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 63; Jouni-Matti Kuukkanen, *Postnarrativist Philosophy of Historiography* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 30-49.

<sup>4</sup>. Obviously, this applies less to Dutch-language studies, perhaps the best of which is P. B. M. Blaas, “Op zoek naar een glimp van het verleden: de geschiedfilosofie van Frank Ankersmit,” *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 119, no. 3 (2006), 377-386.

<sup>5</sup>. Literature on Ankersmit’s political philosophy is scarce. See, however, Sofia Näsström, “Representative Democracy as Tautology: Ankersmit and Lefort on Representation,” *European Journal of Political Theory* 5, no. 3 (2006), 321-342; Quentin Skinner, “Comments on Frank Ankersmit’s *Political Representation and Political Experience: An Essay on Political Psychology*,” *Redescriptions* 12 (2008), 227-231; Raymond Geuss, “Blair, Rubbish, and the Demons of Noontide,” *ibid.*, 232-242.

<sup>6</sup>. F. R. Ankersmit, “Historiography and Postmodernism,” *History and Theory* 28, no. 2 (1989), 137-153.

niably challenges and, in some respects, tries to move beyond modernist concerns about truth. It might be argued that precisely this “postmodern” stance contributed much to Ankersmit’s high profile or, perhaps, “success” as a philosopher of history.<sup>7</sup> Also, Ankersmit has always held Hayden White in high regard, even though at times his disappointment outweighed his admiration. Neither do we dispute that Ankersmit’s most important work has (also) appeared in English, so that at least a first encounter with his oeuvre does not require Dutch-language skills.<sup>8</sup> Finally, although we interpret Ankersmit’s notions of historical and political representations as intimately related, it is justifiable, of course, to examine the first without wondering how and why the author expanded his analysis into the sphere of political philosophy.

What all this consistently obscures, however, is the extent to which Ankersmit does *not* resemble White, raises different questions and draws on different sources than most self-designated “postmodernists” in historical theory,<sup>9</sup> responds to specifically Dutch concerns that are largely unknown to his Anglo-American interlocutors, finds himself inspired by continental European traditions that, especially in his English-language publications, he does not usually invoke explicitly, and is as active as a public intellectual as he has been prolific in philosophy of history. More specifically, as we shall argue in this article, Ankersmit is deeply indebted to a historicist tradition in Friedrich Meinecke’s sense of the word—a predominantly German tradition of historical thought that emphasized the “uniqueness” or “distinctiveness” of every historical period.<sup>10</sup> Relatedly, Ankersmit has been deeply influenced by a twentieth-century admirer of Meinecke-style historicism, his Groningen teacher Ernst Heinrich Kossmann. Reading Ankersmit’s oeuvre against the background of Kossmann and the historicist tradition that he and others invoked by way of an alternative to social-scientific history as practiced in the 1970s helps explain some of the distinct, nonpostmodern, and non-Whitean aspects of Ankersmit’s work, while also illuminating the interdependency of his philosophies of historical and po-

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<sup>7</sup>. Admirers and critics alike often focused their attention on the most “postmodern” aspects of his work. Representative examples include Jenkins, *Why History*, 133-160 and Chris Lorenz, “Can Histories Be True? Narrativism, Positivism, and the ‘Metaphorical Turn,’” *History and Theory* 37, no. 3 (1998), 309-329.

<sup>8</sup>. Most English-language publications are revised and updated versions of pieces published originally in Dutch.

<sup>9</sup>. See, for example, Keith Jenkins, *Re-Thinking History* (London: Routledge, 1991); Alun Munslow, *Deconstructing History* (London: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>10</sup>. Ankersmit’s historicist orientation has been touched upon briefly in Zammito, “Ankersmit’s Postmodernist Historiography,” 331-332; Jürgen Pieters, *Moments of Negotiation: The New Historicism of Stephen Greenblatt* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2001), 103-105; Edward Thaden, “Historicism, N. A. Polevoi, and Rewriting Russian History,” *East European Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (2004), 299.

litical representation.

In what follows, we will substantiate this claim, not by forcing each and every element of Ankersmit's many-faceted oeuvre into a historicist mold, but by showing that some of the most salient aspects of Ankersmit's work can profitably be read as attempts at translating and modifying key historicist notions into late twentieth-century categories. Also, without creating a "father myth" of the sort that White once helped create around his teacher William J. Bossenbrook,<sup>11</sup> we will demonstrate that Ankersmit at crucial moments in his intellectual trajectory drew on texts and authors central to Kossmann's research interests. Using Dutch-language sources especially, including early publications that have been largely overlooked even by Dutch commentators, we offer a much more contextual reading of Ankersmit's work than has been provided so far, in the hope of contributing to a better-informed and more nuanced interpretation.<sup>12</sup>

#### THE EARLY ANKERSMIT

One useful point of entry into Ankersmit's work is the question why the Dutch philosopher of history ever since his earliest forays into the field has been fascinated by "colligatory concepts," "narrative substances," or "historical representations."<sup>13</sup> Ankersmit's first book, *Narrative Logic* (1983), offers two answers, which can be summarized here very briefly, since they are familiar to all students of Ankersmit's work. First, he claimed that philosophers of history in the analytical tradition had done much work on historical statements, but almost totally ignored issues of historical synthesis. Second, he argued that such synthetic judgments take the form of colligatory concepts. These concepts are philosophically interesting because they raise a number of fundamental problems, such as the absence of "translation rules" between historical reality and historical representation and the impossibility of determining the plausibility of narrative substances with correspondence or coherence theories of truth.<sup>14</sup> Because of

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<sup>11</sup>. On which see Herman Paul, "Hayden White: The Making of a Philosopher of History," *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 5, no. 1 (2011), 140-142.

<sup>12</sup>. As both of us are former students of Ankersmit, our account is likely to be colored by the years we spent in Groningen. It is not our aim, however, to take sides in the debate surrounding Ankersmit's work. In particular, we make no attempt to defend Ankersmit against his critics. Here as elsewhere, our goal is not to be "deferential to the master," as David Roberts once suggested, but to correct and supplement previous readings of an influential philosopher of history through more in-depth contextualization than has been provided so far (*pace* David D. Roberts, "Possibilities in 'a Thoroughly Historical World': Missing Hayden White's Missed Connections," *History and Theory* 52, no. 2 [2013], 277).

<sup>13</sup>. Ankersmit dedicated *Narrative Logic: A Semantic Analysis of the Historian's Language* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1983) to William Henry Walsh, the theorist of colligatory concepts, "whose ideas 'colligate' the essentials of this book" (v).

<sup>14</sup>. *Ibid.*, 9.

these two claims, *Narrative Logic* has often been read as a contribution to analytical philosophy of history as it had developed in the English-speaking world since the days of Carl G. Hempel. This is also how the author hoped it would be read: he wrote the book as “analytically” as possible so as to reach an audience of English-language philosophers of history especially.<sup>15</sup> *Narrative Logic*, in other words, was targeted at philosophers of history in the analytical tradition such as Arthur C. Danto, whose work on “narrative sentences” provided a context in which Ankersmit’s intervention could be situated.<sup>16</sup>

This, however, captures only part of why Ankersmit was intrigued by “colligatory concepts.” What the analytical posing obscured was that *Narrative Logic*, based on the author’s 1981 PhD thesis, emerged out of a European or, more specifically, Dutch context in which analytical philosophy of history was rather far away. This context is clearly reflected in Ankersmit’s early writings, which include a dozen or so Dutch-language articles written between 1971 and 1981 for *Groniek* (a periodical published by the University of Groningen) and *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* (the primary Dutch history journal, nowadays known as the *Low Countries Historical Review*). These early articles, most of which are written in a far more colloquial style than *Narrative Logic*, reveal a couple of additional concerns that might help explain why the young Ankersmit was fascinated by “colligatory concepts.”

The 1970s were, of course, a time in which “social-science history” achieved its greatest triumphs, with model-builders and hypothesis-testers who claimed an aura of scientific rationality while, in some cases, condescendingly dissociating themselves from old-style “narrative history.” In the Netherlands, it was the historian and philosopher Kees Bertels who exemplified the iconoclastic spirit of this social-scientific avant-garde with a manifesto-like PhD dissertation (1973). The book caused quite a stir in the Dutch historical discipline, if only because it rejected all *histoire événementielle* and embraced a “structuralist” gospel borrowed from Fernand Braudel, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Michel Foucault, among others.<sup>17</sup> It is worth remembering that this was the polarized context in which Ankersmit finished his master’s in history (1973), began his teaching career at

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<sup>15</sup>. Ewa Doma ska, *Encounters: Philosophy of History after Postmodernism* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998), 71-72.

<sup>16</sup>. Arthur C. Danto, *Analytical Philosophy of History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1965); Ankersmit, *Narrative Logic*, 36-43.

