INTRODUCTION

Writing History and the Social Sciences with Ivan Jablonka

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ABSTRACT: This introduction outlines Ivan Jablonka's theory and practice of writing the social sciences as foregrounded in three of his most noted, recent books, *A History of the Grandparents I Never Had*, *History is a Contemporary Literature*, and *Laëtitia*. As he outlines in his own contribution here, Jablonka advances rigorous, methodical research that nevertheless details the subjective investment of the researcher while at the same time utilizing creative "literary" techniques to engage a wide spectrum of readers well beyond the habitual circles of academic specialists. The essays contributed by Julie Fette, Sarah Fishman, Melanie Hawthorne, Don Reid, and Nathan Bracher explore various facets of Jablonka's approach, including, respectively: writing history with family stories, resisting the erosion of factual reasoning in the Trump years, pursuing biographies of supposedly non-descript lives, appreciating the importance of Communist cultural networks in postwar France, and revisiting the role of the subject in the social sciences.

KEYWORDS: social science, writing, research, history, literature

Ivan Jablonka, a well-published university historian, professor at the Université de Paris 13, and researcher at the Collège de France with the team of Pierre Rosanvallon, has attracted considerable attention with three recent, highly acclaimed books that pioneer literary modes of writing the social sciences: *Histoire des grands-parents que je n'ai pas eus*,¹ *L'Histoire est une littérature contemporaine: Manifeste pour les sciences sociales*,² and *Laëtitia ou la fin des hommes*.³ These works have had a significant impact not only on academics and intellectuals, but also on the broader public, as evidenced by the number of prizes they have received as well as by the coverage that they have enjoyed in the most notable venues of the French press and media.⁴ While the convergence of serious research, intellectual

distinction, and public acclaim proves to be a much more frequent phenomenon in France than in the United States, the intensity of interest elicited by *Laëtitia* has been particularly noteworthy.

In all three of the aforementioned books, Jablonka provides innovative syntheses of two domains often thought to be incompatible, if not mutually exclusive: the literary narrative and the rigorous pursuit of evidence-based knowledge. Instead of harvesting the fruits of history or sociology, then selecting the juiciest morsels and baking them into a literary pie enhanced with the author's own alchemy of stylistic sugar and narrative spice, Jablonka proposes a new approach to spanning the divide between literature, commonly presumed to be the exclusive domain of pleasure and aesthetics, and the social sciences, supposedly restricted to the most sober, "objective" narrative mode, off-limits to flights of creativity and imagination. Jablonka's *Histoire des grands-parents que je n'ai pas eus* retraces the story of his forbears' tragic lives as they unfold within the throes of World War II, then meet their tragic end in the Holocaust. Haunted by their absence from the earliest years of his childhood until the present, Jablonka sets out to save them from oblivion, seeking even to recover a measure of their lives' ardent, generous humanity that had been systematically repressed by the various agents of antisemitic nationalism in Poland and France, and, finally, utterly denied by the Nazis. Along the way, Jablonka delivers a striking account of his own personal and archival quest to retrace the itinerary leading his grandparents out of their impoverished shtetl in Poland to a semi-clandestine life in Paris and finally to Auschwitz. He constructs his narrative as a sort of double or even triple helix, dynamically interweaving biography, archival commentary, methodological reflection, and autobiography.

While on the one hand painting a vivid tableau of politics and war in Europe by retracing the harried lives of his grandparents as they face exacerbated Polish nationalism, antisemitism, police brutality, imprisonment, exile, and the precarity of undocumented immigrants in France in the late 1930s and early 1940s, Jablonka also narrates his own story of gathering evidence and practicing the historian's craft—locating and consulting archives, interviewing witnesses, and visiting sites of historical crimes. In the end, this narrative of his own investigation produces a compelling account of history as practiced in our time by a historian fully engaged with his research and writing. *Histoire des grands-parents* thus dramatically incorporates the subjectivity of the historian into the writing of the text. We take full measure of the dramatic lives of Matès and Idesa, and of their families in Poland, thanks to the presence of Ivan Jablonka's twenty-first-century affective, intellectual, and cultural sensibility, as he attempts not only to follow the many twists and turns of their obscure, harrowing, and

ultimately tragic itineraries, but also to recapture, or at least re-imagine, their vicissitudes as closely as possible, based on archival documents and testimonies. The resulting hybrid text captures the often dissonant public and private, individual and collective repercussions of such individual destinies in our contemporary world.

