

Adventure, Schema, Supplement

Jacques Derrida and the philosophy of history

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Synopsis

This thesis studies ‘history’ in Derrida’s *Of Grammatology*, uncovering a new and productive level of history that impacts historical disciplines (historiography). This is a complex task for two reasons; first on account of the proliferating connotations of ‘history’; second, because contemporary historiography and philosophy have largely talked past each other. Historians sometimes create confusion, by ignoring a crucial delineation of levels which deconstruction highlights; alternately, history has frequently been abandoned by philosophers as uninteresting.

The first part reconstructs the conceptual network surrounding ‘history’ in *Of Grammatology*. Following phenomenological emphasis, Derrida does not address the constituted historical disciplines, but the very historicity that every historical task must presuppose. Derrida seeks to liberate history from concepts that would freeze its very happening. In his reading of Rousseau in particular, Derrida illustrates the metaphysical enchainment of ‘history’, yet loosening it in that very redescription. I show how this issues in a productive if complex ‘diagram’, which is implicitly related to multiple concerns of contemporary historiography, as well as occupying a central role within Derrida’s own work.

In the second part, then, I reconsider some recent historiographical debates from the perspective of this ‘diagram’. This perspective forces historiography to confront its own historicity as much as that of its objects—something historians in recent years have been keen to try and do. The ‘diagram’ is explicated with questions of narrative, meaning, and gender. Through this dialogue, Derrida’s emphasis on history is recovered, and historiography is reinvigorated by a renewed philosophical acuity. In the course of this explication and dialogue, Derrida’s work appears far different from many of the received representations of a thinker concerned with signs and texts. Derrida is revealed as a thinker of concrete historical situations. His philosophy appears very classical, while at the same time always seeking out dialogue between philosophy and other disciplines.

Statement of Candidate

I certify that the work in this thesis entitled 'Adventure, Schema, Supplement: Jacques Derrida and the philosophy of history' has not been previously submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree to any other university or institution other than Macquarie University.

I also certify that the thesis is an original piece of research and it has been written by me. Any help and assistance that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself have been appropriately acknowledged.

In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

The research presented in this thesis was approved by Macquarie University Ethics Review Committee, reference number: 5201000966(D) on 24 August 2010.

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On two separate occasions I travelled to the United States for research and experience. Macquarie funds their students generously. On both occasions I visited Wesleyan University, where the *History and Theory* staff proved excellent company and learning from them was a pleasure. Julie Perkins is an administrative genius, and along with Brian Fay, Ethan Kleinberg, and Dick Vann, all were more than happy to speak about the experience and history of the journal. Elsewhere, Lynn Hunt, Mark Bevir, Martin Jay, David Hollinger, and Allan Megill all made time for me, and received my project with enthusiasm and wise advice. Edward Baring was encouraging and generously shared some of his material with me. David Carr showed me great hospitality in Atlanta, and the students in his phenomenology seminar proved great company on a long trip. Hayden White I thank for a memorable afternoon, as well as the tour of Santa Cruz; an enviable place to live and work. And Joan Scott I thank for encouraging conversation and tips on what to see in downtown Manhattan.

Alas, a short trip to the Derrida archives at the University of California, Irvine, proved much too short a time to learn to properly decipher Derrida's handwriting, but seeing how Derrida worked in his seminars was still a crucial background to the final stages of my research. Steve McLeod and his team made the archives available at extended hours. I hope to return there to pursue more of the work I've begun here.

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Lastly, I thank my markers in advance for their time and patience.

1. Introduction

Enigmatic history

‘History’ means many different things for different people, and not least among them, philosophers and historians. For a good deal of people, however, I imagine that ‘history’ first conjures up memories of a required subject in their schooling. At least in an Australian context, we would normally feel closer to ‘history,’ and historians, than to a philosopher.¹ This closeness would be of a familiarity that usually takes the form of a national story and a school teacher, an education in founding moments, turning points, perhaps horrific conflicts of country and world, shameful injustices that were heroically (or perhaps still are), being put to rights. Indeed, when we think of ‘world’, ‘history’ soon comes trotting on after it. Indeed, ‘it’ (that is ‘history,’ whatever ‘it’ is) seems to be everywhere once one begins to try to define it. The aging buildings on the main street, the monument in the park, the public holiday that commemorates the ‘glorious dead’ (whoever they may be). It can be where I came from, and what I seek to escape, or something I seek to recover. It can strongly polarise opinions. On the one hand, spoken in tones of reverence, it must be gathered up and recovered, protected against the corrosion of time. On the other hand, it must be broken free from, thrown off, perhaps violently even, in order to realise potential, promise, and to not be dominated by a memory, or a competing version of a memory. Even within the individual, at times competing versions of a past can struggle for supremacy. History, it seems, displays a certain kind of promiscuity: it can quickly be turned against itself. No sooner is a history invoked, then another, and then another is told, competing against its forbears, piling one on top of another, clamouring for our attention.

History, it seems, breeds more history. But everywhere it is one history amongst others. Some are large and encompassing, and others are but a few minutes old. Some are inflated, taking in

¹ Although this differs from state to state in Australia. In Victoria, philosophy is an optional subject available in high school. There also exist groups that promote the study of philosophy in schools.

the very universe, and others are the life of a single person. But where is history 'itself'?

Historians can help us when our interest is captured by one or another history. Experts in a small patch, a relatively enclosed group of histories, they can assist us in tracing the story. But whence do we go for history in general? It sounds like a task for the philosopher, you might answer (assuming, of course, you have a general acquaintance with such things). Definitions and generalisations that go 'what is...?' seem a domain for a different kind of inquiry to telling a history. We have crossed a threshold from one kind of talk to another, from 'tell me *what happened when...*?' to '*what is it* in a history, *any* history, which leads us to call it so?' And this latter kind of enquiry is just what the philosopher engages in, but engages in it in a way that seems importantly different to the question of 'what happened...'

The enquiring attitude we portray here, bent on recognising histories wherever it looked, would quickly realise that philosophy, and individual philosophical topics, are likewise possessed of a history, and that their fortunes can rise and fall. Indeed, even if philosophy is not best wholly characterised by a historical question, this does not mean that philosophers never have these types of questions. Assuming a little more knowledge again about things philosophical, that it often takes place as a kind of conversation, we can readily imagine that somebody might collect together a whole range of philosophical questions and answers. Some would occur with more frequency than others, some questions and answers are more pressing, sometimes less so, depending on interests or the 'state of affairs'. This would be philosophy's history. So, the philosopher, even though he is not defined by the historical question, is still not *without* a history, still less able to view it as something from which he or she is exempt or is able to maintain a distance to. But now, we ask, granted that philosophy itself has a history, what kind of a position does 'history' have *within* this collection of philosophical questions?

Now this situation is, of course, something of a fantasy, apparently an innocent conversation, mimicking a philosophical dialogue. In 'Western' countries, at least, more or less by the time we have finished our compulsory education, we are well able to recognise historical and

philosophical kinds of questions, and to respond with more than a few examples of each. But I would wager that the weight is not evenly distributed, and our knowledge of history far outweighs that of philosophy, (unless, perhaps, we are French). But I introduce this rather naïve dialogue here in order to try to pose the philosophical question about history at the right level. And this for just the reasons I wrote of above, that no sooner do we begin to talk of history, then the stories begin to pile up, and they can easily obscure the view. What then, is the position of history within philosophy, or viewed from philosophical activity?

On the one hand, let us first consider the approach of historians reflecting on their discipline. The discipline of history does indeed have its theorists, its own philosophers. But the role is not relished generally, and is often unenviable. (My comments here are directed toward ‘modern’ history, as it is practiced in Australia and the United States.) Historians for the most part would rather get on with *doing history*—which implies, usually, *minimising* the ‘theory’ to prefatory material, with the implication that it is somehow *less* historical. I know I am generalising here, and I am only too happy to be corrected on this score. But it seems fair to say that historians are relatively less interested in theorising their science than any other of the human sciences, for example, anthropologists or sociologists. Indeed, some of the most noted philosophers of history—think Weber, or Lévi-Strauss—come from these latter two disciplines, as they have struggled to come to grips with the dynamic processes and conditions of human societies. We will return to the position of historians and their philosophical attitudes shortly, and indeed, regularly throughout this thesis, but it suffices to first note here that ‘history’ is not exhausted by ‘discipline of history’. What I have to say does not solely concern historians in their professional capacity, but equally it does not avoid, or exclude them either. In fact, one of my ultimate intentions is to increase the trade between history and philosophy.

On the other hand, returning to the curious position of ‘history’ as a topic viewed from a philosophical point of view, there is the divided house of the philosophers. Already with *history* we could become embroiled in a division between so-called ‘Analytic’ and ‘Continental’

philosophers. Having announced my topic as *Derrida and the philosophy of history*, I seem to already be in the Continental camp on *two* counts. Firstly, of course, in studying Derrida's work, and second, for a concern with 'history'. History and 'historicity' has been suggested as a defining feature of Continental thought.² This is, indeed, a general feature of post-Hegelian thought, and insofar as a philosophy considers Hegel to be somewhere amongst its parentage, it also sees the philosopher as within history, and engaged with thinking it. Historicity, what Joseph Margolis calls 'the historied nature of thought', is 'what is most "modern" in "modern philosophy" after Kant,' and this is, precisely, Hegel's achievement.³ As Robert Sinnerbrink writes:

Hegel was the first philosopher to really force us to consider history itself as a philosophical problem; to consider how our very self-understanding and our horizons of knowledge are part of an ongoing process of historical transformation and philosophical self-reflection.⁴

And herein lies a problem. For Hegel's infamous 'historical optimism,' as Sinnerbrink calls it, has become a part of the Western academic mythology, and Hegel has been criticised ever since for it.⁵ For the title 'philosophy of history', at least in its classical understanding, is synonymous with a kind of excessive historical optimism that all those who begin to think about history in our age feel compelled to decry. Even, or we should say especially, Derrida. Framing his investigation in *De la Grammatologie*, he writes that were a 'grammatology' to live up to its intentions, it would perhaps be 'a history of the possibility of history which would no longer be

² See Simon Critchley, *Continental philosophy: A very short introduction*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 60-62, and David West *Continental Philosophy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), 243. Following an extensive project analysing the different traditions in philosophy, Jack Reynolds comments that an 'enduring interest in the relation between *time, history, and politics* ... has some kind of *diagnostic privilege*' not only for identifying the Continental 'family', but also for singling out the methods and positions that attain enduring success. Jack Reynolds, *Chronopathologies: Time and politics in Deleuze, Derrida, analytic philosophy, and phenomenology* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012), 3-4. My emphasis. See also James Chase and Jack Reynolds, *Analytic Versus Continental: Arguments on the methods and value of philosophy*, (Montréal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2010).

³ Joseph Margolis, 'Historicity and the Politics of Predication,' *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 1, no. 1 (2007): 92, 94.

⁴ Robert Sinnerbrink, *Understanding Hegelianism* (Stocksfield: Acumen, 2007), 28.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 26.

an archaeology, a *philosophy of history* or a history of philosophy.’⁶ Nonetheless, as David Carr observes, recent Continental philosophy can be recognised precisely in this way as ‘a new kind of philosophy of history’, a ‘general *historicisation* of knowledge.’⁷

We must add to this situation, however, on the behalf of a small but vibrant tradition of ‘philosophy of history’ that should be separated from the Continental strand. Building on the work of British Idealist philosophers R.G. Collingwood and W.H. Walsh,⁸ and also on a substantial interest in history by philosophers of science, (especially the logical positivist Carl G. Hempel), a small journal titled *History and Theory: Studies in the philosophy of history*, was established in 1960 at Wesleyan University, in Middletown, Connecticut.⁹ Long-time editor Richard Vann characterises their interests in the following way:

When *History and Theory* was founded in 1960 one of the aims of its editor George Nadel, as articulated in many rejection letters, was to establish some boundaries around what, at least for the journal, would count as ‘philosophy of history’. The great speculators, Vico and Hegel and later Marx, were (if treated analytically) in; Toynbee was taken seriously, if critically; but Spengler and Voegelin were out ... the main interest of the journal was in what was conventionally called analytical philosophy of history.¹⁰

⁶ ‘Histoire de la possibilité de l’histoire qui ne serait plus une archéologie, une philosophie de l’histoire ou une histoire de la philosophie?’ Jacques Derrida, *De la Grammatologie* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1967), 43/28. My emphasis. This passage should be compared with Derrida’s preface to *The Problem of Genesis in Husserl’s Philosophy*, trans. Marian Hobson (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003). All further references to the *Grammatology* will give the French pagination first, followed by reference to the Gayatri Spivak’s English translation after a forward slash (/). All translations are my own, however. On this, please see the last section of this introduction.

⁷ David Carr, ‘Philosophy of History,’ in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. Robert Audi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 673. My emphasis.

⁸ For whom, of course, Hegel is crucial. Although Collingwood is known for the text posthumously published as *Idea of History* (1946), for a more accurate collection of Collingwood’s thought, one should see R. G. Collingwood, *The Principles of History, and other writings in philosophy of history*, ed. William H. Dray and W. J. van der Dussen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). Cf. A revised edition of *Idea of History* has also been published, *The Idea of History*, Rev. ed. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

⁹ On this topic, see Kerwin Klein’s recent book, chapter 2 of which maps the fortunes of ‘philosophy of history’ within the analytic side of philosophy. Cf. Arthur Danto, ‘The decline and fall of the analytical philosophy of history,’ in *A New Philosophy of History*, ed. F.R. Ankersmit and H. Kellner, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995), 70-85).

¹⁰ Richard T. Vann, ‘Turning Linguistic: *History and Theory* and *History and Theory*, 1960-1975,’ in *A New Philosophy of History*, ed. Ankersmit and Kellner (University of Chicago Press, 1995), 41.

‘Analytic,’ or synonymously ‘critical’ philosophy of history,¹¹ then, following a distinction proposed by W.H. Walsh, divided up the philosophy of history by an analogy with a philosophy of science and nature. Given that the word ‘history’ admitted two meanings, the happening of events, and the narrative of events, Walsh proposed to call philosophy pertaining to the first ‘speculative,’ and to the second ‘critical’.¹² Although Walsh saw philosophy of history as properly concerned with *both*, he nonetheless reasoned that for those who strongly rejected the first, the second might still be perfectly respectable.¹³

Now, this thesis concerns itself foremost with a ‘philosophy of history’ that appears within Derrida’s work. Derrida never names it thus, although he did teach courses on the philosophy of history, which has a far stronger institutional position in France than in English language countries and is a regular subject in the *agrégation*. Raymond Aron’s path-breaking *Introduction à la philosophie de l’histoire* is of course the important reference, and is still used today.¹⁴ More importantly for us, Aron is also decisive in being the one to introduce Heidegger to Jean-Paul Sartre.¹⁵ However, I am not *only* concerned with Derrida’s reading of history. For I also have the intention of seeing Derrida’s interpretation of history meet with historical practice. To this end, I develop his reading by staging several encounters developed from philosophy of history, taking as my clue or guiding thread a study of the history of the journal *History and Theory*.

¹¹ See, too, Arthur Danto’s 1965 book, titled *Analytical Philosophy of History*, republished in Arthur Coleman Danto, *Narration and Knowledge*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985). The first chapter deals with the distinction between analytical and substantive philosophy of history.

¹² W.H. Walsh, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, 3rd ed. (London: Hutchinson, 1967), 16. The terminology is borrowed from C.D. Broad. ‘Speculative’ is also sometimes substituted with ‘substantive’.

¹³ Walsh’s book was first published in 1951. It is easy to sense the immense feeling on this topic in Walsh’s defensiveness for even proposing the topic. A bias against the philosophy of history is ‘a permanent feature of British philosophy,’ and it is ‘anathema to the cautious British mind,’ ‘If philosophy of history is thus generally despised, why venture to revive it?’ ‘We must break through the fog of emotion with which the name of Hegel is now surrounded,’ Ibid., 14, 14, 15, 143 respectively.

¹⁴ Raymond Aron, *Introduction à la philosophie de l’histoire, essai sur les limites de l’objectivité historique*, Nouvelle édition, ed., Bibliothèque des idées (Paris.: Gallimard, 1948). Translated as *Introduction to the Philosophy of History: An essay on the limits of historical objectivity*, Trans. George J. Irwin, (Boston.: Beacon Press, 1961).

¹⁵ See Ethan Kleinberg, *Generation Existential: Heidegger’s philosophy in France 1927-1961* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2005), 87ff. See especially 90, 93 and 116. Cf. Edward Baring, *The Young Derrida and French Philosophy, 1945-1968* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 68-9.

This thesis does *not* present a history, either of Derrida's thought, or of the philosophy of history. Rather, it seeks to understand Derrida's positions concerning history and historicity, and thence enters into a dialogue with critical developments in historical theory, which I term 'historiography'. Historiography, in current historian's parlance, is the theoretical arm of historical study. Technically, this *is* still 'philosophy'—of the historical discipline. However, insofar as, with a few exceptions, history as a discipline is largely ignored by philosophers (which has concrete ramifications for historiography), it seems to me appropriate to designate it by a different term to the 'philosophy of history'. The 'critical developments' I have selected presuppose an interpretation of the recent history of historiography, and indeed, at an early point, this thesis was proposed as a historical one. It is no longer. But a history of *History and Theory*, and its engagement with Derrida and continental philosophy more generally persists mostly in footnotes. Indeed, a study of the archives of *History and Theory* helped me determine the 'critical developments' I selected, and this archive 'experience' also became an attempt to put myself in the shoes of the historian, and understand their concerns.

Derrida is not, however, generally recognised *as* a philosopher of history. We shall have to undertake to prove that it is both true and important to say that Derrida does concern himself with 'history'. None of Derrida's works were reviewed in *History and Theory* until *Spectres of Marx*, four years after its publication.¹⁶ In that book Derrida offers a retrospective glance on his work that presents history not just as one theme among others but as *absolutely central*:

Permit me to recall very briefly that a certain deconstructive procedure, at least the one in which I thought I had to engage, *consisted from the outset in putting into question the onto-theo but also archaeo-teleological concept of history*—in Hegel, Marx, or even in the epochal thinking of Heidegger. Not in order to *oppose it with an end of history or an anhistoricity*, but, on the contrary, in order to show that this onto-theo-archaeo-teleology locks up, neutralises, and finally *cancels historicity*. It was then a matter of

¹⁶ Moishe Postone, 'Deconstruction as Social Critique: Derrida on Marx and the new world order,' *History and Theory* 37, no. 3 (1998). The lateness of the review was not for want of trying on the part of the editors, who struggled to find an appropriate reviewer who had not already been promised publication for the book review elsewhere.

thinking *another historicity*—not a new history or still less a ‘new historicism,’ but another opening of *eventness as historicity* that permitted one not to renounce but on the contrary to open up access to an affirmative thinking of the messianic and emancipatory promise as promise: as promise and not as onto-theological or teleo-eschatological program or design.¹⁷

Derrida is quite precise. His intention was not to present a rival theory, but to free it from a concept that somehow threatened to close it down. Derrida frames his reminiscence on the early period of his work in the later vocabulary—a *futural* emphasis: ‘messianic’, ‘promise’ etc.¹⁸—of his pronounced ethical ‘turn’ evident from the late 1980’s. If this later period is widely recognised to concern itself with *historicity*, what of the earlier work? Derrida claims here that historicity is foundational, ‘from the outset,’ at the very beginnings and the very motivation of what became ‘deconstruction’. What I shall be undertaking is to show that, in Derrida’s *De la Grammatologie* and central to its concerns, or indeed *its fundamental movement*, is the thinking of a new history or historicity. And, as Derrida indicates above, this new ‘concept’ is in fact a liberation for history, that has definite, *positive* effects that can be described and concretely inquired about. To that end, we will now briefly illustrate how Derrida can be conceived of as a thinker of history.

¹⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York & London: Routledge, 1994), 74-5. My emphases.

¹⁸ See Reynolds, *Chronopathologies*, 88ff. See also Matthias Fritsch, *The Promise of Memory: History and politics in Marx, Benjamin, and Derrida* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 90-1.

The history machine?

Readers of Derrida will know that he has a fondness for machines. From Freud's *Wunderblock* onwards, writing machines are a regular feature in Derrida's works, and they exercise a special fascination over him.¹⁹ Unsurprisingly, he was not only quick to apply himself to the using of computers, but also to reflecting on their possibilities and limits, as well as criticising the social implications of media technologies. In the text we are to follow in this thesis, *Of Grammatology*, the 'today' in which the book begins is one in which *cybernetics*, and the 'practical methods of information retrieval extends the possibilities of the "message" vastly.' It is still in the dawn of the era of memory-machines. This moment is privileged by Derrida as being of historical significance: It is the *historically* embedded unveiling of the *ultra-transcendental trace*.²⁰

In a 1983 interview Derrida proffered a thought experiment as a way of describing his work. It was in response to a question about the *pathos* of his writing, but it also obliquely refers back to the late '60s. Although he does not say so, the description is a precise summary of the end of Derrida's 1968 paper on Hegel's semiology, 15 years beforehand.²¹ 'Let's imagine a kind of machine,' he says, 'which is by definition an impossible one:

That would be like a machine for ingrammatising *everything that happens* and such that the smallest thoughts, the smallest movements of the body, the least traces of desire, the ray of sunlight, the encounter with someone, a phrase heard in passing, are inscribed

¹⁹ Most notably, of course, in 'Freud and the scene of writing', in Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978). But see too *Archive Fever*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), and *Paper Machine*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

²⁰ See especially *De la Grammatologie*, 15-9/6-9, and p.90/61 for 'ultra-transcendental.'

²¹ That is, 'The pit and the pyramid,' in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 69-108. This situation, of the essay and the interview, raises for us an important question to the philosophical status of the interview. Derrida is always careful to describe the contexts of interviews, and warns against using them as a 'short-cut' to understanding. Nonetheless, Derrida has published several volumes of them, and *Positions* occupies an important position in Derrida's oeuvre. I justify my use here by the link to *Margins*.

somewhere; imagine that a general electro-encephalo-cardio-somato-psychogram were possible: at that moment my desire would be absolutely fulfilled—and finitude accepted (and by the same token denied).²²

To record something would be to keep it, enabling one to retrieve it again and again. It is a repetition machine, and so, (as Derrida goes on to mention), a thought experiment somewhat like Nietzsche's eternal return. But the pathos is that it is of course an impossibility, as so much is lost, lost to memory; 'the repetition I love is not possible.'

So I write in order to keep. But keeping is not a dull and dead archiving. It is at bottom a question of infinite memories, of limitless memories which would not necessarily be a philosophical or literary work, or simply a great repetition. What I admire in the philosophers, what interests me most in others, finally, is that they try to construct the most economical machines for repeating.

Derrida's repetition machine is not heartless or cold, (recall, 'the ray of sunlight', the 'trace of desire'), but is suffused with passion for keeping limitless memories, and the whimsical chances of life. But it is also unerringly occupied with repetition, and what can, or should, be repeated.

But before we see the philosophical undergirding of this enchanting eavesdrop which we call an interview, let us compare this thought experiment to another. A famous history machine, with which it bears some marked similarities, this time constructed by Arthur Danto.²³ Developing a comment of C.S. Peirce's about the fixed and absolutely determinate nature of the past, Danto constructs a thought experiment that would test the suppositions of history conceived as a science of the description of a *fixed* past.

²² Jacques Derrida and Elisabeth Weber, *Points . . . : interviews, 1974-1994*, Meridian : crossing aesthetics (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1995), 143-4. The word translated a little inelegantly as 'ingrammatising' by Peggy Kamuf is *engrammer*, which appears to be one of Derrida's inventions, and a development of *gramme*. This is of course present in the title *Grammatology*, as well in the later sections of 'Ousia and Grammē' in Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*.

²³ Danto occupies an interesting place with respect to the *topos* of philosophical institutions. Apparently one of the pillars of the analytic philosophy world, as a Fulbright scholar, he also studied in Paris in 1949 at the same time that Derrida first travelled there to enter *Hypokhâgne* at the Lycée Louis-le-Grand.

I now want to insert an Ideal Chronicler into my picture. He knows whatever happens the moment it happens, even in other minds. He is also to have the gift of instantaneous transcription: everything that happens across the whole forward rim of the Past is set down by him, as it happens, the way it happens. The resultant running account I shall term the Ideal Chronicle (hereafter referred to as I.C.). Once [an event] *E* is safely in the Past, its full description is in the I.C. We may now think of the various parts of the I.C. as accounts to which practicing historians endeavour to approximate their own accounts.²⁴

This ‘historian’s heaven’ is, Danto comments, (writing a little earlier than Derrida in 1961), ‘just the sort of thing a machine could do.’ Some similarities on initial inspection are quite remarkable: a machine, recording the totality of events, even those inside the mind. Danto was testing the peculiarities of historical knowledge, in which, it turns out, the past is hardly fixed at all. For the machine turns out to be useless, unless it can actually also have knowledge of the future, ‘to be alive to the historical significance of events as they happen, one has to know to which later events these will be related.’²⁵ That is, historical meaning is one that is differential. It requires a bridge *between* events for a meaning to appear. ‘What happened’ makes sense because of its *future* and its *past*. But the event itself is an ‘event’ only insofar as, itself, it has this span of a bridge, between a ‘beginning’ and ‘end’. The ceaseless production of new spans, new events, leads to an infinite rewriting of history. Now, if Danto’s point is to point out the peculiarities of history, and that it exceeds a positivist concept of science that would stipulate a fixed meaning for a fixed event, Derrida’s point is not dissimilar. Each points out a ceaselessly rewritten past.

Derrida’s own ‘history machine’ also adds an extra dimension. It highlights just how much falls outside of our efforts to keep and record. It illustrates *loss*. How to record the twitch of muscle? A fleeting shadow? This is bound up with his reading of both Hegel and Heidegger, philosophers *of repetition*, of the possible and the impossible. For at stake in Hegel’s dialectic is

²⁴ Danto, *Narration and Knowledge*, 149.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 169.

precisely the idea of a machine. Hegel is the undoubted master, Robert Sinnerbrink writes, of metaphysical-conceptual machinery.²⁶ Why? Because to *recognise* something such that it can be expressed, lifts that thing up into thought and speech and language, into our conceptuality. We can now *repeat* it over and over, such is the way that languages and codes work. It is precisely this Hegelian machine that Derrida, with marked similarities to Adorno, and Merleau-Ponty, would like to tamper with. At stake is not only a relation to the Hegelian type of philosophy of history. For, as Derrida points out with respect to Levinas' empiricism, 'Hegel says somewhere, *empiricism* always forgets, at the very least, that it employs the words to be.'²⁷

Derrida's 'machine' is also described on the penultimate page of 'The pit and the pyramid.'²⁸ After systematically reconstructing the location of semiology in the Hegelian system, Derrida observes that in calculation, the becoming ideal of number is analogous to the passage from symbol to sign. The mathematical, calculation, mute writing, and the machine, Derrida writes, belong to the same system of equivalences to be worked over by dialectics.²⁹ What kind of negative, he asks, would resist being *relevé*, would resist the *Aufhebung*? 'Quite simply, a machine, perhaps, and one which would function. A machine defined in its pure functioning, and not in its final utility, its meaning, its result, its work.'³⁰

If we consider the machine along with the entire system of equivalences just recalled, we may risk the following proposition: what Hegel, the *relevant* interpreter of the entire history of philosophy, *could never think* is a machine that would work. That would work without, to this extent, being governed by an order of reappropriation. Such a functioning would be unthinkable in that it inscribes within itself an effect of pure loss. It would be unthinkable as a nonthought that no thought could *relever*, could constitute as its proper opposite, as its other. Doubtless philosophy would see in this a non-

²⁶ Sinnerbrink, *Understanding Hegelianism*, 189.

²⁷ In 'Violence and metaphysics,' Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 139. I am indebted to Robert Sinnerbrink (*loc. cit.*) for this point.

²⁸ In *Margins of Philosophy*, 69-109.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 106-7. This mention of calculation gives an early reference for Jack Reynolds' account of Derrida's eschewal of temporal calculation and naming the future. See Reynolds, *Chronopathologies*, 92.

³⁰ Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 107.

functioning, a nonwork; and thereby philosophy would miss that which, in such a machine, works. By itself. Outside.³¹

We need to distinguish between two types of machine here, or two aspects. For the one that we think of is a machine that can *do* something. This is ‘reappropriation,’ that a machine produces something to be put aside for later, in this case a ‘thought’. But the kind of machine Derrida has in mind is an impossible one, that ‘just’ exists, producing nothing, keeping nothing, perhaps just the simple pleasure of being, working, churning itself over. But to the extent that we can write this, is there still some measure of reappropriation?³² Now the first machine would be the kind of speculative approach to philosophy and history that he is seeking to avoid. Avoiding it is harder than you might think, Derrida suggests, precisely because it gets ingrained *in* the way we think. But it seems that Derrida is also proposing another ‘philosophy,’ and another ‘history,’ that seeks to say (without exactly saying, in order to respect), what lies outside of reappropriation. And if this would be a ‘true’ philosophy, it would also be a history, too, perhaps the truest history. Derrida wants to think both the machine, and what escapes the machine, to think philosophy and history, and what lies beyond them. For both Danto and Derrida know that such machines are fantasies, and a travesty of history and philosophy. (‘Finitude would be denied’, says Derrida, and later, Danto admits that his history machine was philosophically shoddy.³³)

For proof that this machine is itself a new kind of ‘philosophy of history’, we can look at the work of Geoffrey Bennington. Bennington uses the machine as a leitmotif for his description of Derrida’s work, christening it the ‘Derridabase’. This machine is Bennington’s systematic attempt to describe the whole of Derrida’s work in a series of database entries that would mimic

³¹ Ibid.

³² Louis Mink points out in a related way, *à propos* Danto’s machine, that even if it is impossible, its *idea* still makes perfect sense to us. Louis O. Mink, *Historical Understanding*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1987), 194-5.

³³ Danto, *Narration and Knowledge*, 182.

a computer.³⁴ The oscillating possible/impossible status of the machine is also the source of many of Bennington's comments regarding both philosophy and history with respect to Derrida. Bennington is an acute observer of the human sciences, and history has been a special topic of his from his first publications.³⁵ He has described deconstruction as 'radically historical'.³⁶ And yet, this point is also combined with a pronounced *refusal* of a historicist approach to Derrida's work.³⁷ Recently, he has written:

There is history (in spite of all the historians in the world, who are professionally occupied in reducing this historicity, in not reading – because the historian as such does not read) – there is history only because there is reading: and if there is reading ... there is no end of history, no last judgement, no arrival that is not a new departure.³⁸

This critique of *a certain* history, of 'historians', is thematic throughout his 'Derridabase'.³⁹ But, as this quotation makes clear, such a refusal is in fact done in the service of a different thinking of history, one that Bennington here associates with the workings of 'reading'. The wager then, that we are engaged in, could be summed up by the proposal: *is it possible to include an entry in Bennington's 'Derridabase' under the title of history?* My answer will be *yes*, and I think that Bennington would also agree to this as well, (after some qualifications). For he, too, does describe this other history, usually under the term 'complicity'. We shall see what this names in due course. But for the moment, Bennington's *refusal* has made us aware that

³⁴ 'G.B. would have liked to systematize J.D.'s thought to the point of turning it into an interactive program' and, 'but this machine is already in place, it is the "already" itself,' Geoffrey Bennington, 'Derrida base' in *Jacques Derrida*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993), 1, 315 respectively.

³⁵ See particularly Geoffrey Bennington, *Sententiousness and the Novel: Laying down the law in eighteenth-century French fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 75. See also the first four chapters of *Legislations: The politics of deconstruction*, (London and New York: Verso, 1994).

³⁶ Geoffrey Bennington, *Interrupting Derrida*, Warwick studies in European philosophy (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 13. Cf. *Legislations: the politics of deconstruction*, 15-17. The point is based upon Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 232/162. Sometimes it is phrased as 'radical empiricism', and Rodolphe Gasché makes the same point in *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 80, 170, 186.

³⁷ Although I am here using Bennington as an example, because of the theme of 'machine', it is important to recognise that he develops this theme directly from Derrida, as we will show below.

³⁸ Geoffrey Bennington, *Not Half No End: Militantly melancholic essays in memory of Jacques Derrida* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 126. A little later, Bennington adds, 'the philosopher as such, the professional philosopher, does not read, any more than does the historian.' In a footnote to this he asks 'who reads? A huge question,' pointing out, 'Dasein does not read.'

³⁹ See for example, Geoffrey Bennington, *Jacques Derrida*, 46-7, 61-2, 85-8, 122, 262-3, 275, 280-1.

there are level distinctions to be made, and that not all ‘histories’ are equal to one another. We must make this clear before going any further.

History and historicity

We are endeavouring, then, not to tell a history about Derrida, or about history, but to put ourselves in the cross or chiasm between history and philosophy. Our manner of proceeding is philosophical, but not non-historical; what we have to say *concerns* history, but this should not solely be interpreted as the *discipline* of history. For the discipline of history cannot exhaust history itself (and this is a good thing), and the philosopher is never wholly separate from the other sciences, including history. Indeed, philosophy is sustained, inspired and rejuvenated in its relationships to the other sciences, which in turn can benefit from philosophy. There is not a war, battle, struggle between disciplines, and nor are they ‘empires,’ ‘turfs,’ or ‘backyards.’ There are, rather, different modalities of questions, which sometimes indicate fellow travellers, now here, now there, at different speeds and with varying interests. But the questions themselves are infinitely divisible, and I always find parts of someone else’s questions in my own. History has its own ‘philosophers’ and philosophical moments, as philosophy has its own historians and irreducible histories. The goal of this thesis is to encourage the dialogue. If Derrida’s ‘principle of contamination’ means that the lines drawn between disciplines are always permeable,⁴⁰ then Derrida has good company in this position with other philosophers of history, for example, R.G. Collingwood.⁴¹ Derrida will even, with a logic we shall have to explain at length, conclude that history is nothing but the history of philosophy. This startling and seemingly indefensible claim will require placing in the lengthy argument of Derrida’s

⁴⁰ See Reynolds, *Chronopathologies*, 221-3.

⁴¹ See, for example, Collingwood, *The Principles of History: and other writings in philosophy of history*, 114, 167.

Rousseau essay, but suffice to say here that this is a ‘dialectical’ moment in that argument, and moreover, according to a dialectic that will *not* see subsumption in a true meaning of history.

Before we get ahead of ourselves we must prepare the region to be discussed. For what is the scope of history? The region is, someone might quickly say, infinite. But it is certainly not *homogeneous*. It is likewise infinite in its variety, infinitely broad. Nonetheless we are able to realise discreet regions amongst this variety. We can and do group together areas of existence long enough to define them, speak meaningfully of kinds, wholes, regions and hence conduct enquiry into them. As we discovered at the outset, however, history quickly *piles up*, in ways that seem contradictory or difficult to synthesise completely. This very diversity is a part of what makes history fascinating to study, *and* difficult to philosophise about. It seems obvious in its connections to human social life, but also uncertain. Have I chosen the right story and the right example? The *good* example, and understood it in the correct way? Let’s proceed by listing the ways in which we use concepts that are something like ‘history’, and then from there, to work at placing them in relation to each other.⁴²

Firstly, in a distinction we have already mentioned, there are two broad areas that are immediately obvious: History as event, and history as narration of an event. Now, although ‘Mr. Everyman’, as Carl Becker calls him,⁴³ can engage in *thematically* treating the past, for whatever reason, for the moment let us take what historians do as the paradigm for narration. These narrations are always constructed through reference to the level of actual happening, insofar as it can be deduced from ‘sources’. Thus:

⁴² My approach here is influenced by Heidegger’s in *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie; Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 378-9. Heidegger raises four alternative significations for history. In an earlier lecture, he had raised six; see Hans Ruin, *Enigmatic Origins: Tracing the theme of historicity through Heidegger's works* (Almqvist & Wiksell, Stockholm University, 1994), 61-64. For references to *Being and Time*, I refer to the German pagination, which is printed in the margins of the English translation.

⁴³ See Carl Becker, ‘Everyman his own historian,’ *The American Historical Review* 37, no. 2 (1932).

1. History as a science that takes ‘history’ as its object: what it is historians – but also philosophers, sociologists (and everyone too on occasion), do in a rigorous, scientific, more or less organised fashion; we meet this kind of treatment early on in life.

2. The actual happening of history, the procession of events, generations, becomings, passing away, the passage of time; wars, revolutions, the bloody sagas of history; but also human social groupings, everyday routines or catastrophic failures, ‘natural’ disasters, and so on.

Now, depending on philosophical taste and training, one can manifest a leaning to one or the other of these two points. To be sure, to be concerned with the second point, which, as we shall see is closer to the ‘Continental’ side, does not automatically mean that we are engaged in ‘speculative’ philosophy of history. It is more a question of the attitude that is taken towards *science*. A moment ago, we took the discipline of history as a paradigm for history as narration. However, were we to refuse that decision, and take the minor historical narrations of life, say for example, ‘how was your weekend?’, ‘where are you up to with writing your thesis?’, then we would quickly realise, as Arthur Danto showed very well, and David Carr will argue explicitly (in chapter 4), that *events* happen already *with* narration. We narrate to ourselves, and to others as a constant feature of life.

But let us keep moving and dividing up the histories that we know of in order to get a better grip on the varieties of ‘history’. As discussed above, the ‘speculative’ half of philosophy of history would concern itself with events, the ‘analytic’ with the ‘scientific,’ that is epistemological side.⁴⁴ (Perhaps you might object to calling history a ‘science’; I use ‘science’ in a mild sense, insofar as history *is* a defined field of investigation with refined methods of investigation and an organised body of knowledge, it is testable and experimental.)⁴⁵

⁴⁴ On the division, see Mink, *Historical Understanding*, 147-162. See also Derek Attridge, Geoffrey Bennington, and Robert Young, *Post-structuralism and the question of history* (Cambridge Cambridgeshire ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 15-16.

⁴⁵ ‘Source criticism in the historical humanistic sciences corresponds to experiment in physical research,’ Martin Heidegger, ‘The age of the world picture,’ in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1977), 122.

Although there are some interesting questions that play out at this level of distinction, (such as in what I've just said about history being a 'science'), this is still far too general to be of much help. It is in fact fairly apparent that it is impossible to keep to just one side of the distinction. Any historical narrative needs to take up as a starting assumption some kind of guide as to what it considers the relevant occurrences in history. It needs to decide upon its object, choosing it from the stream of history, and arguing for a certain significance. In other words, even purely epistemological discussions cannot avoid committing to ontological decisions. On the other hand, a metaphysics of history will offer some explanation as to the intelligibility of history, and so make contributions to the methodology and epistemology of any prospective science. Noting these questions and placing them to one side, let us continue carving up history.

Consider:

3. Objects from the past we consider historical. These are things that announce themselves by their odd shape, or time-worn appearance to be from another time. A whole area of human practices arises in connection here: libraries, heritage buildings, artefacts, museum exhibits, archaeological television shows, or archaic words in our languages that some people endeavour to 'collect'. These are manifestly entities from another age, but they nonetheless exist for us *now*. Some such strange things can still be in use, the vintage tractor still used on a farm, the family heirloom at the dining table, but they immediately proclaim their anachronistic presence, (but at what point to do they become so?). Indeed, such appearances may even be simulated by 'retro' fashions, genuine and faux antiques, and so on.⁴⁶

4. History can also be distinguished as *tradition*. This can take on both intentional and unintentional forms: Repetition, consciously chosen or not, of signifying forms. Think not only of a language, with each dialect possessing idioms, turns of phrase that are

⁴⁶ Witness Heidegger's comments in this regard: 'The antiquities which are present-at-hand have a character of 'the past' and of history by reason of the fact that they have belonged as equipment to a world that has been—the *world* of a Dasein that has been there—and that they have been *derived* from that world,' Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 381. The status of *derivation* [Herkunft] is Heidegger's particular concern here, for it leads one back to Dasein's *world*. *Herkunft* is a Nietzschean term, and is famously taken up in Michel Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,' in *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology: Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954-1984 Vol. 2*, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: Penguin, [1971] 2000).

handed down, but also of intellectual traditions, artistic forms, and styles of representation. The massive presence of religious traditions is an obvious example.

Tradition can be given a positive aspect: durability in the face of flux, a necessary safe-haven of stability that preserves a form because of its value, protection against the vicissitudes of history. It thus carries a certain historical style of dignity.

Alternatively, tradition can be given a negative value, where tradition implies an *unthinking* repetition. Both Husserl and Heidegger, especially, have explored this sense in which the very traditionality of tradition actually seems to take the truth of its value away from us. This is the technical meaning of *crisis*.⁴⁷ The metaphors they use are revealing; tradition *sediments*, it is *hardened up* and must be loosed, tradition *calcifies*. Heidegger separates the positive and negative values by reserving ‘heritage’ for the knowingly chosen inheritance, whereas ‘tradition’ is the negative aspect.⁴⁸

This sense of tradition potentially being negative, and even somehow reckless or irresponsible, is pervasive within philosophy that draws from these two authors, Husserl and Heidegger. The sense of requiring ‘authenticity’ (even if its *jargon* is eschewed), is remarkably hard to avoid. But it is never a case of doing without tradition. For, as Husserl shows, the very technological success of the sciences is brought about by the fact that there is no need to go back and literally *repeat* those discoveries. They *have been* discovered, and, to use the geological metaphor, they have been *lain down* so that we can build on top of them. But in *assuming* such gains the adventure of science also becomes separated from the real-life concerns from which it originally arose. To go back and ‘reactivate’ such origins is, for Husserl, to take responsibility for them. But the traditionality of science is also its crisis and in the eyes of many 20th Century European philosophers, the wars and upheavals of their century were all too vivid proof of this situation.

⁴⁷ See Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), §§1-7.

⁴⁸ ‘Everything “good” is a heritage,’ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 384. For ‘tradition’, see especially H.21, and the analysis culminating in the discussion of *falling* and *thrownness*. The split between tradition and heritage is thus essentially connected with the division between authentic and inauthentic, and therefore the overall shape of *Being and Time*.

5. Finally, we often speak of history as having a *total* sense. Here I am thinking of the way in which things occur in and *as* a kind of *world*. They occur within a complete ‘context’ or a ‘culture’ which must be presumed at least as the whole of a certain totality. It is often invoked only vaguely or idiomatically. Now, this being enmeshed in a world is often what is meant by the term ‘historicity’. We shall explore this term a little more as we go along.

At this point there is a choice to make. It is a choice about the question of *order*. These features of history, or rather, these things each of which *are* history, are arranged in a certain order when we take up history in view of something. That is, when we take up history *thematically*, rather than it simply being our ‘background’ (another level distinction), we instantly arrange the senses of history in a kind of hierarchy more or less explicitly.

In the face of the manifold sense of history, which is implicit in a consideration of the historicity of any entity, how to arrange such variety? There are two ways that interest me here. On the one hand, as I began to describe earlier, if we are interested in what kind of knowledge historical knowledge is, what its scientific status is, then we will most likely explore the practices and accomplishments *of historians*. These people focus solely upon producing accurate historical knowledge. Historians *are*, indeed, *fascinating creatures*. Now, making this choice does not mean we abandon the other distinguished notions of history, but they are reorganised to correspond to our choice.

Points two and five, the events, and the world or context in which they occur, would be the objects which historians most often take as their objects of study. We are leaving aside, for the moment, questions about the historian’s *own* world—precisely because the historian ostensibly does in a kind of rough bracketing operation that could be related to phenomenology.

Points three and four, the remains of the past world, and the inheritances of tradition would be a *medium* through which the study can be executed. And then, the historian's productions and practices themselves occur at the top of the heap as the *governing* science of the region thus outlined. The philosopher is most interested in the historians' science, and so he or she likewise arranges things in the same way. We climb the ladder up to the top, where it is assumed that it is the activity of the historian that is authoritative on the subject of history. To generalise, this is the assumption that determines a large amount of the philosophy of history, or historiography, in English. It takes the historian as the *best* example.

However, by choosing to carve things up into different overlapping regions, we have already implied that this is not the only arrangement possible. If we were to have different philosophical intentions, we would value the regions themselves differently. And indeed, the choice of playing history as a science, at the top of the heap as the exemplary instance of *history* can have a rebound effect. For looking at history under the head of 'science' can push one towards realising that it is a *strange* science. At this point, we verge upon the metaphysics of science, the unity of the disciplines called 'science', and so on. We are pushed towards a whole new 'ladder' of areas which can be arranged in alternative ways. Notably, history no longer has the prestige that it had earlier in the 20th Century. Talk of history *as a science* is distinctly outmoded in current historiography, and this has been a spur for some of its most productive theory.⁴⁹

Let us consider another arrangement. And this one does *not* climb the ladder to history as a discipline at the top. The phenomenological approach to science here would see historiography, or any other discipline, as a highly developed instance of more basic possibilities. It could be

⁴⁹ I am thinking of Hayden White, 'The Burden of History,' *History and Theory* 5, no. 2 (1966). and *Metahistory: The historical imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973). But concerning 'science', see Kerwin Klein, who has systematically questioned the opposition of science and narrative implicit in White's work; Kerwin Lee Klein, 'Anti-History: The meaning of *Historical Culture*,' *CLIO* 25, no.2 (1995) 125-143, and *Frontiers of Historical Imagination: Narrating the European Conquest of Native America, 1890-1990* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: California University Press, 1997).

suggested that the elevation of historical science into an exemplary instance of history runs the risk of making those cultures that write histories into exemplary cultures. But the fact of cultural variety, the world over, complicates any such privilege. How do we respond to the sheer variety of different histories? In order to countermand the risk of riding roughshod over different cultures, a new level of generality is sought. For example, one shows that the possibility of writing a history is in fact but one possibility that is conducted on the basis of, and developed from, a *prior* embedding in a world and a tradition. It can possibly be pursued (or not) thematically, accruing its own gains, and developing upon itself as an ongoing task or project. But to write history—or philosophy—need not be to carry the torch of humanity.⁵⁰ I am, of course, speaking of a phenomenological approach. The fact that, in Derrida's eyes, Husserl and Heidegger do not manage this should not distract us from the fact that phenomenology has made a distinctive gain in allowing us to see the stratification of levels of history, separating them out from each other. (Indeed, we should note that in the *Crisis*, Husserl is actively attempting to *take up* the 'torch' of humanity.)⁵¹

At this point, it is the background phenomena, the 'immersion' and 'connection', that begin to take on significance. 'Historicity' is a name for this level, that extends 'laterally' across everything a community holds in common, (indicating thus a social body, along with a spatial world), but also on a different axis, temporally, such that our lives are a stretch of time, as Heidegger puts it, and that we also overlap, generationally, with others.⁵² Historicity from this perspective 'lies beneath' historiography. A philosophical analysis here goes in almost the

⁵⁰ Interestingly, Heidegger simultaneously refutes and then sneaks back in the concept of people's without history: 'If historiography is wanting, *this is not evidence against* Dasein's historicity, on the contrary, as a deficient mode of this state of Being, it is evidence for it,' Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 20. Heidegger *does* use historiography as a 'good' example, as 'deficient mode' [*defizienter Modus*] suggests here. This will concern us in chapter 2. Nb. I am also altering the translation with respect to the terms 'historiography' and 'historicity'. On this note, and other terminological and translation issues, please see the final section of this introduction.

⁵¹ Husserl, in §7: 'in our philosophising, then—how can we avoid it?—we are functionaries of mankind,' Husserl, *Crisis*, 17.

⁵² On generations, see Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 385.

complete *opposite* direction to the one that sought out history as a science, and it therefore asks different kinds of questions about it.⁵³

This is a rough description of the way in which phenomenology would tend. Because of this differing arrangement and understanding of the relation between sciences and our world, a philosophy of history pursued in this way is often received with some slight confusion. It does not seem to fit on the spectrum of analytic~speculative.⁵⁴

Now, returning to our five rough groupings, we see that common to each of them is the fact that humans are the subjects of the things we have in mind. On the face of it, it is humanity that *is* historical, and that makes things historical. Historical science—however interesting and worthy a pursuit—has some kind of condition of possibility in being human. To tackle questions concerning historicity is *also*, at least implicitly, to tackle a philosophical anthropology. Already we can see that we have been thrown not only into various possibilities about history, but also about some of the most enduring philosophical questions. For example, Kant's fourth question, 'what is man?', summing up all of philosophy; or who, and what, is *Dasein*? What is the relation between the anthropological and the animal, and how does it relate to the distinction between nature and history? In what follows with respect to phenomenology, we will be concerned primarily with the relationship between Heidegger and Derrida over historicity, as evinced in the *Grammatology*, (although Husserl will concern us in chapter 4). Derrida's relationship to Husserl on historicity has been well-handled.⁵⁵ However, there is a pronounced *lack* of literature dealing with the second part of Derrida's *Grammatology*, a part of his work

⁵³ See the succinct summary and development of the phenomenological tradition on historicity in David Carr, 'Phenomenology of historical time,' in *The Past's Present: Essays on the historicity of philosophical thinking*, ed. Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schuback and Hans Ruin (Huddinge: Södertöns högskola, 2005). We will be addressing Carr's phenomenology below in chapter 4. Interestingly, for philosophers of history interested in historicity, R.G. Collingwood devotes an essay 'Reality as history,' to the topic, in which he even considers the historicity of iron particles(!). Collingwood, *The Principles of History*, 170-208.

⁵⁴ See, for example, William Casement, 'Husserl and the Philosophy of History,' *History and Theory* 27, no. 3 (1988).

⁵⁵ See Paola Marrati, *Genesis and Trace*, trans. Simon Sparks (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005); Joshua Kates, *Essential History: Jacques Derrida and the development of deconstruction* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2005); Peter Fenves, 'Derrida and history' in Tom Cohen (ed.), *Jacques Derrida and the Humanities*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 271-297.

which, I will demonstrate, carries on a tacit dialogue with Heidegger, and which concerns *precisely* historicity.