<sup>17</sup>. Kees Bertels, *Geschiedenis tussen structuur en evenement: een methodologies en wijsgerig onderzoek* (Amsterdam: Wetenschappelijke Uitgeverij, 1973). For the debate, see C. M. van den Akker, “Een knuppel in het hoenderhok der historici: de receptie van Kees Bertels’ *Geschiedenis tussen structuur en evenement*,” *Ex Tempore* 14, no. 3 (1995), 173-183. More context is provided in Jo Tollebeek, “De ekster en de kooi: over het (bedrieglijke) succes van de theoretische geschiedenis in Nederland,” *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 110, no. 1 (1995), 52-72.

the University of Groningen (1974), and undertook his first work in historical theory.

Prominent among these early pieces is a review essay of Bertels's dissertation that one commentator has described as "sixteen pages of uncharitable sharpness."<sup>18</sup> A major focus of Ankersmit's criticism was Bertels's "unsparing efforts at being scientific."<sup>19</sup> For Dutch readers, this could hardly come as a surprise: Ankersmit had ridiculed the "stupidity of a major part of the so-called scientific approach to the past" as early as 1971.<sup>20</sup> His complaint was that covering-law explanations of the sort advocated by Bertels eliminate the historicity of the past. They do so by decontextualizing causes and effects from their specific spatiotemporal settings. What matters in a covering-law model is the logical connection between cause and effect, not the time that passes in between, the intentions of those responsible for the cause, or their second thoughts, regrets, and doubts. Typical of covering-law explanations, then, is that they focus on the universal ("timeless") aspects of historical events, thereby neglecting their particular ("time-specific") dimensions. Ankersmit referred to the latter when he claimed that the type of understanding provided by law-like explanations eliminates "the dimension of time": "everything seems to take place in an eternal present and the historicity of the past gets lost."<sup>21</sup>

What made Ankersmit value "historicity"—elsewhere referred to as "uniqueness," "distinctiveness," or "the peculiar character of things"—so highly? Ankersmit's early essays give two answers, which can be summarized in the catchwords "freedom" and "contingency." The first one is a version of the existentialist argument that a capacity to act in freedom is a defining feature of the human condition (in regard to which Ankersmit preferred to take sides with Maurice Merleau-Ponty against Jean-Paul Sartre in their debate on what it means for human freedom to be historically situated).<sup>22</sup> Although law-like models of explanation are not necessarily deterministic and do not exclude the possibility that people act in freedom, Ankersmit argued that their preoccupation with

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<sup>18</sup>. W. Otterspeer, "Ankersmit contra Bertels," *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 91, no. 1 (1976), 83.

<sup>19</sup>. F. R. Ankersmit, "Kees Bertels, Geschiedenis tussen structuur en evenement," *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 89, no. 3 (1974), 400.

<sup>20</sup>. Frank Ankersmit, "Geschiedenis en vrijheid," *Groniek* 17/18 (1971), 243.

<sup>21</sup>. Frank Ankersmit, "Een aantal zwartgallige overpeinzingen, hoewel niet zonder alternatief," *Groniek* 22 (1972), 264.

<sup>22</sup>. Ankersmit, "Geschiedenis en vrijheid," 242-244. For the debate between Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, see John J. Compton, "Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and Human Freedom," in *The Debate between Sartre and Merleau-Ponty*, ed. Jon Stewart (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1998), 176-179.

laws connecting causes and effects made this freedom anything but “perceptible” or “tangible.”<sup>23</sup> Precisely this, however, was what he regarded as necessary for countering the hegemony of the *homme machine* or, more broadly, the hegemony of scientific modes of thinking in the modern world.<sup>24</sup> For Ankersmit, then, emphasizing the “uniqueness” of the past amounted to highlighting a dimension of freedom that he perceived as under threat in a culture dominated by science.

If this first argument was a moral one, the second one had a political edge. History can make people “aware of the contingent character of what has historically grown,” wrote Ankersmit in 1972.<sup>25</sup> Precisely to the extent that history is not depicted as a chain of causes and effects but as a drama of human decisions with sometimes unintended consequences, it enables people to recognize that present-day circumstances, too, are at least partly a product of human action. This means that, if needed, they can be changed by similar human efforts. A historiography attentive to the “uniqueness” of the past is, in other words, an effective means for becoming aware of “what can be improved in one’s own time.”<sup>26</sup> If this is vaguely reminiscent of arguments for “revolution” produced by left-wing-oriented students of Ankersmit’s generation, it should be added that what Ankersmit wanted to see disappear was not the twentieth-century remnants of nineteenth-century bourgeois culture, but rather “our contemporary all-pervading rationality,” “our preference for quantitative analysis,” and “that damned precision, accuracy to one hundred decimals after the comma (for an error in the 99th can cost a human life).”<sup>27</sup> What politicians and citizens need for understanding the challenges they are facing and for distinguishing between living and dying elements in their social and political legacies is not the newest scientific technique, but a well-formed “historical consciousness,” or so the twenty-seven-year old history student maintained.<sup>28</sup>

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Given that “historical consciousness,” or *historisch besef* in Dutch, was a translation of Wilhelm Dilthey’s *historisches Bewußtsein*, it was clear on what

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<sup>23</sup>. Ankersmit, “Zwartgallige overpeinzigen,” 265.

<sup>24</sup>. Frank Ankersmit, “Antwoord aan Henk van Setten,” *Groniek* 19 (1971), 33.

<sup>25</sup>. Ankersmit, “Zwartgallige overpeinzigen,” 265.

<sup>26</sup>. *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup>. *Ibid.*, 262.

<sup>28</sup>. Ankersmit had studied physics and mathematics at Leiden and Groningen before entering Groningen’s history and philosophy programs. This may help explain the sharpness of his polemics against “scientism” as well as his insistence that the “two cultures” are essentially different.

sources Ankersmit drew in dissociating himself from “scientific history.” He was inspired by nineteenth-century historicism or, more precisely, by the German tradition of thought that Friedrich Meinecke, following Dilthey, had codified as *Historismus*. As is well known, Meinecke had defined historicism in terms of “development” and “individuality.”<sup>29</sup> With the former term denoting an organicist view of growth such as found in Leopold von Ranke, the latter term referred to the “distinctiveness” or “uniqueness” of historical periods, such as expressed in Ranke’s dictum that “every epoch is immediate to God.” In Meinecke’s reading, Ranke had been convinced that this “uniqueness” of every period, era, or epoch could be captured in a single “idea.”<sup>30</sup> Precisely this was what Ankersmit, in a 1980 lecture for the Netherlands Historical Society in Utrecht, presented as a crucial insight for his own *Narrative Logic*. He even framed his dissertation project as an attempt at retrieving historicism in Meinecke’s sense.<sup>31</sup> Given that this is not how *Narrative Logic* is typically read,<sup>32</sup> it is worth examining why Ankersmit presented himself as a neohistoricist.

Of course, when Ankersmit embraced a Meineckean *Ideenlehre*, he did so with one major difference. Instead of assigning historians the task of *identifying* characteristic ideas in historical reality, he believed that historians have to *construe* those ideas. For reasons too familiar to be repeated here, he argued that judgments about the characteristic features of the past are expressed through colligatory concepts such as “Renaissance” and “Industrial Revolution,” which are products of the historian’s imagination and serve the purpose of organizing rather than generating knowledge of the past.<sup>33</sup> This antirealist turn had major

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<sup>29</sup> Friedrich Meinecke, *Die Entstehung des Historismus* (1936), ed. Carl Hinrichs (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1959), 5. In 2013, Ankersmit’s last PhD student, Reinbert Krol, devoted his doctoral dissertation to Meinecke’s understanding of historicism.

<sup>30</sup> F. R. Ankersmit, “Een moderne verdediging van het historisme: geschiedenis en identiteit,” *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 96, no. 3 (1981), 468. On the historiographical question to what extent Ranke had actually subscribed to what Meinecke, following Johann Goldfriedrich, identified as a historicist *Ideenlehre*, see Günter Johannes Henz, *Leopold von Ranke in Geschichtsdenken und Forschung*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2014), 409-412.

<sup>31</sup> Ankersmit, “Moderne verdediging,” 458. In *Meaning, Truth, and Reference in Historical Representation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012)—a book that can plausibly be read as a restatement of *Narrative Logic*—Ankersmit similarly described his aim as “an attempt to translate the historicist theory of historical representation into a more contemporary philosophical idiom” (ix).

<sup>32</sup> Despite the fact that *Narrative Logic* emphasized its “close affinity with historicism as advocated by writers such as Ranke, Meinecke or Huizinga” (3) and even presented itself as “a plea for a historicist philosophy of history” (249). It should be noted that Ankersmit used “historism” here as an equivalent to *Historismus* in order to avoid confusion with “historicism” of the sort Karl Popper had famously attacked.