History Is a Contemporary Literature: Manifesto for the Social Sciences serves as a sort of “Discourse on the Method” for both *History of the Grand-parents* but also for *Laëtitia*, which followed. After reviewing the array of historiographic theory and practice from Herodotus to Fernand Braudel, Jablonka proceeds to survey recent approaches to “understanding what humans do” in a variety of works of nonfiction, history, and social science. *History Is a Contemporary Literature* thus offers fresh perspectives on the frequent, substantial, and ongoing overlaps, borrowings, and exchanges between literature, history, and the social sciences. At the core of his assessments are questions of how and to what ends texts account for reality past and present. Hence the two interrelated theses indicated by his provocative title *History Is a Contemporary Literature*: just as literary forms and figures have in reality from the very beginning always constituted an integral part of history, so now history, along with sociology and anthropology, can in fact achieve greater rigor and wider audiences by creating a literary text, written and experienced through a broad spectrum of narrative modes and rhetorical figures. Conversely, a whole range of literary texts—travel logs, memoirs, autobiographies, testimonies, diaries, life stories, and news reports—can implement methods and lines of reasoning inspired by the social sciences. Taking their point of departure from problems to solve or questions to answer, based on documented evidence gathered from a methodical investigation, embodying the knowledge gained in various creative narrative forms, such works constitute a literature of the “real world.” This family of explicative texts constructs and communicate knowledge with the requisite methodological rigor of history, sociology, and anthropology, while at the same time proving to be more transparent epistemologically and more cogent among a wider group of readers.

Jablonka thus underscores the importance of investigative, analytical, and experimental writing in a first person, “literary” mode in which the subjective investment of the author is explicitly visible. This project involves forging a path to knowledge to be followed not only by academics and specialists, but also the broader populace. As he explains here in “The Future of the Human Sciences,” the goal is to make history and the social sciences more transparent, more accessible, and more appealing to the general public by breaking down barriers that have tended to cordon off these academic disciplines into rigidly separated, specialized domains.

Hence the crucial importance of creating more engaging narrative forms offering greater cognitive clarity, efficacy, and pleasure: the ideal of an open society achieving a participatory liberal democracy is after all predicated on a knowledgeable body politic engaged in reasoned debate. That means bringing a wider spectrum of people to become actively engaged in understanding their own institutions, culture, and historical past, then relating that knowledge to the present context. Such are the stakes of writing the social sciences in contemporary society.

That is exactly what Jablonka has done in his most recent book, *Laëtitia ou la fin des hommes*, which attracted extraordinary public attention after its publication in August 2016. Many reviewers emphasized the book's unprecedented approach to "le fait divers," or crime story. Instead of focusing on the crime and the criminal, Jablonka tells the full story of an eighteen-year-old girl, Laëtitia Perrais, who was savagely murdered and dismembered in January 2011. Jablonka refuses to reduce her life to its brutal end, just as he refuses to treat Laëtitia simply as a "victim," which would objectively place her in the domain of the perpetrator. He instead devotes his narrative to tracing this young woman's life from its origins through infancy, childhood, and adolescence, then on to the threshold of the adult autonomy that she was in the process of achieving, even against quite formidable odds, since she had been surrounded by violence and socio-economic disadvantage. At the same time, Jablonka gives what has been quite aptly dubbed "une radiographie" [x-ray] of French society and politics in this second decade of the twenty-first century, since *Laëtitia* scrutinizes France's child welfare institutions, judicial system, and the coverage of the tragedy in the press and media. The book, moreover, analyzes the actions of then President Nicolas Sarkozy, who personally and publicly intervened in several noted instances. Along the way, Jablonka reflects on the attitude and comportment of men with respect to women as evident not only in the various aspects of Laëtitia's troubled life and tragic death, but also in France's laws and institutions. Finally, *Laëtitia* reassesses the conventional approach to "le fait divers" in popular and literary culture, and even reflects on the author-researcher's own emotional and theoretical investment in the subject of his investigation and writing. All in all, *Laëtitia ou la fin des hommes* constitutes a multi-pronged approach to an interrelated set of social, cultural, and political issues constellated around the life and death of the young woman who gave this work its title and raison d'être.

