

# **HISTOIRE PARALLÈLE/DIE WOCHEN VOR 50 JAHREN (La SEPT/ ARTE 1989–2001)**

## **NEWSREELS AS AN ‘AGENT AND SOURCE OF HISTORY’<sup>1</sup>**

Jean Christophe Meyer

Institut d'Etudes Politiques  
 47 Avenue de la Forêt-Noire  
 F-67085 Strasbourg Cedex  
 France

[jeanchristophe.meyer@unistra.fr](mailto:jeanchristophe.meyer@unistra.fr)

**Abstract:** This article gives an overview of *Histoire Parallèle/Die Woche vor 50 Jahren*, a history programme that stands out through its longevity and format. Discussions in this article are based on archive material and statistical data from Institut National de l’Audiovisuel, Arte and Deutsches Rundfunk Archiv, an interview with Marc Ferro, the presenter of the show, as well as press material from the time.

**Keywords:** *Histoire Parallèle/Die Woche vor 50 Jahren*, World War II, history programmes, *nouvelle histoire*

### **1 Introduction**

Moving pictures and photographs shape quite decisively the individual and collective perception of reported historical events, independent of their role as genuine visual records or reconstructed fictional narratives. In any case, they provide clues to understand the past but also the present.<sup>2</sup> In this respect **Histoire parallèle/Die Woche vor 50 Jahren** has a unique place among European history shows to date. Its longevity is certainly the most evident reason justifying such an assertion; the diversity of the broadcast newsreel material, the applied methodology and the competence of the invited guests are further factors to be mentioned. The show was part of the initial programming of experimental TV channel La SEPT (**Société européenne de programmes de télévision**) in October 1989. The show aired weekly for 12 years competing with news and variety shows on Saturdays in prime time.<sup>3</sup> It rapidly found its audience before switching over to ARTE (**Association Relative à la Télévision Européenne**) in 1992. There, it ran until September 1<sup>st</sup> 2001.

1 On Cinema as an “Agent and Source of History,” see Marc Ferro and Isabelle Veyrat-Masson, *Mes histoires parallèles*, Carnet Nord, 2011, 249–267.

2 See Christian Delporte’s foreword, in Christian Delporte, Denis Maréchal, Caroline Moine, Isabelle Veyrat-Masson, eds., *La guerre après la guerre. Images et construction des imaginaires de guerre dans l’Europe du XX<sup>ème</sup> siècle*, Nouveau Monde, 2010, 7–9.

3 For reasons of brevity, the show will be designated as *Histoire Parallèle* in the following paragraphs.



Photo 1. Marc Ferro on the set of Histoire Parallèle in the 1990s

Its beginning, development and end must be contextualized in the French audio-visual landscape.<sup>4</sup> *Histoire Parallèle* responded perfectly to one of the main objectives assigned to ARTE by the French and German supervisory authorities: furthering the reconciliation between France and Germany by producing documentaries dealing with a burdensome past.<sup>5</sup> Since the show was noticeably based on precepts established by diverse members of the **École des Annales**, my paper will first focus on its presenter and expert, Marc Ferro, on his career and crucial contribution to how broadcast and audio-visual media came to be considered, in France, as legitimate historical material. *Histoire Parallèle* was founded on three principles: parallelism, integrality and crossed views.<sup>6</sup> The originality of this concept as well as insights into the production and reception of the show will be discussed in this paper. Last, but not least, this study also intends to shed some light on *Histoire Parallèle*'s evolution after 1995, until the supervisors of ARTE, a channel often considered as 'a sort of European identity contractor,'<sup>7</sup> decided to bring the program to an end.

## 2. A Historian and a Television Author Doing History with Moving Pictures

Born in 1924, Marc Ferro was first an eyewitness and participant of war before eventually becoming a scholar and an occasional historical expert for television. He was already a teenager when the war broke out. By the age of 19, he joined the Résistance in 1943. At the end of World War II, he started his career as a history teacher in diverse high

4 Despite the fact that the show was also financed by German taxpayers and simultaneously broadcast by ARTE Deutschland starting in 1992, it must be considered as a French production.

5 Aline Hartemann, "The Television Channel ARTE as a Time Machine and a Matrix for European Identity," in Katharina Niemeyer, ed., *Media and Nostalgia. Yearning for the Past, Present and Future*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, 153.

6 Klaus Wenger, "*Histoire parallèle*—une série documentaire très actuelle sur la Deuxième Guerre mondiale," in Ursula E. Koch, Detlef Schröter, and Pierre Albert, *Deutsch-französische Medienbilder/Images Médiatiques franco-allemandes*, Rheinhard Fischer Verlag, 1993, 243–246.