<sup>33</sup> Ankersmit, *Narrative Logic*, 79-95.



implications for what historicism could be understood to mean. In Ankersmit's hands, historical "ideas" or "forms" (the neo-Kantian term that Ankersmit borrowed from Johan Huizinga) transformed into "points of view" or "metaphors." Goethe's *individuum est ineffabile*, which had served as an epigraph to Meinecke's book, became a statement about the unique features of historical representations ("points of view are one and indivisible and there is no point of view common to all historical points of view").<sup>34</sup> And the often-heard critique that historicism in its early twentieth-century incarnation had been "quietist," with disastrous political consequences, all of a sudden lost its target: "As soon as we realize that the logic and coherence of a historical study do not mirror a logic and coherence in the past itself, but are only the result of the historian's attempt at writing a good and maximally consistent story, then we also have to realize that no political assignments can be inferred from historical knowledge."<sup>35</sup>

Why then did Ankersmit, despite these significant differences between Meinecke's *Historismus* and his own philosophy of history, choose to inscribe himself in a historicist tradition? Three reasons can be singled out. First, historicism provided an alternative to "scientific history," not only for Ankersmit, but also for other critics of social-scientific history. For instance, in the Dutch context, Hermann von der Dunk at Utrecht University also heavily drew on historicist resources.<sup>36</sup> Because Ankersmit basically shared this strategy, he sought to make historicism as philosophically up to date as possible. Second, as Marek Tamm has recently pointed out, the undisputed hero of *Narrative Logic* was Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, whose monads resembled Ankersmit's narrative substances in offering irreducible interpretive perspectives on the world.<sup>37</sup> Since Meinecke and Ernst Cassirer, Leibniz had been interpreted as a precursor of nineteenth-century historicism, just as the historicist tradition in turn had been read as an "unfolding" of the monadological "idea."<sup>38</sup> Against this background, it made sense for a modern monadologist to identify with Leibniz's nineteenth-century heirs.

Most important, however, was that Ankersmit had been trained in an academic milieu imbued with historicist sensitivities. His most influential teacher had

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<sup>34</sup>. Ankersmit, "Moderne verdediging," 468.

<sup>35</sup>. *Ibid.*, 467. In the Dutch context, this could be read as a response to M. C. Brands, *Historisme als ideologie: het "onpolitieke" en "anti-normatieve" element in de Duitse geschiedwetenschap* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1965).

<sup>36</sup>. Herman Paul, *Het moeras van de geschiedenis: Nederlandse debatten over historisme* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2012), 232-233.

<sup>37</sup>. Frank Ankersmit and Marek Tamm, "Leibnizian Philosophy of History: A Conversation," *Rethinking History* 20, no. 4 (2016), 491-511.

<sup>38</sup>. Meinecke, *Entstehung des Historismus*, 27-45; Ernst Cassirer, *Die Philosophie der Aufklärung* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1932), 306.

been Ernst Heinrich Kossmann, an aristocratically minded historian with German family roots who had taught at University College London before moving to Groningen in 1966.<sup>39</sup> Pairing classic erudition to dignified irony in teaching and writing, Kossmann embodied a professorial persona that Ankersmit, himself from patrician descent, greatly admired.<sup>40</sup> Notably, it was Kossmann who introduced Ankersmit to the historicist tradition and, as we shall see in a moment, stimulated his pupil in other crucial respects, too.<sup>41</sup> The student, in turn, as early as 1977 described his teacher's two-volume history of the Netherlands and Belgium as a brilliant specimen of "what one sometimes calls 'colligation'" as well as an exceptionally good example of how historians can convey a sense of freedom and contingency to their readers.<sup>42</sup> "When I was reflecting on the problems discussed in this study," wrote Ankersmit in *Narrative Logic*, "it was his way of writing history—intelligent, panoramic and penetrating—that I constantly had in mind."<sup>43</sup> For Ankersmit, Kossmann would continue to embody the historical profession at its best.<sup>44</sup>

HAYDEN WHITE

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<sup>39</sup> M. E. H. N. Mout, "Een eenvoudig historicus," *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 93 (1987), 532-536; Klaas van Berkel, "E. H. Kossmann als redacteur van de Bijdragen en Mededelingen," *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 119, no. 1 (2004), 1-9; H. L. Wesseling, "Levensbericht van Ernst Heinrich Kossmann," *Jaarboek van de Maatschappij der Nederlandse Letterkunde te Leiden 2003-2004* (Leiden: Maatschappij der Nederlandse Letterkunde, 2005), 106-125; Wessel Krul, "Een traditie van geleerdheid," in E. H. Kossmann, *Geschiedenis is als een olifant: een keuze uit het werk van E. H. Kossmann*, ed. Frank Ankersmit and Wessel Krul (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2005), 7-17.

<sup>40</sup> Consider the following recollection from 2007: "I admired [Kossmann] a great deal, we could get on very well with each other, though intellectually rather than personally, I should add. He had an unusually strong and fascinating personality—I never met anyone even remotely coming close to what he was like. Just to give you an idea: he was all that one might associate with François Guizot, very much aloof, very intelligent, both impossible to get close to and yet very much accessible and blessed with the rhetorical powers of a Pericles. If he had decided for a political career, the recent history of my country would have [been] completely different from what it is now." Marcin Moskalewicz, "Sublime Experience and Politics: Interview with Professor Frank Ankersmit," *Rethinking History* 11, no. 2 (2007), 263.

<sup>41</sup> For Kossmann's understanding of historicism, see "Friedrich Meinecke (1862–1954)," in *Historici van de twintigste eeuw*, ed. A. H. Huussen, Jr., E. H. Kossmann, and H. Renner (Utrecht: Het Spectrum, 1981), 11-25, and *Thorbecke en het historisme* (Amsterdam: Noord-Hollandsche Uitgevers Maatschappij, 1982). Interestingly, in the second of these essays, Kossmann used Ankersmit's "narrative substances" as a technical term for what Johan Rudolf Thorbecke, a nineteenth-century Dutch historicist, had understood an "epoch" to mean (54-55).

<sup>42</sup> F. R. Ankersmit, "E. H. Kossmann, De Lage Landen, 1870-1940," *Groniek* 51 (1977), 9.

<sup>43</sup> Ankersmit, *Narrative Logic*, 5.

<sup>44</sup> F. R. Ankersmit, "Ernst Kossmann: 31 januari 1922–8 november 2003," in *Levensberichten en herdenkingen 2005* (Amsterdam: Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, 2005), 66-76.

If this historicist orientation helps elucidate the intellectual background of *Narrative Logic*, our follow-up argument is that historicist influences such as exerted by Kossmann can also be detected in other parts of Ankersmit's oeuvre, most notably in the musings on historical experience and in his views on political representation. However, before turning to these later elements, we would like to comment briefly on the conventional view that *Narrative Logic* was indebted, or even a response, to White's *Metahistory*.

Ankersmit's earliest reference to *Metahistory* dates from 1976 and emerged in the context of an essay exploring the morphological similarities between historical novels and works of historical scholarship. Ankersmit's line of reasoning in this essay is strongly reminiscent of *Metahistory*: historians and novelists both write stories, all stories are necessarily selective, and those selections are governed by criteria that are primarily stylistic ones.<sup>45</sup> More critical commentary followed in 1978, when Ankersmit tried to understand how tropological categories could possibly structure historical discourse, as White maintained. This turned out to be difficult, given what Ankersmit (with a bluntness of which he would certainly disapprove today) called "the slovenly manner in which White exposes his ideas. His line of reasoning is often very incoherent and continuously he blurts out crass statements without even trying to justify them. Consequently, next to some brilliant insights, White's book contains much nonsense."<sup>46</sup>

What fascinated Ankersmit in *Metahistory* was the suggestion that metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony can serve as forms of intuition or categories of understanding in the Kantian sense. But was this White's idea or an implication drawn from Ankersmit's own assumption that historical theorists are philosophers trying to answer epistemological questions? Given that White, in Ankersmit's assessment, presented his theory of tropes with "a nonchalance that closely approaches the limits of what is permissible," Ankersmit said he did not know for sure whether the tropes were indeed supposed to structure historical data into narrative substances.<sup>47</sup> And assuming they were, why were there only four of them? "A 'transcendental deduction,' to remain in Kantian style, is entirely absent," Ankersmit complained. "[W]ithout further explanation, the figures of speech come out of the blue."<sup>48</sup> Clearly this criticism reveals the high expectations that Ankersmit had held of White, just as his later disappointment in Richard Rorty would demonstrate how eagerly Ankersmit had

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<sup>45</sup> F. R. Ankersmit, "De historiografie en de historische roman," *Groniek* 47 (1976), 11-19.

<sup>46</sup> F. R. Ankersmit, "Het narratieve element in de geschiedschrijving," *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 91, no. 2 (1978), 202.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

wished the author of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979) to discover the importance of aesthetic experience in the wake of his deconstruction of language as an epistemological foundation.<sup>49</sup>

This frustration was one reason why White ended up playing a marginal role in *Narrative Logic* compared to, for example, Leibniz, G. W. F. Hegel, Bertrand Russell, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and Karl Popper. Another, more important reason was that Ankersmit's aim to develop a neohistoricist philosophy of history in an analytical idiom was too different from White's to benefit from *Metahistory*: the book just was not philosophical enough. These two reasons help explain why, in 1979, Ankersmit managed to write an article on the emergence of "narrativism" in Anglo-American philosophy of history in which White's name occurred only once, in passing.<sup>50</sup> For Ankersmit, "narrativism" was a philosophical position represented not primarily by White, but by Peter Munz, whose book, *The Shapes of Time* (1977), he lauded as one of the most important recent publications in philosophy of history.<sup>51</sup> Consequently, it was Munz, together with Haskell Fain, the author of *Between Philosophy and History* (1970), who was Ankersmit's main American conversation partner in the years when *Narrative Logic* took shape.<sup>52</sup>

The impact of *Metahistory* on *Narrative Logic* should therefore not be overestimated. In the light of Ankersmit's Groningen context as well as his early publications, it makes more sense to read his first book as an attempt at retrieving a German historicist tradition. This is not to say, of course, that White *could* not have provided inspiration for this project. If Ankersmit had read *Metahistory*, as it can plausibly be read, as a call for liberation from the cage of scientific rationality or as a manifest for counter-Enlightenment ideals of the sort embodied by Giambattista Vico,<sup>53</sup> his response might have been different. Also, if White, the existentialist-inspired humanist, had known that Ankersmit's narrative substances emerged at least in part out of concern over human freedom and the contingency

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<sup>49</sup> F. R. Ankersmit, *Sublime Historical Experience* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 66-67. As Michael S. Roth rightly observes, Ankersmit wrote here "in the mode of a disappointed colleague" (Michael S. Roth, "Ebb Tide," *History and Theory* 46, no. 1 [2007], 67).

