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# Postmodernism, Globalization and the Metanarratives of Global- World- Transnational and Big-History

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An enquiry into how the metanarratives of contemporary  
historiography indicate a shift of paradigm beyond  
postmodernism.

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**11 jun. 2013**

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# Introduction

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## Area of Concern

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the new historiographical metanarratives of *global- world-transnational-* and *big-history*, what these entail and how they are related to the ideas of *postmodernism* and *globalization*. This thesis will attempt to identify what distinguishes all of the terms and concepts above, and try to answer the following questions:

- What are the historiographical fields of global- world- transnational- and big-history all about?
- ...and how do these relate to the ideas and theories of postmodernism and globalization?
- My final question will revolve around whether any of the metanarratives of contemporary historiography can be seen as making a crucial break with postmodernism?
- ...and I will attempt to show that big-history is a field indicating a paradigmatic shift in historiography.

This is a contextual theoretical investigation and analysis that will examine the roots and theoretic backgrounds to postmodernism, globalization and have as its main objective to investigate and discuss the contents and theory of the trans-boundary macro-historical approaches of contemporary historiography.

## Method, Material and Theoretical Approach

The initial background chapter of this thesis will present and evaluate the concepts of postmodernism and globalization. The section on postmodernism will mostly be based on Callum G. Brown's *Postmodernism for Historians*<sup>1</sup> and Georg G. Iggers' *Geschichtswissenschaft im 20. Jahrhundert*<sup>2</sup>. The reason for selecting these two works is because of the acknowledgement on the subject they enjoy at the history department in Lund. The short section on globalization will present the definitions of this term according to some of the leading authorities on the subject: Anthony Giddens, Manfred Steger and David Held in addition to the definitions by the International Monetary Fund and the Merriam Webster dictionary. In the same chapter Ihab Hassan's theory on postmodernism will be presented, providing a theoretical backdrop to the analysis and discussion. The source material for this is the preface to the 1982 edition of *The Dismemberment of Orpheus*<sup>3</sup>. Hassan's dichotomies of modernism and postmodernism will be used in the investigation to evaluate the tendencies of the historiographical metanarratives. In addition an attempt to develop his theory one step further in accordance with the results of the investigation will be comprised in the final chapter.

The investigation will consist of assessing how the terms *global-*, *world-*, *transnational-* and *big-history* are used and defined. The term 'transnational-history' in particular will be examined by looking in to the discussion on the matter among professional historians in the *American Historical Review*<sup>4</sup>. All this will

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<sup>1</sup> Callum G. Brown, *Postmodernism for Historians* (Pearson Education Ltd. 2005).

<sup>2</sup> Georg G. Iggers, *Geschichtswissenschaft im 20. Jahrhundert: Ein kritischer Überblick im internationalen Zusammenhang* (Göttingen, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> Hassan, Ihab, *The Dismemberment of Orpheus: toward a postmodern literature* (The University of Wisconsin Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1982).

<sup>4</sup> The American Historical Review, 'On Transnational History' (Vol. 111, No. 5, December 2006), pp. 1441-1464.

show why the terms 'global-', 'world-' and 'transnational-history' will be lumped together in the following investigation. Big-history on the other hand will be examined in a separate investigation because of certain crucial differences that will be put forth.

The main part of the investigation will be conducted by analyzing relevant literature on the subject, starting with the description texts of the historiographical associations the WHA<sup>5</sup> and the ENIUGH<sup>6</sup>. The sources for this derive from their respective websites and should, due to the general acknowledgment among historians these organizations enjoy, pass as legitimate sources on defining the historiographical schools they represent. Marnie Hughes-Warrington's (ed.) *World histories*<sup>7</sup>, Peter N. Stearns' *World History*<sup>8</sup> and Patrick Manning's *Navigating World History*<sup>9</sup> will provide the source material for the majority of the investigation on global-history, while Fred Spier's *The Structure of Big History*<sup>10</sup> and David Christian's book *Maps of Time*<sup>11</sup> in addition to his article 'The Case for "Big History"'<sup>12</sup> will provide most of the material for the investigation into the matter on big-history. Spier and Christian ought to be considered legitimate authorities on the subject: Spier is writer of the first book on big-history and Christian is inventor of the term. Stearns and Manning are mentioned frequently in historiographical writings on global-history, which has been my reason to investigate their writings further. Other articles that have assisted me in the investigation are Bruce Mazlish's 'Comparing Global History to World History'<sup>13</sup> and Stefan Eklöf Amirell's 'Den världshistoriska vändningen'<sup>14</sup>. In addition this thesis will be scattered with quotes and ideas from various philosophers and historians like Jean-François Lyotard, David Hume, Immanuel Kant, Jacques Derrida and Arnold J. Toynbee.

The method in this thesis is to find the core of each concerned area; that is to find the most essential aspects and investigate what seems to be the most commonly agreed upon consistencies. In addition it will be attempted to link the results to Hassan's theory of postmodernism and to the idea of globalization in general.

The final task of this thesis will be the attempt to develop Ihab's theory one step further in order for it to fit with the trends found in big-history, a field I believe points beyond the postmodern paradigm.

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<sup>5</sup> World Historical Association: [http://www.thewha.org/world\\_history.php](http://www.thewha.org/world_history.php).

<sup>6</sup> European Network in Universal and Global History: [http://www.uni-leipzig.de/~eniugh/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=14&Itemid=33](http://www.uni-leipzig.de/~eniugh/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=14&Itemid=33).

<sup>7</sup> Hughes-Warrington, Marnie (ed.), *World Histories* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

<sup>8</sup> Stearns, Peter N., *World History: The Basics* (Routledge, 2011).

<sup>9</sup> Manning, Patrick, *Navigating World History: historians create a global past* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

<sup>10</sup> Spier, Fred, *The Structure of Big History: from the big bang until today* (Amsterdam, 1996).

<sup>11</sup> Christian, David, *Maps of Time: an introduction to big history* (California, 2005).

<sup>12</sup> Christian, David, 'The Case for "Big History"' (Journal of World History 2:2, 1991) pp. 223-238.

<sup>13</sup> Mazlish, Bruce, 'Comparing Global History to World History' (Journal of Interdisciplinary History, xviii:3, winter, 1998) p. 385-395.

<sup>14</sup> Amirell, Stefan Eklöf, 'Den världshistoriska vändningen och strävan att övervinna det nationella paradigmat: Ett svar till Rolf Torstendahl' (Historisk Tidskrift (Sweden) 129:2, 2009) p. 242-246.

# Part 1: Background and Theory: Postmodernism and Globalization

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*"Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity towards metanarratives"*<sup>15</sup>

-Jean-François Lyotard, 1979.

In addition to Ihab Hassan's theory on postmodernism, this chapter will provide the background knowledge of the terms and ideas concerning postmodernism and globalization. Postmodernism is among intellectuals often considered a defining trait of our age, a general condition of western society and thinking for the past three decades. Globalization however is a notion that with little doubt seems to define the times we are living in, and contrary postmodernism, is a concept most people have actually heard about and to some degree understand the meaning of. The starting point of this chapter will be to examine what defines postmodernism and what its impact on critical thinking has been. This leads up to the theoretical framework of the analysis and discussion by introducing the thoughts of Ihab Hassan and his dichotomies of modernity and postmodernity. Finally the concept of globalization, its relation to postmodernity and the idea of a 'global perspective', a notion of great importance to the field of global-history, will briefly be discussed. But first, an introduction to postmodernism:

## 1.1: Postmodernism – a condition of our time

Postmodernism or postmodernity refers to the general state of western society and culture after the end of the so called modern age.<sup>16</sup> In particular it is about how influential thinkers during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century criticized and sought to dissolve certain artistic and scientific institutions, methods, concepts and assumptions associated with modernity. The criticism revolved around modernity's pursuit of knowledge and progress as self-illusory and shallow, and exposed the prevalence of illegitimate totalitarian principles embedded in its hidden despotic, hierarchical structures. According to these critics the modern approach has been one-dimensional and failed its task of enlightenment and emancipation. As an alternative the options of a wide range of new equally valid perspectives have been offered along new approaches to science, art and philosophy.

The historian Patrick Manning describes the differences between modernism and postmodernism in his account of the shift in the field of cultural history: In the past the field was positivistic, that is; the approach was *"...to delineate the elements of culture, the impact of various factors on culture, or the determinants of cultural change."* The postmodern approach on the other hand focuses on relationships and discourse, not objects. Emphasizes indeterminacy, not cause and effect, and sees change as the rule rather than the exception. Where modernism seeks to locate causality, postmodernism tries to identify contingency.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir* (Paris, 1979).

<sup>16</sup> When this exactly took place remains disputed though.

<sup>17</sup> Patrick Manning – *Navigating World History* p. 235.

The discussion on what postmodernism exactly is, its contents and its place in time, has been going on since the early 80's. A common ground has been the aspiration to see postmodern thinking, not only as merely a diagnosis of the age we are living in, but most importantly as a critical movement of thought against the general assumptions of modernity and a way of showing alternative routes to knowledge.

Simply put: Postmodernism is the reaction against modernity's assumptions about the 'rational man' capable of solving all of nature's mysteries – just given enough time. It is the shift of focus from the objective exterior, to the critical deconstruction of the mistakenly 'objective' spectators subjective interior and therefore, if valid, as much of a Copernican turn as modernity once claimed to be.

### **1.1.1: What's that Postmodernism all about?**

A worthy answer to the above question has been put forth by Callum G. Brown who in his textbook *Postmodernism for Historians* published in 2005, began his 'narrative' about postmodernism with a quote from Nietzsche, a quote from a time before modernity became truly modern, that so well sums up what we are dealing with here that I intend to repeat it: *"There are no facts in themselves. It is always necessary to begin by introducing a meaning in order that there can be a fact."*<sup>18</sup> This corresponds to the two core principles of postmodernity, according to Brown, which are that: 1) *"reality is unrepresentable in human forms of culture"* and 2) *"with an inability to represent reality, no authoritative account can exist of anything."*<sup>19</sup> With 'unrepresentable' I do not believe Brown means that one literally cannot create a representation of reality, but merely that the representations one creates will never correspond with what it is portraying. Therefore no one should be given monopoly on conveying the truth about reality to others. The way I read it, the second postmodern core principle is the anti-authoritative consequences of the Kantian insight that *"über das Ding an sich können wir nichts wissen."*<sup>20</sup> – the first core principle is merely to remember and earnestly consider what Kant said about *"das Ding an sich"* in the first place!

Thus the foundation of postmodern epistemology is the key intellectual principle that the notion of 'truth' cannot be verified through empirical research. First of all, because reality is too enormous and complex to be truly representable as it is, second, because it requires subjectivity, and third, because the representation of reality is limited by human signs, which do not themselves resemble the facts being conveyed. One of the primary ethical implications of this is the rejection of moral principles deduced from empirical data. To historians this means the rejection of the claim that history should teach us morality.<sup>21</sup> Brown sees this as the rejection of one of the enlightenment's principles, but whether it is correct or not, it unmistakably resembles that of the British enlightenment philosopher David Hume, who in a famous passage, which later would be named 'Hume's law' in his honor, stated, that an 'ought' cannot be derived from an 'is'.<sup>22</sup> But postmodernists do not *only* reject founding morality on empiricism because of the significant difference between descriptive and normative statements, and the unclear connection between the two as pointed out by Hume, but more importantly because of the

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<sup>18</sup> Callum G. Brown – *Postmodernism for Historians*. p. 4.

<sup>19</sup> Callum G. Brown – *Postmodernism for Historians*. pp. 6-7.

<sup>20</sup> The 18<sup>th</sup> century German philosopher Immanuel Kant renounced the possibility of knowledge independent of the senses, claiming that the noumenal world may exist, but that it is completely unknowable to humans.

<sup>21</sup> Callum G. Brown – *Postmodernism for Historians*. p. 7 - 10.

<sup>22</sup> David Hume – *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Book III, Part I, Section I).

embedded relativism of postmodernism based on the observation that morality seems to change by era and culture, and that what we hold as facts are always open to dispute, since what they contain are only representations of past events and not reality itself.<sup>23</sup>

Postmodernism is not an ideology, but a way of understanding how humans gain knowledge from the world. How we communicate knowledge, how it is experienced by any individual who in the process constructs their identity and how it is reflected back into society. For historians it is the concern of how knowledge and identity is constructed and circulated and how it differs through the ages and locations.<sup>24</sup> No coherent postmodern school of theory exists, and no one uses all and only postmodern perspectives, theories and methods. As Brown puts it, the way scholars go about postmodern theories and methods is more like 'cherry picking' with regards to choosing the suitable approaches for their research. No one is 'being' post-modern all the time,<sup>25</sup> but all postmodern scholars are aware of certain perspectives and seem to be suspicious of the authority and hierarchy behind empiricism and view the idea of modernity and progress as self-illusory and a myth.<sup>26</sup>

### **1.1.2: The Linguistic and Cultural Turn – the path to postmodernity**

The German historian Georg G. Iggers has written an account of the historiographical development in his short textbook *Geschichtswissenschaft im 20. Jahrhundert*, from which, I here intend to briefly present the main ideas regarding the linguistic and cultural turn, and in the following section address its influence on historiography itself.

Prior to the linguistic and cultural turn in the academia it was assumed, even if a material criterion of truth was never agreed upon, that certain formal standards for the examination of nature and humans existed, anchored in the logic of scientific inquiry. This was increasingly questioned after the end of the Second World War. According to the philosophy of language, modern science has seen the language as a vehicle for the transmission of meaningful knowledge. This referential function was exactly that which structuralism was going to question in the 50's and 60's. The central idea was, simply put by Iggers, that: "Man does not use language to transmit his thoughts, but what man thinks is determined by language."<sup>27</sup> and "the text has no reference to an external reality, but is contained within itself."<sup>28</sup>

During the late 60's and early 70's the shortcomings of structuralism led to another development known as poststructuralism, mainly based on the philosophy of Jacques Derrida who in 1969 in a famous passage wrote that "there is no such thing as outside-of-the-text."<sup>29</sup> But the full consequence of exclusively concerning oneself with the text itself and not its author was taken by Michel Foucault, who undertook to eliminate the author all together as an active factor and thereby having human intentionality as a meaningful element rendered irrelevant. The text had to be liberated from its Author

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<sup>23</sup> Callum G. Brown – *Postmodernism for Historians*. pp. 144-145.

<sup>24</sup> Callum G. Brown – *Postmodernism for Historians*. p. 9.

<sup>25</sup> Callum G. Brown – *Postmodernism for Historians*. pp. 10-11.

<sup>26</sup> Callum G. Brown – *Postmodernism for Historians*. p. 30.