7 Aline Hartemann, "The Television Channel ARTE as a Time Machine and a Matrix for European Identity," 2014, 153.

schools located in and around Paris. In 1948, he and his wife were appointed to teacher positions in Oran in Algeria. There they stayed until 1956 and witnessed the first phase of the Independence War. After their return to France, Ferro started his doctoral research on the Russian Revolution of 1917.<sup>8</sup>

Ferro's first professional experience with television occurred in 1963. His PhD supervisor, Pierre Renouvin, asked him to work as a historical expert in a team producing a documentary, *30 ans d'histoire*, on World War I, which was also produced to commemorate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the **Libération**.<sup>9</sup> He worked on three out of a series of six shows, each lasting around 45 to 50 minutes. They were all broadcast in prime time after the evening news at around 8:30 pm. This project was crucial in many ways for Ferro's television career. First, it was quite successful and allowed him to participate regularly in television productions for the next 20 years.<sup>10</sup> Second, it also relied on a methodology that Marc Ferro still applied to a considerable extent when he worked on *Histoire Parallèle*. At the time, the programme announcement in the French TV guide, *Télérama*, stressed the fact that:

in order to achieve this historical fresco (*30 ans d'histoire*), historians were hired who gave for the period 1914–1944 an explanation comprising political, diplomatic, military, economic history as well as a history of ideas. Interviews of witnesses had been deliberately left aside. For the whole period, documents were rare. It was necessary to resort to all the national film libraries—French, English, German, Austrian—to gather a varied documentation of the Western front, Russian front, Balkans, political activities and the numerous aspects of civilian life behind the front. When film material was missing, the authors illustrated the event reproducing newspaper headlines, leaflets, posters, documents published by censorship offices, etc.<sup>11</sup>

It was already a French-German coproduction made under the sign of reconciliation. The documentary was planned to be aired simultaneously in both countries.<sup>12</sup> Marc Ferro, who had no background or interest in cinema at that time, made a fundamental though unexpected discovery in the *Bundesarchiv* in Koblenz. While checking archive reels dealing with his topic, he discovered moving pictures showing the welcoming of the troops back to Berlin on November 11<sup>th</sup> 1918.

It was for him a tremendous shock:

Nothing, not one clue reminded the viewer in the least of anything that looked like a defeat. Hysterical women and girls threw flowers at the soldiers, bands were playing on the streets, everyone was laughing, dancing and having a jolly time. These pictures explained far better the receptivity of German crowds for the 'Diktat of Versailles' concept or the 'Stab-in-the-back-myth' than all essays my distinguished colleagues had written by then.<sup>13</sup>

Marc Ferro was already a famous and prestigious scholar before *Histoire Parallèle*.<sup>14</sup> He belonged to the movement called *Nouvelle histoire*, which aimed to contribute to a history of mentalities by analysing collective representations as well as the mental structures of societies.<sup>15</sup> Members of the *Nouvelle histoire* movement sought to distance themselves from the traditional ways of writing history, which focused on spectacular events and 'great men'.

With *Histoire parallèle*, Marc Ferro seized the opportunity to present numerous examples proving the validity of his approach to film as a respectable and precious historical source.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, the show made clear that "television

8 On these years of 'apprenticeship', see Marc Ferro and Isabelle Veyrat-Masson, *Mes histoires parallèles*, Carnet Nord, 2011, 21–110.

9 Ferro worked on the episodes *Trente ans d'histoire. 1914–1918: 1<sup>ère</sup> partie* (02/09/1964), *Trente ans d'histoire. 1914–1918: 2<sup>ème</sup> partie* (16/09/1964), *Trente ans d'histoire. 1914–1918: 3<sup>ème</sup> partie* (28/09/1964).

10 Ferro had worked on 8 documentaries and 1 television show between 1964 and 1989 before *Histoire Parallèle* started.

11 *Télérama* n° 763, 30/08/1964, 17.

12 For a detailed study of *Trente ans d'histoire*, see Matthias Steinle, "La Grande Guerre dans la série télévisée *Trente ans d'histoire* (1964). Un projet de réconciliation franco-allemand au sein d'une commémoration gaulliste", in Christian Delporte, Denis Maréchal, Caroline Moine, Isabelle Veyrat-Masson (eds.), *La guerre après la guerre. Images et construction des imaginaires de guerre dans l'Europe du XX<sup>ème</sup> siècle*, Nouveau Monde, 2010, 343–365.

13 Interview with Marc Ferro (11/04/2015). See also Marc Ferro and Isabelle Veyrat-Masson, *Mes histoires parallèles*, 2011, 215–216.

14 See Marc Ferro's famous article: "Le film, une contre-analyse de la société?", *Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, 28, 1, 1973, 109–124.

15 Marc Ferro was the secretary of redaction of the *Revue des Annales* from 1964 to 1969 and its co-director for more than two decades.