Now, in the direction of historicity, our concern is with the conditions under which something, anything, can be said *to be* ‘historical’. The level at which this plays out is no longer that of the consciously constructed historical accounts of historians, or even the everyday accounts we give to explain our activities to each other. Rather it focuses on what is implied in, or presupposed by, such accounts. If we call this ‘historicity’, we will approach it as a *general designation* for a whole raft of problems to be considered.

Sometimes historicity is spoken of to refer to the way in which the *content* of human thought varies with different times and places, such that one must carefully reconstruct the context in which it took place in order to understand the products of such a time. The embedding within a context of reference provides the meanings of actions and things, and this is irreducible.

Historicity is thus wielded against ‘universals’ and this is, I think, the common usage amongst historians. ‘To historicise’ in the everyday parlance of historians, is to situate an action or a thing within its referential whole or context. A process, it is assumed, of derivation occurs, that in some fashion, more or less, the context ‘produced,’ or determined in some way the action or the thing in question. Thus Joseph Margolis writes, concerning historicity as:

The fact that conceptual, argumentative, and related resources of thinking evolve over historical time in such a way that crises of communication and understanding, intra- as well as inter-societal, are bound to arise as a direct consequence of the slippage (over time) of what in many different ways, we identify as the content of those resources. I mean the conceptual, semantic, informational, semiotic, predicative ‘content’ of thought itself.

Let me put the point in its grandest and most arresting form. Human beings—selves, agents, subjects—have or are histories, have histories rather than natural-kind natures—because thinking is itself historied! We are the hybrid transforms [sic] of Homo sapiens

by way of internalising the language and practices of some home society. But, in becoming that, we are forever hostage to the transitory and evolving habits of our own artifactual form of mind.⁵⁶

Now, there is a complication here. For Margolis, in the first paragraph (apparently invoking the ‘literary’ Derrida with the word ‘slippage’), the concerns are the ‘predicates’, the ‘content’. In the second paragraph however, and perhaps this is a product of the oscillation about *having* or *being* a history, if thinking *itself* is historied, then it also concerns the *form*, rather than the individual predicates. What ‘predication’ *is* would be subject to change. And this is a whole different level to what Margolis has been speaking about.

This other level would in fact be what Heidegger means by his ‘history of Being,’ and what Iain Thomson terms *ontological historicity*.⁵⁷ In this case, it is a matter of our sense of the ‘real’ being what changes; not changes to things we find *in* history, but changes in how we *see* things *as* historical. As Heidegger writes in his Nietzsche lectures, ‘what one takes to be “the real” is something that comes to be only on the basis of the essential history of Being itself.’⁵⁸ Indeed, when it comes specifically to history, for Derrida, it will be this latter, ontological historicity that will concern us.

‘History’ in Derrida: situating the argument

Although I have claimed a certain timeliness for this thesis by relating it to the defining features of continental philosophy, in the last instance the justification of this study rests upon the extent to which it brings to the surface the status of the *historical* in one of the foundational

⁵⁶ Margolis, ‘Historicity and the Politics of Predication,’ 87.

⁵⁷ Iain Thomson ‘Ontotheology’, in *Interpreting Heidegger*, edited by Daniel O. Dahlstrom, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 106-131; see too, Iain Thomson, ‘Ontotheology? Understanding Heidegger’s Destruction of Metaphysics,’ *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 8, no. 3 (2001).

⁵⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, ed. David Farrell Krell, trans. F.A. Capuzzi, vol. 4 (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982), 232.

texts in Derrida's corpus. Thus the argument is designed firstly to contribute to the scholarly work on *Of Grammatology*, which, despite the staggering popularity of Derrida in English-speaking universities, is surprisingly sparse. The second phase of the thesis, which threshes the 'grammatological' history against several strands of contemporary philosophy of history, is introduced not only in the desire to invigorate this area, but also to provide a serious, exegetical engagement with Derrida where there has been virtually none. This second phase is also introduced with the view that if Derrida is to seriously contribute to a revitalised concept of history, then what is needed is a close engagement with some of the uses of that concept.

In presenting my argument in this way, it coincides with the fact that, as Ethan Kleinberg has argued in the language of *Specters of Marx*, Derrida has only ever haunted historiography.⁵⁹ Various historiographers have indeed attempted to bring Derrida into historical disciplines, with more or less success. But precisely because of the kind of level distinctions which we have been discussing above, many attempts are frustrated. The sub-discipline known as 'intellectual history' has, (and this is a focus in chapter 5), enjoyed a privilege in this respect, especially with the work of Dominick LaCapra. There are some 'natural' reasons for this: Derrida is an 'object' encountered 'in the field' for intellectual historians of Europe, and, on a different level, intellectual history bears some marked similarities to Derrida's works. But the coincidence of several interest points in fact leads often to confusion when the appropriate distinctions are not maintained.

There also exists a class of literature in history undergraduate primers, of which the quality varies greatly. Almost all feel compelled to include some mention of Derrida, often under the general heading of 'post-structuralism', confusing generational proximity with philosophical solidarity, and theoretical anteriority with historical succession. Primers in historiography, setting out to reveal the theory of historical concepts, often default into a successive history of

⁵⁹ Ethan Kleinberg, 'Haunting History: Deconstruction and the Spirit of Revision,' *History and Theory* 46, no. Theme Issue: Revision in History (2007).

historiographic movements, presuming what they should be explaining. The historian, even when wearing their theoretical hat, often finds it hard to not write a history. Although I have occasionally consulted these books, they have not been my focus.

Nonetheless, there is, indeed, some excellent scholarship on the question of history and Derrida (and also one or two on the entirely different but intriguing question of Derrida's own history), which we have drawn support from and it is appropriate to indicate that here. Joshua Kates' *Essential History* has been a recent and extended attempt to come to grips with Derrida's complex continuation and divergence from Husserlian phenomenology.⁶⁰ As readers of Derrida's *Introduction* to Husserl's 'Origin of Geometry' will know, these issues converge around the theme of a transcendental historicity.⁶¹ As much as this is an interesting and profitable thread to follow, my concentration on *Of Grammatology* leads me rather to focus on the long essay on Rousseau's *Essai sur l'origine des langues*. Like the *Introduction* with Husserl, the second part of the book takes a small essay on the fringe of Rousseau's major bodies of work, and tracking its continuity with its author's oeuvre, it exhaustively comments on it, almost line by line. In both cases, the theory of history implicit in each takes *centre stage*.

Kates' 'final' intention in *Essential History* is to understand some of the strange *historical* language that occurs in the opening of the *Grammatology*.⁶² He construes Derrida's argument as a movement *away from history*. Kates writes that the *Grammatology* first uses Heidegger's epochal talk of being, only to move away from it to speak about *language*. 'Derrida intends to shift the force of the ontico-ontological difference, or something like it, away from history, empirical history (and thus away from historicism), and towards a thematics closer to language

⁶⁰ Kates, *Essential History*.

⁶¹ 'Would not, then, [Husserl's] original merit be to have described, in a properly *transcendental* step ... the conditions of possibility for history which were at the same time *concrete*? Concrete, because they are experienced under the form of *horizon*,' Jacques Derrida, *Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry, An Introduction*, trans. John P. Leavey (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 117.

⁶² 'What I seek to ascertain: precisely what such talk of epochs and ages represents for Derrida,' Kates, *Essential History*, 162.

... one far less obviously historical than it.’⁶³ While the first part of his argument agrees with Derrida’s own representation seen earlier in *Specters of Marx*, the second part is, I think, mistaken. Kates is constantly forced to defer his study, or pursue his themes elsewhere, because he is unwilling to deal with the whole of the *Grammatology*, in the same way that some readers prefer to stick to *Division I* of *Being and Time*. History becomes the name of a mystery that is apparently ‘unplumbed.’⁶⁴ Towards the end of his book, the question of the status of the Rousseau essay is raised. It directly concerns our argument in this thesis:

One possible way to investigate this question [of Derrida’s ‘relation to history in its positivity’], of course, leads through Derrida’s discussion of Rousseau in the second half of *Of Grammatology*. Derrida’s treatment of Rousseau ... clearly has Derrida’s stance toward history and historicity as one of its features. Following out the second half of *Of Grammatology* would take too long, however, and would take me too far away from the authors I have treated so far (if not my actual themes). Moreover, as has been repeatedly noted elsewhere in the literature, Derrida’s work on Rousseau, and indeed all *Of Grammatology*, is marked by a distancing from the term ‘history’—a sort of withdrawal or disappearance of this concept—which makes it difficult within the confines of *Of Grammatology* itself to satisfactorily articulate where Derrida stands in this regard. Derrida may talk at the outset ... of history and epochs; nearly from the first, however, such broad accompanying caveats as Derrida’s ‘history, if there is any’ are to be found—and these marks of reserve or even scepticism only seem to grow as *Of Grammatology* continues.⁶⁵

This lengthy quote poses the problems quite precisely for us. We have already recognised the ‘distancing’ from history above, (in the quotation from Geoff Bennington), and the reasons behind it will occupy us in Chapter 3. It certainly is a case of the relationship to Heidegger, and Kates’ avoidance of the Rousseau essay, (which takes up a great deal more than half of the *Grammatology*), is decisive in him not being able to understand where Derrida ends up. Kates leaps to a conclusion based on the ‘distancing’ comments, but these are in fact a level

⁶³ Ibid., 167.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 282 n.10.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 198. My emphases.

distinction that Derrida is putting in place., Such distinctions are deployed on the basis of a minutely developed *theory of history* that is the entire focus of *Part II* of the *Grammatology*.

Kates provides no indication of the literature he says concerns itself with this distancing, although presumably he has in mind some of the relatively few works that do discuss historicity in *Writing and Difference* and the *Grammatology*. Significant for my work here has been Geoffrey Bennington, whom we discussed briefly above, and especially his essay 'Deconstruction and the philosophers: the very idea.'⁶⁶ The footnotes of this excellent essay are in fact a close study of the *Grammatology*, and Bennington is very aware that Rousseau is the place to look on history. Marian Hobson's *Opening Lines* also includes an astonishing account of history in it, all the more astonishing for the fact that, when Edward Baring generously shared his notes on Derrida's 1964 seminar on *l'histoire et la vérité* with me, it turns out that Hobson had anticipated its movement almost exactly.⁶⁷ A recently published commentary on *Of Grammatology* is frustrating, for although collecting many insightful pieces from many authors, its fragmented approach means that any understanding of the whole is put out of play almost immediately.⁶⁸

What I am calling the 'Rousseau essay' was, famously, the occasion for Paul de Man's essay 'The Rhetoric of Blindness.' There is some indication that, with the perception of two 'heavy-weights' hitting out over Rousseau, other scholars have been scared off. This is to be lamented. Robert Bernasconi braved the field, and produced one of the best essays available on the

⁶⁶ Ch.1 in Bennington, *Legislations: the politics of deconstruction*. This essay in fact contains many of the arguments that will form the 'entries' in Bennington's 'Derridabase'.

⁶⁷ Marian Hobson, *Jacques Derrida: Opening lines* (London: Routledge, 1998). See also Hobson's contribution to Attridge, Bennington, and Young, *Post-structuralism and the question of history*, (ch.5) and her 'Deconstruction, empiricism and the postal services,' *French Studies* XXXVI, no. 3 (1982). Edward Baring is the author of excellent historical study, *The Young Derrida and French Philosophy* (2011).

⁶⁸ Sean Gaston and Ian Maclachlan, *Reading Derrida's Of Grammatology* (London and New York: Continuum, 2011).

Rousseau parts.⁶⁹ Rodolphe Gasché, as always, is very dependable (though see Bennington's criticisms precisely concerning history).⁷⁰

Reading *Of Grammatology* has, in my case, moved me strategically toward Rousseau, and how Rousseau functions as a mediator for a curious but also insistent dialogue with Heidegger. The fact that what I call the Rousseau essay itself has received very little scholarship only confirmed my interest. Rousseau's own very interesting position with regard to history confirmed what I felt must have been a part of Derrida's own motivation in looking to Rousseau.

This study first aims to recuperate the thinking of history in Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, and second, to bring it into dialogue with characteristic elements of the theory of historiography. In addition to the fact that I do indeed see a promising thought about history in Derrida's work that is worth recalling, I am also putting into practice the position that assumes a dialogue between philosophy and the sciences is fruitful for both of the parties involved. What is interesting with respect to historiography is that it is usually one of the last 'sciences' picked to be on anybody's team.

Structure of the thesis

In the second chapter of this thesis, we now begin to construct the argument for placing 'history' and 'historicity' at the centre of Derrida's *Of Grammatology*. That text deals, as its peculiar title seeks to intimate, with a theory of 'writing' that is generalised in such a way that *writing* is developed into a new collection of metaphors not only for our ways of being, but also for describing the fundamentally *historical* nature of that being. It therefore has a very definite

⁶⁹ Robert Bernasconi, 'No more stories, good or bad: de Man's criticisms of Derrida on Rousseau,' in *Derrida: A Critical Reader*, ed. David Wood (Cambridge: Blackwell 1992).

⁷⁰ Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection*. Gasché's book is discussed in Bennington's 'Deconstruction and the philosophers.'

relationship to Heidegger's work generally, and especially the project of the destruction of the history of ontology. Here we will unpack some of the historical elements of Heidegger's thinking, and compare them to Derrida's, in order to situate what is new in Derrida's work. Looking back on the '50s and '60s, as Derrida's comments in *Specters of Marx* indicated, it is precisely concerning *history* that Derrida sought to think through Heidegger and distinguishing himself from him. This critical appropriation, which is at once both a 'repetition' and a 'distancing' of Heidegger also brings us into the orbit of structuralist linguistics, and, notably, the anthropology of Claude Lévi-Strauss. These two points of reference, Heidegger and the great anthropologist, one of the true 'giants' of French postwar thought, form ideal entry points into the *Grammatology*. Entry points designed to frame our new interpretation of that book, and Derrida's thought, *as* historical. The anthropological level at issue with Heidegger and Lévi-Strauss will be decisive for the substantive and *positive* thinking of history that I argue that Derrida intends to develop.

Now, I note here that the reader might expect that the question of history and Derrida will go on to confront Derrida's relation to Marxism, and especially Althusser's theory of history. On the other hand, one could legitimately expect to approach the historical question from a psychoanalytic point of view, as well.⁷¹ Now, a *historical* approach intent on restoring the context of Derrida's writings would certainly provide this.⁷² However, I present neither of these two approaches here, for two reasons. Firstly, for internal reasons. I do not think Derrida means his interpretation of history, in principle, to be interpreted this way. He seems to go out of his way to avoid a Marxist or psycho-analytic reading, even if he does recognise their possibility.

⁷¹ Gayatri Spivak frames both approaches. See her Introduction to *Of Grammatology*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997 [1976]), lxxxi-ii. For her Marx, see 'Speculations on Reading Marx: After Reading Derrida.' In *Post-Structuralism and the Question of History*, eds. Bennington, Attridge, and Young, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 30-62. See also, of course, Michael Ryan *Marxism and Deconstruction: A Critical Articulation*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982).

⁷² As Edward Baring does in *The Young Derrida*, chs.6 and 8. Indeed, Derrida's uneasy relation to Marxism is a structuring principle for Baring's book.

Secondly, and for external reasons; the constraints of space and time, along with my sense of the shape of current historiography. These references, therefore, remain as future work for me.⁷³

Returning, then, to Heidegger and Lévi-Strauss, to being and anthropology, a history of being and a history of writing, we are prepared for the main demonstration of this thesis: the systematic interpretation of the 300 page ‘Rousseau essay’ that is *Part II* of *De la Grammatologie*.⁷⁴ This essay has been ignored, and this overlooking has had fundamental effects for how we see Derrida’s work. Thus my interpretation seeks to not only intervene in a critical discussion of ‘history’, arguing for Derrida’s unique contribution to it, but also in the overall interpretation of Derrida. In my understanding of the *Grammatology*, several prominent features of the first part on writing and Saussure’s linguistics are almost impossible to understand without knowledge of the book’s latter parts. Key among these features are precisely the historical language of the history of metaphysics, the slow historical drift from speech to writing, as well as some of the details of the argument with Saussure.

In chapter 3 therefore, I propose an interpretation of Derrida’s interpretation of Rousseau (it should be recalled that the Lévi-Strauss chapter is a prelude to this focus on Rousseau). In order to not get bogged down in interpreting interpretations, I treat this enormous investigation, as we shall see, *schematically*. I mean this literally, for Derrida’s argument concerns a certain type of diagram (in French, *schéma*). Thus, I want to map the movements and levels, the principles and manner of proceeding. Nearly every scholarly piece on this part of the *Grammatology* speaks of how it is structured in a wandering, circumlocutory way. This is usually followed by some kind of disclaimer about not trying to describe it. But *it can be* described, and this is precisely what I have tried to do. The ‘wandering’ appearance is just that, an appearance, which is a calculated

⁷³ Derrida’s archives open up many possibilities, which Baring’s book capitalises on. Samuel Solomon has also recently published an essay based on some of Derrida’s unpublished seminars addressing Althusser’s work. See Solomon, Samuel. ‘L’espacement De La Lecture: Althusser, Derrida, and the Theory of Reading.’ *Décalages* 1, no. 2 (2012): 1-25.

⁷⁴ 300 pages, that is, in the French edition. Derrida, *De la Grammatologie* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1967). English translation by G. C. Spivak, *Of Grammatology*, (see n.71 above). From here onwards, I shall give references to the French edition, with page numbers given first for the French pagination, and then to Spivak’s translation following a forward slash [/].

element in the argument, and its itinerary *can be* explained. Reference here to Derrida's frequent appeals to 'I don't know where I'm headed' is, in the context of scholarly commentary, in bad faith. How does Derrida himself read? He graphs the movements of a text. He distinguishes between levels, even to the point of subterranean continuities of which the author is apparently unaware. If this is 'deconstruction', then it is not unique to Derrida, for it is simply scholarly reading practice. I would rather *not* call it deconstruction, for this perhaps promotes a mystifying attitude to his readings. Eccentric his scholarship most certainly is, but as scholarship, it is nonetheless of the highest, (and in some ways, very classical) order.

So, the Rousseau essay is, I argue, structured around the mapping of Rousseau's concepts of *nature*, *history* and finally, of the *history of writing*. We must not only understand the role of the 'supplement' in the book, but also a curious feature, a Rousseauian *schema* or what is called an 'impossible diagram' that is repeatedly described. In mapping these concepts, Derrida gradually builds a new, positive conceptual network around the idea of history. In doing so, the negative moment of Derrida's highly specific *dialectic* will also be incorporated into this *production*, (which thus also refers back to the 'machine' we began with). Implicit throughout Derrida's interpretation of Rousseau is both Derrida's dialogue with Heidegger (Rousseau's 'Nature' being comparable to Heidegger's 'Being'), as well as Derrida's reading of Hegel's semiology. This strange three-way dialogue, or what Derrida calls the 'impossible diagram' is, I suggest, something like the 'engine room' for Derrida's work. These elements are ones to which he repeatedly returns to develop various threads, suggestions, questions and deferrals in later texts. While I do not pretend to be able to make good on this claim by bringing in later texts to the discussion, I hope that the reader of Derrida will see the basis of it, and this is my justification for the length of the third chapter.

Following my own suggestions for the way in which I think Derrida's work *works*, I use the remaining chapters to return to the diagram and develop more of its elements *in the interests of* theories of historiography and historicity. For as a concrete working out of a concept of history

which simultaneously attempts to apply its consequences to its own writing, there *must* be points at which this new theory of history connects with historiography. If the ‘diagram’ is a competing vision of historicity *à la* Heidegger, then, even if for Derrida historiography is not the *good example*, it must still somewhere touch and concern itself with historiography.

But historiography itself is not a passive theoretical body. It has its own movements, and, indeed, there already exists a ‘reception’ of Derrida within it. I seek to contribute to it. In selecting several touch-points, I have let myself be guided by a *historical study* of the recent history of historiographical theory. Across an incredibly diverse body (for history just *is* diversity and dispersion), I have selected three paradigmatic episodes that, on my account, are promising dialogue partners with my interpretation of Derrida’s theory of history. These three ‘episodes’, which correspond to the *topoi* of ‘narrative’, ‘history of ideas’, and ‘gender’, are my selection of what is most distinctive and pivotal in the history I have reviewed. They are strategic, and not designed to be comprehensive. Nevertheless, they do represent main theoretical themes of the time period in which I am interested: roughly from the late ‘60s to the early ‘90s, the period in which historiography, at least in the American context, came of age. It also happens to correspond to the beginnings and changing fortunes of Derrida’s reception in America.

The first topic taken is that of narrative. I analyse the challenge of Hayden White’s *Metahistory*, and seek to delve deeper in order to substantiate what I feel is an intention of *Metahistory* that it does not quite succeed in: describing the *ontological* structure that provides for the elaborate poetics that Hayden White finds in the great historians and philosophers of history. I do this by following the work of David Carr—who is usually portrayed (even by Carr himself) as taking an opposite stand to White’s position. But the elegant and beautifully lucid phenomenology of narrative that Carr provides is really a chance to connect the temporal and historical dynamics of the ‘diagram’ in Derrida with the poetic dynamics of historiography. Carr, a classical phenomenologist, had like Danto been a Fulbright scholar, working with Ricoeur, and alongside

Derrida at the Sorbonne. In picking up Derrida and White's work, it is *not*, I underline, a case of playing literary games with history. At the level of which we are speaking there is no nonmetaphorical language to oppose to metaphors.⁷⁵

If Hayden White was felt by many to be the history profession's version of Derrida, the historian to most obviously apply Derrida's work in historiography was Dominick LaCapra. In two important articles in *History and Theory*, LaCapra had established himself not only as a historical theorist, but was also the first to undertake the project of introducing Derrida to historians.⁷⁶ The second of the two articles, a manifesto of sorts, established Derrida as a model for a new kind of intellectual history. LaCapra, who had spent time in France in the 60's doing graduate research, was for a long time the poster-boy for deconstruction in history.⁷⁷ The *fact* that some intellectual historians of Europe recognised in Derrida a 'historian of ideas', albeit an unusual one, is a recognition of the philosophical form of his work. Derrida is institutionally and conceptually a thinker who tries to think the way philosophy, and indeed, our thinking and our being itself, take place as and in a history. What is called 'deconstruction' accordingly takes on the form of a history of ideas in several important ways. This provides an occasion to consider the role and typical form that the *philosophical* justification of historiography usually takes. Within the context of the American university landscape, the question of the philosophical unity of the disciplines called 'history' is *easily confused* with the *history* of the discipline and of the idea of history. The two are very separate and distinct things. Interrelated, but separate. But the confusion is characteristic of a large portion of historical theory, and Derrida can help us be clear on the relationship of the two.

⁷⁵ See *De la Grammatologie*, 98-9/67.

⁷⁶ See respectively Dominic LaCapra, 'Habermas and the grounding of critical theory,' *History and Theory* 16, no. 3 (1977); 'Rethinking intellectual history and reading texts,' *History and Theory* 19, no. 3 (1980). Both reprinted, with further additions, in Dominick LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, contexts, language* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983).

⁷⁷ But see LaCapra's retrospection on this, *History and its Limits: Human, animal, violence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 210. LaCapra, from the early '90s, begins to distance himself from deconstruction.

In my final chapter I turn to probably the largest and most profound change and episode within the historical discipline: the massive rectification that has taken place with the growth of women's history, the politics of feminism, and the huge theoretical *fecundity* that has accompanied these. Insofar as it is *philosophical*, feminist historiography is also revisionary, radical, and it fundamentally rearranges the discipline of history. Here, I examine the decisive contribution of Joan W. Scott to historiography and the study of gender. It is an occasion to see productive historical work that has grown, in part, out of an engagement with Derrida's thought. But it is also an occasion for witnessing the importance of philosophical acumen in writing history. It goes directly to the way in which a historical study is framed, and so, here, I develop further the relation between the historical and the philosophical that has been emerging through these three studies.

Philosophy and history, like in all of Derrida's other relations, (the sensible and the ideal, the empirical and the transcendental, the personal and the philosophical), is a relation of contamination. But despite the apparent negativity of this word, this is in fact, for Derrida, a condition for positive work. It is, too, another of the aspects of the 'impossible diagram'. For ultimately, in my view, Derrida is trying to free history, so that it is free to be told in many different ways. This result implies for us here that history as a discipline will always be a heterogenous collection of pursuits that will infiltrate, and be infiltrated by, all of the other disciplines. In what sense then, we ask, is it a united discipline?

There is a persistent metaphor for history as a discipline that gets repeated around about. It goes like this: such and such a theoretical revolution *should have* revolutionised the way history is done, taught, written. But *instead*, another office was added at the end of the corridor. Whether it is social history or women's history, ethnohistory, or some other combination, what should have gone to the very source and affected everyone is instead discovered to be a minor addition. And things go on, as before. I'm not sure where it originated, Joan Scott, Dominick LaCapra,

and Kerwin Klein all employ it. It seems to me to at least be implied by Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*.

This situation in fact suggests precisely the movement of the *supplement* in the *Grammatology*. The supplement, which is at the origin, is only explicitly conceived as an addition or a subtraction from an already existent whole. Derrida does indeed frame it as a principle of historical movement, as I shall demonstrate. The rehabilitation of writing that he performs, is a bit like a *subaltern* history. Writing is the subaltern of speech, and so on. But once we realise that supplementarity *is history*, then the supplements begin to proliferate all over the place, and in all sorts of forms. To put it another way, if we know that history is the science of ghosts, (*geisteswissenschaften*, Michelet taught us that), then we begin to see ghosts everywhere. A bit like Haley Joel Osmont in the film *The Sixth Sense*, whispering *I see dead people*. In any case, the point is the proliferation cannot be constrained, and can certainly not be limited to a single academic department.

A note on translations and terminology

In concluding this introduction, a word or two is needed about translations and terminology. I have endeavoured to provide my own translations of *De la Grammatologie*. Not because I think that they are expert—they are not, but in many of the passages that are critical for my interpretation of this book, Gayatri Spivak (to whom I am indebted, I could not have read the whole book in French), has minimised or obscured aspects of the French that lead me to interpret the *Grammatology* as an essay in the philosophy of history. I give page references to both editions (French/English). Where possible, I give page numbers to the original English editions of other works, rather than the newer versions.

I have also changed the Macquarie and Robinson translation of *Historie* and *Geschichtlichkeit* in Heidegger's *Being and Time* to be more in line with the usage of philosophers and historians today. *Historiography* and *historicity* are used respectively, (where Macquarie and Robinson use *historiology* and *historicality*).

2. Approaching 'history' in Derrida via Heidegger and Lévi-Strauss

Unhappy he who claims to be his own contemporary.

Geoffrey Bennington¹

Equivocations: between philosophy and history

What does ‘history’ mean in Derrida’s works? We have decided to approach this question through *De la Grammatologie*, not because it is the *beginning* or because it contains the *whole* (or does it?), but because it seems to us that in that text, in *the text*, a thought of history is systematically developed. Our hypothesis is that Derrida produces a systematic thinking that aims to be historical through and through. But paradoxically, it would seem, this culminates in statements that seem to deny, or to note dissatisfaction with the concept of history. Derrida says as much in the *avertissement* to *Of Grammatology*: ‘this reading escapes, at least by its axis, the classical categories of history.’² If it escapes, history requires outlining in some way. We shall seek to trace this outline.

My chapter title indicates that one way this thought of history can be approached is through what is said there about Martin Heidegger and Claude Lévi-Strauss. In chapter 3, we will look at history in more depth through what is said of Rousseau. But already, with the first two, Heidegger and Lévi-Strauss, we have perhaps already settled upon a meaning of history and chosen a historical approach. Who are these first two? Are they *predecessors* or *contemporaries*? Does Derrida engage them in

¹ Geoffrey Bennington, *Jacques Derrida*, 8.

² Jacques Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 7/lxxxix. The *avertissement* is titled ‘Preface’ in the English translation.

dialogue, are they masters? And in any case, do we know who Derrida is before his relationship to these two, (and a few others)? These are the very difficulties we wish to examine in this thesis. Not only are these questions germane to the question of how to read Derrida, but also to the kinds of arguments one generally often meets in 'Continental' philosophy.

Now, we cannot serenely presuppose a 'historical setting' for Derrida if this is what he puts in question ('the reading *escapes*'). History has, from the beginning, been thematically highlighted, and must therefore be treated with care. On the other hand, however, it is difficult to see how we could do without supposing a historical setting. We approach his text knowing more or less about the man, his philosophical and historical 'context', works or themes, and so on. Among these, and whatever else Derrida may be, he is *at least* a reader of Heidegger and Lévi-Strauss. These are reference points, entries in an 'index' for the text we will study. They are named there. Thus in some sense they do at least *precede* or *coincide* with him. But in what manner, we shall have to determine.

This book, the *Grammatology*, perhaps more than any other has had such a dramatic effect on Derrida's reception in the United States. The provocative thesis that there is nothing outside of the text has been contentious for many disciplines, including both philosophers and many historians. Historians, just as much as philosophers, prize clarity, and for their part are concerned about being clear on *what really happened*. If many historians and philosophers have equally thought that Derrida violated a principle of clarity, the thesis about the text found in *Of Grammatology* (but so often taken out of context) seemed to push the events of the past beyond the historian's grasp. On the face of it, it was for many historians a direct challenge to foundational premises of their discipline. But no straight-forward and exegetical attempt by a theorist of history to work out what Derrida meant by 'text' and its implications for 'history', or 'the past', was forthcoming. Deconstruction only ever 'haunted' history.³

³ Ethan Kleinberg, 'Haunting History'.

Philosophers, on the other hand, have of course been readily involved in commentary and argument about Derrida's work. This is only natural given it is Derrida's disciplinary home. And yet in surveying the literature there seems to be surprisingly little exegesis of this foundational text in Derrida's *oeuvre*. And what is more, far more effort has been dedicated to its first part, rather than its second. Nor has there been much attempt to systematically elucidate the many references to history that occur in Derrida's texts, and in particular in the three books he published in 1967. Some recent publications are however beginning to fill this gap, and we hope to contribute to this movement. Here, in *Part I* of our thesis, we attempt systematically to account for the way that 'history' functions in *Of Grammatology*. We contend that its meaning is decisive not only for this text, but also for a full conception of Derrida's larger project.

Our last two paragraphs strike a narrative note. It is written in the past tense, and tells the story of a reception, or a missed reception, of Derrida by historians. But the thesis undertaken here is a philosophical one. Our object, however, is 'history', and so we must be aware of how and when we employ historical figures and processes. I have written the last paragraph in a narrative vein because it seems clear that we only decide upon and define our topic through a *historical* strategy and I wish to make something of that known. That is, in deciding upon research, the researcher responds to a certain past concerning such research. This is the pragmatics of deciding upon a research topic that would be 'current', 'relevant', and 'original'. Of course, this needn't be taken too seriously. We act on hunches, follow our noses a little. All too often, a research path proves out to be misleading (but for whom?) What seemed to offer such a bright future splutters out and we go off searching elsewhere. A converse possibility exists, too, of what was first deemed unpromising and later revealed to be extraordinary. As we will see, the unity of this kind of discourse over a career—for example, Heidegger's—will be one kind of 'history' that Derrida tackles. Nonetheless, it is important to remark on the historical narrative that we are inserting our thesis into. There is a vibrant *philosophical* current in historiography, contributed to by both philosophers thinking about history, and historians reflecting on their own practice. We will introduce a critical study of Derrida's thinking of history into this field. One of the crucial contexts for our discussion will therefore be this field, as represented by the journal

History and Theory. A picture of this, and Derrida's position within it already, will slowly emerge in *Part II* of this thesis. For now, our attention is on the tension between the present and past tense, the tenses, respectively, of philosophy and history.

The first step to make in reading Derrida is to give ourselves up to his text and see what happens there. Thus, despite our ambition to relate Derrida to the *philosophy of history*, we must first *read Derrida*. There are, then, two starting points which are, first, one that approaches Derrida, knowing something of history, and curious about what Derrida says on the subject; second, one starts with Derrida, and begins to ask a question about a theme within it, for example history. We are giving the latter the priority. This priority raises a question about reading Derrida's text, not simply before or outside of it. Do we read the *Grammatology* as being 'stuck' in 1967, (and so in the past tense), in which case Heidegger and Lévi-Strauss would certainly be Derrida's *predecessors* and possible *contemporaries*, or do we read it here and now, in the present tense, present for us. How do we relate to its 'today'? Like *Being and Time*, and indeed, every great book of modern philosophy, the *Grammatology* has its own *today*, its *aujourd'hui* that it announces.⁴ We shall propose to take the today of the *Grammatology* as *our* today. The priority of letting the system of Derrida's work determine the way in which it is read suggests that the reader place him or herself within the book's compass, its own present, before seeking to meet other concerns.

History and historicism

Derrida first defines his interest in history by contrasting it with historicism. 'Historicism' is a difficult concept for it is applied as a name in different ways; sometimes as a translation of German terms (*Historismus*), sometimes as a description of simply what historians *do* (that is, they

⁴ See, for example, Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 13, 16/4, 7. (Twice on p.16/7) Cf. 'Mais jamais autant qu'aujourd'hui' on p.15/6, translated as 'at present' by Spivak. 'Today' also plays a conspicuous role in the opening of 'Violence and Metaphysics', *Writing and Difference*, 79-84.

historicise), and sometimes as a *historical relativism*. Often it is these latter two that are implied simultaneously. In this latter case, it is the position that, observing the variety present in human societies over the course of their development, posits this variety as definitive for any attempt to reach an understanding of a given society. Everything historical can *only* be understood in the terms that are peculiar to its historical existence, up to and including the products and achievements of science. Now, of course, there is much room for nuance here, and many questions immediately leap out, but what it suffices for us to note here is that it is a particularly unsatisfying doctrine with respect to the achievements and unity of purpose that is found in sciences. It is in this last instance especially that it raises the ire of phenomenologists, and those who have drawn from this tradition. In Raymond Aron's words, and continuing Husserl's riposte, he writes: 'historicism, a mixture of scepticism and irrationalism, is not so much a philosophy as it is the substitute for a philosophy which is lacking.'⁵ Historicism in this sense projects true historical differences to a metaphysical principle, because all other principles are considered undesirable. It does not, however, have the resources to explain its own workings. For the fact of historical intelligibility must be justified externally to that which the histories themselves describe, as it is intelligible precisely from an external point of view. Which is to say: that historical understanding does not rest on reasons that are themselves simply historical *in the same way* as the objects that history studies. This was, of course, a great theme for Husserl and Heidegger, for whom *historicity* is that which is to be maintained, and always distinguished against historicism.⁶ Derrida likewise cannot accept a historical relativism. These three philosophers in no fashion want to *deny* history. Rather, history is a challenge for thought for these three philosophers which, in their own ways, each tries to meet. We must not understand the philosophical criticism of historicism to be the criticism of the historian's endeavour. Nobody is denying the rich diversity of life, of civilisations, of times and places, nor of the historical effort to understand them. What requires explanation is how we can even begin to know and understand such diversity, let alone then to produce rigorous disciplines—the human sciences—to explore it.

⁵ Raymond Aron, *Introduction to the Philosophy of History: An essay on the limits of historical objectivity*, trans. George J. Irwin (Boston,: Beacon Press, 1961), 297. Aron is, of course, developing this directly from Husserl's 'Philosophy as Rigorous Science,' In *Husserl: Shorter Works*, edited by McCormick and Elliston, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 166-196.

⁶ On this point, see Ruin, *Enigmatic Origins*, 9-11 and fn. 25.

In the third interview of *Positions*, Derrida is asked about historicism by his interlocutors. The question is about Derrida's propositions concerning history in *Of Grammatology*, and the undercurrent is Derrida's relation to a Marxist historical materialism. Derrida is anxious to be clear in this regard, and in a note to the interview, he adds the comment that 'the critique of historicism in all its forms seems to me indispensable.'

What I first learned about this critique in Husserl ... who, to my knowledge, was the first to formulate it under this heading and from the point of view of theoretical and scientific (especially mathematical) rigor, seems valid to me in its argumentative framework, even if in the last analysis it is based on a historical teleology of truth.⁷

It is on this last element, a historical teleology of truth, that Derrida aims to provide something different, and something new. It is not a case of doing without history, nor even doing without science and truth, as Derrida's note goes on to make clear.⁸ Rather, Derrida would like to free history, to *multiply* its effects—but without dispensing with all of the philosophical rigour which he has inherited from Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger. The stakes are therefore high, and the problem to be resolved quite complicated: to critique historicism without denying history, but also without underpinning it with a teleology of truth.

In that same interview, Derrida explicitly refers his 'new logic of repetition and the trace' to history, adding the comment that 'it is difficult to see how there could be history without it.'⁹ That is, it is important for Derrida to *preserve* something about history. It is useful for our reader, if they are a historian, to hold on to this thought—that Derrida is in some way seeking to liberate the historical task, assisting the historian by interrogating the conceptual resources that the historian cannot fail to use, and identifying a fundamental problem that he or she cannot fail to encounter.

⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (New York: Continuum, 2004), 84 fn.32.

⁸ 'In no case is it a question of a discourse against truth or against science,' *ibid.* 85.

⁹ Derrida, *Positions*, 50.

Derrida distinguishes between a criticism of the general *concept* of history, and ‘history in general’. Where Derrida says that he would agree with Althusser’s critique of the concept of history, and that there are multiple, different, heterogenous histories, he then passes on to the necessary question of the unity of history, of history in general. ‘On the basis of what minimal semantic kernel will these heterogenous, irreducible histories still be named “histories”?’¹⁰ As we have just seen, Derrida would like to be able to answer this question without appealing to an essence of truth installed on an ontological ground. Indeed, Derrida would like to submit the essence itself to a renovated concept of history. This tells us that even if Derrida might agree with the critique of historicism, he nonetheless registers a profound agreement with the *intention* of the historicist argument. Derrida sides with Husserl on the count of necessary rigour—but nonetheless aims to *historically* displace the metaphysical values of truth and science.¹¹ Already we can sense that the consequences of this for histories of science and philosophy, but also for the *truth* of history, are going to be important. As we will see later, Derrida’s thought *multiplies* history, while inscribing philosophy and truth into a history which they are not capable of divining the limits of. But this should not be interpreted as a ‘victory’ for the discipline of history over philosophy, which is no more capable than philosophy of governing the field that Derrida describes. We should no longer play history off *against* philosophy. This is a price to pay for the liberation of history.

Repetition and destruction

In accordance with the critique of historicism, Derrida writes that the investigations in *Of Grammatology* should *not* be understood as relativist. The risk of relativism, which Derrida simply equates with historicism, raises itself precisely when he uses terminology that could be easily misconstrued to be so: ‘epoch’, ‘closure of an epoch’, ‘historical genealogy.’ Instead, he declares that

¹⁰ Ibid., 51.

¹¹ Ibid., 84 fn.32.

this terminology must be understood in a *new* way.¹² So, we see that Derrida is expressly setting out to provide a new historical terminology in the pages of *Of Grammatology*, which is expressly separated from a historicism.

Now, from the start of the book, in the 'Exergue', Heidegger's history of metaphysics has been invoked and emphasised, only to also be extended to swallow Heidegger himself:

The history of metaphysics which, in spite of all the differences and not only from Plato to Hegel (even including Leibniz) but also, outside of these seeming limits, from the Pre-Socratics to Heidegger, has always assigned the origin of truth in general to the logos: the history of truth, of the truth of truth, has always been ... the humiliation of writing and its repression outside 'full' speech.¹³

We recognise here the concern with history and its relation to truth, which we saw above. Derrida's radical intentions are signalled when he includes Heidegger and the Pre-Socratics in the history of metaphysics that Heidegger himself had delineated. Derrida indicates the difficult depth at which he poses this new genealogy, and a particular contorsion involved in that depth: A history of a repeated humiliation meted out to 'writing', which ostensibly appears to be a just one element in the history of human technical development, but one which will somehow account for even the history of the functioning of *truth*.

Derrida continues to provide clues to a dialogue with Heidegger at the beginning of the second section of chapter 1. Derrida writes that 'the destruction, not the demolition but the de-sedimentation, the de-construction of all the significations which have their source in the logos' has been begun. Confirming the emphasis on truth above, Derrida adds, 'particularly the emphasis on truth.'¹⁴ The sentence repeats the gesture of the exergue. Heidegger is invoked ('destruction'), but also distanced, ('logos').

¹² See *De la Grammatologie*, 26/14. Cf. 11/3, 'raisons énigmatiques mais essentielles et inaccessibles à un simple relativisme historique.' See also 26/14 where 'we must remove [these historical terms] from *all* relativism.'

¹³ Ibid., 11/3.

¹⁴ Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 21/10.

Distanced, because Derrida would like to explain the privilege of *logos*, without assuming it. Derrida here implies that Heidegger's phenomenological unveiling is still a party to this privilege, particularly in his emphasis upon truth. This is caught up in the explicit link between phenomenology and the concept of *logos* as a making clear or manifest.¹⁵ Now, if Derrida disavows here a certain interpretation of phenomenology, he nonetheless declares a continuation or repetition of a separate interpretation with 'destruction' and 'desedimentation'. One of the keys to the *Grammatology* is therefore of understanding how this repetition and difference work together.

'Destruction' obviously recalls the historical element of Heidegger's phenomenological method, famously announced in section 6 of *Being and Time*. In our search for the specific historical characteristics in *Of Grammatology*, the glossing of destruction by 'deconstruction' serves to alert us to some of the historical aspects of deconstruction.¹⁶ Deconstruction *poses as something like* Heidegger's destructive retrieval of concepts, indeed, as a kind of translation of it.¹⁷ Now, the way that Derrida approaches this is that not only is it a historical procedure in the sense of *retrieving* something from the past, but also the very act of retrieval is to be understood in a 'historical' way. It is developed and acted out in a complex succession. For in *Of Grammatology*, Derrida takes some trouble to point out the quality of the progressive character of Heidegger's work.¹⁸ He notes the *provisional* status of the analytic of Dasein, and how Heidegger *later* renounces the word and project of ontology. He describes as a 'tour d'écriture' (turn of writing), Heidegger's gesture of crossing out the word 'being'.¹⁹ What the crossing over of the word preserves or indicates, writes Derrida, is a *passage*. Derrida places great weight on this progression of Heidegger's thought, and consequently on his own repetition of the gesture. Derrida too indicates a passage, concerning, precisely, the word 'history'.

¹⁵ See, for example, Heidegger *Being and Time*, 32. Cf. Derrida, *Margins*, 126.

¹⁶ De-sedimentation is firstly a Husserlian reference, though I have chosen to not pursue it here. Derrida's relation to Husserlian de-sedimentation is best seen in Jacques Derrida, *Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry, An Introduction*. We shall treat some aspects of Husserl in ch. 4 along with the phenomenology of David Carr.

¹⁷ See Derrida's account, 'Letter to a Japanese Friend', *Psyche: Inventions of the other*, ed. Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg, vol. I (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 1-6.

¹⁸ See especially *De la Grammatologie*, 33-6/20-22. Cf. *Margins*, 124. Derrida argues that, as concerns the values of proximity and being, the opposition of later to earlier Heidegger is not pertinent.

¹⁹ Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 36-38/22-24. See 'On the question of being,' in Martin Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, Transl. by William McNeil et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 291ff.

For history is offered as Derrida's own *provisional* starting point: the passage indicated in the practice of erasure is, writes Derrida, a condensed and formal indication of 'the entire burden' of Derrida's question, a question he entitles *provisionally* 'historial'.²⁰ Derrida has provided a *genetic* account of Heidegger's work whose genesis focused on the unsettling effects of the repeated question of being. The genetic account itself traces the passage of the history of being in Heidegger's thought, as it is turned away from the historicity of Dasein in *Being and Time*, and away from the vocabulary of ontology. Derrida follows the later Heidegger back over his earlier work (without describing a radical shift), looking at it as a continuous deepening through the repetition of a question.

These are famous paragraphs, dense and elliptical.²¹ Let us emphasise the historical characteristics. Note how the movement of Derrida's text matches Heidegger's: Derrida has a provisional question, a 'historial' one, to match to Heidegger's provisional analytic. We can also match this provisional status to the 'new' status envisioned for terminology surrounding concerning 'historical genealogy' that we quoted above. That is, the movement or passage of Derrida's question, its unfolding, will produce the new meanings required for his terminology. Derrida, it seems, wants to 'catch history red-handed', at work. Now, to be 'provisional' is to be something that asks for further clarification. We can thus expect this clarification to concern the type and status of a 'genealogy' that is akin to Heidegger's destruction. But it will not be identical, for at least the simple reason that Derrida begins with the 'whole' of Heidegger (or at least 'more'), something that Heidegger himself in any one of his texts, can never possess.²² Thus the point of erasure, *tour d'écriture*, that Heidegger reached after many years, becomes in turn a starting point for Derrida. It is a kind of repetition of Heidegger's own repetitious proceeding that plays an organising role in the *Grammatology*, and more widely in Derrida's work, as we will see.

²⁰ Ibid., 38/24.

²¹ That is, the 5 or 6 pages on Heidegger at *De la Grammatologie*, 33-39/19-24.

²² What I am describing here is what is at stake in this formulation of Robert Bernasconi's: Derrida 'borrowed and then transformed a term from *Being and Time*, *Destruktion*, to describe an approach that was in fact both inspired by and a response to the later Heidegger's account of the overcoming of metaphysics that emerged a full decade later,' Bernasconi, 'Heidegger', 122. That is, I think Derrida is anticipating and trying to justify this precise collapse of the periods of Heidegger's thought. See, again, Derrida, *Margins*, 124.

Now, it is an understanding of *repetition* that has dictated the two occasions we have already noted where Derrida first invokes a Heideggerian theme ‘history of metaphysics’, ‘destruction’, and *immediately inscribes* his difference from Heidegger. It also governs the seeming ‘hesitation’ in the brief few pages explicitly on Heidegger when Derrida writes, after describing the *kreuzweise Durchstreichung*, ‘not within but on the horizon of the Heideggerian paths, *and yet in them*.’²³ In fact, it is no hesitation. It is the logic of repetition, and this logic produces the truly *dislocating* effect of both continuation *and* difference, *not within ... and yet in*. We now need to establish the sense of the relation between repetition and history. To do so, let us turn to Heidegger’s destruction.

Destruction and deconstruction

It is clear that in one sense, Derrida *repeats* Heideggerian destruction. Derrida repeats a program of repetition. Does he therefore ‘destroy’ destruction? In the pages where Derrida describes the movement of Heidegger’s texts, Derrida is unconcerned about the parts of *Being and Time* that had not appeared. Indeed, he rather argues that *repetition* is the leitmotif of Heidegger’s work. The clarifying and purifying involved in destruction (‘incessant meditation on that question’),²⁴ and Heidegger’s own consciously employed principle of developing his work, Derrida seems to suggest, implies that rather than taking an abrupt ‘turn’ or somehow failing to produce itself, Heidegger’s work has a consistency ‘early’ to ‘late’.

Being and Time often uses the discipline of history as an example, and indeed begins with it in section 6. This is because Heidegger frames his own question of the meaning of Being as an inescapably historical one and he must therefore ground this element of his question. Dasein ‘is in itself “historical”, so that its ownmost ontological elucidation necessarily becomes an “historiographical” Interpretation.’²⁵ Heidegger connects the possibility of historiography with the more basic

²³ Joshua Kates calls this sentence an ‘uncharacteristic awkwardness or hesitation,’ *Essential History*, 163.

²⁴ Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 35/22.

²⁵ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 39. Cf. pp.20-21.

phenomenon that ‘underlies’ the explicit pursuit of a history. This more basic thing, the existential and ontological basis for historiography, is the way in which Dasein stretches itself out *as* temporal existence. Now within this temporality, historicity for Heidegger in fact emphasises the *future*. Dasein, in facing its temporal existence and especially its future death, then comes back to itself, collects itself, as it were, appropriating the past by choosing it, and *repeating* it in a fashion through this choice, as a way of activating its historical possibilities. It is a future-oriented ‘handing down’, an explicit choosing of inheritance, rather than an ignorant subsistence in tradition. It is precisely from this complex bundle of temporal relations that we are most wholly able to respond to situations before us. This choosing and repeating provides a sense of coherence to our lives as a whole. It is, Heidegger writes, neither an antiquarianism, nor a progress, but ‘a moment of vision’.²⁶

Historiography, then, for Heidegger, implicitly activates this temporal structure and possibility of repetition, even if it doesn’t do so in complete awareness. When Heidegger states that the question of the meaning of being is itself historical, he must frame the possibility of pursuing it as one of the consequences of his interpretation. The historicity of Dasein, which is assumed by any and every historiographical search, must be inquired into in order to set the interpretation off on the appropriate footing. In contrast to Heidegger, Derrida very rarely speaks of historiography (that is, the discipline of history), and does not use it as an example.²⁷ Now, one could read this historically, in terms of the prestige and provocative status that history has in Heidegger’s context, which might therefore suggest itself as a powerful example. And no doubt this is true if Heidegger, on his own terms, has authentically ‘handed down’ each element of his philosophy. But, in Derrida’s context, is *Annales* history no less provocative? Could it not, too, have proved a powerful example? Surely if Derrida’s work is as historical as we are arguing he must have considered it? (We shall see a little later that Derrida in fact chooses *anthropology*.) But in any case, this would be to decide the issue on external factors before even understanding the essential reasons given for taking historiography as exemplary. We suggest, rather, that Derrida does indeed consider historiography.²⁸ But he actively decides that it

²⁶ See *Ibid.*, 375, 385-6, 391.

²⁷ But Cf. ch.8 of Derrida, *Origin of Geometry, an Introduction*, (1989).

²⁸ See, negatively, at *De la Grammatologie*, 43-4/28.

is *not* exemplary because history and historicity, up to and including how they are presented in *Being and Time*, are one of Derrida's precise targets in the *Grammatology*. That is, *Of Grammatology* aims to rework the concept of history.