One finds a set of common threads running not only through Jablonka's three most recent works, but also throughout his writing and research since his first book, *Les Vérités inavouables de Jean Genet*, published in 2004. Jablonka himself has pointed to the thematic continuity in his

various studies involving children facing violence in several forms, including separation from parents due to death or deportation. He has also underscored the common methodological approach running throughout his books: the formulation of a question or problem, the investigation to gather and analyze the evidence, and the composition of the narrative that communicates the knowledge obtained, as based on that evidence and perceived by the researcher who has conducted the research and composed the narrative. That is why Jablonka defines his work as that of a writer in the social sciences. While availing himself of literary forms and techniques, he shares the epistemological concerns and investigative methods common to historians, sociologists, and anthropologists.

By design and principle, Jablonka's work proves to be pluridisciplinary. It therefore fully merits an assessment of its significance for the role and function of the humanities and social sciences in our globalized, media-saturated, rapidly-changing twenty-first-century world. Published here for the first time, his essay on "The Future of the Human Sciences" addresses salient challenges now confronting university practitioners of the humanities and social sciences in the age of budget cuts, insistence on narrowly-defined "productivity," and widespread skepticism, even hostility to the critical study of society and human behavior past and present. While fully aware of the obstacles, Jablonka emphasizes the exciting possibilities open to scholars and intellectuals who wish to engage the wider public in reasoned, evidence-based dialogue while pursuing a rigorous agenda of research.

Sarah Fishman's "Jablonka's History: Literature and the Search for Truth" joins Jablonka in speaking to the critical challenges facing the humanities and social sciences in these first decades of the twenty-first century. Noting that "Jablonka articulated a vision of the historian's responsibility that is eerily relevant to today's political moment," Fishman underscores how recent events in the United States, and in particular the electoral campaign and subsequent presidency of Donald Trump, have raised the stakes of the discussion of the role and function of the humanities and social sciences. With the now frequent, even habitual disregard for and even blatant denial of truth and factuality, examining the foundations of public discourse in an ostensibly democratic society has taken on a new urgency.

These reflections on the deteriorating conditions for reasoned debate in the public arena converge with renewed interrogations about the relation of history to literature and fiction. Fishman points out that ignoring and denying the truth can have dire consequences for a society, whose leaders may even engage in war to divert attention from the shambles of the illusions they pushed citizens to entertain. Along with Jablonka,

Orwell, and others, Fishman insists that truthful discourse based on factual evidence is critical for the very existence of a democratic society. Now more than ever, history and the social sciences represent socially oriented endeavors that pursue knowledge to build a more just society. That often means denouncing falsehoods, injustice, and institutional oppression, and so playing a rather subversive role. In order to fulfill that mission, however, historians and social scientists cannot be content with producing highly specialized erudition aimed at peers and more advanced students. They must instead be mindful of engaging the wider public.

At the same time, Fishman points out that neither the pivotal responsibilities weighing on the humanities and social sciences, nor the agency of the researcher and narrator in producing knowledge, have been universally recognized, not even within the ranks of those who practice them. Some observers would contend that historians merely dig up and deliver “the facts” (as if they existed autonomously, outside of specific contextual, epistemological, and narrative configurations), instead of producing knowledge. Fishman, however, provides a compelling description of the agency of the historian and the indispensable role of the narrative by offering examples from her own research. As an active practitioner of the discipline, she describes history writing as a painstaking series of steps toward a truthful account of the past that must be consistent with the results of investigative research: history proves to be a process in which the construction of the narrative coincides with the articulation of the knowledge to be gained and communicated. Likening her work to piecing together a jigsaw puzzle, she observes that the “historian assembles the pieces hoping to create a plausible narrative that answers the questions.” Effective writing plays an important role: rather than simply cranking out and delivering “facts” about the past, the text can implement a wide range of literary techniques to lead readers to understand how a narrative is anchored in and authenticated by research.

Students take more interest in history when they themselves are involved in creating historical narratives, and they can learn a great deal from a researcher-narrator willing to be a visible presence in critically analyzing documents that carry the limitations, orientations, and prejudices of those who produced them. By enabling the reader to see his or her epistemological assumptions and cultural values at work in the analysis, the narrator creates a more transparent and more honest text. At the same time, revealing the connections between one’s own life and one’s research can, though carrying certain risks and anxieties, prove to be personally rewarding.