16 Ferro's major essays and articles on the relation of cinema and history have been published first in a collection entitled *Cinéma et Histoire*, Denoël et Gonthier, coll. "Bibliothèque Médiations", 1977, and later in *Le Cinéma, une vision de l'histoire*, Le Chêne, 2003.

can deal with history using very simple means, whilst avoiding the purely national character of such a historical analysis.”<sup>17</sup>

### 3. Parallel History, Crossed Perspectives and Shared Views

Newsreels went of course through severe censorship especially during the years on which *Histoire Parallèle* focused: 1939–1951. Stories were almost exclusively meant to be presented to a national audience or to moviegoers of an allied country for propaganda purposes. By showing newsreels produced in major countries involved in World War II, *Histoire Parallèle* presented opposing official viewpoints on a wide variety of events but also confronted them with factual data on the military conflict’s evolution available fifty years later. *Histoire Parallèle* clearly intended to explain which buttons were pushed to feed the crowds’ patriotism despite all odds. Beyond obvious political slogans, these newsreels also conveyed pertinent but discrete information that could never be completely controlled or erased by their producers. This is due to the very nature of film that inevitably presents and represents reality at the same time.<sup>18</sup> This point, as mentioned above, was crucial to Marc Ferro and had fostered his interest in film as a historical archive since the early 1960s. On the contrary, written archives, which enjoyed a far greater prestige among historians, could often be controlled by the authorities.<sup>19</sup>

Subjected to audience ratings competition, *Histoire Parallèle* owed its continuity more to the resourcefulness of the crew than to the channel’s decision-makers’ enthusiastic support. Then, as often happens in similar cases, the permanence of the crew members and their solidarity was decisive in transforming contingencies into opportunities.<sup>20</sup> Initially, Marc Ferro and his team did not even dream of being part of such a long-lasting programme. But as the show proved more successful and sustainable than expected, it became possible for them to deliberately make the audience grasp how newsreels impacted public opinion week after week during the war years. The combination of long-term and ritualized programming had tremendous consequences according to Marc Ferro:

In almost any film, documentary or fiction, war lasts as long as the projection: either Hitler takes power at the beginning and Germany is defeated after two hours; or for the same time period, a woman loses her husband, has a lover, the Germans arrive and then they leave. On the contrary, in *Histoire Parallèle*, war is fought at the rhythm of ordinary life, week after week. History unfolds in real time. Those who lived it can relive their past at the rhythm of their own existence, they rediscover its traces, understanding better its meaning thanks to distance.<sup>21</sup>

The fact that *Histoire Parallèle* systematically respected the following editorial requirements underlines the uniqueness of producer Louisette Neil’s initial idea:

- Selected newsreels had to be shown in full with the original comments and the pertinent subtitles for the French-German audience of ARTE.
- Every week the public could only see the newsreel material originally released in film theatres exactly 50 years before. Consequently, newsreels of the second week of February 1942 went on air on Saturday evening during the second week of February 1992.

17 Klaus Wenger, “*Histoire parallèle—une série documentaire très actuelle sur la Deuxième Guerre mondiale*,” 1993, 243.

18 Jean Mitry, *Esthétique et psychologie du cinéma, Tome 1, Les structures*, Éditions Universitaires, 1963, 137.

19 Interview with Marc Ferro, (11/04/2015).

20 Director Didier Deleskiewicz and Producer Louisette Neil were part of the crew from 1989 to 2001 as was historian Klaus Wenger. After joining ARTE’s management staff in 1991, Wenger continued to contribute regularly to the show’s conception and presentation.

21 Marc Ferro and Claire Babin, *Revivre l’histoire*, Liana Levi-Arte Editions, 1995, 10.

Applying these rules, *Histoire Parallèle* allowed its audience to experience how the generation that lived through the war years was (dis)informed and distracted, entertained and manipulated, week after week. Thus, the show “interlocked the past with the present.”<sup>22</sup> Another most innovative aspect of the project resided in the fact that, for the first time, French and German TV viewers would see a great number of foreign stories that had never seemed interesting to historical documentary television producers before. Trivial stories were never cut out, first because they gave significant hints about the communication strategies of the political powers if one connected them with the actual developments on the military front. Then again, this option was rooted in Marc Ferro’s fundamental approach to cinema, be it documentary or fiction, as a means of making history, a history that went beyond memory: “... it [the camera] tells more about all of us than anyone would like to show. It uncovers the secret, it shows the hidden face of a society, its lapsus. It reaches social structures. ...”<sup>23</sup>

The show was the result of a two-step production process. Original newsreel material produced simultaneously in the combatant nations telling different versions of the same event was broadcast, respecting a notion of balanced duration as much as possible. Sometimes the selected newsreels were shorter. In such a case their number would be increased and the predominant paired configuration would be replaced by a version with three or four newsreels, each from a different country.<sup>24</sup> A few months in advance, Marc Ferro would gather information sheets from the companies holding ownership of the newsreels that seemed interesting for a particular week. Due to time pressure, he relied on his expertise as a historian as well as on his experience as a TV documentary producer and chose the show’s material after having only read these information sheets.