It is sometimes pointed out that the comments on 'destruction' remain only programmatic in *Being and Time* and refer only to the never-produced second part.²⁹ But this misses the fact that Heidegger's very concept of phenomenology is formally identical with the movement of destruction.³⁰ Heidegger's emphasis is on the phenomenon as something *hidden*, and of *logos* as making manifest the hidden. This agrees with the described movement of the destruction of the history of ontology.

When tradition thus becomes master, it does so in such a way that what it 'transmits' is made so inaccessible, proximally and for the most part, that it rather becomes *concealed*. Tradition takes what has come down to us and delivers it over to self-evidence; it *blocks our access* to those primordial 'sources' from which the categories and concepts handed down to us have been in part quite genuinely drawn ...

If the question of Being is to have its own history made transparent, then this hardened tradition must be loosened up, and the concealments which it has brought about must be dissolved. We understand this task as one in which by taking the question of Being as our clue, we are to destroy the traditional content of ancient ontology until we arrive at those primordial appearances in which we achieved our first ways of determining the nature of being—the ways which have guided us ever since.³¹

Thus the constant meditation on the right access, whether the correct objects have been selected, whether the phenomenon has been truly wrested in an appropriate way. Through repetition of the tradition, likewise, Heidegger cleared the concretions that shut down the possibility of an authentic understanding of the sources of our categories and concepts. Robert Bernasconi points out that

²⁹ See, for example, Bernasconi, "Repetition and Tradition: Heidegger's Destructuring of the Distinction between Essence and Existence in Basic Problems of Phenomenology," in *Reading Heidegger from the Start: Essays in His Earliest Thought*, eds. Theodore Kisiel and John van Buren, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 123.

³⁰ See the description at Heidegger *Being and Time*, 35 cf. 30-31.

³¹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 43.

Heidegger (in the *Basic Concepts of Phenomenology*) refers to destruction as a ‘genealogy.’³² But although, says Bernasconi, he proceeds historically, the point is not to seek out a historical origin. Rather, in an ‘original’ repetition, he gives a radical reinterpretation, designed to activate positively the fullest range of possibilities. Precisely the kind of action Heidegger describes when considering Dasein’s authentic historicity. ‘Liberation is not from tradition but by way of tradition.’³³ It is the handing down, the taking over of a heritage, the anticipatory resoluteness of Dasein.³⁴

Now Derrida explicitly writes on the first page of the exergue that Heidegger is a part of the logocentric tradition of phonetic writing.³⁵ Indeed, Heidegger writes in the introduction to *Being and Time* that ‘fully concrete’ *logos* is *phoné*. Phenomenology is indebted to the voice.³⁶ On the other hand, in the crossing out of ‘being’, Heidegger also provides the thought of *writing*:

Cette rature est la dernière écriture d’une époque. Sous ses traits s’efface en restant lisible la présence d’un signifié transcendantal. S’efface en restant lisible, se détruit en se donnant à voir l’idée même de signe.

This erasure is the last writing of an epoch. Under its traces, still legible, remains the presence of a transcendental signified. Effacing, yet living on, destroying and giving the very idea of the sign.³⁷

Now, what if Derrida’s deconstruction was in fact the repetition of what ‘Heidegger’ has *become* over what he *has been*? That is, with the knowledge of Heidegger’s own history, Derrida himself clarifies Heidegger’s thought by turning it over onto itself. Repetition is a part of Heidegger’s understanding of ‘authentic’ historiography. But in Derrida’s repetition, it is precisely the *authentic* that will be troubled, along with the values of ‘proximity’ to being, and the ‘making clear’ of the phenomenon. In Heidegger’s ‘later’ thought and elsewhere, Derrida has found a more ‘primordial’ trace, something

³² Robert Bernasconi, ‘Repetition and tradition,’ 126-7. Bernasconi also points out that deconstructing is ‘more than genealogy’, p.136. Cf. Thomson, ‘Ontotheology?’ (2001), 307.

³³ Bernasconi, ‘Repetition and tradition,’ 135.

³⁴ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 383.

³⁵ Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 11/3.

³⁶ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 33.

³⁷ Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 39/23. I have disrupted the repetition of *en restant*, but it seems to me that two of the senses possible, ‘remains’, seemingly lifeless, and ‘living on’, are pertinent here. The relation between ‘life’ and the trace will be examined in chapter 2.

that enables the genealogical clarification of Heidegger's own thought. The later thought now appears as 'older' than the earlier, as a primordial possibility that, indeed, destroys the notion of the primordial. An indication of this thesis would be that in the *Grammatology*, the trace is consistently described as *announcing* itself.³⁸ This apparently innocent term in fact inverts Heidegger's concept of phenomenology. Announcing is the character of appearance, and phenomena are *never* appearances.³⁹

From this point of view, then, Heidegger 'destroyed' his own work. In that case, *repetition* is a principle for understanding the development of a corpus, first of all Heidegger's.⁴⁰ Derrida poses the question of this movement in a footnote to 'Ousia and Grammē'. Raising the problem of translating terms that signify something like 'presence', Derrida asks, 'how to transfer into the single word *presence*, both too rich and too poor, the *history* of the Heideggerian text which associates or disjoins these concepts in subtle and regular fashion throughout an itinerary that covers more than forty years?'⁴¹ Derrida is already outlining here a problem of translation and signature for his own future development, but more to the point, he explicitly connects these problems to a history, to history *in* Heidegger, and *of* Heidegger's texts. Later in the same essay, he writes, 'it is not in closing but in interrupting *Being and Time* that Heidegger wonders whether "primordial temporality" leads to the meaning of Being.' It is, for Derrida, 'a question and a suspension'.⁴² This confirms our understanding of the *Of Grammatology* section on Heidegger, that the progression of Heidegger's work displays a *consistent* problematic that thinks suspension and continuity together. Which is to say that for Derrida, the *non-appearance* of *Part II of Being and Time* is in fact the necessary corollary of the continued repetition of Heidegger's question.

Indeed, Geoffrey Bennington has recently suggested that repetition may itself be the key to understanding the relation between Derrida's own texts themselves. Repetition, as we will see in chapter 2, makes for an interrupted teleology:

³⁸ See especially p.69/47.

³⁹ Heidegger *Being and Time*, 29-30.

⁴⁰ Indeed, repetition is even a principle of proceeding *within* the covers of *Being and Time*. 'By repeating the earlier analysis...' Ibid., 332.

⁴¹ Jacques Derrida, 'Ousia and Grammē', *Margins of Philosophy*, 33 fn.6. JD's emphasis.

⁴² Ibid., 64.

Interrupted teleology shows up especially in relation to a perception about the structure of Derrida's work itself, as its 'progress' always involves a kind of looping back or rereading of its own earlier moments, so that ... apparently unobtrusive or perhaps simply ill-read moments in 'early' Derrida can be shown, but only retroactively, *nachträglich*, to open up, through rereading, more obviously thematised later occurrences.⁴³

If we are correct in what we have suggested about Heidegger's text, then this structure of looping back, of going back over, will not be idiosyncratic to only Derrida—though he has helped us to recognise it. Repetition can now be readily seen to be capable of certain 'historical' descriptions, the history of ideas, for example. That is, to sum up, the principle of repetition being applied in the first chapter of the *Grammatology* is a core of the concept of historical passage. Repetition brings with it a past, but also implies a difference to, or passage 'away from' that past. Each repetition confirms and annuls at the same time, even to the point of announcing its own future eclipse. Repetition, as a recovering and redescribing activity, can consolidate or undermine assurances. Incessant repetition can work down 'deeper', like water dripping on a stone, or it can enumerate possibilities through variation. It is not a case of doing the *same* thing over and over, but of each time, repeating in slightly new circumstances, with new possibilities. In this way, the meaning of a repetition is open to the 'whims of the future'.⁴⁴

Bennington's scare quotes about the 'early' also indicate that neat linear progression is a little too simple a picture for what is going on in repetition. A lot of the metaphors we habitually reach for when it is a case of describing a history will not work in quite the same way. But with repetition we are still very much at the beginning. We have not yet, however, strayed far from the Heideggerian path. Let us make our picture of deconstruction a little more specific by looking at the sign.

⁴³ Geoffrey Bennington, *Not Half No End*, xiii.

⁴⁴ The phrase comes from Jack Reynolds, *Merleau-Ponty and Derrida: Intertwining Embodiment and Alterity*, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2004) 37.

Deconstruction and the sign

The historian may be a bit bemused by what we have discussed so far. At least Heidegger *does* present an account of historiography and its derivation from the essential historicity of Dasein.

Derrida, on the other hand, ostensibly has no such account. ‘Repetition’ does not seem adequate to account for all that goes on in historiography, the historian might suggest, and the latter certainly does more than ‘repeat tradition.’ The emphasis given to this aspect might seem either constrained to certain philosophies, or else a little mystifying.

The richness of facts, however, is not contested by Derrida, nor the manifold of historiographical variety. What is being sought by Derrida however, are the ‘conditions’ under which make this richness possible. His work therefore definitely invokes a form of transcendental reasoning (but then goes on to qualify it). Derrida treats this as a necessity. We must treat with the general, says Derrida, and indeed focuses in such a way as to embrace ‘the greatest totality.’⁴⁵ His ambitions are not small. The greatest totality: *all* history. That is, a determination of the minimal ‘elements’ required not only for any one history, for anything to appear *as* a historical object, and therefore, for anything to appear or happen at all. Recall the history machine in the Introduction—what would it take to record ‘the least trace of desire’? The stakes are clearly of the very highest. Along with this extreme generality, however, Derrida is explicitly and repeatedly cautious about *respecting* historical differences. The soul of the metaphysician, with the sensibility of the historian. Let us see how both of these play out in the question of the sign.

Derrida’s question, ‘what is a sign?’ functions in a similar way to Heidegger’s question of being. Like being, the sign dissimulates itself. Like Heidegger, Derrida has hopes that it will reach beyond metaphysics. Just as for Heidegger the history of philosophy was the history of the *forgetting* of being, this same history is for Derrida a history of the ‘metaphysics of phonetic writing,’ which is a history of the *repression* of writing. From the brief ‘Exergue’ of *Of Grammatology*, as we have seen,

⁴⁵ Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 68/46.

we have a thought that openly presents itself as a kind of double of Heidegger's, travelling in *the same area*—while at the same time appearing very different. For now we must emphasise the differences: for example, the invocation of technological developments appears very unHeideggerian.⁴⁶

What we need to ask here is: in what way is the question of the sign a historical question?

Deconstruction is commonly cited as instituting a 'linguistic turn,' which has often been thought to prevent, or shut out history in some way.⁴⁷ The accusation that Derrida does not deal with history is a strange one (or perhaps it is one that reveals its own convictions about a particular *kind* of history, for example, Marxist). For *Of Grammatology* opens precisely with a historical movement that requires interpretation:

Quoi qu'on pense sous ce titre, le *problème du langage* n'a sans doute jamais été un problème parmi d'autres. Mais jamais autant qu'aujourd'hui il n'avait envahi *comme tel* l'horizon mondial des recherches les plus diverses et des discours les plus hétérogènes dans leur intention, leur méthode, leur idéologie.

Whatever one thinks under this title, the *problem of language* has doubtless never been one among others. But never as much as today has it invaded *as such* the global horizon of the most diverse researches and the most heterogeneous discourses in their intention, their method, their ideology.⁴⁸

A seismic shift is occurring, writes Derrida, and its symptoms are displayed all over the world. But beyond the appeal of fashion and loose talk, Derrida penetrates to a precise shift—a move, a transfer, from speech to writing. The following pages cite the diverse arenas in which the shift is visible. In contrast to the Heideggerian similarities that we have noticed thus far, the technological development in the sciences and of recording and electronic memory is prominent—a most unHeideggerian feature.

⁴⁶ Cf. Kates, *Essential History*, 160ff. *Of Grammatology* is a 'moment of perigee in respect to Derrida's and Heidegger's orbits.' The argument about repetition in Derrida that we are mounting would render this thesis one dimensional. For example, if Heidegger repeats himself multiple times, how can he occupy just *one* position in an 'orbit'?

⁴⁷ For a response and analysis of such accusations, see Bennington & Young, 'Introduction: posing the question,' in *Post-structuralism and the Question of History*.

⁴⁸ Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 15/6.

The scale of diversity that Derrida describes helps us locate the kind of ‘history’ he is writing about. It has now moved well beyond history of ideas or science, although these are examples Derrida emphasises. The range even outstrips the diversity of ‘life’, from cellular reproduction to machines, to the point of verging on a ‘universal’ history: in the ‘element’ or ‘arche-synthesis’ of the trace, Derrida writes that ‘all history’ is found there, ‘from what metaphysics has defined as “non-living” up to “consciousness”, passing through all levels of animal organisation.’⁴⁹ This confirms the astonishing range of ambition which we have identified.

In another slight shift of the Heideggerian sense of destruction, Derrida refers to deconstruction as something *happening* and *not* just as his own task to pursue. It is a historical situation, something coming to pass. Derrida points out that the movements of deconstruction are not limited to any one thinker. Rather, the activity has proliferated, ‘no exercise is more widespread today and one should be able to formalise its rules’.⁵⁰ Derrida’s point therefore isn’t to lay claim to being the first person to point out the possibilities of writing for the way we talk about being, but rather to undertake its philosophical analysis. Derrida’s philosophy responds to a precise, and concrete, historical situation. Charles Spinoza highlights this diagnostic aspect of Derrida in a comparison to Heidegger: ‘as Heidegger would say, [Derrida] simply marked (or remarked upon) a shift that was taking place anyway ... We might as well say that a new way of revealing [that is, understanding of being] is happening.’⁵¹ Nonetheless, the formalisation remains unique to Derrida, and thus Derrida becomes identified with it. Derrida ‘hurries into a scheme the slow movements of *historical maturation*.’⁵²

Derrida therefore *takes up* the idea of writing and the sign because it lies about him in a way that he sees is historically significant. A moment of philosophical and historical interpretation—but an interpretation that *intervenes* in that moment, too. The moment is one of *inflation*. Writing has

⁴⁹ Ibid., 69/47.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 39/24.

⁵¹ Charles Spinoza, ‘Derrida and Heidegger: Iterability and Ereignis,’ in *A Companion to Heidegger*, ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall (London: Blackwell, 2005), 489.

⁵² Catherine Malabou, ‘The End of Writing? Grammatology and Plasticity,’ *The European Legacy: Toward New Paradigms* 12, no. 4 (2007): 437. My emphasis. Cf. ‘Derrida thus affirms here that the semantic expansion of the concept of writing has resulted not from some arbitrary decision but *appeared first in the real*.’ Nonetheless “it is *also* an invention, resulting from a productive philosophical imagination,” p.436. My emphasis again.

outgrown its boots—and even the boots of speech. There is a corollary movement to speech—speech seems fractured. The ability to record and reproduce it has threatened the presence that speech always seemed to safeguard.

Tout se passe donc comme si ce qu'on appelle langage n'avait pu être en son origine et en sa fin qu'un moment, un mode essentiel mais déterminé, un phénomène, un aspect, une espèce de l'écriture. Et n'avait réussi à le faire oublier, à donner le change, qu'au cours d'une aventure : comme cette aventure elle-même. Aventure en somme assez courte.

Everything takes place therefore as if what one calls language could have been in its origin and in its end but a moment, an essential but determined mode, a phenomenon, an aspect, a species of writing. And it would have succeeded in making us forget, in throwing us off the scent, *in the course of an adventure: as this adventure itself*. All up a short enough adventure.⁵³

Speech and common writing are a 'species' of a larger or more fundamental type of writing. The revealing of this more fundamental writing itself signifies a specific type of history, an 'adventure'. This historical movement, which manifests itself as a transfer from 'language' to 'writing,' is not chaotic contingency, it has a defined style. It is not a movement of fashion that could easily disappear tomorrow. It concerns and is manifested in the development of sciences and technologies, as well as the results of historical and anthropological research. It has slowly appeared over a few centuries. It is *une longue durée*, and thus evidence for it must be carefully considered on a very broad scale of reference. But such an epoch is not tightly unified: 'It is on that scale that we must reckon it here, being careful not to neglect the quality of a *very heterogenous historical duration*.'⁵⁴ He wants to avoid at all costs simplifying the matter, or presenting the appearance of a neatly sequential train of epochs. He is concerned to respect, in good historical fidelity, the complex rhythm of *la durée historique* that he is addressing. Nonetheless, despite all care, there is also the suggestion that perhaps

⁵³ Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 18. My emphases. I especially want to emphasise the role here of adventure, the qualities of which will become clearer in chapter 3. Spivak's translation, '*It is* therefore as if what we call language...' retains no trace of the 'tout se passe'.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 18/8.

even the orthodox historian may not be capable of such respect, that what is at issue is not a question of competence.

For the ‘adventure’ that has been brought to light by this historical shift is not a straight-forward story. Despite all the necessary attention to facts across numerous domains, the adventure is one that ‘throws us off the scent.’ It is, Derrida suggests, a kind of *ruse* or trick.⁵⁵ Therefore we can suppose that if this history *itself* leads us down the wrong path, then the manner of enquiring into it cannot be the comparatively straight forward way in which a historian usually operates. The question about the sign, will tell us something about history, or more precise, something about the *origin* of history: Derrida begins with the hypothesis not only that it is a change in the history *of* writing, but also in history *as* writing.⁵⁶ This helps us clarify the ‘depth’ he has in mind. The historical ‘situation’ that Derrida approaches through the sign is, he tells us, *absolutely necessary*. It could not have been otherwise. It more goes to the level of how we *see*, than of facts *that* we see.⁵⁷ As soon as the ‘change’ is noticed—it has always been so. It is a history of the *a priori*, a transcendental history, a history of truth.

History cannot be taken for granted, or assumed to be obvious at this point. This is why the question of the sign is so important. It acts as a kind of ‘revealing agent’ for Derrida.⁵⁸ How then does Derrida pose the question of the sign? Because of the priority that he has identified, (or that has been imposed on him), Derrida would like to give to *writing* a definition that makes of it a general concept that occupies a position analogous to ‘being’ for Heidegger; ‘the sense of being is ... a determined *signifying trace*.’⁵⁹ This quotation clearly sets out a *derivative* quality for being—which until now we

⁵⁵ ‘Ruse’ appears repeatedly throughout the *Grammatology*, always related in some way to writing. Ruse for the simple reason that it disguises itself by pointing to its signified. It is the ‘pointing’ that is the adventure.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 18/8.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 17/7. Cf. *Writing and Difference*, 3. ‘By the very act of considering the structuralist invasion as an object [the historian] would forget its meaning and would forget that what is at stake, first of all, is an *adventure of vision*, a conversion of the way of putting questions to any object posed before us.’ My emphasis.

⁵⁸ Bennington, *Jacques Derrida*, 39.

⁵⁹ Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 38/23.

supposed to be *primordial*, or original.⁶⁰ After all, the written sign is apparently secondary in that it seems (and this is the ruse) to refer firstly to our speaking, and we can thus begin to see how this question can upset philosophical categories.⁶¹ Derrida must therefore take great pains to explain the derivative position which the written sign occupies within philosophical and linguistic systems, and, indeed, in common sense, and thus all the difficulties associated with privileging ‘writing’. This is the historical change he wishes to describe and hasten—the move from derivative to originary. He is *not*, he underlines, trying to demonstrate that writing preceded speech chronologically. Indeed, Derrida has chosen this term precisely because of its derivative position, and it is this very fact that he wants to analyse. So, the question of the sign is approached elliptically, by way of the *movement* of signification, rather than pointing at some ‘thing’ that would be the exemplary sign. Because of this complex approach that takes the apparently derivative thing first, the apparently simple question, ‘what is a sign?’ possesses a tacit complexity.

The linguistic sign does not interest Derrida as a way into a ‘philosophy of language.’ The strong historical emphasis we have made should make this clear—it is a change in the very sense of ‘world,’ which is a transcendental task, and is not restricted to the linguistic realm. Rather, his hypothesis is that the history of writing merges with the history of metaphysics outlined by Heidegger. A seemingly technical question tied to fundamental ontological categories. If we recall that Heidegger described an *ontotheological* structure to metaphysics that played itself out again and again in history, Derrida’s addition of writing to this structure suggests that the *phonocentric* orientation of writing systems, and a whole raft of associated values and distinctions, are intimately linked with that metaphysics.

So, famously, the linguistic sign has a *phonocentric* structure (a systematic privilege of voice) that reinforces the *logocentric* structure of historical metaphysics (a systematic privilege of being as presence). Heidegger, according to Derrida, does not entirely escape this pattern. The unity of these two structures is displayed in the proximity accorded between *voice* and *being*, that the voice gets

⁶⁰ Heidegger, quoting the *Sophist* (242c) in the introduction to *Being and Time*, writes that Being should not be *derived*.

⁶¹ Bennington, *Jacques Derrida*, 23.

closer to the reality of being. The voice expresses the content of the mind, and writing would be only of a second order at best, because of merely representing speech: *phonetic* writing. Derrida sets up the relationships by going to Aristotle, where writing is furthest from being, from consciousness, from the signifier and meaning. The mind (being essentially transparent) brings the voice into close proximity to meaning, while writing languishes farther off.⁶²

If one were to break apart or affect the privilege given to the voice (as Derrida argues is *in fact* happening), there would therefore be correlating changes in the understanding of being. The linguistic sign is therefore a way into Heidegger's thought that changes from the very start what is at stake. Derrida tacks between developments in linguistics and Heidegger's thought, tracking voice, word and sign. Although Heidegger is explicitly only written about over some eight or nine pages, the effect of Derrida's argument is to pose everything that follows in relation to it.⁶³ This *transforms* the field that corresponds to the study of the linguistic sign, which is now no longer 'regional,' and leads one back to the question of being itself.⁶⁴

Whether in linguistics or in philosophy, sound has a privilege over writing that would be *natural*. The sound impression in the mind has an intimate and direct bond with the concept it invokes, whereas the visual impression, writing, would only have a mediated, derivative, connection, having to be sent via the 'detour' of a representation of sound. This conclusion is reinforced by taking alphabetic, phonetic, writing to be exemplary of *all* writing, and it reinforces a certain model of consciousness that is based on the voice. Heidegger, too, can be read in this way: beneath the epochal determinations of being, being as the transcendental opens the logos, and is revealed through the logos, it becomes the transcendental word. 'Being is the *transcendens* pure and simple,' Heidegger writes in *Being and Time*.

⁶² Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 22/11.

⁶³ Geoffrey Bennington discusses a similar structure he finds in 'White Mythology,' and suggests that it is a repeated one throughout Derrida's texts. See Bennington, *Jacques Derrida*, 125, 127-9.

⁶⁴ Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 35/21-2.

The very starting point for *Being and Time* relies upon the pre-comprehension of the word ‘being’ as something that is *closest* and unified, and therefore initiates the question of the meaning of being in general. What Derrida suggests is that Heidegger is only able to make this move because he relies upon an *implicit* structure of a privilege of voice, that this pre-comprehension is modelled on the privilege of voice. Now this privilege of the voice is itself only possible when writing is taken to be *generally* structured on the *particular* example of Western, phonetic, scripts. But no phonetic system is purely phonetic—it relies upon punctuation, space, articulations, elements that have no distinct phonic value, but nonetheless help to shape our meanings by indicating differences amongst the sounds we produce. But if this phonic standard is removed, the place at the end of the line for writing, as signifier of a signifier is no longer justified. The particular instance of a ‘modality’ of writing has unfairly decided the general concept. There is a resemblance to the Heideggerian argument here, the determined being metaphysically used to derive being in general, now turned against its author.

At this point however, there is an abrupt reversal in Derrida’s argument concerning Heidegger. If at first Heidegger seems to pose being straightforwardly as the transcendental, this is, as we were saying earlier, but a provisional step. If being is traditionally clear and lucid, then Heidegger troubles this certainty.⁶⁵ Phenomenology, in the Heideggerian sense, aims to uncover what is close, but *hidden*, so near, but *forgotten*. Being is *not* clear or luminous, *not* immediately intelligible, but something that must be wrested from entities. Being dissimulates itself, indeed, like writing. The question of being ‘does not restore confidence’ through a clear intelligibility, the ‘voice’ of being is, in a word that Derrida obviously attaches great importance to, *aphonic*, ‘the voice of the sources is *not heard*.’⁶⁶ This is the *ambiguity* of the Heideggerian situation which we have suggested is made possible through the logic of repetition.

Derrida is explicit about the turning point of his argument with respect to Heidegger: ‘*In opposition to what we suggested above*, it must be remembered that, for Heidegger, the sense of being is never

⁶⁵ Werner Marx, *Heidegger and the Tradition*, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1971), 37-8.

⁶⁶ Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 36/22.

simply and rigorously a “signified.””⁶⁷ Heidegger’s question of being, therefore, dislocates the unity of the word just as much as the science of linguistics would.

The point of Derrida’s two-stranded, two-stage argument between Heidegger and linguistics is to produce a hypothesis, confirmed through the demonstrations that fill up the rest of the book. The ‘sign’ is no longer a linguistic object, but has become the ‘element’ from which all experience, all meaning is made possible. It replaces Heidegger’s ‘fundamental ontology.’ In fact, the sign, through its trace to the other, reverses Heidegger’s phenomenology. In *Being and Time*, the phenomenological conception of the phenomenon excluded ‘appearance.’ But the sign is only just that appearance, Heidegger even says so.⁶⁸ Reversing Heidegger’s structure of the phenomenon, the trace does not appear, and is only announced in this not appearing.

The greatest difficulty in thinking this is the continued respect for the rigours of philosophy. Derrida holds in both hands first the movement of a staggeringly vast history in which a huge edifice or machine is slowly moving—like a washing machine, tottering adventurously on its feet as it spins because it has lost the anchor of its centre-balance. Secondly, Derrida insists that this knowledge is *a priori*, and always already announced—but we only know it *now*. Respect for the transcendental, inscription of the transcendental in a system. Historicity of the trace, whose ruses include its reduction.

Heidegger and Lévi-Strauss

If Martin Heidegger is one of the great poles of philosophical ferment in post-war France that was crucial for Derrida, another is Claude Lévi-Strauss. The two are giants in the French philosophical

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 35-6. ‘Least of all can the being of entities ever be anything such that “behind it” stands something else “which does not appear,”’. Compare Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 68-9/47.

imagination. But are they related? Ostensibly, no. Lévi-Strauss like many of his peers, abandoned his French philosophical masters. Where Merleau-Ponty, Aron and Sartre discover Husserl and Heidegger, Lévi-Strauss makes an altogether different intellectual journey.⁶⁹ A journey both literally and figuratively in pursuit of anthropology. Lévi-Strauss is no Heideggerian, and yet Derrida argues for a common turn between them. Their work operates at a common depth, and they are for Derrida the symptoms of the same historical moment.

The criticism of ethnocentrism is for Derrida, we will see, a social-scientific corollary to the deconstruction of metaphysics. Lévi-Strauss also has much to say about history, and in connection with this, writing.⁷⁰ We could say, retrospectively, that Lévi-Strauss' anthropology is a *necessary* staging point in Derrida's itinerary. Derrida certainly gives this impression. Lévi-Strauss rarely appears in philosophical literature on Derrida, which is a great omission. Their relation needs to be elaborated. For it is in Lévi-Strauss that are gathered together many of Derrida's concerns; a differential system; a theory, history and politics of writing, explicitly concerned with the state of colonies and their relation to Europe; the admiration for Jean-Jacques Rousseau; and not least, a careful but tense approach to history. Indeed, what would these concerns be for Derrida, and for any other French thinker of the period without Lévi-Strauss?⁷¹

With the Algerian war and independence vividly before the French in the 1960's, Lévi-Strauss' critique of ethnocentrism and racism possessed an extensive, political and symbolic power.⁷² Indeed, Derrida points out the precise historical conjunction, concerning the fundamentally unequal relation

⁶⁹ Ethan Kleinberg points out that Lévi-Strauss' structuralism had a similar appeal to a younger generation of philosophers drawn also to Heidegger's *Letter on 'Humanism'*. See Ethan Kleinberg, *Generation Existential: Heidegger's philosophy in France 1927-1961* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2005), 4 fn.1, 200-1. See also François Dosse, *History of Structuralism: The rising sign, 1945-1966*, trans. Deborah Glassman, vol. 1 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

⁷⁰ Lévi-Strauss' thought on history extends well beyond the polemic with Sartre in *The Savage Mind*. See also 'History and anthropology' in *Structural Anthropology I*, and 'The scope of anthropology' and 'Race and history,' both in *Structural Anthropology II*; as well as *Tristes Tropiques*. It is significant for our argument concerning the place of history in Derrida's thought that Derrida touches on nearly every text of Lévi-Strauss' that concerns *history*.

⁷¹ See, for example, 'The Ends of Man', Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 117. See too Foucault's description in *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, (New York: Routledge, 2002), 410ff.

⁷² See especially 'Race and history,' in Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, Trans. by Monique Layton. Vol. 2. (London: Allen Lane, 1977), 323ff.

between the new-born state and the international society, found in Lévi-Strauss' text; 'The ideological atmosphere within which such formulae breathe *today* could be described.'⁷³ Could Derrida, the Algerian, not but feel this closely?⁷⁴ By connecting the movement of writing to world-historical events—decolonialisation—Lévi-Strauss is critical in recognising the slow historical movement that Derrida, and we, have described. Lévi-Strauss is indeed, *more* than an 'exergue'.⁷⁵

Here, as the reader will have already gathered, we must reintroduce a historical tone. The success of Levi Strauss was exactly contemporary with a 'second reading' of Heidegger, one that began to free itself from the influence of Sartre's version of Heidegger.⁷⁶ *Tristes Tropiques* is published the same year that Heidegger visits France, and with much the same appeal. Here is Derrida's interpretation of ethnology as a *historical and logical* corollary of the criticism of metaphysics:

Ethnology could have been born as a science only at the moment when European culture—and, in consequence, the history of metaphysics and of its concepts—had been dislocated, driven from its locus, and forced to stop considering itself as the culture of reference. This moment is not first and foremost a moment of philosophical or scientific discourse. It is also a moment which is political, economic, technical, and so forth. One can say with total security that there is nothing fortuitous about the fact that the critique of ethnocentrism—the very condition for ethnology—should be systematically and historically contemporaneous with the destruction of the history of metaphysics. Both belong to one and the same era.⁷⁷

History, as a discipline, is in the same position that Derrida describes for ethnology, which he takes as exemplary for the human sciences. Indeed, Lévi-Strauss himself takes the trouble to co-ordinate his structuralist anthropology with the discipline of history, oftentimes polemically, but other times in far

⁷³ Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 193-4/132-3.

⁷⁴ In this context, Edward Baring has uncovered a valuable letter of Derrida's to the historian Pierre Nora, concerning Algerian independence, and Derrida's complex relation to France and Algeria. Edward Baring, 'Liberalism and the Algerian War: The Case of Jacques Derrida,' *Critical Inquiry* 36, no. 2 (2010).

⁷⁵ Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 148/100.

⁷⁶ See Kleinberg, *Generation Existential*, 157ff.

⁷⁷ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 282.

more collegial fashion.⁷⁸ Indeed, anthropology is positioned systematically to furnish both resources to history, as well as allowing a criticism of historical science.

Methodologically, Lévi-Strauss saw structural anthropology as complementary to historical science, albeit with anthropology placed *logically prior* to history, and with a greater claim to scientific authority. It is perhaps for just this reason that historiography has borrowed massively from anthropological discourse in the last half-century.⁷⁹ While history covered conscious action, anthropology covered the unconscious formations that structured action.⁸⁰ In *Race and History*, Lévi-Strauss sought to systematically de-couple concepts of progress, evolution, growth and continuity from representations of ‘primitive’ peoples. By describing a relational model of development, no single society became the ‘owner’ of a successful history; cultural success and progression was a matter of coalition *between* cultures, and the interaction between them was modelled on the gamblers game of fortuitous sequence.⁸¹ The diachronic metaphors of history, on the other hand, emphasising continuity, led to conclusions too simplistic to be able to describe the realities of the systems that anthropology uncovered. History became a retrospective abstraction of the subject—a work of myth—that itself was part of a system that could be formalised, described and reduced in order to concentrate on processes ‘further upstream’. There emerges already, therefore, concurrent to Derrida’s development as a philosopher, a significant critique of disciplinary history in the work of Lévi-Strauss. This same work is also concerned to think a history that was more true to life. Derrida touches on almost every text of Lévi-Strauss’ that relates to history, and he strongly underlines the methodological caution with which it is approached.⁸² Even more, Derrida takes up one of Lévi-Strauss’ counter-images for historical development, the game, and it occupies an essential position in the *Grammatology*. And again, the crucial *supplement* is likewise discovered in the *Introduction to*

⁷⁸ See, ‘History and anthropology,’ in Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*. Trans. by Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grudnfest Schoepf. Vol. I, (Basic Books, 1963), 6, 16-8.

⁷⁹ On the blurred lines between history and anthropology, including sections on Lévi-Strauss and Derrida, see Kerwin Lee Klein, *Frontiers of Historical Imagination* (1997)

⁸⁰ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grudnfest Schoepf, vol. I (Basic Books, 1963), 18.

⁸¹ *Structural Anthropology*, vol. 2, 354.

⁸² Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 291.

Marcel Mauss. For Derrida, the concern is to pick up where Lévi-Strauss has left off, and explore the tensions that such a critique of history leaves us with.

It is a mistake, then, to read Derrida as opposing himself to Lévi-Strauss, or aggressively attacking him. He is more than sympathetic to the anthropologist's political and scientific ambitions.⁸³ Indeed, the most straight-forward way to read the chapter on Lévi-Strauss in *Of Grammatology* is as a kind of homage. To invert Derrida's statement, it is not that he could not go around Lévi-Strauss' anthropology because of the influence of linguistics upon it—but rather that, after Lévi-Strauss, one can no longer go around linguistics, writing, or Rousseau.⁸⁴ And when Derrida names a 'new science', grammatology, it is in the same spirit, and with the same words, that Lévi-Strauss had announced the science of structural anthropology.⁸⁵

Derrida and Lévi-Strauss

If Derrida has already sought to bring the question of the sign to bear on metaphysics and especially Heidegger, then Lévi-Strauss is a necessary port of call as part of the ferment that is both historical and philosophical. But even without the historical context that links linguistics, anthropology and philosophy, Lévi-Strauss' work, as was already implied above, poses questions at the same depth which has concerned us. Derrida comments at the close of 'Structure, Sign, and Play' that the region in which his analysis of Lévi-Strauss takes places is that of historicity, that region we have been

⁸³ *Concept and Form: The Cahiers pour l'Analyse and Contemporary French Thought*, (Website) Synopsis, CPA 4.1, <http://www.web.mdx.ac.uk/cahiers/synopses/syn4.1.html> [March 31, 2010 version]

⁸⁴ 'What I have already brought up will not let me skirt around a structural anthropology upon which phonological science exercises so declared a fascination,' Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 151/102.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 74/51.; Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, 9.

steadily staking out.⁸⁶ Therefore Derrida is not principally concerned with the status of linguistics in anthropology, or even, indeed, with his assorted comments on the discipline of history. Derrida's interest is deeper and concerns a presupposed *metaphysical* phonologism that works its way through Lévi-Strauss' anthropology. This is then related to a methodological choice that takes place, and issues in a situation where, from Derrida's point of view, we can see Lévi-Strauss acting to preserve fruitfulness of empirical research. But this same choice leaves him open to a specific historical problem.

First the phonologism. Derrida scrupulously observes the distinction between fact and essence: the fact that the Nambikwara bar the use of proper names is carefully distinguished from the general and essential point about 'the essence or the energy of *graphein* as originary effacement of the proper name.'⁸⁷ The essential loss of the proper name is one recognised by Lévi-Strauss himself in *The Savage Mind*—'names' are classifications in a system, which means that, strictly speaking, one *never* names, if a name is understood to be a unique designation. The *empirical* fact of the prohibition of names is neither here nor there with respect to the general condition. 'Nonprohibition, as much as prohibition, presupposes fundamental obliteration.'⁸⁸ The fundamental position of the *graphein*, of writing as the loss of the unique name, is placed in the position of historicity. In the same way that it would make no sense to speak of a 'society without historicity', it also is senseless to speak of a society without *writing*. 'There is neither reality nor concept that would correspond to the expression "society without writing."⁸⁹ The critique begun by Lévi-Strauss in *Race and History* is continued through Derrida's carefully expanded sense of writing-in-general at the level of historicity. Consequently the limits of historicity are not found in a concept of the 'human' to which one might admit some and not others. Because it is historicity *as* writing, and a writing that is not connected with

⁸⁶ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 293. Note that Derrida also says that this is a 'provisional' name.

⁸⁷ *De la Grammatologie*, 159/108. 'L'essence ou de l'énergie du *graphein* comme effacement originaire du nom propre.'

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 161/109. Heidegger makes a structurally similar point about being unhistoriographical: 'If historiography is wanting, this is not evidence against Dasein's historicity; on the contrary, as a deficient mode of this state of being, it is evidence for it. Only because it is 'historical' can an era be unhistoriographical.' Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 42.

⁸⁹ Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 161/109. 'A l'expression de "société sans écriture" ne répondrait donc aucune réalité ni aucun concept.'

a self-consciousness, historicity is not even limited solely to the human. Indeed, the historicity, as we shall see, of a new sense of 'life' is announced.

Nonetheless, in Derrida's retelling of Lévi-Strauss' masterful 'Writing Lesson' in *Tristes Tropiques*, it is shown that Lévi-Strauss still, without wishing to, continues concepts the anthropologist has himself criticised. Through the skilled construction of narrative in *Tristes Tropiques*, Lévi-Strauss sets up the premise of an originally good and innocent community. This is a Rousseauist gesture, it appeals to a political and historical structure that Derrida will explore in the chapters that follow. The Nambikwara are innocent with respect to writing, their community is small enough to not need to communicate over a distance through written signs, the community still within earshot, a community of the voice. This community will then suffer *true* violence, as if for the first time, when Lévi-Strauss undertakes to teach it to them. Of course, it is easy for Derrida to point out other violent episodes that the anthropologist recounts in the life of the Nambikwara; poisoning, political struggle, and so on. Lévi-Strauss responds to Derrida (who published this reading following its delivery as a seminar) with a false ingenuousness, saying that he never meant to portray the Nambikwara as originally innocent, nor should one take *Tristes Tropiques* to be 'philosophically coherent.'⁹⁰ But Lévi-Strauss, hiding beneath 'les songeries d'un ethnographe,' cannot hope to be convincing at this point. Derrida carefully illustrates the mastery of the so-called 'travel journal' and justifies what might seem to be an unfair focus on it. A division runs right through *Tristes Tropiques* between anthropological confession and theoretical discussion, he argues. Its composition is *artful*, and follows faithfully 18th Century tradition. Anecdotes, journal fragments, and confessions—which occupy a special place, after all, for Rousseau *and* Lévi-Strauss—are '*calculated* for the purposes of a philosophical demonstration.'⁹¹

⁹⁰ '[C]ar n'est-ce pas jouer une farce philosophique que de scruter mes textes avec un soin qui se justifierait mieux s'ils provenaient de Spinoza, Descartes ou Kant? En toute franchise, je n'estime pas que ce que j'écris vaut tant d'égards, surtout s'agissant de *Tristes Tropiques* où je n'ai pas prétendu exposer des vérités, mais seulement les songeries d'un ethnographe sur le terrain, dont je serais le dernier à affirmer la cohérence.' Claude Lévi-Strauss, 'Une lettre à propos de 'Lévi-Strauss dans le dix-huitième siècle',' *Cahiers pour l'Analyse* 8(1967): 89.

⁹¹ Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 166/113; Cf. pp.157, 171/107, 117 and especially pp.173-4/119.

Lévi-Strauss, in order to highlight the violence and ethnocentrism of the international system of the West, develops a theory of writing as power of violence and enslavement. *And Derrida does not disagree*, as he testifies on several pages.⁹² Where he does disagree is in the way in which Lévi-Strauss pushes the Nambikwara back to the far side of writing in order to safe-guard them from the violence of writing, presenting them as an innocent community, nostalgically recalling a time of present speech.

L'idéal qui sous-tend en profondeur cette philosophie de l'écriture, c'est donc l'image d'une communauté immédiatement présente à elle-même, sans *différance*, communauté de la parole dans laquelle tous les membres sont à portée d'allocution.

The ideal which profoundly underlies this philosophy of writing is therefore the image of a community immediately present to itself, without *différance*, community of speech in which all the members are within earshot.⁹³

Derrida identifies here a Rousseauist system: humanity drawn together from the dispersed state of nature, close enough to have developed a language, yet not so developed as to have begun to envy one another, to enslave one another.⁹⁴ The priority that the anthropologist grants to this historical mode is also the systematic corollary, Derrida suggests, of the privilege given to phonology in the scientific models of anthropology, speech before writing. The valorisation of the phonic as the defining element of scientificity cannot be separated from an ethnocentric system of political organisation.

The anti-ethnocentrism of Lévi-Strauss is carried away by an unperceived ethnocentrism in his philosophy of writing. It is, Derrida suggests, the problem of the *bricoleur*. *Bricolage*, as an empiricism, is completely incapable of justifying its own discourse. At each point, the bricolage—taking up the tools laying by the side of the road, as it were—is defeated and circumvented by the

⁹² See Ibid., 141, 156, 190 /92-3, 106, 130.

⁹³ Ibid., 197/136.

⁹⁴ See, for example, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*. Translated by Franklin Philip. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 60.

history which provided those tools. *Bricolage* occurs at a technical level that fails to think its own possibility, precisely because it must *suspend* history to analyse the specificity of a structure.⁹⁵

Despite Lévi-Strauss' stated oppositions to phenomenology, Derrida recognises similarities to Husserlian procedure in the anthropologist's approach to history. Let us see how Derrida sets up the problem:

The quality and fecundity of a discourse are perhaps measured by the critical rigour with which [the] relation to the *history* of metaphysics and to *inherited* concepts is thought ... It is a question of explicitly and systematically posing the problem of the status of a discourse which borrows from a *heritage* the resources necessary for the deconstruction of that *heritage* itself.⁹⁶

We recognise the situation that both Heidegger and Derrida locate for themselves, but Lévi-Strauss, as well. It is, precisely, a question of history.

Now this critique may be undertaken along two paths, in two 'manners.' Once the limit of the nature/culture opposition makes itself felt, one might want to question systematically and rigorously the history of these concepts. This is a first action. Such a systematic and historic questioning would be neither a philological nor a philosophical action in the classic sense of these words. To concern oneself with the founding concepts of the entire history of philosophy, to deconstitute them, is not to undertake the work of the philologist or of the classic historian of philosophy.⁹⁷

Once again we recognise the strange historical 'style' of Heidegger and Derrida. But Lévi-Strauss takes a different tack.

The other choice [Lévi-Strauss'], in order to avoid the possibly sterilising effects of the first one, consists in *conserving all these old concepts* within the domain of empirical discovery while here and there denouncing their limits, treating them as tools which can still be used.

⁹⁵ Cf. Jerzy Topolski, 'Lévi-Strauss and Marx on History,' *History and Theory* 12, no. 2 (1973).

⁹⁶ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 282.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 284.

No longer is any truth value attributed to them; there is a readiness to abandon them, if necessary, should other instruments appear more useful. In the meantime, their relative efficacy is exploited, and they are employed to destroy the old machinery to which they belong and of which they themselves are pieces. This is how the language of the social sciences criticises itself.⁹⁸

I have placed these long quotations here so that we can see the contrast between the Lévi-Strauss' position and what I have called the 'genealogy' of Heidegger and Derrida. It highlights the tension with history implicit within Lévi-Strauss' *bricolage*. Lévi-Strauss opts to criticise concepts in this way, because to choose the other path is to (perhaps) never reach empirical study. Historians have not been unaware of this tension in Lévi-Strauss. What often goes unnoticed, however, is that Derrida expands this difficult and tensed position to all of the human sciences.

That is, the historian is a *bricoleur* too. Pragmatically we know this is true—the historian often reaches for theories that are *effective* and credits them a certain plausibility, while reserving judgement on their truth (often adding a humble disclaimer about not being a specialist). But if so, what should be made of the fact that 'in accordance with a gesture which was also Rousseau's and Husserl's, [Lévi-Strauss] must "set aside all the facts" at the moment when he wishes to recapture the specificity of a structure?'⁹⁹ We should not think Lévi-Strauss is simply *ahistorical*. But Lévi-Strauss reaches that historical level which is not the realm of fact, but that of historicity. However, Derrida suggests, *within* the level of historicity, Lévi-Strauss is constrained to think of changes between structures of historicity only in a certain way, as sudden and complete.

We can hardly fault Lévi-Strauss for not discovering what Derrida calls 'arche-writing'. Or rather, Derrida in fact suggests that Lévi-Strauss already knows something of it, in the violence of writing, in the prohibition of names, and Derrida is thus indebted to him in many respects, not least in some of

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 292.

the vocabulary he accrues.¹⁰⁰ The issue is instead one of the founding principles and concepts of the history of philosophy, and indeed, especially with the concept of history.

The difficulty here is extreme. Although Derrida approves of the reduction of history, by nonetheless remaining empiricist, Lévi-Strauss renders himself *less* capable of respecting history in the expression of his methodology. Derrida rather thinks that it is the philosopher who is still best placed to do this, ‘despite certain appearances, philosophers of method are perhaps more profoundly sensitive to historicity, even though they seem to remove digressions from history’s path.’¹⁰¹ Derrida repeatedly demonstrates occasions when Lévi-Strauss all too hastily derives an essential and general proposition from a situation of fact. He suggests instead that if we want to *respect* history, then one should follow the path of a genealogy that concerns the founding concepts of philosophy. Empirical science is not immune from this by virtue of its empiricism. Common language, as much as the technical and philosophical, are *caught in a strange diagram* that cannot be ignored. All of us ‘are trapped in a kind of circle.’

This circle is unique. It describes the form of the relation between the history of metaphysics and the destruction of the history of metaphysics. There is no sense in doing without the concepts of metaphysics in order to shake metaphysics. We have no language—no syntax and no lexicon—which is foreign to this history.¹⁰²

We need to see how this unique circle is related to history. It will be explicitly explored by Derrida in the extremely long reading of Rousseau in *Of Grammatology* that makes up *Part II* of the book and to which Lévi-Strauss has been the exergue.

¹⁰⁰ Elizabeth Clark describes Derrida’s reading of Lévi-Strauss as if arche-writing were obvious. Her representation of both parties is quite misconstrued, *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 59.

¹⁰¹ Derrida, *Edmund Husserl’s Origin of Geometry, An Introduction*, 38.

¹⁰² Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 280.

Conclusions

In the opening pages and first chapter of *Of Grammatology*, Derrida begins a careful and rigorous identification of a historical situation that is then interpreted philosophically. He wants to provide a demonstration that obeys all the rules of logic—but the consequences of which are the revelation of those rules as ‘determined traces’. The system thereby described becomes not only a particular unique and expansive historical structure to which we could give a name in the same way we label ‘the enlightenment.’ Rather, the situation of ‘writing’ in fact becomes simply what it means to *be* a situation: a negotiation between the future and the past in the language we inherit, and the particular weight of the values of truth, presence and objectivity that being in a situation throws up for us. This occurs not only on the grand scales of centuries and millennia, and in grand philosophical discourses, but also in the history of the body of work of a thinker, Heidegger’s in particular.

We have seen the beginnings of a new historical terminology take place around these issues, taking the Nietzschean and Heideggerian term ‘genealogy.’ Taking the genetic account of Heidegger’s corpus as our example, we could say that this new genealogy seeks to repeat the structures of truth in a defined body of work, simultaneously trying to respect both its ‘internal’ specificity, *and* its repetition and/or deviation from classical concepts and movements. It helps us to describe his relation to Heidegger, too. At the beginning we framed it in terms of the question of contemporaneity, influence, in ‘historical’ terms. We can now be more specific. The *history* of Heidegger’s texts is certainly crucial for Derrida, for it demonstrates one way of negotiating the ‘circle’ in which we are trapped. This history is one that repeats its founding principles and questions it at multiple times. It is never a case of one definitive moment with respect to Heidegger, but rather the complex staging of repetition. Derrida sketches a similarly genealogical account of Lévi-Strauss’ work, but quickly reaches a fork in the road, and decides to follow a different route, while acknowledging the productivity, and the difficulties of Lévi-Strauss’s chosen path.

What better example of the logic of repetition than the *Letter on 'humanism'*?¹⁰³ It is a paradigmatic case of repetition, and one which possesses enormous authority for Derrida. Heidegger repeating *Being and Time*, to a new context, in a new way, with a more developed vocabulary, against misreadings, and so on. By virtue of having already this 'history', this repetition of Heidegger, already to hand, Derrida's own repetition of Heidegger could not fail to be different. Derrida knows what Heidegger *has become*.

Retrospectively, therefore, one can see the 'old' in the 'young', but what is learnt from the latter-day 'world-historical' situation is taken there too. 'Voice' is traced in Heidegger and Lévi-Strauss. Derrida does not phrase this operation in organicist terms, where a seed would flower into the mature philosophy. Rather, it is seen as a repetition-machine. Repetition would *interrupt* the organic and teleological unfolding of a thing, for example, *Being and Time*, or, in a different way, it would *interrupt* the laying down of a *new* terrain through the unperceived *continuity* with a past, for example, in Lévi-Strauss' bricolage. The common possibility, or common 'root' of both of these resides in the trace. The question of history in Derrida, therefore, ends up turning into an account of his whole thought. But we have only, thus far, examined some brief arguments that appear as the opening gambits for much longer paths. We shall now turn to examine that long detour through Rousseau. Here we will find that all of these themes will be developed into a rigorous *diagramming* of history.

¹⁰³ In Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, 239-276.