Inspired by Jablonka’s work, Julie Fette’s “From Casablanca to Saint Cloud: The Story of Talia’s Grandparents” offers a first-person narrative of

the multi-faceted, transnational, and multicultural past of her daughter's grandparents. Steeped in Arabic, Hebraic, and French traditions, their itineraries lead them from the colonial mellahs of interwar Morocco, to the Paris of *les trente glorieuses* and beyond, on to Peru, and finally back to twenty-first-century France. Far from anecdotal, the savory "poulet aux olives" narrative served up at the outset offers a metonymic paradigm of memory, telescoping the present with multiple pasts spanning three generations, juxtaposing the present-day American context with French and Morocco cultural and political milieus. As Proustian as it may be, the "poulet aux olives" conveys the thematics of basic human sustenance, rich with flavor, produced by a set of instructions handed down from generation to generation, modified according to contexts and orientations, providing vital nourishment for all who partake, while reaffirming their ties to each other, the past, and to younger generations. The flavorful dish thus serves as a natural springboard for engaging larger questions about culture, politics, and narrating the past.

For Fette as well as Jablonka, family stories can become history, and the visible, active presence of the researcher-narrator in constructing a narrative of the past proves to be an integral part of the knowledge that is to be gained and transmitted. Indeed, the preparation and consumption of this particular Moroccan dish highlight the contemporary cosmopolitan context that is the author's own as writer, historian, and family member. Fette uses comparisons with her own twenty-first-century Franco-American context to bring out the contours and texture of the grandparents' past, first in interwar colonial and independent Morocco and then in postwar France.

Fette's explanation of her own motivations for writing this narrative of a family past underscores an essential point articulated by Friedrich Nietzsche, Benedetto Croce, and Marc Bloch, and recently reaffirmed by Ivan Jablonka and Henry Rousso: the notion of a past completely cut off from, dissociated with, and indifferent to the researcher-narrator, is a myth and an illusion. We delve back into the past because we are driven by our own reasons of the present.⁵ As deeply personal or scrupulously professional as those reasons may be, they are anything but parochial or irrelevant: by making them visible and explicit, the reflexive components of the historical narrative enable us to better understand the implication of the research-writer in all accounts of the past. Just as Jablonka's *History of the Grandparents I Never Had* integrates the project of producing a more complete and coherent knowledge of a family past with a method of doing history, Fette's essay yields richer and more accurate knowledge precisely because of the visible implication of the historian-narrator who, instead of trying to evacuate everything that she brings to her project, makes it available to the reader.

On the smaller scale imposed by the confines of an article, Fette has engaged in the same kind of history composed of “family stories” that French sociologist Nathalie Heinich, a CNRS researcher and EHESS professor known for her many books on the sociology of art and artists, practices in her recent (2018) book, strikingly titled, *Une Histoire de France*.⁶ Tracing the individual destinies of her ancestors—Ukrainian Jews on the paternal side, Alsatian Protestants on the maternal side—through the collective upheavals of the twentieth century, from the mid-nineteenth century to the present, from the pogroms in Czarist Russia to hard-earned prosperity in the Third Republic on to the infamous Jewish Statutes and massive police roundups of the Vichy years and finally to the liberalization of mores in *les trente glorieuses*, Heinich thus weaves her “family stories” into the fabric of larger events to write history. The resulting narrative of her forbears thus constitutes one story among many others possible, the incalculable sum of which would constitute the story of the nation. Yet beyond their particularities, these family stories are emblematic of what constitutes the country that happens to be hers. Heinich was mindful of relating the vicissitudes of the families to national upheavals throughout, giving particular attention to the issues of “identification, adhesion, [and] attachment to a country,”⁷ which often occupy the forefront for both families at several important junctures, when they found themselves exiled, having to make painful choices, paying a stiff price in order to remain French. Heinich’s *Histoire de France* thus illustrates how national history impacts individual lives, and, vice versa, how personal choices involving naturalization, enlisting in the army, expatriation, and legal dilemmas impact the history of the nation. Ultimately, the researcher-narrator’s construction of the narrative is what makes it possible to join all the various strands of individual lives together with continuity, coherence, and signification that leads from family stories to the collective and institutional history.

