

“FORGET ABOUT IT”: “PARALLEL PROCESSING” IN THE SREBRENICA REPORT

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“A good metaphor implies an intuitive perception of the similarity in dissimilars.”

Aristotle²

ABSTRACT

Dominick LaCapra has remarked that “when you study something, you always have a tendency to repeat the problems you are studying.” In psychoanalytic supervision this phenomenon is called “parallel processing.” Parallel processes are subconscious re-enactments of past events: when you are caught up in a parallel process, your behavior repeats key aspects of what there is to know about what you’re studying—in a way, however, that you yourself don’t understand. This article analyzes the extent to which the “NIOD Report,” the official Dutch report on the massacre in Srebrenica (1995), “parallels” the events it describes. It introduces the phenomenon, examines the way the NIOD researchers unwittingly replicated several key aspects of the events they studied, and discusses some instances in which parallelling highlights precisely those features of the events under consideration that are hard to come to terms with.

I. INTRODUCTION

On April 10, 2002, in a live television broadcast, the director of the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation (NIOD) presented the first copy of the long-awaited NIOD Report about the “events prior to, during and after the fall of Srebrenica” in 1995 to the Dutch minister of Education, Culture and Science. In three massive volumes (totaling 3,394 pages), four book-length “partial studies,” and a CD-ROM with another eleven such studies, the NIOD described and analyzed the inability of a battalion of Dutch peacekeepers to protect the Bosnian Muslims herded together in the “safe area” of Srebrenica.³ The contract between the NIOD and the Dutch government, which had commissioned the study and paid the costs, stipulated that the aim of the project was to “increase our under-

1. This article was funded by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research.

2. *On the Art of Poetry*, transl. and ed. I. Bywater (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909), 71.

3. Nederlands Instituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie, *Srebrenica, een ‘veilig’ gebied: Reconstructie, achtergronden, gevolgen en analyses van de val van een Safe Area*, 3 vols. (Amsterdam: NIOD, 2002) (“Srebrenica, a ‘Safe’ Area—Reconstruction, Background, Consequences and Analyses of the Fall of a ‘Safe Area.’” Additional bibliographical information at http://www.srebrenica.nl/en/a_index.htm, accessed July 16, 2004).

standing . . . of the causes and events which led to the fall of Srebrenica and the dramatic developments which ensued.”⁴

One of these “dramatic developments” was the murder—by Serb militiamen—of probably as many as 7,500 Bosnian Muslims. From the beginning it was quite clear that the *raison d’être* of the NIOD investigation was to ascertain whether Dutch politicians, military, civil servants, or peacekeepers were in any way to blame. The report with which the NIOD came forward after more than five years of research was critical about the eagerness with which the then government had sent a battalion of peacekeepers on an “impossible mission,” but it did not indict any Dutch politician (nor indeed any other Dutch individual or institution). Nevertheless, less than a week after the publication, and only a few weeks before the next general election, the Dutch cabinet resigned—because it “broadly subscribed” to the conclusions of the report. Mr. Wim Kok, the prime minister, didn’t specify exactly to which conclusions the cabinet, or, for that matter, he himself, subscribed, but explained to the parliament that *somebody* had to take political responsibility for the inability of the international community to prevent the mass murders, and that he had decided that he would be the person to do so.

In the weeks that followed, the report was duly reviewed in newspapers, talk shows, and magazines. Though it had toppled a cabinet, it proved extraordinarily difficult to fathom the value of the NIOD study. Political journalists had their shots; historians supplied authoritative sound bites; commentators, editorialists, and other pundits ventured tentative evaluations—but behind the coquettish opinions shimmered bewilderment. What to make of this huge number of words about—or at least triggered by—one fatal week in July 1995? In November 2002 a symposium was held at Leiden University, in which historians and philosophers of history tried to get some grip on the theoretical underpinnings of the report; they were also able to discuss their findings with NIOD director (and head of the project team) Professor J. C. H. Blom.⁵

Because (as a historian who is also a psychologist) I have written about the way historians deal with traumatic events, and because I was in the midst of writing a novel about Srebrenica,⁶ I attended the Leiden symposium. Listening to Professor Blom it struck me that the words in which he described, explained, and defended his project closely resembled the words in which back in 1993, 1994, and 1995 the political and military authorities had talked about the Dutch mission in and to Bosnia. “We knew,” Blom said, “that ours was a very hazardous enterprise.” And: “we risked a highly unfortunate result,” “we had to build things up from scratch,” “it was unsure whether we could muster adequate resources,” and so on.⁷ This resemblance between *report* and *event*, or, to be more precise,

4. As the instruction to the NIOD was worded. See the letter of 18 October 1996 from the minister of Education, Culture and Science, the minister of Defence, and the minister of Foreign Affairs to the Dutch Parliament (English translation on http://www.srebrenica.nl/en/a_index.htm, accessed August 10, 2004).

5. The lectures given at the symposium are published in *Het drama Srebrenica: Geschied-theoretische beschouwingen over het NIOD-rapport*. Special edition of *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 116 (2003), 185-328.

6. Now published: Eelco Runia, *Inkomend vuur* (Amsterdam: Augustus, 2003).

7. Later Blom made similar remarks in “Het NIOD-rapport onevenwichtig en intellectueel gemakzuchtig? Een kwestie van lezen,” *Internationale Spectator* 56 (2002), 448-453; J. C. H. Blom,

between “what happens in the reporting environment” and “what happened in the environment about which the report purportedly reports” reminded me of a phenomenon I had often encountered in my work as a psychologist: the “parallel process.”

Dominick LaCapra has remarked that “when you study something, at some level you always have a tendency to repeat the problems you are studying.”⁸ From a theoretical as well as a societal point of view, parallel processes are important manifestations of this tendency. Broadly speaking, a parallel process is going on when difficulties experienced in one environment are replicated in another environment. The concept originates in psychoanalytic supervision, is used in medical and psychotherapeutic settings, and refers, typically, to instances in which problematic interactions between residents and their patients are mirrored in the teaching encounter, in, that is, the interaction between residents and their tutors. System theorists speak in this respect of “isomorphism”—a term borrowed from mathematics. In general, says Douglas Hofstadter, the term “isomorphism” “applies when two complex structures can be mapped onto each other in such a way that to each part of one structure there is a corresponding part in the other structure, where ‘corresponding’ means that the two parts play similar roles in their respective structures.”⁹

In this article I will introduce this phenomenon, examine the way Blom and his fellow NIOD researchers unwittingly replicated several key aspects of the events they studied, and discuss some instances in which paralleling highlights precisely those features of the object of the NIOD study that are hard to come to terms with.

II. THE PARALLEL PROCESS

As a psychologist I used to teach medical doctors to reflect upon their dealings with their patients—because doctors who are able to do so are less likely to stumble into unprofitable antagonisms or, as happens much more often, counterproductive symbioses with their patients. One of the methods I employed is group-supervision, in which physicians discuss unsatisfactory doctor–patient interactions with their peers, while the group leader signals subconscious group processes. Using this method I was time and again struck by similarities between what is observable in the supervision group, and the ostensible difficulties the doctors have with the patients about whom they are talking. Typically, some aspects of what had happened between the doctor and his or her patient are not verbalized in the intended story the doctor tells, but are, as it were, “played out” in the group.

B. G. J. de Graaff, and D. C. L. Schoonoord, “Oordelen in uitersten,” *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* (BMGN) 118 (2003), 337-356; and J. C. H. Blom and B. G. J. de Graaff, “Het Srebrenica-onderzoek: Een extreem geval van eigentijdse geschiedschrijving,” *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* (TvG) 116 (2003), 300-322.

8. Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 142.

9. Douglas Hofstadter, *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid* (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 59.

In an article about the Dutch General Practitioners training programme I gave the following, rather straightforward, case:

In the second month of the training, K, a junior GP who has substantially more clinical experience than most other group members, tells the group about a patient who has visited him because of frequent headaches. He reports having examined the patient carefully and having made an effort to help the patient to the best of his abilities: "I even hinted at the possibility that his complaints might have some psychosomatic origins, but he wouldn't go into that." After some consideration he had decided to ask the patient to monitor for two weeks under what circumstances his headaches did in fact occur—to which the patient had responded: "That's all very well, but I'd rather have a referral to a neurologist." K reports that he had felt annoyed, but had nevertheless, "because of the time," consented to the patient's request. In the group, K's story is ardently discussed, and a lot of interesting observations and valuable considerations are made. Initially K listens actively, but in time he seems to lose interest and at the end he shows no signs whatsoever that the discussion has clarified anything. During the ensuing coffee-break K asks the [...] group leader—within earshot of his fellow group members: "By the way, what do *you* do in cases like the one I told you about?"¹⁰

In taking it higher up, K behaved—on another level—in the same way as his patient. Doing so, he evoked the same emotions as he had experienced himself: by his question to the group leader K humiliated the group, just as he had felt humiliated by his patient. He had unwittingly enacted the aspect of the behavior of the patient that had most infuriated him.

In K's case, at least four things stand out. First: it is not just a random aspect of the reported event that is omitted, but the spot where the shoe really pinches. Though he hadn't realized it, for K, his feeling of having been humiliated by his patient was much more of an issue than the origins of the headaches, the pros and cons of his advice, or the propriety of the referral. A second characteristic is that the parallels are so pervasive: not only the humiliation, but also the exertions (by K as well as by the group) and the time pressure are mirrored. Third, drawing attention to parallels is a way to overcome deadlock. When in the next group session the "coffee-break event" was discussed, K, though initially protesting, acknowledged the parallel and experienced it as a real eye-opener. The fourth feature is that in parallel processes, acting out is wedded to—and hides behind—conventionality. K's behavior was not so conspicuous as to provoke his colleagues to protest, yet conspicuous enough to affect them. His question to the group leader aroused feelings of embarrassment, of having witnessed something that, though elusive, was definitely off-limits, but these feelings were swamped by the urge to go along with the flow of events. To address K's behavior required the unconventional, "unsociable" act of returning to the subject of his (coffee-break!) question in the next group session—something people are not easily prepared to do.