3. The impossible diagram

We ought to demonstrate why concepts like production, constitution, and *history* remain in complicity with what is at issue here. But this would take me too far today—toward *the theory of the representation of the 'circle' in which we appear to be enclosed*—and I utilise such concepts, like many others, only for their strategic convenience and in order to undertake their deconstruction at the currently most decisive point. In any event, it will be understood *by means of the circle in which we appear to be engaged*, that as it is written here, *différance* is no more static than it is genetic, no more structural than historical. Or is no less so ... such oppositions have not the least pertinence to *différance*, which makes the thinking of it uneasy and uncomfortable.¹

Introduction

In my initial chapter we understood history, before being owned or initiated by the historian, as made possible by a *historicity* that sets the terms for appearing in any historical story about 'facts', and that deconstruction sets out to think these conditions, and thus Derrida's thought has a decided historical tenor. Language becomes one site for these problems, but this does not mean that they are only 'linguistic' problems. Derrida's aim is to think the 'game of the world', not as ahistorical structure or pure becoming, but what in fact enables synchrony and diachrony, consciousness, objectivity, as well as philosophical understanding and historical accounts. Derrida thinks *history and world* according to a repetitive manner of forming relations that breaks with the linear models which we habitually use. Derrida's analysis does not find itself at the end of a trajectory, therefore, but dives back into the very history it seeks to elucidate as a risky and uncertain *adventure*. The best model that Derrida

¹ Derrida, 'Différance', *Margins of Philosophy*, 12. My emphasis.

has for his new concept of history is writing, and he finds the resources for its description in the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

The movements of deconstruction that Derrida describes indicate historical movements on a vast scale. The history that is indicated is not limited to the 'human', rather it began to look like the scale of a universal history. Such vast-reaching descriptions are coupled with minutely detailed analyses that aim to intervene in that history. *It appears as if Derrida wants to move the world by changing a letter, by writing a letter.* For example, the *a* in 'différance'. But such letters are not written by Derrida from a secure vantage point. The intervention is itself subjected to history, and history, in a way, destroys itself for want of a historian who could ever write one. There will never be enough time to get it all straight.

Writing and history are therefore coupled together. History is thought to be written on and about the remains of a past present. But that very present, for Derrida, implies an absolute past that can never be rehabilitated.² 'Presence' itself *has a pre-history* that it papers over with the dazzling light of the phenomenon. What, then, are history and writing if they proceed without a present point of departure? We could expect that, within *De la grammatologie*, that premier text *on writing*, the historical hints we have already uncovered receive confirmation, elaboration, and further exploration—and they do. This chapter, therefore, investigates the analyses of *history* where it occurs with perhaps unequalled persistence in Derrida's work: in the essay on Jean-Jacques Rousseau in the second part of *De la Grammatologie*.

² Jacques Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 97/66. Derrida gives clear signs that the first chapter of *Part II* on Lévi-Strauss is also an integral part of the reading of Rousseau. See Ibid., 149-157/101-6. Cf. Robert Bernasconi, 'No more stories, good or bad: de Man's criticisms of Derrida on Rousseau,' in *Derrida: A Critical Reader*, ed. David Wood (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell 1992), 149. I have used Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Oeuvres complètes III*, ed. Bernard Gagnebin, Marcel Raymond, and et al., vol. III (1964); and *Essai sur l'origine des langues*, ed. Charles Porset (Bordeaux: Ducros, 1970), as well as the following English translations: *Discourse on Inequality*, trans. Franklin Philip (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); *On the origin of languages*, Trans. John H. Moran, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).

Unequalled persistence: histories of all kinds, diagrams of historical concepts, declarations concerning history *tout court*, bizarre formulations such as the ‘history of life’ or the ‘history of love’. Despite such insistence on the theme of history, no account that I have found gives it much attention. Even more, not much of the literature touches on the Rousseau ‘essay’ at all, often confining itself to Derrida’s summary passages. It receives less attention even than the chapter on Lévi-Strauss, which is but its opening gambit. Rousseau would seem to be a minor note in Derrida’s *oeuvre*, and within it, ‘history’ a passing reference and easily dismissed—as Paul de Man would have it, as a convenient *fiction*.³ Joshua Kates’ *Essential History* sets out precisely to understand ‘history’ in the *Grammatology* but decides against any analysis of the Rousseau essay, assuming that it can bypass this part of the text on the basis that Derrida’s trajectory is already known, and that that direction is away from ‘history’. We think that this decision is precipitous, and will seek to demonstrate why. According to Kates’ decision, *two-thirds* of the *Grammatology* are discarded as if they were a useless detour.⁴ Derrida’s stance toward history is judged according to a confident assertion about the *history of* that work, and its mode of ‘development’. But this is to deny the very opportunity not only of understanding ‘why history?’, ‘why Rousseau?’, but also what history means in the other parts of the book. To the extent that many accounts of Derrida’s work have not engaged with something that was obviously of some moment for Derrida suggests that many have not yet properly grappled with Derrida’s text.

This is confirmed for us by a formulation of Geoffrey Bennington’s, criticising Rodolphe Gasché’s *Tain of the Mirror* ‘essentially Hegelian’ kind of history of philosophy as reflection that would deposit Derrida at the end of a line of thinkers. Bennington responds with the comment that ‘there is really no way that Gasché can understand in this perspective the fact

³ Paul De Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, 2nd edition, revised ed. (London: Routledge, 1983), ch.7. There is some evidence that some scholars have ‘given up’ the field in the face of De Man’s expertise on Rousseau. For example, Spivak, in Sean Gaston and Ian MacLachlan, *Reading Derrida's Of Grammatology* (London and New York: Continuum, 2011), xxxi.

⁴ Joshua Kates, *Essential History*, 160-1, 198. Almost all of the literature refers on the Rousseau essay refers to its bewildering length and meandering progression of argument. This is precisely the challenge of reading and writing on it for us here.

that Derrida's descriptions of *the supplementary structure of history* should be worked out in and through Rousseau, that real pre-Kantian, post-Hegelian 'antecedent' of Hegel.⁵ This sentence both highlights the importance of this part of Derrida's work for us, but also the disturbing conclusions with respect to history for which we must account.

This chapter, therefore, sets out to demonstrate the function and usage of 'history' in *Part II* of the *Grammatology*. A return to this text seems to me to be justified by the unique insistence on history within its pages. Secondly, the relative paucity of commentary on the second part of the book reinforces such a task. I will aim to show, from within the pages of *De la Grammatologie*, the movement of argument, its structures and modes. In a modest way and in far-briefer fashion, it is both an attempt to provide the kind of 'architectonic' reconstruction that Derrida himself does, and also to present the arguments *for* that kind of reading.⁶ Because Derrida's essay is itself this kind of reading, I am forced to be *schematic* about its movement, in order to avoid being lost in commentary on commentary. Accordingly, I do not seek to systematically present 'Rousseau on history', but am attracted to the points of Derrida's active interpretation and strategic arrangement of Rousseau's arguments and themes.⁷ I don't think that is what is called 'deconstruction', although deconstruction makes it possible. As we have already set out in the last chapter, 'deconstruction' is a description of a historical situation, not a style of reading or mode of argument. In so doing, I do not want to reach for later texts that might seem to explain away peculiarities by showing what has become of certain themes. Nor do I want to apply a pre-

⁵ Geoffrey Bennington, *Legislations: The politics of deconstruction*, (London: Verso, 1994), 22.

⁶ See Derrida's description concerning the 'architecture' of Rousseau's *Essai*, Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 279/195. A recently published commentary on *Of Grammatology* is designed to reflect the structure of the book by respecting its divisions and allotting them to separate authors, resulting in 'scattered close readings'. This approach, despite being justified with reference to Derrida, risks giving up the chance to understand the meaning of its very division. There is a subtle confusion here, I think, between the normal procedures of scholarship and the inevitable scattering effect of *différance*. See Gaston and Maclachlan, *Reading Derrida's Of Grammatology*, xi, especially xix.

⁷ For Rousseau on history, see Timothy O'Hagan, *Rousseau*, (New York: Routledge, 1999); Asher Horowitz, *Rousseau, Nature, and History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987); Lionel Gossman, 'Time and history in Rousseau,' *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 30(1964); Henri Gaston Gouhier, *Les Méditations métaphysiques de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, (Paris: J. Vrin, 1970).

determined mould of ‘Derrida’s thought’ over its surface. The point is, rather, to allow *Part II* to provide the picture of Derrida’s thought.

The essay on Rousseau is enormous, ‘monstrous’, according to one scholar, picking up on one of the *Grammatology*’s own terms.⁸ Like the *Introduction* to Husserl’s ‘Origin of Geometry’, it comments on a short text in astonishing detail, relating it back to almost the entire oeuvre of its author. Including the Lévi-Strauss chapter, it extends over 300 pages in the French edition, *twice* the length of the ‘theoretical matrix’ of *Part I*! Intricate, detailed, and constructed in a consciously meandering, exhaustive, manner—perhaps this is why it does not receive attention. But *why*, indeed, does Derrida focus on Rousseau? *Because Rousseau represents a decisive articulation in the history of metaphysics.*⁹ This means that under the name of Rousseau we find a *clear description* of the principles, decisions, and movements that Derrida takes to be constitutive of metaphysics generally. Rousseau is *not* simply an example.¹⁰ It would not be the same without him. Thus it also means that it punctuates or *joins together* that history, combining different threads, creating a turning point, a hinge, even: Platonic and Cartesian repetition, anticipation of Hegel. And contrary to what we might normally expect from this description, it doesn’t finish with Hegel, as Bennington’s comment made clear. Here Rousseau is pushed right up against Heidegger. Derrida’s ‘Introduction to the “age of Rousseau”’ is arranged like a transparent sheet that one might place over Heidegger’s version of the history of metaphysics in order to double it and change its appearance a little. When Derrida writes of Rousseau’s ‘Nature’, we should also see something of Heidegger’s ‘Being’.¹¹ We are on the grounds of repetition once more:

⁸ Peggy Kamuf, ‘To do justice to “Rousseau,” Irreducibly,’ in *To Follow: The Wake of Jacques Derrida* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 167.

⁹ Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 145-6/97. Cf. pp. 30-31/17-8; 232/162.

¹⁰ Contra Irene E. Harvey, ‘Doubling the Space of Existence: Exemplarity in Derrida—the Case of Rousseau,’ in *Deconstruction and Philosophy*, ed. John Sallis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). Derrida is explicit about the status of example; Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 7, 145/lxxxix, 97. I suspect that the status as ‘example’ (which Derrida clearly problematises) contributes to the lack of scholarship on it. See Geoffrey Bennington *Jacques Derrida*, 127-8. This point is not unrelated to history, as Bennington makes clear.

¹¹ Derrida is explicit only late in the essay: ‘the relationship with the mother, with nature, with *being* as the fundamental signified,’ Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 376/266.

Si l'histoire de la métaphysique est l'histoire d'une détermination de l'être comme présence, si son aventure se confond avec celle du logocentrisme, si elle se produit tout entière comme réduction de la trace, l'œuvre de Rousseau nous semble occuper, entre le *Phèdre* de Platon et l'*Encyclopédie* de Hegel, une situation singulière.

If the history of metaphysics is the history of a determination of being as presence, if its adventure merges with that of logocentrism, if it takes place entirely as the reduction of the trace, the work of Rousseau seems to us to occupy, between Plato's *Phaedrus* and Hegel's *Encyclopedia*, a singular position.¹²

A little later, in a note, Derrida will tell us that Heidegger's reading of Kant could be moved on to Rousseauist ground, and the reader can see underneath Rousseauist terms Heideggerian ones also.¹³ Derrida's emphasis on Rousseau contrasts directly with Heidegger's emphasis on Descartes.¹⁴ Scholars have perhaps neglected Derrida's Rousseau, but Derrida also implies that Heidegger did so before them. And now, that *other Jacques* is replacing him, Rousseau, in history.

This *revisionist history* is set up by Derrida explicitly *as a way of questioning history itself*. The 'articulation' of a discourse *and* a historical totality, that is: all manners of conceiving the way in which one thing relates to, determines or causes another, takes place, happens 'in a context', one thing inside, or within, another and so on, cannot escape being brought directly into the argument.¹⁵ This is not restricted to a 'linguistic' realm, but is concerned with *Geschehen*, the very happening of history and the determination of what priorities are to

¹² Ibid., 145-6/97.

¹³ Ibid., 265 n.21/342-3.

¹⁴ See Ibid., 147/98. In 'The age of the world picture', Heidegger places Descartes at the foundation of anthropology. 'The age of Rousseau' is therefore, in part, a rival history of the human sciences as much as a rival history of metaphysics. See Martin Heidegger, 'The age of the world picture,' in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1977), 139-40.

¹⁵ Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 148/99.

be observed in interpreting it.¹⁶ History is not peripheral to Derrida's program; it is not peripheral to writing.

A few words on 'history'

History is not an accidental or peripheral feature of *De la grammatologie*. History is 'articulated' within its argument, in the senses of 'joined' and 'clarity' we have just mentioned. With 'articulation', Derrida is already beginning to modify the concept of history. We need to be aware of his strategy. If the trace refers to an absolute past, then there are *at least two* ways of using history operational in the book. Firstly, in the common or traditional sense, which is a dual sense, of referring to past events *or* their narration—this constitutes the critical moment, where Derrida will uncover the basis of history's relationship to presence. Secondly, a positive movement of history in relation to the trace. Derrida describes this as the *history of life*. 'History' is used in a positive manner in relation to the range of *arche* terms Derrida names in the course of the book: supplement, trace, arche-writing, etc. But this remains obscure, and difficult to see in application. How can the *arche*, which would also be the origin of history, itself *be* a history? In this respect, is history not akin to what produces difference among linguistic terms—a kind of difference, which is an effect, that engenders?¹⁷ In both positive and negative moments, the difference between the happening of history, and history as a discourse is not decisive, for the objective and subjective ranges are both submitted to the critical and positive phases. Therefore we must be attentive to which 'moment' the use of 'history' might refer to, and reconstruct this latter, 'positive' moment.

¹⁶ Derrida's formulations of the problems in this section bear some resemblance to Raymond Aron's, which also happens to use Rousseau as its example. See *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, (1961), 87-89.

¹⁷ See Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 11-12.

Derrida clearly states that he tries to produce a new ‘positive’ concept of history in *Positions*. His comments bear directly on his general strategy in writing, but also on the results that he aims to achieve. Moreover, the later date of this interview, June 1971, indicates that well beyond the *Grammatology*, history is of crucial importance to Derrida’s work. He says:

Although I have formulated many reservations about the ‘metaphysical’ concept of history, I very *often* use the word ‘history’ in order to reinscribe its force and in order to *produce another concept or conceptual chain of* ‘history.’¹⁸

Derrida, in order to revise the concept of history utilises a strategy of *proliferation*. The logic of very frequent usage has the intended effect of linking ‘history’ to many different ‘styles’ of temporality and transformation. The intention seems to be a kind of deflationary tactic. By ‘spreading history around’, it would then be very difficult to assert a principal or strict meaning as the one that has priority, exemplarity. *Derrida doesn’t move on from history to something else, but rather tries to rework it.*¹⁹ This is why we are attending to the function of ‘history’ in Derrida’s writing, and the overall dynamic of the essay. There is no one moment at which the change takes place, no individual ‘turn of a page’ which would take one from an old definition to a new one—for this is not how history, as Derrida will demonstrate, actually works. This also spells some difficulties for the ‘developmental’ approach of Joshua Kates, which wants to securely locate Derrida’s position at various points along an itinerary. My emphasis on Rousseau here should be understood as ‘strategic’. Kates wants to hold on to the subtle nuances of Husserl’s thinking of history that continue into Derrida’s ‘mature’ deconstruction. He holds Husserl as a kind of ‘truth’ of deconstruction. By insisting on Rousseau here, I want to demonstrate not that Husserl is not necessary or important in understanding Derrida, for he is, but that Derrida really does continue thinking history, and on other grounds than Husserl’s. The quotation from *Positions* was very clear on this point.

¹⁸ Derrida, *Positions*, 50.

¹⁹ Cf. Kates, *Essential History*, 210-1.

Looking at Derrida's essay on Rousseau, then, we see histories proliferate precisely in accordance with the principle described above. There is a 'history of life',²⁰ a 'history of love',²¹ the history of Rousseau himself,²² the history of the composition of the essay on the origin of languages,²³ the history of the separation of music and speech (and of the arts more generally),²⁴ and of course, the history of writing.²⁵ This is not to mention the 'history of man calling himself man',²⁶ an 'essential history',²⁷ a history of theatre and of political representation,²⁸ the history of psychoanalysis and more.

Now, these are present in Derrida's essay because they are present in Rousseau's work. They are not intended to be 'true' or 'factual' histories, but are instead hypothetical, according to the manner that Rousseau develops in the *Discourse on Inequality* and the *Essay on the Origin of Languages*. Perhaps, the reader will ask, these are just 'stories', rather than 'histories'? After all, *l'histoire* can also mean simply 'story.' But, this is highly unlikely, because immediately alongside this *multiplication of histories* also occur attempts by Derrida to formalise Rousseau's *concept of history*, which entails firstly mapping the movement of numerous histories, as well as the proposing of theses of 'history *tout court*' in Rousseau. But also, as Derrida argues, the history of philosophy is explicitly in question. Let us recall that in the *avertissement* Derrida writes explicitly that the classical categories of history are explicitly put in question. It is a matter of understanding how and why this is done.

Despite listing so many histories, Derrida is not interested in *telling* their stories. He is not himself writing history. But, as we have argued, he *is* concerned with historicity, with what makes these histories as such. He is interested in the 'structural' principle of the

²⁰ Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 235-6/165-6, see also 125/84.

²¹ Ibid., 248-54/174-9, see also 377/267.

²² Ibid., 204-5, 219-226, 229-30/142-3, 152-7, 160.

²³ This also means the history of the debates over its composition, Ibid., 243-245, 272-8/171-2, 192-4.

²⁴ Ibid., 279-309/195-216.

²⁵ Ibid., 397-416/280-295.

²⁶ Ibid., 347-8/244-5.

²⁷ Ibid., 442/314, see also 415-6/294-5.

²⁸ Ibid., 416-8, 430/295-6, 304.

supplementary stories and of situating them in relation to each other. That is, within the system of Rousseau's propositions and descriptions, the organisations which allow movement from one 'state' to another, from a nature to culture, from *amour de soi* to *amour-propre*, from a united sung-speech to song and speech independent of each other. This movement is always the movement of a *supplément*, that now-famous term which Derrida extracts from Rousseau and which is the unerring focus of his essay. How does history operate in connection with the supplement? In a couple of places, Derrida specifies 'history—as supplementarity', or uses the vocabulary he has carefully linked to the supplement in connection with history.²⁹ In *Part I*, Derrida has already used 'history as writing', proposed that historicity is tied to the possibility of writing, and announced *all* history as the movement of the trace, and linked together life, *différance*, with the 'history of the *gramme*.'³⁰ History is thus used to describe, at least in part, the *active movement of différence, trace, and supplément*, which somehow opens history, as historicity itself. The change in the form of the word is important. 'Historicity', 'supplementarity', indicate a somewhat Kantian language of possibility. This apparent Kantianism is, however, disabled by the recognition that its possibility is also its *impossibility*, in a way that we shall have to make clear.³¹

Le supplément is another name for *différance*, which Derrida also calls, astonishingly, 'history of life'.³² If history designates the movement of the supplement, if we can say history as supplementarity—does this mean that history is another term in the special chain of signifiers, designating that difference that is older than being? We must answer 'no'. No, because even though Derrida will parse the 'lexemes' of *différance*, trace, etc., as various *kinds* of history, this is to call attention to and represent certain elements of their

²⁹ See *Ibid.*, 254, 284/179, 199.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 18, 43, 69, 125/8, 27, 47, 84. Cf. *Writing and Difference*, 4. In the *Grammatology*, the passage on p. 69/47 occupies a priority for us here. See 'the history of life' below.

³¹ Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 206/143. Cf. Bennington, *Legislations: the politics of deconstruction*.

³² *Ibid.*, 25, 236/84, 165.

functioning.³³ These lexemes often indicate a temporalizing or additive aspect that is involved in our descriptions of movement and change. The concatenation of a series of changes together can be collectively called a ‘history’. This relates them as a body, and establishes the field of relevant differences, the ‘context’, under which we can understand any individual difference.

Nonetheless, history remains, as we will see, inadequate as a name for the level Derrida wishes to describe. Although the relation between the lexemes and history itself has become established, and, according to Derrida’s statement continues as a part of the work Derrida intends, it nonetheless has certain limits. History, in French, German or English, in one term or two, obviously doesn’t possess the range of reference of the other terms he uses to ‘nickname’ the trace.³⁴ Despite Derrida’s declaration of the intention to *modify* the concept of history, this modification is itself subject to limits imposed by the historically attested features of history. The work Derrida wishes to carry out is not voluntaristic, in the sense of whimsical or arbitrary decision about its meaning. It is a rigorous and painstaking work that seeks to find in the workings of ‘history’ an element that can be appropriated.

‘History’ as a concept, open *within limits* to being modified, lacks a feature which Derrida deems important for his purposes. But it is by no means unique in this regard. Rather, this is precisely the state of *complicity* that Derrida describes between our common language and metaphysics as the priority of presence. This doesn’t mean we move on to something better, however. *None* of our philosophical concepts are adequate, whence the resurrection of curious old names and laborious effort to re-ensconce them. These are offcasts and chances of history and in history, their deformities symptomatic of *decisions* that Derrida would like to expose, in order to reveal something about history.

³³ ‘Lexemes’ after Marian Hobson’s description, *Jacques Derrida: Opening lines* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

³⁴ ‘Les concepts de *présent*, de *passé* et d’*avenir*, tout ce qui dans les concepts de temps et d’histoire en suppose l’évidence classique ... ne peut décrire adéquatement la structure de la trace.’ Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 97/67.

So history is not dropped. It has a positive but ‘minor’ role in connection with the lexemes. In its later, positive definition, ‘after’ it has been worked over, it is indeed related to Derrida’s major terms, but it is missing at least one whole range of movement that Derrida thinks necessary. So, perhaps ‘history’ is a false thread to follow—a dead end? Derrida’s texts may even seem to support this conclusion at several points, concluding history as a name is ‘no longer suitable’, or that another word should be used.³⁵ But to conclude this would be to miss the fact that *history’s very unsuitability must have an instructive value that exceeds it*, which explains Derrida’s persistent use of a word he so clearly deems inadequate. That is, Derrida wishes to demonstrate something by this ‘unsuitability’. Derrida never simply proposes something else, a new name. This strategy could be related to both Rousseau and Heidegger. Heidegger’s destruction, for example, which ‘retrieves’ concepts, but also Rousseau’s renovation of the concept of ‘nature’. The ‘revisionist history’ of the Rousseau essay questions and exhausts history in a certain way even as it then ‘returns’ to it, continues it, *persists* in using the old name. But if history is the unsuitable name, there are also proposed by Derrida names, or ‘nicknames’ at least, that have a relative priority over history. The major instance of this is the now famous term ‘supplement’.

Supplement

In the *Grammatology*, the main lexeme related to history is ‘supplement’. A rigorous description of the ‘concept’ of the *supplément* is the aim of the Derrida’s essay, for it is the critical element of the theory of writing Derrida finds in Rousseau. Derrida tracks the word everywhere in Rousseau’s corpus, and, like the histories we mentioned, supplements proliferate, multiplying themselves all over the place, for this is precisely the meaning of the

³⁵ See Ibid., 127, 350/85, 246. The same movement occurs in ‘Violence and Metaphysics’. See *Writing and Difference*, 122-3 and 148. History is also mentioned as unsatisfactory in ‘Différance’, *Margins of Philosophy*, 11.

supplement. Supplement takes precedence over history. History can appear as *but one kind* of supplementarity, and so we need to distinguish them and determine their relationship. Supplement is that famous term, designating the relationship of writing to speech in Rousseau: writing is the supplement of speech. It announces the derivative nature of the relation, according to Rousseau. But Derrida takes the supplement and uses it to describe the general 'text' in what he calls an 'infrastructural sense'.³⁶

Derrida has extraordinary ambitions for the status that is described by 'infrastructure'. This infrastructural sense names 'that which not only *precedes* metaphysics but also *goes beyond* the thought of being'.³⁷ It literally overflows being. How can *anything* be outside being? We begin to see why the supplement is called a *nothing*. As we saw in the previous chapter, Derrida wishes to describe 'the greatest totality', and here we see this same ambition.³⁸ A member of the series that also includes *trace*, *différance* and *arche-écriture*, 'supplement' and these other terms affect or apply to themselves, in Rodolphe Gasché's words, 'being folded upon themselves in such a manner that they themselves become a paradigm of the law they represent'.³⁹ That is, the supplement describes its own movement, it supplements itself with another definition, indicates its own substitution and replacement. We see in these terms a dual movement that, like Hegel with *Aufhebung*, Derrida delights in. However, they also mark a difference to *Aufhebung*, in that they indicate difference without contradiction, or contradiction without opposition.⁴⁰ They do not ascend into higher terms, but continue producing differences.

³⁶ The term is Derrida's, though it has come to be associated with Rodolphe Gasché's account of Derrida's work in *Tain of the Mirror*. Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 234/164.

³⁷ 'Ce qui non seulement précède la métaphysique mais aussi déborde la pensée de l'être', Ibid., 207/143.

³⁸ 'la plus grande totalité,' Ibid., 68/46. That is, it is the most general functioning imaginable, such that it can describe the entire field of entities, without, nonetheless, itself being an entity, (see the following page, p.69/47).

³⁹ Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror*, 243.

⁴⁰ See Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 107, cf.121.

In reading Derrida's Rousseau essay, we note that the movement of the argument does not begin with writing, but rather with the concept of nature. The supplement, as Rousseau uses it, Derrida notes, must first be related to nature, the 'real mother'. Nothing can replace the mother's love, Derrida quotes from *Emile*, implying the sufficiency and uniqueness of the provisions of nature for mankind.⁴¹ But we begin to see the subtlety and difficulty of the operation of the supplement when we see that it adds supplementary levels, complicating effects. At the cultural, pedagogical level, the raising of children, their education, is nothing but a system of *supplying nature's deficiencies*. Nature has *not* provided all we need to exist, for we must work hard to obtain so much; learning, teaching, inventing when we encounter a deficiency.

A moral level to the supplement is also encountered when human artifice supplements nature, or when evil occurs. The character of *perversion* is always the *turning away* from a sufficient nature to other pursuits, to a non-natural evil.⁴² As Derrida progressively describes the supplement, it will be writing, he argues, that comes to exemplify such a threat for Rousseau. Why would one turn away from nature, unless it was already somehow lacking or missing something? But that nature is deficient is something that defies reason, according to Rousseau's concept. Derrida formulates the threat of the supplement as the threat of an *image* that accounts *for* reason. If it accounts for reason, it is therefore unaccountable *within* reason, being external to it:

La raison est incapable de penser cette double infraction à la nature : qu'il y ait du *manque* dans la nature et que *par là-même* quelque chose s'ajoute à elle. D'ailleurs on ne doit pas dire que la raison est *impuissante à penser cela* ; elle est constituée par cette impuissance. Elle est le principe d'identité. Elle est la pensée de l'identité à soi de l'être naturel. Elle ne peut même pas déterminer le supplément comme son autre, comme l'irrationnel et le non-naturel, car le supplément vient *naturellement* se

⁴¹ Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 209/145.

⁴² Ibid., 211/147.

mettre à la place de la nature. Le supplément est l'image et la représentation de la nature. Or l'image n'est ni dans ni hors de la nature.

Reason is incapable of thinking this double offence against nature: That there is a lack in nature, and that because of that same lack something adds to it. Nonetheless, one must not say that reason is *powerless to think this*; it is constituted by this powerlessness. It is the principle of identity. It is the thought of the identity of the natural being itself. It cannot even determine the supplement as its other, as the irrational and the non-natural, because the supplement *naturally* comes to take up the place of nature. The supplement is the image and representation of nature. But the image is neither in nor outside of nature.⁴³

The supplement makes reason possible—but by the same token, it is precisely what reason is incapable of thinking, appearing only as a kind of contradiction and under the strange status of the image, neither inside nor outside nature. The supplement is thus a *nothing*, parasitic on what it doubles or replaces. Neither presence nor absence, word or thing, no energy of its own.⁴⁴ To prefer the image to what is natural is a perversion and threat to the bounty of nature: but of course this perversion is necessary, because nature, which gives everything being, is structurally in need of supplementation, and so the 'nothing' of the image turns out to have a scandalous priority.

Considered from the perspective of the faculties involved, this priority of the image brings the *imagination* to the fore—it is the faculty of *images*, signs and representation.⁴⁵ A passage from the ontological to the anthropological is inscribed in Rousseau, in considering the genesis of man from animality. Imagination, before reason, will broach history and fuel it

⁴³ Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 214/149.

⁴⁴ Ibid. 'Le supplément n'a pas de sens et ne se donne à aucune intuition. Nous le faisons donc sortir ici de son étrange pénombre. Nous en disons la réserve' (214/149). 'Le supplément n'est rien, il n'a aucune énergie propre, aucune mouvement spontané. C'est un organisme parasitaire' (253/178). 'Rousseau se sert du mot et décrit la chose. Mais nous savons maintenant que ce à quoi nous avons ici affaire n'est ni du mot ni de la chose' (348/245). 'Moins que rien et pourtant, à en juger par ses effets, beaucoup plus que rien. Le supplément n'est ni une présence ni une absence' (442/314).

⁴⁵ See especially Ibid., 259-262/182-5.

through perfectibility.⁴⁶ It awakens man's powers, dormant up until that point. It gives birth to language and inaugurates the relationship with death. Temporality is here too, so that the horizons of past and future are opened.⁴⁷ Here is the boundary, on Derrida's reading of Rousseau, between the human and animal, between nature and history: imagination, power of the image, the supplement. Derrida unites the ontological and the anthropological in an astonishing formulation that describes life itself. But then, of course, he will find these qualities precisely in Rousseau's descriptions of writing.

L'imagination est le pouvoir, pour la vie, de s'affecter elle-même de sa propre représentation. L'image ne peut re-présenter et ajouter le re-présentant au représenté que dans la mesure où la présence du représenté est déjà pliée sur soi dans le monde, dans la mesure où la vie renvoie à soi comme à son propre manque, à sa propre demande de supplément. La présence du représenté se constitue grâce à l'addition à soi de ce rien qu'est l'image, l'annonce de sa dépossession dans son propre représentant et dans sa mort. Le *propre* du sujet n'est que le mouvement de cette expropriation représentative. En ce sens l'imagination, comme la mort, est *représentative et supplémentaire*. N'oublions pas que ce sont là des qualités que Rousseau reconnaît expressément à l'écriture.

The imagination is the power, for life, of affecting itself from its own representation. The image cannot re-present and add the representer to the represented except insofar as the presence of the represented is already folded over on itself in the world, insofar as life refers to itself in its own lack, to its own need for a supplement. The presence of the represented is constituted thanks to the addition to itself of the nothing that is the image, the announcement of its dispossession in its own representative and in its death. The *ownness* of the subject is nothing other than the movement of this representative expropriation. In this sense, the imagination, as death, is *representative and supplementary*. Let us not forget that these are the qualities that Rousseau explicitly recognises in writing.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 259-260/182-183.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 270-1/191.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 261-2/184.

The formulation is very difficult but precise. The strange ontological status of the ‘image’ (‘nothing’, neither in nor outside nature as in the previous quotation), becomes the condition of ‘life’. The structure of the representer and the represented is that of a self-relation. ‘I’, who am the representer of myself, and thus the represented; this is the complex structure of my ‘ownness’ (*propre*), ‘presence’ or self-consciousness. This self-relation, writes Derrida, must proceed by passing through the world, ‘folding over on itself’ in the world. The possibility of the ‘image’ essentially relies upon a ‘worldly’ space and substance. It thus calls up the distinction between myself and another, between the space of my body and the space of the world.

The image, however, is also in this way, the relation to death. Immediately before our quotation above, Derrida writes ‘Imagination is at bottom the relationship with death.’⁴⁹ This is because my image, which gives me the sense of being that being who has sense, passes through the world, and remains there. My trace, Derrida writes elsewhere, is left in the world, abandoned in exteriority.⁵⁰ This source of my presence, my very sense of self, is thus also my *dispossession*, ‘announcement’ of my death, as Derrida writes.⁵¹ Now, this strange and disconcerting power of the image is posed at several levels all at once. It is *ontological*, as the structure and ‘power’ of ‘life’.⁵² Additionally, within the context of Rousseau’s writing, it also marks the *anthropological*, and thus the beginning of the *historical*; the separation of man from nature, at the point of becoming human through sociality,

⁴⁹ ‘L’imagination est dans son fond le rapport à la mort,’ Ibid., 261/184.

⁵⁰ The opening page of *Part II*, ch.3 describes the same structure, Ibid., 235/165. See, too a description of the same structure in the opening pages. It confirms the concatenation of ontological and historical levels, ‘the privilege of the *phonè* does not depend on a choice that could have been avoided. It responds to a moment of economy (we say of the ‘life’ of ‘history’ or of the ‘being as self-relationship’). The system of ‘*s’entendre-parler*’ through the phonic substance—which gives itself as non-exterior, non-worldly signifier, therefore non-empirical or non-contingent—has necessarily dominated an entire epoch of the history of the world, has even produced the idea of world, the idea of the origin of world that arises from the difference between the worldly and the non-worldly, the outside and the inside, ideality and non-ideality, universal and non-universal, the transcendental and the empirical, etc.’ (17/8). These two references are also, of course, references to Derrida’s *Speech and Phenomena*. See p.79.

⁵¹ Recall that in the previous chapter we had argued that ‘announcing’ was a privileged structure of the ‘phenomenology’ of the trace.

⁵² ‘A universal structure of experience,’ ‘condition of an experience in general,’ ‘another name for “life,”’ Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 235/165.

inauguration of society.⁵³ Lastly, the possibility of the image communicates with the ‘qualities’ of writing. The image, and the faculty of imagination, and the dizzying horizons that it opens, is thus also connected with the technical aspects of drawing and writing, the entire range of possibilities in the arts of representation. For, as mentioned above, a trace or a representation left by means of a worldly signifier is ‘like’ writing. Indeed, that the possibility of language can be summed up by the ‘image’ is indeed the demanding thesis of the entire *Grammatology*—that there is a (‘graphic’) writing at the heart of speech, ‘an eye at the centre of language.’⁵⁴ But we must add one more ‘level’, which would be not so much a level but the name of the concatenation of all these levels together. Its general feature is the supplement, and so the description of this situation of its various possibilities, could be described as ‘supplementarity’. But if this new level exceeds all the others, and is nonetheless characterised as a ‘nothing’, then it is a strange new level, too of history, or rather historicity.

The imagination is representative and supplementary, Derrida writes. It is a faculty that works expressly according to the ‘logic’ of the supplement. The subject becomes what he is thanks to the supplementary image, the human becomes what she is thanks to the powers of the imagination. On this basis, Derrida draws up a *scheme* or *diagram* for Rousseau’s thought. *Le schema*: ‘it never varies,’⁵⁵ and this diagram would determine the *metaphysical* function of history, of locating a *break* as opposed to play, repetition, substitution, and gradual differentiation—in a word, supplementation, at the birth of man.⁵⁶ Having described the ‘logic’ of the supplement we are now in a position to grasp what I contend is the core of the Rousseau essay, which governs the development of the argument, and which has been

⁵³ ‘Imagination is the becoming-human of pity,’ Ibid., 262/185. Imagination ‘broaches history ... inaugurates liberty and perfectibility,’ (259-60/182-3).

⁵⁴ See Ibid., 339/238.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 262/185.

⁵⁶ See especially Ibid., 265-6/187, but the whole section 259-266/182-187. In ch.1, in foreshadowing his emphasis on Rousseau, Derrida has already pointed out that Rousseau was well within the ‘Platonic diagram’. See 29-30/16-18.

constantly shied away from in the criticism on the *Grammatology*. It is nothing other than this diagram of history.

The diagram of history

History, in Rousseau, but also conventionally, names the break at which man would have emerged from a state of nature. History coincides with the name of 'man'. In becoming man, in being distinguished from the animal that he is by virtue of his faculties, by literally his *virtue*, man becomes historical. 'History' is an over-arching concept opposed to that of nature, a second nature that makes nature itself appear by distancing itself from it. Coordinated with the 'working hypothesis' of a state of nature is the methodological stipulation that history *as a discipline of facts* can do little in the face of Rousseau's question. The historical condition which Rousseau seeks to discover, that simple soul upon which the accretions of history have had so devastating effect, *requires* the bracketing of the various stories of man's actual past in order to produce that universality with which one can judge the historical state of man. History is excluded precisely in order to demonstrate a more radical historical level, the historicity of man's being. Thus Lionel Gossman still calls Rousseau's method 'historical', even if 'we begin therefore by excluding all the facts, for they do not reach the point in question.'⁵⁷ Various facts can then be *readmitted* into the exercise, but purely for providing examples of imaginative variation, *not* because they ground the account. Rousseau can thus consider travel narratives, examples from various native peoples, or Biblical stories, but he is not, in doing so, contradicting his methodological requirements.⁵⁸ Derrida admires Rousseau on this consistency and rigour. It

⁵⁷ 'Commençons donc par écarter tous les faits, car ils ne touchent point à la question,' Rousseau, *Oeuvres complètes III*, 132. Gossman, 'Time and history in Rousseau.' Cf. Gouhier's description of nature as « extra-historique », Gouhier, *Les Méditations métaphysiques de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*. There are some remarkable similarities between Gossman's 1964 essay and Derrida's Rousseau essay.

⁵⁸ Cf. Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 357/252.

is a point he compares to Husserl, and to Lévi-Strauss. The *reduction* of the ‘facts’ of history produces the utmost attentiveness to the requirements for thinking history.

So, at this stage, we have reached the point where man moves into history, *becomes man*, by supplementing nature. Whether this distinction is described by Rousseau as the advent of agriculture and industry, love, speech, the imagination, or social laws, each case is one of supplementing the provision of nature with the ingenuity, artifice, or in the case of love, perversion, of humanity.⁵⁹ In terms of understanding the movement of Derrida’s text, we find it expressed with admirable economy in the title for *Part II*, ‘nature, culture, writing.’ It tracks the movement from nature into culture, and then, a focus on a determined instance of culture—writing—and this latter feature provides the resources to describe the *whole* ensemble. Derrida’s aim is therefore to isolate the theory of writing contained in Rousseau’s *Essai sur l’origine des langues*, which appears there at first glance as a minor inclusion; two chapters in the total of twenty. But the *method* of Derrida’s approach is to proceed by formalising Rousseau’s concept of history. This is precisely because it is history that names the level at which ‘writing’ is situated in Rousseau’s work, as a feat of culture. However, it is also only by mapping the concept of history that ‘nature’ is brought into view.

For we recall that within Rousseau’s thought, nature is nowhere a ‘given’. It is that state ‘which no longer exists, perhaps never did, and probably never will.’⁶⁰ Nonetheless, it is necessary to have precise ideas about ‘nature’, even if they remain hypothetical, for only in this way is one able to secure a critique of present society. The operation that Rousseau describes for thinking nature, in setting aside the facts and stripping man of his ‘successive modifications’ resembles a kind of wild reduction to ‘man in general’. Now, within this general idea of man, Rousseau detects two principles antecedent to reason. One is care, or concern, for self-preservation and well-being, and the other is pity, such that man is repulsed

⁵⁹ For agriculture and love, for example, see respectively *Ibid.*, 212-3, 250ff./149, 175ff.

⁶⁰ ‘Un Etat qui n’existe plus, qui n’a peut-être point existé, qui probablement n’existera jamais,’ Rousseau, *Oeuvres Complètes III*, 123; *Discourse on Inequality*, 15.

by seeing the suffering of another.⁶¹ By displacing reason in this way, man is not, for Rousseau, firstly a philosopher.⁶² Concern for preservation, and pity, are therefore in Rousseau privileged points of access to an ontological definition of the animal that is man. Especially pity, insofar as it reveals itself as a common property of animals and men.

Now, Derrida begins with *pitié*, that natural sentiment that is repulsed by the suffering of another creature, because of this privileged access. The faculty of pity is modified when man becomes historical. For Rousseau, this amounts to a perversion, as we have indicated above. Charting its modifications under its ‘historical perversion’, *la passion amoureuse*, Derrida notes that this is the *history of love*: ‘In it is reflected history simply as *denaturalisation*’.⁶³ The movement from pity to passionate love forms a pattern or diagram, *le schéma*, that Derrida will increasingly refine as he examines other ‘supplements’. In this pattern, we find combined the theory of pity, history (brought into view by the perversion), and the supplement (the mechanism of the perversion). History as denaturalisation is:

Ce qui s’ajoute à la nature, le supplément moral, déplace, par substitution, la force de la nature. En ce sens le supplément n’est rien, il n’a aucune énergie propre, aucun mouvement spontané. C’est un organisme parasitaire, une imagination ou une représentation qui détermine et oriente la force du désir. On ne pourra jamais expliquer à partir de la nature et de la force naturelle que quelque chose comme la différence d’une *préférence* puisse, sans propre, forcer la force. Un tel étonnement donne tout son élan et toute sa forme à la pensée de Rousseau. Ce schéma est déjà une interprétation de l’histoire par Rousseau.

That which adds to nature, the moral supplement, shifting, by substitution, the force of nature. In this sense the supplement is nothing, it has no proper energy, no spontaneous movement. It is a parasitic organism, an image or representation which

⁶¹ Rousseau, *Oeuvres Complètes III*, 125-6 ; *Discourse on Inequality*, 17-8.

⁶² This is the polemical thrust of the Second *Discourse*, that reason stifles nature.

⁶³ Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 253/178. My emphasis; ‘en elle se réfléchit l’histoire tout court comme dénaturaion’. This history of love is *also* a philosophical history: ‘Rousseau décrit ici la lutte entre l’homme et la femme selon *le schéma* et dans les termes mêmes de la dialectique hégélienne du maître et de l’esclave,’” (The example is from *Emile*), *Ibid.*, 250/176.

determines and orients the force of desire. One can never explain from nature and natural force that something like the difference of a *preference* could, without its own force, force force. Such an astonishment gives all its momentum and shape to Rousseau's thought. This diagram is already an interpretation of history by Rousseau.⁶⁴

History is once again the supplementary image of nature. How is it an 'image'? It implicitly rests on his understanding of the pivotal role played by the imagination in the generation of reason. The portion of the *Discourse* under discussion makes it clear. 'Imagination, which wreaks much havoc among us, never speaks to the savage's heart.'⁶⁵ In order, under the social or 'moral' element of love, to focus one's attentions on one particular woman, one must have access to conceptions of beauty, and thus comparison, (which is the element of conceptuality for Rousseau). The one whom I love is thus a representation produced by reason, with the qualities of beauty, proportion, etc.⁶⁶ Given this source in reason, this is a perversion of the natural, 'physical' sentiment of desire. Woman is supplemented by her representation, which focuses, like a lens, the force of nature. The image thus produces real and lasting effects. The natural force of desire has been turned, deviated, in this case by the change which diverts natural pity or compassion, diverting and focusing it into passionate love: focusing a universal force onto an individual. It marks the boundary between nature and society in this way, and jealousy among men becomes an index of the distance from nature. Thus the 'diagram' is the turn, the deviation and departure, away from nature; denaturalisation, inaugurated by an image. And what is a diagram but an image? It *represents* the effects of the supplement, the movement of history itself, astonishingly through nothing less than the easily missed import, the slight fact, of representation.

⁶⁴ Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 253/178.

⁶⁵ 'L'imagination qui fait tant de ravages parmi nous, ne parle point à cœurs Sauvages,' *Oeuvres Complètes III*, 158 ; *Discourse on Inequality*, 49.

⁶⁶ 'The moral side of love is an unnatural sentiment ... grounded on certain notions of merit and beauty that a savage is not equipped to feel and on comparisons he is not equipped to make, it must be almost non-existent for him. For since his mind cannot form abstract ideas of regularity and proportion, his heart is incapable of feeling those sentiments of love and admiration that—even without its being noticed—issue from the application of these ideas,' Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, 49.

Derrida immediately notes that there is a possibility of reading this interpretation as a *theory of history* in two different ways, and that Rousseau oscillates between them. Firstly, as above, it describes the origin of history, historicity. But on other occasions when speaking of women and love, the supplement appears *within* history, *already* established. It is no longer the original corrupting supplement, but now it is itself supplementary, another corruption in an accelerating downfall, or even, the corruption of corruption, that is, its slowing. This is the serial, proliferating nature that the meanings of ‘supplement’ can indicate, and that Derrida has indicated as the logic of history. Derrida is exhibiting the dizzying ‘logic’ of the supplement—it allows its appearance at multiple levels, sometimes determined as negative by Rousseau, other times as positive. History here is the play, *le jeu*, of the different values of the supplement, sometimes accelerating evil, sometimes guarding against it, protecting itself. It is what allows the supplement to sometimes appear as providence, and what in Derrida’s later texts is called auto-immunity.⁶⁷ History regulates itself through the supplement. If the image is the threat of death, history also protects itself from the abyss.⁶⁸

The various histories that Derrida identifies in Rousseau’s text allow Derrida to chart the possibilities of the supplement. Their variations allow the refinement and increasingly complex construction of the diagram. In this first effort to draw the diagram, we think history according to a line that *begins* to turn away from nature. *Pitié*, however, was itself already a ‘natural deviation’ from *amour de soi*. Deferring the concern for one’s own well-being through concern for another, pity naturally refracts care through the relation to others. Animals moreover, are not without it.⁶⁹ We cannot, therefore, easily situate a break or a beginning, between nature and history, animality and man. But this is the direction that the concept of history would usually push us towards: History or becoming is thought in terms of the ‘accomplishment of a dynamis’, which would make a ‘pure history’, opposed to

⁶⁷ See Martin Hägglund’s account, *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 13-15.

⁶⁸ Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 254/179.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 248-9/174-5.

nature, of man coming into his own, which entails man recognising himself *as* man, defining by excluding the animals and all that is not man from his realm.⁷⁰

The most completely described ‘history’ of man in the *Grammatology* is one that tracks the history of the voice. Man is distinguished from the animals, for Rousseau, in his very cry.

‘As soon as vocal signs strike your ear, they announce to you a being like yourself.’⁷¹

Rousseau’s *Essai* speculates on an entwined history of song and speech, a history of their divergence from a common birth. It is here Derrida’s ‘diagram’ receives its fullest description. It begins from nature: ‘On several levels, nature is the ground, the inferior stage: it is necessary to cross it, to exceed but also rejoin it. We must return there but without cancelling the difference.’⁷² This difference is crucial, for it is history itself, it is the passage between one point and another, a passage we recall that was so economically expressed in the graphic ‘turn of writing’ that crossed itself out. Here, nature is the limit that operates an ‘archeo-teleological’ structure, which a supplement would *turn* one away from or back towards. There is never only one supplement however, and the series piles up. It proliferates. Here, language, philosophy, political structure and arts of representation are all braided together in Rousseau’s history.

These histories do not operate independently but are supplements and deviations of each other. Philosophy, for Rousseau, corrupts speaking, and so music is compromised. Cold rationality holds forth repressing the art of arousing emotion in song, and the poets and musicians leave the city, and political servitude soon follows.⁷³ This concatenation of ‘catastrophes’ is, Derrida declares, truly ‘the strange pace of the historical process

⁷⁰ Ibid., 266,347/187,244. Another history: Derrida writes ‘L’homme ne s’appelle l’homme qu’en dessinant des limites excluant son autre du jeu de la supplémentarité : la pureté de la nature, de l’animalité, de la primitivité, de l’enfance, de la folie, de la divinité ... L’histoire de l’homme s’appelant l’homme est l’articulation de toutes ces limites entre elles,’ (247-8).

⁷¹ Rousseau, *Essay on the Origin of Languages*, 63; Cf. Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 280-1/196.

⁷² Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 282/197.

⁷³ See the descriptions and quotations at Ibid., 287-8/201-2.

according to Rousseau'. In the process, he lays out the full description of the diagram of history:

A partir d'une origine ou d'un centre qui se divise et sort de soi, un cercle historique est décrit, qui a le sens d'une dégénérescence mais comporte un progrès et des effets compensateurs. Sur la ligne de ce cercle, de nouvelles origines pour de nouveaux cercles qui accélèrent la dégénérescence en annulant les effets compensateurs de cercle précédent, et d'ailleurs en en faisant alors apparaître la vérité et le bénéfice.

From an origin or centre which divides and parts from itself, a historical circle is described, which has a degenerative direction but carries progress and compensatory effects with it. In the path of that circle, new origins for new circles, which, besides making its truth and goodness appear, quicken the degeneration and cancel the compensations of the preceding one.⁷⁴

The concatenation of historical cycles serves to produce a continuing series of catastrophes and compensations. It is a kind of self-regulating system that links diverse systems and levels together, ensuring that the origin, nature, is never drawn near, but nor is the catastrophe ever complete. Language and grammar improve, but music suffers. The degeneration takes one away from nature, but the progress of reason is a compensation. Derrida's innovation is to detect a kind of isonomy at work that allows each element to have both positive and negative effects, 'progress' and 'regress' in Rousseau's system.⁷⁵ Each catastrophe destroyed the compensations of a previous period, but would then produce its own equilibrium, before being disclosed and destroyed by a subsequent development. The origin itself is described like a cellular mitosis, dividing, and dividing again. The system has no end, and so Derrida remarks 'and thus to infinity'.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Compare Asher Horowitz, *Rousseau, Nature, and History*, (1987), 90. Horowitz notes Rousseau's awareness of distinct 'socio-economic' forms in human history. All are 'internally contradictory' and thus unstable, incomplete realisations. Derrida agrees—but expands the economy beyond the 'socio-economic', and, moreover, sees in Rousseau as we see here, not only the instabilities, but *also* the *relative* stabilities or equilibriums that are achieved.