Length was often a crucial selection criterion at this stage and budgetary limitations forced Ferro to minimize orders of potentially redundant material.<sup>25</sup> The film companies mentioned below were first chosen considering the importance of their activity during the war period. But, of course, the quality of material preservation and of their catalogue and their readiness to contribute to the show’s production at an affordable price were also decisive in the choice of the main providers:

- Pathé France (F)
- Actualités Françaises (F)
- Deutsche Wochenschau (D)
- Pathé Gazette London (GB)
- Soyouz Kino News (USSR)
- Novostni (USSR)
- Paramount News (USA)
- Nippon News (JPN)
- Giornale Luce (I).

22 Aline Hartemann, “The Television Channel ARTE as a Time Machine and a Matrix for European Identity,” 2014, 154.

23 Marc Ferro, “Le film, une contre-analyse de la société ?,” 1973, 113.

24 Unfortunately, the archive files at INA (*Institut National de l’Audiovisuel*) do not always indicate precisely the number, origin and length of the newsreel material broadcast in the show. A research with INA’s search engine, *Hyperbase*, covering the period going from January 1<sup>st</sup> 1989 to December 31<sup>st</sup> 1994 leads only to a total of 113 references without any detailed information on the broadcast film material. This was a time when *Histoire Parallèle* was produced by la SEPT but aired on FR3. It begins with *Histoire Parallèle* n° 23 and stops with n° 126 on April 25<sup>th</sup> 1992. From this date on until the entry into force of the *Décret sur le dépôt légal de la radio-télévision* (1992) on January 1<sup>st</sup> 1995, INA has no archive, written or audio-visual, of the program.

25 Newsreels had an average length of 15 minutes, plus or minus 2–3 minutes.

The show lasted a total of 55 minutes. Once relevant material was selected, a discussion was organized for the final 10–15 minutes: as often as possible, considering the budget at their disposal, a specialist on the period or on the question addressed by the broadcast newsreels was invited to take part in a debate with Marc Ferro. The guest generally received the selected material a couple weeks before the show. The conclusive debate was more than a ritual, it was meant to assist the audience in gaining historical insight into events originally reported in a manner allowing little room for viewer discretion. Fifty years later, it also aimed to help those among the viewers who had witnessed the reported events in their youth to nuance their predominantly memorial approach to the broadcast material. Every week Marc Ferro introduced the programme for a few minutes contextualizing it as part of the general developments of World War II. In doing so, he also targeted potential new viewers watching the show for the first time. It seldom happened that precise hints concerning the selected material were given to the audience. When it happened, these hints generally concerned an aspect of cinematographic aesthetics and not a reported historical fact about which viewers had to develop a personal opinion.

In 630 shows, several hundred different guests were invited.<sup>26</sup> A great majority of them, more than 75%, were scholars. They were often French, but much more often German, so as to balance Ferro's continuous presence on the show. British, American, Italian, Russian and Japanese guests were also featured on the set of *Histoire Parallèle*. Actors and witnesses of the reported events, prestigious guests like Henry Kissinger, Michal Gorbachev or Gehrhard Schröder also accepted Marc Ferro's invitation.<sup>27</sup> The show took advantage of the attraction that a city like Paris exerts on anyone, including renowned international scholars or elder statesmen. To limit expenditures it was often possible to invite prestigious guests on the set while they were in town for a conference, a book fair or while staying as guest professor at a Parisian university. This was the case for the German professors Von Thadden, Kageneck, Hudemann or the American star professors Paxton and Hoffman.

#### 4. Designing an Attractive Program at Minimal Cost

There are 313 accessible files with audience figures starting from September 9<sup>th</sup> 1995. The following tables give an overview of the available audience data thanks to *Hyperbase*.<sup>28</sup>

Only an indication concerning the special show featuring Henry Kissinger broadcast on May 8<sup>th</sup> 1995 (see footnote 27) could be obtained from ARTE France.<sup>29</sup> Despite special design and prestigious guests, it only reached a 2.3% share, which represented around 450,000 viewers. For the same show, ARTE Deutschland indicated a 0.1% share and a total of 30,000 viewers with an average age of 45 years old. Only 10 shows out of 335 broadcast between January 6<sup>th</sup> 1995 and September 1<sup>st</sup> 2001 reached an audience of 100,000 viewers or more in Germany.<sup>30</sup>

These figures document considerable differences between the programme's audiences in both countries. They coincide only partly with what journalists and scholars sometimes assumed to be the show's audience. Of course, the assertion that "*Histoire Parallèle* used to boast 1.5 million regular viewers" is obviously exaggerated according to the data shown above.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, ARTE's decision to end the programme in 2001 appeared unjustified and questionable to many as far as audience figures were concerned: "Saturday after Saturday, *Histoire Parallèle* kept on being surprising, and the audience followed with 500,000 faithful viewers. Anyway, there was no reason why the show should not go on.