Melanie Hawthorne’s “Searching for What Is Already Found: Ivan Jablonka and the Life of a Nobody” takes us in a decidedly different direction to focus on the ways in which Jablonka’s *Histoire des grands-parents* and *Laëtitia* can be considered as exercises in writing the biography of people whose lives are commonly presumed to have no historical interest. Turning away from the project of history, whose very premises and *raison d’être*—at least as she depicts them here—leave her skeptical, Hawthorne chooses to view Jablonka’s books as contributions to an “emergent sub-genre of biography.” She accordingly points to parallels between, on the one hand, Jablonka’s writing and of historian Alain Corbin’s *Le Monde retrouve de Louis-François Pinagot, sur les traces d’un inconnu*, which uses the mundane elements of everyday life as the basis for historical analysis, and on the other hand, more literary-minded biographers who have taken up

the challenge of writing entire books devoted to ostensibly non-descript persons. Regarding the enterprises of literature and the social sciences, Hawthorne states that “it is taken as a given that these two forms of writing are mutually incompatible and each views the other with distrust.” Without explicitly staking out a position on the subject, she provides her own reasons for maintaining, if not deepening, the divide between the two. In first place, she considers narrative construction as proceeding from arbitrary linguistic choices irreconcilable with the scientific notion of objectivity. Second, she points to the work of Tversky and Kahneman, who consider events to be “for the most part random occurrences” to suggest that, if we are interested in truth, predictive science, and positive social outcomes, we would be better served, not by either biographies or history, but instead by tightly-focused experiments capable of uncovering mechanisms of decision-making.

It is far from clear, however, that the dismissive assertions of Kahneman and Tversky are adequate bases for positing the epistemological, social, and ethical futility of the writing of history. We may not be able to pin down the exact innermost psychological mechanisms at work in the minds of Hitler, Himmler, Heydrich, or his generals. But we can indeed say why, for example, and on the basis of what ideological and strategic logic, Nazi Germany invaded Poland then proceeded to decimate the human infrastructure of the Polish state, military, and intelligentsia before setting out on the enterprise of exterminating Jews, as recent works by Timothy Snyder and Johann Chapoutot have demonstrated.⁸ Both historians point to the discourse recorded and widely disseminated in the form of numerous printed documents, political speeches, instruction manuals, and military orders to demonstrate the strong connections between the Nazis’ thought as articulated, embodied, and transmitted by words and texts, and their behaviors. The patterns of ideas, and the resulting decisions and actions, are overwhelmingly clear. Even though they were ultimately unable to exert control over the course of history, the Nazis left very little either to random chance or whimsical, fortuitous actions in their military campaigns and genocidal enterprise.

Jablonka himself underscores what remains inscrutable or ambiguous in human minds, and what ethical and epistemological limits that places on his research and narration. At the same time, one of the most powerful passages of *A History of the Grandparents* analyzes the archives to demonstrate that his grandmother knowingly made the wrenching decision to “abandon” her children, leaving them with a dentist to prevent their being deported to their deaths.⁹ In the end, Tversky and Kahneman’s critique of history seems a bit facile. Instead of considering what historians actually do (which would include a wide, diverse array of things), they

seem to have set up a simplistic paradigm easy for them to demolish. One indeed wonders what sort of “history” books they find so easy to dismiss, if not the caricature of “great men” producing “great events” in a neatly chronological sequence, in other words, an epistemological framework long since abandoned. For history can neither be confined to a (rather naïve) search for discrete, linear, cause and effect mechanisms supposedly “underlying” the visible phenomena of human affairs, nor be reduced to the conscious decisions of human protagonists supposedly driving a chronological sequence of events. Nor, for that matter, is Jablonka interested in singling out one discrete “cause” of the murder of Laëtitia Perrais. He emphatically stresses the importance of telling the story of her life, set within the specific contexts of twenty-first-century France, with the structures, codes, and behaviors of its political, judiciary, and social welfare institutions, and with attitudes and perceptions shaped by longstanding literary and journalistic practices.

Nor is it reasonable to claim that history is futile because it is not a predictive science or because one cannot claim positive results from its “use” or “application.” Certainly history offers no panacea, no magic solution to tough issues past, present, or future. Does that really mean we may as well consider it futile? Faced with the current resurgence of racism, white supremacism, and even neo-Nazism, for example, does anyone really want to argue that we would be better off knowing nothing or claiming to know nothing about the history of slavery, the Confederacy, the Jim Crow South, or Nazi Germany? When offered “alternative facts” by autocratic rulers and their spokespersons, are we really content to shrug our shoulders, musing that, after all, one narrative is just as “arbitrary” as another?