Encore cet infini n'est-il pas celui d'un horizon ou d'un abîme, d'un progrès ou d'une chute. C'est l'infini d'une répétition suivant un étrange chemin. Car il faut encore compliquer le schéma précédent : chaque nouveau cycle entame une progression-régression qui, détruisant les effets de la précédente, nous reconduit à une nature encore plus enfouie, plus vieille, plus archaïque. Le progrès consiste toujours à nous rapprocher de l'animalité. Nous le vérifierons souvent. En tout cas, le 'ainsi à l'infini' de ce mouvement se laisserait difficilement représenter par le tracé d'une ligne, si compliqué soit-il.

Ce qu'on ne peut pas ainsi représenter par une ligne, c'est le tour du retour quand il a l'allure de la re-présentation. Ce qu'on ne peut pas re-présenter, c'est le rapport de la représentation à la présence dite originaire. La re-présentation est aussi une dé-présentation. Elle est liée à l'œuvre de l'espacement.

Yet this infinity is not that of a horizon or an abyss. It is an infinity of repetition following a strange path. For the preceding diagram must be complicated yet again: Each new cycle broaches a progression-regression which, destroying the effects of the preceding one, escorts us back to a nature yet more buried, more ancient, more archaic. Progress always consists of bringing us closer to animality in cancelling the progress through which we have transgressed animality. We will confirm it often. In any case, the 'thus to infinity' of this movement leaves us in difficulty with representing it in a linear plan, however complex.

What one cannot then represent by a line is the turn of the return when it has the pace of re-presentation. What one cannot re-present is the relation of the representation to the presence called originary. Re-presentation is also a de-presentation. It is tied to the work of spacing.⁷⁶

Derrida draws a diagram. It is the schema that collects together all of the elements of Rousseau's ontology, anthropology, the systems of arts and politics and the isonomy of supplementation which connects them. All are related to the distinction against the ground of

⁷⁶ Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 289/202-3.

nature, operating at several levels, which allocates values of 'progress' or 'degeneration' according to its movement. But Derrida quickly narrows the diagram down to a complication, then a difficulty, and then an impossibility. *Repetition* is what complicates problems for the historical line. Why? Because repetition implies historical distance *at the same time* as also presenting the same path. It says proximity and distance, repetition and difference, at once. Thus the description tends toward a circular figure that attempts to preserve this repetition, difference and proximity, by joining and retracing itself. And yet, because the difference of the traced path always remains, we would therefore conclude that the circle never completely succeeds in rejoining itself, remaining open.

Derrida quickly moves on, however, to what makes the graphic possible, and here we find the impossibility. If the catastrophes of history are the supplement as image of nature, then in *drawing* a diagram, we are already 'representing' re-presentation. We are repeating it, precisely. However, the *initial* relation between the re-presentation and its original presence is lost. What first brings about the diagram cannot itself appear *in* the diagram. In other words, we can represent a meaning of history, interpret it in a diagram only so long as the origin has been obscured by the decision to pose it thus; in considering it in the form of the line, it necessarily reduces the possibility that allows it. Now this impossibility is not that of complex design. Even if we *could* draw what Derrida describes as a complex network of circles and divisions, the impossible representation to which Derrida then refers is what must *be assumed* in any and every drawing. One cannot *draw* a diagram illustrating the *possibility* of diagrams.

From here on, Derrida will therefore refer to it as a *strange graphic* or the *impossible diagram*: Rousseau is 'caught' in the 'graphic of supplementarity'. This 'graphic' doubles as a contrast with 'logic', referring then to a kind of visibility in distinction to the vocal

connotations of *logos*.⁷⁷ This visibility is that of the ‘image’, and the imagination that we have already indicated, the ‘eye’ in language. Reason and discourse are supplementary systems that do not have a priority in Rousseau’s concept of history, they are but one determined system of representation caught *in* the diagram of history. By contrast, the ‘graphic’ is *silent, unheard*. It is therefore a rather literal corollary to the argument for speech being a species of ‘writing’. The graphic is privileged over speech by Derrida, in terms of Rousseau, because for the latter it is itself closer to nature. Rousseau’s system of thought allows him to praise the *gesture* as ‘a more natural, more expressive, more immediate sign’, and because the graphic essence of writing therefore *precedes* and *follows* speech, writing ‘comprehends’ speech. Writing therefore includes speech within it, and its graphic is closer to representing the supplement. In a way, the entire argument of the *Grammatology* is in this difference between ‘graphic’ and ‘logic’. It is in this sense, then, that Derrida writes that there is an *eye* at the centre of language.⁷⁸

The diagram proposed by Derrida, for which we could imagine a very complex design of open circles, a spiral, or perhaps a *chain*, stands in for an ‘impossible diagram’. We should emphasise this ‘standing in for’ as itself ‘supplementary.’ Derrida has already told us that the supplement is *in* a chain and *describes* that chain.⁷⁹ Here it also becomes clear that in one part of its movement, the supplement escapes from its representation. This was the ‘impossible’ element that could not itself be represented. Now, this is precisely what Derrida means by ‘textuality’. Insofar as a text is a kind of referential system that includes within it reference to an indefinite, unlimited process of repetition and replacement, it cannot

⁷⁷ See, for example, Ibid. ‘caught in the graphic,’ (350/246); graphic comprehending logic, (366/259); ‘the circle, the ellipse, the *unrepresentable figure of the movement of history*,’ (300/211); ‘the *progress of history*, the degradation that unites with it according to *the strange graphic of supplementarity*,’ (321/226); ‘the strange time, the *indescribable* diagram, the *unrepresentable* movement of its forces,’ (382/271). Emphases mine.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 335-9/235-8. See especially 338-9/238 and compare 390-1/276; For this point, see Peggy Kamuf, ‘The eye at the centre of language,’ in *Reading Derrida's Of Grammatology*, ed. Sean Gaston and Ian Maclachlan (London: Continuum, 2011).

⁷⁹ Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 233/163.

circumscribe its own boundaries. It is structurally open to continuation and modification. And thus the reworking or modification of the concept of history that we are describing is itself an application of a ‘textual’ work that seeks to intervene in a referential network.⁸⁰ Now Derrida seems to associate the temporal openness to modification with the impossible origin when he speaks of the supplement being *exorbitant*.⁸¹ It is the point at which what is named by the supplement determines that the diagram must be impossible, and that point is its advent or origin. Derrida explains the levels at work here:

Le passage de l'état de nature à l'état de langage et de société, l'avènement de la suppléментарité, se tient donc hors de prise pour la simple alternative de la genèse et de la structure, du fait et du droit, de la raison historique et de la raison philosophique. Rousseau explique le supplément à partir d'une négativité parfaitement extérieure au système qu'elle vient bouleverser, y intervenant donc à la manière d'un factum *imprévisible*, d'une force nulle et infinie, d'une catastrophe naturelle qui n'est ni dans la nature ni hors de la nature et reste non-rationnelle comme doit l'être l'origine de la raison.⁸²

The passage from the state of nature to the state of language and society, the advent of supplementarity, holds itself beyond the reach of the simple opposition of genesis and structure, of fact and right, of historical reason and philosophical reason. Rousseau explains the supplement from a negativity perfectly exterior to the system it comes to up-end, therefore intervening there in the manner of *unforeseeable* factum, a null and infinite force, a natural catastrophe that is neither in nor outside of nature and remains non-rational as the origin of reason must be. [My emphasis]

Imprévisible: unforeseeable, unpredictable. The point where the *graphic* fails to be seen. We have been talking about the supplement as something that it was possible to recognise: laws supplement natural pity for social cohesion, education supplements the provisions of nature to make a woman or man, history supplements nature generally. But all of these only present

⁸⁰ Derrida, *Positions*, 51.

⁸¹ On the ‘exorbitant’, see Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 232/162. Note that a ‘diagram’ is discussed on the same page.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 366/259.

a finite face, as it were, of a shifting, unstable, indeterminate play that remains resolutely in the back ground as ‘null and infinite force’, itself not identifiable as an object for philosophy or history—but not for that matter non-philosophical or non-historical. What it makes possible, its representation, precisely because it designates representation limitlessly, it also makes impossible.

*

The diagram of history has converged with that of the supplement, which is in fact the name that Derrida has lifted from Rousseau for this ‘impossible’ structure. The name ‘history’ is operating in the argument at several levels at once. On the one hand, it names that which is entered into upon man’s leaving a state of nature. It names society, law, tradition, and above all, language. It also names the individual trajectories of song, speech, love, etc. Derrida has *also* used it as a synonym for supplementarity, and in his analyses of the various histories he has already done enough to suggest that the supplement exceeds the state of society, that it exceeds the sense of history—and thus this ‘new’ or latter history conforms to a new level of encompassing. That is, this latter sense of supplementarity refers to the whole ensemble – the concatenation of all levels, processes, times and events. That is, as a totality. But we will note that this notion of totality has undergone a revision, for it is no longer everything that *is*, *was*, or *will be*, for under the conditions of supplementarity, presence itself is abstracted or idealised from a constant shifting of values of presence and absence that forestalls there being any pure presence or absence.

The history of writing

The diagram has shown us the relation between history and supplement. It proposed a complex dynamic in Rousseau's thought of turn and return, distance and proximity that suggested a circle, before settling on an impossible or indescribable graphic. When Derrida begins to narrow his analysis (in chapter 4) to consider Rousseau's theory of writing, he modifies the graphic again. It is now a case of two poles which set the structural limits for a form of script. One pole is the most natural, the other the most arbitrary. Every historical variation would appear between these two limits, but a historical progression or sequence is not prescribed. Once more, Derrida bends it around in a circular way. Writing is now the clearest example of the supplement: 'Writing will appear to us more and more as another name for this structure of supplementarity.'⁸³

L'histoire de la voix et de son écriture serait comprise entre deux écritures muettes, entre deux pôles d'universalité se rapportant l'un à l'autre comme le naturel et l'artificiel : le pictogramme et l'algèbre. Le rapport du naturel à l'arbitraire serait lui-même soumis à la loi des 'excès' qui 'se touchent'.

The history of the voice and its writing would be composed between two mute writings, between two poles of universality related one to the other as the natural to the artificial: the pictogram and algebra. The relation of natural to arbitrary would itself be submissive to the law of 'extremes' which 'touch each other.'⁸⁴

Within the range prescribed here, systems of writing are distributed according to various 'economies', various compromises among constituent elements such as technology, available materials and ease of use. It is, as always, a system of supplements. But now Derrida's demonstration and diagram are directed towards showing how Rousseau makes this history of writing entirely contingent, in the sense that Rousseau *attempts* to keep it exterior to

⁸³ Ibid., 348/245.

⁸⁴ Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 428/302.

speech, and only as a *fact* rather than *essentially* implicated in speech.⁸⁵ This contingency is itself part of the calculation or regulation that Derrida has argued for throughout his essay, according to which Rousseau declares one thing, while describing its contradiction.

Rousseau's history of writing is set off by Derrida against Condillac and Warburton's, with whom Rousseau is in conversation.⁸⁶ Condillac and Warburton's proposals occupy an interesting position for Derrida, and it is difficult to determine their role in the *Grammatology*. At first glance, it is a matter of differentiating Rousseau's originality from his sources.⁸⁷ But the import of the differentiation appears to be that Condillac and Warburton here stand in as representative of the metaphysical tradition. This is because both Condillac and Warburton hold the thesis that speech is continuous with a language of action, and thus a *sensible* origin of ideas. This is explicitly co-ordinated with a theological basis, and Derrida detects here a source of the 'plenitude of experience' that remains still in Husserl.⁸⁸ This then provides the opportunity to demonstrate how Rousseau both exceeds and repeats that tradition.

So, Derrida now reconstructs the linear model found in Condillac and Warburton's history of scripts. And, curiously, it is this model that provides some of the bizarre historical imagery—the proliferation of libraries as sign of the end of the book—of the opening sections of the *Grammatology*.⁸⁹ Here, Derrida draws *another* diagram. He has broken off into *two different diagrams* at this point, and the differences between them will be decisive. This must be grasped otherwise it is very difficult to understand why Condillac and Warburton appear at

⁸⁵ See Ibid., 415-6/294.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 397/280ff. Cf. 360, 378, 384-8/254, 268, 272-4. See too Etienne Bonnot de Condillac, *Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge*, Transl. by Hans Aarsleff, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 152-3, and 178-181. Condillac also quotes several paragraphs from Warburton.

⁸⁷ See Derrida *De la Grammatologie*, 386, 398/273, 281.

⁸⁸ See Ibid., 400-1/282-3. The notion of experience, Derrida writes, remains 'fundamentally inscribed in onto-theology'. As is the case throughout this essay on Rousseau, Heidegger is never far away.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 'Cette mort de la civilisation du livre, dont on parle tant et qui se manifeste d'abord par la prolifération convulsive des bibliothèques,' (18/8).

all. With Rousseau's two sources, Derrida undertakes to describe the system within which *logocentrism* finds its justification.

L'histoire de l'écriture, comme histoire de la science, circulerait entre les deux époques de l'écriture universelle, entre deux simplicités, entre deux formes de transparence et d'univocité : une pictographie absolue redoublant la totalité de l'étant naturel dans une consommation effrénée de signifiants, et une graphie absolument formelle réduisant à presque rien la dépense signifiante. Il n'y aurait d'histoire de l'écriture et d'histoire du savoir – on pourrait dire d'histoire tout court – qu'entre ces deux pôles. Et si l'histoire n'est pensable qu'entre ces deux limites, on ne peut disqualifier les mythologies de l'écriture universelle – pictographie ou algèbre – sans suspecter le concept d'histoire lui-même.

The history of writing, as the history of science, would *circulate* between the two epochs of universal writing, between two simplicities, between two forms of transparency and univocity: an absolute pictography doubling the natural entity in a rampant consumption of signifiers, and an absolutely formal graphic reducing the signifying expense to almost nothing. There would be no history of writing and history of knowledge – one could say no history *tout court* – but between these two poles. And if history isn't thinkable but between these two limits, one cannot disqualify the mythologies of universal writing – pictography or algebra – without suspecting the concept of history itself.⁹⁰

On this model of scripts, the history of writing proceeds by a kind of economy: namely, that it is too tedious and expensive to write by drawing everything, and so one progressively abbreviates sign systems. The more formal the language, the better economy it possesses. 'Logocentrism,' which is that stage which unites symbols to the sounds of speech, thereby 'exalting' the logos, would thus be but one stage in this movement, a stage of relative economy.⁹¹ Extrapolating then to the limit of that period, Derrida concludes that 'it is this history (as epoch: epoch not of history but as history) which is closing at the same time as

⁹⁰ Ibid., 404/ 285. My emphasis.

⁹¹ Ibid., 405/286.

that of the form of being in the world that one calls knowledge. The concept of history is the concept of philosophy and of the episteme.’⁹²

This history is closing. That is, its limits have been glimpsed and grasped. In another confirmation of the link between these latter pages of the book and its opening, the concept of *closure* is linked to that of the diagram.⁹³ But which history, and, for we have noted how the diagram has been divided into two, which diagram? What Derrida is illustrating is the metaphysical solidarity of the concepts of history, philosophy, knowledge.⁹⁴ But, if we recall the distinction we made at the beginning of this chapter, this is surely the first, or negative moment, the metaphysical concept of history. If so, then if a different concept of writing approaches (Derrida is about to consider Rousseau’s difference here), and then the whole system will receive a shake-up. Or to put it another way, the system is conceived according to different principles, different economies. But for Derrida it is an intruding *nothing*, that has *no name*:

Ce qui excède alors cette clôture *n’est rien* : ni la présence de l’être, ni le sens, ni l’histoire ni la philosophie ; mais autre chose qui n’a pas de nom, qui s’annonce dans la pensée de cette clôture et conduit ici notre écriture. Ecriture dans laquelle la philosophie est inscrite comme une place dans un texte qu’elle ne commande pas.

What exceeds this field is nothing: neither presence of being, nor sense, nor history, nor philosophy; but some other thing which has no name, which announces itself in the thought of this field and drives here our writing. Writing in which philosophy is written as a place in a text which it doesn’t govern.⁹⁵

⁹² ‘C’est cette histoire (comme époque : époque non pas de l’histoire mais comme histoire) qui se clôt en même temps que la forme d’être au monde qu’on appelle savoir. Le concept d’histoire est donc le concept de la philosophie et de l’épistémè,’ Ibid.

⁹³ ‘Closure’ at Ibid., 25/14. This recognition might lead to the hypothesis that the *Grammatology* itself acts as a kind of circle. See, too Simon Critchley’s classic discussion of closure in *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), ch.2, especially p.88.

⁹⁴ As it happens, also announced in the first chapter, cf. Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 20/10.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 405/286.

We already know—thanks to Lévi-Strauss—that there are no names, only classifications. If there is no presence, no sense of being, then philosophy and history will no longer be what they are, what they have henceforth been described to be. If they are *not* described by what they have been previously called, then here is announced a *future* for philosophy *and* for history. At the price that they do not govern the whole field. Which is to say that they never have.

What approaches or announces itself, what knocks on the door is writing, according to Rousseau, (as read by Derrida). So, if the closed system of writing was what Derrida has found in Condillac and Warburton, what is Rousseau's correction or innovation? This is understood from the perspective on the question of space. We move from a metaphysical history based on sensible intuition, a being present to my spontaneity, to gaps and dispersion, spatial and temporal *difference*. For the origin of writing and of language that Derrida has discovered in Rousseau is of a natural dispersion.⁹⁶ What is the theory of writing Derrida finds in Rousseau? Firstly, *space is given sense* by writing. 'Before writing, there is no homogenous space,' and it is therefore not originarily intelligible, either.⁹⁷ Writing here is understood in the general sense, 'as habitation,' it means our very bodily being in the world. Space is not ideal or objective before writing, but writing creates spatiality as it carves. This also means for Derrida that time, too, is shaped in similar ways. Both are *syntheses*, rather than pure simple presences. A differentiated element in which multiple forces produce a singular negotiation of reception and resistance. Taking the body as an example, Derrida writes that even the body is not homogenous, and is distributed with elements that have incompatible 'economies'. In response the body thus creates its own hierarchies, which we could also perhaps call an equilibrium. For example, our hands have a privilege over other parts of the body, our sensory system is distributed unevenly. As we move and ingrain habits within a certain environment, the body adjusts its 'economy'. It *trains* itself, which suggests,

⁹⁶ See Ibid., 331/232.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 407/288.

that the body itself has a 'history'.⁹⁸ For Derrida, 'writing' should be understood as a bodily experience.⁹⁹

But the economy of any particular system of 'script,' that is inhabitation, *endures* after it outlives its usefulness, its influence can be retained long after it is surpassed. Particularly effective syntheses can, by their very efficiencies, come to dominate. Thus one is always in a position where there are conflicting demands between what one inherits, and the very space in which one finds oneself. In what is a very difficult passage to interpret, Derrida uses 'writing' to suggest that our sense of body and space, of time and even of our very self-presence, our 'consciousness', are the products of historical development operating according to these principles, *and are yet open to ongoing change*. This cannot be represented as simple linear progression because of the constant and complex negotiation between inherited systems and the openness to the future. If all of these are 'economies' which can be altered, for example, by advances in technical apparatus which influence the way we orient ourselves in space and time, then no *one* temporality or history is prescribed. Rather we have the proliferation of times and spaces—that very proliferation of histories that we have in fact already seen.

Derrida *commits himself* to these changes, to *inhabiting* these changes, in the pages of *De la Grammatologie*. History, nature, writing; you can read history happening *in* and *to* these words there. It is like the festival at the water hole, for Rousseau.¹⁰⁰ Before and after are almost impossible to distinguish, linear genesis is confused, the absolute point of birth is

⁹⁸ Derrida is thinking here of the work of André Leroi-Gourhan, which was presented in *Part I* of the *Grammatology*, which describes 'human' history as an 'adventure of relationships between the face and hand' that in fact *creates* what we think are our hands, our faces, (see particularly 125-7/84-5.) In 'La parole soufflée', Derrida writes of the 'articulated body', its organic differentiation. In the *Grammatology* 'articulation' is natural/historical dispersion. See *Writing and Difference*, 186.

⁹⁹ Admittedly, I am consciously developing what are fleeting references in the *Grammatology* here. Nonetheless, I think they occupy an important place for Derrida—witness the constant invocation of ears, eyes, hands, and orifices in his work. An engagement with Merleau-Ponty would, of course, be important to develop this further.

¹⁰⁰ Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 377/267.

absent. Contrary meanings rub against each other within a sentence, not in the sense of plays on words, but rather in the juxtaposition of Rousseau's writing and history with Condillac's.

For Derrida, the supplement as writing appears as a contingent history that affects the essence of speech. In Rousseau (and Saussure in *Part I* of the book), this is then turned around for it is a threatening situation, speech must be protected from writing. But because the *Grammatology* appears to end on the note of writing's contingency, and the status of 'example' or application, along with the necessity of using 'old' names and categories, these terms appeared to have contributed to the dismissal of the largest part of this book. The positive links between the first chapter and the Rousseau essay are missed, only opening and closing summary sections are quoted, if at all. Rousseau thinks nature, culture and writing – the very title of *part II* – as the supplement, *and all of them appear as histories*. History goes to the very heart of what Derrida is trying to achieve here. By carrying off the origin to an absolute past, and in the same space opening every concept to a radical future, Derrida opens up an ontological historicity such that even the form of 'history' is not prescribed, but is radically contingent. Dates and times, rhythms and spacings are now paradoxically seen as contingent systems for establishing absolutes, establishing themselves for a time, but always potentially different. Anything that moves and breathes according to the supplement, for Derrida, is a history. There is thus no radical break between nature and culture, nor between man and animal. But as we shall see, the new is not so easily won. Reappropriation appears very quickly, and precisely because what Derrida calls 'metaphysics' has a very real efficiency, that responds to what we might call 'objective' conditions—that is, my self-presence *is* plausible, it *feels* like spontaneity, and the system of supplementarity *necessarily* 'throws up' the (illusion) of an origin, Derrida must maintain a vigilance and stop short of proclaiming a new name.

The unsuitable name

For history is *not* a satisfactory name for supplementarity. And because of this fact, some have interpreted Derrida as moving ‘away’ from history. ‘Supplement’ itself is a kind of nickname, for the reasons we outlined above, but it is *a better one* than ‘history’. Why so, if, after all of the examples we have presented have twinned the supplement and history together? On the one hand, Derrida *does* mean to underwrite history *as* supplementary movement, a work of repetition. We have seen him do it. As we know, there is no *new* language to be had, that can be invented in a single blow. New determinations must be networked within the already available resources of language, distinctions, definitions and uses. With rigour and care, one can isolate a meaning, work on it, turn it over, enlarge or shift its direction here or there. This requires an enormous effort, repeating and repeating it in order to ensconce the new concept within a discourse, to effect a change in it. Thus deconstruction, as ever, works from within. It is obvious that Derrida, in *De la grammatologie*, and particularly in the essay on Rousseau, intends to include history in this process.¹⁰¹ Indeed, Rousseau was already doing this. In his critique of natural right, in portraying nature as itself possessing a history, Rousseau himself is moving ‘history’ on.¹⁰² Nonetheless, despite the importance of this concept that we are arguing for, we must also recognise where it falls short in Derrida’s project. This falling short will itself help us to realise an important further step.

In explaining the supplement, Derrida has already noted how Rousseau was sceptical of the immediacy of speech, how he withdrew from society the better to present himself by writing. Writing enabled a reappropriation that Rousseau desired. He could gather up his thoughts in a way that wasn’t possible through speech. The value that Derrida finds so useful with

¹⁰¹ Derrida’s comments in *Positions* are relevant here. ‘I very often use history in order to reinscribe its force,’ Derrida, *Positions*, 50.

¹⁰² Asher Horowitz shows the importance of Rousseau’s rethinking of history in Horowitz, *Rousseau, Nature, and History*. See p.46

‘writing’ is that it *resists* this reappropriation, but resists it in a strange way: It resists Rousseau’s gamble on the truth of writing because it does *not* resist: it is itself ceaselessly reappropriated, and so Rousseau’s ‘gathering’ cannot last. The very definition of writing is that it gives itself up to reappropriation in signification.¹⁰³ Thus what it makes possible—Rousseau’s calculated presentation of himself, it also makes impossible. ‘Writing’, and ‘supplement’ are both able to convey this double movement, of possibility and impossibility. ‘History’ does not, as was seen with Condillac and Warburton. Derrida is very clear: ‘History and knowledge, *istoria* and *episteme* have always been determined (and not only etymologically or philosophically) as detours for the purpose of the reappropriation of presence,’; ‘The concept of history itself returns’ to metaphysics; ‘*Aufhebung* is, more or less implicitly, the dominant concept of nearly all histories of writing, even today. It is *the* concept of history and of teleology.’¹⁰⁴ ‘History’ cannot simply be wrenched free of this network. While the value of ‘detour’ accords well with the values of writing and supplement, history generally works from one presence to another. In contrast with *physis*, nature, or in its opposition to philosophy, and in alliance with the action of human subjects, with meaning, spirit, culture, labour.

A specific feature of history’s own history is that it has been, within the history of philosophy, expressly co-ordinated with presence. If we will note, in a moment, the necessity of keeping the traditional meaning active, now, something *within* that traditional meaning means that ‘history’ would not be suitable as a name for the general text, although it is sometimes described as ‘historicity’.

Et lorsque Hegel dira l’unité de l’absence et de la présence, du non-être et de l’être, la dialectique ou l’histoire continueront d’être, du moins dans cette couche du discours que nous appelions le vouloir-dire de Rousseau, un mouvement de médiation entre deux présences pleines.

¹⁰³ Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 205-6/142-3.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 20, 350, 40/10, 246, 25.

And when Hegel will say the unity of absence and presence, of non-being and being, dialectic or history will continue to be, at least in this layer of discourse that we have called Rousseau's meaning-to-say, a movement of mediation between two full presences.¹⁰⁵

History allows itself to be re-appropriated to presence in a way that writing, and the other names Derrida drums up for the *arche*, do not. Derrida's names are explicitly calculated on a strategy that returns their multiplying and fracturing senses upon themselves. History does not do this, and has rather been associated with, and continues to have the risk of, the summing up of history in a final, full presence.

This hesitation over the value of *history* is no doubt the reason for Derrida stating that his question is *provisionally* called 'historiale'.¹⁰⁶ But this very hesitation implies that history is precisely one of Derrida's targets. 'Writing', reprogrammed as the *arche* would be *meaningless* unless it touched history at its heart. In order to do so, the common sense of history *must* be preserved. This is, of course, the writing 'under erasure' that Derrida lifts from Heidegger. Here we are trying to make clear just how much passes under that erasure. History as a general concept is precisely that: general. It needs to be co-ordinated with an active principle that organises it, provides it with explanatory power—otherwise it is tale told by an idiot. Labour, culture, redemption; these are but some of the usual concepts which co-ordinate a history on a grand scale, but, on the personal, biographical level we can think of others, for example, realisations of truth, conversions, or the dialectics of education that always returns the profit of experience, however negative, to our gain. The sense of the active principle often links explicitly with an eschatology or teleology, providing history with a direction; a fall, a rise, a final goal. In order to change the meaning of history, one must work on the network of principles with which it is explicitly and implicitly co-ordinated. Derrida is highly sensitive to the 'modifications' that these co-ordinating

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 349/246.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 38/24. The same hesitation appears at the close of 'Structure, sign, and play,' *Writing and Difference*, 293.

principles undergo, but he demonstrates that they are extremely durable. There is no simple 'turning the page' of metaphysics: the short comings of Lévi-Strauss' *bricolage* has taught us that.

This is precisely what Derrida does: At its most general, following Heidegger, he sees history as co-ordinated by 'presence'. Moreover, it is *also* co-ordinated by writing as Derrida repeatedly reminds us: writing figured explicitly in the ethnocentric teleology that helped determine the idea of Europe and its others, and from which even Lévi-Strauss did not escape, captured most succinctly in the infamous phrase, 'peoples without writing'. So, when Derrida sets out to re-program 'writing', because its virtues include the ability to complicate presence, *history* cannot help being affected.

Derrida elevates and generalises the importance of writing, no longer referring to a particular script, but now as the *arche*. As soon as he does so, the concept of history is re-organised. Or should be—but this is the very complication of writing. The old principles are still active, memorable, ensconced in discourse through institution, by virtue of the very trace that Derrida hopes will provide rehabilitation. This new differentiation between the traditional organisation and the new is precisely what gives the new its meaning *as new*. *It relies on the old sense – history must be both rehabilitated as writing and remain incorrigible*. So, there is an old sense of history, and a new sense, deployed alongside each other. This means that there is no *transgression*, no moving on in the same way as Heidegger, to something else, something other than philosophy, no excavation of an even more primordial past.¹⁰⁷ This, too, is an essential meaning of the diagram, its repetition, its historicity that ensures that we remain and live on, negotiating the past and the future in a politics. To leap out of the diagram would be to close this possibility.

¹⁰⁷ Jean-Luc Nancy, 'Blank opening,' in *Reading Derrida's Of Grammatology*, ed. Sean Gaston and Ian Maclachlan (London and New York: Continuum, 2011), 107.

Thus to infinity

‘Thus to infinity’ Derrida remarked in drawing his diagram of history as supplementarity.

We have already seen the same phrase, ‘thus to infinity,’ in that famous paragraph that announced that there is nothing outside of the text.¹⁰⁸ In fact, our diagram is announced a few pages later.¹⁰⁹ The image of ‘the chain’, employed to help describe the advantages of the supplement and its excessive meaning, seems to propose something similar to our diagram. From its process-like appearance, and because it occurs in the context of Derrida discussing the analogies between his method and empiricism, it sounds like, at first glance, Hegel’s spurious infinity. Indeed, the ‘thus to infinity’ seems to be a deliberate and provocative invocation of it.¹¹⁰

The diagram evokes the tedious repetition of the spurious infinite. But the circular nature also evokes the representation of the *true* infinity, of which chain is also the image. ‘The image of the progress to infinity is the *straight line* ... the image of the true infinity, bent back into itself, becomes the *circle*, the line which has reached itself, which is closed and wholly present, without *beginning* and *end*.’¹¹¹ It is easy enough to see that the true infinite is a direct target of Derrida’s: to install a difference in presence to self. The diagram kept splitting off from itself, differing from itself. But the strange course of the infinite of Derrida’s diagram *also* seems to be distinguished from the negative infinite: ‘Yet this infinity

¹⁰⁸ Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 228/159.

¹⁰⁹ ‘Ce schéma,’ at 232/162; ‘un dessin complexe,’ at 233/163. Compare also ‘tache aveugle’ and ‘non-vu’ on 234/163 to the impossible or unrepresentable diagram.

¹¹⁰ Derrida: ‘On dira que ce style est empiriste et d’une certaine manière on aura raison. La *sortie* est radicalement empiriste.’ The necessity of thinking it as empiricist is the same that required us to deny that ‘history’ in its traditional meaning was left behind: ‘Mais ici le concept d’empirisme se détruit lui-même.’ Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 232/162. Cf. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Hegel’s Science of Logic*, trans. Arnold V. Miller (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press International, 1989), 141-2, 148-9.

¹¹¹ *Hegel’s Science of Logic*, 149.

is *not that of a horizon or an abyss*. It is an infinity of repetition following a *strange* path.’¹¹²

This path is a ‘strange path’ because first, it is unrepresentable (the *impossible* diagram), but second, it also *accounts* for the production of both spurious and true infinite. It is what Rodolphe Gasché has called ‘structural infinity’:

In many ways similar to spurious infinity, structural infinity, or what is called by that name, is different from it because it is a non-semantic concept and distinguished by such necessity. But its characterisation as necessary, paradoxically, also shows it to vie with the *aprioriness*, and hence necessity, of genuine infinity while aiming at the same time at nothing less than unseating true infinity from its central position.¹¹³

The effect of this structural infinity, which here I am matching to the ‘unrepresentable’ aspect of the supplement, is to give birth to an infinite concatenation of finitudes, and itself *produces* the desire for presence. We do not need to pursue this complex notion of structural infinity further here (which Gasché chases into *Dissemination*, rather than our text), except to note one of its major effects—the structural condition of non-totalisation. Derrida already writes of this in ‘Violence and metaphysics’, on the question of a certain anti-Hegelianism, where he names a ‘structural totality’.

Perhaps one would have to show that history is impossible, meaningless, in the finite totality, and that it is impossible, meaningless, in the positive and actual infinity; that history keeps to the difference between totality and infinity, and that history precisely is that which Levinas calls transcendence and eschatology. A *system* is neither finite nor infinite. A structural totality escapes this alternative in its

¹¹² Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 289/202. My emphasis.

¹¹³ Rodolphe Gasché, ‘Nontotalization without spuriousness: Hegel and Derrida on the infinite,’ *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 17, no. 3 (1986): 299. Marian Hobson has explored the function of positive and negative infinite in the tradition and in Derrida’s work on a wider scale, Hobson, *Jacques Derrida*, 44ff. See also Martin Hägglund, *Radical Atheism*, 92-3, who, I think, resolves too quickly in favour of the negative infinite. Hägglund is commenting on a page in ‘Violence and metaphysics,’ (*Writing and Difference*, 119), which describes the difficult relation between positive and negative infinity. Derrida is far more non-committal in this early text than Hägglund makes him out to be.

functioning. It escapes the archaeological and the eschatological, and inscribes them in itself.¹¹⁴

This ‘non-finite’ system is precisely the question of the diagram we have been approaching. And, for *structural* reasons (to wit: no origin or end), which are not those of the finitude of a subject, it entails the endemic incompleteness of positive enquiry. Derrida invokes it particularly every time it is a case of conducting an historical inquiry, right into his latest seminars. Such inquiries are ‘interminable.’¹¹⁵ His characteristic response – and I could multiply references to it – is given according to a formula of ‘there is not enough time,’ (and thus the diagram is also related to Derrida’s thinking on temporality). On the surface, it seems to refer to the finite subject’s constraints of time, energy, the wealth of material, and so on. But there is every reason that it *also* is a coded reference to this structural constraint. There will never be enough time to do history, at least in the ‘total’ sense, a fact which *liberates* history from the weight of having to give a final word. History becomes possible precisely because it is impossible. History is given a radical contingency such that it is never finished, that ‘the past’ *keeps happening*, in a way. No historical question is answered once and for all, because the past is not closed. This is a condition of there being any historiography at all, as we shall try to illustrate in following chapters. Indeed, the continuous working of history could be related to the ‘history machine’ problems that we saw in our introduction. Both Danto’s and Derrida’s versions emphasised the continuing functioning, the radical incompleteness of our accounts of the past. The machine, it turns out, is another version of what we are here discussing under the name of the diagram.

The history of life

¹¹⁴ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 122-3. Cf. 94. A key passage on the difference between an empirical infinite and a structural one also occurs at 289.

¹¹⁵ Derrida mentions this in *Of Grammatology* at 9/24, in response to the *historical question* of why writing is announced ‘today.’

Here we need to note one of the most important consequences of the diagram that we have already alluded to. It is a problem of part and whole, where the 'whole', indicated by the non-finite system we have just seen, takes on staggering proportions. The knowledge with which we can grasp this whole will always be problematic. The diagram, with its infinite oscillations, not only provides a 'philosophy' of history, but that this is also a philosophy of 'nature' or of 'life'. This has been already implied by our brief discussion of the 'history' of the body.¹¹⁶ The diagram has rendered the point of difference between nature and history ungraspable and unseeable, in fact, non-existent. History is already happening outside of man and in nature. Man finds himself in it and begins to set himself off from nature by obscuring the trace. He does so, however, precisely on the basis of his 'power of repetition,' where repetition can only occur via a *worldly* residence. In *Speech and Phenomena*, and in summaries of its argument in the *Grammatology*, Derrida describes the diagram as a situation where the world is admitted as a 'third party', and under the propulsion of this repetition the subject emerges as it realises itself against the exteriority of the world. Speech, and conversation, Derrida comments, should be understood as a particular instance of this *diagram*. The diagram is the structure of auto-affection, a 'universal structure of experience,' a structure of the *history of life*, writes Derrida.¹¹⁷ We recall that the description of the supplements of history was like a cellular mitosis. Through the trace structure, which here and there is indicated as a biological principle, Derrida has thus opened up a scope for something that resembles a universal history, but on new terms, other than the realisation of a teleology, and rather as the complex interplay of intertwinement, economy and equilibrium, trace and repetition.

¹¹⁶ With respect to 'life' we must be careful to note that this includes the relation to death from the start, as we saw with the 'image' and 'imagination,' above.

¹¹⁷ 'L'auto-affection est une structure universelle de l'expérience,' Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 236/165. Marian Hobson has identified several different incarnations of the auto-affection structure in Derrida's writing and related them to history in Marian Hobson, 'History traces,' in *Post-Structuralism and the Question of History*, 111-2.

In chapter 2 of *Part I*, when Derrida explicates the trace through Saussure's linguistics, Derrida recognises the breadth of vista opened by the trace. Derrida sets out to *not derive* historicity from nature, but think it as originary.¹¹⁸ 'History', in its classical position, is in opposition to nature, and like the traditional notion of writing, occupies a derivative position in a hierarchy. Historical being would be a *second* nature. But this is to refuse to recognise that nature has its productions and institutions, according to the trace. In the trace, it is a matter of a signature of the world, another time and place indicating both spatial and temporal difference, 'the wholly other [being] announced as such—without any simplicity, identity, resemblance or continuity.' In this announcement is 'all *history*, from that which metaphysics determines as the "non-living" up to "consciousness," passing through *all the levels of animal organisation*. The trace where the relation to the other is marked, articulates its possibility over the entire field of the entity.'¹¹⁹

All history! From the 'non-living' to sentience! Here one can perhaps imagine our diagram as a spiral, differentiated according to powers of repetition.¹²⁰ Here, despite the vast differentiation of forms, there is a continuity, precisely, through repetition which procures those differentiations, 'such that no discontinuity or transcendence needs to be introduced between any of its successive layers.'¹²¹ Thus, in the closing pages of *Part I*, where Derrida draws upon André Leroi-Gourhan, Derrida writes of genetic inscription and the behaviour of

¹¹⁸ 'Tout cela renvoie, par-delà l'opposition nature/culture, à une opposition survenue entre *physis* et *nomos*, *physis* et *technè* dont l'ultime fonction est peut-être de *dérivée* l'historicité ; et paradoxalement, de ne reconnaître ses droits à l'histoire, à la production, à l'institution, etc.' Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 49-50/33.

¹¹⁹ 'L'immotivation' du signe requiert une synthèse dans laquelle le tout autre s'annonce comme tel—sans aucune simplicité, aucune identité, aucune ressemblance ou continuité—sans ce qui n'est pas lui. *S'annonce comme tel* : c'est là toute l'*histoire*, depuis ce que la métaphysique a déterminé comme le 'non-vivant' jusqu'à la 'conscience', en passant par tous les niveaux de l'organisation animale. La trace, où se marque le rapport à l'autre, articule sa possibilité sur tout le champ de l'étant, que la métaphysique a déterminé comme étant-présent à partir du mouvement occulté de la trace,' Ibid., 69/47.

¹²⁰ Derrida has expanded on differentiation and repetition in 'The pit and the pyramid': 'The idealising and *relevant* negativity which works within the sign has always already begun to disturb matter in general. But since sensory matter is differentiated, it forms hierarchies of types and regions according to their power of ideality.' In its context, it is precisely a matter of the Hegelian circle. *Margins of Philosophy*, 91. The working of differentiation into hierarchies recalls the descriptions of the body we indicated above.

¹²¹ Jean-Philippe Deranty, 'Witnessing the Inhuman: Agamben or Merleau-Ponty,' *South Atlantic Quarterly* 107, no. 1 (2008): 180.

the amoeba and the annelid, thought on the base of the history of the *gramme*. Derrida immediately notes that, being *within* this history, the knowledge with which we reach to grasp it is itself only produced, like us, in that history. A determined moment in the diagram trying to grasp the very *adventure* of that diagram.

Adventures of the diagram

Derrida writes that history is no longer a suitable word to describe the ensemble in which both history and philosophy appear. We have argued that not only does he not provide an exact alternative, but this is actually the necessity of the diagram that he has described. But this does not mean that Derrida has not sought to elevate other elements in connection with history, along with ‘supplement’, that help us to understand this latter, positive reinscription of history. Indeed, Derrida does, the supplement is not alone. Prominently in *Of Grammatology*, but also throughout *Writing and Difference*, Derrida employs the Merleau-Pontyan theme of *aventure* to emphasise an *uncertainty* that both history and philosophy are subject to, as well as the possibility of the *new*. ‘Adventure’, is possibly a fore-runner of Derrida’s later insistence on the *a-venir*.¹²² It emphasises the risk, chance, and possibly terror, of an uncertain journey, but also the unknown, the future discovery, the hope that there is more to come. Adventure works beyond the realms of the calculable and programme, and is a way of naming, in an ‘empty’ fashion, the future. It is, then, eminently ‘historical,’

¹²² Sean Gaston points, on this note, to a sentence in the ‘Exergue’ concerning ‘*ce monde à venir*,’ (14/5 translated as ‘that future world’ by Spivak). One of Spivak’s comments in her lengthy introduction is quite peculiar in this regard. How could she have known of the messianic that Derrida would come to make his own? Her comments are concerned with history: ‘In a text where he elaborately launches a theory against teleological patternings of history and thought, why does Derrida fabricate so strong an argument for historical necessity? Why is the opening chapter full of a slightly embarrassing messianic promise? ... with what seriousness can we declare a different “world to come”? How reconcile ourselves with this break between the world of the past and the world of the future?’ Interestingly, Spivak has translated the sentence here differently to in the book (she gives a reference), it is the same sentence Gaston points to. Gaston, *Reading Derrida's of Grammatology*, 68. Spivak’s questions at *Of Grammatology*, lxxxii.

even to the point of exacting revenge on the confidence of a historian who shows a situation's necessity.

The stirring opening of 'Violence and metaphysics' had already formulated 'the difference between philosophy as a power and adventure of the question itself and philosophy as a determined event or turning point within this adventure.'¹²³ History, too, is subject to such adventures, in accordance with Derrida's adequation of the concept of history and philosophy, and this means that each denotes a complex passage from old to new. We have already seen how philosophy is written within a history of (arche) writing, a 'place in a text which it [philosophy] doesn't govern.' 'Text', therefore, is not a reduction of the world to wordplay, but rather the situating of history and philosophy in an adventurous hyperdialectic that ensures *life and history* in fact exceed the best abilities of history and philosophy.

We noted above that the concept of 'closure' was entailed in that of the diagram. 'History is closing', we read, this was where the diagram was split in two, and we read it dialectically, as the declaration that a new concept of history was possible. In Merleau-Ponty's terms, 'the dialectic ... is a thought that does not constitute the whole but which is situated within it. It has a past and a future which are not its own simple negation.'¹²⁴ The 'diagram' we have been describing is, in fact, what Derrida calls 'text'. The 'closure' of history and philosophy is the definite ensconcement of an 'absolute past', which, according to the non-finite 'structural totality', is also the way in which it is structurally left *open*. This openness is the adventure, the 'wandering' or 'errancy' of thought that finds itself already *here* and *now*, but also nevertheless, *charged* with history. Very quickly, we are discovering that the adventure of this diagram is leading us into the very heart of deconstruction. This adventurous history

¹²³ See Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 80-1. Cf. structuralism as an 'adventure of vision', specifically concerning history, on p.3.

¹²⁴ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Adventures of the Dialectic*, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 204.

turns out to be nothing other than there being ‘nothing outside the text.’¹²⁵ A few pages after that sentence, Derrida notes the ‘radical empiricism’ of his work. ‘The *departure* is radically empiricist. It proceeds in the manner of a wandering [errante] thought on the possibility of itinerary and method. It is affected by nonknowledge as its future and *ventures out* [s’aventure] deliberately.’¹²⁶ Far from being an end to philosophy and history, deconstruction is a philosophical-historical *sortie*, sallying out into a future for both.

*

In a final note on the diagram, I discovered, after writing this chapter, John Mullarkey’s *Post-Continental Philosophy*. In this book, Mullarkey develops Deleuze’s philosophy of the diagram, and speaks of a ‘diagrammatology’ that opens out new conceptual vistas for philosophy. In a chapter that reproduces many fascinating philosophical diagrams, including an astonishing table of diagrams drawn by Alexandre Kojève, where ‘no philosophy is left unschematised,’¹²⁷ Mullarkey does not discuss the Rousseau diagram. Derrida is not, for Mullarkey, a *post*-continental philosopher, because of his continuation of Heideggerian themes. But Mullarkey does, however, point out that the ‘erasure’ developed from Heidegger’s crossing out of Being is itself diagrammatic, something that we have confirmed above.¹²⁸ Suffice it to say that, although we are here striving to relate Derrida’s thought to ‘history’, the ‘diagram’ that we have discovered possesses opportunities that address the ‘post-continental’ future for philosophy.

¹²⁵ Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 227/158. The surprise of Lionel Gossman’s (cited above) article is that he describes Rousseau as saying almost the exact same thing: that Rousseau ‘was constantly demonstrating the all-pervasiveness of history, the fact that *there is literally nothing outside of it*,’ Gossman, ‘Time and history in Rousseau,’ 345.

¹²⁶ ‘La *sortie* est radicalement empiriste. Elle procède à manière d’une pensée errante sur la possibilité d’itinéraire et de la méthode. Elle s’affecte de non-savoir comme de son avenir et délibérément s’aventure,’ Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 232/162. Derrida’s emphasis.

¹²⁷ John Mullarkey, *Post-Continental Philosophy: An outline* (London: Continuum, 2006), 161-2.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 158.

Conclusions: towards historiography

A little after the publication of *De la grammatologie*, Derrida writes in 'Différance' an aside or passing reference concerning 'the theory of the representation of the "circle" in which we appear to be enclosed.'¹²⁹ I placed it as the epigraph to this present chapter. Although a fleeting reference, in the 1972 book *Margins of Philosophy*, it was still obviously a concern. There also seems to be some development along these lines in *Dissemination*, where Derrida speaks of a 'square circle' as well as a 'chiasmus'. Scattered references in interviews, too, seem to refer to this theory of the diagram we have tried to describe. It has been a long and difficult path, with some very difficult problems. Now, we will leave off tracing the diagram and begin to move towards historiography. On the one hand, the diagram is *the situation* in which we find ourselves. On the other, our language and our concepts, the very resources we have for describing and making sense of our world, and thus the resources of historiography, are also entrenched in this impossible circle, and especially, it would seem, the concept of history.

In Derrida's diagrammatic thinking there are clearly two moments in thinking history. The first is in its ensconement in the metaphysics of presence, but the second refers beyond such metaphysics through its positive association with Derrida's *différance* and other terms, such as supplement. Here, in these terms which describe the structure of the trace, it is the announcement of 'all *history*, from that which metaphysics determines as the "non-living" up to "consciousness,"' it covers 'the entire field of the entity.'¹³⁰ The discovery of this larger structure, the impossible diagram or text or historicity in which we find ourselves, is the announcement of all kinds of history. The two moments, so clearly delineated by Derrida, in fact return to the single paradoxical name. It indeed liberates the name 'history' from a final consummatory synthesis (even while preserving its memory) in which every history would

¹²⁹ Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 12.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 69/47.

make one universal history, where the diagram would return to itself and cease its oscillations. Instead, an infinite array of stories are launched, according to the rhythm and time of their traces and relations.

From here we shall follow out some threads that are discernible in the diagram. Firstly we will focus on two closely linked elements for any historiography; narrative and time.

Temporality is involved in Derrida's thinking, without doubt. The trace is presented in the *Grammatology* as the trace of an absolute past that enables the synthesis of temporality, of a past and a future. But is it of any use with respect to narration? For historians *tell stories*. Is such story telling an act of literary creation, or is there a deeper way to approach it?

Secondly, we will examine the way in which the Rousseau essay appears as a kind of genealogy. For historiography, this would be closest to what is called 'the history of ideas', and it explicitly confronts the problem that has been repeatedly indicated as being one of the most fundamental conditions of the diagram: how to describe something anterior to our situation, when we only have the resources, the language and concepts, that have been produced 'downstream' as it were, from decisions that have had decisive consequences for that language and those concepts?

Lastly, we will explore the decisive impact of feminism and the potential of the concept of 'gender' for transforming some of the criteria of history writing. A history of sexual difference was one of the first 'histories' that was named by Derrida in Rousseau, the 'history of love.' Gender and sexual difference are explored in some of Derrida's later texts, but rather than exegeting further, here we shall limit ourselves to looking at two positive examples of writing history in light of Derrida's work.

In each case we try to replicate something of the movement of the impossible diagram itself, by returning, repeating, and following out different threads. So many of Derrida's later themes seemed to be named in the proliferating histories that he names there. We are

convinced that we have captured something of the real movement and production of what is called 'deconstruction' in tracing these themes. But of course, Derrida always proves elusive, elliptical. Have we caught him here, in the graphic? The diagram is impossible, he repeatedly says, and it is not a circle.

4. Time and narrative

Gathering around narratives: a historical introduction

The scientific status of historical disciplines has often been troubled by its written *medium*. All sciences engage writing at some point—it is a condition of knowledge—but the weight of writing for history is the extent to which it relies upon *story*. The discourse of history appears to have in narrative an *essential* component. ‘Modern’ philosophy of history (say, since the 1950s in English speaking universities) has been profoundly marked by attempts to come to grips with the value and problems of narrative for historical discipline and knowledge. Indeed, questions about narrative, especially with respect to its relation to temporality have even crossed the divide in philosophy between ‘analytic’ and ‘continental’. Where narrative was at first a troubling question for American and English philosophers of science, towards the end of the 20th century, it increasingly became a question approached by way of French and German authors. The status and level of narrative has, according to the characteristic focuses of these discourses, changed from technical and epistemological, to an ontological level. Any engagement with philosophy of history must not only treat narrative, but address it at the appropriate levels.

