The observation above, originally published by Friedrich Nietzsche in 1878, still holds true for our society today. Although we are always comparing – whether on the local level in everyday life or in international contexts – researchers have never systematically investigated how comparing is used to order and understand the world.

To conduct such basic research is precisely what the Collaborative Research Centre (Sonderforschungsbereich, or SFB) 1288 ‘Practices of Comparing’ has set out to do. Established earlier in 2017, it brings together researchers from the fields of history, literary science, philosophy, art history, political science and law to study the myriad aspects of comparing.

This brochure was developed to introduce you to the SFB itself, the research topics it covers and the faces who represent it. Some brevity is inevitable if this brochure is to be as easy to understand as possible. The descriptions of the different subprojects are intended as digests, compiled to illustrate the diverse nature of the SFB’s various working areas.

I hope you will find this brochure informative and useful.

Angelika Epple, Spokesperson of the SFB 1288

‘THIS IS THE AGE OF COMPARISON!’
Basic research often requires patience and a long-term commitment and relies on the collaboration of many individuals. A collaborative research centre (Sonderforschungsbereich, or SFB) conducts interdisciplinary basic research for up to 12 years. Collaborative research centres bring together scientists from a variety of disciplines whose research projects are guided by a common set of principles and questions. They are funded by the German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, or DFG), which supports institutions of higher education in establishing particular focus areas of research.

TOP 5
KEY CONCEPTS
OF THE SFB 1288

1 PRACTICES
prâxis (Ancient Greek): Deed, action, activity
- Practices require practical knowledge and are part of a network of other practices.
- Practices are determined by a specific actor and situation and a specific cultural and historical context.
- The combination of what is said and what is done is crucial.

2 PRACTICES OF COMPARING
- Rather than being a seemingly objective or logical operation, comparing involves specific contexts and actors.
- The focus on ‘practices of comparing’ draws attention to specific objects, routines and contexts, rather than on abstract theories and methods of ‘comparison’.
- Practices of comparing can remove that which is being compared from one context and place it in another.

3 ACTORS
- Actors do not necessarily have to be individuals, but may also be groups or institutions.
- The main focus is on the contexts in which comparisons are being made.

4 ORDER
- Comparing can be used to arrange impressions in a specific order and help to find one’s way in the world ...

5 DYNAMICS
- ..., but it can also instigate change and confuse existing orders.
WHAT DO WE ACTUALLY DO WHEN WE COMPARE?

Whether in sports, politics or science, our everyday life is shaped by ratings, statistics and competition. Comparing is believed to be objective and to help us to obtain clear results. But how neutral is comparing really?

People compare their skills with those of others, companies compare their financial performance, countries compare their gross domestic products. Among other things, comparing influences how we perceive the other: Does it reveal similarities or differences? What value judgments does it lead to? When do entrenched perspectives sneak into supposedly objective processes of comparing, and why?

This project is the first of its kind to bring together researchers from the fields of history, literary science, philosophy, art history, the political sciences and law to examine how practices of comparing order and change the world. The Collaborative Research Centre (SFB) 1288 ‘Practices of Comparing’ conducts basic research by shifting the focus away from ‘comparisons’ to ‘practices of comparing’: What are actors doing when they are comparing?

By studying an essential practice of order and dynamics not only in modern but also in premodern, as well as in European and non-European societies, the SFB seeks to contribute to a model for rethinking history, societies and historical change in the context of current historical and cultural theories.
As Spokesperson of the SFB 1288, Angelika Epple represents the interests of the collaborative research centre within Bielefeld University and in all dealings with the DFG. In addition to allocating SFB funds, Ms Epple and her deputy spokespersons, Walter Erhart and Johannes Grave, are primarily responsible for gathering the SFB’s various individual subprojects under the umbrella of its common research question.