<sup>27</sup> Eng. translation of: *Geschichtswissenschaft im 20. Jahrhundert* – Iggers, George, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century* (Middletown, 1997) p. 120.

<sup>28</sup> Eng. translation of: *Geschichtswissenschaft im 20. Jahrhundert* – Iggers, George, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century* p. 121.

<sup>29</sup> Derrida, Jacques, *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1967) pp. 158–59, 163 "Il n'y a pas de hors-texte".

so to speak.<sup>30</sup> This led to an increased occupation with discourses as forms in which interpersonal communication is performed. The goal was to understand the intentions of the text's author in accordance with the time and age it was produced, "that is: to embed the time in the discourse."<sup>31</sup> It was no longer just about the thoughts of certain authors, but instead about the reconstruction of a discourse based on fragmentary sources.<sup>32</sup>

But what are discourses made of? The answer to that question would be 'signs', as Brown puts it, which "...come lumped together to make up the discourse."<sup>33</sup> Foucault urged a new 'linguistic turn' in order to reveal the social construction of the sign and the meaning of language. This meant a revolution for historians, since it implies that the sign itself has an ability to convey meaning and that signs are a kind of building blocks in the construction of our perceived 'reality', but, however do not enable the reconstruction or imitation of reality. Put in another way, we should not mistake the map of the world for the world itself – and historical narratives are precisely that: maps representing past events. Representation cannot be complete, or replicate the entire complexity of relations between things. Only through the use of signs can the past be represented, and these signs are culturally determined. The representations can only be examined by putting the structured signs into cultural influenced narratives, which do not exist or resemble reality itself. Finally the representations will change with time and from culture to culture. 'Reality' is therefore demonstrably unreconstructable.<sup>34</sup>

### 1.1.3: What is the postmodern influence on historiography?

The linguistic and cultural turn was a critique against the professional historian's assumptions that acquisition of objective knowledge about the past was possible through systematic research. Throughout the 70's and 80's a growing amount of historians agreed that economic and quantitative societal factors were not adequate and that they had to consider the importance of culture and language in the steady changing constructions of reality.<sup>35</sup>

The core idea of postmodern theory in historiography is to deny the reference to reality claimed by traditional modernistic historians. In 1979 Jean-François Lyotard wrote that "*Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity towards metanarratives*"<sup>36</sup> by which he meant teleological stories that guide or structure explanations of social reality.<sup>37</sup> The postmodern attitude of disbelief in any metanarrative, as proposed by Lyotard, had a certain impact on historiography, and with the death of modernity's grand narrative of eternal progress it seemed to influence historians such as the British historian Lawrence Stone who in the same year as Lyotard's famous passage, rejected the belief that "a coherent scientific explanation of change in the past" is possible".<sup>38</sup> Roland Barthes and Hayden White went as far as to claim that historiography does not differ from fiction, but itself is a kind of fiction since

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<sup>30</sup> Georg G. Iggers – *Geschichtswissenschaft im 20. Jahrhundert*. pp. 102-104.

<sup>31</sup> Georg G. Iggers – *Geschichtswissenschaft im 20. Jahrhundert*. p. 107 „In den Diskurs der Zeit einzubetten.“.

<sup>32</sup> Georg G. Iggers – *Geschichtswissenschaft im 20. Jahrhundert*. p. 108.

<sup>33</sup> Callum G. Brown – *Postmodernism for Historians* p. 59.

<sup>34</sup> Callum G. Brown – *Postmodernism for Historians* pp. 46-47.

<sup>35</sup> Georg G. Iggers – *Geschichtswissenschaft im 20. Jahrhundert*. pp. 124-125.

<sup>36</sup> Lyotard, Jean-François *La condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir* (Paris: Minuit, 1979).

<sup>37</sup> Marnie Hughes-Warrington – *World Histories* p. 175.

<sup>38</sup> Eng. translation of: *Geschichtswissenschaft im 20. Jahrhundert* – Iggers, George, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century* p. 97.

no scientific criteria of truth exists in historiography.<sup>39</sup> White even used the term ‘verbal fictions’ when talking about historical narratives.<sup>40</sup>

But after all the new historiography was not a rejection of scientific rationality, but rather an extension of it.<sup>41</sup> As Derrida proclaimed “*The revolution against reason can be made only within it*” the method to undermine reason would still be reason itself.<sup>42</sup> But here I would say that we have found the greatest weakness of postmodern thought, namely its practicality: To resist rationality with nothing more than rationality itself, criticize metaphysics without any metaphysical tools and deconstruct the historical coherency without attempting to build a new form of historical metanarrative on its ruins. These circumstances naturally make any practical application very hard and even Foucault himself was skeptical about living in accordance with his own insights. What postmodernism takes away from us is a belief, a belief in the ideal of the enlightenment that with a lot of carefully conducted systematic research in accordance with the rational scientific method; gradually it will provide us with the whole truth about the condition of the world. What postmodernism primarily does is to change our epistemology, so that our answers to the questions about what we can know about the world, what we can proclaim as true and right about the world, are what essentially differ from the modern worldview. The world itself and how we go about it continues more or less as before, what postmodernism has provided us, is a precautionary principle and humility about our claims of truth about the world we inhabit.

In the long run it was not possible to conduct science based on the idea that history was only a creation of the language and not a reflection upon an historical past. During the 90’s the extreme relativity of the cultural and linguistic turn gradually diminished, but not without an everlasting impact on historiography.<sup>43</sup> Postmodernity in historiography should be seen as the pinnacle of a long development throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century and as part of a greater shift in historiography with an increased focus on human action and consciousness, and an emphasis on the subjective aspects of human existence. Not as merely the most extreme relativistic ideas of a few theorists in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was the revival of the art of the narrative and the change of focus from the rich and powerful to the lives of ordinary people. From the German *Sozialgeschichte* and the French *Annales* in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, to the Marxist school and world-system theory preoccupied with structures and processes, and the advent of cultural studies, gender studies and micro-history concerned with cultures and ways of living in the second part. The array of historical contents was gradually expanded, and the shift of focus from wars and kings to the culture and lives of previously invisible groups like women, minorities and poor people was proportional to the increased democratizing of western societies as a whole throughout the century. This breakdown of existing hierarchies can be seen as something inherently postmodern, but also as the final consequences of the modern project – the end of the road where modernism ends, collapsed on to itself, and where postmodernism begins.

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<sup>39</sup> Georg G. Iggers – *Geschichtswissenschaft im 20. Jahrhundert*. p. 101.

<sup>40</sup> Georg G. Iggers – *Geschichtswissenschaft im 20. Jahrhundert*. p. 102.

<sup>41</sup> Georg G. Iggers – *Geschichtswissenschaft im 20. Jahrhundert*. p. 62.

<sup>42</sup> Callum G. Brown – *Postmodernism for Historians* p. 31.

<sup>43</sup> Georg G. Iggers – *Geschichtswissenschaft im 20. Jahrhundert*. pp. 126-127.

It is not that the old ideas and perspectives of modernity are not still alive, they are, but conscious about it or not we are all more or less subject to the postmodern condition. This applies not at least to the academia and historians alike. The old notion of the historical department concerned with wars and kings is since long in the past. What we experience among contemporary historians is not so much the typically postmodern intellectual, but more as Brown chose to put it a kind of 'cherry picking' when it comes to perspectives and methods. The smorgasbord of second half 20<sup>th</sup> century theory, deconstruction, discourses and the like, brought to us by Foucault & Co. is not to be ignored by any historian or any other scholar in the humanities – no matter if they like it or not. The influence of gender studies, rights of minorities and the like has left its impact on the academia and society as a whole. Our age is postmodern and we all seem to be influenced by it.

#### **1.1.4: The Postmodern Influence in Society**

Lyotard said that postmodernism is “...the consequence of capital and informational flows that have moved beyond political or instrumental control.”<sup>44</sup> The democratization of the west, economically as well as politically during the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century does explain how the postmodern condition came about. There is a simple reason it happened in the west and not in the communist east: people could afford it and had the time to start thinking postmodern, *and* there were no one to stop them doing that or hindering the spread of their ideas through the mass media.

A notable example that our age can rightly be said to be postmodern is the attempts to break up all the old hierarchies, authorities and norms that have been going on since the late 60's. This is a process that is still in motion today and for example manifests itself in the questioning of the traditional gender roles and the prevailing sexual heteronormativity, the role of the nation-state expressed most strongly in the idea of multiculturalism and transnational organizations, and the ongoing debate about the rights of animals and so on. To the postmodern the *de-jure* equal rights of women and minorities provided by modernity was not enough, the hidden despotic hierarchy behind it has to be exposed and broken down. A close friend of this is relativism. The cultural and value relativism that for good and for worse can be said to characterize our age is an inherent tool of the postmodern rebellion. When the superiority of western culture after two world wars, the atom bomb and the holocaust lost its validity, when the old structures of society were revealed to be suppressing and hypocritical and the last great ideologies came crashing down with the Berlin Wall in 1989, the question about which values to rely on became harder to answer for the generations to come. This led to sarcasm and the refusal to elevate anything to the status of superior or sacred, apparent in a cultural life preoccupied with surfaces rather than contents. The irony of the 90's and the attitude of the since long adult generation x is still with us, and it often leads to misunderstandings with older generations and people from premodern societies. The end of history since the early 90's, as Fukuyama wrote after the collapse of the USSR, is also the end of all the great narratives as Lyotard proposed back in 1979. This is evident in the political life of the west since the end of the cold war, the lumping up in the middle between left and right and the neglect of all the old ideologies prevails through most of the western democracies. All this is notable counter modern. But modernism still drives forward, secularization, technological progress and the march of liberal democracy, not at least globally.

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<sup>44</sup> Marnie Hughes-Warrington – *World Histories* pp. 175-176.

Traditional modern values like progress, efficiency and the idea of objective truths co-exist alongside new postmodern values like diversity, ecological sustainability and relativism. We live in a world where the eco-feministic hippie and the nihilistic deconstructing intellectual live side by side with the businessman on Wall Street and the strict empirical natural scientist. This multitude of different perspectives could itself be described as an intrinsic part of the postmodern condition. Often modernity and postmodernity even merge and overlap. For example successful business endeavors like Apple hit the chord of the postmodern consumer, but Apple itself is an enterprise structured along the lines of modernistic ideas of economic efficiency and technological progress. Or the talk about green growth and multiculturalism in mainstream politics among inherently modernistic thinking center right politicians is another example. The following section will give examples of how modernity and postmodernity differ with the assistance of Ihab Hassan.

## **1.2: The Theoretical Backdrop of This Enquiry – Ihab Hassan’s Dichotomies**

In this section I will examine the main differences between modernism and postmodernism based on the thoughts of Egyptian-American literary theorist Ihab Hassan. He is the writer of *The Dismemberment of Orpheus - toward a postmodern literature*, and is best known for, in the postface from the 1982 edition of this work, to have assessed a list of dichotomies representing modernity and postmodernity. A shortcut to understand postmodernity I would say. And therefore even a reasonable way of understanding how postmodernism differs from its opposite, modernism, as well. The reason that Hassan’s dichotomies are so usable is because the single concepts and the visual duality of the dichotomies creates, without a lot of words, an immediate impression of what modernity and postmodernity are all about. It does however, require that the reader is already conscious about the break between modernity and postmodernity and what they entail, but if so, it helps to further crystalize one’s understanding. I have presented my own impression in the commentary field in the table on the next page. It is my aspiration that it will help the reader to understand how modernity and postmodernity could be perceived. This impression of mine will further provide the theory for the analysis and discussion and help me in the investigation to determine the modern and postmodern traits of the metanarratives of contemporary historiography. Now, let’s have a look at what Hassan writes about postmodernism:

Hassan believes the term postmodernism denotes temporal linearity, belatedness and even decadence. It suffers however like any other categorical term from a certain semantic instability, due to the lack of any clear consensus. A similar difficulty concerns the historical instability given the terms openness to change – modernism and postmodernism are not separated by an iron curtain as he puts it, neither in time or in space. The term postmodernism is not a temporal term like romanticism or classicism since it carries the name of its predecessor with it. This means that seen as a period, Hassan urges, postmodernism should be perceived in terms of both continuity and discontinuity and believes that it invokes a somewhat double view, sameness and difference, unity and rupture, filiation and revolt.

Hassan emphasizes that the defining traits are dialectical and plural. To merely assume that postmodernism is anti-formal, anarchic and decreative is not enough. Postmodernism also contains a

need to discover a unitary sensibility, to cross the border and close the gap and to attain an immanence of discourse, an expanded noetic intervention and a neo-gnostic im-mediacy of mind.

With this brought to our attention, Hassan has assembled a list with distinguishing dichotomies of modernism and postmodernism. In the following table I have chosen the terms I consider sum up the most relevant differences and added my own comments on what I believe Hassan has intended to show with the various concepts:

### 1.2.1: Table of Modern/Postmodern Dichotomies

MODERNISM	vs.	POSTMODERNISM	My Comments
Purpose	-	Play	Modernism is oriented towards the fulfillment of a goal, while for instance Foucault deconstructs reality just because he can. Affluent societies can afford postmodern play, California and upper class Paris can afford it – Russian workers can't.
Design	-	Chance	In modernism human beings are at least partially in control of human history, consciously steering developments and events. In postmodernism there is no such protagonist, things just happen. Shit happens, so to speak.
Hierarchy	-	Anarchy	Modernist thought attempts to construct rationally sound hierarchies describing reality (id-ego-superego, tribal-traditional-modern, bureaucracy, management, evolution). Postmodernism will have none of it. All hierarchies are viewed with suspicion.
Signified	-	Signifier	Ferdinand de Saussure distinguished between the signified (that which we point to when we speak) and the signifier (the pointing itself, e.g. a word or phrase). Modernism focuses on the signified, attempting to see the essence of reality, whereas postmodernism is happy to study how reality is (inescapably) indicated in our symbolic universe. Postmodernism focuses on the discourse.
Distance	-	Participation	Modernism studies reality from the vantage point of an 'external observer', like William Blake's painting of Isaac Newton. Postmodernism insists that we are always already part of the studied phenomenon through our perspective and narrative.
Creation/Totalization	-	Decreation/Deconstruction	Modernism tries to build up solid knowledge about the world, where each new insight is a part of the puzzle. Each part of this total is used to create and control the world. Postmodernism seeks to prove that things are never what they seem, that we can always find new perspectives through which what was rational and sound seems less so.