26 Before 1995, the archive files of INA do not mention the guest's identity and TV program magazines like *Télérama* or *Télé 7 Jours* do it quite irregularly. But the files corresponding to the last 348 episodes of *Histoire Parallèle* starting with n° 282 on January 7<sup>th</sup> 1995 give this information. After this date, exactly 248 different guests were present on set.

27 Henry Kissinger was the star guest of a special show broadcast to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of World War II in May 1995. See *Histoire Parallèle* n° 300 'Spécial 8 mai 1945', 08/05/1995, Archive INA, DL T 199505508 ART 001. 001; DL T 199505508 ART 001. 002.

28 The years 1995 (29 shows) and 2001 (37 shows) are incomplete. Audience figures for the show aired on May 11<sup>th</sup> 1996 are missing.

29 Telephone interview with Brigitte Hofstetter, Chargée d'étude, ARTE GEIE, (12/05/2015).

30 Source: AGF in Zusammenarbeit mit GfK; TV Scope 6.0, (06/01/1995–04/02/2015). Historisches Archiv, Information, Dokumentation und Archive des Südwestrundfunks und des Saarländischen Rundfunks, (18/09/2015).

31 Aline Hartemann, "The Television Channel Arte as a Time Machine and Matrix for European Identity," 2014, 153.



Photo 2. Marc Ferro interviewing Michal Gorbachev in Paris (03/01/1998)<sup>32</sup>



Photo 3. Marc Ferro and Rudolf von Thadden with Gerhard Schröder at the Federal Chancellery in Bonn (24/04/1999)<sup>33</sup>

ARTE's management made another decision, explaining that it was simply victim of a change in the programming schedule. A bit short for an explanation, since the show still remained a safe bet for the channel."<sup>34</sup>

32 *Histoire Parallèle* n° 439, "De la Guerre Froide à la Perestroïka," 03/01/1998, Archive INA DL T 19980103 ART 001.001.

33 *Histoire Parallèle* n° 507, "Gerhard Schröder et cinquante années de social démocratie," 24/04/1999, Archive INA DL T 19990424 ART 002.001.

34 Laurent Thévenin, "La dernière Histoire de Marc Ferro," *Télérama* n° 2694, 29/08/2001, 73.

F	Highest ratings	Smallest ratings	Average
2001	0.80%	0.20%	0.50%
2000	0.80%	0.20%	0.50%
1999	1.00%	0.10%	0.60%
1998	1.10%	0.40%	0.50%
1997	1.10%	0.30%	0.60%
1996	0.80%	0.30%	0.55%
1995	1.10%	0.40%	0.70%

F	Highest share	Smallest share	Average
2001	3.10%	1.20%	2.0%
2000	3.10%	0.80%	1.95%
1999	3.70%	1.00%	2.45%
1998	4.10%	1.30%	2.15%
1997	3.10%	1.30%	2.10%
1996	4.30%	1.10%	1.95%
1995	3.20%	1.20%	1.90%

Not only audience figures alone mattered.<sup>35</sup> According to Marc Ferro himself, *Histoire Parallèle* was devoid of aesthetic creativity in terms of production and TV channels could hardly admit the legitimacy of such a production. The program's design never changed. Of course, the sobriety of the sequences produced on set, quite evident in photos 4, was primarily an editorial choice made to valorise the selected film material.<sup>36</sup>

French and German newsreels were strongly predominant in the first season of *Histoire Parallèle*. Despite unexpectedly good ratings, André Harris, head of programming from 1989 to 1992 first at La SEPT and then at ARTE, was still quite sceptical about the French public's interest in a show presenting only German images of the Blitzkrieg and the Battle of France.<sup>37</sup> For this reason he thought the show would definitely not 'survive' the episode of the collapse of the French Army in May–June 1940, since the collapse had caused a total disorganization of the film industry and the military film services (*Service Cinématographique des Armées*). To save the show, Marc Ferro had the idea to include Pathé Gazette London newsreels to contrast with the *Deutsche Wochenschau* and compensate for the absence of French newsreels. It was crucial to fill this gap until newsreels produced in Paris under German authority and in the *Zone Libre* ruled by the Vichy Régime became available again.<sup>38</sup>

Historically such an initiative made sense. Actually it was this decision that changed it all. From the viewers' letters, the show's producers concluded that the public adhered to its editorial choice to give priority to material covering what historian Marc Ferro considered to be the most important events of the week. It did not matter so much if France or Germany were not directly concerned. But if possible, newsreels produced in enemy countries should be shown every week, thus respecting the fundamental configuration of the conflict opposing the Allies to the Axis powers. Of course, this option was partly influenced by the quality of material available on a weekly basis. Consulting the archives at INA,

35 The number of *Histoire Parallèle*'s loyal program viewers exceeds by far the sales figures generally associated with the notion of a 'best-seller' for non-fiction literature or historical essays.