This chapter seeks to bring into a single discussion the most distinct historiographical attempt to formulate a critical discourse on narrative in historiography—the work of Hayden White—together with a phenomenological response by David Carr. This phenomenological response concerning narrative helps us to address narrative in our ongoing investigation into history in Derrida’s early work, for it has a surprising result. Carr’s phenomenology of history leads him to some of the same conclusions as Derrida: a criticism of the concept of ‘presence’; a spatialised concept of temporality. In travelling the same territory as Derrida and in describing the same structures, Carr changes how we

read Derrida. In the light of individual and social temporality, and the structures of historicity, Derrida appears as concretely engaged and concerned with how we see ourselves and our communities in their pasts and futures, and thus especially in the work of historiography.

*

The *institutional* situation of a discipline has very real consequences for the progression of theoretical research. It is a specialised instance of a tradition. Indeed, both Derrida and Heidegger suggest that theoretical development occurs precisely when reflection focuses on its foundations.¹ Philosophy of history in this regard is at a distinct disadvantage, for it is a kind of ‘academic orphan’, which means that it finds itself with no easy home in any one discipline—it lacks institutions.² The journal *History and Theory*, founded in 1960 at the height of an interest in history among philosophers of science, is a major venue for discussion of the philosophy of history in English.³ Since its inception, it has pursued the fortunes of the philosophy of history with dogged enthusiasm, manufacturing a discipline through constant correspondence and cross-fertilisation through regular conferences. The ‘international conference’ is a crucial element in such a situation. The gathering together in a conference is, and was, a necessary pursuit for a journal set up around such an elusive topic. It is handy for us to recall this here, because it is in recalling one such conference, organised by the journal *History and Theory*, we will be introduced to the philosophy of history as it occurs in the pages of that journal, and more particularly, how we can begin to combine the work on Derrida’s texts that with theory explicitly concerned with historiography.

Bad Homburg, Germany, August 1985: In the summer of 1985 a conference gathering philosophers and historians from North America, Britain, France, Germany and elsewhere was conducted. It was

¹ See Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Ian McLeod Geoff Bennington (University of Chicago Press, 1987), 19. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 9.

² In English speaking universities, that is. Richard T. Vann, ‘Turning Linguistic: *History and Theory* and History and Theory, 1960-1975,’ in *A New Philosophy of History*, ed. Ankersmit and Kellner (University of Chicago Press, 1995), 40. See too, Kerwin Lee Klein, *Frontiers of Historical Imagination*.

³ It is not the only one of course. *CLIO* should also be mentioned, and a new journal *Journal of the Philosophy of History*, was established in 2007.

the 25th anniversary of *History and Theory*, but more importantly for the organisers, it seemed that there was happening across disciplines a confluence of themes and concepts that seemed to them momentous for the direction of historical study. It was the peculiarities of historians' language use that was arousing attention. Academic fads come and go, but this seemed different. Reflecting on that moment, a decade after, long-time *History and Theory* editor Richard Vann noted that 'what *only now* becomes clear is that something like a paradigmatic shift had occurred; for *the next twenty years* historians' language, not explanation or causality, would be the topic around which most reflections on history would centre.'⁴ Vann has, of course, a specific instance of the more general phenomenon of the 'linguistic turn' in mind. What is meant here is that the historians' practice of writing was no longer considered *transparent*. It was no longer looked *through* to consider the event or things themselves, objectively accessible and verifiable; rather, historiography, the historian's *writing* had become the object of attention. By the convergence of themes felt by the editors (and Vann among them) a decade prior to the reflections I have just quoted, it was specifically the concept of *narrative* that seemed to gather together the diverse movements of scholarship. But this was no passive drift imposed from without. The editors, and principally Richard Vann, had continuously exhorted a pursuit of narrative and related concerns for two decades.

The theme and title of the conference was 'Narrative: The medium of history?' In this moment, the growth of the social sciences and the emphasis upon quantitative methods was interpreted in light of the concept of narrative. So too were technological changes with the development of computers on one hand, and the production of historical television documentaries, or historical movies, on the other.⁵ Above all, the new dynamism of literary theory was sensed, as it began to appropriate Barthes, Foucault, and Derrida. Each area seemed to either pose expanding vistas for narrative forms (such as film), or to break down narrative into calculable elements (such as quantitative methods). The short of

⁴ Vann, 'Turning linguistic,' 69. My emphasis.

⁵ See the *History and Theory* archive, section *Conferences*, event *Bad Homburg*, 4th division, 3 page proposal written for a grant proposal to the US National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), July 1984. Hereafter, *HT*: section/event/correspondent, date. See notes in the introduction for more information.

and the beyond of the historians traditional writing provide a highlight on what had seemingly been taken for granted.

This conference was rather carefully conceived and constructed with loving labour. Only some 30 would attend, and only four papers would be given, each pre-circulated, and all participants required to write a short response in advance.⁶ The cast were carefully considered so as to provide just the right mix for productive discussion. It was hoped that the conditions so created would provide fertile ground for bold and new thinking. The conference seems to have originated in plans for the 25th anniversary of the journal. *History and Theory* had held conferences in the past, but this was planned to be something rather more special. In a May 1982 letter to the philosopher Louis Mink, also an editor for the journal, Hayden White suggested a conference based on the ‘human sciences’, viewed from the standpoint of history—‘the fundament of the whole domain’. History, he implies, originates both chronologically and logically prior to the human sciences, and so it is not surprising that history should be of a theoretical interest to such sciences. White diagnosed the continental concern for historicity, and also noting their unusual ‘mode’:

Actually, however, for all their professed disinterest in history, the ‘sciences humaines’ as they have developed over the past 20 years (from early Barthes and Lévi-Strauss to late Barthes, Foucault, Lacan, Derrida, etc.) have become much more obsessed with the problem of recuperating the past, although not in the modalities of either conventional historiography or social scientific generalisation.⁷

The feeling, articulated by White here and echoed by the editors of *History and Theory*, was that not only a response was required, at a theoretical level, to a challenge laid down by the development of other sciences, but that ‘history’ also possessed an essential element that any theory of a human science required. Mink, sadly, was unable to pursue this much further; he died after a sudden and

⁶ The four long papers were carefully selected. The editors didn’t simply want a rehash of existing positions. Although the correspondence file for the conference is very large, the number of people willing to write the long contributions were small. The four papers were given by Hans Kellner, David Carr, Stephen Bann and Robert Anchor. Some of these were published in the *Beiheft* (theme) issue of 1986. The conference format was considered an outstanding success, and has remained a feature of *History and Theory* conferences to date.

⁷ *HT*: Bad Homburg, 2nd Division, Folder 3: Hayden White, letter to Louis Mink, 19 May 1982.

massive heart attack in January of 1983. Richard Vann, however, managed to organise not long after a circular letter, sent from Middletown to some 75 historians and philosophers in Australia, France, Germany, Italy, Britain and North America.⁸

The circular letter polled its recipients on the directions they felt to be most promising in the philosophy of history, broadly construed. Its three pages evoked the surpassing of a covering-law model of history,⁹ the challenge of the *Annales*, of a literary reading of historiography, and the advent of postcolonial criticisms. It went on to cite the development of the social sciences, under the influence of structuralist linguistics, away from historical models, and finally, the formalism of literary studies. In asking for responses, the editors of *History and Theory* sought to not only identify the philosophical direction of a huge and disparate field, but also sought to intervene in it, to become a conduit for such thinking, to draw it together and breathe life into it in the act of publishing. To such ends, they requested older correspondents to suggest younger scholars who would fit the broad topic areas they had identified as promising:

1. The viability of the 'covering-law' model of explanation and its relationship to quantitative history;
2. The challenge to *histoire événementielle* by structuralist and post-structuralist historians;
3. The emergence of non-Western and minority-oriented historiography, with its implications for traditional conceptions of universal history; and
4. The revival of narrativism, with its evocation of literary models.¹⁰

As it unfolded, the conference played out two opposing points of view: a 'rhetorist' and 'relativist' position, which focused on the imaginative power of the historian; and those who defended narrative through holding its continuity with the real world of human experience and action. For the latter point,

⁸ HT: Bad Homburg, 4th division, Letter template dated March 17, 1983. The final version seems to have been posted in the following week. The correspondence that followed makes for fascinating reading, and provides an interesting tableau. Respondents included Fernand Braudel, Richard Rorty, John Patrick Diggins, David Hollinger, Isaiah Berlin, Geoffrey Elton and William Dray.

⁹ The 'covering law' theory names the position that historical explanation only explains *scientifically* insofar as the historical event appeals to, and the events are subsumable under a 'general law'. The classic statement is Carl G. Hempel, 'The Function of General laws in History,' *The Journal of Philosophy* 39, no. 2 (1942). See also Daniel Little, 'Philosophy of History,' in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2011/entries/history/>), 3.1. Accessed 29 April, 2012.

¹⁰ HT: Bad Homburg, 4, Letter template, p.3. Some revisions are marked on the template, and it appears the circular letters were posted (or began posting) about a week later.

the rallying point was the contribution of a philosopher, David Carr, new to *History and Theory* circles, and only brought in to the conference when other participants dropped out.¹¹ Carr had provided an analysis of individual and social time, on small and large scales that described a continuity between the basic configurations of temporality and the basic configuration of a historical story.¹²

The actual connection between the status of narrative, in real life and in a ‘human science’, however, remains obscure. In a hastily scrawled series of notes for a summary of the conference on the final day, Dick Vann had listed a series of ‘red herrings’ for both sides of the debate. Third on the list appeared that famous quotation, ‘everything is a text’. The questions that lay behind these herrings (of which there were an equal amount on both sides) were rather the role of imagination in a scientific endeavour, and the criteria and grounds for preference of one explanation over another, the moral components of explanations, and the relation of prose to graphic depiction.¹³

It is evident that, beyond discussion of what constitutes a narrative, and attempts to connect or sever it from lived experience, ‘narrative’ possessed a quality that gathered together many disparate elements. Thus when ‘the question of narrative’ was deployed, it repeated in its echoes for this audience a host of associated meanings, that whatever we may read in the archives, is difficult to grasp as more than a fleeting shadow. The feeling of radical change, of challenge to paradigms is all too quickly lost. Even for those who witnessed it. For, despite the vitality felt at this conference, this gathering of a disparate community, within a decade the life had gone out of ‘narrative’.¹⁴ But what remains, then, for us, who read? This mortality of the subject, given it was felt by its participants, is no obstacle to those who

¹¹ Carr became known to *History and Theory* through William Dray, (they were colleagues at the University of Ottawa), who had suggested him as a reviewer of Ricoeur’s *Temps et Récit*. When Dray couldn’t make the Bad Homburg conference, he immediately suggested Carr, who had just finished his book, *Time, Narrative, and History*.

¹² Carr’s paper, which is a summary of *Time, Narrative, and History*, is published as David Carr, ‘Narrative and the Real World: An Argument for Continuity,’ *History and Theory* 25, no. 2 (1986).

¹³ HT: Bad Homburg, 2nd division, Folder 4, Handwritten notes.

¹⁴ From the close of 1994, a constant item on the fortnightly editorial meetings of *History and Theory* was the question ‘after narrativism—what?’ A similar sentiment is expressed in various editorial correspondences with authors.

come after. Derrida has shown us that this is essentially what writing *is*. But can his work take us beyond this and breathe fresh life into the dust that settles over historiography itself?

Hayden White's challenge to historiography

In Hayden White, historiography has a native and great thinker of its own presuppositions. A voracious reader, theoretical *puncher*, impatient with mere academicism, White delivered a singular realignment of historiography at a theoretical level. The archives of the *History and Theory* disclose that this was not achieved only through publication, but also in tireless networking through correspondence and travel, and self-effacing promotion of other figures.¹⁵ Some have mistaken it as a taste for novelty. White's talent includes the ability to offer penetrating syntheses of disparate presentations. They are almost always oriented to the ways in which a whole is produced, not through a dominating unity, but through tension, provocation, and negativity. And such has been his role in historiography. Distancing himself from philosophical discussion on the degree to which historical writing could be compared to sciences of the physical world, his *Metahistory* (1973) forcefully elaborated an analysis of not only historical statements, but *entire works* by 'master historians' of the 19th Century (Michelet, Ranke, Tocqueville, Burckhardt), and likewise for the *philosophers* of history (Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Croce). This analysis is dedicated to establishing, in counterbalance to the preceding emphasis on scientificity, the *poetic* elements of historiography.¹⁶ *Metahistory* attempts the wholesale displacement of historical thinking, jumping rails from epistemological criteria to criteria developed from rhetorical models.

¹⁵ An extensive body of correspondence occurred between White and editors Louis Mink and Richard Vann which spans almost the entire history of the journal from the mid '60's until the present, an incomplete portion of which is archived in the *History and Theory* offices. From my reading, it seems that White's correspondence, which often connects and introduces people and topics across disciplines, has been just as significant in the recent history of the humanities as his published work has been.

¹⁶ Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), xi.

At the heart of the ambitious scale of *Metahistory*, and the sense of urgency that pervades the manner in which White, ever a masterful essayist, delves into the organising principles of this or that scholarly work, lies an abiding conviction of the critical and social power of historiography to transform human communities. The *project* to remember a past event or person is suffused with social and moral significance. It is in this way essentially metaphorical. Metaphorical because the very grasp, the organisation of the elements in a history and their address towards a particular sphere of thought and action 'transports' a social desire, a project of representation, a model of relations and actions that is aimed at confronting the problems of a contemporary age and is conceived *as* a statement about contemporary society and its future possibilities. Either directly or by more circuitous routes. Even the very disinterest of science is thus comported in an interested way. In light of this, the historical profession that White saw before him in the 50's and 60's was not yet fulfilling this potential:

Since the second half of the 19th Century, history has become increasingly the refuge of all those 'sane' men who excel at finding the simple in the complex and the familiar in the strange. This was all very well for an earlier age, but if the present generation needs anything at all it is a willingness to confront heroically the dynamic and disruptive forces in contemporary life. The historian serves no one well by constructing a specious continuity between the present world and that which preceded it. On the contrary, we require a history that will educate us to discontinuity more than ever before; for discontinuity, disruption, and chaos is our lot.¹⁷

History, as White saw it, was labouring under a manner of seeing and writing the past that had outlived its intended usefulness. History proceeds from and returns to a world of thought and action, and as such it had become drastically anachronous, thus 'missing' its contemporary destination. This embrace of the metaphorical power of historiography was itself startling to many in a historical profession that had traditionally defined itself by excluding such powers as a guarantee of its objectivity.¹⁸

¹⁷ Hayden V. White, 'The burden of history,' in *Tropics of Discourse* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 50. (This essay was first published in 1966 in *History and Theory*.)

¹⁸ Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The 'objectivity question' and the American historical profession* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 599-600.

Explicitly regarding the project of a history in this way implied a very different set of guiding principles than were usually entertained. White felt that the epistemological considerations—which enjoyed significant philosophical popularity in the 1950’s—had been done to death. They had foundered on the rock of representation. The nature of ‘realistic’ representation with respect to historical processes was *the* problem for modern historiography.¹⁹ The key step consists in bracketing judgment on the truth value of a representation in favour of considering the *form* that a given representation may take. In analysing the classic works of history and the philosophy of history:

I will not try to decide whether a given historian’s work is a better, or more correct, account of a specific set of events or segment of the historical process than some other historian’s account of them; rather, I will seek to identify the *structural components* of those accounts.²⁰

[The] status [of classical works] as *possible models* of historical representation or conceptualisation does not depend upon the nature of the ‘data’ they used to support their generalisations or the theories they invoked to explain them; it depends rather upon the consistency, coherence, and illuminative power of their respective visions of the historical field. This is why they cannot be ‘refuted’, or their generalisations ‘disconfirmed’, either by appeal to new data that might be turned up in subsequent research or by elaboration of a new theory for interpreting the sets of events that comprise their objects of representation and analysis.²¹

This formal and structural accounting therefore bracketed empirical considerations. He sees that the classical models of historical science (and he emphasises that his analysis is based on the *recognised masters*, ‘of distinctly classic achievement’) could not rest on *factual* considerations alone. In an ironic turn, the recognition of the *contingent* and essentially empirical nature of the factual components *of* a history (access to, state of archives, dependency on the state of other sciences, all of which may be surpassed or rendered null by future achievements, etc.), contingency was arranged *against* the science of contingencies and used to exclude the truth-status of the work from consideration. White formally incorporates the historicity of the historian-subject, and excludes by a

¹⁹ White, *Metahistory*, 2-3 fn.4.

²⁰ Ibid., 3-4. My emphasis.

²¹ Ibid., 4. My emphasis.

kind of reduction consideration of the historian's object. This move is made necessary by the fact that historians—Thucydides, Leopold Von Ranke, Michelet and so on—retained their authority well beyond their status as factual records of (merely) 'what happened'. This authority then, argued White, stemmed from the poetic: 'Their status as models of historical narration depends, ultimately, on the preconceptual and *specifically poetic* nature of their perspectives on history and its processes.'²²

What is important for White, then, is a preceding, and 'preconceptual', level at which decisions take place that have formal implications for the historical work. The reduction of empirical considerations is necessary for this to come into view. But for a discipline rather slower than White to be aware of contemporary (and European) developments, and less inclined to theoretical reflection, all of this is easily misconstrued. The emphasis on the poetic aspect of the imagination was all too quickly construed to be a species of the rise and incursion of literary criticism, encroaching on the historical domain. Of course, White drew resources from literary criticism readily, but rather from Northrop Frye and Kenneth Burke, an older generation than the poststructuralists White was taken to be representing. Fundamentally, however, White saw himself as activating a tradition of philosophically accounting for historiography in a rhetorical way, principal among which, for him, were Vico, Hegel, Nietzsche and Croce.²³

The vivacity of White's essays is drawn from the manner in which he quickly penetrates to the poetic level, and the way in which this is then related to an ideological stratum. It combines depth of insight with a keen eye for critical potential. The aim is to develop a way of accounting for 'historiographical style,' where style is not an ineffable quality but rather a product of a specific set of combinations among explanatory levels in an historical work.²⁴ The important outcome for White is thus the synthesis of the *whole* work, rather than individual propositions or particular arguments. There is a 'coherent vision or presiding image of the form of the whole historical field. This gives to the

²² Ibid., 4. My emphasis.

²³ See especially White, 'Interpretation in History,' *Tropics*, 51-80, and 'The abiding relevance of Croce's idea of history,' in *The Fiction of Narrative*, ed. Robert Doran, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 50-67.

²⁴ White, *Metahistory*, 29.

individual thinker's conception of that field the aspect of a self-consistent totality. And this coherence and consistency give to his work its *distinctive stylistic attributes*.²⁵ It is a matter, therefore, of isolating the level, characteristics and grounds of this unitary vision.

This 'vision' amounts to what White calls a *prefiguration*. It is the constitution of the historical field 'as an object of mental perception'. This occurs prior to interpretation, and it is the construal of a domain populated by certain figures of various orders, and bearing certain kinds of relationships. This act is 'poetic inasmuch as it is precognitive and precritical in the economy of the historian's own consciousness',²⁶ and it determines not only the ground *and* its objects, but also any explanatory concepts used in order to provide an explanation of them. This might seem overly schematic, but what is being analysed is the plan and processes of historical works, *not* the manifold of historical reality. These styles, it is maintained, are consistent with the four principal tropes of poetic language: metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony. White thus applies a 'tropological' analysis to a scientific discourse – whereas, at least in structuralist work, these had been more readily applied only to artistic and mythic bodies of work.²⁷ But this move is consistent with the reductive gesture that occurred from the beginning and which I have already described.

The issue, as it seems in light of my purposes here, is not so much that one can or cannot characterise a discourse in this way, but whether or not it does really provide access to the preconceptual level. What is meant here is not the manner of metaphors a writer employs in this or that situation, nor is it the fundamentally metaphorical quality of the project I wrote of above. Rather what is in view is the way in which a philosopher or historian characterises the *relationships* among phenomena, as the region of the past itself, in order to begin to build an explanation of them. It must be recalled that this is not straight forward perception or even recollection, but rather the characterisation of a region that is usually not even within the experience and lifetime of the historian, though certain traces of it are.

²⁵ Ibid., 30.

²⁶ Ibid., 31.

²⁷ White discusses his choice of the fourfold tropes in a long footnote on pp.31-33. It is Vico in particular who provides the governing pattern, who is favourably compared against the structuralist linguists.

The tropes are for White 'alternative paradigms' with which this region is prepared for understanding. That is, they render 'the historical field' in such a way as to make it amenable to analysis, and description and thus explanation according to one of several modes. In the formal description provided in *Metahistory*, a fundamental *trope* is united with modes of *emplotment*, *argument* and *ideological implication*. If the fundamental prefiguration occurs at the deep level that White maintains, (precritical, preconceptual, he writes) then in what way is it a 'choice'?²⁸ But what is the manner of the choice, and what, if anything, precedes it?

It is precisely this issue that phenomenologist David Carr has focused on. Carr's analysis presents the issue as a question revolving around the fact that, at bottom, the structure of a narrative is an imaginative *imposition* on the events of a past, or can be considered to be in some way *continuous* with it. That is, is there truth to the form of a narrative account. It is this issue, whether the narrative *form* has some continuity or not with the experience of the real, that Carr poses as a starting point to consider the ways in which historiography might be said to represent the past. He thus opposes himself to White, and others like Louis Mink who argue 'that the narrative, as a *literary artefact* produced by historians, reads into the reality of the past a narrative structure that the past does not "really" have.'²⁹

The moral force of White's position lies in the fact that our construal of the past also projects an ideal organisation we envisage for the future, (it is a structure and emphasis that recalls Heidegger's). 'For discontinuity, disruption and chaos is our lot', and the form of our stories confronts this chaos, makes sense of it, and gives us hope for it. But life does not itself *happen* as a story, as he writes in a later work.³⁰ Such comments that life does not occur in the form of stories, while playing a definite polemical role for White, actually obscure some of the potential of his work. It is precisely such comments that David Carr focuses on, with good reason, as an opposite pole to his own view which

²⁸ Hans Kellner analyses the role of choice in *Metahistory*. See Hans Kellner, 'A Bedrock of Order: Hayden White's Linguistic Humanism,' *History and Theory* 19, no. 4 *Beiheft* 19: *Metahistory: Six Critiques* (1980).

²⁹ David Carr, *Time, Narrative, and History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 13.

³⁰ Hayden V. White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative discourse and historical representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 24-5.

we shall consider in a moment. But to deny story, plot and narrative a grounding in life only begs the question of their origin. We must surely already inherit at least partial story-forms in our early life. We could hardly ascribe to Hayden White a thought that would state that stories arrive, fallen from the sky, fully formed.³¹ Ascribing them to dreams and desires again only defers the question. Thus when Carr takes up the question of the origin of historical narratives, it seems possible to me to understand his work as complementing that of White's.

In a manner analogous to the reductions of the phenomenologist, White takes the *historical narrative* as an example of a distinctive operation of consciousness and penetrates to the formal structures that constitute the meaning of a representation of 'history'. There is no 'real' outside or beyond this level, for it is an analysis of what constitutes the historical 'real' itself as it appears *for us*.

The thought about the object to be represented and the words to be used in representing either the object of the thought about the object are all consigned to the usages of figurative discourse. It is imperative, therefore, when analysing putative 'realistic' representations of reality to determine the dominant poetic mode in which its discourse is cast. By identifying the dominant mode (or modes) of discourse, one penetrates to that level of consciousness on which a world of experience is constituted prior to being analysed.³²

However, for all the value of White's analyses of historical and philosophical works in *Metahistory*, the construction of the historiographical text is so vulnerable to a multiplicity of interests that one cannot be certain that such a constitutive level is reached. David Carr's phenomenology of historical consciousness would then complement this position by taking up in closer detail the question of the link between the experience of the *lifeworld*, and the developed construction of a historical past. But more importantly, Carr's classical phenomenology will also show us just how concrete and specific to

³¹ In the introduction to *Tropics of Discourse*, White takes up the question of the origin of the rhetorical styles he outlined in *Metahistory*. He considers several options, including locating their development in psychological phases of childhood development, as outlined by Piaget. But White ultimately steps back from subscribing to this (13). The greatest difficulty, it seems, relates to the choice of an active or passive description of prefiguration. Here, in an interesting passage, White writes that metaphors are 'as much imposed as found' (19), and that 'no metaphor is completely erroneous,' (20). These statements undo somewhat the position that White takes elsewhere, and that Carr emphasises.

³² White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, 33.

real world narrations that Derrida's work can be. For Derrida's thinking of supplementation and trace, of relation to the other, is in fact a basis for stories. Why tell a story? Because we want to relate a movement from one state to another. They need to be related by some trace, some remnant of that passage.

Narrative, phenomenology and history

In the work of David Carr, English-speaking philosophy of history is introduced to philosophy of history in a phenomenological mode.³³ Any reader of Husserl's late texts and of Heidegger's *Being and Time* will be aware that history is absolutely crucial for them. In David Carr's work, the connections between phenomenology and Anglophone philosophy of history are made and developed into a broad phenomenology of human temporality, historicity and narrative practices. This is framed as the pre-scientific, 'lifeworld' basis for the development of a critical historiography. The crucial argument of *Time, Narrative, and History* is the *continuum* drawn between the structures of temporality and historicity and those of narrative. The argument is to show how professional historiography can be a (very developed) extension of 'our' experiences. Carr is thus inspired by the efforts of the older Husserl to overcome, in *The Crisis of the European Sciences*, the alienation of science from lived experience. 'I want to do something comparable for history and for our awareness of the historical past. I want to set aside the historian's cognitive interest and bracket the past as an object of knowledge in order to let the past appear as an element of the experienced world.'³⁴

³³ Four books by Carr interest us here, *Time, Narrative, and History* (1986) presents a united treatment of the phenomenon of history; *Interpreting Husserl: Critical and comparative studies* (Dordrecht: M. Nijhoff 1987), brings together the background work to the 1986 book; *Phenomenology and the Problem of History: A study of Husserl's transcendental philosophy* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974) assesses history in the late Husserl texts, and forms a companion to Carr's own translation of Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970). See, too, Noel Carroll's review of *Time, Narrative and History* in *History and Theory* 27, no. 3 (1988).

³⁴ Carr, *Time, Narrative, and History*, 3-4.

Applications of ‘narrative’ are indeed a very fruitful stream in contemporary philosophy.

Phenomenology and narrative meet in Paul Ricoeur’s hermeneutics, to which Carr responds.³⁵

Narrative has become of particular importance in philosophical treatments of the unity of selves.³⁶

This area is notably inter-disciplinary, and spans too the divide between ‘analytic’ and ‘Continental’ philosophy.. Insofar as Carr’s account of history and time is both strikingly original and, I think, yet to be surpassed for historiography in the broad encompassing it presents in Derrida’s work. Those features, which will be discussed in the next section, will help us elaborate the question of narrative with what we have thus far discovered in *Of Grammatology*. I will use Carr’s work to highlight the temporal issues in historiography which are explicit and concrete in Derrida. Deconstruction—the diagram—is *all about time*, and Carr will helps us see the link between historical experience and the writing of history.

By referring to *Lebenswelt*, Carr means the world of practical, everyday, and above all *prescientific* experience. He sets out to develop Husserl’s phenomenology of inner time-consciousness in the direction of action, firstly on a small scale, and then extended to the coherence of life, and its social and cultural situation. He thus *grounds* the discipline of history in structures that can be located in the intimate details of the consciousness of individual and social being, as they are immersed and dispersed in a ‘pre-given’ world—not a world that they create, but a world in which they find themselves and must come to grips with.

This grounding takes up an opening that is lacking in the work of Hayden White and others that concentrated on the *developed products* of historiography. They had not accounted for, as Husserl would say, the origins of the science. Although Carr’s efforts are inspired by Husserl’s *Crisis*, in

³⁵ A historical note is of particular interest to us here: David Carr was a Fulbright scholar in 1963, and he studied in Paris alongside Paul Ricoeur, and participated in Ricoeur’s seminar at the Sorbonne. He met Derrida there, too, who gave some of the seminars on the *Logical Investigations*, and the two were on friendly, though not particularly close terms, through their careers. Carr remembers Derrida already developing the argument of *Speech and Phenomena* at the Sorbonne in 1963. Interview with David Carr, (21 March, 2011). Cf. Edward Baring, *The Young Derrida*, 239.

³⁶ See, for instance, Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After virtue: A study in moral theory*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 204ff. and Marya Schechtman, *The constitution of selves* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996).

detail he prefers to begin with the structures he finds in Husserl's much earlier lectures on time-consciousness.³⁷ The problem of drawing a continuum between lived experience and historiography is posed by inquiring into the common-sense understanding that 'telling a story' about a certain event or events can indeed succeed in truthfully relating *what happened*. Not only in relating the empirical content of the events, but also in the particular sequential form in which I present such a story, with a beginning, a middle, an end, told from a certain point of view. That is, that the *particular structure* of the *story* can adequately represent the movement, pattern, rhythm and process of the events in question. Carr zeroes in on assertions that would pose a radical discontinuity between lived experience and narratives about it.

The story or narrative element is attributed to a 'literary' imagination that is found by these thinkers to unsettle the cognitive practices of the historian. In so far as it is called 'literary', it is considered to bear no relation to events in the form of the actuality of happening. But in a radical move, the artful story-telling of a historical work is not belated ornamentation, attached only at the end of a scientific process of research and intelligible comprehension, discovery, and confirmation. Rather the literary aspect insinuates itself into the knowing *from the very start*. The challenge from White and Mink and others is that literary apprehension is at once the only form of knowing open to the historian, and yet in its very essence it does not answer to brute existence.

This *primary role* of the literary imagination means that there is no way to penetrate to an event that is free of its influence. Indeed, Arthur Danto had already established that no 'event' exists except under a description.³⁸ Narrative, the fulfilment of description, remains solidly on the side of invention, artifice, culture, and as such is found to be *discontinuous* with the real. It thus becomes important to explore historical narratives in the direction of their continuity with literature, rather than as if they were of a kind with the physical sciences. The 'discontinuity thesis' thus proposes a continuity in

³⁷ Edmund Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time (1893-1917)*: *Husserliana X*, trans. John Barnett Brough, vol. IV (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1991).

³⁸ See Arthur C. Danto, *Narration and Knowledge*,

another direction – with literary art. Historiography becomes a species of the genus story.³⁹ As we saw, however, to assert a discontinuity between historical events and historical narratives only begs the question of the origin of narratives themselves. That is, historical science must find itself grounded in the lifeworld in some way, and this grounding must provide the elements of a justification for the use of narrative. Even if we go via ‘story’. This path from lifeworld to fully-fledged historiographical narrative is the journey we are seeking. This project is accordingly of far greater significance than simply one side of a conversation over the status of narrative within historiography. The careful reconstruction it proposes situates historiography within a broader theory of society and a theory of recognition, it thus proposes the critical role of historical narratives within communal life itself. Carr’s project then reinforces the social critical role for historiography that inspired White himself.

The object of the exercise is the *pre-thematic* view of the past. We note that this is very different to the one posed by White’s analyses—the structural imagination of the master historian or philosopher. The term ‘pre-thematic’ expresses the point that an awareness of *past moments* operates in conscious experience as part of its ‘minimal’ level, precisely when we are not explicitly trying to represent or recall the past. Which is to say, ‘everybody’ has this experience of the past, whether they are historians or not. We can, in an act of reflection, make the past ‘thematic’ by explicitly bringing some aspect of this experience to attention and inquiring of it, but we need not do this at all times.⁴⁰ History as a discipline, on this account, obviously treats the past in a *very* developed way. It not only treats various regions of the past (‘French history’, ‘the Reformation’, and so on), in a thematic way, but the discipline itself (which is a social, or plural, subject), *also* has its own past that is *pre-thematic*: accumulated rubrics, classical works for inquiring into, inherited contours of a discipline. Thus, for the phenomenologist, the ‘distance’ implied by the complexity of the historical discipline presents a significant challenge in drawing an account that would connect it to the everyday awareness. One

³⁹ White, “The abiding relevance of Croce’s idea of history”, 112.

⁴⁰ Although the ‘coherence of life’, as a project of the self, would imply that recollection and a kind of ‘historical’ work, or at least memory work, is a necessary part of being a person.

must find a way to account for the multiplicity and complexity in the concept of history, in order to get a handle on the basic phenomenon.⁴¹

In order to first get a grasp upon temporal structure in a general enough way, Carr takes the relatively ‘passive’ experience of hearing a melody—the classic phenomenological example. In the temporalising element of life, we rarely experience *mere* sequence. Rather, we experience time in sets or fields according to the experience which the duration embraces. We experience time as a form, a temporal *Gestalten*:

of whose parts, in their temporal arrangement, the subject has a protentional-retentional grasp; a changing and flowing grasp, to be sure, since the whole is grasped successively from each of its parts, each time (metaphorically speaking) from a different ‘perspective’.⁴²

Thus we do not experience time for the most part as a mere sequence, but as an adumbration of the concerns of experience. Protention and retention constitute a closure, articulating time according to our action and inaction. Emphasis towards the ‘past’ (retention), the ‘present’, or the ‘future’ (protention) is weighted *according to the activity*.⁴³ This *Gestalt* view of time, the *patterned* structure of a consciousness is foundational for everything which Carr will argue.⁴⁴ Time is patterned, writes Carr, with structural parts that are consonant with the basic parts of *story*.

The changing ‘point of view’ within temporal patterning is likened by Carr to the unique position of the narrator of a story. While still *within* a temporal order, a narrator has a grasp forwards and backwards of where they are up to. What is crucial is that experience is *articulated*. It is distinguished

⁴¹ One can recognise a similar project in the historian Carl Becker’s famous presidential address of 1931 to the American Historical Association: ‘If the essence of history is the *memory* of things said and done, then it is obvious that every normal person, Mr. Everyman, knows some history. Of course, *we do what we can to conceal this invidious truth*.’ Carl Becker, ‘Everyman his own historian,’ *The American Historical Review* 37, no. 2 (1932). My emphasis.

⁴² Carr, *Time, Narrative, and History*, 41.

⁴³ Here, Carr provides an intriguing synthesis of Husserl, Heidegger, and Dilthey on temporality each of whom emphasise a different part of the temporal field. Carr speculates that this is so because of the unnoticed weighting of their favoured examples. See Carr, *Interpreting Husserl*, 205ff. This ‘balanced’ view of time is not dissimilar to the argument Jack Reynolds mounts concerning a ‘chronopathological’ overemphasis on any one aspect. See *Chronopathologies*, part 3.

⁴⁴ Cf. Carr, *Phenomenology and the Problem of History*, 72.

into various aspects, correlated with others into a complex whole, but nonetheless as distinct themselves. Thus a temporal experience, such as listening to a melody, is configured in its very experience. ‘The horizons of time, like those of space, are not undifferentiated plena but are “inhabited” by, articulated into more or less distinct events.’⁴⁵ Time is not homogenous. We recognise the beginning of a melody as distinct from its ending, and the stretch of its duration is experienced *as* a melody by retaining the impression of successive moments as an *organised* sequence: it rises, it falls, it pauses or quickens. Simultaneously, we anticipate, pretend its direction, experiencing the climax of the tune, a resolution, its end. It can surprise us, moving in a manner we do not expect. These experiences are as of parts of a whole, the heard melody, which reveals itself always *as* a complex whole.

Protention, the anticipative index in temporal experience also highlights how the elements of the whole have a value that is relative to that whole. If an experience does indeed include a surprising turn, such as an action failing, or an unconventional chord progression, then the whole itself becomes retrospectively something different. Past elements, in retention, are rewritten in light of this.⁴⁶ This structure then indicates that the punctual point of the ‘now’, without retention or protention, is a meaningless, abstracted fiction.

Through all of the developments that Carr follows in the rest of the book, the coherence and organisation that is found in time-consciousness remains foundational. If anything, the examination of the temporality of action only heightens the issue, for it highlights how the ‘point of view’ within the temporal experience may change, moving its focus from what is presently received, to the future *goal* of an action that I intend to complete. But whether active or passive, the same retentive-protentive structure provides a closure internally articulated into constitutive parts. Carr’s emphasis, as in a genetic phenomenology, is not only on the fact that we experience objects as a temporal synthesis, but

⁴⁵ Carr, *Time, Narrative, and History*, 24.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 29-30.

also that the cogito itself is ‘spread out’ over time.⁴⁷ By describing the varying senses of ‘point of view’ as indicated different temporal constructions, Carr adds a dynamism to our sense of time, such that the varying ways of viewing time are themselves temporalized, rather than abstracted.

Now the move from relatively small and complete actions or experiences is obviously a significant jump. An extended experience, such as watching a play that is broken by an interval, or reading a book in several sittings, or even more, acquiring an education at an institution, involves a different register of coherence. While pursuing these things, we also carry on numerous other elements of life, each with their own smaller or larger set of coherencies. These phenomena are not simply held together by attention. Here a level of *reflection* is required, though it isn’t detached or contemplative.⁴⁸ Returning to a book which I’ve put down in the middle of reading, I reorient myself once again to the flow of its arguments or narrative; while cooking a meal, I must pause and collect together what I’ve done, what I still have yet to do, and the time remaining in order to produce it at the correct time. Here we have recollection, or second memory, and a future oriented deliberation or planning. The temporal components become thematic:

What distinguishes these ‘reflective’ components of actions and experience from the pre-reflective ‘immersion’ we have spoken of so far is that here the temporal object, experience, or action is taken apart, broken down into its elements, such that it can be attended to separately.⁴⁹

The ‘breaking down’ is a practical kind of concern which has the goal reorganising and reorienting oneself within an overall action. The elements are considered with respect to their relationships. Here Carr is thinking of the German term *Besinnung*, highlighting its sense of ‘taking stock’ as a practical attitude, and its relation to Dilthey’s *Zusammenhang des Lebens*. Such reflection aims at the *coherence* of life. That which is constituted by this reflective, yet practical taking stock is the unity of

⁴⁷ Carr, *Phenomenology and the Problem of History*, 77.

⁴⁸ Carr, *Time, Narrative, and History*, 56.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

an action that is dispersed across time, interrupted, and requires an act of thought to be taken up once more.⁵⁰

Not only does this move to larger events cover the way in which coherence may be found despite interruptions. It also shows how pre-thematic elements, experienced in the temporal flow, become thematic. This is a transition from primary memory to secondary memory, which despite their seeming similarity according to such names, operate at radically different levels.⁵¹ Secondary memory is recollection, the active representing in consciousness of a past experience. Retention, on the other hand, is the experience of what has just been. Retention is a part of what makes recollection possible, and when I recall something that has a temporal sense to mind in remembering it, retention is still operative *in* the recollection, for I experience the recollection in time, ‘once again’, as it were. Thus I do not sometimes retain the past, and other times recollect it actively, nor is one ‘short term’ and the other ‘long term’ memory. Retention is operative as part of my temporal experience, whereas recollection is operative specifically when a past is reactivated and represented.

Now, I can actively direct my recollection according to the organising role of reflection. The practical, orienting grasp of *Besinnung* can be seen to be a kind of story-telling position. Carr frames it as a developed instance of a ‘point of view’. We tell ourselves, or others, where we are up to, what we hope to achieve, our goals and dreams. Past and future are organised in such telling. To be sure, we are still immersed in the flow of life and are not infallible as narrators of our life, but essentially, the ability to act out our lives involves negotiating between past and future. ‘What we are saying, then, is that we are constantly striving, with more or less success, to occupy the story-teller position with respect to our own actions.’⁵² This story-telling, narrator position is *a site of security*, it assures the person who occupies it with a sense of the grasp that is held over the actions within their life. This recognition in fact lends a certain plausibility to Heidegger and Derrida’s remarks about ‘presence,’ and why it is desired. At the same time as recognising this, however, precisely because we also see

⁵⁰ Ibid., 56-7.

⁵¹ Cf. Husserl, *Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, 34, 38.

⁵² Carr, *Time, Narrative, and History*, 61.

that this is something we struggle for and never really retain, we can *also* see the plausibility of Derrida's arguments that presence is always a constituted *effect*.

For Carr, then, narrative is not a clothing of experience with an additional layer which hides a naked experience. The literary imagination does not super-impose a structure on real events devoid of such structures. Rather narrative is itself the naked experience. There is nothing outside such narrative experience: 'In our view, there is nothing below this narrative structure, at least nothing that is experienceable by us or comprehensible in experiential terms.'⁵³ We can then go on to dismember, and analyse experience, but this is an abstraction, rather than a penetration to a hidden core.

Until now, narrative has only been considered from the individual viewpoint. Carr develops the phenomenological tradition by mapping a move from the individual to the social, from the 'I', to the 'we'. A full blown historiography is Carr's destination, and accordingly he must be able to account for narratives of a group, a *plural* subject. Here, he incorporates a theory of recognition, by turning to that older 'phenomenology'—Hegel's. If we can say that 'we' act, when speaking of a social group that mutual recognises its members, organised according to various tasks, that maintains itself in its cohesion in a self-conscious way, 'the group itself, as we-subject, is constituted as the unity of a temporally extended multiplicity of experiences and actions.' In maintaining itself in a variety of ways, it performs a kind of collective reflection, 'we act or experience in virtue of a story we tell ourselves about what we are going through or doing. It can be seen that the roles of agent (we act), narrator (we tell), and audience (to ourselves) turn up again, this time in plural form.'⁵⁴ In this plural subject the ground is prepared for the recognised role of a thematic, professionalised pursuit of the pasts of various groups.

While Carr's account of narrative, (of which I have only canvassed the foundations, and not the entire breadth) is a trenchant response to the 'discontinuity thesis', it does not, I think, actually respond to

⁵³ Ibid., 65-6.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 149.

some of the strongest elements in Hayden White's work. Does not respond to it because it has no need to. White wants to make explicit the political and social role of historiography. It would be a mistake to construe the two thinkers to be in complete opposition. As I emphasised earlier, the two operate on vastly different grounds, and in other respects, they need not be arranged against one another. The strength of White's work lies elsewhere – in the way he shows an historical work to contribute to contemporary society in its projective capability. But this capability is the very kind of thing that Carr seeks to ground. Read from this point of view, Carr's analyses actually contribute to much of what White seeks to do.

But Carr's efforts, more importantly, also begin to change how we read Derrida. In the *Gestalten* of time, in its sociality and historicity, Carr is in fact describing those very same structures that Derrida has sought to describe in the 'diagram'. But where Derrida declares a complicated relationship to the name of 'phenomenology', Carr maintains his work within a classical phenomenological framework, even though, as we shall see, he comes to some of the same conclusions. Although I by no means want to ignore the very real differences between Carr and Derrida's 'phenomenology', their proximity particularly in the case of temporality means that Derrida appears *less strange*, and this is a useful development, for it is often the appearance of strangeness that impedes historiographers with respect to Derrida, rather than issues of substantial content. Derrida does indeed penetrate 'below' the narrative experience structure, however, one of the principle points of the diagram, which here we compare to narrative, was that we saw that any 'lower' point is only conceived on the basis of the supervening diagram. Indeed, as we shall see, Carr is not unaware of this. Carr, then, joins together thoughts of time and history, and in doing so, we can see how Derrida is in fact a concrete thinker of the complex relation that a community lives to its pasts and futures. Carr explicitly connects these elements to a historiography, and thus provides grounds for considering Derrida as connected likewise.

Gestalt and diagram

Let us recall some of the elements of the ‘diagram’ of history that were established in the previous chapter. It was, as Derrida wrote, an ‘impossible’ diagram, an ‘unpresentable’ graphic. In this way Derrida indicates how we are always found within a system of representation, ‘caught in a graphic’, that had no resources for describing its own genesis, other than as a blank space, opening or dispersion. In contrast to the metaphysical schema that was a closed circle, Derrida’s positive diagram was adventurously open to the future.

Now David Carr has explicitly described time as a shaping that moves with us, and we grasp this shaping from different perspectives within it. The relation between the point of view and the larger whole, be it an extended activity, or even our life as a whole, was subject to the difficulties of a part-whole problem. One’s perspective is always from within one local region of activity. We do not transcend the narrative, the Gestalt, or, let us say, the diagram. We can only describe it with the resources which are available to us. This activity of grasping, of reflecting and constituting the coherence of our life, undertaken individually and also socially, is a way of being: ‘The narrative grasp of the story-teller is not a leap beyond time but a way of being in time.’⁵⁵

This being in time, however, is ever restless. The perspective constantly shifts, seeking an equilibrium as we reorganise our activities, or have them reorganised for us by events and encounters with others. Although we do, indeed we must, plan and anticipate the future direction of any particular ‘narrative shape’ of my life that I am engaged in, such plans and anticipations must always be capable of being

⁵⁵ Ibid., 89. Carr’s focus is, of course, in grounding the narrative element of *historical* work. But the reflective taking stock of *Besinnung* is just as applicable to philosophy, which is additionally, not without its own historical narratives. We would like to see Carr’s conclusions on what a characteristic being in time of philosophy would be. The approach towards the differences in continental and analytic philosophy taken by James Chase and Jack Reynolds, which includes historical elements as well as analysis of the modes of questioning seems to highlight the various *experiences of questioning* taken up between the two traditions. It then becomes significant that there is a ‘contretemps’ or disjunction precisely over the experience of time. See James Chase and Jack Reynolds, *Analytic Versus Continental: Arguments on the methods and value of philosophy* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), 199-201.

surprised. We aim for coherence and calculate on achieving one just so. When this does not happen, we try to restore or retrieve a lost coherence. In this way, insists Carr, lived reality is permeated with narrative. ‘That the imagination is involved there is no doubt’ he writes, opposing himself to the ‘literary’ imagination of Hayden White.⁵⁶ But it is precisely this type of imagination White was trying to reach (whether he reached it is a different question). Now Carr links this practical, everyday imagination with our anticipation of the future, and also when we are faced with a disparity between the real and our desires and expectations. It is the work of a particular kind of imagination that negotiates the restless shapes of our being in time.

Now, recall that a theory of the imagination occupied a decisive position in Derrida’s discussion of history. It was the imagination which ‘broached’ history, the faculty of images which turned aside the forces of nature. Moreover, it is the imagination that is at its heart the relation with death.⁵⁷ The imagination is also, Derrida writes, another name for *différance*.⁵⁸ For Rousseau, the imagination was what set the human apart from the animal, and activated the faculty of pity and opened the reign of temporality.

In the experience of suffering as the suffering of the other, the imagination is indispensable in the measure where it opens us to a certain non-presence in presence: the suffering of the other is lived by comparison, as our non-present suffering, past or to come. And pity would be impossible outside of this structure binding imagination, time and the other, as the one and same opening into non-presence.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Carr, *Time, Narrative, and History*, 91. And further, Carr is saying that this practical imagination is the source of our other narratives—that is, he extends and clarifies White’s analysis, rather than opposing it.

⁵⁷ Jacques Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 261/184. Indeed, Carr’s comment about the imagination being active when we experience a *disjoint* between the real and our expectations becomes very interesting in light of a passage from *Emile* which states it is this very disjunction between desire and power, the breaking of an equilibrium that *awakens* the imagination. See *Ibid.*, 264/186.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 265/187.

⁵⁹ ‘Dans l’expérience de la souffrance comme souffrance de l’autre, l’imagination est indispensable dans la mesure où elle nous ouvre à une certain non-présence : la souffrance d’autrui est vécue par comparaison, comme notre souffrance non-présente, passée ou à venir. Et la pitié serait impossible hors de cette structure liant l’imagination, le temps et l’autre, comme une seul et même ouverture à la non-présence,’ *Ibid.*, 270/191.

Now, what interests us here with returning to this element of the imagination is that for Derrida it is putting into play all of the features of the *Gestalt* of time that Carr has spoken of, especially including, as Carr's applications of Dilthey and Heidegger make clear, the relation to death.⁶⁰ It is by this imagination that we establish our sociability, being able to perceive the point of view as another, as a kind of imaginative variation, projected into the future or past, of our own experience. This important opening brings the experiences of others within our grasp, and also opens us to predecessors and successors, it introduces a 'we'. Derrida makes this clear when he emphasises the operation of *comparison* in Rousseau's thought. 'Comparison', there, is an operation of generalisation. It is the genesis of the concept, and by virtue of comparison, the 'we' announces the concept of 'humanity'.

What Carr is able to bring out is that the interplay of 'images' of the 'shapes' of time are a practical element in individual and social life, that we tell and receive from ourselves and others, making us who we are. And we can see that Derrida is enquiring in to precisely what makes these things possible, in the partial identification with others, in the ability to identify a 'we', to constitute the world in language, and so on. Derrida does indeed problematise such experiences, especially in later work, but he nonetheless also seeks to illuminate their conditions of possibility. We now need to show the connection of these structures with the language of historical narration.

Time, metaphor and narrative

It is now apparent that Derrida and Carr, contemporaries and fellow readers of Husserl and Heidegger, even sometime colleagues in Paris, have learnt many of the same lessons from the phenomenological tradition. Indeed, in reading *Time, Narrative, and History* after reading Derrida's 1967 books, one is struck by the terrain which they share, even if they share it according to very different styles. Now, we have linked Derrida's diagram and Carr's work on the narrative shapes of life. What we shall now

⁶⁰ See Carr, *Time, Narrative, and History*, 77, 81, and 96.

show is how the thinking of history and the diagram in *Of Grammatology* relates to specific acts of narrativisation. This will concern the use of a specific kind of metaphor. We will show how Carr's emphasis on narrative is a *parallel* attempt to push the Husserlian theory of temporality beyond its ties to the 'living present'. In this way we will extend our analysis of the diagram in its relation to the task of historical writing.

If Hayden White is concerned with a 'deep structure' in historiography that can be described according to a governing metaphor that unites the temporal unfolding in the narrative, David Carr pushes such metaphors back to our very experience, the constitution and coherence, of life. Temporality is, for Carr, the dispersed, space-like structure that becomes those structural metaphors that govern our stories—historical and otherwise. Derrida, too, connects metaphor and temporality to space, and Carr arrives at the same conclusion as Derrida, that this disrupts any punctual present. They come to the same conclusions because, while doing so with different aims in mind, they are describing the same situation.