<sup>50</sup> F. R. Ankersmit, "Een nieuwe synthese? Recente ontwikkelingen in de Angelsaksische geschiedfilosofie," *Theoretische Geschiedenis* 6, no. 1 (1979), 64.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>52</sup> F. R. Ankersmit, "Eloge van de cultuurgeschiedenis," *Groniek* 53/54 (1977), 4-10.

<sup>53</sup> See Herman Paul, *Hayden White: The Historical Imagination* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2011), 57-81, and "An Ironic Battle against Irony: Epistemological and Ideological Irony in Hayden White's Philosophy of History, 1955-1973," in *Tropes for the Past: Hayden White and the History/Literature Debate*, ed. Kuisma Korhonen (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 35-44. For White's relation to historicism, see Herman Paul, "Hayden White and the Crisis of Historicism," in *Re-Figuring Hayden White*, ed. Frank Ankersmit, Ewa Doma ska, and Hans Kellner (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 54-73.

of the sociopolitical order, it is possible that his review of *Narrative Logic* in *The American Historical Review* would have been more enthusiastic.<sup>54</sup> But this is counterfactual history. In reality, Ankersmit would continue to treat White as a “new neo-Kantian,” whose tropology tried to do for history what Kant’s *Anschauungsformen* and *reine Verstandesbegriffe* had done for epistemology.<sup>55</sup>

#### HUIZINGA’S HISTORICAL SENSATION

Assuming that our interpretation of Ankersmit’s retrieval of historicism makes sense, then the follow-up question is to what extent this motive of retrieval can also shed some light on the most contested element of Ankersmit’s oeuvre: his philosophy of (sublime) historical experience, such as presented programmatically in his 1993 inaugural address. Right from the beginning, critics have been bewildered and annoyed by what seemed an outright rejection of the “representational” philosophy of *Narrative Logic*.<sup>56</sup> Outside the Netherlands, this criticism emerged in particular after *Sublime Historical Experience* (2005), the much-delayed, book-length elaboration of the Groningen inaugural. In *History and Theory*, Michael Roth wondered how the once “mighty contributor to post-modern history and theory” could have become so naïve as to believe in the possibility of experience unmediated by language.<sup>57</sup> Peter Icke even goes so far as to contrast the “good Ankersmit” of *Narrative Logic* to the not so good Ankersmit of *Sublime Historical Experience*, who, despite his earlier commitment to the linguistic turn, “steered himself into an ‘experiential’ cul-de-sac.”<sup>58</sup> Could Ankersmit’s neohistoricism help explain this counterintuitive move?

Ankersmit himself has framed his philosophy of historical experience as a response to the then-popular genre of micro-stories. For Ankersmit, studies like Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie’s *Montaillou* (1975) and Carlo Ginzburg’s *Il formaggio e i vermi* (1976) seemed “at odds with all that I had been saying about the nature and purpose of historical writing,” given that they zoomed in on details of everyday life instead of engaging in configurational comprehension. “I

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<sup>54</sup>. Hayden White, review of *Narrative Logic* by F. R. Ankersmit, *The American Historical Review* 89, no. 4 (1984), 1037-1038.

<sup>55</sup>. Frank Ankersmit, “White’s ‘New Neo-Kantianism,’” in Ankersmit, Doma ska, and Kellner, eds., *Re-Figuring Hayden White*, 36-37.

<sup>56</sup>. Lodi Nauta, “Een postmodern levensgevoel: Ankersmit over de historische ervaring,” *Theoretische Geschiedenis* 20, no. 3 (1993), 283-290. See also the subsequent exchange: F. R. Ankersmit, “Antwoord aan Nauta,” *Theoretische Geschiedenis* 20, no. 4 (1993), 523-533; Lodi Nauta, “Weerwoord op Ankersmit,” *Theoretische Geschiedenis* 20, no. 4 (1993), 534-537.

<sup>57</sup>. Roth, “Ebb Tide,” 66, 68.

<sup>58</sup>. Icke, *Ankersmit’s Lost Historical Cause*, 8, 104. See also Harold Mah’s devastating critique in “The Predicament of Experience,” *Modern Intellectual History* 5, no. 1 (2008), 97-119.

retained from it,” says Ankersmit, “a fascination for the issue of experience versus language.”<sup>59</sup> In this reading, Ankersmit’s inaugural of 1993 was a natural follow-up to a notorious paper delivered in Utrecht in 1986, in which Ankersmit had claimed that a postmodern autumn wind had begun to blow through Western historical studies, causing the leaves to fall off the tree. “What remains now for Western historiography is to gather the leaves that have been blown away and to study them independently of their origins.”<sup>60</sup> That is to say that, for Ankersmit, a desire to grasp as concretely as possible how life in the past had felt was going to replace the historian’s traditional task of showing patterns across time and space. And if that was the case, *Narrative Logic* had to be supplemented, if not with an *Experiential Logic*, then at least with a philosophical account of whether and how the past can be experienced in its vivid concreteness.<sup>61</sup>

Arguably, however, this is not the whole story: other factors also contributed to Ankersmit’s interest in historical experience.<sup>62</sup> Also, by contrasting “representation” and “experience,” Ankersmit’s autobiographical account obscures the parallels or analogies that existed between his neohistoricism and his philosophy of historical experience. Perhaps the most important of these analogies is that both were attempts at reformulating an early twentieth-century idea in late twentieth-century categories. Whereas *Narrative Logic* sought to revive Meinecke-style historicism, *De historische ervaring* (1993) aimed at a retrieval of what Johan Huizinga in 1920 had called the “historical sensation.” This phrase referred to an experience of “direct contact with the past,” typically evoked by relatively trivial relics such as a drawing or a notarial charter. In all their simplicity, such relics are capable of bringing about an *effet de réel*: they seem to reveal the “the essence of things,” or disclose what the past really looked like.<sup>63</sup>

Ankersmit’s interest in Huizinga’s *fin de siècle* sensitivism emerged in a con-

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<sup>59</sup> Frank R. Ankersmit, “Invitation to Historians,” *Rethinking History* 7, no. 3 (2003), 427, 428.

<sup>60</sup> Ankersmit, “Historiography and Postmodernism,” 150. This essay originally appeared in Dutch as “Tegen de verwetenschappelijking van de geschiedbeoefening,” in *Balans en perspectief: visies op de geschiedwetenschap in Nederland*, ed. F. van Besouw *et al.* (Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff/Forsten, 1987), 55-72. Tollebeek describes the impact of the Utrecht lecture in “De ekster en de kooi,” 59-60.

<sup>61</sup> See Ankersmit’s retrospective in Frank Ankersmit and Jonathan Menezes, “Historical Experience Interrogated: A Conversation,” *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 11, no. 2 (2017), 247-273.

<sup>62</sup> Not the least important of these was a personal one. *Sublime Historical Experience* abounds with autobiographical stories about the boredom Ankersmit experienced as a child (286), his love of rococo decoration (297), and the transference of personal feelings of loss to the trauma of the French Revolution (442). Ankersmit, in other words, not only theorized “historical sensation”; he knew it first-hand.