Parallel processes—like K's question to the group leader—are subconscious re-enactments of past events. They differ in two ways from Collingwoodian re-enactments: they do not refer to *in vitro* representations but to real—*in vivo*—interactions; second, they are not the intended result of a conscious effort but the

10. Eelco Runia, "The Parallel Process in the Training of General Practitioners," *Medical Teacher* 17 (1995), 399-408.

unintended ripples of subconscious processes. In a sense, a parallel process is a compulsion to repeat. When therapists do not understand what is going on between them and their patients, and consequently are not able to give a satisfactory report about it, they may, by parallel enactment, transmit the elusive aspect of the relationship with the patient to their supervisor. LaCapra's adage that “when you study something, . . . you always have a tendency to repeat the problems you are studying” thus gets a special twist. When, like K, you are caught up in a parallel process, your behavior repeats key aspects of what there is to know about the problem you study—in a way, however, that you yourself don't understand.

The explanation of this remarkable phenomenon ultimately derives from Freud, who theorized that what is not adequately remembered may be repeated in the therapeutic situation through unconscious enactment.¹¹ In a groundbreaking article, Harold Searles, elaborating on Freud's idea, stated that enactments are not the prerogatives of patients, but occur within the supervision (that is, in the interaction between therapist and supervisor) as well.¹² Searles's supposition that the therapist was a kind of medium through which the enactment of the patient was flawlessly “transmitted” to the supervisor, was, however, rather quickly discarded. Since the 1970s most theorists in the field take the position that it is not just idiosyncrasies of the *patient* that may be transmitted to the supervision, but also (some say: predominantly) idiosyncrasies of the *patient-therapist interaction*—that, in other words, the therapist is not a transparent medium, but part and parcel of what is transmitted to the supervision.¹³ Accordingly, Sachs and Shapiro state that most parallelisms do not refer to the content of the therapeutic process, but to “treatment alliances”—to the tacit rules that form the basis of the therapist-patient relationship.

When a parallel process is operative there is always a dual set of transferences and countertransferences involved—the one, the patient/therapist set, as it were *in absentiae*, the other in the here and now of the supervision.¹⁴ Yet parallel processes are not reducible to transferences or countertransferences. Key to parallel processes is a 180° turn of the “middle man”—the therapist. Paralleling occurs when therapists, in the supervision setting, unconsciously identify with their patients, enact this identification, and elicit responses from the supervisor that replicate the difficulties they themselves have encountered—as *therapists*—

11. Sigmund Freud, “Erinnern, Wiederholen und Durcharbeiten,” *Gesammelte Werke X* (London: Imago, 1914), 126-136.

12. H. F. Searles, “The Informational Value of the Supervisor's Emotional Experiences,” *Psychiatry* 18 (1955), 135-146.

13. See, for example, D. M. Sachs and S. H. Shapiro, “On Parallel Processes in Therapy and Teaching,” *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 45 (1976), 319-415; H. K. Gediman and F. Wolkenfeld, “The Parallelism Phenomenon in Psychoanalysis and Supervision: Its Reconsideration as a Triadic System,” *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 49 (1980), 234-255; and L. Caligor, “Parallel and Reciprocal Processes in Psychoanalytic Supervision,” in *Clinical Perspectives on the Supervision of Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy*, ed. L. Caligor, P. M. Bromberg, and J. D. Meltzer (New York: Plenum Press, 1984), 1-28.

14. In the therapeutic setting there is transference from patient to therapist and countertransference from therapist to patient; in the supervision setting there is transference from therapist to supervisor and countertransference from supervisor to therapist.

in the therapy. This, of course, is a highly ambiguous gambit: the therapist brings up the “itching” relationship he or she has with his or her patient in order to *change* it, but by eliciting the responses they themselves have got caught up in, he or she also seems to want to *perpetuate* it. But in this respect too, the supervision often mirrors the therapy. In K’s case, it would be a good guess that just as K himself wants *both* to remain the omnipotent doctor he fancied himself to be *and* to find more satisfactory ways of dealing with his patients, the patient he talks about wants *both* to get rid of his symptoms *and* to retain them.

That therapists presents their case in such an ambiguous way should not be taken to mean that the underlying problem is not a serious one. It almost always is. In most cases it is so serious that the therapist somehow is convinced that he or she “cannot do without it.” In fact, parallel processes often point to problems so bound up with the identity of the therapist that the therapist feels he or she has no other option than to try to have it both ways: to simultaneously address the problem and to evade it. In their being bound up with identity, the problems feeding into parallel processes resemble (psychological) traumata.¹⁵ Like traumata, they want to be left alone just as much as they want to be overcome. Unfortunately, when not addressed, this strategy of having it both ways tends to be self-defeating: it engenders numbness, apathy, and deadlock, and diffuses an atmosphere of “forget about it.”

III. THE OSSENDRECHTSE HEIDE

Remarkably, these were precisely the feelings the NIOD Srebrenica Report generated. In the weeks after the study was published there was an initial burst of attention—from newspapers, TV stations, weeklies, and so on—followed a short while later by a welter of articles in specialized and professional journals. Then there were some conferences and congresses, and finally the two most prominent Dutch historical journals, the *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* and the *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, devoted special editions to the NIOD report. Many points were made, many issues raised, many hypotheses suggested—and there was, on the whole, remarkably little pedantry. Yet, the issues raised did not get any follow-up. Instead, as a Dutch weekly recently wrote, “silence set in.”¹⁶

That the report led to an atmosphere of “forget about it” was hardly to be expected. In the first place, because the NIOD study—eagerly awaited and long overdue—addressed the urgent question of how the Dutch could have failed to protect 7,500 Bosnian Muslims from being massacred, it was widely believed that the publication of the Report would be the starting signal for a clarifying dis-

15. See my *Waterloo Verdun Auschwitz: De liquidatie van het verleden* (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1999), 176-202.

16. Alain van der Horst, “Onmacht, onkunde en onwil,” *Haagse Post* (December 12, 2003), 25-42, 26. The fact that, in the Netherlands, 2002 was a very turbulent year (with the rise and murder of the charismatic populist Pim Fortuijn, two general elections—both ending in landslides—and the demise of a whole generation of politicians) does not, to my mind, sufficiently explain this apathy: it was not only the public media but, most conspicuously, the *professionals* (especially historians) who gave up.

cussion about why, back in July 1995, things went so terribly wrong. On the basis of the thoroughgoing documentation and informed analysis of the NIOD there would be a kind of collective self-examination from which insights and conclusions would be drawn. That instead of this, apathy set in, was also remarkable because, second, the researchers themselves professed that discussion and reflection was what they had been after. They had taken care, they said, not to steal someone’s thunder, and repeatedly declared that now they had done their job, there could be a blossoming of well-informed discussions.

On consideration, what in fact did happen was not unlike what happened in K’s supervision group. After K had told about his interaction with his patient, the group members eagerly ventured questions, opinions, advice, and interpretations—each to the best of his or her abilities, each expecting that his or her remarks would be taken up, so that, eventually, K could gain enough insight into himself and his patient to overcome the impasse in which he had become locked. Needless to say, the contributions of the group members—however involved—were not intended as definitive statements. They were provisory inducements meant to get things going. But when nothing really *got* going, when there was no indication that K was seriously considering what was brought up, the group lost focus, and the discussion petered out into a melancholy coffee-break.

Though in the case of the NIOD report there was no single, clear-cut, K-like acting out, there were enough “provocations” to suspect that the Report was indeed surreptitiously trying to have it both ways. I hasten to remark that by using the word “provocations” I do not in any way want to suggest that the makers of the Report enjoyed putting cats among the pigeons. What I *do* want to say, however, is that they unwittingly drew enough attention to what they unwittingly wanted to hide as to merit the hypothesis that a parallel process was going on. The tendency to “forget about it” that their Report engendered might have been the result of their wanting *both* to explore *and* to evade the question of what in fact did happen in 1995 in Srebrenica. Were that indeed the case, then, according to parallel-process theory, the issues evaded could be expected to be bound up with identity. Chances are, moreover, that the issues at stake would have been encapsulated in the “provocations” occurring in and around the Report.

Before turning to these “provocations”—and considering the question what they might hide as well as reveal about the Dutch mission to Srebrenica—I will pause for a moment and ask, first, whether object (the Dutch role in Srebrenica) and subject (NIOD) had enough in common to enable the subject to identify with the object, and, second, whether identification did in fact manifest itself in the operational modus of the research group. The questions are crucial, because a substantial amount of identification is a precondition for parallel processes to take place. In psychoanalytic supervision this communality is hardly problematic: the supervision is structured along roughly the same lines as the therapy. In both settings there is a person seeking help and a person offering help, a person stating a problem and a person trying to make sense of it, a person presenting disjunction and a person suggesting conjunction. As a matter of fact this is rather less unlike the situation in historiography than might have been assumed. A read-

er of a historical work—or, to be more precise, the public to which that work is addressed—is in the same “tertiary” position as a supervisor: historical reality communicates something to historians, historians communicate it to their public.