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When we speak of 'metaphor' here, we are not referring to the deployment of written style. When it comes to time, and descriptions of change, there is no literal language possible. Or to put it another way, expressions describing temporality are *original* metaphors. Now, in the 'Exergue', Derrida makes a comment about 'historical style' in response to the historical movement, particularly in the sciences, away from phonetic writing systems. Derrida demonstrates in the final chapter of the *Grammatology*, as we saw in our previous chapter, the implications of this movement for the concept of history. In the 'Exergue', however, Derrida is content to invoke the enigmatic character of this scientific and historical drift:

But today something lets it [the historical movement] appear as such, allows it a kind of takeover without our being able to translate this novelty into *clear cut notions of mutation*,

explanation, accumulation, revolution, or tradition. These values belong no doubt to the system whose dislocation is today presented as such, *they describe the styles of an historical movement* which was meaningful—like the concept of history itself—only within a logocentric epoch.⁶¹

‘Style’ is employed here to describe a category of ‘values’ that refer to modes of change. The ‘values’ are the individual characteristics of change that each of the terms express. These are primarily *ontological* possibilities, not literary ones.⁶² Noting, however, how Hayden White has drawn our attention to the way that certain metaphors govern historical writing, we can intuit clearly how a historiographical exposition can work with such ontological values. Indeed, combining this insight with what we have learnt from David Carr, these ‘styles’ also connect directly with the narrative configurations that just are the way that we experience time. They are certain shapes which simply are the bedrock of experience.

Derrida contends that these values are part of the ‘logocentric’ system, that system, which is indeed the entire Western culture, which determines beings as presence, and unites presence with the immediacy we experience when we hear our own voice.⁶³ Such styles must be a part of this system, according to the ontological level in question. These kinds of change or movement are directly related to the concept of *time*. Not only because they are ‘historical’, insofar as their occurrence indicates a temporal passage, but also because ‘time’, too, is a principal element of the logocentric system. We have already seen, in the last chapter, how phonetic writing was placed within a ‘history of life’ that had united systems of writing with consciousness, with speech and a concept of linear temporality.⁶⁴ The important consequence for us to note here is that such ‘styles’ are related to temporality, and, indeed, are related to *presence*. They express temporal modifications of presence; an initial present state, that then transitions to a following state. They imply an initially present being, the mode of its

⁶¹ Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 13/4. My emphasis.

⁶² A discussion of Derrida’s actual writing style would, in fact, be concerned with uniting the temporal and ontological implications with the possibilities of expression. In fact, an implicit understanding of this was at work in our interpretation of the diagram in the last chapter. However, we do not have the space or time to pursue it here.

⁶³ The fact that Derrida connects presence with the natural equilibrium of the human body suggests that a priority of presence would by no means be limited to the West.

⁶⁴ See Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 409/289.

modification, and the presence of the resulting being. Nothing more mysterious is implied by ‘presence’ than that the before and after stages could be indicated as a fact, present for somebody, somewhere. When, therefore, Derrida is *reinscribing* history, in the ‘positive’ and productive way that we have discovered, his descriptions of its *style* are therefore explicitly concerned with the metaphors that express temporal change, the transitional, middle part of the ‘narrative’. (Indeed, we have already seen that ‘supplementarity’ is pitched precisely as this kind of movement.)

So here we seem to have a particular class of metaphor, which would be those that indicate a paradigmatic type of historical change.⁶⁵ These metaphors are not opposed to any ‘literal’ sense that could describe such movements any more directly. We can trade among metaphors, searching for the most harmonious expression, but that is all. The operation of this class of metaphors is as the large umbrella term which gathers together certain groups of changes. A series of political changes might suggest one kind of metaphor; a series of natural changes a different one. They are thus generalising, complex and often modelled upon explicit, historical, examples—consider ‘revolution’, or, more suggestive of biological terms, ‘mutation’. These are by no means considered as simple, and in any one case, there can be disagreement over the correct description. Indeed, these metaphors would have their own histories which it would be both important and difficult to reconstruct.⁶⁶

Now, in order to build upon our notion of ‘historical styles’, which we have determined as being the very description of historical changes (thus uniting both its very happening, *and* any possible description of it), we can compare this with a succinct structural description that Derrida gives for history. History, he writes, *is a detour*, but one undertaken for the sake of the reappropriation of presence.⁶⁷ The ‘detour’ of history would evidently refer to the middle, transitional element of history.

⁶⁵ Indeed ‘paradigm’ itself has become a part of this group through Kuhn’s notion of a ‘paradigm shift’ within a science.

⁶⁶ In fact, one way of conceiving of Derrida’s work is as a tracking of a series of fundamental metaphors in philosophy. Time is a metaphor, Derrida writes in Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, 85. In ‘Violence and metaphysics’, Derrida quotes Borges concerning universal history as ‘*the history of several metaphors*’, *Writing and Difference*, 92. Metaphor is again brought up on the page in the *Grammatology* where Derrida speaks of time-consciousness, *De la Grammatologie*, 98-9/67.

⁶⁷ *De la Grammatologie*, 20/10.

The stretch *between* locations that one could describe according to a metaphor.⁶⁸ Derrida is particularly attracted to figures that place themselves in the middle, transitional positive: the hinge, articulation, difference itself, and, of course, the sign. If we recall the diagram, now, according to Rousseau's description historical events were concatenated each on the other, progressing and regressing in such a way that the detours leapt forth from other detours, detour upon detour without origin or finality.⁶⁹

Now when Derrida speaks of the detour being reappropriated by presence, he evidently has the diagram of history in mind here, and, according to dialectics, its circular return to itself. In this sense, this part of the diagram is the negative moment, the closed diagram that he wishes to interrupt. It is the circular return which he has precisely tried to alter, as we have seen.⁷⁰ But the description of history as a form of reappropriation suggests that the call for history tends to be 'cashed in' in terms of presence. This is the implication in the quotation above where 'revolution' and the other historical metaphors were part and parcel of the logocentric system.

Let us pursue this implication of presence in history with respect to temporality. Indeed, we can see an everyday instance of something like this in some of the ways that David Carr has described our relationship to the past. In the processes of recollection, reflection (*Besinnung*), and deliberation, I can re-awaken the past, I undertake the detour 'into' my own past, or to some fact concerning me, which I then retrieve back to the present in order to put it to work in the project I am engaging in. This structure of detour and re-appropriation is of course quite general. It is the kind of thing we undertake everyday when we recall things, and especially when our memory is being tested. Not only, then, does it seem that Derrida has in mind the diagram of history with this description, but also the structure of temporality. This may be confirmed by the fact that Derrida italicises 'détours *en vue* de la

⁶⁸ Interestingly, Derrida also describes *metaphor* as a 'detour', for example *Margins of Philosophy*, 241.

⁶⁹ See, once again, the description at *De la Grammatologie*, 288-9/202-3. At several places, Derrida also indicates that the structure of the chapters on Rousseau are a series of detours. For example, *Ibid.*, 258, 327/181, 229. Cf. *Margins of Philosophy*, 71.

⁷⁰ Cf. *De la Grammatologie*, 405/286.

réappropriation de la présence'. The '*en vue*' is 'for the sake of', that is, one of Heidegger's temporal 'ecstases', the futural component of Dasein's temporality.⁷¹

Now this issue of fundamental metaphor occurs when we read Derrida's analysis of the processes of time-consciousness in Husserl. Carr notes that the lectures on time-consciousness stand as the 'best clue to a phenomenological clarification of historical experience,' better than the *Crisis* texts.⁷² It is the inclusion of a *not-now* in the *now* that leads Carr to this conclusion. For Derrida, it is likewise this unity of the now and the *not-now* that is radical and undermines all of our calm descriptions of the present. For Derrida, the trace of the *not-now* *interrupts* all of our talk of time. But the present, we hasten to say, is not something that can accordingly be done away with.⁷³ Rather, it is a question of how it is to be thought, and indeed, of things being more complicated than we acknowledge. To go beyond presence, to meditate on non-presence, Derrida notes in *Of Grammatology*, amounts to going beyond the principle of phenomenology. There is a 'dead' time, according to the trace, within the time of presence, and this cannot be reconciled with the presentation of a phenomenon.⁷⁴

Now it is precisely the importance of the complexity of the 'present' that David Carr wishes to emphasise through describing time spatially. Carr's *Gestalt* approach explicitly wishes to weaken the idea of the 'now' in Husserl's account of time. For Derrida, he notes the priority of the 'now' in Husserl's theory of time that forms a nucleus of conscious apprehension, but also notes that the structure of retention and protention, included essentially in 'perception' by Husserl, threatens this priority. The past phase of retention, a not-now, a non-present, is included within the now of perception. This structure is primordial, Derrida argues, and what makes possible the 'upsurge' of the present.⁷⁵ Derrida, noting the strict distinction that Husserl places between primary memory and secondary memory, nonetheless argues for a 'common root' of both, repetition in its most general

⁷¹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 327.

⁷² Carr, *Interpreting Husserl*, 249.

⁷³ 'Within philosophy there is no possible objection concerning this privilege of the present-now; it defines the very element of philosophical thought, it is evidence itself, conscious thought itself, it governs every possible concept of truth and sense,' Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, 61-2.

⁷⁴ *De la Grammatologie*, 99/68.

⁷⁵ Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, 65-66.

form, which he calls the trace.⁷⁶ The trace is ‘more primordial’ than the phenomenologically primordial structure of the present. The trace is not experienced then, but the ‘present’, including the non-present aspect of its structure, is the effect of the dialectic, the trace of the covering up of the trace. Now, the temporal structure that Carr describes *implies* the ‘common root’ that Derrida calls the trace as its connective element, although Carr does not name it as such. He does not name it for, as we recognised earlier, Carr’s interests remain with our lived experience. And so this is thought from within a classical phenomenology. For Carr, one is always in the midst of deploying an *articulated* temporal field, which like our field of vision is unevenly distributed, and contoured. This *variegated* temporal life, in which we imaginatively engage with others, with ourselves as others, and with the future as we narrate our lives to each other, constantly *interrupts* a simplistic vocabulary of the ‘present’.

Carr to this end emphasises more than Husserl the *spatial* analogy with time. The temporal configuration in which I always am is likened to a field of vision. Just as an object is perceived against a background, so too the present is perceived against the ‘background’ of retention.⁷⁷ Indeed, in the example of the musical tone, in which I experience the rushing up and dropping back of the now, would not the note also be inextricably intertwined with a *whence*, a spatial element that dictated the shape of the now? The temporal whole surrounding the individual is emphasised as an *articulated* structure, that, according to what it is that I am doing, has a different shape, and a different emphasis on its past, present, or future components.⁷⁸ It would be underlain by a becoming-space-and-time that is the trace. It is a primordial complex structure, ‘what I am doing, seeing, feeling now is *part of a temporal pattern* that makes it what it is for me, gives it its meaning.’⁷⁹ Carr emphasises the spatial metaphors in our talk of time in order to heighten the sense of its patterning, or configuration. He wants to show how our inherence in time is uneven, ‘lumpy’, or shaped. Accordingly, he steers clear of calling experience ‘present’, realising that *the present* would actually stall time: ‘to use this

⁷⁶ Ibid., 67.

⁷⁷ Carr, *Interpreting Husserl*, 251-3; and *Time, Narrative, and History*, 23-4.

⁷⁸ *Time, Narrative, and History*, 39.

⁷⁹ *Interpreting Husserl*, 252. My emphasis.

expression would be to deny precisely what we are trying to affirm here, namely the genuinely temporal character of experience and action.⁸⁰ It is crucial, for Carr, to insist upon the fact that any particular experience is one which includes the whole configuration, even while I only view the configuration from one of its parts. That one part is never isolable, but experienced as meaningful only as a part of the whole.⁸¹ Derrida's thought of the trace deepens Carr's account by thinking the basic 'element' which enables the adaptability of our configurations, it is the 'blank opening' that earlier we saw Derrida describe as the opening of temporality and our relation to the other in pity.

Carr sees that the spatial emphasis allows him, like Derrida, to correct some misleading elements of Husserl's theory of time. Husserl seems to be misled at times precisely by spatial metaphors. For example, that 'distance' in time (a perceived duration, now past, held in retention) brings about a 'contraction'.⁸² That is, the flow of my experience operates according to the principle of perspective, in which objects recede as they move further into the distance. Carr argues that Husserl is misled by the illusions of perspective. Rather, Carr suggests that the horizon of retention is *variable* according to the phenomenon that is in focus. Its 'objective' length is immaterial, and it can accommodate gaps or interruptions, it can designate 'landmarks' within it. That is, it is not homogeneous. To experience temporally is, according to Carr, to experience a temporal *situation* or configuration. This configuration will have more or less 'visible' features, some of which remain irrevocably in the background, while others intrude rudely upon our attention. Their arrangement depends on both our attitude, and the action or experience that is being undertaken. Now, when we take up a situation *thematically* in a narrative, recalling it for some reflective purpose, we can then explore precisely what remained in the background. It is according to this rule that a historian can reconstruct a context. 'As historians we may pick out for treatment some familiar landmark ... or we may turn to something hidden in the recesses among the familiar landmarks, something that puzzles us precisely because it is for us a gap in the terrain.'⁸³

⁸⁰ *Time, Narrative, and History*, 42.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Husserl, *Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, §§8-9, especially p.28.

⁸³ Carr, *Time, Narrative, and History*, 174.

Carr says, therefore, that in temporal experience, there are gaps, dark shadows and recesses. Such things do not *present* themselves, and are only intuitable as a puzzle, mystery, or horizon. Now, retention and recollection must be co-ordinated such that one can reflectively identify such recesses. Insofar as they have left an ‘impression’, then they were a part of the ‘experienced configuration’, and can be recollected. Indeed, when Carr describes how the temporal focus of our projection in time can be variously weighted, according to our activity, he implies that we can actually trade in the shapes of time to a degree, moving its shape according to our needs. Now, it can only be manipulated, traded in, because of the ‘common root’ which Derrida describes, which enables is also what enables us to speak of it as a shape.⁸⁴ But our ‘trading’ in time always remains uncertain, never quite mastered. An ‘imperfect’ tense, as David Farrell Krell puts it, that must remain never quite domesticated by our abilities to calculate.⁸⁵ For the recesses, however we articulate time, cannot reactivate the ‘absolute past’, which is merely approached and sensed far off us puzzle and mystery. Nor should we understand this densest, most intractable moment of time to be neutral or innocent of action. As Derrida writes in a pivotal section of the *Grammatology*: ‘the dead time is at work’.⁸⁶

The force of Carr’s analysis is precise. He wishes to *weaken* the force of the ‘living present’ in the concept of time. He says it explicitly, that he is questioning *precisely* the *Quellpunkt* and the *lebendige Gegenwart* that Husserl later develops—the very priority of presence that is Derrida’s concern. Carr writes:

I believe Husserl may have been misled not only by the comparison with space, but by some ontological and epistemological prejudices as well. He correctly saw that time experience must unite a consciousness of what *is* with that of what *is not*. A remnant of the view that actuality is prior to potentiality in the order of being may have led him to suppose that same

⁸⁴ ‘Spacing ... notice that this word speaks the articulation of space and time, the becoming-space of time and the becoming-time of space,’ Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 99/68.

⁸⁵ David Farrell Krell, *The Purest of Bastards: Works of mourning, art, and affirmation in the thought of Jacques Derrida* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 116.

⁸⁶ ‘Le temps mort est à l’œuvre,’ Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 99/68.

priority for consciousness. Husserl's use of the Humean term 'impression' suggests another source of his view.⁸⁷

Carr figures the philosophical tradition, certainly, in a far different way to Derrida. But they are agreed on the issue of time and presence. Time for Carr, becomes a moving, articulated, *Gestalt* that is configured according to the experience or action lived through. He presses the spatial analogy to strengthen the account of the *articulation* of time. Time has a 'field' sense, with the field being differentiated according to what moves within it. Multiple dimensions are capable of standing out, some more, some less, and for certain, time can no longer be considered as a line. Carr is accordingly also renovating the concept of experience.

And so time is decisively moved away from a linear model, and the role of the present within it is changed. Time is understood as a configuration, intimately related *and* distinguished from our experience of space, with corresponding different levels and each with its own temporal rhythm. For Derrida, it was the Freudian concept of deferral, *Nachträglich* time, that best illustrated what he felt was needed. Carr's description of the ability to pick out shapes from the dim recesses of our retention works very well with this. Even more if, as above, we emphasise that the dark and the dim nonetheless still *work*. And, especially when we consider the social, historical past, we are not venturing into an uninhabited world. Other people have shaped time before us. As Carr explicitly recognises with Husserl, and in his discussion of authenticity, time metaphors can dominate us.⁸⁸

We live the historical past as part of the continuing present before we ever turn our attention explicitly to the past ... When we do turn our attention to the past, as in historical inquiry, we are not venturing out into an unknown domain to reconstruct something of which we are totally ignorant, on the basis of a few scraps of evidence; rather we are picking out something from within a pre-given and familiar horizon of more or less clear shapes and contours.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Carr, *Interpreting Husserl*, 256. Cf. *Time, Narrative, and History*, 42.

⁸⁸ On authenticity, see Carr, *Time, Narrative, and History*, 86ff.

⁸⁹ Carr, *Interpreting Husserl*, 264.

But as Carr realises, to work on this social horizon-consciousness of the past is in fact to change it. It begins a new negotiation of those pre-given shapes, and allows us to open up new futures. It is to bring into view, to 'hand down' as Heidegger would say, a heritage, to activate new possibilities for the future. In this way, all history becomes revisionary. Indeed, we have already seen Derrida applying this. In unearthing the strange corners of Rousseau's thought on the origin of languages, Derrida revises not only the history of philosophy, but also the philosophy of history. A piece of the diagram, changing the shape in which it is but one recess.

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On the level of temporality, and concerning the future, it seems that Carr, White and even Derrida agree. For all the differences between the radical thought of deconstruction, the classical phenomenology of Carr, and White's poetics, each emphasises a certain role of the future which they wish to protect. Not even necessarily a *radical* future, but simply the chance for *some* future that is not dominated by present construals, but has the hope of determining itself differently. And indeed, by reading Carr and Derrida together, we begin to read Derrida differently, a new future that is, for deconstruction. Even if this thesis is not constructed as a history, it nonetheless aims to have historical import. For suddenly, in light of Carr's elegant portrayal of temporality, the elaborate contortions of Derrida's sentences are revealed to be detailed efforts to think both our philosophical inheritance *and* the openness to change, the burden and the freedom, together.

We began with the way in which, at a certain moment, narrative had appeared as a promising thread for enlivening philosophical debate over history. That promise had faded, but not, on the results of our investigations here, out of a lack of possibilities. Rather it seems that what was needed was some guiding lights by which historiography could focus its efforts. But at precisely that time at which phenomenology held out a promising avenue, all coherence in the discipline of history, as we shall now see, appeared lost. The discipline of history itself required some special effort of *Besinnung*, some taking stock, if it was to retain its unity as a discipline. Some representatives of the collective

discipline needed to tell its story, shape its history, in order to determine a future. This role is taken up in a quite precise way, by the historians of ideas.

5. The history of ideas

The question of ‘history of ideas’ in Derrida’s work concentrates all of the problems upon which we have been working. This makes an analysis of this specific overlap between philosophy and history important, but also very difficult. The issues are close, very close, and difficult to distinguish at times. On the one hand, it is both the philosophical heritage which constitutes Derrida, *and* also that which he would distinguish himself from. A philosophical history that criticised historicism without valorising truth. The *Grammatology* proposes a new genealogy, developed in accordance with the theory of the diagram, and we must develop this thread. We must also recognise that in American ‘intellectual history’ (as it is called), Derrida’s closeness to the history of ideas has indeed been felt, but due to a confluence and sometimes confusion of roles, it has been little explored.

Introduction

How do historians habitually reflect on the possibilities of their discipline? What forms their ‘philosophy’? This role almost always, in the United States, falls to a particular group. In much of the little over a century that ‘history’ has been an organised profession in the United States, it has been intellectual historians—or historians of ideas—that fulfilled the role of reflective, philosophical consciousness. In addition to the distinct realm of history that they pursue, intellectual historians have also stood in as philosophers for the discipline as a whole. They might not have called it *philosophy*, but this is, I think, essentially what they have attempted. This role is unsurprising. Hegel placed conceptual history (for example of

art, law, and other spiritual products) as the closest of historical disciplines to philosophy.¹

John Higham—one of those who contributed most to establishing American intellectual history—also described the intellectual historian’s identity as ‘an amateur philosopher’, whose work was in part straightforwardly philosophical.² Thus the intellectual historian dons the philosopher’s mantle within his discipline relatively easily.

What is ‘intellectual history’? What makes this dual position so easy? It is the task of the intellectual historian to research *the products of thought in its historical passage*. To be sure, there is room for great variety in this description. Not only in the great variety of things that may be classed as ‘products of thought’, but also in the polemical positions taken up within it regarding the best manner of study. Should one emphasise the social context of intellectuals, or is the coherence of a system of thought essentially ignorant of social details? Does one respect the contours of an individual system, or disrespect it by drawing similarities with what preceded and followed it? The object taken as study will potentially already suggest one particular mode of history by the very form in which it is found. Alternatively, the tradition from which the study is framed might constrain one to limited choices of method. Whatever the case, the position taken on what the ‘products of thought’ actually are will also expose one to philosophical scrutiny. For whether one studies such products as a historian or a philosopher, or from another discipline, the researcher must satisfy their own discipline, as well as that of the object of study. The scientist will scrutinise the history of his science, the philosopher the accurate portrayal of their favoured philosophers in a history of philosophy, and so on. In addition, the *definition* of the object of study, such as a ‘science’ or ‘philosophy’ is a decidedly philosophical act. The pitfalls are many for the intellectual

¹ See, for instance, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction, reason in history* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 23.

² John Higham, ‘American Intellectual History: A critical appraisal,’ in *The Craft of American History: Selected Essays*, ed. A. S. Eisenhardt (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1966), 10. See also Daniel Wickberg, ‘Is Intellectual History a Neglected Field of Study,’ *Historically Speaking* 10, no. 4 (2009): 15–6. Wickberg offers a *de facto* observation: ‘intellectual historians *are often* historiographers and critical and self-reflective students of historical practice in a way their colleagues are not. In many departments, the intellectual historian *teaches the dreaded historiography or history and theory* course, while her colleagues teach the nuts-and-bolts methods courses.’ My emphasis.

historian, precisely because the ‘constituents’ of his history are divided among the disciplines.

But when the intellectual historian turns to philosophise about *his own* discipline, the twin role of philosopher *and* historian can easily generate confusion for the pursuer of that task. The divided constituency with which the intellectual historian is faced heightens the need to justify and defend the object that is subsumed under the title of ‘intellectual’ or ‘ideas’.

When writing about *history*, he or she easily extends their range to cover the historical discipline as a whole. But when the historical method is united with the philosophical definition in the single name of ‘history,’ the historical and the philosophical can be difficult to distinguish. The intellectual historian often lives in the general antagonism that exists between historical and philosophical questions—a distinction at least as old as Plato.³

Generally, however, the overwhelming majority of historians prefer a *historical* justification of their discipline rather than a philosophical one. He raises his disciplinary commitment to a transcendental privilege, inverting the point of view of the philosopher, who is criticised for being ‘un’ or ‘ahistorical’ according to their degree of formalism. This situation is most apparent when the disciplines of history and philosophy are institutionalised in ways that are relatively distant from each other, as is often the case in both the United States and Australia.⁴

An excellent example is Peter Novick’s *That Noble Dream*.⁵ This book is an attempt by an intellectual historian to foster *philosophical* argument in his discipline through *historicising* the historian’s supposed ‘objectivity’. Its title is in fact the *re*-quotation of another title, of an infamous essay by the historian Charles Beard which appeared in 1935.⁶ Beard was

³ See, for example, *Phaedo*, 96b ff.

⁴ There can be, however, significant variation between individual universities on this score.

⁵ Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The 'objectivity question' and the American historical profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

⁶ And indeed, Beard’s title is in fact a quotation from another historian in an ongoing discussion. See Charles Beard, ‘That Noble Dream,’ in *The Varieties of History*, ed. Fritz Stern (Cleveland and New

notorious for being a historical relativist. The dream referred to is that of the historian's vaunted *objectivity*. Novick's book proposes from its first lines that objectivity is at the centre of the historical venture, but also that it is, and remains, 'essentially contested'. But *That Noble Dream* is not a philosophical discussion of objectivity. Rather, it charts a history of reflection and argument, political investment and guilt, and the oftentimes scandalous attitudes among historians, all pertinent to the topic of 'objectivity'. The effect is to produce the conclusion that Beard himself urged, that the dream is indeed a dream—in the sense of an illusion, which can never be resolved.⁷

Novick knows his audience. Rather than producing a philosophical argument defining objectivity for historians, which he guesses would be sidelined, he goes about historicising objectivity instead by employing the norms of rigorous archival research, by being as 'objective' as a historian knows how to be.⁸ He shows historians to be far more biased than one hopes they would be. The reader of *That Noble Dream* sees quickly that 'objectivity' is most often read as 'neutrality', a shift that allows Novick to focus on precisely when historians were at their least neutral.⁹ In a forum on the book, the author explicitly stated that his strategy was calculated in order to 'win over those who could be won over and make difficulties for those who ... would like to discredit my findings and conclusions by disparaging my scholarship.'¹⁰ The point was a pragmatic one that highlighted the importance of the procedural elements of historical scholarship. Somewhat like Lévi-Strauss' *bricoleur*, the techniques of scholarship are what the historian has at his disposal.

York: Meridian Books, 1956). For Novick on Beard's essay, see *That Noble Dream*, 250ff. Derrida has frequently been likened by historians to Beard's theoretical ally, Carl Becker.

⁷ "'Historical objectivity' is not a single idea, but rather a sprawling collection of assumptions, attitudes, aspirations and antipathies ... the exact meaning of which will always be in dispute.' Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 1.

⁸ For a philosophical discussion of objectivity geared especially for historians, See Allan Megill, Steven Shepard, and Phillip Honenberger, *Historical Knowledge, Historical Error: A contemporary guide to practice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 107-24. See, too his insightful comments on Novick's book at 159-164.

⁹ See Thomas L. Haskell, 'Objectivity is not Neutrality: Rhetoric vs. Practice in Peter Novick's *That Noble Dream*,' *History and Theory* 29, no. 2 (1990).

¹⁰ Peter Novick, 'My correct views on everything,' *The American Historical Review* 96, no. 3 (1991): 701.

They are equipment for making arguments, and historical equipment to be sure, but there is nothing else to use.

When Novick brings his history to a close, right up to his own time of writing, he infamously proclaims that ‘there is no king in Israel’.¹¹ The biblical quotation was meant to emphasise the dethroning of objectivity in the face of a profusion of overtly politicised subdivisions *within* the discipline of history that had nonetheless very little, almost nothing, to say to each other, and no common criteria to converse over. Now, the point that Novick is making is widely misunderstood, (perhaps even by Novick himself). His point here is *not* concerned with the *proliferation* of types of history. Indeed, proliferation is simply a part of the meaning of ‘history’, as we saw Derrida has tried to emphasise. The point rather goes to the status of the philosophical task within history, in which ‘objectivity’ had been a key watchword for a theory of history. But now the watch word had fallen silent. Theoretical work, where there was any, was exiled to strange border lands of the discipline, peopled by theorists who spoke different languages. The journal *History and Theory* was a ghetto.¹² Novick was lamenting precisely the state of *theoretical* reflection, the debate over the *meaning* of historical work, but he wasn’t lamenting the actual state of *historical* work, which survived rather well:

The bad news was that the American historical profession was fragmented beyond any hope of unification. The good news was that the fragments were doing very well indeed. New fields were explored in innovative ways; historical works of considerable originality and even brilliance appeared every year. Among subcommunities of historians there were higher levels of fruitful interaction and higher critical standards than at any time in the past ... at the level of everyday practice, things had never been better. One thing the American historical community

¹¹ The quotation is from the book of Judges, 2:25.

¹² Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 593. It’s hard to separate Novick’s voice from the sources here. He seems to imply that the founding of *History and Theory* actually contributed to historians giving up on theoretical concerns. An interesting thesis, but not one that is justified by the content of the journal. Nor does he take into account the dynamics of American philosophy at this point.

could not do was sustain *a discipline-wide discussion on the meaning of the historical venture as a whole*.¹³

So, the actual historical work, and its formal, theoretical, reflection were widely out of kilter. The ‘meaning’ of the venture could be invoked by the ghosts of historians past, but substantial engagement required a theoretical level that made no pretensions about ‘synthesising’ the widely divergent types of history being done in actuality. Novick’s tone was widely misconstrued as meaning that the whole profession was in crisis in its practical execution. But his criticisms were precisely on the one facet, ‘the *meaning* of the historical venture as a whole.’¹⁴ It was the theoretical justification that was missing, and it was precisely this that Novick wished to incite.

This culmination and criticism is consistent through the massive book. Novick consistently criticises the *form of argument* in reflective discussions. Where historians rose to tackle objectivity, such as Charles Beard and Carl Becker, the ‘arguments’ they were met with were demonisations and witch-hunts, not logical demonstration, or countering historical analysis.¹⁵ Where strong arguments were produced, they were often sidelined in favour of partisan prejudice. Such an emphasis is certainly not incidental to the project of the book. For precisely in telling the story of the discipline as a whole, Novick calls up the very unity he has announced as missing. His book *is* the beginning of that discipline-wide discussion, and he designed it to be as rigorous an argument as he knew how.¹⁶ And it worked. Historians

¹³ Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 592. My emphasis.

¹⁴ Ibid. One could speculate that Novick did not include extended theoretical argument in his book not through a lack of ability or inclination, but so as to maximise the potential to provoke answers and replies.

¹⁵ For example, on Beard and Becker: ‘almost none of the many historians who rejected their conclusions, who expressed dismay at the implications of their conclusions, or were appalled by their alternative conceptualisations ever challenged their arguments.’ ‘Among defenders of objectivity there was frequently an impatience with philosophical reflection, which ... bordered on anti-intellectualism.’ Ibid., 260, 277.

¹⁶ The book is sometimes slighted for not being a ‘true’ intellectual history. Kerwin Klein routinely calls Novick’s book a *social* history (part implicit criticism, part, perhaps, as distinction from his own project), but this is surely reductive and a little unfair. Novick chose this course, it seems to me, because of the dominant role social history played at the time of his writing: it was sure to be the most

paid attention, the book became an ideal graduate student text, and discussion of it coincided with a new ambition to theorise the historical task. A forum on the book at the *AHA*'s annual conference, three years after its publication, overflowed with not even standing room available. We can thus admire the acumen of its strategy, its execution, and its masterful deployment of metaphors for the historical profession.¹⁷ Responding to an absence, it fills that lack by telling the very story of that void.

The situation resembles the commonplace that 'we'—the West, the educated etc.—hold against 'speculative metaphysics': there is indeed *nothing* that unites history. So why should not the discipline reflect this situation? *Total history*, *Annales* style, is impossible, we say. But of course, Novick wagers that there is a kind of objectivity that still holds our allegiance. After all, we still say 'we'. *We* cannot free ourselves from it so easily, and so Novick must still utilise it. He must still presume the historical tools he can use, *bricoleur*-like, that have come under sustained argument. Their truth value may have been compromised, but truth lives on with a little 't', objectivity with a little 'o', history with a little 'h'. Ambitions are more modest, we are told, and we disclaim any intentions to identify essence, to achieve a uniting story. But such statements threaten to immediately fall into ritual, repetition and crisis while leaving the questions of reflection begging.

If Novick describes the fact that no identity held between the American historical profession of 1880's and that of the 1990's, it was because his definition was stapled to *professional organisation*. This is after all what the book is: a history of the *American Historical Association*. 'Objectivity' is a mark of professionalisation that sets historians off from all of the *amateur* invocations of history. Much of the book's undeniable power is produced through this equation of scientificity with professionalism. Novick's is not only a rigorously

convincing. See Kerwin Lee Klein, *Frontiers of Historical Imagination*, 1; and *From History to Theory*, 20.

¹⁷ Note in particular two prominent metaphors: in the first half, that of a *church* that policed its doctrine, ousting heresies, and in the second, an *empire* that fragments under the roiling mass of its constituents.

executed history, but also a thematic treatment of that which every American historian *prethematically* sees himself or herself as a part of. It cannot be ignored, if ‘we’ are an American historian, for it is a part of ‘us’. But curiously, *this* criterion is precisely the *unprofessional*, the *prethematic*.

But to emphasise the discontinuity of professional historiography, heightening its pathos, simply does not reckon with the durability of the word *history*. ‘History’, it seems banal to point out, ranges far wider than that of the *AHA*, even *within* the United States. It goes without saying, of course. Nonetheless, it is an overlooked fact. As a question, the unity of ‘history’ cannot be unsettled by the travails of the American historical profession, for this remained, and remains one specific gathering together of its significations. It did, however—and this was Novick’s wager (which he ‘won’)—provide the opportunity to ask the questions anew.

This returns us, as we shall see, precisely to Derrida’s questions regarding history. ‘What permits us to call “histories” these histories irreducible to the reality of a general history?’¹⁸ How do we explain the endurance of the concept, through *millennia*, without positing something like an essence of history? The critical issue lies in not ‘cutting short empirical enumeration’,¹⁹ in not posing *one* history, for example, history of professional standards, as the rule for all of the others.

On one page, Novick noted that true ‘cosmopolitans’, ‘supradisciplinarians’ were few and far between.²⁰ A.O. Lovejoy, founder of the *Journal of the History of Ideas* certainly was one.²¹ John Higham (perhaps another), had suggested that the intellectual historian should fill

¹⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, 51.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 590.

²¹ Lovejoy, as we shall see below, was a philosopher with a historical focus, rather than the reverse.

this kind of role.²² But we can note its difficulty; how difficult is mastery of one discipline, let alone many! Sympathy or allegiance to an individual discipline, *even history*, on the other hand, sabotages an intellectual history, Higham noted. This was certainly one criticism raised of *That Noble Dream* by keen observers located outside of history.²³ *History needs its philosophers*, free to ask questions of unity and coherence without having to answer to, or formulate themselves in accordance with the very things they want to place in question. To question is not necessarily to undermine, but rather is a question of intellectual responsibility.

Thus we can see both the reasons why Novick had to attach history-in-general to history-as-a-discipline, and why he had to keep history 'in reserve'. The history of (the American discipline of) history must invoke a general history if its endeavours are not to be a farce. But to seek a justification of this general history would be to minimise the role of the professional historians who gave the project its life. But then, the small 'h' history will always appear limited, local, and precarious: A general history is *nothing*, it has no content, apart from the particular histories with which we fill it. One cannot tell a history of history in general, only of one particular instance of its incarnation. Thus, in order to produce the kind of history that his own discipline would recognise as authoritative, he had to restrict history to its American professionalization. In this way, the full force of those intellectual historians—those traditionally who fulfilled the reflective role—who sought sustenance from *other* disciplines, who sought to be 'supradisciplinary', namely Hayden White and Dominick LaCapra, is felt as a betrayal of allegiance.²⁴ But at the same time, no recourse is left to understand how other disciplines might think history.²⁵

²² Higham, 'American Intellectual History: A critical appraisal.' And he lamented their absence, too.

²³ Charles Tilly, 'Historians' Facts, Factions, Artifacts, and Factitiousness,' review of *That Noble Dream*, by Peter Novick, *Contemporary Sociology* 19, no. 4 (1990).

²⁴ See Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 599-605.

²⁵ Kerwin Klein, noting that other disciplines do indeed employ concepts of history has sought to provide a history of the negotiation of history in philosophy, anthropology, literature and history. See Klein, *Frontiers of Historical Imagination*, 8-11.

That Noble Dream is a 'common' object for the historical discipline, a narrative that historians look to and cannot but respond to. It helps relay the unity of the profession, in the kinds of ways that David Carr has alerted us to, even when it describes its fragmentation. *That Noble Dream* was a call to arms, and it re-consolidated an audience in that call. There is the letter of what the book says, and there is what its gesture means. In this intellectual history we find the *most prominent* attempt of history to take into account its own discourse. The moment of fragmentation in history occurs contemporary to the impact of post-structuralism.²⁶ Derrida is a noted part of the milieu in which the historical discipline begins to once more take its own underpinnings as an issue. And it is intellectual historians who became 'fluent' in Derrida's language, seeking to renovate history on that basis. What was the basis for this recognition? That there is a history of ideas in Derrida, and that this is a point that establishes a connection, both in fact and in principle, with history as a discipline. Not only does Derrida systematically work over the concept of history, but he also productively applies it. But in order to clearly identify both moments, we need to radically distinguish them. The force of American intellectual history seems to repeatedly slide towards confusing a *philosophical* elaboration of the elements of 'history' and its related network of concepts and practices, with a *history* of 'history'. And it deforms the products of their research. If Derrida's work forms a history of ideas of a new complexity that is grounded in an essential incompleteness of ideas which are thus 'open' to history, he is nonetheless, as we shall see, uncompromising in the distinction between the philosophical and the historical.

Derrida and the history of ideas

Derrida writes often, in his early works at least, of the history of ideas. This is unsurprising, for it is both an essential component of Hegelian philosophy, and (this fact is not separate

²⁶ See Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 543ff.

from the former) institutionalised in the systems of French education; its institutions: the *classe de philosophie*, the *agrégation*, the chairs in philosophy at the Collège de France. Derrida's own position, from 1964 at the Ecole Normale Supérieure as *agrégé-répétiteur*, was a position in the history of philosophy. *De la Grammatologie*, submitted for a *Doctorat du troisième cycle*, is an exercise in the history of philosophy—its subtitle is of interest to us here: 'Essai sur la permanence des concepts platoniciens, aristotéliens et scolastiques du signe écrit'.²⁷ From this, we could propose Derrida's characteristic historical-philosophical question as the following: how and why do concepts obtain permanence or continuity? Which concepts have the greatest continuity, and what are the systematic implications of this permanence? Such concepts are not ahistorical for Derrida. They have a history, they *achieve* permanence thanks to their function, their repetition, and their institution.

A philosophical analysis of history and a practice of philosophy as a kind of history of ideas is indeed the philosophical heritage that Derrida takes on, that he internalises, that helps make him 'Jacques Derrida'.²⁸ So much so that Edward Baring can argue that 'Derrida's career tracked the development of French philosophy and can stand in metonymically for the intellectual history of the period'.²⁹ Both a historical approach to philosophy, *and* the philosophical justification of history are an important element of the French philosophical institutions.³⁰ This adds a weight to lines from the avertissement of *De la Grammatologie* which we read once more:

Nous tentons de produire, souvent en nous y embarrassant, des problèmes de lecture critique ... Celles-ci exigent que la lecture échappe, au moins par son axe, aux

²⁷ Alan D. Schrift, *Twentieth-Century French Philosophy: Key themes and thinkers* (Malden: Blackwell, 2006), 120.

²⁸ In this context, Derrida's name-change from 'Jackie' to 'Jacques' is significant. See Benoit Peeters, *Derrida* (Flammarion, 2010).

²⁹ Edward Baring, *The Young Derrida*, 3, 299. Cf. 13. Baring takes his cue from 'The ends of man'. Such an analysis is, I think, implicitly suggested by Derrida, (see *Margins of Philosophy*, 109-136).

³⁰ Although it is incongruous to associate the two thinkers, Derrida, in his own way practices these words of Raymond Aron : 'in reflecting on the historian, the philosopher reflects upon himself, he perceives his own historicity, even though he does not renounce the effort to transcend it,' Aron, *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, 11.

catégories classiques de l'histoire : de l'histoire des idées, certes, et de l'histoire de la littérature, mais peut-être avant tout de l'histoire de la philosophie.

We try to produce, only to embarrass ourselves there, some problems of critical reading ... These demand that reading escape, at least in its axis, the classical categories of history: from the history of ideas, certainly, and from the history of literature, but perhaps above all from the history of philosophy.³¹

What we have already learned from Derrida—these problems of ‘critical reading’—we can easily see at the outset that they will cause difficulties for the historian of ideas, or that the historian of ideas finds himself in a particular situation. It forms one of the very starting points from which Derrida pushes off: That the historian is implicated in the very history he seeks to write.

What is the form of this implication? First, it is that the historian must speak and write in the same language as that which he or she wishes to recount, excavate, or criticise. This runs the risk of repeating the covering-over and distancing that the historian seeks to counter-act and that is the very premise of the historical task—that some form of *retrieval* is required. Thus Levinas must ‘speak Greek’ to break with Parmenides, Foucault must speak and write and reiterate the crime in order to undertake an ‘archaeology of silence’, Lévi-Strauss and Rousseau are of the same ‘age’, and Heidegger demonstrates the necessity of using the resources of the heritage one wishes to unsettle. Even André Leroi-Gourhan, whom Derrida holds in high esteem, cannot escape ‘mechanist, technician and teleological’ language when it is precisely his aim to uncover the anterior conditions that made such things possible.³² The problem is a general one, not simply the fault or failing of a particular author. It ‘is true of *all discourse*’.³³ These are, we now recognise, all features of the series of part-whole and relation problems that are associated with the impossible diagram we have developed.

³¹ Jacques Derrida, *De la Grammatologie* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1967), 7/lxxxix.

³² Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 110, 42; *De la Grammatologie*, 25, 126, 150-157/14, 84-85, 102-7.

³³ Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 126/85.

We can readily observe that Derrida includes philosophers, anthropologists, and historians, and in fact *everybody* in this problem. The historical problem, from the point of view of language, takes everybody in. Derrida formulates it clearly in the chapter on the supplement. ‘The writer writes *in* a language and *in* a logic of which, by definition, his discourse cannot dominate absolutely the proper system, laws and life.’³⁴ Derrida italicises the *dans*. He emphasises this *being-in* a language that in a specific degree frustrates our literate agency. Our ‘very own’ expression of thought, even our own distinctive *style* (we need to remember here that ‘proper’, *propre*, is both ownness and property, and so refers to both our identity and the *objective* properties of a language) is also *not* us. So, Derrida argues that the distinctive problem of the historian, of communicating, conversing with another age, another language, is in fact a general problem of philosophy.

And we know this well by now. It is the problem of the *bricoleur*, inheriting his ‘tools’. Here, we need to bring it into focus with the ‘history of ideas’. We can already see the outlines of the problem—of the scholar who takes up a work, for example, Rousseau’s, and who seeks to understand it, *graph* its movements, its principles, arguments and conclusions. The simple fact that one can learn to read a text in another language, from another time necessarily supposes that, in a general way, myself and this other text appear within a historical network that is still substantially the same in an important way, despite all the obvious and necessary differences and ‘distance’ between us. Were this not so, I would not even be able to read it, to recognise it, classify it, it would not even surge into view for my attention. Thus Derrida writes ‘in a certain way, we are *in* the history of psychoanalysis just as I am *in* the text of Rousseau.’³⁵ Once again, Derrida emphasises the *dans*. Note also how he equates *history* and *text*. Derrida is here capitalising on the disorienting effect of using ‘text’ to indicate both an object, what Rousseau has written, *and* his extension of text to describe the whole constellation that includes Rousseau, Derrida, and us, his readers, too.

³⁴ Ibid., 227/158.

³⁵ Ibid., 230/160. ‘D’une certaine manière, nous sommes *dans* l’histoire de la psychanalyse comme nous sommes *dans* le texte de Rousseau.’

Yet he does give us enough to indicate the kind of thing he means by ‘text’. The reference to *being-in*, to *habitation* means that ‘text’ refers to the connections that enable my experience of a *world*, but simultaneously, that these connections are historical, not absolute. This is why he names them ‘text’, names them according to an ontic metaphor, a name drawn from a history. Strangely, what begins by looking like an argument *against* a historical relativism—that I am within the same historical network of another person or culture far removed from me—turns out to have the consequences that a historical relativism sets out to achieve: that my very perception of the world *is* historically conditioned, that the structures of mind or of reason are not ahistorical—but they are of sufficient permanence and duration that we don’t know of anything else.

We are beginning to close in on the history of ideas. Reason or mind is subject to history—but in a strange way, and according to different a rhythm rarely entertained by historians. If I can ‘converse’ with Rousseau to the extent that we are *in* the same text, then the *epoch* implied here is vast! And when we recall that Rousseau himself repeats the *Socratic* injunction, (it is the opening of the second *Discourse*) then a *certain* continuity reaches enormous proportions. Thus we can understand one of Derrida’s repeated objections to Foucault. Derrida objects on methodological grounds: Foucault delineates a ‘man’ that is a local and parochial, derivative and secondary, phenomenon. But he simply refuses to entertain the durability of the name ‘man’. It is a similar problem to that which we noticed above with respect to the unity of the name ‘history’. Thus, if we have already noted how the ‘Age of Rousseau’ section is a polemic against Heidegger in one fashion (the importance given to Rousseau), it is also a polemic against Foucault—the relative unimportance of the ‘classical age’, and Rousseau as a better ‘example’ than Kant or Descartes. The importance of the point for Derrida is for him great enough to repeat it in remarkably similar terms several times (without naming Foucault) throughout the later *Margins of Philosophy*.³⁶

³⁶ See *Margins of Philosophy*, 72, 118-9, 230. Note particularly the very clear references to Foucault’s *Les Mots et les choses* in ‘The ends of man’. On Derrida and Foucault, see Antonio Campillo,

Foucault and Derrida, then, do describe competing visions of a 'history of ideas'. Foucault sees in Derrida's version a decidedly conservative approach, while Derrida sees in Foucault an empiricist haste and irresponsibility.³⁷ But Foucault's accusations (deliberately, perhaps) confuse several different levels. We shall formulate them, and these will structure what follows. We are not concerned here with describing Foucault's historical projects, which others have done admirably, but he is here a 'foil' to help us realise these levels in Derrida.³⁸ Foucault uses the familiarity of Derrida's position as a historian of philosophy and his respect for the principles of transcendental philosophy to cast aspersions on the radical implications of arche-writing. But let us state the levels:

1. At the most superficial and obvious level, Derrida is a historian of philosophy. He teaches the history of philosophy for the *agrégation*, and he writes on historical-philosophical figures. With a particular liking, Geoffrey Bennington observes, for the 18th Century.³⁹ He pays attention to the context and level for each text, and is concerned to respect their particularity, to locate their continuity with a tradition *and* carefully isolate their departures, *especially within* a given corpus. Departures, for Derrida, will only make sense against a background of continuity. We have already seen the scholarly dating of Rousseau's essay on the origin of languages, which was precisely a question of the unity of Rousseau's thought. Likewise his studies on Husserl, which, like Ricoeur's work, argued for the productive consistency of Husserl's texts right through to the *Crisis* period.⁴⁰ This level of the history of

'Foucault and Derrida: The history of a debate on history,' *Angelaki* 5, no. 2 (2000). See also Geoffrey Bennington, 'Derrida's "Eighteenth Century",' *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 40, no. 3 (2007): 385-6. There is a distinct lack of literature comparing Foucault and Derrida. Two of the best works on Foucault, Hubert L. Dreyfus, Paul Rabinow, and Michel Foucault, *Michel Foucault, beyond structuralism and hermeneutics*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), and Béatrice Han, *Foucault's Critical Project: Between the transcendental and the historical*, (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2002) have nothing to say about Derrida.

³⁷ See, for example, the very explicit discussion of 'primal writing', (without naming Derrida), in 'What is an Author?' and the direct (but belated) response to Derrida, 'My body, this paper, this fire'; both in Michel Foucault, *Aesthetics: Essential works of Foucault 1954-1984 Vol. 2*, ed. James D. Faubion (London: Penguin, 2000), 208-9 and 393-417.

³⁸ On Foucault and history, in addition to the books cited above, see Thomas R. Flynn, *Sartre, Foucault, and historical reason*, 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

³⁹ Bennington, 'Derrida's "Eighteenth Century".'

⁴⁰ Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 238-278/167-194.

philosophy is concerned with the institutional position and pedagogy of philosophy, and is reflected in Derrida's political actions and commitments, for example, in reforming philosophy education in France; seeking to both practically criticise the philosophical institution *and* positively transform philosophical teaching.⁴¹

2. But at the level of philosophical content, Derrida describes what he calls 'a history of the text in general.'⁴² Indeed, we have been describing this above when we spoke about the repetition of Plato in Rousseau. This level is nothing other than the complex theory of the diagram that we have been constantly returning to, which has also been called the 'history of life'. In contrast to what is often thought, this is not the reduction of everything to a text, but a careful observation and respect for the rules and 'economies' of being in the world, the habitation, that we referred to above.⁴³
3. Within this description of the general text, Derrida then demarcates what would be a 'history of ideas' which refers to a specific mode or occurrence upon which one can focus one's attention. Derrida's concerns here are genetic and genealogical, and they connect not only with his professional work (ie. the first level, above), but also with the task of making oneself responsible for the unity of a discipline.⁴⁴ That is, Derrida wishes to track the *decisions* whereby long-standing distinctions are introduced into philosophical and everyday vocabulary. By 'repeating' such decisions, or seeking to

⁴¹ I am taking my language and the two-fold point from Derrida, *Who's Afraid of Philosophy? Right to philosophy I*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 74.

⁴² Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 159/229.

⁴³ See especially the description at Ibid., 408/288. 'Space orders itself wholly for the habitation and inscription in itself of the body "proper."'