<sup>63</sup> J. Huizinga, “Het historisch museum,” *De Gids* 84, no. 1 (1920), 251-262. For an excellent discussion, see W. E. Krul, “Huizinga’s definitie van de geschiedenis,” in Johan Huizinga, *De taak der cultuurgeschiedenis*, ed. W. E. Krul (Groningen: Historische Uitgeverij, 1995), esp. 270-276.

text where Huizinga's name was on virtually everyone's lips. In 1972, Kossmann had organized a five-day Huizinga conference in Groningen,<sup>64</sup> which has been interpreted retrospectively as the start of a "Huizinga revival" that lasted throughout the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>65</sup> Indicative for this revival were no fewer than four PhD dissertations devoted to Huizinga, the first of which was written under Kossmann's supervision, and the publication of a three-volume edition of Huizinga's correspondence.<sup>66</sup> Although this revival was driven by various motives, most of the scholars engaged in it paired clear anti-social-scientific attitudes to slightly nostalgic appreciations for literary style, high culture, and Humboldtian *Bildung*. This was especially evident in a book-length essay (1992) by two young Belgian historians, Jo Tollebeek and Tom Verschaffel, who made a passionate plea for "historical sensation" as the pulsating heart of historical studies. They argued that the foreignness of the past in which historians claim to be interested is nowhere as tangible as in relics from the past—letters, pieces of furniture, works of art—which confront present-day observers with a world different from theirs. The enchantment emanating from such relics elicits a desire for knowledge, which in turn is the best possible stimulus for historical inquiry. Huizinga's "historical sensation," then, is not incompatible with scholarly research, but the driving force behind it.<sup>67</sup> Among Dutch historians in the early 1990s, this argument received enough attention for a skeptical reviewer to bemoan that "a ghost roams through Dutch historical studies: the ghost of the historical sensation."<sup>68</sup>

Meanwhile, Ankersmit had been studying Ernst Gombrich's "Meditations on a Hobby Horse" (1951) and Danto's *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (1983)—two texts to which he had turned in an attempt at extending his concept of historical representation to the political sphere (on which more below). The notions of aesthetic representation developed in these seminal studies made such

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<sup>64</sup>. E. H. Kossmann, *Familiearchief: notities over voorouders, tijdgenoten en mijzelf* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 1998), 177-181.

<sup>65</sup>. Van Berkel, "E. H. Kossmann," 8; Christopher Strupp, *Johan Huizinga: Geschichtswissenschaft als Kulturgeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 12, 15.

<sup>66</sup>. W. E. Krul, *Historicus tegen de tijd: opstellen over leven en werk van J. Huizinga* (Groningen: Historische Uitgeverij, 1990); Mark Kuiper, *De vaas van Huizinga: over geschiedenis, verhaal en de betekenis van de dingen die voorbij gingen* (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 1993); Léon Hanssen, *Huizinga en de troost van de geschiedenis: verbeelding en rede* (Amsterdam: Balans, 1996); Anton van der Lem, *Het eeuwige verbeeld in een afgehaald bed: Huizinga en de Nederlandse beschaving* (Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek, 1997); J. Huizinga, *Briefwisseling*, ed. Léon Hanssen, W. E. Krul, and Anton van der Lem, 3 vols. (Utrecht: Veen, 1989-1991).

<sup>67</sup>. Jo Tollebeek and Tom Verschaffel, *De vreugden van Houssaye: apologie van de historische interesse* (Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek, 1992).

<sup>68</sup>. Barbara Henkes, "De a-historische sensatie van Tollebeek en Verschaffel," *Leidschrift* 9, no. 3 (1993), 137.

a deep impression on Ankersmit that he drew on them in virtually all of his work of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Gombrich and Danto not only rejected mimetic theories of representation, as Ankersmit had done in *Narrative Logic*, but also, each in his own way, proposed a substitution theory according to which, in Danto's words, the value of art is "logically tied up with putting reality at a distance."<sup>69</sup> In this line of reasoning, resemblance between art and reality is not what matters, but a difference that enables one to look with fresh eyes at the world, or even to see the world at all.<sup>70</sup> When, from the late 1980s onwards, Ankersmit characterized his philosophy as "aesthetic," he often did this specifically to emphasize that representations are like works of art, the value of which lies primarily in their difference from reality.<sup>71</sup> This implied, among other things, that historical representations cannot be expected to rely on self-images circulating at the time. If their function is to "transfigure the commonplace," as Danto put it, then it makes more sense for them to draw attention to "what a period has *not* said about itself" or to tiny, "commonplace" details that, from a hindsight point of view, turn out to embody defining features of the past under discussion.<sup>72</sup> And precisely that is what Huizinga seemed to hint at with his historical sensation.

Against this twofold background, then, Ankersmit's inaugural address can be read as a response to the Dutch Huizinga revival, as an attempt to explain how historians identify what is peculiar about the past in comparison to the present, but also as an exploration of a hitherto neglected aspect of what Huizinga in his own inaugural, back in 1905, had called "the aesthetic element in historical thought."<sup>73</sup> In other words, while reading Huizinga in the context of studying Gombrich, Danto, and Nelson Goodman, Ankersmit recognized that the aesthetics of history also includes a dimension of what Huizinga had called "sensation"—something close to the heart of the antique collector, admirer of rococo, and devotee of eighteenth-century music that was, and is, Ankersmit.<sup>74</sup> Defining

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<sup>69</sup>. Arthur C. Danto, "Artworks and Real Things," *Theoria* 39, no. 1-3 (1973), 2.

<sup>70</sup>. F. R. Ankersmit, "Historical Representation," *History and Theory* 27, no. 3 (1988), 219.

<sup>71</sup>. For example, F. R. Ankersmit, *De macht van representatie* (Kampen: Kok Agora, 1996), 10-11; *Macht door representatie* (Kampen: Kok Agora, 1997), 14-18, 148-151, 154-157.

<sup>72</sup>. Ankersmit, "Historiography and Postmodernism," 146.

<sup>73</sup>. J. Huizinga, *Het aesthetische bestanddeel van geschiedkundige voorstellingen* (Haarlem: H. D. Tjeenk Willink, 1905).

<sup>74</sup>. Ankersmit, *Macht van representatie*, 10, 173-175, 243-243. Few journalists who have interviewed Ankersmit at home have been able to resist the temptation of describing his richly furnished study in terms of the trope of a "different world" (as employed by Machiavelli in his famous 1513 letter to Francesco Vettori). "A visitor to Ankersmit's home enters a different world. The color of the interior hovers between golden yellow and wine red. The furnishing reminds one of a salon in Enlightenment Paris, where Voltaire, Diderot, and Rousseau met each other. Their absence is compensated by an immense number of books. Politicians, historians, theologians, sages, thinkers, and



and defending this “historical sensation” in modern philosophical terms became Ankersmit’s main project in the years between 1993 and 2005.<sup>75</sup>

Our point here is not that Huizinga’s historical sensation was as typically historicist as the “historical ideas” that *Narrative Logic* sought to revive. Consequently, Ankersmit’s sublime historical experience did not have as distinctly a neohistoricist profile as narrative substances or historical representations. Strikingly similar, however, was the mode of retrieval: Ankersmit’s attempt to translate and modify an early twentieth-century idea into late twentieth-century categories. When he brought an “updated” version of Huizinga’s historical sensation into critical conversation with “transcendentalism, textualism, lingualism, semiotics, *Wirkungsgeschichte*, and narrativism,” his hermeneutic strategy was identical to the one we encountered in *Narrative Logic*.<sup>76</sup>

#### POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

Meanwhile, Ankersmit had taken his first steps into the field of political theory, thereby fulfilling a long-cherished hope of Kossmann. As Ankersmit explained in a 2007 interview, his former teacher had “very much wanted me to continue his interests and to start doing political theory as well. So he was deeply disappointed by my choice for philosophy of history.”<sup>77</sup> Yet, as early as 1974, Anker-

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thinkers over thinkers from the past ten centuries have gathered here in great numbers. At night, they enter into debate with each other; at daytime with their owner.” Luc Panhuysen, “Het verleden laat zich niet kennen”: Frank Ankersmit ziet in mensen die alles dreigen te verliezen de beste historici,” *NRC Handelsblad* (October 8, 2005).

<sup>75</sup>. Although this project has sometimes been interpreted as “a radical departure from his previous language-governed, representationalist style of historical theory of the kind defended in *Narrative Logic*” (Icke, *Ankersmit’s Lost Historical Cause*, 67), Ankersmit himself emphasized, and would continue to emphasize, that representation and experience are different things. Just as he perceived his theory of representation as “a *supplement* to what was said in the 1950s and 1960s about the truth of statements about the past or about causal explanation and not a *replacement* of it,” so he intended his exploration of the question “What makes us aware of the past at all?” to augment rather than replace his views on representation. In his own words: “I most emphatically insist that this is a book about sublime historical experience—and *not about anything else* (such as historical explanation, causality, narrative, or representation). This book is therefore not to be interpreted as a recantation of what I have said about such other topics in my previous writings.” Ankersmit, *Sublime Historical Experience*, xiv, 14.

<sup>76</sup>. F. R. Ankersmit, *De historische ervaring* (Groningen: Historische Uitgeverij, 1993), 25. Note also that the idiom changed from “sensation” to “sublime” and “trauma”—categories that by the 1990s were receiving increasing amounts of attention and therefore better served Ankersmit’s purpose. See F. R. Ankersmit, “Trauma als bron van historisch besef,” *Feit en Fictie* 4, no. 3 (1999), 7-17; Ankersmit, *Macht van representatie*, 234-243.