Synthesis	-	Antithesis	Modernism strives towards a synthesis, the combination of the best parts of knowledge into something better, more correct. Postmodernism strives towards an antithesis, something disproving the current knowledge and/or state of affairs.
Presence	-	Absence	Modernism studies that which is present, the apparent empirical reality. Postmodernism studies that which is not, the excluded, the implicit, the invisible, the unheard voices in science and society.
Centering	-	Dispersal	Modernism seeks the core of things, the center of events, of political power, of knowledge. Postmodernism looks at the relations between all things, showing that centers, cores and essences are not solid at all, that they are fleeting and transient.
Genre Boundary	-	Text/Intertext	Modernism has clear categories in its understanding of reality, physics is not geography for instance, Carl von Linné categorized the plants hierarchically and so forth. Postmodernism views all categories as narratives, forms of text that can and will refer to one another.
Semantics	-	Rhetoric	Modernism focuses on what is said, on the meaning and content of the spoken or written word. Postmodernism is more interested in <i>how</i> things are said and written.
Narrative / Grande Histoire	-	Anti-narrative/Petite Histoire	Modernism strives towards a grand narrative describing reality as a story of progress. Postmodernism does not accept any grand narrative (Lyotard). On the contrary, the small narrative, the detail, the untold story is king.
Origin/Cause	-	Difference/Trace	To modernism it is important to know why something happens, what its cause or origin is. To postmodernism it is only important to successfully differentiate one thing from another and to see how they are related (genealogy).
Form (conjunctive, closed)	-	Antiform (disjunctive, open).	Modernism looks at entities in the world, connected to one another in a coherent system. By contrast postmodernism believes that there are only fragments and shards of reality, formless, that will never add up to a coherent whole.

**It is important to stress that the comments to the right are my own interpretations following a thoughtful evaluation of the different concepts, still based merely on an immediate intuitive impression – the exact same faculty I suspect Hassan is targeting.**

Regarding the dichotomies themselves Hassan adds the following disclaimer: "*Yet the dichotomies this table represents remain insecure, equivocal. For differences shift, defer, even collapse; concepts in one vertical column are not all equivalent; and inversions and exceptions, in both modernism and postmodernism, abound.*" Though he concludes, what might be evident from the postmodern column, that indeterminacy and immanence are central constitutive tendencies in postmodernism.<sup>45</sup> Here I may add that determinacy and transcendence (cartesian duality) thus are likely candidates of being central constitutive tendencies in modernism. In simpler wording: there is a given reality out there, and the historian can find it and study it. Postmodernism disagrees.

## **1.3: Globalization – some important definitions and perspectives before we go on**

This section will briefly attend the most common definitions of globalization and its contents according to some of the most widely acknowledged and uncontroversial authorities on the subject. The purpose is to examine one of the most significant ideas of our time, a concept inseparable from one of this investigation's main topics, namely global-history, and attempt to answer the question which perspectives globalization entails and how it relates to postmodernity. Also, since the term 'globalization' is going to be used frequently in the following chapters, and because I believe the idea of globalization is intimately intertwined with the field of world-, global- and transnational-history, I consider it important to briefly discuss the term here before we move on.

### **1.3.1: Globalization: Key Definitions**

'Globalization' can arguably be said to be a defining trait of our age. But what exactly does it mean when we talk about globalization? In *The Consequences of Modernity*, Anthony Giddens defines globalization as "*...the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa.*"<sup>46</sup> This conception of the term does seem to pinpoint what we are talking about and I believe it is a rather indisputable statement, however still rather vague. The IMF's definition focuses not surprisingly on the economic aspects and conceives globalization as a historical process being "*the result of human innovation and technological progress*" that "*...refers to the increasing integration of economies around the world, particularly through trade and financial flows*", and to some extent even the movement of people and knowledge across borders. The IMF adds that there exist broader political and environmental dimensions of globalization.<sup>47</sup> Curiously enough the Merriam-Webster dictionary resembles the economical definition of the IMF by declaring Globalization to be "*the development of an increasingly integrated global economy marked especially by free trade, free flow of capital, and the tapping of cheaper foreign labor markets.*"<sup>48</sup>

The above mentioned definitions may be a bit narrow though. The British political theorist David Held has stated that Globalization refers to the widening, deepening and speeding up of global interconnections. It can be located on the local, national and regional level on a continuum from the

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<sup>45</sup> Ihab Hassan – *The Dismemberment of Orpheus* pp. 259-271.

<sup>46</sup> Giddens, Anthony, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991) p. 64.

<sup>47</sup> <http://www.imf.org/external/np/exr/ib/2000/041200to.htm#I> (07-05-2013)

<sup>48</sup> <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/globalization> (07-05-2013)

social and economic relations, and networks on a local and/or national basis to the networks which crystallize on the wider scale of regional and global interactions. “*Globalization can be taken to refer to those spatial-temporal processes of change which underpin a transformation in the organization of human affairs by linking together and expanding human activity across regions and continents.*” A clear, coherent formulation of the term requires a reference to such expansive spatial connections, and must capture the “...*extensity (stretching), intensity, velocity and impact of these*” Held concludes.<sup>49</sup>

Manfred B. Steger, professor of Global Studies and writer of the book *Globalization: A Very Short Introduction*, argues that in order for scholars of globalization to fully grasp the concept of globalization, a multidimensional approach is needed. The four dimensions of globalization are economic, political, cultural, and ideological, and they are all interconnected.<sup>50</sup>

When exactly globalization began is a contested question. The year 1492 with the European discovery of America is often referred to as globalization’s ‘big bang’.<sup>51</sup> Others like Andre Gunder Frank, writer of the influential book *ReOrient* from 1998, has proposed that the forces of globalization started way earlier than the European discoveries. Global-historians often emphasize that the process of increased contact and exchange of goods, people and ideas between societies far apart is an ongoing process since the first human civilizations arose and perhaps even before that. What remains a fact, whether we call it globalization or not, is that today we live in an interconnected world, a result of processes that can be traced way back in the past. So in order to get closer to understanding our world and its past, even on the local level, a global perspective, a perspective that goes beyond the national state we inhabit is required.

### **1.3.2: How Historiography can be Global in its Perspective**

A global perspective requires of one to be aware and capable of transcending any kind of ‘centrism’, whether it is eurocentrism, sinocentrism or perhaps the narrow perspective of one’s local community – a perspective from the Moon so to speak, or, as Bruce Mazlish puts it: a perspective from outside our planet where we will be spectating ‘Spaceship Earth’. He considers this way of viewing things one of the keys to understand global history.<sup>52</sup>

In order to comprehend what one perceives from this point of view in space, the awareness and focus on connections between societies and the possible interdependence between them is crucial. This perspective even implies the idea of ‘one humanity’ and excludes the notion of exceptionalism (the notion that the society one would happen to inhabit is truly, in its essence, something entirely different than any other society). Though all societies to some extent are exceptional, unique in the way that there are none exactly like it, this idea is important if we are to consider societies comparable in our investigations of how the world works. To some degree, this perspective even implies the political idea of equality for all humankind. To put it simple: A global perspective entails moving a step back in order to see the whole, focusing on the interconnections between parts all perceived equally comparable.

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<sup>49</sup> Held, David, *Global Transformations* (Cambridge: Polity Press 1999).

<sup>50</sup> Steger, Manfred B. *Globalization – a very short introduction* (Oxford, 2003).

<sup>51</sup> O’Rourke, Kevin H. & Williamson, Jeffrey G. ‘When Did Globalization Begin?’ (National Bureau of Economic Research, Working Paper 7632, 2000) <http://www.nber.org/papers/w7632.pdf> (07-05-2013).

<sup>52</sup> Bruce Mazlish – ‘Comparing Global History to World History’ p. 389.

### **1.3.3: The Question Regarding Globalization's Relation to Postmodernity**

Is globalization postmodern? Yes and no. No, not particular since the process of globalization predates even modernity itself. But on the other side it is one of the main characteristics of our age, and in that way perhaps part of the postmodern condition we are all subject to. But societies barely modern and alien to the thoughts of postmodernity are equally exposed to the forces of globalization as the affluent and developed societies of the west. Perhaps it can be said that exactly that, as with the co-existence of various values and perspectives in my description of the postmodern condition, is what constitutes this global society? The typical postmodern trait of breaking down hierarchies could be seen as getting its most essential fuel by the awareness and close co-existence of different cultures and societies on different levels of development. Perhaps this is the direct reason for the cultural relativism and multiculturalism that characterizes this time and age. In this global reality it is suddenly much more difficult to tell what is normal and what is right than before.

Globalization can be said to be *the* great narrative of our age and therefore something beyond postmodernism. After the fall of the great narrative of socialism in the east, the fusion of all the old democratic political ideologies in the west and the death of the great tale of progress that modernity brought along. The boom in transnational connections, the erosion of the national state and the rise of the internet, brought the idea of globalization to our attention and paved the road for thinking globally. This way of thinking led to a whole new development in historiography to which we will turn now.

# Part 2: Investigation: World-, Global-, Transnational and Big- History: Towards a New Synthesis

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*“The rise of world history clearly represents the biggest area of change in historical studies at present”<sup>53</sup>*

–Patrick Manning

This investigation will begin with a discussion about the concepts ‘world-’, ‘global-’, ‘transnational-’ and ‘big-history’, how to understand the terms, and how they differ – if they differ. Following this it will be examined how world/global-history is defined by the World Historical Association and its European counterpart. The investigation will continue with examining the contents of world/global-history and the way to go about things as a historian in this field based on the writings of Patrick Manning and Peter Stearns. Finally the investigation will probe into the field of big-history according to the writings of Fred Spier and David Christian. But now, let’s get those terms right by looking at how they are used and defined:

## 2.1: Getting the Terms Right

The above mentioned terms in the heading are but a few of the labels given to the metanarratives of contemporary historiography, which have all in common, that they are trans-boundary, macro-historical approaches to history. I would argue that the difference between ‘world-history’ and ‘global-history’ is not significant as the two terms are often used synonymously, which can create a fair amount of confusion. Influential scholars in the field, e.g. William McNeil, have equally denied any difference to exist between the two.<sup>54</sup> The term global-history is often used to underline a more intense focus on global contacts and interconnections, closely linked with the increased focus on globalization that has been present since the 90’s when the term came in to common usage. The history of globalization is by some also termed ‘new global-history’,<sup>55</sup> among them Bruce Mazlish, who has stated that “...*much of global history has necessarily to devote itself to studying the factors of globalization in relation to a “local” reality, which can take many forms.*”<sup>56</sup> But all this does in my opinion not seem to fundamentally differ from works labeled world-history, as the processes and impact of globalization to some extent already are integrated into the nature of working with narratives concerning large scales and several major regions. We will return to this later. ‘World-history’ seems to be the preferred term in the Anglophone world. In Scandinavia and continental Europe ‘global-history’ seems to be the most common, with more or less the same meaning as world-history in the Anglophone world and not

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<sup>53</sup> Patrick Manning – *Navigating World History* p. 167.

<sup>54</sup> Bruce Mazlish – ‘Comparing Global History to World History’ p. 388.

<sup>55</sup> Peter N. Stearns – *World History* pp. 14-15.

<sup>56</sup> Bruce Mazlish – ‘Comparing Global History to World History’ p. 390.

necessary with a sole focus on globalization as such.<sup>57</sup> This probably has to do with the fact that the term 'world-history'<sup>58</sup> in this part of the world usually is associated with historical encyclopedias.

Since the field includes a range of other genres and disciplines under its domain name, the authors of Marnie Hughes-Warrington's (ed.) book *World Histories* have chosen the plural form of this word as expressed in the title.<sup>59</sup> Other terms that are used interchangeably are 'transnational history', sometimes even termed 'international-history'. Even though differences may appear in theory, as the following discussion will show, the terms 'world-', 'global-' and 'transnational-history' has more in common than not, and when it comes down to practicality, that is when one takes on the task of writing either, it is my impression that the apparent differences disappear as the different concepts and their implications coalesce to an extent that makes it of no great importance which term is being used. What the narratives under these labels all have in common after all, seems to be the ideal of anti-euro- or any other centrism and a transnational and global perspective on things.

The writers of Wikipedia seem to agree with me on the above conclusion by lumping the three terms in to one article, redirecting the search-quests 'global-' and 'transnational-history' to a single article about them all under the title 'world history'.<sup>60</sup> I will use the terms interchangeable, my preferred term is 'global-history', but I will use the term 'world-history' when this exact term is used by the references.

The term 'big-history' can more accurately and with less confusion be defined due to the limited amount of scholars preoccupied in this field and because of the inventor of the term, David Christian, has given a more or less common agreed upon definition by making it closely affiliated with his own works and the organization he represents<sup>61</sup>. Big-history is rather different than global-history because of its all including timeframe that goes way before that of humans and because of its preoccupation with the natural sciences to a degree, that it can be seen as the historization of the natural sciences rather than the mere inclusion of these in a historiographical framework. Furthermore, big-history seems to have a quite different all-encompassing theoretical underpinning than that of the other historical sciences. This will be evident from the investigation later. Because of all this I believe big-history deserves to be examined as a separate topic. Even on this one the writers of Wikipedia seem to agree with me.

But before we move on to a more comprehensive account of the field known as world- and global-history, I wish to begin with a discussion on the specific term 'transnational-history'.

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<sup>57</sup> *Comparativ. Zeitschrift für Globalgeschichte*, german historical journal: <http://www.uni-leipzig.de/comparativ/> 'Global-history' at the university of Heidelberg, Germany: [http://www.uni-heidelberg.de/studium/interesse/faecher/global\\_history.html](http://www.uni-heidelberg.de/studium/interesse/faecher/global_history.html) 'Globalgeschichte' at the university of Vienna, Austria: <http://www.univie.ac.at/Geschichte-Meta/Globalgeschichte/?lang=en> 'Globalhistorie' at the university of Oslo, Norway: <http://www.hf.uio.no/iakh/forskning/vi-forsker-pa/verdenhistorie/globalhistorie/> 'Global-history' as research field at the university of Uppsala, Sweden: <http://www.hist.uu.se/Forskning/Vemforskaromvad/tabid/5556/language/en-US/Default.aspx?Areald=75> 'International and Global History' at the university of Aarhus, Denmark: <http://humaniora.au.dk/nyheder/2011/laes-international-historie-i-aarhus/> (07-05-2013).

<sup>58</sup> German: 'Weltgeschichte', French 'histoire du monde', Swedish: 'världshistoria'.

<sup>59</sup> Marnie Hughes-Warrington – *World histories* p. 18.

<sup>60</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World\\_history](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_history) (07-05-2013).

<sup>61</sup> The International Big History Association.

### 2.1.1: The term ‘Transnational-History’ – beyond the national paradigm

In the American Historical Review during the summer of 2006 a debate concerning the concept of transnational-history took place. Transnational-history was seen as the latest incarnation of the approach that successively had been termed comparative-, international-, world-, and global-history; an approach attempting to break out of the constraints of ethnocentrism and the nation-state. This section will provide a brief summary of that discussion and I will add my own thoughts following that. The purpose is to investigate the term and the relevance of the term’s use before we move on.