Don Reid’s “To Bear Witness After the Era of the Witness: The Projects of Christophe Boltanski and Ivan Jablonka” focuses on writing Holocaust memory as undertaken by third generation “children of the Shoah,” such as the two authors in question. Both probe the realities of antisemitism and the Holocaust in France by revisiting family stories of their grandparents in occupied Paris; both deploy “knowledge, ethics, and aesthetics” in forging memory viable for the twenty-first century; and both draw their readers into the text by foregrounding the role of the narrator in researching records and constructing narratives of the past. Just as Jablonka’s *History of the Grandparents I Never Had* leads the historian-narrator to trace his forbears’ itinerary through a vast network of archives, eyewitness accounts, literary reconstitutions, and site visits, so Boltanski’s project leads him to scrutinize the ordeal of being a Jew in occupied Paris and to view behaviors not only through the prisms of complex, interrelated itineraries of several generations, but also through the unusual literary

production of his grandmother. The major difference with respect to Jablonka's ancestors emerges from the fact that, having survived the war, Boltanski's grandparents resume life in Paris, but go against the grain of bourgeois convention by frequenting mainly Communist survivors and adopting their views on politics and culture. Reid, moreover, emphasizes the importance of the postwar French Communist social milieu for the lives of Boltanski's grandparents and Jablonka's father, an element that has taken on even greater prominence in Jablonka's lyrical, yet socio-historical account of decisive importance of the unconventional vacation expeditions he experienced with his parents and their friends in his book *En camping-car*.¹⁰

My own essay, "Jablonka et la question du sujet en sciences sociales," focuses on the visible, active presence of the researcher-narrator in *Laëtitia* to revisit the question of subjectivity in the social sciences. I explore how Jablonka's approach to the research and narration of Laëtitia's life and tragic death enhances the precision of his account and the transparency of its epistemology. I argue, moreover, that Jablonka's reflections on his own approach to this young woman's story, his various avenues of investigation, his interpretation of the data, and the sometimes lyrical formulation of his own personal response to the people, institutions, and events provide an implicit response to the debate over the status and role of the human subject as engaged by Claude Lévi-Strauss, Emmanuel Lévinas, and Tzvetan Todorov. The ongoing pertinence of this debate can be seen in the criticisms of Pierre Assouline, who, in chiding Jablonka for "confusing" the literary with the sociological, assumes the former to be the domain of lyricism, imagination, and emotion, while reserving the latter for a putatively scientific objectivity leaving no place for the human subject conducting the research and writing the text. Similarly, Philippe Artières would demand a self-effacing role for the historian, who, he proclaims, should simply "se faire le relais de la parole de l'autre" [serve to relay the speech of the other] without otherwise intervening in the text.

These admonishments by both Assouline and Artières lead us back to Lévi-Strauss, who sought nothing less than a total effacement of the human subject as such from the social sciences and the humanities, with the ultimate goal of "integrating humans back into nature." As both Lévinas and Todorov point out, however, one cannot claim to study people, society, culture, and history just as one would study the chemical composition of a stone or a collection of butterflies. In the first place, researchers in the social sciences and humanities in all cases remain both subjects and objects of study: they can neither deny, evacuate, nor even totally bracket their own human subjectivity, since they bring a specific set of intellectual, emotional, and cultural orientations to any given research. Second,

the findings of research in the social sciences and humanities are invariably formulated and disseminated in the form of narrative, which necessarily entails choices, priorities, and configurations decided by the human subjects who write it. Rather than the schema opposing, on the one hand, some sort of isolated, imperious, solipsistic subject, with a monolithic set of impersonal structures and automatisms on the other, Jablonka's portrayal of Laëtitia examines a specific human subjectivity interwoven with society: while distinctly hers, Laëtitia's affectivity and itinerary were indeed largely structured and driven by the social institutions and cultural tendencies of her time. *Laëtitia* thus represents a synthesis not only of literature and social science, but also of subjectivity and objectivity.