<sup>77</sup>. Moskalewicz, “Sublime Experience,” 263.

smit had been teaching a course on political theory.<sup>78</sup> In 1981, no fewer than five of the thirteen “propositions” added to his PhD dissertation had addressed political issues. It would take until 1987, though, before Ankersmit wrote his first paper on political representation, on the not altogether surprising occasion of a conference marking Kossmann’s retirement. Drawing, once again, on Gombrich, Goodman, and Danto, Ankersmit argued that there is an analogy between political representation and historical representation that can best be understood in aesthetic terms—that is, in terms of Gombrich’s and Danto’s substitution theory of art.<sup>79</sup> Political representation, too, requires differences instead of similarity between represented and representation. Parliamentarians and their electorate are separated by what Ankersmit could later call an “aesthetic gap,” which guarantees the politician’s freedom to make electorally unfavorable judgments and decisions.<sup>80</sup> Just as historical representations cannot be reduced to historical statements, so political judgment, in Ankersmit’s analysis, is more than the sum of electoral preferences. Ankersmit’s paper thus defended the politician’s free mandate over against a view “that would reduce the representative to a mailbox” for voters to submit their petitions.<sup>81</sup>

Interestingly, Ankersmit perceived such “mailbox” theories of political representation as widespread, if not among political philosophers, then at least in political reality: “It is particularly difficult for us to say goodbye to such mimetic conceptions.”<sup>82</sup> For Ankersmit, this was caused by the near-ineradicable expectation that voters and parliamentarians have something in common—an ideology, a tradition, or a distinctive belief in austerity—that enables them to agree on problem definitions and solution strategies. In Gombrich’s and Rorty’s technical language, such shared horizons serve as *tertia comparationis*, or as orders shared by represented and representatives alike. Historically speaking, virtually all political philosophy, from neo-Stoic natural law to modern free-market capitalism, had operated on the assumption of such *tertia*. This made aesthetic representation *in politicis* a rather revolutionary idea. If mimetic theories of representation make way for substitution theories, the implication is that all “sharedness” between politicians and electorate is redundant or even counterproductive.<sup>83</sup> Ankersmit

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<sup>78</sup>. “Overzicht themagroepen 1974/1975,” *Groniek* 33 (1974), 430-431.

<sup>79</sup>. F. R. Ankersmit, “Politieke representatie: betoog over de esthetische staat,” *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 102, no. 3 (1987), 371-376.

<sup>80</sup>. F. R. Ankersmit, *Aesthetic Politics: Political Philosophy beyond Fact and Value* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 18.

<sup>81</sup>. Ankersmit, “Politieke representatie,” 370.

<sup>82</sup>. *Ibid.*, 367.

<sup>83</sup>. Although in later writings, Ankersmit would allow more space for ideologies, which by then he would define in terms of *ad hoc*, metaphorical, nonmetaphysical “points of view,” this would not detract from his rejection of *a priori* ideologies. See Ankersmit, *Aesthetic Politics*, 357, and “De

thus put all his cards on the politicians' powers of judgment. Within the period of their mandate, politicians are as free in exercising these powers as historians are in developing new colligatory concepts.<sup>84</sup>

Although the 1987 lecture abounded with examples from early modern neo-Stoic natural-law philosophy—one of Kossmann's fields of expertise—Ankersmit did not hide that his real target was the evil known as “bureaucracy.” Ever-expanding government apparatuses producing ever more detailed codes and regulations are a true sign that the state is being absorbed by society. In such bureaucratic contexts, “every wrinkle at the surface of society” is supposed to have political implications, with the effect of political decision-making becoming truly mimetic.<sup>85</sup> Ankersmit's remedy, presented in a quasi-Freudian one-liner, reads like a summary of his political philosophy: “Where bureaucracy is, representation must come.”<sup>86</sup> Or more abstractly: Where *tertia comparationis* reign supreme, aesthetic reorientation is needed. For Ankersmit, liberation must indeed come from aesthetics, given that only aesthetics is able to resist the temptation of invoking timeless truths or universal schemes (a temptation to which Ankersmit, drawing on his old antipathy, believed social scientists especially susceptible). Aesthetics is the art of finding unique solutions to unique problems.<sup>87</sup>

A good politician, then, does not rely on social-scientific expertise or on ethical or metaphysical doctrines. In the Dutch context, this meant that Ankersmit dissociated himself simultaneously from a “pillarized” (*verzuild*) political system dominated by confessional parties as well as from “social and cultural planning” of the kind practiced widely since the Second World War.<sup>88</sup> A good politician instead is an independent thinker, able to surprise his or her voters with unexpected analyses and original viewpoints. A politician is like an artist, then, who does not need ethical arguments or epistemic expertise to make people perceive their world differently. Ankersmit thus transposed Danto's notion of artistic style into the political realm.<sup>89</sup> Aesthetic politics is a politics of style, “be-

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hedendaagse politieke partij: van representatie van de kiezer naar zelfrepresentatie,” in *DNPP Jaarboek 2001* (Groningen: Documentatiecentrum Nederlandse Politieke Partijen, 2001), 15-17.

<sup>84</sup>. F. R. Ankersmit, *De spiegel van het verleden* (Kampen: Kok Agora, 1996), 270-271. Characteristically, Ankersmit seldom felt a need to elaborate on the limits of this freedom.

<sup>85</sup>. Ankersmit, “Politieke representatie,” 377.

<sup>86</sup>. *Ibid.*, 378.

<sup>87</sup>. *Ibid.*; Ankersmit, *Aesthetic Politics*, 76.

<sup>88</sup>. On the latter, see Jan Willem Duyvendak, *De planning van ontplooiing: wetenschap, politiek en de maakbare samenleving* (The Hague: Sdu, 1999).

<sup>89</sup>. Ankersmit, “Politieke representatie,” 374.

yond fact and value.”<sup>90</sup>

What this implied for political practice became apparent in 2001, when the right-wing dandy Pim Fortuyn appeared on the Dutch political stage, not only with viewpoints that were widely perceived as politically incorrect, but also with a style of self-presentation that made the entire intellectual establishment in the Netherlands grumble about “populism.”<sup>91</sup> Ankersmit, however, though not approving Fortuyn’s ideas, praised the newcomer for his radiant style and dismissive attitude toward political correctness. Moreover, invoking one of his favorite themes, he believed Fortuyn to be able to reclaim some of the space that parliament had lost to bureaucrats, judging, for example, by his sovereign indifference to “scientific” reports of the sort issued by the Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis (CPB).<sup>92</sup> Instead of seeking truth, Fortuyn, in Ankersmit’s optimistic assessment, tried to practice aesthetic politics. He did not rely on neo-Stoic *tertia*, but promised to become a truly Machiavellian conflict negotiator.<sup>93</sup> (Yet, whereas Machiavelli, back in 1527, had died peacefully in bed, Fortuyn was assassinated just days before the parliamentary elections in 2002—a political murder that did not fail to leave a deep imprint on Dutch political culture.)<sup>94</sup>

#### THE MACHIAVELLIAN TRADITION

Invoking Machiavelli is unavoidable in addressing the question to what extent Ankersmit’s political philosophy, just like his philosophy of history, can be said to draw on historicist sources. Although Kossmann’s influence on Ankersmit’s political theory is not difficult to detect, it is perhaps less evident that the latter is also permeated with historicist affinities. Yet, in his 1987 lecture as well as on many later occasions, Ankersmit consistently emphasized the intellectual affini-

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<sup>90</sup>. Ankersmit, *Aesthetic Politics*, 157-158; Ankersmit, *Political Representation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 147-159.

<sup>91</sup>. Jasper Camiel Muis, “Pim Fortuyn: The Evolution of a Media Phenomenon,” PhD thesis, Free University Amsterdam, 2012.

<sup>92</sup>. Already in the late 1990s, Ankersmit had lamented that Dutch politics had become a “governmental Augean stable,” due mainly to politicians who did not see any harm in outsourcing political discernment and judgment to bureaucrats and scientific experts. “Our problem is . . . a chaotic, autistic, bungling, brainless, and headstrong state—a state that knows too much about little and too little about much to be capable of meaningful political action.” F. R. Ankersmit, “Geef koningin meer invloed,” *NRC Handelsblad* (November 11, 1997). See also Hans Goslinga and Marcel ten Hooven, “Ankersmit: kloof tussen kiezers en politici moet juist groter,” *Trouw* (April 3, 1996).

<sup>93</sup>. F. R. Ankersmit, “Fortuyn product van verveling: de balans van Paars,” *NRC Handelsblad* (March 29, 2002); “Nooit meer politieke correctheid,” *Trouw* (May 11, 2002).