Chris Bayly believes that the term ‘transnational-history’ means more or less the same as ‘international-history’, but that it “...gives a sense of movement and interpenetration”.<sup>62</sup> Isabel Hofmeyr considers that the key claim of the transnational approach is its central concern with movements, flows, and circulation, the attention to the “space of the flows” as she puts it,<sup>63</sup> elaborating that “The claim of transnational methods is not simply that historical processes are made in different places but that they are constructed in the movement between places, sites, and regions.”<sup>64</sup> Sven Beckert agrees that global-, world-, international-, and transnational-history have much in common, in that they transcend the boundaries of the nation-state or any other politically defined entity, which sets them apart from traditional historical writing.<sup>65</sup> It is an approach to history that has its focus on connections in the form of networks, institutions, ideas, and processes transcending politically bounded territories.<sup>66</sup> The question, he asks, is what to call this form of history. ‘Global-history’ is a good term for this kind of endeavor, but it does suggest a global scope that not every investigation necessarily has. Many are only regional in their scope and for these investigations ‘transnational-history’ can be a more appropriate term.<sup>67</sup> Chris Bayly agrees on this point and adds that ‘transnational-history’ has “...the advantage of including works which raise critical issues about transnational flows, but do not claim to embrace the whole world”<sup>68</sup>. However one should be aware of the ‘nations’ embedded in the term, not as original elements to be transcended by the processes, but as products, and often rather late products, which he underlines, by those very same processes.<sup>69</sup> Patricia Seed stresses the importance of cultural studies in transnational-history, though the two part on the point that the former seeks to find interconnectedness, whereby the latter “...examines the process by looking at not just which groups become connected, but also how they become excluded from transnational exchanges.”<sup>70</sup>

The concept of ‘transnational-history’ seems very broad and even all-encompassing, just as ‘world-’ or ‘global-history’, but everybody seems to agree that it deliberately attempts to avoid becoming a ‘grand narrative’.<sup>71</sup> To this Matthew Connelly agrees, pointing out that the skepticism towards all grand narratives seems to derive from none ever having provided satisfactory answers; but he admits that ideas of modernization, development, and now globalization have provided historians with better ways

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<sup>62</sup> AHR Conversation – ‘On Transnational History’ p. 2.

<sup>63</sup> AHR Conversation – ‘On Transnational History’ p. 12.

<sup>64</sup> AHR Conversation – ‘On Transnational History’ p. 13.

<sup>65</sup> AHR Conversation – ‘On Transnational History’ p. 20.

<sup>66</sup> AHR Conversation – ‘On Transnational History’ p. 22.

<sup>67</sup> AHR Conversation – ‘On Transnational History’ p. 23.

<sup>68</sup> AHR Conversation – ‘On Transnational History’ p. 34.

<sup>69</sup> AHR Conversation – ‘On Transnational History’ p. 35.

<sup>70</sup> AHR Conversation – ‘On Transnational History’ p. 75.

<sup>71</sup> AHR Conversation – ‘On Transnational History’ p. 64.

of explaining how the current world came about.<sup>72</sup> Beckert agrees that transnational-history is not about creating a new master narrative; still it engages an existing grand-narrative, namely the story of globalization. The process of greater interconnectedness humanity has engaged in, has become an object of study transnational-history has begun to build a narrative upon. Together with the meta-narratives of the development of capitalism and state-formation, globalization in a transnational context helps explain a lot about the world. He concludes that the great question, why the people of Europe during a period of 200 years came to dominate the world, are to be found in the transnational links in the global economy, and therefore depends just as much on African slaves, Indian peasants and Chinese traders as on people in Europe and North-America.<sup>73</sup> Matthew Connelly has added that “*International, transnational, world, and global history each mean different things. But together they can contribute to a new way of understanding the world*”<sup>74</sup>, imagining that “*Smarter students will instead ask how it is that anyone ever wanted to study international relations from the perspective of just one state, or research immigrants without investigating where they came from, or teach European history without the Ottomans.*”<sup>75</sup>.

David L. Ransel has summed up the discussion, by concluding that the general view seems to be that while world- and global-history strive for comprehensiveness, and international-history, using the nation as the primary category of analysis, seeks to transcend traditional diplomatic-history by investigating not only interstate relations but also cultural, social, political, and other institutional contacts and influences between countries that affect state governments. Transnational-history in contrast, is concerned primarily with connections: how people, ideas, institutions, technology, and commerce flow across national borders and link up with or influence people and processes in other countries. Yet there is disagreement about applying the term to pre-national or non-national times and places.<sup>76</sup> Ransel mentions the question, whether Braudel’s *La Méditerranée* should be regarded as a work of transnational-history or if the term should only be used “*to refer to new ways of writing history in the era of nationally organized states without being constrained by the form of the nation-state?*”<sup>77</sup> Now, Braudel’s account of the Mediterranean world was occupied with a time-period where nationalism and the nation-state were not of political importance, but at the same time he accomplished to go beyond the borders of single political units and cultures. The discussion whether this work should be coined trans-national or not, appears to me a bit silly and futile, since the method does not have the nation as its primary object of study and therefore does not depend on it. The focal point of the transnational methodology is its concern with border crossing entities and perspective going beyond the national borders, with seeing areas as a whole so to speak. When using the term transnational, the meaning transregional and transcultural seems to be implied too. Therefore I would argue that this debate is derived from not having a better word than ‘national’, the word ‘trans-boundary’ would perhaps define the methodology at play more appropriately, though from an idiomatic point of view ‘transnational’ is probably a better term. It should be clear that the way of conduct in *La Méditerranée* has a lot in

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<sup>72</sup> AHR Conversation – ‘On Transnational History’ p. 69.

<sup>73</sup> AHR Conversation – ‘On Transnational History’ p. 81.

<sup>74</sup> AHR Conversation – ‘On Transnational History’ p. 28.

<sup>75</sup> AHR Conversation – ‘On Transnational History’ p. 33.

<sup>76</sup> David L. Ransel - Reflections on transnational and world history in the USA and its applications p. 628.

<sup>77</sup> David L. Ransel - Reflections on transnational and world history in the USA and its applications p. 628.

common with the transnational approach; it has even been seen as a role-model for this methodology, and shares the same characteristics as transnational studies investigating more modern examples. So I see no reason for not using the term for this particular work or for pre-national times or non-national areas in general as well.

I agree that the term 'transnational' may not imply the same grand scale as 'world' or 'global', but it does not necessarily exclude it either. Since all world- and global-history essentially have to be transnational, the whole discussion of a clear-cut significant difference between how to apply the term and to which seems rather futile. The question whether we have to do with an independent field of history or not does not seem very crucial at all. Whether one chooses to label one's work 'transnational-', 'world-' or 'global-history' does not seem very important since it is likely to end up in the same history journals anyway. As I mentioned before, in practicality the difference between the terms are of no substantial relevance no matter what they may or may not imply. In the following I have chosen to use the terms 'world-' and 'global-history' as terms to describe this new, if you like, transnational trend in historiography.

## 2.2: World/Global-History – narratives of an interconnected world

The origins of this trend can be found in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in the reactions against narrowly confined national history of the time and as a means of escaping a western or Eurocentric view on history. It can be seen as primarily a reaction against traditional national historiography. Marnie Hughes-Warrington has avowed that "*World-history is first and foremost an effort to go beyond European and national scopes*"<sup>78</sup>, which seems to be a commonly agreed upon impression among many scholars. Peter Stearns for example, considers world-history a reaction against euro-centrism in the historical field,<sup>79</sup> in the US partly caused by the changed ethnic composition of American colleges.<sup>80</sup> And in a Swedish historiographical journal the historian Stefan Eklöf Amirell has written that the world-historical turn in historiography, which he argues we are in the middle of, "*...first and foremost shall be seen as a reaction against the national paradigm*"<sup>81</sup>, and he elaborates, that while historians traditionally have observed interactions between societies as exogenous and autonomous causes, in the attempt to describe and analyze various particular societies, the contemporary world-historian on the other hand, projects his interest towards the trans-boundary processes and relations per se; and instead of being seen as exogenous explanatory variables, the trans- political, cultural and religious becomes the main organizing principle in the narrative.<sup>82</sup> The increased debate about globalization since the early 90's, is with little doubt also a major contributor to the rise of world and global-history during the same period. Breaking the confines of the national paradigm can be associated with the postmodern tendency of breaking down all hierarchies, however to apply Hassan's term 'Anarchy' to this development of global-history would probably be to stretch it too far. Though the switch of focus from national states to that of

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<sup>78</sup> Marnie Hughes-Warrington (ed.), *World Histories* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) p. 24.

<sup>79</sup> Peter N. Stearns – *World History* pp. 1-2.

<sup>80</sup> Peter N. Stearns – *World History* p. 10.

<sup>81</sup> Stefan Eklöf Amirell – 'Den världshistoriska vändningen' p. 654 (own translation "*Den världshistoriska vändningen bör i första hand ses som en reaktion mot det nationella paradigmet*").

<sup>82</sup> Stefan Eklöf Amirell – 'Den världshistoriska vändningen' pp. 656-657.

connections per se, could be seen as a move from 'Centering' to 'Dispersal' and therefore be considered an indication of a postmodern trend in global-history.

Before we move on I need to add a remark about the common misconception that world-history is just about non-Western history, somewhat like the genre 'world-music'. It is not uncommon to find works of historiography labeled world-history that merely attends a single non-Western culture in a more or less similar framework as the national narratives of the west. This I will not consider world-history as it does not correspond with the view of what world-history is really about, rather the contrary. This will be evident from the following investigation.

### **2.2.1: Definition and Contents According to the WHA and the ENIUGH**

In order to find a decent definition of the concept 'world/global-history' this section will turn to, what seem like suitable authorities on the subject, namely the World History Association and The European Network in Universal and Global History.

According to the World History Association (WHA) "*...world history is macrohistory. It is transregional, transnational, and transcultural.*", though acknowledging the importance of all cultures, states and other historical entities "*...the world historian stands back from these individual elements in that mosaic to take in the entire picture, or at least a large part of that picture [...] the world historian studies phenomena that transcend single states, regions, and cultures, such as cultural contact and exchange and movements that have had a global or at least a transregional impact.*" The WHA stresses comparative history, thus states that it refrains from the study of "*discrete cultures and states one after another and in isolation from one another*" but states at the same time, that, that is not necessarily the same as global-history, which is defined as "*...the study of globalization after 1492.*", concluding that "*As long as one focuses on the big picture of cultural interchange and/or comparative history, one is a practicing world historian.*" Examples for topics includes: cultural exchange, exchange of goods, ideas, flora and fauna, comparative holy wars, the spread of diseases and global or transregional impact of single items, i.e. fire arms or cotton.<sup>83</sup> Because of this vast array of different topics interdisciplinary appears as a defining trait of the field.

The European Network in Universal and Global History (ENIUGH) is a German based (Leipzig), European equivalent and official affiliate of the WHA. The organization is based on two assumptions: 1) "*...world and global history is understood as arising from experiences with the phenomenon of and discourses on globalization and as responding to the social, political and economical needs, conflicts and challenges that grow out it. It seeks to historise the globalized world, to show in historical terms how it came into being and thus aims to a thoroughly understanding of the current processes of globalization.*" 2) "*...a need of a professional historiographical reflection is acknowledged originating from a long tradition of an older teleological universal history that can be traced in many European countries. These traditions have to be taken into account, need to be examined and also in parts re-employed in order to reach a*

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<sup>83</sup> [http://www.thewha.org/world\\_history.php](http://www.thewha.org/world_history.php) (07-05-2013).

*critical attitude towards its influence and implications on current approaches in world and global history.”<sup>84</sup>*

It is peculiar that while the WHA wants to underline that world-history is more than just the history of globalization; the ENIUGH explicitly defines just that, the processes of globalization, as their key point of interest. This does however correspond with ‘global-history’ being defined by the WHA as merely the history of globalization. Both are nonetheless unclear about the exact definition of globalization and if we are dealing with the post-1492 world or a broader timescale.

However, what is more curious is the way the ENIUGH emphasizes the older teleological universal history, although without any closer explanation if it refers to i.e. Spengler and Toynbee or perhaps even scholastic texts? The WHA has a more concrete definition about what they consider world-history compared to the rather vague text of what the ENIUGH considers global-history. What both organizations have in common though is an open anti eurocentrism and an explicitly interdisciplinary approach to things. I believe it would be futile to conclude any fundamental difference between the two organizations based merely on their description texts and explicit differentiation between world- and global-history. Regarding globalization as an area of interest or not, I believe as mentioned before that the processes of globalization are not to be neglected by anyone investigating historical events on the global scale anyhow, which renders the entire discussion rather irrelevant. My apparent impression when I look at the articles printed in their respective journals is also that any of these could be printed in the other.<sup>85</sup> All this has furthermore convinced me of lumping the two terms together. In the following section we will move on to a more elaborate inquiry in to the question what kind of historiographical field we are dealing with when it is labeled ‘world-’ or ‘global-history’.

Global-history’s ambition of a ‘Grande Histoire’ is definitely a trait affiliated with modernity and as stated by Lyotard the ground-pillar of postmodern hostility. The focus on connections however, fits with postmodernity’s focus on ‘Dispersal’, and even ‘Absence’, in the way that connections per se often has been neglected by historians due to their lower visibility. Global-history’s concern about transcending borders of all kind and its interdisciplinary, all corresponds with a shift away from modernity’s ‘Genre/Boundary’. The explicit anti-eurocentrism of both organizations is again a typical postmodern break with old hierarchies.

## **2.2.2: Contents of World/Global-history**

The prominent historian William McNeil, with a longstanding interest in trans-civilizational encounters, and by some considered the father of contemporary world-history, has defined world-history as the study of “...interactions among peoples of diverse cultures.”<sup>86</sup> He and his son John McNeil have with their book *The Human Web* argued “that world history is essentially about the webs of interconnection that have linked human societies.”<sup>87</sup> Hughes-Warrington sums up what world-history seems to be about when she concludes that: “What stands out in the end is that world history is open-ended, tends to the

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<sup>84</sup> [http://www.uni-leipzig.de/~eniugh/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=14&Itemid=33](http://www.uni-leipzig.de/~eniugh/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=14&Itemid=33) (07-05-2013).

<sup>85</sup> WHA, Journal of World History: <http://www.uhpress.hawaii.edu/t-journal-of-world-history.aspx>, ENIUGH, *Comparativ. Zeitschrift für Globalgeschichte und vergleichende Gesellschaftsforschung*: <http://www.comparativ.net/> (07-05-2013).