On top of this, there was, in the case of the NIOD, a more specific inducement for identification. Surprisingly, in 1996, the year the NIOD got the assignment to investigate the Dutch role in Srebrenica, the institute was in roughly the same position the Dutch army was in 1993, the year in which the United Nations asked the Netherlands to provide a battalion of peacekeepers for the UNPROFOR mission to Bosnia. This similarity sprang from the circumstance that, in the early 1990s, both army and NIOD had to face the fact that what for decades had been their *raison d'être* was irremediably gone—both had to find new tasks, new challenges, new legitimacies. The army, after the end of the Cold War, began to shift its attention to participation in United Nations missions. In 1991, the Dutch Minister of Defense proclaimed a major reduction in the size of the army, coupled with the creation of an elite “Air Mobile Brigade”—intended as a component of a NATO rapid-deployment force, but tailor-made for politically attractive peacekeeping operations.¹⁷ In 1993 the seriousness of the new orientation was put to the test, when decisions had to be made whether the expensive equipment (as, for example, Apache attack helicopters) the army wanted for the Air Mobile Brigade would indeed be purchased.¹⁸

When, in this climate, the Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, reminded the Dutch government of its promise to furnish troops for the Bosnian peacekeeping mission, several high-ranking military—including the commander of the Air Mobile Brigade—began to maneuver to put the Air Mobile Brigade on offer. Was a mission to Bosnia not an excellent opportunity to show what the Brigade was capable of? The Commander of the First Army Corps, Lieutenant-General Schouten, declared that it would be “very bad for the attractiveness” of the Air Mobile Brigade “when after two and half years it would not have left the Ossenrechtse Heide other than for a small exercise in Greece.”¹⁹ The politicians, headed by the Minister of Defense, jumped upon this idea, the skeptics were overruled, and—after some juggling and wriggling—the Air Mobile Brigade, though not fully up to strength (there were recruitment problems), not having completed its training and as yet still provisionally equipped, got its golden opportunity. The feeling was that “Srebrenica” would be a difficult mission, but this feeling was outweighed by the confidence that—with the famous Dutch hands-on approach—the job could be done.

The NIOD, meanwhile, was also in an unprecedented process of transformation. Established in 1945 as the Rijksinstituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie (RvO, later RIOD),²⁰ the Institute had, in the early 1990s, outlasted its task of collect-

17. *Herstructurering en verkleining. Defensienota 1991*. The third component of the plan was the abolishment of compulsory military service. The proposals were subsequently worked out in the *Prioriteitennota 1993*.

18. *Srebrenica, een 'veilig' gebied*, I, 1041-1085. See also H. A. Couzy, *Mijn jaren als bevelhebber* (Amsterdam: L. J. Veen, 1996).

19. Quoted in *Srebrenica, een 'veilig' gebied*, I, 1044. The Ossenrechtse Heide is a military training ground.

20. See, for the prehistory of the NIOD for example, A. J. van der Leeuw, “Loe de Jong, het Koninkrijk en het Instituut,” in *Een dure verplichting en een kostelijk voorrecht: Dr. L. de Jong en*

ing, disclosing, and studying the documentary evidence of the history of the Netherlands during the Second World War. The last (twenty-seventh) volume of *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog*—which had become the mainstay of the Institute—was published in 1988, and with the completion of this monumental work the question arose whether the Institute had a future. Wasn't it time to move its archives to the National Archive, its other collections to the appropriate museums, and its research to the universities—and to close the Institute? Or could the NIOD be transformed into an “Institute of Contemporary History”? The discussions hadn't been conclusive²¹ when in 1996 J. C. H. Blom, a successful and ambitious professor at Amsterdam University, was appointed the new director. Three days before he was to take up the directorship, Blom was phoned by the Minister of Education, Culture and Science and asked whether he would contract for an “independent and historical-scientific study” of the Dutch role in Srebrenica.²² Blom, not wanting to get stuck in his own version of the Ossendrechtse Heide, weighed the risks, counted his beads—and jumped upon the opportunity the Dutch government so unexpectedly had offered him.

IV. REPLICATIONS

This identification-inducing origin was planted in identification-enhancing circumstances: the fact that Blom got *carte blanche*²³ gave him and his group a blank space in which identifications could easily be projected. It was, I think, this unique constellation that caused the Srebrenica researchers to replicate several key features of the Srebrenica mission with such uncanny precision.

In the first place, they took the same moral high ground as the one from which the Dutch Srebrenica policy had been conducted. The moral posture of the then Dutch government was based on an obliteration of the fact that it had voluntarily taken on the assignment—and might be characterized as a combination of a sense of duty and a sense of being just the right entity to fulfill this duty. Both were copied. Government as well as NIOD presented their task as a “societal imperative,”²⁴ and both accepted what they saw as their lot with a dissimulated, subdued pride. Rather unsurprisingly, the similarity in posture led to a similarity

zijn geschiedwerk, ed. M. de Keizer (The Hague: SDU, 1995), 21-58, and Max Pam, *De onderzoekers van de oorlog* (The Hague: SDU, 1989).

21. The future of the NIOD was finally settled when, in 1997, the Minister of Education, Culture and Science endorsed the conclusions of the Kossmann committee (April 1997) that the NIOD was viable if it broadened its scope to twentieth-century warfare and genocide.

22. Y. Albrecht, “De waarheid in hoofdletters hebben we hier niet” (Interview with Professor Blom), *Vrij Nederland* (November 2, 2002), 32-35.

23. Surprisingly, there were no restrictions as to the size and composition of the research group. Nor was there a budget: the NIOD could send in its expense account to the Minister. Unbelievably, there was not even a time limit. Only when the study was well on its way did the NIOD group promise that it would publish its results just after the general elections of 1998. When it proved to be impossible to live up to this promise, the NIOD agreed to be ready in the summer of 2001. This deadline couldn't be met either, and again the publication was postponed: first to November 2001, then to April 10, 2002—ironically just *before* the *next* general election.

24. See Blom, de Graaff, and Schoonoord, “Oordelen in uitersten,” 339, and Blom and de Graaff, “Het Srebrenica-onderzoek,” 300-322.

in consequences. By insisting, for example, that they had taken on the Srebrenica study not because they had wanted to, but because it was a societal imperative, the researchers made Dutch society accessory to their project in the same way the Dutch government had enrolled Dutch society in its Srebrenica policy. Consequently, the question whether—in the case of Srebrenica—this sense of duty deteriorated into a feeling of having to do someone else’s dirty work, and to a concomitant erosion of responsibility, had to be answered by researchers who ran comparable risks.

Second, the researchers copied the mode of operation. From the beginning, Blom, like the Air Mobile Brigade and the Dutch cabinet that sent the Brigade on its mission, systematically relied on the Napoleonic principle *On s’engage, puis on voit*—or, rather, on the Dutch equivalent of this principle, “de mouwen opstropen,”²⁵ a combination of willful unpreparedness, lack of interest in the big picture, improvisation, and a hands-on approach. The reliance on this mode of operation might be regarded as the corollary of the fact that neither Blom nor the NIOD had any expertise in their subject when they grabbed the opportunity to study it, but it was certainly not inevitable. In the manner of the Air Mobile Brigade—which had not been too interested in the experiences of the Canadian unit it replaced—the NIOD preferred to start with a clean slate and didn’t look for, or build upon, expertise that was already available. So, right from the acceptance of the job, the project was pervaded with the “can do” mentality that also determined the Dutch mission to Srebrenica. And in this respect too, what in fact had been a choice felt like a necessity. As the NIOD researchers later said: they had had to “wrestle” with the fact that they “had to build everything up from scratch.”²⁶

Then, third, the research group replicated the logistic predicament of the Air Mobile Brigade. Because, as an enclave, Srebrenica was completely surrounded by territory controlled by Bosnian Serbs, and because supply by air was vetoed by the Bosnian Serbs, the Brigade was in the position of having to protect prisoners against their jailers while at the same time having to ask these very same jailers permission to enter and leave the jail. The Srebrenica research group ended up in an equivalent logistic dependency when it accepted that access to foreign sources could not be guaranteed. With that acceptance, Blom and his associates made themselves totally dependent on the cooperation of the Dutch government, the government, that is, they might have to criticize. Of course, the Dutch government promised not to interfere in any way, to be forthcoming with documents, and to grant military and government officials permission to talk to the researchers—promises that were subsequently laid down in the contract Blom negotiated with the Dutch government.²⁷ This contract offered enough safeguards to make questioning the independence of the research group—as has repeatedly been done²⁸—a dead-end street. The question is rather whether the research group, being in the same logistic predicament as the Brigade, might not

25. Literally, to roll up one’s sleeves.

26. Blom and de Graaff, “Het Srebrenica-onderzoek,” 301.

27. See, for the arrangement with the Dutch government, Blom’s “Proloog.” *Srebrenica, een ‘veilig’ gebied* I, 9-31. For a critical assessment, see Van der Horst, “Onmacht, onkunde en onwil.”

28. For example, Van der Horst, “Onmacht, onkunde en onwil.”

have been misled by the decency with which the Dutch government refrained from abusing its logistic monopoly. Might not this decency have desensitized the group to the rashness with which the then government acquiesced in placing the Brigade (and itself) in the logistical nightmare that was Srebrenica?²⁹

Fourth, having embarked on his mission, Blom recruited a battalion, not of peacekeepers, but of experts. The Air Mobile Brigade had had major—and increasingly serious—recruitment problems, and consequently, Dutchbat III, the battalion that was in Srebrenica when the Serbs attacked the enclave in July 1995, had to be assembled from personnel of many different units. Dutchbat III therefore was a rather heterogeneous lot: some were very idealistic, some were in it only for the money, some were seasoned, some were green, some were the tough professionals the Air Mobile Brigade had wanted to attract, some had neither military experience nor ambitions. Because at the NIOD nobody was qualified for the Srebrenica study, Blom also had to bring a team together—and out of all the available options, he chose the recruitment policy that most resembled the one the Air Mobile Brigade had employed. The heterogeneous group of specialists Blom assembled (on an ad hoc basis, and in different batches) comprised a journalist, a former Navy officer and military historian, a London-based anthropologist, a specialist in foreign affairs, one of his former students, a teacher in Serbo-Croatian, and a former employee of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.³⁰ Of course, the point is not that these people weren't capable—most of them were—but that, by replicating the recruitment policy of the Air Mobile Brigade, the research group came to embody some of the very problems it was supposed to study.