SPOKESPERSON OF THE SFB
- Angelika Epple

DEPUTY SPOKESPERSONS
- Walter Erhart
- Johannes Grave

The SFB Office coordinates the work of the SFB. Among other things, this involves planning, organizing and conducting national and international conferences and workshops. The SFB Office team also provides direct assistance in all matters relating to funding and staff, as well as to equal opportunities and the promotion of young researchers. The Managing Director ensures the smooth flow of internal communications among the different projects, departments and deaneries involved. She is also responsible for maintaining and strengthening the SFB’s national and international collaborations and for communicating with the DFG and other actors from outside Bielefeld University.

MANAGING DIRECTOR
- Sabrina Timmer

SECRETARY
- Andrea Caio
Doctoral students make essential contributions to the research at the SFB 1288. The SFB uses the excellent infrastructure at Bielefeld University to support these students successfully. The Bielefeld Graduate School in History and Sociology (BGHS), which is funded by the Excellence Initiative of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, ensures a structured education of the doctoral students. The Excellence Initiative’s interdisciplinary study programme is available to everyone working at the SFB.

The focus of the SFB’s early career support activities is on providing continuous training in a variety of areas, including the digital and public humanities. One of its main objectives is the promotion of international networking and scientific autonomy, which involves activities that prepare the students for professional careers in the best possible way, whether within or outside the academic world.

**SUPPORT AND TRAINING**
- Research data management
- Digital humanities
- Public humanities
- Training for student assistants

**INTERNATIONALIZATION**
- Fellowships for guest researchers
- International teaching experience for young researchers

**AUTONOMY**
- Postdoctoral fellows as principal investigators at the SFB
- Teaching experience through summer schools
- Funding for proactively organized workshops
- ZF funding programme for postdoctoral fellows and the junior professor

Transitional periods, such as from graduation to doctoral research or from doctoral research to habilitation, are major milestones in an academic career. Very often, they also are a time of insecurity and of financial and personal stress.

The SFB focuses on three particular aspects of such transitional periods in order to respond to the small percentage of women among its postdoctoral fellows.

**AFTER GRADUATION**
- Scholarships and fellowships
- Regular presentation of SFB research in the Gender Studies Master’s programme

**AFTER THE DOCTORATE**
- Regular counseling regarding career opportunities
- Financial support for child care during appointments in the evening or on weekends
- Contract extensions for women who give birth during the first funding period

**EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES AND DIVERSITY OFFICER**
- Continuing evaluation of equality measures
- Adapting or changing measures if necessary
ONE OF THE SFB’S MOST DISTINCTIVE INNOVATIONS IS ITS PROJECT ON DIGITAL RESEARCH METHODS IN THE HUMANITIES. THESE DIGITAL METHODS ALLOW FOR AN IMPORTANT CHANGE IN PERSPECTIVE IN THE HANDLING OF RESEARCH DATA. DIGITAL ANALYSIS SOFTWARE CAN BE USED TO ANALYSE TEXTS WITHOUT BEING INFLUENCED BY ANY PARTICULAR SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT THAT MAY LEAD TO NEW APPROACHES, PRODUCTIVELY COMPLEMENT AND CHALLENGE RESEARCH QUESTIONS OR DRAW ATTENTION TO (STATISTICAL) ANOMALIES.

For this purpose, research data are collected and prepared for collaborative analysis. Simultaneously, existing digital and statistical methods are evaluated to determine whether they can be used to analyse data contained in the SFB’s databases. In addition, new solutions can be developed to meet the particular requirements of different subprojects.

Another focus besides methodology is the publication of data. Publishing the hypotheses and data that result from research processes can help to generally make research in the humanities easier to understand and replicate. This project will contribute to the development and dissemination of new forms of digital publishing in the humanities, such as data journals, which describe and track research data – a crucial approach to handling research data in general.
COMPARING IS NOT EXCLUSIVE TO THE WORLD OF RESEARCH. RATHER, PRACTICES OF COMPARING ARE ALSO USED IN EVERYDAY LIFE AND SOCIAL COMMUNICATION, AMONG OTHER AREAS. GIVEN THE BROAD IMPORTANCE OF ITS MAJOR THEME, THE SFB DEVELOPED A PROJECT THAT SEEKS TO MAKE RESEARCH PROCESSES IN THE HUMANITIES EASIER TO UNDERSTAND.