<sup>86</sup> Bruce Mazlish – “Comparing Global History to World History” p. 386.

<sup>87</sup> Marnie Hughes-Warrington – *World histories* p. 76.

*comparative, is concerned with long-term and large-scale happenings, and has a penchant for thinking in terms of civilizations.*"<sup>88</sup> The open endedness of the field relates to postmodernism's 'Antiform', but its scale and use of civilizations goes along the lines of modernity's 'Grande Historie' and modern categorical thinking of 'Genre/Boundary'. But is this, to some extent archaic, civilizational framework really an essential part of global-history? This is a question that will be probed into later on.

Now, let's have a look at two historians, Patrick Manning and Peter Stearns, who have both written extensive accounts on what they believe world/global-history is all about. The purpose of the next sections has basically been to find the core of things.

### **2.2.2.1: Patrick Manning**

Patrick Manning, Andrew W. Mellon Professor of World History and president of the World History Network, has assembled a comprehensive account on the field of world-history in his work *Navigating World History* from 2003.

In the introduction of this book Manning writes that his definition of world-history is that it constitutes "...a field of study focusing on the historical connections among entities and systems often thought to be distinct."<sup>89</sup> simply put and similar to McNeil "...the story of connections within the global human community."<sup>90</sup> The task of the world historian "...is to portray the crossing of boundaries and the linking of systems in the human past." and "...to link speculation, logic, and evidence into a coherent analysis with the goal of developing broad, interpretive, and well-documented assessments of past transformations and connections."<sup>91</sup> This source material "...ranges in scale from individual family tales to migrations of peoples to narratives encompassing all humanity."<sup>92</sup> And Manning adds that "World history is far less than the sum total of all history." But that it still adds to our knowledge about the past regarding the connections between localities, periods and themes.<sup>93</sup> World-history, he concludes "...is the story of past connections in the human community." and it "...presumes the acceptance of a human community – One riven sometimes by divisions and hatreds but unified nonetheless by the nature of our species and our common experience. It is the study of connections between communities and between communities and their environments."<sup>94</sup> Manning urges world-historians to go beyond focusing on dominance and instead towards interactions,<sup>95</sup> because even the weak affects the strong.<sup>96</sup> This idea is one of the major themes in world-history and I believe a valuable contribution to the field of historiography, which traditionally has tended to focus on the various dominant groups, nations and empires of an age; to the neglect of the weaker more invisible groups at the same time. An idea we will return to soon. A reason for the growth of world-history may according to Manning be explained by our need to make sense of our expanded knowledge of the human past.<sup>97</sup> He believes that a new side to the role of the historian in the future will include that as a 'storyteller' reflects this circumstance. This new

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<sup>88</sup> Marnie Hughes-Warrington – *World histories* p. 27.

<sup>89</sup> Patrick Manning – *Navigating World History* p. 7.

<sup>90</sup> Patrick Manning – *Navigating World History* p. 3.

<sup>91</sup> Patrick Manning – *Navigating World History* p. 33.

<sup>92</sup> Patrick Manning – *Navigating World History* p. 3.

<sup>93</sup> Patrick Manning – *Navigating World History* p. 3.

<sup>94</sup> Patrick Manning – *Navigating World History* p. 15.

<sup>95</sup> Patrick Manning – *Navigating World History* p. xi.

<sup>96</sup> Patrick Manning – *Navigating World History* p. 161.

<sup>97</sup> Patrick Manning – *Navigating World History* p. 14.

role will be that of synthesizer of methodology and mediator among theoretical and methodological alternative, combining these in interpreting historical records in order to provide a comprehensive and coherent view of the past.<sup>98</sup>

This focus on connections is as mentioned, clearly a feature associated with the postmodern trait 'Dispersal', but linking that to a greater 'Synthesis' appears as a predominately modern trait. The shift of focus from dominance towards interactions also goes along the lines of 'Dispersal', but even indicates a shift from modern 'Presence' to postmodern 'Absence' – the typical postmodern manner of listening to the unheard voices of history that is. Similarly postmodern is the acknowledged role of the historian as storyteller. The idea that we are just dealing with narratives, can be put together with Hassan's concept 'Play', but even 'Participation', since the storyteller participates in creating the narrative and is aware of his role in this endeavor.

### **2.2.2.2: Peter Stearns**

Another influential authority on the subject is Peter Stearns, professor of History and author of several books on the subject, among them the short textbook *World History – the basics* from 2011.

According to Stearns there are three basic approaches all world-history programs have in common, those are: 1) Comparison of societies, often by tracing the evolution of major societies or civilizations and the interactions between them. 2) Contacts between societies, not only by comparison, but also to embrace skills appropriate to understanding interactions and over time how patterns of interaction change. 3) The larger forces that impinge on a number of different societies, even when they are not in direct contact.<sup>99</sup> Here it is important to notice Stearn's focus on 'Trace' rather than 'Cause' – a typical postmodern trait.

Special interests of world-historians are typically systems of interconnections, shifts in power balances, alterations in basic economic and technology systems, big shifts in population structures, and patterns of change and continuity within major societies.<sup>100</sup> Common topics in world-history are: 1) Contact and interactions between major societies, such as: Trade patterns, missionary religions, cultural contacts, diplomatic and military history, migration and interregional disease transmission 2) Basic characteristics of major societies themselves, such as societal structures like: Political structures, that is political history and the functions of government; Cultural-history, such as political theories, science and artistic styles; Economics, including technology and technological change, the roles of merchant and cities, agriculture and manufacturing, labor systems and economic systems; and Social-history, with key-points like class-structure, race, gender, family, kinship-systems and demography.<sup>101</sup> According to the Advanced Placement course in the US<sup>102</sup>, topics in world-history are somewhat similarly divided into: 'Humans and the environment' (demography, disease, technology); 'development and interaction of cultures' (religion, science, art etc.); 'state building and conflict' (types of government, empires and nations, revolutions); 'economic systems' (agriculture, trade, the industrial revolution etc.); and 'the

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<sup>98</sup> Patrick Manning – *Navigating World History* pp. 140-141.

<sup>99</sup> Peter N. Stearns – *World History* pp. 13-14.

<sup>100</sup> Peter N. Stearns – *World History* p. 66.

<sup>101</sup> Peter N. Stearns – *World History* pp. 141-152.

<sup>102</sup> Standardized courses to high school students that are generally recognized to be equivalent to undergraduate courses in college.

development and transformation of social structures' (gender, family, race, social and economic class).<sup>103</sup> Similar main topics are to be found on the WHA's list of 'Areas of Specialization for World History' which are: 'Cultural-Social', 'Economic', 'Political', 'Environmental' and 'Scientific and Medical', all with a vast array of sub-themes.<sup>104</sup> This gives a rather extensive overview, but still limits the scope to what seems to be associated with global-history, namely the concern with large-scale transnational processes.

This brings us to the *way of thinking* as a world-historian. Stearns mentions three habits of mind that are particularly attached to world-history and separates it from history in general; two of them are comparison and relating global to local.<sup>105</sup> How different cultures operate through comparative analysis has always been the basis of world-history, and finding similarities and differences and relating the effects of the global processes to the local and vice versa can be derived directly from the world-historical agenda and the discussion about globalization. However, the third habit of world-history tends to divide historians, namely the use of civilizations. The civilizational framework is a heritage from Oswald Spengler and Arnold J. Toynbee,<sup>106</sup> which William McNeil carried into modern world-history. The advantage of using civilizations is that the number of core societies can be limited, thus helping the historian to work with both regional diversity and change over time. Assuming that several core features and shared experiences define a civilization, this helps to give a good overview, but civilizations rarely tend to be the tidy uniform entities they are presented as.<sup>107</sup> It does not appear to be a shared feature of global-history and there seems to be a great deal of awareness among historians of the weaknesses possessed by this modernistic categorical thinking along the lines of 'Genre/Boundary'.

How people across various regions have influenced each other seems to be the focal point of world-history. Determining how this has come about, the levels of significance of different forms of contact, and changes in systems of contact over time is ultimately the object of study.<sup>108</sup> In world-history, Stearns underlines one of the most significant rules of thumb, which is the importance of syncretism. The important aforementioned idea and major contribution to the field put forth by Manning as well. Contacts are mutual experiences and they produce mutual compromises and adjustments. This is particular important to have in mind when contacts involve significant power disparities. The mutuality of encounters has three important points: 1) apparently conquered groups are not usually put under maximum possible pressure to conform, 2) mutual impact, also the conquerors are affected by the encounter, and 3) subjected people will always preserve certain cultural elements.<sup>109</sup> As mentioned before, this is a very important contribution to traditional historiography by undoing its blindspot of focusing on dominance. The syncretism stressed by Stearns is a typical postmodern trait along the lines of 'Dispersal' and 'Absence' (lifting up the previous silent voices of history), but also 'Deconstruction' could help describe this phenomena, due to the aspiration of revealing that things are not what we thought they were, and even 'Anarchy', since if not the dominant group is in charge, then no one is.

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<sup>103</sup> Peter N. Stearns – *World History* p. 13.

<sup>104</sup> [http://www.thewha.org/files/Areas\\_of\\_Specialization\\_for\\_World\\_History.pdf](http://www.thewha.org/files/Areas_of_Specialization_for_World_History.pdf) (08-01-2012).

<sup>105</sup> Peter N. Stearns – *World History* pp. 66-72.

<sup>106</sup> Oswald Spengler – *Untergang des Abendlandes* (1918) + Arnold J. Toynbee – *A Study of History* (1934–1961).

<sup>107</sup> Peter N. Stearns – *World History* pp. 104-106.

<sup>108</sup> Peter N. Stearns – *World History* p. 122.

<sup>109</sup> Peter N. Stearns – *World History* pp. 133-140.

Changes in contact patterns is a vital part of world-history, and according to Stearns, this, especially through the shifts in trade exchanges, is the single most important component in determining transitions from one major time period to another.<sup>110</sup> When it comes to periodization, it naturally raises the question about where to begin. Traditionally historians have started with the first written records, and at many history departments, this is also where to begin – if one wishes to go further back in time, one is referred to the archaeology departments (!)<sup>111</sup> In world-history this has largely dropped from view, and the origins of humankind, the first migrations and the nature of hunting and gathering economy is often used as a backdrop to the advent of agricultural civilization.<sup>112</sup> Periodization in world history differs to some extent from traditional history. As it has to include the entire world, the notion of the dark-ages or medieval times is thus in this global context arguably rendered obsolete. Certain guidelines exist though: As a premise world-history periodization must apply to most major societies, whilst the period's themes must have implications for all of them, for example the agrarian revolution and the rise of the first empires, the acceleration of interregional contacts around the year 1000 and the age of increased global contact around 1500. The so called 'big-bang' of globalization as mentioned before. Stearns highlights two factors that have to be present in every world-history period; those are "*measurable changes in the nature and range of trading interaction*" and "*measurable changes in the roster and balance among major societies or civilizations.*"<sup>113</sup> For example the year 1500 is characterized by the starting increase in power of the West-European states, brought on by the increase in global trade these peoples began to dominate. The contemporary era is among historians and sociologists often pinpointed to begin around 1950, with the emergence of the modern consumer culture in the west, or around 1970 with the intense acceleration in global contacts and trade.

Not only time, but also space raises additional questions in world-history. To the world-historian the problem of regional choices arises out of the question of avoiding the extremes of localism on the one hand and sweeping geographic determinism on the other. The question revolves mainly around how many regions it is practical to identify, and how much space there is for detail. Some regions are harder to agree upon than others, and decisions about internal coherence, external boundaries and the overall combination of geographical markers and shared histories are required. But also awareness of internal regional distinctions is vital to prevent misleading generalizations. There is no tidy formula as Stearns puts it.<sup>114</sup> This of course relates to the same issues as those of civilizations, regarding overlapping structures and the balance between manageability and excessive generalizations.

### **2.2.3: Global-History's Lack of a Coherent Theoretical Underpinning**

Global-history has been criticized for having no principle of selectivity, a lack of conceptualizing power in regard to the absence of any elegant idea to order all human experience and to have no clear idea about how to conduct research in the field.<sup>115</sup> Given the field's diverse historiographical roots and the wide distribution in the section relating to matters and perspectives, to attempt to establish a comprehensive

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<sup>110</sup> Peter N. Stearns – *World History* p. 121.

<sup>111</sup> Which astonishingly happened to me in an introductory speech on my first day when I began my history studies at the university of Lund in 2010.

<sup>112</sup> Peter N. Stearns – *World History* p. 84.

<sup>113</sup> Peter N. Stearns – *World History* p. 81.

<sup>114</sup> Peter N. Stearns – *World History* pp. 96-103.

<sup>115</sup> Marnie Hughes-Warrington – *World histories* p. 28.

theoretical framework of history in order to better understand the human interaction-processes, would probably be futile.<sup>116</sup> However, the beauty of using globalization as a loose theoretical underpinning of global-history, is that it is one with open ends and not a single, specific guiding driver or principle. A point I will return to in the discussion.

To what extent the discipline has escaped a Eurocentric world-view has been questioned. That world-history mostly relies on the synthesis of others' work, rather than conducting its own original groundwork has also been criticized. On the other hand the advantages of synthesis are not to be underestimated – someone has to connect the dots I may add. And as Hughes-Warrington argues *“While world-history’s tendency to base itself upon civilizations is and should be increasingly subject to examination, its commitment to rise above the nation, its desire to avoid Eurocentrism, its embrace of the comparative method, and its general ecumenical intentions impress most observers as praiseworthy.”*<sup>117</sup>

A common critique is also that the world-historical perspective is more appropriate for encyclopedic works and teaching than for research, since the trans-borderly topics and material tend to be too extensive to be handled by the same researcher.<sup>118</sup> To some degree world-history is to be understood as merely a teaching topic and a theoretical subject debated among historians and other scholars. Few historians wish to label themselves as global- or world-historians, even if they have made major contributions to the field and actively engage in world-historical discourses, perhaps because it would appear a bit too presumptuous.<sup>119</sup> Although, Christopher Alan Bayly has pointed out that every historian is a world-historian – even when they are not conscious about it.<sup>120</sup> And Patrick Manning likewise has stated that on the most expansive level, all historical studies have become world-history, due to the fact that all contemporary historians are expected to pay attention to interdisciplinary and historical connections and transnational issues on the global scale.<sup>121</sup> But, at the same time he concludes that *“For all its achievements and advances, world history remains an arena of amateur activity.”*<sup>122</sup> Whether that is all true or not can be debated, but it is evident that the field is in its infancy and that the room for further development is vast. However, Manning believes that historiography as a whole is *“...undergoing a revolution, with world history currently in the lead.”* Not only in the way of understanding the world as an interconnected place, but also in the methods and sources ranging over a vast repertoire entering the ground of other sciences.<sup>123</sup>

#### **2.2.4: Conclusion thus far: Global-history is about transborderly interactions and tends to be concerned with long-term and large-scale happenings.**

Judging from this short investigation there seems to be quite a coherency and agreement between the mentioned organizations and historians when it comes to the core of what global-history is concerned with. William McNeil basically answered the question as stated in the introduction when he was quoted

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<sup>116</sup> Stefan Eklöf Amirell – ‘Den världshistoriska vändningen’ p. 664.