I will mention just two. The most obvious problem springs from the fact that because of its heterogeneity and because it was too new to have traditions, the Air Mobile Brigade lacked *esprit de corps*. Loyalty was at company—or even platoon—level. The lack of *esprit de corps* might well have been the reason that Dutchbat III, and especially the Potocari-based staff unit, was afflicted by serious tensions (some of them—as, for example, the bitter feud between an army and a navy medical team—attributable to cultural differences). The question to what extent these tensions influenced the effectiveness of the battalion when, in July 1995, the Serbs attacked, had to be answered by a research group that, according to several sources, was also plagued by strife and controversy.³¹

Another, perhaps more important, problem has to do with the fact that “recruitment policy” is not a neutral input factor, but points forward to what eventually

29. There are no indications that it was a conscious strategy, but given the fact that logistically the research team was in a position equivalent to the Brigade's, the Dutch government could not have chosen a more potent and vicious way to influence the research group than it did in fact choose: to be decent and forthcoming. Had the Dutch government behaved more “like the Bosnian Serbs”—and used its logistic monopoly more aggressively—it probably would have made the research group more perceptive to the misappraisals on which the Srebrenica mission was founded.

30. Ultimately, the group consisted of eleven researchers. It might be remarked that in selecting these persons, the NIOD, like the Air Mobile Brigade, did not comply with standard recruitment procedures.

31. Van der Horst mentions that in 1997, because of major cooperation problems, a consultant was hired. Van der Horst, “Onmacht, onkunde en onwil.” Blom himself has repeatedly called the fact that the group ultimately figured *in toto* on the title page of the report “a miracle.” Quoted in Albrecht, “De waarheid in hoofdletters hebben we hier niet.”

will count as a good job. The way the NIOD research group was assembled predisposed it to an end result in the form of a collection of individual contributions. Blom and his group seem to have operated on the assumption that as long as all the relevant specialties were represented on their team, and as long as the fruit of everybody's toil found its way into the end-report, the group had acquitted itself of its task. Consequently, accumulation, and not synthesizing, distillation, or just plain writing, provided the formal structure of the report. As one of the researchers remarked: "cutting and gluing, that's the way to do it."³² The supposition that an assemblage of individual contributions could count as a good job may well have led the NIOD group to the perspective from which they assessed the Srebrenica mission: that there is no one to blame when everybody has done his or her own individual job to the best of his or her abilities.³³

This conception of duty is inseparable from the fifth way in which the research group replicated their object: the style of leadership. The fact that the title page of the report mentions (apart from the names of the researchers) not one, but two persons with whom the "final responsibility" rested,³⁴ suggests that the group replicated the peculiar dual leadership of Dutchbat III. In Dutchbat III, Lieutenant-Colonel Karremans concentrated on the contacts with the "outside world" (higher UN-echelons, Dutch army headquarters, Serb and Muslim leaders) while his deputy, Major Franken, effectively commanded the battalion on a day-to-day basis. Though this division of labor certainly resembled the one between Blom and his deputy, the dual leadership was probably introduced too late (in 2001) to have influenced the way the group treated their object.

Far more pervasive was, I think, the extent to which the research group replicated Dutch cabinet-style decision-making. Dutch cabinets are—as they are called—"collegial." Ministers have a dual task: each of them is responsible for a department, but together they discuss, decide, and defend the common policy. This common policy is supposed to be monolithic: there is no voting, there are no minority views, discussions are secret, and neither parliament nor public is ever permitted to have a look at cracks or fissures. The task of the prime minister—who has no "spending department" himself—is to chair the cabinet meetings, to take care that the ministers exercise their dual task in a balanced way, and to embody the indivisibility of the common policy.³⁵ This description neatly describes the working method the NIOD group chose to employ. The researchers, like ministers, had to run their own "department," but were to discuss the work of their peers during weekly meetings, and to juggle their findings and opinions into common conclusions. Like ministers, they promised not to spill the beans, and like ministers they agreed to keep their mouths shut even when their days in office were long over.³⁶

32. Dick Schoonoord, as quoted in Bas Blokker, "Knippen en plakken," *NRC Handelsblad* (November 9, 2002), 23-24.

33. On this issue, see Frank Ankersmit, "Een schuld zonder schuldigen? Morele en politieke oordelen in het Srebrenica-rapport." *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 116 (2003), 262-284.

34. "J. C. H. Blom (director), P. Romijn (head research)."

35. C. W. van der Pot, *Handboek van het Nederlandse staatsrecht*, 13th ed. (Zwolle: Tjeenk Willink, 1995).

36. See Van der Horst, "Onmacht, onkunde en onwil," and Blokker, "Knippen en plakken." Several researchers are on record as having said that they were advised not to speak to the press after the completion of the report.

What Blom disclosed about his leadership style suggests that he, for his part, had meant to lead the group in the collegial manner of a Dutch prime minister. Science, remarked Blom (who consistently presented the Srebrenica study as a scientific endeavor) should not take place in “hierarchical surroundings.” “Scientists should do their research in freedom, without someone saying at the end of the trajectory: I am right, because I am the boss.”³⁷ In addition to some of the advantages, the cabinet style of doing research also had some of the pitfalls of its governmental counterpart. One of the risks is that when tensions run high, and time begins to press, there is a tendency to neglect the second component of the task: to communicate with your colleagues. This, in fact, happened in the final stages of the making of the report: the researchers became so absorbed by their own “department” that they virtually stopped reading each other’s texts.³⁸ Something of the kind may also have happened in the Dutch cabinet, when, in 1993 it had to decide whether to send the Air Mobile Brigade to Bosnia, and in July 1995, when the enclave was overrun by the Serbs.³⁹ The replicated leadership style almost inevitably led to the replication of the yardstick with which leadership was to be assessed. The NIOD group evaluated the performance of Wim Kok, the Dutch prime minister from 1994 till 2002, with the yardstick with which Blom himself wanted to be assessed⁴⁰: the quality with which he had exercised his *regiefunctie* (an untranslatable word meaning a leadership-style somewhere between “coordination” and “steering”).

LaCapra’s remark about researchers repeating the problems they study is rather crassly illustrated by the sixth way in which the NIOD group replicated its object: it created its own enclave. Supervised by the AIVD (the Dutch State Security Service), the third floor of the NIOD building was converted into a stronghold that effectively kept outsiders out and insiders in. The doors of the researchers’ rooms were strengthened and provided with combination locks and judas holes. To prevent the occupants of the houses on the other side of the canal from peeping in, the windows were covered with curtains. The computers the researchers used were disconnected from the internet.⁴¹ Not only were the borders with the outside world made as impermeable as possible, the researchers also *behaved* as if they were surrounded by enemies.⁴² They were as anxious about being diddled out of their information as the common Dutchbat soldier was about being robbed of his equipment. The rationale for their locking themselves in was, of course, that the information they worked on might be politically sensitive. They had to imprison themselves, as they themselves afterwards said, because they had to operate “beside and in . . . the political–journalistic complex.”⁴³

37. Quoted in Blokker, “Knippen en plakken.”

38. This was said by at least two researchers. See *ibid.* “We were tired,” one of the researchers said. “I thought: suit yourself,” another remarked.

39. In both instances the NIOD report itself is not quite clear, and because the minutes of the meetings of the cabinet are secret, and the ministers have as yet not disclosed anything, there is no way to ascertain exactly what happened in the cabinet. Blom, by the way, was the only researcher who had permission to see the minutes, albeit in a depersonalized version.

40. See for the evaluation of Kok: *Srebrenica, een ‘veilig’ gebied*, III, 3141. About the cabinet-like mode operation of the NIOD team, see: *ibid.*, I, 4.

41. The measures are described in Blokker, “Knippen en plakken.”

42. *Idem.*

43. Blom and de Graaff, “Het Srebrenica-onderzoek,” 300-322.

By creating an enclave, a dynamic came into being in which the outside world of Dutch politics, on which the researchers were in any case logistically dependent, began to count as “Serb” (with the journalists as its irregulars), while the research object, with which the researchers had locked themselves in, was “Muslim.” The rules of the game implied that as long as the researchers had not acquitted themselves of their “Muslim” research task, the “Serb” “outside world of Dutch politics”—though culturally familiar⁴⁴—was to be distrusted.⁴⁵ By making an enclave in the Herengracht NIOD building, the researchers replicated not only the relation with the “enemy,” but also the relation the Dutch had had with the Muslims who were entrusted to their care back in 1995. Behind the perimeter of the strengthened NIOD doors, the troublesome relation of Dutchbat (or rather, the Dutch government) with the Muslim population of Srebrenica was grafted onto the relationship between the researchers and their (unfamiliar) object.⁴⁶

Seventh (and last), the research group copied the combination of protraction, exhaustion, and frenzy that characterized the time frame of the Srebrenica mission. Dutchbat III had had to be relieved on July 1, 1995, but because the Dutch government had got itself into a jam with the United Nations,⁴⁷ and because the Bosnian Serbs had intensified their policy of obstructing replacements and blocking supplies, the battalion was in a state of exhaustion when, on July 6, crisis struck. Not surprisingly, this exhaustion, aggravated by severe shortages, impeded the functioning of the battalion and induced, in their The Hague headquarters probably even more so than in the field, a feeling of “let’s get it over with.” The NIOD research group worked itself into a comparable sequence of protraction and exhaustion when, after having missed the summer 2001 deadline, it also missed the November 2001 deadline.⁴⁸ They *had* to be ready on the next date agreed upon: April 10, 2002. Pressure from parliament, public, and press mounted: in May there were to be general elections. In these circumstances a great part of the report had to be written. A “crisis staff” worked from 8 in the morning until 11 in the evening; at dinnertime pizzas were brought in; some researchers slept in a nearby hotel. “We went along the abyss,” Blom later said, “some threatened to collapse.”⁴⁹

44. One of the researchers said afterwards that in team meetings researchers sometimes talked like Dutchbat soldiers. “In Serbia you at least get a decent hotel and you don’t have to sit on the floor when you are interviewing someone” (quoted in Blokker, “Knippen en plakken”).