The most important activities in the humanities are thinking, reading and writing. At first glance, this seems to make it difficult to appropriately present and illustrate the processes involved. The Science Communication project seeks to show that the theme that guides the SFB – practices of comparing – has important implications for society as a whole.

For this purpose, new forms of science communication are developed, such as a series of talks, to be held in unusual venues, that brings together researchers from the SFB and prominent figures from sports, politics or economics. Another major activity besides organizing activities that involve external actors and the general public is for the project to examine its own science communication activities and to contribute to the research in this area and to the public humanities in general.
The SFB’s main focus is on comparing, a practice that comes in all kinds of different forms. For this reason, the projects give particular attention to situations and contexts in which comparing is relevant in various different ways. People who see themselves in direct competition with others and have to make decisions use different practices of comparing than do a novelist or a scientist, for example, whose comparisons do not immediately lead to specific actions.

The SFB 1288 ‘Practices of Comparing’ is divided into three project areas:

- Do situations of conflict and negotiation and social spaces of (self-)reflection lead to the emergence of different practices of comparing? Are people more inclined to try to find differences in some of these cases and to find similarities in others? Are contexts of observation and reflection – such as the sciences, literature and art – more likely to involve open, explorative comparisons that do not already imply a particular result?

The SFB’s three project areas are not intended to draw a clear line between three different types of practices of comparing. Rather, their purpose is to draw attention to deeper relationships between situations and practices.
Comparing Forces and the Forces of Comparison
Comparing and Competition
From Local Conflicts to Global Changes
Cultural Comparisons in Magazines
Comparing Forces and the Forces of Comparison. Comparisons of military forces as comparisons of power in the international system from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries

**Principal Investigator**

Prof. Dr. Mathias Albert

**Staff**

Kerrin Langer
Thomas Müller

**Contact**

mathias.albert@uni-bielefeld.de

Comparisons of armed forces have shaped the international system of states with lasting effects. The project investigates how practices of comparing have influenced, and continue to influence, observations of the international system in general, and of the balance of power in particular, making this the first systematic study of the history of practices of comparing armed forces.

Countries compare their national armed forces to gauge their respective power potentials. The main assumption guiding this project is that such practices of comparing play an essential part in generating an international and systemic relationship among states.

The project examines the interplay of practices of comparing armed forces and the development of the international system from the 18th century to the end of the Cold War. Such a system emerges when countries consider the potential actions of other countries while reflecting on their own possible actions.

In addition, the project explores the hypothesis that practices of comparing became increasingly professionalized during the period under study, especially during the Cold War. Did this increasing professionalization lead to comparative observations being regarded as particularly rational and objective?

Comparisons of armed forces are not only one of the earliest forms of global and globalizing practices of comparing, such comparisons also continue to play a key role in debates about power relations and their measurability.
ECONOMIC COMPETITION IS ONE OF THE MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF CAPITALISM. CAPITALISM IN TURN DOMINATES ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES IN THE MODERN ERA, WHICH MAKES THE STUDY OF PRACTICES OF COMPARING USED IN COMPETITIVE SITUATIONS A FRUITFUL ENDEAVOUR. THIS PROJECT WILL CONDUCT SUCH STUDIES WITH A FOCUS ON THE IRON AND STEEL INDUSTRY, WHICH WAS ALREADY A GLOBAL ACTOR IN EXPORTING AS EARLY AS THE LAST THIRD OF THE 19TH CENTURY.

According to Max Weber, competition is a mode of a largely non-violent ‘social struggle’. Competition between two (or more) competitors may be understood as a simultaneous struggle over a third entity, such as the market or the state.

When practices of comparing are used in the capitalist economy, in most cases companies observe and monitor themselves and others in their field, always with an eye on their own position. The particular function of practices of comparing may vary depending on such factors as whether the purpose is to reach the public through advertising or to impress competitors within a given branch.