<sup>117</sup> Marnie Hughes-Warrington – *World histories* p. 28.

<sup>118</sup> Stefan Eklöf Amirell – ‘Den världshistoriska vändningen’ p. 661.

<sup>119</sup> AHR Conversation – ‘On Transnational History’ p. 30.

<sup>120</sup> G. Budde, S. Conrad & O. Janz, *Transnationale Geschichte: Themen, Tendenzen und Theorien* (Göttingen, 2010) p. 11.

<sup>121</sup> Patrick Manning – *Navigating World History* p. 7.

<sup>122</sup> Patrick Manning – *Navigating World History* p. xii.

<sup>123</sup> Patrick Manning – *Navigating World History* p. 11.

of saying that world-history is about “interactions among peoples of diverse cultures” and, here I may add, to repeat the words of Marnie Hughes-Warrington from the same paragraph, tends to be concerned with “long-term and large-scale happenings”. This, and the addition of almost any term you can put ‘trans’ in front of and I think we have a sound definition of what we are dealing with here, all adding up to: *A historiographical field about transborderly interactions and connections, with a tendency to be concerned with long-term and large-scale happenings, by perceiving past events, just as I concluded on how to be global in one’s perspective, by “moving a step back in order to see the whole, focusing on the interconnections between parts all perceived equally comparable.”*<sup>124</sup> This I believe adequately sums up the main thoughts and basic core of global-history shared by both the WHA and the ENIUGH, alongside Patrick Manning, Peter Stearns and all their other colleges mentioned in this investigation.

However, past events can be perceived through a perspective well beyond the viewpoint of the average global-historian, this will be the subject of this enquiry’s next investigation. Bruce Mazlish has concluded, that what all world-histories have in common, is “...the desire to transcend the local lines of their time”<sup>125</sup> (Although locality, of course, is a constantly changing entity). Of equal importance, he concludes, is the world-historian’s search for “...transcendental meaning, theological or historical, to the human experience of the past.”<sup>126</sup> This quest, that global-history has begun, is being taken to a whole new level by a few brave scholars in an entirely new historiographical field – so called big-history. To this we will turn now.

### **2.3: Big-History – a step towards a new narrative**

Gilbert Allardyce has proposed that what the field of world-history needs, is “...a simple all-encompassing, elegant idea”<sup>127</sup> – Big-history might be able to offer just that.

Before we rush to reviewing this elegant idea, we need to understand its limitations. Big-history is not like historiography in any classical sense, and it cannot replace the hard work of detailed historical investigations. Rather, the field presents some complimentary perspectives that can help us to understand findings from other sciences in a historical perspective. Certainly, big-history simply makes too large claims to be viewed as directly historiographical. However, this does not mean that the field is irrelevant to history as an academic discipline. Big-history seems rather to offer a historization of other sciences, not least the natural sciences.

What then are the big claims made by big-history? Certainly it is not to claim that we know everything, that the whole story is told. Rather, it offers theoretical underpinnings that historians can use to communicate with other sciences.

Big-history is an emerging academic discipline which seeks to incorporate global-history in a larger chronological and topical vision than any other historical discipline. Its timeline stretches from the big bang and includes the entire universe; from the creation of the solar-system, to the origins of life on

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<sup>124</sup> p. 15.

<sup>125</sup> Marnie Hughes-Warrington – *World histories* p. 40.

<sup>126</sup> Marnie Hughes-Warrington – *World histories* p. 40.

<sup>127</sup> Fred Spier – *The structure of Big History* p. 1.

earth and on to humankind and the present. According to Stearns *“The goal is to seek common themes and patterns without full distinction between the human experience and the earlier and ongoing evolution of larger physical and biological systems.”* The field’s multidisciplinary approach embraces archaeology and natural sciences like cosmology, evolutionary biology, climatology, demographics and environmental studies, all viewed as historical sciences. Interdisciplinarity is one of big-history’s appeals,<sup>128</sup> and the central concern is with issues of order and disorder.<sup>129</sup>

In the following I will examine the theoretical frameworks presented by two historians who have been in the lead of this development from the beginning: Fred Spier and David Christian.

### **2.3.1: Fred Spier: Understanding history as the story of self-organizing regimes**

Fred Spier, biochemist, cultural anthropologist and lecturer on big-history is one of the pioneers in the field. In 1996 he wrote the first big-history book *The Structure of Big History – from the big bang until today*. Spier talks about the field as offering *“one unified theory of the past”*<sup>130</sup> and has argued that big history is essentially about ‘regimes’, or large and more or less stable patterns that exist on many different scales.<sup>131</sup> Spier’s definition of a ‘regime’ is that it is *“a more or less regular but ultimately unstable pattern that has a certain temporal permanence.”*<sup>132</sup> His reasons for using the term ‘regime’ rather than for example ‘system’, ‘pattern’, ‘configuration’, ‘order’ or something similar, is that he believes it to be the only term capable of being *“...utilised without hindrance to analyse all of big history.”*<sup>133</sup> He admits it to be a rather vague concept, but, as he writes *“For an adequate analysis of fuzzy reality, we need fuzzy yet versatile concepts.”*<sup>134</sup>

Regimes can refer to planetary systems, ecological environments and also human cultures. Human regimes are *“...constellations of more or less institutionalised behaviour”*<sup>135</sup>, that is, relatively stable patterns among humans about what they feel they and others should do and what to abstain from. These regimes arise as a response to the problems created by humans’ relations to the environment, other humans and themselves. Humans constantly seek to solve these problems, and in so doing they create new ones in a constant evolution of human culture. Spier urges this to be *“the most general interpretive scheme underlying our efforts at structuring human history”*. These aforementioned ecological, social and individual regimes, as Spier puts it, are what determine the human regimes. They never exist fully independently of each other, but can exhibit a certain amount of autonomy. Various regimes find themselves in various complex reciprocal relationships that to variable degrees affect each other.<sup>136</sup> The human regime itself seems to be caught between physical micro- and macro-processes, themselves regimes as well.<sup>137</sup> These regimes, from the DNA sequences of living creatures to the

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<sup>128</sup> Peter N. Stearns – *World History* p. 84.

<sup>129</sup> Marnie Hughes-Warrington – *World histories* p. 35.

<sup>130</sup> Fred Spier – *The structure of Big History* p. 16.

<sup>131</sup> Marnie Hughes-Warrington – *World histories* p. 76.

<sup>132</sup> Fred Spier – *The structure of Big History* p. 14.

<sup>133</sup> Fred Spier – *The structure of Big History* p. 3.

<sup>134</sup> Fred Spier – *The structure of Big History* p. 9.

<sup>135</sup> Fred Spier – *The structure of Big History* pp. 5-6.

<sup>136</sup> Fred Spier – *The structure of Big History* p. 6.

<sup>137</sup> Fred Spier – *The structure of Big History* p. 13.

biological environment that surrounds them, have all had a crucial impact on the human regime, but at the same time themselves to various degrees been affected by human behavior.

Spier emphasizes the principle that in order for regimes to evolve, that is for matter to organize itself to form increasingly complex structures, they have to be neither too rigid to change nor too flexible that they fall apart, exist “*near the edge of chaos*” so to speak as he puts it by quoting Stuart Kauffman.<sup>138</sup> The attractiveness of this principle is that it applies to non-organic, organic as well as human cultural regimes. When studying the evolution of all regimes, two general principles appear: The first that regimes influence one another and the balances of influence between the various regimes, seen from a long term perspective, to a varying degree appear unstable. The second principle is that regimes come in to being because of this, they never appear from nothing and cannot appear unless some instability exist in the parent regime, but never too much, because then that regime would never have existed in the first place.<sup>139</sup> From Spier’s viewpoint ‘entropy’ seems to be the driving force behind creation, a concept that perhaps could be one of big-history’s unique properties. We will return to that later.

### **2.3.1.1: A Holistic View on History**

It is obvious that Spier has a holistic approach to things. Seeing the world as a whole seems to be on his agenda, believing that “*...we live in one single, undivided Universe, within one single Solar System, on one single planet, as one humankind...*”<sup>140</sup> On several occasions he stresses the importance of understanding regimes as making up ‘wholes’ greater than the sum of its parts<sup>141</sup> – the key mantra of holism. The human regimes consist of many individual biological units, persons, regimes themselves who again consist of billions of regimes of singular cells, all the way down to the countless regimes on subatomic levels.

This ‘whole’, supposedly greater than the sum of its parts, the so called ‘regime’, defines, according to Spier, higher levels of complexity, and thus cannot be adequately explained by a theory concerned only with lower levels of complexity like atoms and molecules. All of nature can be seen as regimes. And apparently chaotic phenomena viewed from a higher, more embracing perspective, may display higher degrees of order, so the definition of chaotic behavior depends merely on the scale of inquiry. But Spier stresses the importance of keeping in mind that regimes are just analytic and didactic models, representations of reality, but not reality itself.<sup>142</sup>

What Spier emphasizes in these models are the various human regime transformations, i.e. from non-fire using to fire using regimes, or from agricultural to industrial, by using Goudsblom simple model: First no one has it, then some has it and finally everyone has to have it (or succumb). One would necessarily have to look on all the power differentials that occur during these processes. But by focusing not only on outcomes, but more importantly on transition processes and developing phase differentials, one would gain a much more “*...dynamic and reality-congruent view of history*”. He stresses the importance of interdisciplinarity in order for us to understand these complex happenings. Since certain natural as well

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<sup>138</sup> Fred Spier – *The structure of Big History* p. 25.

<sup>139</sup> Fred Spier – *The structure of Big History* pp. 27-29.

<sup>140</sup> Fred Spier – *The structure of Big History* pp. vii-viii.

<sup>141</sup> Fred Spier – *The structure of Big History* pp. 12 + 29.

<sup>142</sup> Fred Spier – *The structure of Big History* pp. 12-13.

as social sciences often deal with complex unstable configurations that are unique in character, in which situations never repeat themselves exactly, and in which small causes can have large effects in the long run. The common occupation with patterns and feature of non-linear processes of the sciences should be the common ground of investigating the past – and thereby, I may add, bridging the gap between the humanities and the natural sciences. Spier adds the disclaimer the he does view the human adventure here on earth as undetermined, unplanned and unconscious – we don't really know what we are doing – however, by observing common patterns and regularities in the universe, we can realize that the developments we see are not completely random.<sup>143</sup> Spier concludes that a better way of structuring human history (the narrative) is to look at the developing phase differentials rather than their outcomes, that is, to look beyond the dominant human ecological and social regimes.<sup>144</sup> I believe this is a rather important point and a reason to include the preceding pre-human regimes, to use Spier's terminology, in order to understand the global history of humankind and its place in the universe. This idea resembles global-history's emphasis on syncretism and tendency towards 'Dispersal'.

### 2.3.2: David Christian: A Modern Creation Myth

A colleague of Spier, Professor David Christian, president of the International Big History Association, credited with coining the term 'big-history' and author of *Maps of Time: an Introduction to Big History* that came out in 2005, has compared the formation of states to that of star-clusters, and human organizations along the same lines of hierarchy and division of labor similar to that of insects. This cosmological approach to history, he argues, was chosen in order to give students a more secular, scientific and above all more comprehensive view of life, than the diverse school and university courses with no coherent view of society or history, and with relatively scarce connection to one another were able to give. Aware that this can only be stated in mythic form, he wanted to offer a myth for our time, as he has said: "*To understand ourselves [...] we need to know the very large story, the largest story of all.*"<sup>145</sup>

Christian believes historians have become too absorbed in details and deliberately have neglected the task of generalization, so that we are left with "*...plenty of information but a fragmented and parochial vision of its field of inquiry*" to a degree that it has become difficult to explain why anyone should bother studying history at all.<sup>146</sup> Big-history permits asking the very large questions and encourages searching for larger meanings in the past. By tackling these questions, new approaches are required that encourage the drawing of new links between different academic disciplines in a way capable of transcending "*the intellectual apartheid between "the two cultures" of science and the humanities*".<sup>147</sup> Christian stresses the importance of "*...drawing closer links between the traditional content and methodology of history and that of other disciplines*" in order to "*...enrich the theoretical and methodological toolbox available to historians.*"<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Fred Spier – *The structure of Big History* pp. 40-43.

<sup>144</sup> Fred Spier – *The structure of Big History* p. 87.

<sup>145</sup> [http://www.thegreatcourses.com/tgc/courses/course\\_detail.aspx?cid=8050](http://www.thegreatcourses.com/tgc/courses/course_detail.aspx?cid=8050) (08-01-2012).

<sup>146</sup> David Christian – "The Case for "Big History"" p. 224.

<sup>147</sup> David Christian – "The Case for "Big History"" p. 227.

<sup>148</sup> David Christian – "The Case for "Big History"" p. 234.

In the introduction of *Maps of Time* Christian considers the modesty among modern historians surrounding the reluctance of offering any unified account of how things came to be as unnecessary and even harmful. First of all it is unnecessary because we have never before had access to so much information about our past as we have today. The elements of a creation myth are all around us. Second, it is harmful because it creates an incoherent fragmented view of the world, that contributes to a subtle but pervasive feeling of disorientation and not ‘fitting in’, a quality created by modern life referred to by Émile Durkheim as ‘anomie’ (the breakdown of social bonds between the individual and its community). The answers to the big questions about who we are and where we come from, which throughout earlier times was offered by creation myths, seems to be an incapacity of our modern age. A way of tackling the lacking sense of belonging and direction created by this, would be to assemble all the disconnected fragments of modern science in to “...a coherent and accessible account of origins, a modern creation myth”.