45. Their research object being, of course, the Dutch role in Srebrenica. Remarkably, when within a week after the publication of the report the Dutch cabinet resigned, the NIOD group was as completely overwhelmed by this “outside world of Dutch politics” as Dutchbat was overwhelmed in July 1995, when the Serbs attacked and within a week 7,500 Muslims were killed. And in fact, in this deluge, the research findings, the dozens of issues the report addressed, were as completely disregarded as the Muslims were in July 1995.

46. See below, 311-312.

47. In a typical maneuver, the Dutch government had, back in 1993, promised the Dutch parliament that the Air Mobile Brigade would be at the disposal of the UN for the Srebrenica mission for at most a year and a half, but this restriction was not communicated to the UN. The one-and-a-half year deadline transpired on July 1, 1995, but, not surprisingly, when that date approached, the UN did not experience the same sense of urgency as the Dutch government did. Consequently, even in July, no replacement had been found. See *Srebrenica, een ‘veilig’ gebied*, II, 1705.

48. See above, note 23.

49. Quoted in Blokker, “Knippen en plakken.”

By replicating the crisis, the research group also replicated the exhilaration of the participants in the original Srebrenica crisis. Blom later compared it to a “pressure cooker”—and its ingredients were similar to the ingredients of the pressure cooker of those hot days in July 1995: apprehension, adrenalin, righteousness—and a wish to get it over with.⁵⁰ So, the NIOD campaign ended in an orgy of writing, a delirious “flow” of competency, determination, and improvisation in which in an incredibly short time an impossible number of pages was produced—a number that (when appendices and so on are included) was roughly equivalent to the impossible number of Muslims killed in 1995.⁵¹

V. STAYING ON THE SURFACE

How did the way in which the NIOD research group identified itself with its object affect the content, tenor, and/or conclusions of its work? Before answering this question, it might be remarked that identifications in themselves are neither good nor bad. They may *diminish* as well as *enhance* the quality of an analysis—depending on the way they are used. Arthur Mitzman has shown how Jules Michelet’s identification with the fate of France during the French Revolution went as far as his replicating, in his life, some of the key events he had to describe. In order to narrate the fall from grace of Danton, Michelet orchestrated his own falling from grace. According to Mitzman, Michelet subconsciously brought himself to a position in which he could be fired from the Collège de France, dismissed as the head of the Archives, and sent into exile to Nantes⁵²—where he subsequently wrote the famous Danton pages of the *Histoire de la Révolution française*. Being in themselves neither good nor bad, identifications may, however, *diminish* the quality of description and analysis when—as happened in the case of K—their metaphorical provisionality (enabling the subject to understand the object in terms of the subject) somehow gets lost. In such cases, the identifications submerge and assume a life of their own (that is, are taken up in parallel processes)—only to emerge, sooner or later, as acting out, or, as I have called them, “provocations.”⁵³

50. I will not describe here the parallels in the sense of relief and in the way this relief manifested itself. Nor will I discuss the disturbing coincidence that not only an unknown, but probably large, number of Dutchbat soldiers, but presumably also some of the NIOD researchers, afterwards developed serious social, psychological, and/or relationship problems. For problems among soldiers, see my “De haat van de vredessoldaat,” *NRC Handelsblad* (March 13, 2004), 34; for the researchers, see Van der Horst, “Onmacht, onkunde en onwil.”

51. Coincidence or not, the number of pages of the abridged version of the report (that appeared somewhat later) was approximately the same as the number of Muslims killed in the vicinity of the compound in Potocari—that is, within view of the Dutch.

52. Arthur Mitzman, *Michelet, Historian: Rebirth and Romanticism in 19th-century France* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), 246. Mitzman designates “Michelet’s secret wish to be suspended” “regression in the service of the ego.” Likewise, Jakob Burckhardt could describe the Italian Renaissance as the discovery of the plasticity of matter (stone, paint, cities, states) because, as a writer, he *lived* on the hypothesis that in giving form to your conceptions you may create a reality that is at least as valid as the heritage you inherited. See my “Centauren aan de bosrand,” in *Waterloo Verdun Auschwitz*, 52-82.

53. On the concept of “provocation,” compare Freud’s “Observations on Transference-Love” (“Bemerkungen über die Übertragungsliebe”): “one gets the impression that the resistance is acting as an *agent provocateur*.” Standard Edition. XII, 157-171, 163.

The best way to identify such unfruitful identifications is not by scrutinizing the story, but by tracking the provocations. However, scrutinizing the story—hermeneutics—is what literate people instinctively do: in the case of K, the group members (working on the hypothesis that, because K brought up his interaction with the patient, something must be amiss) seized upon the story K told, only to discover that their interpretations, whether sensible, judicious, “true” or not, didn’t make any difference. Instead of delving deep, one had better stay at the surface. The important thing, as Freud said, is to conceive of the illness “not as something of the past, but as a force that influences the present.”⁵⁴ When acting out takes place, attention should not gravitate to the stories about the “historical” there-and-then before the *actuality* of the here-and-now is clarified. “Staying on the surface” means resisting the temptations the words of the patient, the therapist, or, as in the present case, the historian offer, and trying to concentrate on what in and by the telling is brought about in the encounter between, in the present case, historian and public. “Provocative” acting out takes place when the rules that determine that encounter (or the relationship in general) are transgressed. Sometimes the rules that are transgressed are *explicit*, but in the majority of cases the *aktuelle Macht* of the unacknowledged identification is brought to bear upon the tacit rules that form the basis of the relationship. Acting out, in other words, usually manifests itself in the “treatment alliance.”

Acting out in the form of surreptitiously mocking the treatment alliance⁵⁵ is difficult to handle. Addressing the transgression of an explicit rule is relatively easy: addressing the transgression of one of the tacit rules that form the basis of the relationship in which the transgression occurs is very difficult.⁵⁶ Technically it is difficult because such “provocations” always have a Janus-face: they are “conventional” as well as “subversive,” sanctimonious as well as sacrilegious, “constructive” as well as “destructive.” If you address the one, you risk being shown the other. In the case of K, attempts to address his coffee-break remark in the next session might seriously backfire because K might profess having forgotten the incident altogether, or he might play to the gallery and say: “What’s wrong with being curious?” or “We are here to learn, aren’t we?” Addressing such remarks is technically difficult because it means keeping in touch as well as being steadfast, without drifting into a zero-sum game in which either the transgressor or the person addressing the transgression feels denuded. On top of this technical difficulty, there is the problem that having to say things about things that should go without saying is literally unsettling. It means that a discussion about *historische Angelegenheiten* (or, more broadly, a discussion on the level of representations) is supplanted by a discussion about the preconditions that regulate and determine that particular discussion. It means, in short, focusing on *function* instead of *intention*—which (as, for example, the reception of Foucault among historians has shown) is a very threatening thing to do.

54. Freud, “Erinnern, Wiederholen und Durcharbeiten,” 127 (“nicht als eine historische Angelegenheit, sondern als eine aktuelle Macht”).

55. Though strictly speaking it is only one of the two kinds of acting out, in the following I will equate “acting out” with the transgression of *implicit* rules.

56. Consequently, “staying on the surface”—as a means of addressing transgression of implicit rules—is much more difficult than “deep” interpretation.

So, in order to answer the question in what respect the NIOD Srebrenica report was influenced by the way the researchers unwittingly identified with their object, one has to resist the temptation to plunge into the text. Instead one has to “stay at the surface” and track the “provocations” in and around the report: where and how did the researchers transgress the tacit rules of the relation between historians and their public? Chances are that in their provocations the researchers repeated, in LaCapra’s words, the problems they studied. It might be supposed that in these provocations they enacted those aspects of the “dramatic developments” of July 1995 that were too bound up with themselves—be it as historians, as men and women, or as Dutch citizens. What exactly did the NIOD researchers enact? In this section I will sketch three provocations that, in my view, point to paralleling. I will do this rather cursorily—in order to gain some space to discuss, in the next section, one instance of paralleling at somewhat greater length.

One of the provocations that immediately created a lot of disturbance was the fact that the NIOD research group delivered its 3,394 page report (and the thousands of pages of appendices) with the message that, though the report contained the facts the group had assembled and the “explaining analyses” it had performed, the judgments weren’t included (whereupon everybody read the fifty-page “epilogue” to scan for whom the report would mean trouble). As Blom said in his presentation speech: “making judgments is up to others.”⁵⁷ By its stubborn refusal to pronounce judgment, the NIOD group enacted, I think, the obsessive impartiality of the Dutch policy in Srebrenica. For the researchers, impartiality meant withholding judgment on the politicians, the military, and the civil servants who had played some role in the catastrophe. For the Dutch in Srebrenica, impartiality had meant that no sides would be taken for or against either the Bosnian Muslims or the Bosnian Serbs. Consequently, in Srebrenica the official policy had been that, while the Serbs had to be kept *out* of the enclave, the Muslims *in* the enclave had to be disarmed.