The comparative analysis of the practices of comparing of German, British, American and French iron and steel manufacturers will contribute to the ‘Comparing and Competition’ complex, which is an important component of the SFB as a whole. The objective of the studies conducted as part of this project is to work towards a historically grounded theory of capitalism.
THE WAR BETWEEN THE SPANISH EMPIRE AND THE UNITED STATES IN 1898 CHALLENGED THE WORLD ORDER OF THAT TIME: THE UNITED STATES ESTABLISHED ITSELF AS A NEW EMPIRE; SPAIN LOST ITS LAST REMAINING COLONIES; CUBA AND PUERTO RICO AND THE PHILIPPINES CAME UNDER THE RULE OF ANOTHER IMPERIAL POWER. THIS PROJECT TAKES A CLOSER LOOK AT THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LOCAL CONFLICTS AND GLOBAL CHANGES, WITH THE MAIN FOCUS ON IMPORTANT WAR OBSERVERS.

When commenting on major global changes, the local war reporters, medics, scientific experts and intellectuals used comparisons, and the ‘communities’ to which they each belonged then disseminated their observations. The designs of world orders that emerged as a result of these practices of comparing shaped a new global public and its perspective on the events.

Generally speaking, the practices of comparing being analysed in each specific context of the project can provide insights into the changes in practices of comparing and in the roles they play on a global level: How does comparing in times of crisis contribute to efforts to explore and understand in a new way a world that is in a state of upheaval?
THE QUESTION OF WHAT IS CONSIDERED A NATION’S CULTURE IS A SUBJECT CONTINUOUSLY NEGOTIATED AND RENEGOTIATED IN PUBLIC DEBATES. DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR, GERMAN RUNDSCHAU MAGAZINES WERE INCREASINGLY USED TO REFINE AND POLISH THE IMAGE OF THE GERMAN EMPIRE. THESE MAGAZINES PLAYED A FUNDAMENTAL ROLE AS POWERFUL MEDIA OF WAR JOURNALISM. THEY PROVIDED INFORMATION ABOUT THE NATIONS INVOLVED IN THE WAR, WHICH IN TURN ALLOWED FOR CULTURES TO BE COMPARED.

This project uses historical examples to illustrate the role of magazines in the production of cultural identity: What is the role of political and military decisions in such processes, and how do the practices of comparing used in the relevant magazines influence the public image of culture? When viewed from this angle, magazines can themselves be regarded as practices of cultural comparing.

Of course, the project also takes into consideration that nationalist war propaganda pursues very specific interests and objectives: How are the practices of comparing that magazines use to produce cultural knowledge intertwined with propaganda efforts?

The project team will analyse war journalism with a special focus on how knowledge is produced and presented by means of practices of comparing. In addition to making this innovative contribution to the general theme of the SFB, the team will show how cultural comparing was used for nationalist purposes.
_01_ Which Law Applies to Whom?
_02_ The Innovative Power of Practices of Comparing
_03_ ‘Travel is the school of comparison’
_04_ Describing the ‘Other’ to Deal with the World
_05_ The English Novel as a Social Laboratory
_06_ Outlawing Practices of Comparing
WHICH LAW APPLIES TO WHOM?

Order in diversity: Practices of comparing in intercultural jurisdiction from the 17th to the 19th centuries

**Principal Investigators**
Dr. Christina Brauner  
Prof. Dr. Antje Flüchter

**Staff**
Andreas Becker  
Anna Dönecke

**Contact**
christina.brauner@uni-bielefeld.de  
antje.fluechter@uni-bielefeld.de

WHEN CROSS-CULTURAL ENCOUNTERS BECOME PART OF DAILY LIFE, RULES FOR THIS EVERYDAY LIFE AND ITS CONFLICTS NEED TO BE NEGOTIATED. COMPARING PLAYS AN ESSENTIAL ROLE IN SUCH SITUATIONS, NOT ONLY TO MAKE THE UNFAMILIAR FAMILIAR AND TO DEAL WITH DIVERSITY, BUT ALSO TO BOTH DRAW AND QUESTION BOUNDARIES.  

How did Europeans respond to the challenges of everyday encounters with different cultures in the early modern period? To address this question, the project focuses on law and jurisdiction in different contact zones from the 17th to the 19th centuries. It consists of two case studies that focus, respectively, on the French colonial outpost of Pondicherry in southern India and on the Swedish expansion to Lapland and in the Atlantic World to examine how different legal concepts and institutions were made comparable.