36 Marc Ferro, "De la BDIC à *Histoire Parallèle*. Regards d'historiens et de témoins sur les archives," *Matériaux pour l'histoire de notre temps* n° 89–90, 2008/1, 147–155. <http:// Cairn.info/revue-materiaux-pour-l-histoire-de-notre-temps-20081-page-147.htm>

37 André Harris (1933–1997) was then a highly experienced director and producer. He was one of the scriptwriters and producers of Max Ophüls' classic *Le Chagrin et la pitié*. Released in 1971, this documentary contained, without comment, passages of newsreels produced under the authority of the Vichy regime that were mixed with contemporary interviews of inhabitants of Clermont-Ferrand recounting the Occupation years (1940–1944).

38 Marc Ferro and Isabelle Veyrat-Masson, *Mes histoires parallèles*, 2011, 237–238.



one notes that American and Japanese newsreels logically find their way into the program after Pearl Harbor. The increasingly crucial importance of the Pacific War is perceptible in the evolution of subjects chosen from week to week.

The presentation of many Soviet newsreels that nobody had ever seen in the West was probably one of *Histoire Parallèle*'s major contributions. Ferro was a renowned specialist on the USSR to which he had made around 20 visits for his PhD and later research. He had good and old contacts in Moscow and in times of Perestroika and Glasnost he met Russian archive officials who were more receptive than before to his requests. But it was not always easy to deal with people who still expected gifts in order to cooperate efficiently. For example, to obtain uncensored, quality material, Marc Ferro gave the Russians copies of film reels or photographs he had found in French archives that showed demonstrations against the Western intervention in Russia in 1918. Sometimes these kinds of exchanges were not sufficient:

When I went to Moscow in 1990 to gather material concerning June 1941 and the beginning of the Operation Barbarossa, I found very interesting stories. In 1991 I went back to seek material covering 1942, but my partner refused to give me any documents asserting that ARTE and Pathé never paid. Back in Paris I actually discovered that the Russians had never sent the bill. I went back to Moscow and asked my partner about the bill. He took it out of a drawer and told me: "We never sent it because we want something else. If you pay this bill, the archive service will never see the color of money that will get lost in the lobbies of the Ministry of Information". He opened another drawer and showed me the prospectus of a Renault utility van. Its price corresponded more or less to the payment in arrears. I went back to Paris and did the necessary to have the van delivered to the right archive service and get the material I needed. Of course, this demanded one be quite inventive because such international bartering of goods is not a means of payment accepted in French public finance rules.<sup>39</sup>

Written archives at INA show that newsreels produced by the national news agency of countries liberated from German occupation after 1944 were almost systematically included in the program. This included not only France and Italy, but also Poland, Denmark and the Netherlands. Despite Spain's official neutrality during World War II, Spanish newsreels produced once the Axis' defeat seemed likely also found their way into the show. They document the evolution of Franco's diplomatic strategy after the Red Army's victory in Stalingrad.

## 5. Overcoming National Cultural Barriers: Visions and Wishful Thinking

Before the show switched over to ARTE in 1992, Klaus Wenger asserted that *Histoire Parallèle* did not wish to "revive nostalgic memories, but spur reflection on the historical evaluations and foundations of French-German relations and their repercussions on Europe."<sup>40</sup> With the end of World War II, the show changed focus and perspective indeed. It drifted from a recurrent French-German view of a burdensome past to a more open apprehension of reconciliation perspectives offered by European integration.<sup>41</sup>

*Histoire Parallèle* then often focused on one country, on one theme or on a single character. In these shows an evident diachronic approach based on appropriate film selection was added to the synchronic crossed views exposed on set by Ferro and his guest(s).<sup>42</sup> The last episode of the programme, *Histoire Parallèle* n° 630, for example, addressed the theme "From Hitler's Europe to tomorrow's Europe". The guests on set were Bronislaw Geremek, historian and former Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jacques Rupnik, a French historian, and Rudolf von Thadden, a German historian,

39 Interview with Marc Ferro, 11/04/2015.

40 Klaus Wenger, *Histoire parallèle—une série documentaire très actuelle sur la Deuxième Guerre mondiale*, 1993, 243.

41 Aline Hartemann, "La réconciliation par les ondes. De l'histoire Franco-allemande à l'information européenne," *Revue d'études comparatives Est-Ouest*, Volume 45, Issue 03-04, December 2014, 177-204, pp. 187-189.

42 Mathias Steinle, "L'expérience d'*Histoire parallèle*", Communication at the International Conference "Le cinéma au prisme de l'histoire. Les laboratoires 'Cinéma et Histoire,'" EHESS, Paris, May 20-21 2010, in Aline Hartemann, "La réconciliation par les ondes. De l'histoire Franco-allemande à l'information européenne," 2014, 187.