Given the cultural tensions of our time, we would do well to undertake fresh, dynamic approaches to adapting our social, political, and academic institutions to current needs, stresses, and challenges. Ivan Jablonka's proposals for writing the humanities and social sciences offer promising avenues in this regard. For if we do not ourselves actively participate in updating the status and role of our disciplines, there are clearly a host of forces, ideologies, and constituencies that will shape them for us, if indeed they reserve any significant place for them at all. Yet there is no reason to confine the new frontiers of humanities and social sciences to regions of "gloom and doom." As evidenced not only by Jablonka's own books, but also by a wide variety of works that have created factual accounts of "what humans do" in innovative textual forms, "writing the social sciences" can offer more rewarding opportunities for researching, writing, and reading in ways that contribute to a more just, open, democratic society.

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Notes

1. Ivan Jablonka, *Histoire des grands-parents que je n'ai pas eus* (Paris: Les Éditions du Seuil, 2012), published in English translation as *A History of the Grandparents I Never Had*, trans. Jane Kuntz (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016).
2. Ivan Jablonka, *L'Histoire est une littérature contemporaine: Manifeste pour les sciences sociales* (Paris: Les Éditions du Seuil, 2014), published in English as *History Is A Contemporary Literature*, trans. Nathan Bracher (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2018).
3. Ivan Jablonka, *Laëtitia ou la fin des hommes* (Paris: Les Éditions du Seuil, 2016).
4. Jablonka's *Histoire des grands-parents que je n'ai pas eus* garnered no less than three prizes in 2012: the Prix Guizot de l'Académie française, the Prix du Sénat du livre d'histoire, and the Prix Augustin-Thierry des Rendez-vous de l'histoire de Blois. In the fall of 2014, *L'Histoire est une littérature contemporaine: Manifeste*

pour les sciences sociales prompted highly favorable reviews in *Le Monde* (Julie Clarini, “Paul Veyne et Ivan Jablonka: ‘L’histoire peut s’écrire pleinement’,” http://www.lemonde.fr/livres/article/2014/10/02/paul-veyne-et-ivan-jablonka-l-histoire-peut-s-ecrire-pleinement_4499430_3260.html), France Culture (“L’histoire est une littérature contemporaine: manifeste pour les sciences sociales,” <http://www.franceculture.fr/oeuvre-l%E2%80%99histoire-est-une-litterature-contemporaine-manifeste-pour-les-sciences-sociales-de-ivan-jab>), *Libération* (Marc Semo, “L’histoire est un roman vrai,” 10 September 2014, http://www.liberation.fr/livres/2014/09/10/l-histoire-est-un-roman-vrai_1097584), and *La Croix* (Antoine Peillon, “L’Histoire en toutes lettres,” 22 October 2014, <https://www.la-croix.com/Culture/Livres-Idees/Livres/L-Histoire-en-toutes-lettres-2014-10-22-1225158>). Then in 2016, *Laëtitia ou la fin des hommes* has not only won three prestigious awards, *Le Monde*’s Prix Littéraire, the Prix Médicis, and Le Prix des Prix, but has also received highly favorable reviews, often accompanied with author interviews, in all major Parisian and provincial newspapers and news magazines, and also in a good number of prominent publications and broadcasts in Belgium, Switzerland, and Canada. Jablonka has also made guest appearances to discuss *Laëtitia* on France Culture, France Info, Europe 1, Radio France Internationale, as well as on almost all of the major television channels, including France 2, Fr3, and Canal Plus.

5. See Friedrich Nietzsche, “De l’utilité et des inconvénients de l’histoire pour la vie” in *Considérations inactuelles I et II* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), 91, 103–104 and Henry Rousso, *La Dernière Catastrophe: L’histoire, le présent, le contemporain* (Paris: Gallimard, 2012), 34–35. Rousso cites Croce (34) and Bloch (108–109). Jablonka, *L’Histoire est une littérature contemporaine*, 134–135.
6. Nathalie Heinrich, *Une Histoire de France* (Bruxelles: Les Impressions nouvelles, 2018).
7. *Ibid.*, 218.
8. Timothy Snyder, *Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning* (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2015); Johann Chapoutot, *La Loi du sang: Penser et agir en nazi* (Paris: Gallimard, 2014) and *La Révolution culturelle nazie* (Paris: Gallimard, 2017).
9. Jablonka, *A History of the Grandparents*, 229–231.
10. Ivan Jablonka, *En camping-car* (Paris: Les Éditions du Seuil, 2018). The work also garnered significant coverage in the press and media, and was awarded the Prix Essai France Télévisions.