

JAKOBSLEITER

CALL FOR PAPERS

Reconstruction(s)



Scientific inquiry is profoundly concerned with time. It aims at figuring out what happened, and one of its key objectives is to use this knowledge to predict what is going to happen in the future. These predictions rely upon a regulated system of interpretations.

Psychological experiments aim to understand how human behaviour works; physicists try to measure the qualities of their subject matter; political scientists try to make sense of societal changes; and historians obsess over *how things actually were*. Whatever it is we do, we are all bound by a diverse set of rules of interpretation. The process of such interpretation, the scientific reconstruction of what we experience, is the theme of the 2023 issue of Jakobsleiter.

Reconstruction is a term imbued with a variety of meanings. It is often used in the sense of restoration, alluding to a desire to return to a previous state of higher development. In the case of the Roman Empire, attempts at its reconstruction ranged from Justinian to Charlemagne, from Dante to Mazzini, and even the European Union can be viewed as an attempt at recreating it. Some of these political projects of reconstruction can be seen as benign, and some more sinister, e.g. when trying to bring back an overturned or outdated social order. This reminds us that reconstruction is not necessarily a uniformly positive thing, nor is it merely a pure expression of intellectual curiosity. There are similar tendencies in scholarship: a community of mathematicians is trying to reconstruct *Hilbert's program* of grounding all mathematical theories in a set of axioms after Gödel's incompleteness theories, while natural scientists repeatedly try formulating their understandings in a systems biological perspective instead of reductionist thinking.

Reconstruction can also mean the repairing and improvement of broken things. In the Japanese art of kintsugi, broken pottery is reconstructed through the addition of new, interwoven layers of a mixture of lacquer and gold. The end result supersedes the original by the presence of new elements and the inclusion and expression of the original object's history. One finds many examples of such work in fields concerned with cultural heritage: in the practice of conservation specialists, architects, and all kinds of practitioners who work with material objects from the past, be they clay pots or remains of living beings. The history of scientific inquiry in other disciplines is also full of analogous cases: such is the continuous push for a grand unified theory in physics that would successfully combine general relativity and quantum mechanics. And such is the recent trend in cognitive science of analysing decision-making processes in light of basic patterns of human thinking, thus enabling the advanced and combined understanding of psychology, economics, and even law.

There is yet another, third meaning of reconstruction, which aims at neither restoration nor improvement: the humble and humbling act of interpretation, one of the key tasks of all scientific inquiry. The challenge of finding the right interpretative framework to reconstruct what exactly happened is more than the historian's dilemma. The same question is posed to physicists looking at a moving electron that is behaving in curious ways; to astrophysicists trying to explain what holds our galaxy together; to psychologists baffled by how toddlers acquire language in very diverse ways, while linguists are similarly baffled by the fact that even adults can learn new languages. It is in much the same way that anthropologists study sacrifices, criminologists study murderers, social scientists and economists look at irrational decision-making processes, and so many more—all of them are confronted with the task of interpreting and explaining the varied and unruly reality that we inhabit.

We are dedicating the second issue of Jakobsleiter to the rich theme of reconstructions. And we, the Editorial Board, are eagerly awaiting submissions addressing this theme from any perspective, in any scientific discipline.

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