A variety of new social groups emerged in zones of cultural encounter: indigenous converts to Christianity, and ‘mixed marriages’ that resulted in ‘mixed’ families. Which law applied to such groups, and how did these groups use the leeway opened up by the concurrence of different legal orders? In contexts such as these, practices of comparing can stabilize order just as much as they can instigate change. Taking a closer look at the transition from the early to the late modern period, the project addresses processes of long-term change and discusses the specific character of ‘modern’ practices of comparing.
THE INNOVATIVE POWER OF PRACTICES OF COMPARING

MODERNITY BETWEEN ‘INDIGENITY’ AND ‘BLACKNESS’:
Inter-American practices of comparing in the fields of cultural production, social sciences, and politics

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS

Prof. Dr. Olaf Kaltmeier
Prof. Dr. Wilfried Raussert

STAFF

Pablo Campos
Susana Rocha Teixeira

CONTACT

olaf.kaltmeier@uni-bielefeld.de
wilfried.raussert@uni-bielefeld.de

European colonization led to the emergence of distinctive classifications in the Americas that continue to exist to this day, such as ‘black’/‘non-black’ or ‘indigenous’/‘non-indigenous’. However, due to forms of assimilation or hybridization, in-between and floating categories emerged that not only complicate or resist simple comparisons and classifications, but also stimulate reflections on these categories and excite new practices of comparing.

The project consists of two case studies, one exploring issues of ‘blackness’, and the other ‘indigeneity’. The first case study focuses on the New Negro Movement, and in particular on the Harlem Renaissance, which can be seen as one of the first African American art movements. During the first half of the 20th century, joint efforts to create a new African American self-image through written and visual materials were related to innovative practices of comparing in the Americas.

The second case study is concerned with the cultural and political power struggle over the ‘problema indígena’ during the first half of the 20th century: How did scientists and politicians work together to develop strategies for integrating or assimilating the indigenous populations in order to implement modern concepts of society and the state?

In a third step, the project juxtaposes the findings of the two case studies on ‘blackness’ and ‘indigeneity’ in order to gain valuable insights into the emergence of the modern era in the Americas.
‘TRAVEL IS THE SCHOOL OF COMPARISON’

Comparing and knowing the world: European world travel narratives from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS

Prof. Dr. Walter Erhart
Prof. Dr. Kirsten Kramer

STAFF

Julian Gärtner
Christine Peters

CONTACT

walter.erhart@uni-bielefeld.de
kirsten.kramer@uni-bielefeld.de

FROM THE 18TH TO THE 20TH CENTURIES, THE LITERATURE ON SCIENTIFIC EXPEDITIONS, JOURNEYS AROUND THE WORLD AND GEOGRAPHICAL EXPLORATIONS WAS INCREASINGLY Concerned WITH THE WORLD AND KNOWLEDGE ABOUT IT. ALMOST ALWAYS WHEN PREVIOUSLY UNKNOWN CULTURES AND COUNTRIES WERE EXPLORED AND STUDIED, COMPARING WAS INVOLVED, WITH THE RESULT THAT NEW EXPERIENCES WERE CONSIDERED IN THE LIGHT OF PRE-EXISTING KNOWLEDGE.

One major function of these travelogues was that they made different worlds comparable in the first place. This led to the emergence of complex relations rather than to the perpetuation of the dichotomies of ‘unfamiliar’/‘familiar’ and ‘primitive’/‘progressive’.

This project consists of two case studies of modern European world travel literature, with one focusing on English and German texts by such authors as Charles Darwin and Adelbert von Chamisso and the other examining French accounts and adventure stories by authors including François-René de Chateaubriand and Jules Verne.