Here I want to stress that the idea of a creation myth is to be seen as the equivalent of the world map. The world map cannot show details like street names and every single town and creek, its shorelines are somewhat inaccurate, but what it offers instead is a view of the whole. The importance of emphasizing this approach is highlighted by Christian by quoting physicist Murray Gell-Mann, who stated that “...no complex, nonlinear system can be adequately described by dividing it up into subsystems or into various aspects, defined beforehand [since], “The whole is more than the sum of its parts.””. Christian urges scholars not to be scared of inaccuracies and superficiality, because even if imperfect, this ‘grand unified story’ is still a story that deserves telling – even if we risk “...making fools of ourselves” as he concludes by quoting the Austrian physicist Erwing Schrödinger’s call for a more unified vision of knowledge.<sup>149</sup>

### **2.3.2.1: Beyond Postmodernism**

Christian agrees (with postmodernism) that there is no possibility of a creation myth to be neutral, since modern knowledge does not offer the neutral observation point of an omniscient being anyhow. And as he argues “All knowledge arises from a relationship between a knower and an object of knowledge.” So the case of an anthropocentric narrative should not be held against the creation myth – a myth always belongs to someone, and at the center of it is a desire to understand.<sup>150</sup> Christian argues that below the surface of all our modern knowledge and reasoning, we have not and will not manage to eradicate the poorly composed myths we never the less seem to construct by ourselves. So why not deliberately construct a better myth and have it out in the open so we can criticize it and improve it? And, as an implicit comment to the postmodern historian who does not feel convinced about his reasoning, he concludes that “In history as in building, construction must precede deconstruction.”<sup>151</sup> The use of the term ‘myth’ when talking about big history is a way of reminding us of the postmodern virtue that all accounts of reality are provisional, that they are merely maps of reality, and never just true or false. The strongest claim affiliated with a modern creation myth is that it “...offers a unified account of origins

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<sup>149</sup> David Christian – *Maps of Time* pp. 2-5.

<sup>150</sup> David Christian – *Maps of Time* p. 6.

<sup>151</sup> David Christian – *Maps of Time* p. 10.

from the perspective of the early twenty-first century.”<sup>152</sup> And that seems to be Christian’s purpose of writing such a tale.

The focal point of this tale is that there exist “...phenomena that cross all scales”. The key interests are the ordered entities at every level, from molecules and galaxies to human societies, and explaining how these things come into being, develop and perish. The central theme is about how the rules of change vary from one scale to another.<sup>153</sup> But there are also matters that appear at all different scales: “Of all the patterns that occur at many different scales, the most fundamental is the existence of pattern itself.”<sup>154</sup> Spier has stated that the way he himself uses the term ‘regime’ is similar to the notion of ‘equilibrium systems’ used by Christian.<sup>155</sup> The way how ‘regimes’ develop from within and how they break down because of too much instability is also similar to Christian’s ‘equilibrium systems’.<sup>156</sup> In a paper from 1991 Christian asks if there is “...a discernible pattern to the past?” This pattern seems to Christian as well as Spier to be ‘entropy’, a kind of force that “...leads to imbalance, the decline of complex entities, and a sort of “running down” of the universe” and a counterforce “...that manage to form and sustain complex but temporary equilibria despite the pressure of entropy”. This is what Christian calls ‘equilibrium systems’ and they include everything from galaxies, stars, the earth, the biosphere to social structures of various kinds, living things, and human beings. “These are all entities that achieve a temporary but always precarious balance, undergo periodic crises, reestablish new equilibria, but eventually succumb to the larger forces of imbalance represented by the principle of “entropy.”” These can be found at all times and all scales. Human history is the story of one such system and “...the most profound question that can be asked by a member of the species *Homo sapiens* living in the modern era is this: will human society manage to establish a new equilibrium of some kind? Or will it succumb to the forces of entropy?”<sup>157</sup>

### **2.3.2.2: The Key Concept of Entropy (disorder) – and the counterforce (order) leading towards self-organizing increasingly complex entities**

Entropy refers to the so called second law of thermodynamics that says that in a closed system, such as the universe, the amount of free energy, or energy capable of doing work, tends to dissipate over time. What it predicts is that over an extremely long timespan, all differentials will diminish. That is, eventually everything will become increasingly less ordered as it tends towards a state of thermodynamic equilibrium. Complexity will diminish that is. This core belief of modern physics asks the question, how order is possible in the first place at all? This is one of the great puzzles of modern cosmology, but the constant expansion of the universe may be able to explain it. Christian refers to Paul Davies who explains that “Matter and energy in far-from-equilibrium open systems have a propensity to seek out higher and higher levels of organization and complexity.”<sup>158</sup> So “Paradoxically, the tendency toward increasing entropy - the drive toward disorder - may itself be the engine that creates order.”<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> David Christian – *Maps of Time* p. 11.

<sup>153</sup> David Christian – *Maps of Time* p. 7.

<sup>154</sup> David Christian – *Maps of Time* p. 505.

<sup>155</sup> Fred Spier – *The structure of Big History* p. 3.

<sup>156</sup> Fred Spier – *The structure of Big History* p. 28.

<sup>157</sup> David Christian – ‘The Case for “Big History”’ pp. 237-238.

<sup>158</sup> David Christian – *Maps of Time* pp. 506-508.

<sup>159</sup> David Christian – *Maps of Time* p. 509.

How complex entities reverse the workings of entropy but at the same time increase entropy by using up the available free energy, adding to the paradox, has by Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stenger been termed 'dissipative'.<sup>160</sup> Christian concludes that the fundamental rule of emergent properties seems to be for complex entities to gradually emerge by "...linking already existing patterns into larger and more complex patterns at different scales" where some of these patterns happen to constitute new arrangements that are even more stable and durable. This "...endless waltz of chaos and complexity..." is one of the unifying ideas of Christian's *Maps of Time*.<sup>161</sup>

### **2.3.3: Conclusion on Big-History Regarding Hassan's Theory**

I have come to the conclusion that big-history, regardless of its ostensibly both modern and postmodern tendencies, essentially remains something fundamentally different and that it breaks the boundaries of Hassan dichotomies. Where 'Dispersal' seemed to describe the tendencies of global-history quite well, this I believe is not a good enough description of big-history. Here I would say that the new concept 'Dissipative' would be a more suitable choice, because the core of the narrative is like a whirlpool with no solidity or consistency, a dissipative structure with a center, but one that is always on the move, always changing and that it can only be kept intact by dispersing its surroundings. The dichotomies of 'Design' (modernity) and 'Chance' (postmodernity) has given me another interesting dilemma, and my conclusion became that the only fitting concept regarding big-history would be 'Self-organization' or 'Autopoeisis'. Other examples I stumbled upon is 'Presence' vs. 'Absence', in big-history 'Emergence' seems more accurately to be the case. In addition neither 'Form' nor 'Antiform' seems to be at the core of big-history's ontology, but rather perceiving the world in forms of 'Pattern'. Because of this I have chosen to develop Hassan's theory so that it better corresponds with the findings in big-history. This will be the final part of this thesis. But first I wish to discuss and analyze how the metanarratives of this investigation relate to postmodernism in general.

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<sup>160</sup> David Christian – *Maps of Time* p. 509.

<sup>161</sup> David Christian – *Maps of Time* pp. 510-511.

# Part 3: Analysis and Discussion:

## The indication of a shift beyond postmodernism in historiography

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In this chapter I will attempt to analyze and discuss the many different aspects thus far. Hopefully I will succeed in collecting all the loose ends and make for a coherent closing of the ideas presented in this thesis. I will begin by connecting the theories of postmodernism and globalization with the field of global-history, and after that I will attempt to do the same with big-history. Regarding big-history in specific I will use my results from that part of the investigation to compare and further develop the theories of Ihab Hassan. My final conclusion is that this trend in historiography is an *indication* of a shift in paradigm beyond postmodernity. Regardless of whether that can be said to be entirely correct or not, I hope it will be clear to the reader why I have come to that conclusion. But, to begin with I will introduce the reader to a significant difference between both postmodern and most contemporary historiography and the metanarratives of this investigation, namely the ‘smash’ perspective.

### 3.1: Beyond the ‘Smash’ Perspective

There appears to be one specific feature that haunts historical narratives of the grander scale, which global-history wants to make away with: The so called ‘smash’ perspective<sup>162</sup>. Smash perspective is when different historical narratives are put together in a theoretical disorganized way. Many contemporary textbooks on the history of the world, e.g. John McKay’s *A History of World Societies*<sup>163</sup>, do not have the interlinked perspectives of global-history. The ‘smash’ perspective does acknowledge different histories and perspectives – but has no principle by which it can coordinate and compare this multitude of histories. It simply ‘smashes’ them together. ‘Smash’ is more inclusive than just favoring one history or one perspective, but it leads historiography towards the “*one-damned-thing-after-another*”<sup>164</sup> approach to history criticized by Arnold Toynbee. Contemporary historiography is today in large parts a ‘history in pieces’ which corresponds to the thoughts of postmodernism. Historiography is, at least in this regard, today postmodern. One does not have meta-stories to link the many pieces together. Let me present some examples:

- Presenting each part of the world as a separate history (Europe, China, India, the Americas etc.).
- Treating certain topics as ‘add-ons’: gender history, environmental history, etc.
- The narrative of globalization as Europe’s colonization of a largely passive world.
- Detailed accounts of historical facts (clothing, cultural aspects, ideas, religions) without wider contexts.
- Understanding fascism as a specifically German phenomenon or the American War of Independence as an exceptionally American phenomenon.

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<sup>162</sup> A term credited to the American theoretical behavioral scientist and a complex systems scientist, Michael Lammport Commons.

<sup>163</sup> McKay, John, *A History of World Societies*, 8th ed. (Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2009).

<sup>164</sup> Arnold J. Toynbee, ‘Law and Freedom in History’, (*A Study of History*, Vol. 2, 1957).

In all of the above examples, one learns history, but does not develop one's relationship to history as a whole. There are exceptions to this 'smash' perspective and these come mainly from modernist historians (i.e. 'pre-postmodern' historians). Modernist historians such as Marxist historians or world-system theorists or economic historians (with the notion of the 'economic man') all have a synthesizing approach to history, linking the study of disparate phenomena to one another. But these intellectual projects all appeared prior to the linguistic turn and postmodernism. They all reduce history to one guiding principle (again: class, economic man, world system) and do not look beyond that one principle. They all take their own principle to be real, not only a model, not merely one narrative of many possible narratives.

But global-history can aspire to synthesize disparate phenomena in a way that mainstream history does not. What the study of globalization in history offers is a grand narrative – but one with open ends, not with one guiding driver or principle. Thus globalization studied through historiography enriches the multiple perspectives of the historian. At least to me it makes more sense to study tea and sugar consumption of English coal-miners or the horsemanship of Native Americans on the North American plains, when these bits connect to and inform a larger perspective on history as a whole. Global-history can thus be said to be an attempt at post-postmodern historiography, a step away from the history in pieces we have grown accustomed to.

## **3.2: Global-History and Its Relationship to Postmodernism**

Postmodernity's incredulity towards all metanarratives naturally renders the notion of global-history and especially big-history something essentially non-postmodern. The question remains though how far these new narratives diverge from postmodernity, if they point back to an age more hospitable to grand synthesis or remains something hitherto unseen in historiography?

Globalization, the ideological backdrop of global-history, could be said to be *the* great narrative of our age. At the same time, our age is distinctly postmodern. But, while almost the entire world is submitted to the forces of globalization, postmodernism has been theorized and described from a largely Eurocentric perspective. That is, the only postmodernism we seem to know is that of the West. Can something that corresponds to Western postmodernity occur and be observed in China or India? As we can see, postmodernism is linked to globalization – but it is not yet globalized itself. Perhaps there can be other postmodernisms than the one I have described in this thesis? These are questions I am unable to answer. However, if there is a multitude of postmodernisms (one in China, India etc.) this points to a lack in the postmodernist way of understanding reality because the theory revolving around it is based on a western specific cultural perspective. The time and age we are living in is characterized by the staggering diversity of world-views. While postmodernism describes this reality, it does not offer tools to integrate and understand the relationships between world views. What I believe is inherently postmodern is our lacking capability of handling this great diversity. Perhaps we would improve in that regard if we went beyond postmodernism, while remembering to include its many important insights.

### **3.2.1: Commonalities and Differences between Postmodernism and Global-History**

Anti-eurocentrism is both a feature of postmodernism and the global thinking advanced by globalization and global-history. Professor of history Michael Lang has in his essay "modern, postmodern, world"

written that what world-history and postmodernism have in common is that they both have “...endeavored to decentre European assumptions about itself”, though with the important difference that whereas postmodernism has undertaken to change forms of thinking, world-history has merely attempted to change the content of the historical accounts.<sup>165</sup> To this I disagree. As mentioned in the introduction to the chapter on global and world-history, world-history is not like a world-music festival (smashing together all kinds of ‘ethnic’ music, be they Balkan or West African). You do not write world-history by merely moving your point of interest outside Europe. It is obvious that this point has been entirely missed by Lang.

Global-history as a field offers more than just new contents. Like postmodernity it also offers a whole new way of thinking. The global-historian goes beyond the traditional way of observing societies as exogenous and autonomous entities. By investigating the trans-boundary processes and relations *per se* and seeing them as the main organizing principle in the narrative, the global historian offers a new way of understanding historical causality. As put forward by Manning historiography is enriched by the use of new focus points:

1. The story of connections within the global human community and the portraying of the crossing of boundaries and the linking of systems in the human past.
2. The linking of speculation, logic, and evidence into a coherent analysis with the goal of developing broad, interpretive, well-documented assessments of past transformations and connections.

These points can be viewed together with Stearns’ emphasis on relating the global to the local, his emphasis on the role of syncretism (the idea that contacts always are mutual experiences that produce mutual compromises and adjustments) and his willingness to turn to archaeology. All this shows us that global-history entails a new way of thinking for the historian. It does not merely offer new contents.

In the investigation of the previous chapter it was evident that global-history shows both modern and postmodern tendencies according to Hassan’s theory. It is not like postcolonial-history, that takes globalization into account, but in its core is centered around the postmodern emphasis on ‘Petite Histoire’ and the ‘Absent’, previously neglected silent voices of history – in addition to its political underpinnings of fighting the old hierarchy created by the planets former white masters – its qualitative focus also contrasts global-history’s quantitative propensities. How postmodern or modern global-history remains is a good question. I do not wish to label it here. The move away from viewing societies as autonomous exogenous entities, ‘Form’, to focus on connections in themselves, points to postmodernism’s inclination of ‘Antiform’. The openness of globalization as a theoretical framework corresponds with that too. But in this regard, as with big-history, the concept ‘Pattern’, understood as provisionally conjunctive, has gotten some meaning to it as well. Postmodern ‘Decreation/Deconstruction’ does not exactly fit the bill either when it comes to global-history, since that essential virtue of postmodernism hardly seems to be on the global-historical agenda. Neither does ‘Creation/Totalization’ since it hardly corresponds with global-history’s specific way of creating a greater picture, ‘Transformation’ I would say, since the study of how deep transformation occurs and how it is

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<sup>165</sup> Marnie Hughes-Warrington – *World histories* p. 169.

part of a greater picture of many past great transformations seem more accurately to describe the global-historical agenda – as well as that of big-history. The word ‘Synthesis’ has been used frequently in relation to the metanarratives of contemporary historiography in this investigation, but perhaps the term ‘Proto-Synthesis’ would describe it better, since it admits that the synthesis it produces can never be final or absolute. Stearns mentioned the emphasis on ‘Trace’<sup>166</sup> or ‘Difference/Trace’ as an important feature of global-history, but ‘Origin/Cause’ seems to me of equal importance, perhaps ‘Differentiation-Integration’ would describe this feature better, since differentiation and integration are two sides of the same coin. That is, by differentiating between phenomena and concepts, and then putting them together, global-history integrates them into more meaningful wholes. The concern with interdisciplinarity and the tendency to transcend borders of all kinds corresponds with a shift away from modernity’s ‘Genre/Boundary’, but postmodernisms ‘Text/Intertext’, the view that all categories are merely narratives, forms of text that can and will refer to one another, does not seem to fit with global-history, or big-history for that matter. I would suggest ‘Complexity’ as a fitting concept describing the way abouts of these metanarratives – in big-history though, an explicit and integrate part of the theoretical framework.