<sup>94</sup>. In theory, aesthetic politics in Ankersmit’s definition has no specific inclination toward extreme positions on the right–left spectrum. To the contrary: Ankersmit admires *juste milieu* politics of the sort classically embodied by François Guizot for its willingness to compromise. In practice, however, his support has usually gone to conservative candidates.

ties between aesthetic political representation and Meinecke-style historicism.<sup>95</sup> For him, the most recognizable link between the two was provided by Machiavelli, who in Ankersmit's reading had rejected all *tertia* (Christian ethics in particular) in favor of *ad hoc* political judgment as the only effective guide in an arena characterized by perennial disagreement. Instead of assuming that princes and their subjects have common interests or share a set of moral or religious principles, Machiavelli had emphasized the need for rulers to make up their own minds and judge for themselves what sort of interventions are advantageous in current circumstances. Situating his work in "the Machiavellian tradition," as Ankersmit did in 1987, was therefore a way of emphasizing that political insight depends more on grasping the distinctiveness of the present moment than on applying timeless principles to ever-new cases.<sup>96</sup>

The link between historicism and Machiavellian *raison d'état* thinking became more explicit when Ankersmit in several later publications compared the Renaissance thinker to Leopold von Ranke. "Both share a rejection of the clear and transparent world of moral argument, both recognize the ever-present dimension of the unintended consequences of all human action . . ." <sup>97</sup> Or as *Political Representation* made the argument more elaborately:

The two are linked by an awareness of the specific individual nature of a state, nation, or institution. Political action as dictated by *raison d'état* required of the statesman a recognition of the historical, statistical facts under which he has to act. And the historicist's demand that the action of historical agents must be understood against the background of existing historical realities is based on a similar argument. . . . The Machiavellianist doctrine that objective historical circumstances necessitate the statesman to act in a certain way underlies both *raison d'état* thinking and historicism.<sup>98</sup>

Ankersmit even went so far as to portray Ranke as an intellectual successor to Machiavelli.<sup>99</sup> His favorite proof text, cited on various occasions, was Ranke's 1836 inaugural address, which claimed that it is "the task of history to extract from past events the nature of the state and to bring us an understanding of it; the task of politics, to carry on and develop it after recognition and understanding are sufficiently achieved."<sup>100</sup> For Ankersmit, the historicist *cum* Machiavel-

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<sup>95</sup>. Ankersmit, *Aesthetic Politics*, 15, 212, 321-322, 326, 375-376; *Macht door representatie*, 21, 38-43, 52-57, 117-118, 211; *Political Representation*, 16-17, 47-50, 222-226.

<sup>96</sup>. Ankersmit, "Politieke representatie," 379. See also Ankersmit, *Macht door representatie*, 169-177; *Political Representation*, 134; "Krabbelen op de bergwand: Machiavelli en het schandaal van de ethiek," *De Groene Amsterdammer* 137, no. 48 (2013), 36-39.

<sup>97</sup>. Ankersmit, *Aesthetic Politics*, 15.

<sup>98</sup>. Ankersmit, *Political Representation*, 31-32.

<sup>99</sup>. *Ibid.*, 8, 32.

<sup>100</sup>. Leopold von Ranke, "On the Relation of and Distinction between History and Politics" (1836), in *The Theory and Practice of History*, ed. Georg G. Iggers (London: Routledge, 2011), 80,

lian political theorist, then, history and politics were closely related, not just because politicians in the absence of *tertia comparationis* have no other guide to the future than historical insight, but also because representation in both areas requires *prudentia*: the virtue of judging what is appropriate in a given context.<sup>101</sup>

All this, of course, echoed *Die Idee der Staatsräson in der neueren Geschichte* (1924), in which Meinecke had depicted Ranke as a true representative of the Machiavellian tradition, given that Ranke, some reservations and objections to the Italian thinker notwithstanding, had charged politicians as unambiguously as Machiavelli had done with the task of advancing the “egoistic” interests of the state.<sup>102</sup> In Meinecke’s spirit, though more straightforwardly than Meinecke himself had done, Ankersmit also emphasized that Machiavelli had anticipated a historicist conception of history, attributing to Machiavelli and Francesco Guicciardini nothing less than “the birth of modern historical consciousness.”<sup>103</sup> Ankersmit thus read Machiavelli through a Meineckean lens, just as he read Ranke through the prism of *Die Entstehung des Historismus* (1936).<sup>104</sup> This illustrates once again how important historicist resources were for the development of Ankersmit’s thought. Primary conversation partners for his political theory did not include contemporary theorists such as John Rawls or Jürgen Habermas. Ankersmit’s “social imaginary,” to borrow a Taylorian expression, was shaped first and foremost by a historicist tradition, the need for revival of which constitutes a *Leitmotiv* in Ankersmit’s oeuvre.

#### PUBLIC INTELLECTUAL

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as quoted in different translations in Ankersmit, *Aesthetic Politics*, 212; *Political Representation*, 32; *Macht door representatie*, 55-56; *De sublieme historische ervaring* (Groningen: Historische Uitgeverij, 2007), 351.

<sup>101</sup>. On *prudentia* as a prime virtue for what Ankersmit in deliberately old-fashioned language preferred to call the “statesman,” see Ankersmit, *Aesthetic Politics*, 14-16; *Macht door representatie*, 47-52, 107-116; *Political Representation*, 52-55.

<sup>102</sup>. Friedrich Meinecke, *Die Idee der Staatsräson in der neueren Geschichte* (1924), ed. Walther Hofer (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1957), 442-459.

<sup>103</sup>. F. R. Ankersmit, *Denken over geschiedenis: een overzicht van de moderne geschiedfilosofische opvattingen* (Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff, 1984), 294-296; *Spiegel van het verleden*, 26-58; *Sublieme historische ervaring*, 392-400. For Meinecke’s more reserved assessment, see *Entstehung des Historismus*, esp. 83. Jacques Bos elaborates on Ankersmit’s reading in “Framing a New Mode of Historical Experience: The Renaissance Historiography of Machiavelli and Guicciardini,” in *The Making of the Humanities*, ed. Rens Bod, Jaap Maat, and Thijs Weststeijn, vol. 1 (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 351-365.

<sup>104</sup>. Kossmann was a great admirer of Machiavelli, too. In portraying Machiavelli as “‘superficial’ in the proper sense of that word,” Ankersmit closely followed Kossmann’s lead. See Frank Ankersmit, “Kossmann en de politieke theorie,” in Kossmann, *Geschiedenis is als een olifant*, 19; Ankersmit, *Political Representation*, 151.

Is there a sense, finally, in which historical and political representation in Ankersmit's world not only resemble each other theoretically, but also practically come together in narrative substances that interpret the present moment in historical terms, thereby simultaneously "understanding the nature of the state" and suggesting a course for further "development" in Ranke's sense of the word? More simply put, has Ankersmit, the theorist of historical and political representation, ever felt a need to practice what he preached and tried to shed historical light on the political dilemmas of the present?

Few Dutch newspaper readers will have trouble answering this question. Since the 1990s, Ankersmit has written hundreds of op-ed pieces on current political affairs. He was an active member of the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) from 2000 and caused some commotion when he left this liberal party out of frustration over its neoliberalism and failure to provide an adequate answer to the economic crisis of 2008.<sup>105</sup> Before leaving the VVD, he had been involved in drafting its "Liberal Manifesto" (2005)—a think piece with strong antibureaucratic leanings and, not coincidentally, an epigraph borrowed from Huizinga.<sup>106</sup> Moreover, in 2006, he had been part of a government committee charged with offering suggestions for improvement of the Dutch parliamentary system—a task that seemed to offer Ankersmit a chance to translate his political theory into practice, but ended in disappointment when, for various political reasons, the committee's report ended up in a drawer.<sup>107</sup> If all this does not make Ankersmit a "political professor" of the sort known in nineteenth-century Germany<sup>108</sup>—he never assumed political responsibilities, despite candidacies for the newly founded Liberal Democratic Party in 2012 and the even newer Forum for Democracy in 2016—it does make him a "public intellectual" in Richard Posner's sense of the word: someone who "expresses himself in a way that is accessible to the public, and the focus of his expression is on matters of general public concern of (or inflected by) a political or ideological cast."<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>105</sup>. "Voor de neoliberal is het algemeen belang onzin, voor de liberaal is het juist de kern," *NRC Handelsblad* (January 3, 2009); "Ankersmit keert VVD de rug toe," *Trouw* (February 26, 2009); "Partijprominent stapt op: 'VVD is de kluts kwijt': interview met Frank Ankersmit," *De Volkskrant* (February 27, 2009).

<sup>106</sup>. Frank Ankersmit, *Om de vrijheid: liberaal manifest* (The Hague: VVD, 2005).

<sup>107</sup>. R. J. Hoekstra et al., *Hart voor de publieke zaak: aanbevelingen van de Nationale Conventie voor de 21e eeuw* (The Hague: Nationale Conventie, 2006).

<sup>108</sup>. Ulrich Muhlack, "Der 'politische Professor' im Deutschland des 19. Jahrhunderts," in *Materialität des Geistes: Zur Sache Kultur: Im Diskurs mit Ulrich Oevermann*, ed. Ronald Burkholz, Christel Gärtner, and Ferdinand Zehentleiter (Weilerswist: Velbrück, 2001), 185-204; Niklas Lenhard-Schramm, *Konstrukteure der Nation: Geschichtswissenschaftler als politische Akteure in Vormärz und Revolution 1848/49* (Munster: Waxmann, 2014), 59-77.

<sup>109</sup>. Richard A. Posner, *Public Intellectuals: A Study of Decline* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 35. This definition has not gone uncontested, though: Stefan Collini, *Absent Minds: Intellectuals in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 241.