The aim of the project is to illustrate how practices of comparing presented in literary form not only provided cultural guidance in the world but also were reflective of how the world has continuously been changing since the beginning of the modern era.
**DESCRIPTING THE ‘OTHER’ TO DEAL WITH THE WORLD**

**Principal Investigator**
Prof. Dr. Raimund Schulz

**Staff**
Julian Gieseke
Marie Lemser

**Contact**
raimund.schulz@uni-bielefeld.de

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**THE ANCIENT GREEKS WERE ALWAYS ON THE MOVE, WHETHER AS COLONISTS, TRADERS, PIRATES, PHYSICIANS, SCIENTISTS OR SOLDIERS. ALONG THE WAY, THEY ENCOUNTERED OTHER PEOPLES, AS WELL AS NEW CULTURES THAT WERE SIMILAR TO THEIR OWN IN SOME RESPECTS, BUT VERY DIFFERENT IN OTHERS. GIVEN THEIR CUSTOM OF COMPETING WITH ONE ANOTHER IN CONTESTS, SUCH AS IN SPORTS, IN WAR OR IN DRAMA, IT SEEMED ONLY NATURAL TO USE PRACTICES OF COMPARING TO CATEGORIZE WHAT THE GREEKS SAW AS THE ‘OTHER’.

From Homer to Herodotus’ historiographic writings, the Greeks began very early to describe things that were strange and unfamiliar to them. This ethnographic way of thinking helped to bring about a new understanding of their changing world.

This project is guided by the assumption that practices of comparing became more widely used in response to major political or military developments, such as the Persian Wars or the Roman conquests.

The aim of the project is to present a history of how the ancient Greeks observed others, with their comparative ethnographic way of thinking playing a fundamental role. It was through this way of thinking that a new order could be established, which means that practices of comparing were a response to changes while at the same time stimulating reorientation.
SOCIETY IN THE 18TH CENTURY WAS AN ARENA OF MANY POLITICAL, CULTURAL AND SOCIAL SHIFTS. THE ENGLISH NOVEL OF THAT PERIOD ADDRESSED THESE CHANGES IN A MULTITUDE OF WAYS. THE GUIDING IDEA BEHIND THIS PROJECT IS THAT SOCIAL DEVELOPMENTS ARE REFLECTED IN LITERARY PRACTICES OF COMPARING. JUST AS IN A LABORATORY, THESE NOVELS Explored, STEP BY STEP, SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF THESE SHIFTS, SUCH AS THE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL CHANGE ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE DIFFERENT SOCIAL CLASSES.

One important question in this regard is how the novel dealt with the economic developments that led to Great Britain becoming a modern consumerist society. Traits that were slowly emerging at that time, such as avarice and selfishness, had to be reconciled with the prevalent ethical and religious values. The novel of the 18th century increasingly began to employ literary practices of comparing, portraying the middle class as honest and upright, in order to distinguish them from other groups within the social hierarchy.

Through negotiation concerning the values of norms, literature played an active part in the construction of reality. The aim of this project is to show that literary practices of comparing helped to establish, but also to undermine, middle-class values in 18th-century Great Britain.
OUTLAWING PRACTICES OF COMPARING

SINCE THE INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION BECAME EFFECTIVE IN 1969, RACIAL DISCRIMINATION HAS BEEN OUTLAWED; A CONTROL MECHANISM HAS BEEN PUT IN PLACE TO MAKE IT VANISH FROM EVERYDAY LIFE.

BUT WHAT EXACTLY IS ‘RACIAL DISCRIMINATION’? WHAT KIND OF PRACTICES OF COMPARING BOLSTER DISCRIMINATION?

How can we differentiate between comparing that depreciates others and fosters stereotyping and neutral practices of drawing differences or classifying or ordering? The project addresses difficult questions of boundary-making in legal doctrine and jurisprudence: Which practices of comparing are illegitimate because they are considered racist and which are not? And what is ‘racial’ discrimination?

The project assumes that the Convention delegitimi zes practices of comparing that negate the equal worth of others because of the colour of their skin or their origin. However, practices of comparing that reveal vulnerability and hence protect particular groups seem to be acceptable even if those groups are defined through a common ancestry or way of life, such as minorities or indigenous people.