This policy was paralleled in the report. The NIOD researchers, who in their Herengracht “safe area” had come to regard the outside world of Dutch politics as “Serb,” and the research object with which they were locked in as “Muslim,” consistently tried to keep their distance from Dutch politics, while at the same time “disarming” their report by depleting it of (potentially dangerous) judgments. On the face of it, the one might have been a consequence of the other. The more effort it took for the NIOD group to keep the “familiar” world of Dutch politics at a distance (and the better it succeeded in doing this), the more the group felt obliged to fulfill what it saw as the other side of its mission: to disarm the “unfamiliar” research object. Reproaches that the NIOD researchers had purposely spared Dutch politicians therefore are, I think, beside the point.⁵⁸

57. Quoted in *De Volkskrant*. See also *Srebrenica, een ‘veilig’ gebied*, I, 30-31. Similar statements were reiterated on many occasions. Needless to say, in the following I am not criticizing a decision, but interpreting a phenomenon. I *do* think, however, that the confusion this decision provoked was caused by the gut feeling of many commentators that there was more to it than the apparently tallying explanations Blom and company provided, that, in other words, something “uncanny” (in my view, a parallel process) was going on.

58. See, for example, J. A. A. van Doorn, “NIOD-rapport: te laat, te lang en slordig bovendien,” *Trouw* (April 17, 2002), 7.

Paradoxically (or, from the perspective of parallel process theory, quite logically), it was precisely their sense of having upheld their “incorruptibility” *vis à vis* Dutch politics that led them to disarm their report.

A second provocation was the fact that a report that took months (full-time) to read,⁵⁹ was presented as something that no citizen wanting to join the debate about what had gone so terribly wrong could afford to leave unread. “Historians,” said Blom, “have to present their findings in such a way that every citizen can join the debate about moral judgments on the basis of reliable knowledge and analysis.”⁶⁰ The message was that every participant in the debate had to found his or her opinion on the basis of the “reliable knowledge and analysis” that the NIOD had provided, but that this inexorable substratum of facts could not *itself* be the object of debate. Convinced that the facts they had assembled need not be spoken for, the researchers felt themselves excused, as Ranke famously put it, “to vanish as it were into thin air and to let . . . the potent forces speak for themselves”⁶¹—leaving their public to stare at their report as at the grin of the Cheshire cat. It might be argued that by delivering their (potential) readers to their unmanageable text, by insisting that they (despite its unmanageability) base their decisions on it, and by suggesting that their report was really all there was to know, the researchers placed the (potential) readers in the same position as the Dutch political and military leaders had been *vis à vis* the original events.

Both in 1993 (when decisions about the participation in the UN mission to Bosnia had to be made), and in July 1995 (when the Serbs attacked), the Dutch leaders acted as if they were at the mercy of events. They felt obliged to take so many facts and circumstances into account that they lost their room for maneuver. This (quasi) inexorable face of events is paralleled in the (quasi) inexorable face of the report. The inexorable face of the report is, in turn, a result of the fact that the NIOD group consistently worked on the assumption that the workmanship of the historian yields a body of, as Blom said, “verified facts,” and that out of these verified facts “the story as it were forces itself on the researcher.”⁶² In

59. One might even regard the fact that this pile of documentation was called “information” as a provocation. In information theory, the informational value of a message is an expression of what *could have been*—instead of what *is*—communicated. As Charles Bennett says: “the value of a message is the amount of mathematical or other work plausibly done by its originator, which its receiver is saved from having to repeat.” Quoted in Tor Nørretranders, *The User Illusion: Cutting Consciousness Down to Size*, transl. Jonathan Sydenham [1991] (New York: Viking, 1998), 78.

60. Albrecht, “De waarheid in hoofdletters hebben we hier niet,” 34.

61. L. von Ranke, “Englische Geschichte, vornehmlich im 17. Jahrhundert,” in *Saemtlichen Werke* (Leipzig: 1877), Band 15, 101 (“sich gleichsam auszulöschen und nur die . . . mächtigen Kräfte erscheinen zu lassen”).

62. Blom *et al.*, “Oordelen in uitersten,” *BMGN*, 353. This point was also made by Pieter Lagrou, “Het Srebrenica-rapport en de geschiedenis van het hede,” *BMGN* 118 (2003), 325-336. The NIOD report may be regarded as a prime example of what Chris Lorenz calls “naive realism.” See his “Historical Knowledge and Historical Reality,” *History and Theory* 33 (1994), 297-328. Ironically, the immediate reactions of the politicians reinforced this naive realism. Many politicians professed to be “shocked” by the report—which led to the fall of the cabinet. But insofar as they were really shocked, they were belatedly shocked by what had happened in Srebrenica, not by the findings or conclusions of the report. Nevertheless, the “shocked” reactions of the politicians (occasioned, not caused, by the report) was grist to the mill of anyone who liked to believe that the way historians represent historical reality offers—when done competently—a complete, unmediated, and unimpeded view of that reality.

the same way, in 1993 as well as in 1995, the Dutch politicians acted as if the events in which they were taken up had a “logic” (or a “dynamic”) of their own, as if, in other words, “policy forces itself on the politician.”⁶³

The suggestion that “things just happen as they happen to happen” manifests itself right down to the style of the report. The description, in the “Epilogue,” of how the crucial decision was taken to put the Air Mobile Brigade at the disposal of the UN, is a case in point.⁶⁴ The passive form is profusely used, people “support” some policy, other people are “informed,” things are “discussed,” people “subscribe” to some “line of policy,” people are “strengthened in their views” (whereas other people “strike critical notes”), “foundations for decision-making are laid,” points of no return are passed, occasionally somebody even “takes the lead” in something—but in the whole passage nobody ever *decides* something. Nevertheless, a course of events is embarked upon—or, in the words of the report: “The political–journalistic constellation had far-reaching consequences. In fact, The Netherlands put an Air Mobile Battalion at the disposal of the UN without preconditions.”⁶⁵ This indefiniteness *might* be a characteristic of what is described, but because it *certainly* is a characteristic of the way of describing, it would be a safer bet that the way the researchers present the events mirrors the way the protagonists saw them, that—in other words—the dissociation of doer and deed is paralleled in the dissociation of writer and text.

The third provocation was the fact that the Srebrenica study on the one hand was presented as a scientific endeavor, but that on the other hand the researchers publicly declared that, insofar as they had elucidated the numerous incidents they assumed their public had wanted them to elucidate, their project had no scientific value at all. At the Leiden symposium, Blom called the dozens of pages the report devoted to one of the most publicized issues—the destruction, in a Dutch army laboratory, of photographic evidence of Serb atrocities—“from a scientific point of view totally irrelevant.”⁶⁶ What, according to the researchers, *was* scientifically relevant, however, was to put research findings in a context “in such a way that the inherent dynamic of the historical process becomes visible.”⁶⁷ It was to be a recurrent theme in the report: for a “clear understanding” (as the researchers used to call it) events had to be “contextualized” by competent historians.

In their interpretation of what their mission as professional historians was, the researchers enacted, I think, the way the Dutch back in 1995 interpreted their task as peacekeepers. In Srebrenica, the Dutch had taken their task to mean that they shouldn’t bother too much about provocations and humiliations as long as they succeeded in their job of keeping the Serbs *out* and the Muslims *in*. The responsible Dutch politicians and diplomats for their part had, during the year and a half a Dutch battalion was in the enclave, operated on the assumption that they

63. This inexorability also permeates the discussion in the Prologue about what the Dutch might have done against the Serbs. Blom repeatedly dismissed consideration of the options open to Dutchbat as “speculation.” See *Srebrenica, een ‘veilig’ gebied*, III, 3143.

64. *Ibid.*, 3133–3136.

65. *Ibid.*, 3136; cf. I, 1076.

66. Cf. Blom’s disparaging remarks about the “tragedy of Srebrenica” becoming an “affair in The Netherlands.” *Srebrenica, een ‘veilig’ gebied*, III, 3126.

67. Blom and de Graaff, 300; see also 310.

shouldn't bother too much about the ("incidental") Srebrenica abscess, as long as they were taken seriously in the international political arenas where a solution for the Bosnian problem was to be found.⁶⁸ By regarding incidents not *as* their mission, but as peripheral to or even distractions *from* their mission,⁶⁹ the NIOD paralleled the way the Dutch back then—by not bringing their full weight to bear on incidents—were sent barking up the wrong tree.

The inclination of the Air Mobile Brigade to regard incidents as peripheral to its mission, was, I think, bound up with its professional identity. In the Brigade a distinction was made between, on the one hand, operating in a military mode ("green"), and, on the other hand, operating (counterintuitively) in a peacekeeping mode ("blue"—after the color of the UN). It was quite clear that in the "blue" mode you couldn't make full use of your "green" military resources—but how to command respect in a "blue," non-military way was rather less clear. Instead of thinking this problem out, the Air Mobile Brigade from the start interpreted its mission in an ambiguous manner: on the one hand it chose as its prime objective a task that left ample room for its congenial, "greenish," professional identity: to man a perimeter (not quite to defend, but to "observe" it); on the other hand, the Brigade tried—by being friendly, helpful, facilitating, and generous—to find a non-green way for everyday, peacekeeping use.