In light of the foregoing, it will come as no surprise that Ankersmit's gravest cause of concern, judging by his op-ed interventions, was the "managerial" style generally adopted by modern politicians.<sup>110</sup> This "managerialism" did not include just bureaucracy or reliance on scientific expertise. From the late 1990s onwards, Ankersmit objected in particular to the proliferation of so-called "quangos"—quasi-autonomous non-governmental organizations to which governments seemed happy to "outsource" significant parts of their responsibilities, power, and budget. By 2004, the Dutch government alone had helped to create no fewer than 3,200 such quasi-privatized government bodies, which employed more civil servants than all ministerial departments together.<sup>111</sup> From a managerial point of view, such quangos have the advantage of being more effective than traditional government bodies, because they are not subjected to traditional parliamentary oversight. But this, wrote an indignant Ankersmit in countless op-ed pieces, is their fundamental problem as well: they defy democratic control and drastically confine traditional government authority. Especially in situations of conflict, parliament is nearly powerless against such quasi-autonomous bodies as the Cadaster, the Dutch Healthcare Authority, the Authority for Consumers and Markets, and the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers.<sup>112</sup>

Consistent with his view that historical representations interpret the past through the prism of a single metaphor ("Renaissance," "waning of the Middle Ages"),<sup>113</sup> Ankersmit sought and found an image conveying the essentials of his criticism. The metaphor, introduced as early as 1997,<sup>114</sup> was that of a "quasi-feudal archipelago of selfish managerial islands," created by a "re-feudalization of public government."<sup>115</sup> Situated in the no-man's land between state and society, quangos resemble feudal land grants in that they cut political authority into countless pieces, thereby obstructing political accountability. Thus, whereas privatization tended to be justified in terms of "modernization," Ankersmit by contrast perceived it as "a reintroduction of a government logic the shortcomings of

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<sup>110</sup>. F. R. Ankersmit, *Tegen de waarheid in de politiek* (Deventer: Deventer Universitaire Pers, 2002).

<sup>111</sup>. R. A. J. van Gestel, P. Eijlander, and J. A. F. Peters, "The Regulatory Powers of Quangos in the Netherlands: Are Trojan Horses Invading Our Democracy?" in *Netherlands Reports to the Seventeenth International Congress of Comparative Law*, ed. J. H. M. van Erp and L. P. W. van Vliet (Antwerp: Intersentia, 2006), 426.

<sup>112</sup>. Frank Ankersmit, "Privatisering bedreiging voor democratie," *NRC Handelsblad* (October 20, 2005).

<sup>113</sup>. Ankersmit, *Narrative Logic*, 209-220.

<sup>114</sup>. Ankersmit, *Macht door representatie*, 195.

<sup>115</sup>. F. R. Ankersmit, "Nieuw elan voor een vormeloze zak meel," *NRC Handelsblad* (January 4, 2003).



which were clear by 1500.”<sup>116</sup> Or as he put it in a 2005 interview: “A re-feudalization of public administration has taken place. Just as back then, in the absolute monarchy, feudal lords effectively had a decisive say, so today [political] authority has been divided over all sorts of organizations and bureaucracies. It has been transferred to Europe, to departmental apparatuses, to judicial powers, and especially to independent governing bodies.”<sup>117</sup>

Since 2005, Ankersmit has been further developing this re-feudalization thesis, most notably in a book manuscript provisionally entitled *De nieuwe Middeleeuwen* (The New Middle Ages).<sup>118</sup> Remarkable about this book is that its historical and political analyses are hard to distinguish and that its central claim—neoliberal privatization of government functions amounts to a return to feudal forms of rule—is a historical representation as much as a political one. On the one hand, this is to say that Ankersmit, more than in any of his previous books, engages in historical research so as to substantiate his analogy between medieval feudal rule and contemporary political practice. On the other hand, the political implications of this analogy are hard to miss. If democracy is worth defending, then political authority needs to be centralized once again—out of the hands of neoliberal lords into those of properly elected parliamentarians. Unsurprisingly, then, Ankersmit’s sources of inspiration in *De nieuwe Middeleeuwen* are nineteenth-century liberals, who in the wake of the French Revolution pursued a similar program by advocating and implementing strict distinctions between private and public responsibilities. Concretely, Ankersmit draws on François Guizot, Alexis de Tocqueville, and especially Johan Rudolf Thorbecke, a Dutch philosopher of history and influential prime minister who defended the distinction between public and private law cemented into the constitution of 1848 with an argument closely anticipating Ankersmit’s re-feudalization thesis: “One returns to before this principle, one returns to the medieval state, as soon as one confuses civil and political law.”<sup>119</sup>

Is it necessary to add that Thorbecke was a thoroughbred historicist, who as such has been compared to Ranke by, once again, the *éminence grise* of the Groningen department of history, Ernst Kossmann?<sup>120</sup> At this point, it may not be surprising either that Ankersmit’s book manuscript is dedicated to Kossmann,

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<sup>116</sup>. *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup>. Marcel ten Hooven, “Sterke staat, sterke burgers,” *Trouw* (February 24, 2005).

<sup>118</sup>. We would like to thank Frank Ankersmit for sharing a draft of this book with us.

<sup>119</sup>. J. R. Thorbecke, *Bijdrage tot de herziening der grondwet* (Leiden: P. H. van den Heuvel, 1848), 81, as quoted in Frank Ankersmit, “Bolkestein moet zijn ouderwetse bril afzetten,” *De Volkskrant* (March 23, 2009).

<sup>120</sup>. Kossmann, *Thorbecke en het historisme*. See also F. R. Ankersmit, “Recensieartikel over J. Drentje, Thorbecke,” *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 121, no. 1 (2006), 35-41.

“my highly esteemed mentor,” in the hope that he will “look down ‘from above’ with some satisfaction on the work of his pupil and . . . will recognize something of himself in it.”<sup>121</sup> Nineteenth-century historicism as interpreted by Kossmann is a source on which Ankersmit continues to draw, in his capacity as public intellectual and critic of neoliberal privatization.

#### CONCLUSION

Over against a “thin,” stereotypical image of Ankersmit as a White-inspired postmodernist, this article has tried to offer a thicker description of the Dutch philosopher of history by situating him firmly within his European context. We have argued that Ankersmit’s work has been shaped decisively by the Dutch historical profession—by the social-scientific moment of the 1970s that he detested as much as by the Huizinga revival to which he actively contributed—and especially by the University of Groningen, where Ankersmit stayed all of his professional life, until his retirement in 2010. We have argued that his Groningen teacher Ernst Kossmann exerted considerable influence on Ankersmit, most importantly by introducing his pupil to nineteenth-century historicism as interpreted by Meinecke. Retrieving key elements from this historicist tradition is a *Leitmotiv* in Ankersmit’s work, or so this article has argued. Nothing is more characteristic of Ankersmit’s reflections on history and politics alike than his attempt to translate a historicist *Ideenlehre* into modern analytical categories, thereby stripping it of its metaphysical dimensions and emphasizing the aesthetic nature of both historical and political representation.

This does not imply that there are no affinities between White and Ankersmit or that “postmodern” readings of Ankersmit’s work are off the mark. As said, it seems plausible that Ankersmit’s reputation as a philosopher of history depends more on his “postmodern” interventions—his constructivist account of historical narratives in particular—than on the historicist subtext laid bare in this article. Also, there have been times in which Ankersmit did not hesitate to call historicism “an anticipation of postmodernism” and postmodernism a “radicalization of historicism.”<sup>122</sup> And as long as “post” prefixes convey a sense of dissatisfaction with the substantives to which they are attached, Ankersmit can well be read as insisting on the need to move beyond “modernist” fascinations with natural or social-scientific method. An almost neo-Kantian desire to counter the hegemony

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<sup>121</sup>. Ankersmit, *De nieuwe Middeleeuwen*, 8.

<sup>122</sup>. F. R. Ankersmit, *Historical Representation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 11; *History and Tropology: The Rise and Fall of Metaphor* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 223, 238. On Ankersmit’s gradual move away from “extreme postmodernism,” see John Zammito, “Ankersmit and Historical Representation,” *History and Theory* 44, no. 2 (2005), 156.

of science in history and politics runs like a red thread through his work, from his earliest *Groniek* articles to his recent attempts at, once again, reviving Leibniz's monadology.<sup>123</sup> Yet, given the myriad of forms such projects can take, labeling them (negatively) as "postmodern" is by far not as informative as specifying (positively) the resources on which they draw and the visions that inspire them. In Ankersmit's case, at least, a contextual reading of an oeuvre permeated with unfashionable historicist sympathies and situated in a Dutch milieu unfamiliar to most of its readers arguably yields more interpretive insight than catchwords and stereotypes created mainly for polemical purposes.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Frank Ankersmit, "History as the Science of the Individual," *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 7, no. 3 (2013), 396-425; "Representationalist Logic," in *Other Logics: Alternatives to Formal Logic in the History of Thought and Contemporary Philosophy*, ed. Admir Skodo (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 103-122. These articles pick up a line of thought first articulated in *Narrative Logic*, 129-142. Ankersmit's *Journal of the Philosophy of History*, founded in 2007 out of dissatisfaction with a perceived lack of focus and philosophical rigor in the field, is committed to a similar agenda: Frank Ankersmit *et al.*, "The Philosophy of History: An Agenda," *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 1, no. 1 (2007), 1-9.

<sup>124</sup> We would like to thank Mihail Evans, Rik Peters, and especially Henk te Velde for their helpful remarks on an earlier version of this essay.