Photo 4. Marc Ferro and his guests on the set of *Histoire Parallèle* during the last show, 01/09/2001.

some of the experts who had often been invited during the preceding years. The stories aired in the final show were diverse productions. The chronological scope during which they were filmed ranged from 1940 to 1992. Contrary to the programme's ritual design and probably because it was the last episode, viewers did not see a newsreel of the corresponding week in 1951 first. They saw stories produced or preserved by UFA, Bundesarchiv Transit Film, Soyouz, Paramount News, Sherman Grinberg, Pathé Gazette, Parkfield, Gaumont Actualités, Cinémathèque Gaumont, INA, ITN, Telewizja Polska, Reuters, Journeyman Pictures. These stories addressed following subjects: "1940: Victorious Nazism; Hitler in Paris" (D), "1943 Stalingrad" (USSR), "1944 D Day" (USA), "1945 Yalta; German Surrender; Liberation of Concentration Camps" (GB), "1949 foundation of NATO" (USA), "1955 the Warsaw Pact" (F), "1956 Budapest" (F), "1968 Prag" (F), "1981-1989 Solidanosc" (PI), "1985-1989 Fall of the Berlin Wall; Reunified Germany; Gorbachev in Bonn" (F), "1991: Treaty of Maastricht" (F), "1992: Siege of Sarajevo" (USA).<sup>43</sup>

After 1995, *Histoire Parallèle* still went on promoting a European consciousness based on a "history seen from below".<sup>44</sup> Ferro and his staff were astounded by the fact that the 10,000 letters they had received so far were neither framed by the standards of traditional history nor did they often address typical topics of the "Nouvelle histoire." Thus most politicians were not mentioned in these letters, which also paid little attention to engagement in organizations like the *Résistance*. Furthermore the specificity of Nazism was mostly ignored while the *Occupation*, the occupation by the German army, was deeply resented:

This version of history seen from below—that is by ordinary people—is not the official history neither is it the history of the opponents; it is not the truth of organizations and parties; it is what was experienced at home and in private. It is a simple version of history. It has as much value as other versions.<sup>45</sup>

43 *Histoire Parallèle* n° 630 "De l'Europe d'Hitler à l'Europe de demain," 01/09/2001, Archive INA DL T 20010901 ART 001. 001.

44 Various episodes of the show were devoted to popular culture or issues seldom addressed in history shows. Two examples: *Histoire Parallèle* n° 519 "Le triomphe du néo-réalisme italien," 17/07/1999, Archive INA DL T 19990717 ART 001. 001; *Histoire Parallèle* n° 564 "Les handicapés dans la cité," 27/05/2000, Archive INA DL T 20000527 ART 001. 001.

45 Marc Ferro and Claire Babin, *Revivre l'histoire*, Liana Levi-Arte Editions, 1995, 13.

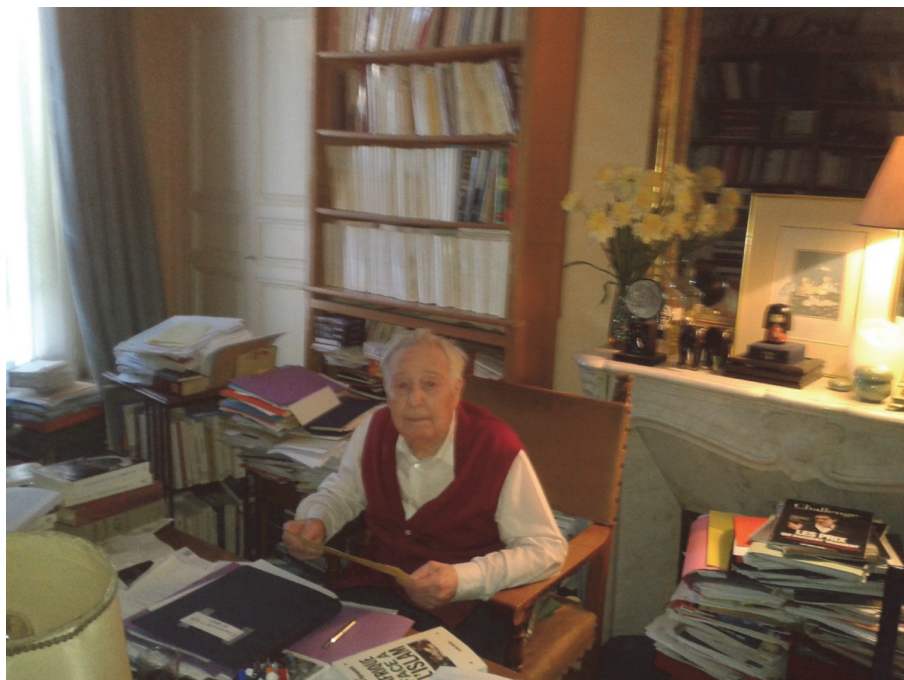


Photo 5. Marc Ferro during interview (11/04/2015).