The consequence of this ambiguity was that as a peacekeeping unit, the Brigade did not succeed in becoming authoritative. It did not even gain respect—not from the Serbs, not from the Muslims. It never occurred to the Brigade (let alone to the politicians back home) that to respond authoritatively to the daily incidents and humiliations *was* the mission, and not a nuisance that unfortunately was included in the bargain. The predicament of the Air Mobile Brigade was that where its professional identity was (at the perimeter) there was no mission, and where its mission was (in the incidents) there was no professional identity. Not surprisingly, the inability to deal honorably with the daily incidents eventually undermined not only the Brigade's belief in itself as a peacekeeping force, but its "green" professional identity as well. Consequently, when in July 1995 the Serbs attacked—and the perimeter was overrun—Dutchbat could not come up with an adequate "green" response. Instead the battalion resorted to a caricature of the way it had interpreted its "bluish" mode of operation: it threw itself on being friendly, helpful, facilitating, and generous to the Muslims who were herded together at Potocari and held at gunpoint by their Serb enemies.

For the NIOD researchers, the congenial "green" mode of operation consisted in being able to bring their "scientific" competency as professional historians to bear on the Dutch role in Srebrenica, whereas investigating incidents (like the destruction of photographic evidence) was mere "blue" peacekeeping. Like the Air Mobile Brigade, the researchers chose a task that was as "green" as possible,

68. As was also the conclusion of the NIOD study. Cf *Srebrenica, een 'veilig' gebied* I, 1163.

69. In the case of the NIOD report, the distinction between "mission" and (relatively minor, but dirty, throbbing, abscess-like) "incidents" is, I think, a more clarifying distinction than the distinction between "context" and "detail." See *ibid.*, 310-311. But, of course, the conspicuous frequency with which the researchers wrote about the importance of context makes it understandable that commentators regarded the context/detail dimension as a major clue in coming to grips with the report. See also note 57.

and like the Air Mobile Brigade they decided to man a perimeter—in their case the “perimeter” was called “context.” Right from the start the researchers began to work on an ever-expanding perimeter of spatial and temporal context—until the small kernel of the ten days in July 1995 was surrounded by so many layers (thousands of pages) of context, that, in the eye of the public to which the report was addressed, it became almost totally incidental. By acting out, instead of thematizing, the tension between mission and incident, the NIOD group drew attention to (as well as evaded) what may well have been a major determinant of the Dutch policy toward, and conduct in, Srebrenica. Insofar as the report became yet another instance of a “tragedy in the Balkans” becoming an “affair in The Netherlands,” it perpetuated it.

VI. “TO DETER ATTACKS BY PRESENCE”

A provocation I would like to discuss at somewhat greater length is the peculiar way the NIOD researchers⁷⁰ reacted to the historians who took their report seriously enough to write an article about it. In these reactions⁷¹ the researchers invariably exhorted their colleagues to engage in “serious scientific discussions” while showing their teeth to anyone who did not completely identify with the way the NIOD had defined its task. I shall not try to demonstrate and tabulate the more subtle stratagems the researchers used to intimidate their colleagues, and will restrict myself to the ones that best survive quotation: one of the historians was called “small-minded,” another “sour,” a whole group of historians (those interested in theory) was called “arrogant,” there was talk about the “self-appointed detectives of the theoretical police,” some historians were said to revel in “ostentatious learning,” and so on. All the while the NIOD researchers, in their reactions, did not yield a single inch on a single issue raised by a single historian. Instead, they reiterated, explained, and justified what they had done in their report, and, second, availed themselves of the opportunity to lecture their colleagues about how to conduct a historical investigation, how to conceive of the societal mission of the discipline, and how to behave in scientific discussions. This was accompanied by professions of modesty. Time and again the NIOD researchers proclaimed that neither they themselves nor their report had any “theoretical pretensions” and that they hadn’t written their report for the “(historical) theoretical connoisseur.”⁷² The only critique the group accepted was critique about irrelevant details⁷³ and about the error-laden index.

70. I continue to treat the group as an undivided whole (though the articles written after the completion of the report are usually written by Blom and only one or two of his fellow researchers) because the researchers *themselves* kept insisting on their “unity of policy.” Cf. “This article is also the fruit of consultations in the research group of the Srebrenica report. The authors, who put it together, thank the other researchers for their suggestions and contributions. When in the text there is talk of ‘we,’ most of the time the group as a whole is referred to” (sentences translated as faithfully as I could that indicate that not only the report as a whole, but even a relatively short article was “put together” from individual “contributions” rather than written), Blom and de Graaff, 300n.

71. The (three) most important reactions are mentioned in note 7.

72. All from Blom and de Graaff, “Het Srebrenica-onderzoek,” 300-322. The display of modesty is similar to the display of modesty in Anglo-Saxon linguistic philosophy that is so brilliantly analyzed by Ernest Gellner in his *Words and Things* (Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin Books, 1968).

73. For example: the group rather ostentatiously agreed with a reviewer who had pointed out “that *slivovitsj* is not brewed but distilled.”

My point here is not that this pattern of reaction is remarkably similar to the way the Dutch government reacted to the Srebrenica catastrophe⁷⁴ (which makes it a replication), but that by transgressing the rule that in professional discussions you play the ball and not the man, it was a provocation of their fellow historians. The *ad hominem* remarks of the researchers cannot, I think, be attributed to personal characteristics of the researchers or the project leader. Neither can it be maintained that they were polemical responses to polemical attacks. On the contrary: all the intimidating remarks were made in professional journals in response to professional articles written in professional turns of phrase. In fact, Blom and his group did not react at all to reviews in newspapers, magazines, or other “lay” publications, or to articles whose authors had (in the eyes of the NIOD group) insufficient professional credentials. So, though their report was commissioned by the government and intended as a “discussion paper” for a nationwide debate, their peers—being the only ones they wanted to interact with—constituted their real public. The insistence of the researchers, often in the very same paragraph in which they showed their teeth, that they wanted to engage their colleagues in “serious scientific discussions” gives their reactions the Janus-face that is so characteristic of parallel processes. By simultaneously calling for and discouraging discussion, the Srebrenica researchers prevented both what they did *not* want (their peers attacking them) and what they *did* want (elucidation). Instead, they instilled an atmosphere of “forget about it” even they themselves came to deplore.

What did the NIOD group simultaneously want to address and evade in its provocative pattern of reaction? The answer is, I think, that in the way they reacted to their fellow historians, the researchers enacted the Dutch mandate in Srebrenica. This mandate was “to deter attacks by presence.” In Srebrenica, the Dutch battalion, too small and too lightly armed to withstand a full-scale attack, had the task of deterring the Bosnian Serbs from overrunning the enclave by being conspicuously present. The assumption was that the Serbs would not dare to harm the Muslim population of Srebrenica because doing so meant harming Dutchbat, and harming Dutchbat meant incurring the wrath of the international community Dutchbat supposedly represented. The Dutch acquitted themselves of their task by building exposed, uncamouflaged observation posts along the perimeter of the enclave: they calculated that the Serbs would not dare to violate the line demarcated by the Dutch posts. By not yielding an inch, by refusing to compromise, by declining to evacuate positions once taken, by showing their teeth and firing intimidating warning shots when anyone approached too near, by taking up blocking positions when inroads seemed imminent, the NIOD researchers enacted the options that in July 1995 were open to Dutchbat—or rather, to the Dutch government. One might say that right down to its intimidating materiality, the three bulky, closely printed volumes of the report repeat what Dutchbat was supposed to do: to deter attacks by presence.⁷⁵

74. The embracing of the critique of the index is entirely comparable to the reaction of the Dutch government; in both cases an innocuous stricture is accepted to keep the substance (of report/policy) intact while not creating the impression of being impervious to critique.

75. Of course, this intimidating bulkiness was a function of the way the researchers interpreted their “mandate.” To deter attacks, they took care to demonstrate that they had maximally covered

As in the case of K, the parallels are uncannily pervasive—and point to aspects of the Srebrenica mission that are rather hard to stomach. The professions of modesty may be said to reflect the low-profile approach of which, at the time, Dutch peacekeepers were uncommonly proud. Whereas American, French, or British peacekeepers (like, perhaps, the “self-appointed detectives of the theoretical police”) were regarded as a bit trigger-happy, or, at least, a bit too heavy-handed to tame passions effectively, the “unassuming” Dutch prided themselves on their ability to pacify animosity in a much more natural way.⁷⁶ Moreover, the way the NIOD group appealed to “science” is similar to the way Dutchbat was supposed to represent the international community. Both were “outposts” (the researchers even designating their study “an extreme case of contemporary history”⁷⁷), both (felt they) had to bolster their position by referring to what they felt they represented—a dependence that, in the case of Dutchbat, was utterly betrayed when, in July 1995, the international community left the enclave in the lurch. Further, the wish to stay on speaking terms at all costs was reminiscent of the original Srebrenica mission. Up to the very end the Dutch didn’t want to antagonize the Serbs—no matter how crassly those very same Serbs violated the rules and humiliated the Dutch. The researchers, for their part, always wanted to “discuss” things with their peers—no matter how abused they felt when those peers didn’t identify with their plight.⁷⁸ Then, finally, there were the ambiguous attempts to civilize the “barbarians”: the way the NIOD researchers lectured their unimpressed colleagues reflecting the way Dutchbat—or, rather, the Dutch—tried to breathe some civilization into the Balkans.⁷⁹

The peculiar manner in which the NIOD researchers tried to deter attacks by their mere presence also reflects an unflagging belief in the rule of law—or, perhaps more accurately, a belief in the unassailable priority of the “law,” of rules. This belief—which was a key feature of the Dutch Srebrenica policy—betrays itself in the provocative inappropriateness with which the NIOD researchers employed Dutchbat “rules of engagement” in a scientific setting. The Dutch attitude with regard to rules showed itself both in the content of the “rules of engagement” the researchers chose to apply, and—perhaps more importantly—in the extent to which they made themselves dependent on them. As to the rules *per se*,

their object, that there weren’t people they hadn’t spoken to, documents they hadn’t seen, sites they hadn’t visited, sources they hadn’t explored, clues they hadn’t followed—that, in short, they had been, nay, *were* present “all over the place” and occupied every square inch of the “enclave” of their research object as completely as they possibly could.