Given that the human rights discourse distinguishes between ‘acceptable’ and ‘unacceptable’ practices of comparing, how can we tell one from the other?
Comparative viewing: Forms, functions, and limits of comparing pictures

Principal Investigators
Prof. Dr. Johannes Grave
Dr. des. Britta Hochkirchen

Staff
Robert Eberhardt
Joris Corin Heyder

Contact
johannes.grave@uni-bielefeld.de
britta.hochkirchen@uni-bielefeld.de

Images invite comparisons. Whether in everyday life, or in art and culture, or even in politics and society, images are often arranged in ways that elicit comparisons. In such arrangements, images can complement or contradict one another, or they can show different perspectives or elicit irritation. Most importantly, however, they change the perspective of the viewer who, rather than focusing on just one image alone, moves his gaze back and forth between the images.

Focusing on the 18th century, the project examines how art connoisseurs developed comparative routines through engaging with images and how artists or collectors used purposefully arranged image pairs. The aim of the case studies is to draw attention to certain effects of image comparisons that have previously gone unnoticed. The results might show that comparative viewing not only helps to improve viewing skills, but also can distract attention away from many qualities of an image.

How is image perception influenced and altered by comparing? This project studies comparative viewing as a physical practice that became a major aspect of identity, first for art connoisseurs and later for art historians.
COMPARING THE INCOMPARABLE

Incommensurable? The comparative self in the premodern and modern eras, from the 11th to the 19th centuries

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS

Prof. Dr. Franz Arlinghaus
Prof. Dr. Walter Erhart

STAFF

Carina Engel
Lena Gumpert

CONTACT

franz.arlinghaus@uni-bielefeld.de
walter.erhart@uni-bielefeld.de

This project analyses autobiographical texts from the 11th/12th and 19th centuries that amply reflect the massive social upheavals of the times in which they were written. It focuses on these two different time periods to identify changes in the practices of comparing over the course of the development of society.

BEING INDIVIDUAL MEANS – INTUITIVELY –, TO BE INCOMPARABLE. THEN AGAIN, INDIVIDUALS ARE COMPARED WITH ONE ANOTHER ALL THE TIME. A PARTICULARLY POINTED EXAMPLE OF THIS PREDICAMENT IS WHEN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITING COMPARES TO PRESENT THE AUTHOR’S LIFE AS SOMETHING OUT OF THE ORDINARY.

When and how did premodern and modern autobiographical texts use practices of comparing to place their protagonists in a particular context? What alternatives to comparing were available? What can comparing achieve that other forms of representation cannot? Which practices of comparing are used to productively combine uniqueness and comparability?
A CONCEPTUAL HISTORY OF COMPARISONS

Terms of comparing: The semantics of comparing from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

Prof. Dr. Willibald Steinmetz

STAFF

Dr. Kirill Postoutenko

CONTACT

willibald.steinmetz@uni-bielefeld.de

Along with individual terms that refer to acts of comparing, the project considers the related notions of analogy, drawing parallels and contradistinction, and also goes beyond nouns to include the corresponding verbs and adjectives. The year 1500 was chosen as the starting point because previous research suggests that it was around that time, which was marked by the invention of the printing press and increasing encounters with other worlds, that people began to compare more than they had ever done before.

During the first stage of the SFB, the project will assist with refining its terminological inventory. Tracing the conceptual history of comparing will help to identify the historical situations and periods in which practices of comparing changed or became contentious.
Obstacles to comparing and how to overcome them

Scientific research and enquiry can sometimes confront obstacles to comparing. This project addresses various different types and forms of such obstacles. One example is when different standards are used for comparing, which leads to irreconcilable results.

If the results of several comparisons deviate too much from one another, it becomes impossible to make an unambiguous overall comparison. What strategies are used to overcome such obstacles? And are these strategies successful?

This project takes a closer look at the study of molecular genetics in the 20th century to illustrate the role of practices of comparing and to test the hypothesis that the respective practices of comparing are influenced primarily by changes in terminology and by different theoretical approaches.

What do practices of comparing generally contribute when it comes to producing new knowledge and reordering existing knowledge? What effects do obstacles to comparing have? How should one deal with such obstacles?