The ecological focus of much of global history is a feature it shares with postmodernism (inherently hostile to the wrongdoings of industrial modernity’s antagonistic relationship with nature). Global-history often portrays the intricate relationship between humans and their environment. Though there is a limitation to global-history in its way of viewing the split between human culture and nature. In big-history however, humans are to a higher degree part of nature and their culture is the next step in cosmic evolution.

### **3.2.2: The Shift to Big-History: History in Nature and Nature in History**

Big-history attempts to overcome this split between human culture and the natural world. It studies patterns of self-organization that occur both in nature and culture. Thus it expands the reach of historiography: it sees nature in history and it treats the natural world as a historical development.

Wolf Schäfer has proposed that it is time to look beyond the opposition between man and nature.<sup>167</sup> This is something that goes beyond postmodernity. Where modernity was preoccupied with taming and exploiting nature, postmodernity exposed and criticized this endeavor. A progressive way of looking at things would be to see human culture as part of nature, not divided from it. Perhaps this is a more appropriate narrative for humanity in a global age. Like global-history, big-history studies how humans in comparatively antagonizing ways came to be part of an interconnected web. But big-history *also* studies how we are part of an interconnected web that began long before the history of humanity itself. This narrative is the story of ‘one humankind’ – not the story of how certain portions of it acted in more or less benign ways against other parts of it. It offers a potential base of common identity for all humans. To me this sounds like a praiseworthy endeavor, difficult as it may be!

However, where global-history is much about finding patterns in past events, in big-history pattern itself is the story.

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<sup>166</sup> p. 25.

<sup>167</sup> Patrick Manning – *Navigating World History* p. 225.

### 3.3: Big-History: Escaping the postmodern condition, but keeping its insights

Fred Spier's idea of 'one unified theory of the past' is enough to make anyone with a few postmodern tendencies allergic. His use of the term 'regime' (instead of 'system' or 'pattern' ) however, deliberately pursuing its vagueness as a merit, can be seen as quite a postmodern trait alongside his emphasis of the importance of keeping in mind that we are just dealing with models, representations of reality, but not reality itself.

David Christian's notion of a 'creation myth of our time', how postmodern doesn't that sound? But his narrative integrates the well-established critical thinking of the postmodern epistemology by not mistaking the map for the world. After all, he himself admits that his story is not really true in any absolute sense. What is *not* postmodern about it is the lack of irony in Christian's proposal. This point deserves to be stressed again: Big-history is using a general historiographical perspective for creating a map of reality, *without mistaking the map for reality*. The same can be said about Spier, but at the same time Christian includes the pre-modern usage of mythos, and he bases this myth on a modern view of progress, seen as the development of ordered entities of increased complexity over time. Christian agrees with postmodernism that there is no possibility of a creation myth to be neutral, since all knowledge arises from a relationship between a knower and an object of knowledge. But he does not agree that we should just relax and give up on metanarratives after realizing that all of our ideas about the world were merely constructions of the mind reflected by the discourse of our surroundings.

Big-history includes many of the substantial wisdoms of postmodernity, but at the same time transcends this paradigm without being reactionary. With 'reactionary' I mean turning against postmodernity, refusing its insights by going back to the perspectives predating it. What points to big-history going beyond postmodernity and not reacting against it are illustrated by the following examples:

1) Christian's eager proposal that "*construction must precede deconstruction.*"<sup>168</sup> Postmodern theory showed us the limits of our way of perceiving knowledge and now he suggests that we ought to see what then to build up with that in mind – or put in another way, since our knowledge about the past can only consist of narratives, structures of the mind, then let's construct the best available narrative of our age! Differentiation has with postmodernism come to an end, further differentiation is not possible. This I believe has led to an increasing will among some to do something else, pick up the pieces and build a new narrative – but not by going back and do what was done before everything got deconstructed. Not only Christian, but also Manning has emphasized this aspect of writing history, by emphasizing the role as storyteller to the future historian and to "*...be that of synthesizer of methodology and mediator among theoretical and methodological alternative, combining these in interpreting historical records in order to provide a comprehensive and coherent view of the past.*"<sup>169</sup> This leads us to the next example:

2) The relaxed attitude towards the postmodern adaptation of the role of storyteller, a position modern historians, worried about their scientific credentials, have been rather uncomfortable about recognizing,

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<sup>168</sup> p. 32.

<sup>169</sup> p. 24.

that, is a sign of progression rather than reaction. But in the case of big-history it also points to the role of historians as meta-synthesizers of knowledge, not just producers of even more quantities of information – or deconstructors of the same.

3) Seeing the world as a whole and as an interconnected place. The holistic perspective of big-history, that the whole is more than the sum of its parts points towards a new synthesis: Where modernism was intrinsically hierarchical in its ontology, postmodernism reacted against this by being unreservedly anarchical. Big-history’s approach however could be classed as holarchical, showing that there is a structure out there in was seemingly appears to be chaotic, but it is structured along the lines of complexity, structures wherein all parts retain their autonomy while at the same time remaining parts of a greater whole.

4) Big-history has a ‘non-oops’ explanation of creation – shit doesn’t ‘just’ happen. This goes beyond both postmodernity’s view of randomness, ‘Chance’, but also modernity’s mechanic and non-teleological view on things, ‘Design’. Big-history’s explanation model is ‘autopoiesis’, or with a simpler word ‘self-organization’. Things happen because of immanent features, i.e. not due to some kind of transcendental dualism (modernity as well as western pre-modernity), but this immanence is not random – it is destiny. Contrary the modernistic view that the human adventure here on earth is not planned; it is not humans themselves who are the driving force behind change, but the driving force itself, pattern, that manifests itself through human beings and their culture.

I consider global-history and especially big-history to be part of a new wave of intellectual thought that will influence the 21<sup>st</sup> century just as postmodernity did in the 20<sup>th</sup>. To this I have sought to develop Hassan’s table one step further in adding the concepts I believe describe this development. The comments to the right refer to big-history, but could be applied to other trends in science and philosophy also, e.g. complexity science, integral theory etc. Just as Hassan’s terms are to be understood more or less intuitively, so are mine as well – so please, add your *own* comments.

### 3.5: Table of Hassan’s dichotomies’ relation to big-history

MODERNISM	POSTMODERNISM	BIG-HISTORY	My Comments on big-history
Purpose	Play	Playful purpose	Big-history is written with a specific purpose but, accepting the postmodern critique, it can only state its quest for truth in provisional, playful terms.
Design	Chance	Self-organization/ autopoiesis	Big-history studies how remarkably unlikely events and processes happen despite the odds. How many factors come together and self-organize into new, more complex orders.
Hierarchy	Anarchy	Holarchy	All parts of reality are ordered according to their level of complexity, but they are also interdependent parts of a whole, where each complex entity is dependent on regimes of various complexity within the web they inhabit.

Signified	Signifier	Significance	All self-organizing regimes process information from the exterior world, thereby creating meaning and knowledge. Indeed, meaning and knowledge exist only through this processing of information.
Distance	Participation	Co-Creation	When we study reality, interact with it, or conceptualize it – we also create reality. A part of this co-creation is that we ourselves are changed and reorganized as a result of the interaction.
Creation/ Totalization	Decreation/ Deconstruction	Transformation	Big-history studies how deep transformation occurs and how it is part of a greater picture of many past great transformations.
Synthesis	Antithesis	Proto-Synthesis	Big-history attempts to construct an overview of world history in a cosmological context, but admits that the synthesis it produces can never be final or absolute.
Presence	Absence	Emergence	How things come into being is the focus of big-history, how they emerge through interaction with one another, how they go from being absent to being present and vice versa
Centering	Dispersal	Dissipative	Like a whirlpool with a center but no solidity or consistency, the dissipative structure has a center, but only one that is always on the move, always changing. It can be kept intact only by dispersing its surroundings.
Genre Boundary	Text/Intertext	Complexity	Big-history works with different disciplines that are distinct but in complex relationship with one another. It is by seeing these complex relationships that one can see the common patterns of big-history.
Semantics	Rhetoric	Mythos Creation	Big-history is concerned with creating a meaningful myth for our time. The message is stated in mythic form, not to be taken as absolute truth.
Narrative / Grande Histoire	Anti- narrative/Petite Histoire	Meta-narrative	Big-history strives towards the most comprehensive narrative presently available but does so through the study of both large and miniscule phenomena.

Origin/Cause	Difference/Trace	Differentiation-Integration	Differentiation and integration are two sides of the same coin – differentiating between phenomena and concepts, and then putting them together, integrating them, into more meaningful wholes.
Form (conjunctive, closed)	Antiform (disjunctive, open).	Pattern (provisionally conjunctive)	The world consists not of form but of partially interconnected patterns. These are however far from only disjunctive and discontinuous – indeed each pattern connects to its environment continuously, and must do so to sustain its existence.

Hassan states that *“the relation of postmodernism to modernism remains ambiguous, Oedipal or parasitical.”*<sup>170</sup> Postmodernity is modernity’s anti-thesis, but it has far from liberated itself from its predecessor and would to some extent not be able to exist if it could not constantly mirror itself in the reflections of its evil twin modernity. If postmodernism is modernity’s anti-thesis, then what appears to the right in the table above I would be tempted to call their synthesis. These new trends in the way of thinking, that for example big-history constitutes, seems to break free of the constrains of its predecessor by transcending and including both its precursors. Not reacting against, but including the many wisdoms and insights of both modernism and postmodernism; not merely construct a compromise between the two (which wouldn’t work either due to their direct opposing views on most things), but actively seeking a solution beyond by creating a new paradigm in its own right. This can most evidently be seen in the case of differentiation. Modern science was partly successful by differentiating, that is reducing the world to its smallest most easy comprehensible parts. The evolution of differentiation did not come to an end with postmodernity; on the contrary, it sought to chop reality down to even more pieces by ripping the formerly coherent neutral observer apart. As mentioned, we have come to the end of the road here. If we wish to go beyond, develop a truly new paradigm, we have to work with developing a new meta-narrative, as Christian puts it: *“construction must precede deconstruction.”* and this is something entirely new – as well as being an enterprise as old as humanity itself. The dogma that history is just *“one damned thing after another”* has surely been challenged by this new development in historiography. The quality of its work however and how well the current achievements perform what is promised is of course an open question.

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<sup>170</sup> Hassan, Ihab, ‘From Postmodernism to Postmodernity: the Local/Global Context’ [http://www.ihabhassan.com/postmodernism\\_to\\_postmodernity.htm](http://www.ihabhassan.com/postmodernism_to_postmodernity.htm) (07-05-2013).

# Conclusion

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The work with this thesis has shown that world-, global- and transnational-history ought to be considered as roughly the same historiographical field, preferably labeled global-history, and that big-history seems to differ to a degree that it should be seen as a separate category.

Global-history is a historiographical field about transborderly interactions and connections and tends to be concerned with long-term and large-scale happenings. Globalization seems to be an important theoretical underpinning of this discipline, but a rather open ended one that is. The global perspective this entails implies perceiving past events by moving a step back in order to see the whole, focusing on the interconnections between entities all perceived equally comparable.

Big-history is concerned with the story of self-organizing regimes or equilibrium systems. These patterns and pattern per se is at the core of the narrative, but so is the awareness that we are just dealing with models as implied by the use of the concept 'creation myth'. The theoretical underpinnings are holistic (the view that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts) and takes account of complexity and non-linear processes. If globalization is to be considered the central idea of global-history, entropy seems to be the driving idea behind big-history.

These metanarrative can be seen as having both modern and postmodern tendencies. However, the attempt of 'Grande Histoire', an indication of an essential non-postmodern inclination, does in this case not appear as any modernistic approach either. The move beyond the 'smash' perspective, and in big-history's case even the move beyond the perceived split between human culture and nature, alongside the historization of the natural sciences and linking up with the humanities, seeing the world as a whole and the non-oops, non-mechanic, non-dualistic view of creation, all points towards a new paradigm. This paradigm urges that construction must precede deconstruction, however by emphasizing that the synthesis it creates can never be final or absolute – a proto-synthesis. It is the realization that postmodernism spells the end of differentiation and the only way to progress is by going in the other direction. The re-adaptation of the historian's role as storyteller is not in any apathetic way caused by the difficulty of relating to absolute truths, but on grounds of a genuine desire to understand. It is that which shows global- and big-history to point towards a new paradigm shift.

# Afterword

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It is important to stress that big-history is merely an *indication* of a paradigm shift; it is not *in itself* the shift beyond postmodernism that I am describing in the right column of table 3.5. Big-history is *part* of a greater shift in the way of thinking alongside many other new trends on the verge of entering mainstream academia in both science and philosophy.

In historiography it does not mean that we all in the future are supposed to write big-history, i.e. having every historian to start with the big bang, finish with the present and include all major events in between. No, in the same way writing history like Foucault is not the only way to write history as a postmodern historian, there will be many ways of applying the new paradigm that is to come to historiography. What this paradigm will demand of the future historian though, will be an increased awareness of interconnectedness, the complexity of the world we inhabit and an avoidance of the trap of the smash-perspective. The historian's role as storyteller and synthesizer of knowledge will probably be perceived as a more acceptable endeavor and the desire to construct will go along with that to deconstruct.

I am aware that many postmodern influenced readers will be less convinced about the insights of this thesis. This can partly be explained by the postmodern view that narratives like this one should end with an 'Anti-thesis'. This I do not provide. It was never my intention either and all I can do is to urge the reader to look beside that fact and try to reconcile with my humble attempt of a 'Proto-synthesis'. I do not claim that it is the final truth about this paradigm shift in historiography. My claim is merely that the metanarratives of contemporary historiography in my view make a convincing *indication* of a profound change in the way that we look at history and science in general. A change I believe points towards the future.

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