For many observers the emergence of a European consciousness will not be effective as long as every nation-state goes on celebrating the conquests that created it.<sup>46</sup> Television's ethnocentrism contributed considerably to this state of affairs for decades. *Histoire Parallèle*, on the contrary, staged a "past which is seen as a foil, fraught with horror, and is thus rejected."<sup>47</sup> It seems that at the beginning of the new millennium ARTE's supervisory authorities believed that the time had come to end a show "serving the brown soup"<sup>48</sup> to the public on Saturday nights. A news magazine bringing 'institutional Europe' closer to the TV viewers was meant to become the channel's new flagship instead. The initiative was also supposed to promote collaboration between the German and French editorial teams. Actually, it would be quite exaggerated to assert that thereafter *Le Forum des Européens*, *ARTE Europa* and *Zoom Europa* proved to be a public success whilst contributing to a more intense cooperation between French and German partners and helping ARTE to become a genuinely "European" channel.<sup>49</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

Fifty years after the events of World War II, *Histoire Parallèle* shed new light on censored propagandist reports initially produced to motivate troops and crowds in times of fierce nationalistic antagonism. The show's innovative character was founded not only on the presentation of contradictory official viewpoints but also on solid historical analysis realized

46 Suzanne Citron, "L'imaginaire et le rapport à l'histoire," in Joseph Rovin, Gilbert Krebs (dir.), *Identités nationales et conscience européenne*, PIA, 1992, 61.

47 Aline Hartemann, 'The Television Channel ARTE as a Time Machine and a Matrix for European Identity,' 2014, 153.

48 In ARTE insiders' jargon the 'brown soup' ('die braune Soße') designates documentaries and shows dealing with World War I and II and considered as reliable means to attract viewers. See Aline Hartemann, "La réconciliation par les ondes. De l'histoire Franco-allemande à l'information européenne," 2014, 186–187.

49 On challenges faced by ARTE's binational redaction, see Jean-Michel Utard, "Du 8 ½ à Arte info: le quotidien d'une rédaction binationale," in Marie-Noëlle Sicard, Marie-Françoise Lévy, *Les Lucarnes de l'Europe – Télévisions, cultures, identités, 1945–2005*, Publications de la Sorbonne, 2008, 265–278; see also Aline Hartemann, "Les relations franco-allemandes au sein de la chaîne culturelle à vocation européenne ARTE. Dissensions et modes de résolutions des conflits au prisme de l'analyse stratégique et de la sociologie des organisations," *Trajectoires* n° 5, <http://trajectoires.revues.org/818>.

by specialists with diverse backgrounds (nationality, age, specialty, etc.). In *Histoire Parallèle*, mass consumption and propaganda became an object of historical study and debate. The film analysis proposed by Marc Ferro opened television to a “historical approach founded on a reflection, which integrated the function of moving pictures in a confrontation strategy. *Histoire Parallèle* was not only telling something based on stories, but indeed analysed the mechanisms that supported their production.”<sup>50</sup>

The project was successful enough to last for twelve seasons in a time when history programs were in decline. It targeted neither older generations nor traditionalists lamenting an on-going loss of patriotic values initiated by the counter-revolution of the 1960s. With *Histoire Parallèle*, history became a subject open to post-modern innovation and not primarily meant to foster patriotism and national identity.

Currently *Histoire Parallèle*'s lack of digital accessibility illustrates how an emblematic show is condemned to sink into oblivion despite considerable initial success. Except for media historians ready to do research in Paris at INA or at the Documentation Center of the EHESS, *Histoire Parallèle* has become almost invisible since the last show was aired.<sup>51</sup> ARTE is only authorized to market derivative products from the show like the *Carnets d'histoire parallèle*. Initially the station managers did not believe enough in the show's success and refused to pay the quite insignificant extra sum required by the copyright holders to allow the show's multicasting and its resale.<sup>52</sup> Due to the copyright regulations in force, it will obviously be a while before the show falls into the public domain and finds a new audience on the Internet.<sup>53</sup>

50 Béatrice Fleury-Vilatte, “Comment la télévision écrit et réécrit l'Histoire,” in *Communication et langages* N° 116, 2<sup>ème</sup> trimestre 1998, 35. (Translation by the author)

51 Historians doing research on the period from April 25<sup>th</sup> 1992 to January 7<sup>th</sup> 1995 actually have to consult Marc Ferro's personal archive, which he donated to the EHESS. Unfortunately many shows are still recorded only on VHS and not digitalized yet.

52 Interview with Marc Ferro (11/04/2015).

53 See **Droits des auteurs, Durée de la protection in Code de la propriété intellectuelle.**