76. In fact, Dutch society is based on mutual pacification between different religions. Mutual pacification by a silent, obliging, live-and-let-live system is so ingrained in Dutch culture that only by exporting it do its limitations become clear. The discovery in Srebrenica that, rather than a universal human value, this “obligingness” was a Dutch peculiarity that engendered contempt and hostility from Serbs as well as Muslims was/is rather difficult to come to terms with.

77. As was the title of their article in the *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis*.

78. See Blom and de Graaff, “Het Srebrenica-onderzoek,” 127. The anger of the researchers when they couldn’t recognize themselves in their colleagues’ reactions to the report was not unlike the anger of the survivors of the Srebrenica bloodbath when they, for their part, didn’t recognize themselves in the events as described in the report.

79. I will not discuss in this article how the mandate to “deter attacks by presence” functioned on the level of Dutch politics—but it is quite clear that the sheer “presence” of the NIOD research group “deterred” attacks on the Dutch government over the Srebrenica issue for more than five years.

the NIOD group made it unmistakably clear that they would refuse to join battle with “irregulars”—journalists or other non-academics alike. Moreover, it unilaterally defined the terms on which it was prepared to fight with the persons who happened to have the right marks and badges, and backed up its conditions with an appeal to an absent higher authority. Then, it didn’t accept arbiters, which, of course, was a logical concomitant of its unilateralism—and which, incidentally, made it essential that “theoretical historians” be provoked out of their proclivity for addressing rules, conditions, presuppositions, and other things that go without saying. Finally, it chose the terrain—which was to be not inside, but at the perimeter of, the enclave of the report. The researchers bluntly stated that, “as a rule,” “in the report there was to be no discussion with earlier publications.”⁸⁰

The most conspicuous parallel, though, was not the substance of the rules, but the degree to which the NIOD group made itself dependent on them. Macaulay tells in his *History of England* that Lord Galway was beaten in the battle of Almanza because he preferred losing by adhering to the rules to winning by disregarding them. In Srebrenica, in 1995, the Dutch did something of the same kind. Right to the time of their retreat, when around them the Muslims they had undertaken to protect were massacred by the thousand, the Dutch felt bound to “rules of engagement” by which they had much to lose and nothing to win. It was a dependence on two levels: in the enclave (in their dealings with the Serb attackers), and in the international political arena (in their relations with the UN and the UNPROFOR command and control system). It is an ugly and painful fact that, though on both levels their opponents did not live up to, disregarded, or transgressed the rules agreed upon, and though adhering to the rules is far more disadvantageous to the weak than to the strong, the Dutch persevered to the very end in upholding rules that had lost any validity. This dependence is completely reiterated in the descriptions, analyses, and conclusions of the report. “In the given situation,” the NIOD writes about the Dutch obligingness in the face of the Serb attack, “it wasn’t reasonable that Dutchbat—on its own accord or pressed by the Dutch government—would have gone against the grain of the line that was agreed upon. Such an initiative to a different way of acting should have originated from the higher UNPROFOR echelons or from the ultimately responsible UN.”⁸¹

The uncritical reiterations of rule-dependency⁸² are, I think, consequences of the way the NIOD paralleled the Dutchbat mandate to deter attacks by its mere presence. In their report the NIOD researchers were just as “reasonable” as the Dutch had been in 1995—and they wanted, in turn, to have their report measured with the same yardstick—that is, in terms of the same “rules of engagement.” Naturally, the historians who wrote articles about the report, not knowing the rules of engagement they were supposed to apply, couldn’t help violating them. Rather than inferring from the critique of their colleagues that they had been unconsciously dependent on a narrow and inappropriate set of rules, the

80. As for example the books by Honig and Both, Westerman, and Rijs and Rhode, mentioned in Blom, de Graaff, and Schoonoord, “Oordelen in uitersten,” 345.

81. *Srebrenica, een ‘veilig’ gebied*, III, 3143.

82. To quote just one other such reiteration: “anyway, in the light of the laws and customs of war, the separation of the able-bodied men in order to make sure whether there were soldiers among them who had to be taken into custody as prisoners of war was not uncommon or forbidden.” *Ibid.*, 3158.

researchers interpreted criticism that didn't comply with “their” rules of engagement as “smoking guns” that justified retaliation.

VII. CONCLUSION

There are many things I did not do in this article. I did not relate the concept of parallel processing to earlier attempts to ascertain the extent to which thoughts are replications of what these thoughts are trying to encompass. I did not perform a detailed textual analysis to establish in what respects paralleling affected, on a micro level, descriptions and analyses of the report. I also did not address the question to what extent I myself, as the author of this article, “triplicate” the original events, and perpetuate the parallels I describe (or have forgotten to describe).⁸³ What I did do, however—taking stock of the NIOD Srebrenica study by means of parallel-process theory—raises enough questions to end on a meditative note. In the first place there is the question of validity. As I write, I am still amazed by the extent to which what happened in and around the NIOD study can be accounted for by the parallel processes that revealed themselves in the casual remarks of Professor Blom at the Leiden symposium. But is the extent to which the NIOD study can be interpreted in terms of the events it describes an artifact of a metaphorical way of looking at things, an epiphenomenon of something else (as for example “Dutch culture” or “Dutch national character”), or what I think it is: a genuine, logical, and comprehensive—albeit also an unsettling and a bit eerie—manifestation of unconscious identification processes? In the context of psychiatric supervision the validity of a parallel process interpretation can be ascertained by asking, Does it work? In supervision there is always a dual check: a valid interpretation leads to a sense of relief by the group members that the (factual and emotional) phenomena they have experienced can be so parsimoniously explained; it breaks deadlock and occasions the group to resume its work in a productive manner. A second check is that a truly valid interpretation starts a process of significant behavioral change in the therapist who brought the case up. Though, of course, the operationalization differs in the case of history, the test of the interpretation put forward in this article also has to be: Does it work? In the present case, this means: Does it fit the facts? Is it convincing? And, perhaps, does it eventually break the deadlock of “forget about it”?

Second, there is the question of representativeness. In some respects the NIOD Srebrenica study may have been atypical. The similarity between, on the one hand, the psychological position from which Blom and his group embarked on their project and, on the other hand, the position from which the Air Mobile Brigade went to Bosnia was quite exceptional. The same holds true for the unique, identification-enhancing blank space into which the infrastructure of the study could be projected. Then, the scarce information that leaked out of the research group suggests that right from the start an uncommonly compelling kind

83. In some respects I might: this article is also “obsessively” (“clinically”) impartial, and perhaps, by writing it in English, I may have created a displacement that is equivalent to the displacement from (secondarily) “events” to “report” and (originally) from “a tragedy in the Balkans” to “an affair in the Netherlands.”

of group-think was operative. Group members dissuaded themselves and their colleagues from reflecting on what they were in fact doing—both as individuals and as a system—and if they did, they dared not address the matter and so precluded the group from altering the course it had hit upon. The extent to which the NIOD group replicated its object may finally have been augmented by incomplete and tricky conflict resolution. LaCapra has identified two extremes in trying to come to terms with emotional response. On the one hand there is “full identification, whereby you try to relive the experience of the other”; and on the other hand there is “pure objectification, which is the denial of transference, and blockage of affect as it influences research, and the attempt to be as objectifying and neutral an observer as possible—whether as an empirical fact gatherer or as a structural-formal analyst.”⁸⁴ The articles by Blokker and Van der Horst suggest that in the NIOD group there was a conflict between “identifiers” (who tended to identify with the Muslim victims) and “objectifiers” (who wanted to historicize the Srebrenica event). The identification that eventually came about (not with the *victims*, but with the *research object*) may have been the (unintended, unconscious, and ultimately invalidating) “compromise” between these two factions.

But favorable though circumstances may have been in the NIOD case, they do not, I think, fully explain how the event came to be so surprisingly faithfully enacted in and around the report. The circumstances may account for the *scope* of the identification, the *flagrancy* of the provocations, and the *comprehensiveness* of the parallels, but can hardly be held responsible for the *tendency* to identify, the *urge* to provoke, and the *propensity* to enact the things that are too hard to tell. This, of course, raises the question whether parallel processes are common phenomena in the history of historiography. They may well be. In fact, I see no reason why they shouldn't arise when pervasive identification is accompanied by absence of reflection. Rather than an unfortunate blemish on the histories in question, this may be a happy opportunity, for, as I think I have demonstrated in this article, parallel processes are not only real-life phenomena, but effective analytical instruments as well. Studying historical works from the perspective of parallel-process theory may uncover mechanisms that otherwise are silently replicated. By making use of parallel-process theory, “sources” can be tapped that otherwise stay outside the range of the historian or the historiographer of history—as, for example, the “surface sources” of the responses evoked in and by the confrontation with a historical text. Finally, studying historical works by means of parallel-process theory transcends the introversion of both postmodernist theory of history and the positivist practice of history. Studying—as I did in this article—the “surface” of the practice of history from a parallel-process point of view is a fruitful and exciting way to reconnect words and deeds, representations and events, historiography and history.

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84. LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, 147.