⁴⁴ A lesson learnt with and adapted from Husserl: 'To meditate on or investigate the sense of origins is at the same time to: make oneself responsible for the sense of science and philosophy, bring this sense to the clarity of its 'fulfilment', and put oneself in a position of responsibility for this sense starting from the total sense of our existence,' Derrida, *Origin of Geometry, An Introduction*, 31. It is a telling note to observe that it is precisely this question of responsibility that Derrida asks of Foucault in 'Cogito and the history of madness', *Writing and Difference*, 37-8.

understand what is at stake in them, Derrida is seeking to steer the course of philosophy, to be responsible for its direction.⁴⁵

4. The structure of decision described in the previous point is also Derrida's attempt to introduce history *into* the *Idea*. That is, into the concept of the Idea itself. Or rather, because Hegel's Idea does indeed *include* history, the Idea in Derrida is never finally closed off. It remains in an ongoing adventure, as we have said.

In order, then, to describe the history of ideas, as it is formulated in the *Grammatology*, we will now take a closer look at these levels.

The history of ideas in *De la Grammatologie*

Derrida urges as a basic philosophical discipline the careful reading and reconstruction of dynamics and relations of a text, its 'architectonic'. And this is what we have tried to do, especially in our 'diagram' chapter, and here, we need to do with respect to Derrida's own work as a 'historian'. Is Derrida not, too, one of those great thinkers, compulsive writers, restless spirits, ceaselessly writing, working out, working at working out, an 'idea'? Our thesis is that Derrida's 'idea' is historical through and through, to the point of 'idea' *only meaning* its passage through historical repetitions. The idea never arrives, or, to say it another way, the idea is only understood by virtue of its historical differentiation. To articulate it is to enter the possibility of changing it. To write on it is to intervene *in* it. Here we shall explore the levels outlined above, one at a time, in order to realise the possibilities for a 'history of ideas'.

⁴⁵ On Derrida's 'decisions' in the history of philosophy, see Hobson, *Jacques Derrida*, 61; on Derrida's *model* of the decision, see Reynolds, *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 'Derrida', §5.a, 'Decision'. (<http://www.iep.utm.edu/derrida/>) [Accessed 29 April, 2012]

I will not discuss the institutional context in which Derrida teaches the history of philosophy. We should acknowledge its importance, however, and the concept of ‘institution’ has an important position in *Of Grammatology*.⁴⁶ The pedagogical nature of many of his works is significant, and well-known, he has been politically active, and published books on the institution and teaching of philosophy. The Lévi-Strauss and Rousseau parts of the *Grammatology* were also involved in preparation courses Derrida taught for the *agrégation*, (Althusser, too, lectured on Rousseau at the same time).⁴⁷ The sections concerning commentary and interpretation in *Part II* can, and should, be read against the light of the rigours of the *agrégation*.⁴⁸ But reference to the French tradition of the history of philosophy is not enough to explain Derrida’s occupation with *history*, even if it adds additional motive and specifies some of the critical debates. Or rather, we should read it as a *question*: the opening up of history in an institutional setting to what is possible, not just what is *de rigueur*.⁴⁹ What are the histories that Derrida in fact proposes? What are their principles and conceptual consequences? The governing movement of these histories will be the entire system, the history of the ‘text’ *in general*.

The history of the text in general

Let us recall our diagram. The diagram was assembled by constructing the system of supplements in Rousseau’s corpus. Supplements were not beings or things themselves, nor even words or concepts, but rather a description of the manner of movement or relation

⁴⁶ Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 68, 102/46, 70. Cf. *The Truth in Painting*, 19.

⁴⁷ See Louis Althusser, *Politics and History: Montesquieu, Rousseau, Hegel and Marx* (London: NLB, 1972).

⁴⁸ On this point, see Baring, *The Young Derrida*, 221ff.

⁴⁹ A quotation from *The Truth in Painting* puts it remarkably well: ‘Deconstruction ... attacks not only the internal edifice, both semantic and formal, of philosophemes, but also what one would be wrong to assign to it as its external housing, its extrinsic conditions of practice: the historical forms of its pedagogy, the social, economic, or political structures of this pedagogical institution. It is because deconstruction *interferes with solid structures*, “material” institutions, and not only discourses or signifying representations, that it is always distinct from an analysis or a “critique”.’ Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, *loc cit*.

between successive states. Never could the fullness of being or nature be returned to without calling for more supplements, more images. A negativity of negativities, the supplement is that nothing which could force nature to produce reason in nature's withdrawal. The supplement cannot itself 'appear', for it is what produces appearance; being cannot itself be *a* being. History and supplement merged in the diagram, proliferating histories. At any point, one is always caught in the graphic of supplementarity, attempting to conceive of what remains invisible to it, while only having the resources to draw yet another diagram.

The diagram is a description of what Derrida has also called the 'general text'. We saw, in its concatenation of positive and negative infinities, that the graphic resembled the chain. The supplement 'describes the chain itself, the being-chain of a textual chain', which results in a proliferation of histories of all types.⁵⁰ Thus the chain is not *homogenous*. We will see this in a moment. Derrida is *not* arguing for the homogeneity of history. Supplementarity, the diagram, the 'chain', is designed as a principle which renders its 'incarnations' quite singular. It is a matter of thinking the unique *in* the system.⁵¹ The impossibility of conceiving of the origin of history is itself 'historically articulated'. To take into account the history of the text in general is to pay attention to the specific determinations of the system one finds oneself within.

For example, we know that Rousseau's *Essay on the Origin of Languages*, and the second *Discourse* are hypothetical histories of *man*. Heidegger, too, offers a history of 'man'—particularly in the *Letter on Humanism*. The latter text occupies an absolutely pivotal place for Derrida.⁵² In neither case is it an attempt to cover the vast empirical history of all that has happened to 'man', but it is rather the attempt to identify within man that which makes him

⁵⁰ Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 233/163.

⁵¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 164/112.

⁵² Derrida explicitly cites the *letter* as the standard and model for French philosophical anthropology in 'The Ends of Man,' *Margins of Philosophy*, 128. Cf. 'The "Letter on Humanism" created a schism between the first reading of Heidegger in France ... and the second reading ... which was adopted by the younger post-war generation of intellectuals,' Ethan Kleinberg, *Generation Existential*, 184ff.

‘human’. Now, Derrida has described the history of man as but one element in a much larger and ongoing history of *différance*, a history of life, the dynamics of which he tries to capture in the diagram.⁵³ One can consider Rousseau’s texts, as Derrida suggests, as a kind of predecessor or ‘ground’—both chronological *and* logical—for Heidegger’s delimitation of man in *Dasein*. What is useful for Derrida in these authors is that they furnish resources to describe the movement of the larger history that *exceeds* man, and can thus account for the humanity of man.

Now, we can consider this ‘history of man’ as an example of a ‘history of ideas’. But it is not just that this is an example of a ‘history of X’, where X is one or another idea that we perceive as a series of historical incarnations. ‘Man’ is a name which links or separates ‘history’ against ‘nature’, it is itself concatenated with history. The name ‘man’ is also the designation, and distinction of that being who *has* ideas, who develops and records them, and distinguishes himself from other beings in doing so. Further, if history only begins with the becoming of man, then a history that can reach anterior to and describes this becoming is also a radically enlarged history. We have once again entered into the problem of perceiving the whole from the perspective of the part. The history of man is one articulation within the general history of the text, the ‘chain’, a determined system.

Within this general history, there are relatively determined systems—each an episode that goes to contribute, but not exhaust the larger history. Each determined system has its different relationships, presentations and modes of ‘writing’, as it were. So, the *philosophical* text has its own specificity, as does those of literature, anthropology, and of history. Derrida is by no means making out that everything is really just the same ‘stuff’ in the end, ‘presence’ or something else. Rather, he defends the particularity of each case, and the necessity of obeying its ‘internal’ dynamics, and within these dynamics, the elements that form the largest body, the most durable aspects. He expresses the point quite regularly,

⁵³ Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 125/84.

which I shall now quote from. Derrida here lets us see his methodological principles at work with respect to a philosophical *priority*, which can be summarised as treating the ‘largest chain first’.

It would be more than foolish to erase the differences of these restructurations in order to produce a smooth, homogenous, ahistorical, all-of-a-piece cloth, an ensemble of invariant and allegedly ‘original’ characteristics. And would it be any less foolish, inversely, to overlook, not an origin, but long sequences and powerful systems, or to omit (in order to see them from too close a range, which is also from too far away) the chains of predicates which, even if not permanent, are still quite ample, not easily permitting themselves to be displaced or interrupted by multiple rupturing events, however fascinating and spectacular these events might be for the first unaccommodating glance? For as long as *the great amplitude of this chain* is not displayed, one can neither define rigorously the secondary mutations or order of transformations, nor account for the recourse to the *same word* in order to designate a concept both transformed and extirpated—within certain limits—from previous terrain.⁵⁴

And again:

No petition is being made here to some homogenous continuum ceaselessly relating tradition back to itself, the tradition of metaphysics as the tradition of rhetoric. Nevertheless, if we did not begin by attending to such of *the most durable constraints which have been exercised on the basis of a very long systematic chain*, and if we did not take the trouble to delimit the general functioning and effective limits of this chain, we would run the risk of taking the most derivative effects for the original characteristics of a historical subset, a hastily identified configuration, an imaginary or marginal mutation. By means of an empiricist and impressionistic rush toward alleged differences—in fact toward cross-sections that are in principle linear and chronological—we would go from discovery to discovery. A break beneath every step!⁵⁵

⁵⁴ In ‘The pit and the pyramid,’ *Margins of Philosophy*, 72.

⁵⁵ In ‘White mythology’, in *Ibid.*, 230.

In both descriptions, which refer to the same methodological right and necessity, the figure of the chain is prominent. And it is this chain that is worked out in connection with the ‘general text’. But by means of this chain, it also connects with our ‘diagram’, for this is precisely what the chain is, and what is summed up by Derrida in the term ‘supplementarity’. A similar principle is therefore elaborated in the Rousseau essay:

Rousseau is not alone in being caught in the *graphic of supplementarity*. All meaning and therefore all discourse is caught there ... Consequently, before posing the necessary questions of the historical situation of Rousseau’s text, one must locate the traits of its adherence to the metaphysics of presence, from Plato to Hegel, rhythmized by the articulation of presence on presence to self. The unity of this metaphysical tradition must be respected in its general permanence through all the traits of adherence, genealogical sequences, the more narrow circuits of causality which *chain together* Rousseau’s text. One must recognise, preliminarily and prudently, what this historicity amounts to; otherwise, what one would inscribe in a narrower structure would not be a text and it especially wouldn’t be Rousseau’s text.⁵⁶

I have italicised here once more the reference to a graphic, and to a chain.⁵⁷ What does it mean to be caught in this chain? For all the uniqueness of one’s life, the irreducible impact of a context, and at the limit the *world* in which I move and exist, when I tell myself about this world, when I speak to others, and hear and understand myself speak, I must make use of a determined system which has indeed formed me and my world, my understanding of it.

⁵⁶ *De la Grammatologie*, 349-50/246. ‘Aussi Rousseau n’est-pas le seul à être pris dans *le graphique de la supplémentation*. Tout sens et par suite tout discours y est pris ... Par conséquent, avant de poser les questions nécessaires sur la situation historique du texte de Rousseau, il faut repérer tous les traits de son appartenance à la métaphysique de la présence, de Platon à Hegel, rythmée par l’articulation de la présence en présence à soi. L’unité de cette tradition métaphysique doit être respectée dans sa permanence générale à travers tous les traits d’appartenance, les séquences généalogiques, les circuits plus étroits de causalité qui *enchaînent* le texte de Rousseau. Il faut reconnaître, préalablement et prudemment, ce qui revient à cette historicité ; faute de quoi, ce qu’on inscrirait dans une structure plus étroite ne serait pas un texte et surtout pas le texte de Rousseau.’

⁵⁷ Spivak’s translation offers ‘organize’ for *enchaînement*, thereby missing or obscuring the connection with the image of the chain.

All discourse is caught within this chain which has exhibited priorities throughout its history.⁵⁸

Now, the extreme permanence gives a kind of anonymity to this general text. The relations that are described by this chain are not subject to the intentions of subject. They do not answer to self-presence in consciousness, but in fact produce that self-presence. In its permanence and duration, this aspect of discourse, which is formal but still historical, is not interested in authorship, what Derrida calls the ‘narrower circuits of causality’ of a life in the above quotation. Not that these questions are unimportant, as, Derrida immediately concedes that they are entirely necessary. But Derrida’s first attention is to what enables, makes possible such questions. He is one who wishes to think the unity and the possibility. It is a moment for the grand ‘system’ which would indeed account for systems in general.

If the ‘narrow circuits,’ that is to say, the more or less ‘immediate’ context, are a negative example, such questions help us to show what Derrida is trying to do here. The kind of interconnections that make recognisable any ‘context’ cannot themselves simply *have* a context. Derrida is attempting to describe the limits of what makes possible philosophy and history as disciplines, their forms and their contents—meaning itself—but using only resources that are of course developed from *within* those disciplines, that history. Having denied the possibility of a metaphysical grounding beyond these, how can one describe the outside from the inside, unless, here and there, a trace of the outside is found within them? To put it another way, what makes possible any ‘context’ is a *chronic* openness to connection, an open set which can be indefinitely added to—which is to say, supplemented.

⁵⁸ Interestingly, given the context of intellectual history, David Hollinger observes that there is *no* reason why intellectual history need limit itself to communities of intellectuals. Rather, the function of *shared questions* can be tracked anywhere. This claim seems to us consonant with Derrida’s here. Derrida, elsewhere, defines philosophy as a ‘community of the question.’ See David Hollinger, ‘Historians and the discourse of intellectuals,’ in Higham and Conkin (eds.) *New Directions in American Intellectual History*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 54-55.

Derrida's history of the text is impersonal, and we can see why, in the section titled the 'Introduction to the "Age of Rousseau"', he declares that the proper names of Rousseau etc. are only 'indices'.⁵⁹ In the 1968 'The ends of man', where it is a question of giving a kind of historical report on philosophy in France, Derrida again points up the 'anonymity' with respect to the issues he wishes to highlight. The general text, and what he calls in 'The ends of man' a 'subterranean necessity', does not finally answer to any individual author. (This also leads him to later consider the concept of signature.)⁶⁰ But the caution with respect to names is not limited to authors, where it might also be diplomatic, for it also applies to period names ('Classical', 'Age of Rousseau'), and even to geographical regions ('France'), all of which are treated with quotation marks to indicate that it is one representation among many, an *index* used to group a certain context that remains an open set in which even the *name* of the set is not immune from change.

Because of the formal structure of the general text, its endemic openness, such identities are provisional, nicknamed, or so-called. There are no 'proper' names, we recall. One might think that this leads to a hopelessly abstract account, but the result is in fact the opposite. What could be more Rousseauist, what could more *lovingly* linger with Rousseau's texts than Derrida's several-hundred page essay? Derrida's lodging within Rousseau's discourse is a safeguard or security for its formulation—but also ensures it remains tied to a distinctive history. The 'general text' never attains a *pure* generality, and speaking of it here in such abstract ways fails to do it justice, which is why we preferred to first spend the time on charting the diagram in Rousseau and Derrida. The 'general text' is only ever explored in relatively local situations, contexts—for example, the texts of Rousseau, the institutions of French philosophy, and, here, our own.

⁵⁹ Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 148/99.

⁶⁰ See *Margins of Philosophy*, 119, 231.

The 'history of ideas' in the Rousseau essay

This leads us to then ask a little more closely about the specific appearance of the 'history of ideas' in the Rousseau essay. Derrida puts it very plainly in the section titled 'The inscription of the origin.' Derrida speaks of both the history of man, and the history of ideas. For if supplementarity is what precedes and exceeds man, even if it is also, in Rousseau's descriptions, everything that makes man most what he is, there is also a history of man *calling himself 'man'*. This naming is the drawing the line between himself and another: animals, primitives, children, madness and divinity. 'The history of man calling himself man is the articulation of all these limits among themselves.'⁶¹ Here, then, would be Derrida's program: by tracking supplementarity, which is simultaneously the condition of possibility and impossibility of man, Derrida would effectively track and trouble all of the limits that man has drawn about himself. Are not Derrida's later texts on the animal announced already in the *Grammatology*?⁶²

In the same passage that we have already quoted above, regarding the enchainment of Rousseau's text, Derrida also sets out the scope of a history of ideas. The supplement, Derrida reminds us, is strictly neither word nor thing, but what makes these possible. It is, as we have seen, the nothing of an image, which is somehow at the origin. The uses of 'supplement' in Rousseau's discourse should be understood as a 'contradictory unity', and it appears in places where Rousseau seems to contradict himself.

Il faudrait donc définir un espace dans lequel cette 'contradiction' réglée a été possible et peut être décrite. Ce qu'on appelle 'histoire des idées' devrait commencer par dégager cet espace avant d'articuler son champ sur d'autres champs.

Quelles sont les deux possibilités contradictoires que Rousseau veut sauver simultanément? Et comment s'y prend-il ? Il veut d'une part *affirmer*, lui accordant

⁶¹ *De la Grammatologie*, 347-8/244-5.

⁶² I am thinking of the passages on Ibid., 265/187 and 343-4/241-2.

une valeur positive, tout ce dont l'articulation est le principe ou tout ce avec quoi elle fait système (la passion, la langue, la société, l'homme, etc.). Mais il entend affirmer simultanément tout ce qui est biffé par l'articulation (l'accent, la vie, l'énergie, encore la passion, etc.). Le supplément étant la structure articulée de ces deux possibilités.

One would have to therefore define a space in which this regulated 'contradiction' had been possible and can be described. What one calls 'history of ideas' should commence by clearing this space before articulating its field over against other fields.

What are the two contradictory possibilities that Rousseau wants to save simultaneously? And how does he think it? He wants on the one hand to *affirm*, granting them a positive value, everything of which articulation is the principle or all those things which it makes a system (passion, language, society, man, etc.). But he means to simultaneously affirm everything which is cancelled by articulation (accent, life, energy, passion yet again, etc.). The supplement is the articulated structure of these two possibilities.⁶³

Now, without diving once again back into the system of Rousseau's thought and Derrida's complex interpretation, let us orient ourselves to this mention of 'history of ideas'.

Articulation was a critical element in the determining the concept of nature, and is what gives history and writing a spatial sense (and we have also seen articulation take an indispensable role in Carr's *spatialised* description of the *Gestalt* of time). 'The ground and space of articulation, which seems to introduce difference as an institution, is natural dispersion: that is to say space itself.'⁶⁴ Man is defined by Rousseau as that animal capable of mastering space and time, by virtue of being able to substitute (ie. a 'faculty' of

⁶³ Ibid., 349/245.

⁶⁴ 'L'articulation qui semble introduire la différence comme une institution a pour sol et pour espace la dispersion naturelle: c'est-à-dire l'espace tout court,' Ibid., 331/232. 'Articulation', it should be noted, is the title of section III of chapter 3, and pp.327-344/229-242 are a 'detour' dedicated to capturing it as a concept.

supplementation) one thing for another, should he somewhere be confronted with a lack or deficit. Man can articulate nature and convention in order to accomplish his needs and desires. And Rousseau himself has demonstrated it, articulating incompatible elements together, in the quotation above: ‘the positive (is) the negative, life (is) death, presence (is) absence.’⁶⁵ In ‘articulation’, nature is not left once and for all for convention, but the two are intertwined; no hierarchy exists between voice and eye because man ceaselessly articulates one to the other; and, one might add, this *dispersion* (Heidegger’s *zerstreut*) is not tinged in its description with inauthenticity in the same way as Heidegger’s.⁶⁶ Its significance here, with respect to the ‘history of ideas’ is that in *supplement*, as in some of Derrida’s other terms, one glimpses an anterior system out from which ideas are generated by being stabilised into oppositions.

This field of ‘contradictory unity’, inadmissible under the principle of identity, or the excluded middle, is what Derrida attempts to describe with respect to the supplement.⁶⁷ But this ‘common root’ would not be a consoling or reassuring idea, but, as it is for Rousseau, unsettling.⁶⁸ The concept of ‘root’ emerges noticeably in *Of Grammatology*, especially in an extended description at the opening of the Lévi-Strauss chapter, where it is precisely united with the concept of genealogy:

If a text always gives itself a certain representation of its own [propre] roots, those roots live only by that representation, that is to say, by never touching the soil. Which undoubtedly destroys their *radical essence*, but not the necessity of their *racinating function*.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Ibid., 348/246.

⁶⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 390.

⁶⁷ For the principle of identity, see *De la Grammatologie*, 254/179. I have quoted and translated this passage in chapter 3, above.

⁶⁸ See Marian Hobson, *Jacques Derrida*, 65ff. Hobson is discussing *Dissemination*, not the *Grammatology*, however.

⁶⁹ ‘Et si un texte se donne toujours une certaine représentation de ses propres racines, celles-ci ne vivent que de cette représentation, c’est-à-dire de ne jamais toucher le sol. Ce qui détruit sans doute leur *essence radicale*, mais non la nécessité de leur *fonction enracinante*,’ Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 150/101.

The Rousseau essay itself is an example of following the complex genealogy of Rousseau's text, its structure and genesis.⁷⁰

Derrida concludes by writing that these questions, about a history of ideas in a field of regulated contradiction 'can only be asked'.⁷¹ This impossibility lines up with the 'unsuitable name' of history for that larger ensemble, and the fact that supplementarity never 'takes place', and, indeed, why the 'science' of grammatology cannot ever be founded. It is, he wrote on the last page of *Part I*, the 'incompetence' of philosophy—it is what exceeds the episteme, the closure of history and philosophy, *impossible* diagram.⁷² We have no other language to use that would not already be tributary to presence in science, presence in history.⁷³ But as I have already tried to argue, one needs to read Derrida here in the way one reads a negative of a photograph.⁷⁴ For the insistence is true: we do not simply 'turn the page' on the metaphysics of presence. *And yet*, and yet, by demonstrating how 'presence' itself is constituted, how 'the desire for the origin becomes an indispensable and indestructible *function* situated within a syntax without origin,'⁷⁵ Derrida has shown that presence is a kind of projection, a—necessary—transcendental illusion or lure, produced by supplementarity. The impossible *happens*, and here, a Derridean positive genealogy is described, seeing in determined contradictions the trace of an 'older' thought.⁷⁶

Notwithstanding declarations of impossibility, Derrida's program *does* stake out a 'history' where one tries to proceed upstream to older forms that are prior to fundamental distinctions

⁷⁰ Genealogy here, for Derrida, also resembles Deleuze's description of Nietzschean genealogy in Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983). Indeed, Nietzsche also uses the image of a chain. See, for example, Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, (New York: Vintage, 1989), 77.

⁷¹ Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 349/245.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 142/93.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ I find this is done in an exemplary way by Jean-Luc Nancy. See Jean-Luc Nancy, 'Elliptical sense,' in *Derrida: A critical reader*, ed. David Wood (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992). Cf. 'Blank opening,' in *Reading Derrida's Of Grammatology*, ed. Sean Gaston and Ian Maclachlan (London and New York: Continuum, 2011). This reading, and the analogy, is of course Hegelian.

⁷⁵ Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 243/345.

⁷⁶ This 'thought' would also be the opening to the future. See *Ibid.*, 97/66-7 and 142/93.

of our language and logic. Marian Hobson calls it a ‘history of the development of the idea of rationality’.⁷⁷ But since our language and logic are what has become of these older forms, we are at an impasse, and this project issues in seeming contradictions—which can make Derrida’s texts look like so many word games to the hasty reader. But in fact what is in view is the tracing of relays, circuits, and relations which have been closed off: a genealogy that exceeds ‘logic’ because it gives birth to it.⁷⁸

If there are indeed no positive terms, then the relative stability of concepts and words are institutionalised through a certain set relationships. One could trace carefully and minutely the *decision* or *catastrophe* that divides and institutes certain relations. If reason, logic *are* these relations and hierarchies, then such terms necessarily cannot account for what is ‘older’ than them. Derrida’s wager is that one can find within certain seemingly contradictory units a trace of that older state. A ‘paleontology’ of logic, where in seeming offcasts, figures of transition and infringement, ‘hangovers’ are identified.

History in the idea

Recall our analysis of the *diagram* in *Of Grammatology*. The milieu that is indicated by the contradictory unity of supplementarity referred to the condition of possibility of that diagram. It was itself the stratum that could never in fact be represented, precisely because it was that link between the representation and what it represented. It was an irreducible background to all diagrammatisation. I wish to note here that the diagram, and the image of the *chain* are also the *exact* images that Hegel uses in describing the fully present Idea.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Hobson, *Jacques Derrida*, 64.

⁷⁸ Derrida refers to this genealogy at *De la Grammatologie*, 26/14. ‘For a proper understanding of the gesture that we are sketching here, one must understand the expressions ‘epoch’, ‘closure of an epoch’, ‘historical genealogy’ in a new way; and must remove them from all relativism.’ Compare also 17/7, and in the previous quotation above, ‘genealogical sequences’ at 350/246.

⁷⁹ See *Hegel's Science of Logic*, 842, ‘a circle of circles ... links of this chain are the individual sciences.’

Onion-like, we continue to find more and more layers of reference in Derrida's Rousseau essay. Insofar as supplementarity indicates an 'absolute past' of the diagram, Derrida has introduced an irrecoverable history *into* the idea—such that the circle is never complete, that is, that there is no full presence.

We can indicate these implications here with a kind of formality that, obviously, requires more. We can also note that Derrida frequently invokes the image of incomplete circle in numerous interviews and more casual statements. As such, this remains for me a path for future research to trace out its full unfolding in Derrida's texts, and the precise consequences it has for Hegel's thought. It remains beyond the scope of this essay.

At this point, we exceed the boundaries of the essay on the *Grammatology* that we have set, but a direction for research is outlined: how does Derrida's entire body of work proceed? What is the 'logic' of its system which would unite its key texts—and which texts are they? We are still far from having the measure of his *oeuvre*. But even this would necessarily still only be at the superficial (but *necessary*—I by no means to slight such an exercise, on the contrary, I hope to contribute towards it) level outlined above. One would still need to penetrate to its organising axioms, its tacit and unwritten principles. The task is daunting.

Intellectual history in the United States

We suggested at the outset of the chapter that the American intellectual historian finds their self in a distinctive position: both 'philosopher' for his discipline, as well as specialist historian of ideas in his or her own field. But in putting on the philosopher's hat, the historian's hat is not removed. History returns with a force that produces the attempt to not only philosophically account for their discipline, but the simultaneous urge to also tell the

history of that discipline. Disciplinary commitment returns as the transcendent demand to ‘always historicise!’ This demand is capable of sabotaging in many cases the philosophical attempt.⁸⁰ Good history of ideas—the best historians—are wary of the trap and negotiate it with conceptual clarity and stylistic smoothness.

As we have seen, Derrida discusses both levels, the philosophical, (which is also the transcendental for him) and the historical, both the history of philosophy and the philosophy of history, and is careful to distinguish them. But he is often operating at a level that combines them without conflation. At once both historical, in the sense, for example, of a decision concerning ‘writing’, that is a determining moment in the history of philosophy, *and* ‘logical’, a genetic and structural level, treated formally and systematically, while yet being implied as that determining and historical moment. Indeed, Derrida even gives the impression that *he* is producing, through writing as an ‘originary’ production, those historical moments. That is, by writing about Rousseau’s theory of writing, Derrida ‘produces’ a new history of writing, now firmly tied to a history of metaphysics. In that tie, it tries to indicate what would not be governed by metaphysics. The philosopher is in history in a new way, and this adds a further level, which is indeed not even a ‘level’, so much as it is the movement *among* levels, and which produces the *effect* of levels. This movement is what Derrida has called writing, and it is in its movement strictly neither the historicising nor the transcendental but their tying together, a movement of articulation.⁸¹

In this way, Derrida refuses, negotiating in a rigorous but subtle way, the trade-offs described by Raymond Aron, to choose between necessity and contingency, rational progress and scepticism. So that when Aron, *the* French epistemologist of the human sciences, *and* one of those who introduced Husserl and Heidegger to the French, writes that every

⁸⁰ We should underline that all historicist attempts are not equal. Cf. Ian Hunter, ‘The History of Theory,’ *Critical Inquiry* 33, no. Autumn (2006), and Frederic Jameson’s rather pointed reply, Frederic Jameson, ‘How Not to Historicize Theory,’ *Critical Inquiry* 34, no. Spring (2008).

⁸¹ Cf. Hobson, *Jacques Derrida*, 19, 46.

philosopher *decides* his philosophy and thus gives it cohesion and a history, or else he has no history of philosophy, Derrida rather shows both that philosophy has been already decided for us, *and* that it could have been decided otherwise.⁸² Philosophy thus has a past and a future to be negotiated. Supplement, *différance*, and their multiple companions, which are called, by analogy *undecidable*, have been introduced by Derrida into the past of philosophy. Rather, they have been introduced *and* found therein.

*

We do not have to look far to find an intellectual history that has been influenced by Derrida. However, for all the reasons we have covered; the closeness to philosophy, but also the wish to hold both history and philosophy together, both opens the intellectual historian up to considering deconstruction, but also presents a decision regarding the *how* of consideration. Now, Derrida himself often seems to explicitly invite such histories; histories of concepts, of decisions, of institutions. Thus Ethan Kleinberg writes a history of the French interpretation of Heidegger, a task that is itself suggested by ‘The ends of man’⁸³; Allan Megill writes a history of a certain aesthetics in Nietzsche, Foucault, Heidegger and Derrida⁸⁴; and Edward Baring has recently authored an excellent study of the ‘young’ Derrida himself.⁸⁵ (Indeed, Derrida also wrote an endorsement for the cover of François Cusset’s *French Theory*.)⁸⁶ None do so ignorant of Derrida’s own arguments about history, and they encourage a stance

⁸² See Aron, *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, 122-129. Compare this with, for example, the final page of ‘Cogito and the history of madness,’ *Writing and Difference*, 62.

⁸³ Kleinberg, *Generation Existential*, (2005). See 285-6 concerning Derrida.

⁸⁴ Allan Megill, *Prophets of Extremity: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985). See especially 294-8 concerning our focus on history.

⁸⁵ Baring, *The Young Derrida and French Philosophy, 1945-1968* (2011). See also ‘Liberalism and the Algerian War: The Case of Jacques Derrida,’ *Critical Inquiry* 36, no. 2 (2010).

⁸⁶ François Cusset, *French Theory: How Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze & Co. Transformed the Intellectual Life of the United States*, trans. Jeff Fort (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2008). Derrida’s endorsement, such as it is, runs as follows: ‘In such a difficult genre, full of traps and obstacles, *French Theory* is a success and a remarkable book in every respect: it is fair, balanced, and informed.’

towards history that does not take its concept for granted.⁸⁷ What we are seeking to do here is to de-emphasise the historical story in order to focus upon the philosophical element.

That is, in a consciously Derridean manner, we do not want to decide *for* history *instead of* philosophy. But this does not mean we are trying to imitate Derrida's style. Rather, it is the attempt to approach the 'common root' spoken of before, where differentiated elements have not yet been settled into opposition, but nor are they presented as homogenous plenitude.

The Derridean genealogy we have uncovered above will mean that we are not necessarily being *unhistorical* by pursuing history in this consciously theoretical way. Indeed, Derrida allows us to formulate the possibility that the historian, by choosing history over philosophy and not being philosophical *enough*, can run the risk of being *unhistorical*.⁸⁸

Texts and contexts

Geoffrey Bennington has suggested that 'it is perfectly reasonable to read Derrida's entire output as working between the attachment to and detachment from context or rather ... the economy of forces of detachment and the forces of attachment'.⁸⁹ Furthermore, he has also suggested that this is the point at which there is a risk of the historian misunderstanding Derrida. In the face of the descriptions of the 'long chain' which we have been analysing, the historian may feel the insistence of putting an author—such as Rousseau, or Descartes, in the essay on Foucault—'back' into a context deemed to have a priority.⁹⁰ What Derrida is

⁸⁷ See notably Kleinberg, *Generation Existential: Heidegger's philosophy in France 1927-1961*, 18; 'Haunting History,' esp. 119-121. Baring, *The Young Derrida*, 9-13. Baring has also worked on the relation of history and philosophy in an unpublished essay on Derrida's 1964 seminar on 'Histoire et vérité' which he has allowed me to see, and I acknowledge his generosity here.

⁸⁸ See Derrida's formulation of the choice between a history and a system-oriented thematics in 'Violence and metaphysics,' Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 84. Cf. Jack Reynolds, *Merleau-Ponty and Derrida*, 86ff. 'Successful deconstructive reading is conditional on the suspension of choice.'

⁸⁹ Geoffrey Bennington, *Legislations*, 19.

⁹⁰ Geoffrey Bennington, *Jacques Derrida*, 85. See also Geoffrey Bennington, *Not Half No End*, 109.

attempting to question, however, is, if it may be put this way, the ‘context’ of this move to put into ‘context’.

What this means is that for the historian, the demand to put into context acts as a kind of rule that can be applied to *any* context, and so, the rule does not *itself* have a context, or, perhaps we can say is rather free of these *kinds* of context. That is to say, it is a part of the structure of truth for the historian, part of what goes to define validity and objectivity (defined as being universally accessible, reproducible in footnotes, etc.). Part of what Derrida is attempting to do in the extreme long view genealogy that we have seen is to examine the ‘history’ of the interconnected network of concepts that help define, among other things, how ‘context’ is applied as a rule. That is, the ‘long chain’ is the context *of* context.

What Bennington makes clear is that there is a dominating historicist point of view in the human sciences that falls into a trap if it tries to force Derrida back into a historicist framework. Dominick LaCapra has also recognised this, and tried to develop a related historiography that takes into account the historicity of the historian. He does so by shifting the focus of historical work away from an objective *reconstruction* free of the historian and towards the dynamic process of ‘dialogue’ *between* several contexts, including that of the reading historian. He arrives at this formulation, certainly, influenced by Derrida, but the dominant reference is in the end a psychoanalytic one of transference.

Despite LaCapra undoubtedly pioneering a way of introducing Derrida’s work to the principles of historical study for intellectual history, his approach nonetheless feels quite restricting: a series of episodes for the reader in his study, reflecting on the dynamics and positions at play as he reads. Everything appears to be placed on this same level by this reading.⁹¹ For all of LaCapra’s insistence about the text not being restricted to the book before me, he does not show us otherwise. His manifesto article, ‘Rethinking intellectual

⁹¹ See, for example, LaCapra, *History and its Limits*, 22.

history,' is indeed a substantial interpretation of the method of the *Grammatology*.⁹² But he neither *shows us* the how or the why of it, and Derrida is therefore only presented as an *example* or 'application' of a method of reading, that one may select from a shelf.⁹³

LaCapra's Derrida is a theorist of 'reading' and 'texts' that is only ever understood in the everyday sense of these words, and never reaches the real stakes posed in Derrida's 'concept' of writing.

Bennington and Derrida's answer to the historian appears to be a classical one.⁹⁴ Far from an overcoming of philosophy, it suggests that philosophy and history do not name separate fields which have a corresponding separate discipline. Rather, they are modalities of questions that divide the interior of disciplines. One can strengthen the genealogical aspect of a historical inquiry by strengthening its philosophical discipline. Indeed, are not great historians sustained by a heightened philosophical acuity? We shall see this at work, in the following chapter, in the radical challenge that has been given to historiography by a theory of gender.

But I would like to close this chapter by returning to the particular conundrum of the American intellectual historian which we opened. The intellectual historian takes up the philosopher's baton for his discipline, but often feels the overwhelming weight of his discipline pushing him to historicise the theory, and leave his historicism untheorised. In what follows, we will examine two cases where we can see a kind of genealogical project, with similarities to Derrida's, which we envisage as avenues of possibility for a historical-philosophical 'intellectual history' that does not simply historicise concepts, nor remain ingenuous to their historicity.

⁹² Dominic LaCapra, 'Rethinking intellectual history and reading texts,' *History and Theory* 19, no. 3 (1980).

⁹³ See Ibid., 251 n.5. Dominick LaCapra, *History and Reading: Tocqueville, Foucault, French studies* (Toronto University of Toronto Press, 2000), 29 gives a 'typology' of reading.

⁹⁴ 'We must allow for what in Derrida can sometimes look like a quite classical defence of philosophy against the pretensions of the human sciences,' Bennington and Derrida, *Jacques Derrida*, 61.

The first is the work of Kerwin Klein, whom we have already had occasion to refer to in the course of this thesis. In *Frontiers of Historical Imagination*, Klein presented a project that attempted to track the concept of ‘history’ over approximately a century of American intellectual debate.⁹⁵ The size of the project is staggering, for it attempts to grasp not only the *function* of the concept for those who take on ‘history’ in their professional description, but also in the commerce of the discourses of history with those in other fields—namely anthropology, American literary studies, and philosophy. The guiding thread of *Frontiers* is on the hand the supposed opposition of *narrative* and *knowledge*, which is crossed with the axis of European and Native American. Each of *Frontiers*’ four parts or ‘books’ begin with a kind of genealogical reading launched from the writings of early American historian, Frederick Jackson Turner.⁹⁶

Turner is famous for his proposal of a ‘frontier thesis’ for explaining American development. The existence of a ‘frontier’ of civilisation which was possessed of special circumstances with distinct sociological and economic consequences, it was proposed, created a certain force in American society. Turner analyses census data, which utilised a demographic formula to reach a technical definition of ‘frontier’ as the margin of settlement which has a density of two or more to the square mile. But ‘it is not the European frontier—a fortified boundary running through dense populations. The most significant thing about it is that it lies at the hither edge of free land.’⁹⁷ It is, for Turner, the meeting point of ‘savagery and civilisation.’⁹⁸ But Klein has something altogether more subtle in mind than the depiction of European invasion (although this is certainly implied). He tracks the life of the ‘frontier thesis’, particular as it attaches itself, as a social scientific *thesis*, to debates over the

⁹⁵ Klein, *Frontiers of Historical Imagination: Narrating the European Conquest of Native America, 1890-1990*. (1997). The project continues, with some modification, in *From History to Theory*, (2011).

⁹⁶ ‘*Frontiers* traces a critical genealogy of the narrative traditions through which historians, philosophers, anthropologists, and literary critics have understood the European occupation of Native America, and it explores how those understandings shaped and were shaped by changing conceptions of history,’ *Frontiers of Historical Imagination*, 6.

⁹⁷ Turner, quoted at Ibid., 14.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

scientificity of historiography. The early reliance on census data is pivotal in this regard. It was a beacon for scientific historiography, and it therefore attracted philosophers like Carl Hempel, looking to bolster or test their accounts of the unity of science.⁹⁹

Under the impetus of the proliferating interpretations of the frontier thesis, Klein returns again and again to Turner, which provides a structuring principle of his book. If debates over scientificity led him to Hayden White and narrative (whom we encountered in the previous chapter), Klein then returns these developments back to Turner's work, thus zigzagging his way across history. This time, Turner's thesis, as perhaps could have been anticipated, takes on distinct Hegelian tones, as the dialectic of freedom and human development.¹⁰⁰

Throughout all the developments that are followed in massively annotated detail, traditional oppositions of masculine and feminine, hard and soft, native and white-person, narrative and science, tragic and comedic plots, mythic and historical, prove extremely hard to completely dislodge. No sooner does one attempt try to free a history from some of these oppositions than other unhappy traditions slip in unnoticed for Klein. Although we should be careful to note many differences between Klein and Derrida, the resistance of language to being overhauled in a stroke, and the persistence of the 'encoding' of history that 'reaches back to Plato', suggest that this is no simple historicism.

In one of the few places where one can see Klein's own point of view emerging, he writes that 'history does not stand on one side of a sundered humanity but rather shapes darkly the spaces that join and divide worlds.'

History *is* the difference, the frontier, the event, the dialogue from which we abstract ourselves and our stories, and the deep silence of its opposed figure, the other side of

⁹⁹ See Ibid., 30. Hempel's essay discussing the frontier thesis is available in William H. Dray, *Philosophical analysis and history*, Sources in contemporary philosophy (New York,: Harper & Row, 1966), 95-126.

¹⁰⁰ Klein, *Frontiers of Historical Imagination: Narrating the European Conquest of Native America, 1890-1990*, 64-5.

language and time, marks the very limit of imagination and the ragged edge of what can be thought, told, and live ... dialogue between different histories is what we should seek. Without history, however contested or contingent, we have no meaningful engagement, only so many incommensurable cultures speaking past one another in the arithmetic chaos of uncritical pluralism.¹⁰¹

Like Derrida, history only appears in difference, and to give up on a medium in which that difference can appear (frontiers, events, dialogues) is also to give up not only a true level of historical constitution but also, it seems, the chance of an ethical level to other stories. And this dialogue is no reader in his study, but real world communities and the politics of their narration. But if we can note some similarities with Derrida easily enough, Klein is cagey about any straight-forward discussion of his philosophical commitments. In *From History to Theory*, we see perhaps a different Klein, or a modified project of what was presented in *Frontiers*. Gone are the ontological resonances that gave a profound level to *Frontiers*. The caustic criticism of professionalised history is still present,¹⁰² and, certainly, an intriguing history of analytic philosophy from the point of view of history, but it often seems that Klein has been forced into a corner, providing a stream of titles and dates, a list of significant publications taken to indicate a broad ‘usage’ rather than the earnest, profound, genealogy of the earlier book.

The second ‘intellectual history’ is in fact something of an anachrony. I want to briefly discuss A.O. Lovejoy’s history of ideas.¹⁰³ Although in its very title it is seemingly passé, there are some surprises hidden amongst Lovejoy’s almost 80 year-old work.¹⁰⁴ For, strange as it may seem, the history of the philosophy that the American professor of philosophy at Johns Hopkins, sometimes seems to pose a history of metaphysics that can sound similar to

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 294-5.

¹⁰² See, for instance, *From History to Theory*, 31ff.

¹⁰³ See two principle works: Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being; A study of the history of an idea* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936), and *Essays in the History of Ideas* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1948).

¹⁰⁴ I do know of a recent defence of Lovejoy’s work as a form of cultural history: Daniel Wickberg, ‘Back to the Future: The History of Ideas after the Linguistic and Cultural Turns,’ Conference presentation, at the US Intellectual Historians conference, Nov. 13, 2009.

what Heidegger speaks about, and begins to take on aspects of the genealogy that we have discussed above.

The gesture for which Lovejoy is famous is his conception of ‘unit-ideas’. It develops more sharply the conception of a general history of philosophy by ‘cut[ting] into the hard-and-fast individual systems and, for its own purposes, breaks them up into their component elements, into what may be called their unit-ideas.’¹⁰⁵ He gives an example to clarify what he has in mind: ‘the idea of God is not a unit-idea,’ he writes. Aristotle’s God is not the God in the Sermon on the Mount. What Aristotle had in mind rather, ‘was merely one consequence of a certain more general way of thinking, a species of dialectic ... not particular to him but highly characteristic of the Greek and almost wholly foreign to the ancient Jewish mind.’¹⁰⁶ Lovejoy is interested, rather, in the conceptual features of Aristotle’s ‘God.’ He is, of course, sensitive to the ironies of history that bring the Aristotelian and Judeo-Christian God together. But Lovejoy is more interested in the *prior* idea, ‘more fundamental and variously operative ... the persistent dynamic factors’ that exercise a determining influence in the history of thought.¹⁰⁷ This level is very abstracted, and runs beneath that of the consciously held doctrines or positions that the history of philosophy usually recognises. He conceives of philosophical positions as differential relations; what matters is their combination, and instability can often *produce* something quite original. Lovejoy compares them to chemical compounds, which, in their various combinations and transformations would then produce the distinctive positions of philosophers. Thus:

In the whole series of creeds and movement going under the one name, and in each of them separately, it is needful to go behind the superficial appearance of singleness and identity, to crack the shell which holds the mass together, if we are to see the real units, the effective working ideas, which in any given case, are present.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being*, 3.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

Now, in practice, and beginning with the unity of the Platonic corpus (concerning which, interestingly, Lovejoy is indifferent as to the actual historical identity of Plato; what matter is that it was taken to be ‘Plato.’),¹⁰⁹ he discerns at its centre what he calls a ‘principle of plenitude’.¹¹⁰ This principle is what institutes what in the 17th Century was called ‘the Great Chain of Being’. It is not that Lovejoy is arguing *for* this ‘chain’, but rather that he is attempting to demonstrate that certain platonic distinctions and decisions have irremediably shaped the history of western thought.

What is the principle of plenitude? Tracing the Platonic Idea of the Good, Lovejoy parses it as being comprised of fullness, self-sufficiency, lacking in nothing.¹¹¹ The principle feature is negation and otherworldliness, which Lovejoy easily finds examples of in the history of theology. But what is important for him is that Plato doesn’t stop there.¹¹² For the existence of the mundane world must also be explained, and this is done so, too, by the Idea of the Good. This pregnant fullness, as Lovejoy calls it, contains implicit consequences which mark the subsequent history in Neo-Platonism and scholastic theology: the ranging out into a great chain of being in the filling of the world with every possible kind. Now, my intention is not to dive into interpreting Plato, or tracking Lovejoy’s historical adventures of the chain of Being (which, for the record, Lovejoy thinks is a failure).¹¹³ Rather, it seems to me that Lovejoy is proposing something *like* a version of the ontotheology that Heidegger proposes, which is the conflation of a question of ‘*what* it is...’ and ‘*that* it is...’ into a single principle.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁹ See Ibid., 35.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 52. Note here an interesting use of the word ‘supplement’: ‘a God unsupplemented by nature in all its diversity would not be “good”.’

¹¹¹ Ibid., 43.

¹¹² Ibid., 45.

¹¹³ Interestingly for current trends in philosophy, it is precisely the *temporalisation* of being that spells the end of the chain of Being for Lovejoy. See Ibid., 244, 329.

¹¹⁴ See Iain Thomson’s lucid exposition, ‘Ontotheology? Understanding Heidegger’s Destruction of Metaphysics,’ *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 8, no. 3 (2001).

We are not here suggesting that such an identification is perfect, nor that Lovejoy's interpretations will be wholly suitable to our own era. Rather, what is interesting is the way in which an extreme long term view begins to note repetitions. If Klein can, over the course of but a century, note the repetitions of old 'metaphysical' oppositions, how would this play out on the scale that Lovejoy describes? Would it not look something like the genealogies that Derrida produces? All three of these scholars, Klein, Lovejoy, and Derrida, resist the pigeonholing of modern academia, and range with astonishing erudition across multiple areas. They approach those 'cosmopolitans' that were mentioned at the start, those supra-disciplinarians, who, in confronting their thought with the findings of incredibly diverse specialisations, are forced to refine and nuance, but also, in the process produce new possibilities. In a recently published commentary on the *Grammatology*, the enormous diversity of the sources which are there assembled is brought home by the number and diversity of scholars that it takes to provide commentary on it—and even then there are substantial gaps in the text remaining undiscussed.¹¹⁵ Perhaps what is indicated in all three instances is that each of these authors begins with a meta-philosophical dialogue, transcending boundaries in an effort to critique the state of knowledge which they find. Derrida's distinctive genealogy being a particularly vivid example, taking up the principle which seemed to him 'in the air', writing, and seeing in it a principle of the greatest possible 'totality'. But yesterday's dialogue becomes inevitably tomorrow's tradition, and the need for new dialogues is insatiable. One must balance the 'forces of attachment' as Bennington says, and those of detachment, and this not only should happen within philosophy or history and their different traditions, but also across philosophy *and* history, as these examples seek to demonstrate.

¹¹⁵ I am referring to Sean Gaston and Ian Maclachlan, *Reading Derrida's Of Grammatology* (London and New York: Continuum, 2011).

6. 'In the shadow of shadows': gender

If the intellectual historian *assumes* the mantle of philosophising on behalf of his discipline quite easily, it is, on the other hand, the feminist historian who naturally, as it were, takes up a theoretical approach. The struggle to even find the space to begin to justify something like women's history necessarily leads that historian to theorise that task. The feminist historian allies herself with the apparent subversiveness of theory for history; she is already in the position that calls for subversion. Deconstruction, fulfilling the criteria of theoretical subversion thus appeals strongly to a feminist historiography, and we can readily locate 'examples' of deconstruction in this area of historical writing. Indeed, we will see that 'gender' calls forth something analogous to *différance* or something posed at a similar depth. Closer examination, however, will lead us to carefully distinguish between deconstruction and a history-writing that is *consonant with it*. This is, in fact, a good thing, and is liberating for historiography. In turn, this leads us to formulate a new way of understanding the distinction between disciplines, especially history and philosophy.

Introduction: feminist history, theory, and deconstruction

So far, we have been looking at groups of problems in recent philosophical or theoretical discussions on history. We have then compared them with what we have read in the *Grammatology*. We go back and forth, noting similarities, confusions, possible openings. We make discoveries and connections; Derrida is closer than many realise to these problems. From our study of *De la Grammatologie*, we are convinced 'history', in a range of meanings

and contexts, is of critical importance to Derrida, and we have sought to flesh out his formulations by trying them out on some discussions of history. The distinction between different levels of analysis has been crucial. But so far, we have presented comparatively little ‘real’ history, actual attempts at history *writing*. To be sure, we have looked at some, particularly in intellectual history, and worked implicitly with some sense of what they might be. But were we to leave things as they are, historians would happily confine Derrida to intellectual history. Indeed, some already have. To paraphrase Derrida, intellectual history has become an intra-historiographical leper colony. So now let us change tack slightly and try to encounter attempts (outside of intellectual history) to write history *with Derrida in mind*. Instead of following more or less theoretical discussions, let’s examine some histories manifestly influenced by Derrida. This is the strategy I propose for considering the relations between feminist history and deconstruction. I want to examine some feminist historiography here because, in a manner different to intellectual history, feminist historians are more open to theoretical discussion. This is unusual for historians, but it is not a quirk associated with the idiosyncrasies of personality. It is a tension produced in the crucible of wedding feminism and history writing.

Through the attention paid to the construction of sexual identity, often strengthened with psychoanalytic theories, feminist critique could appear similar to Derrida’s work. In a vague sense it was claimed that deconstruction was what ‘feminists have been doing for years’, *avant la lettre*.¹ Feminist scholars are prominent in the reception and translation of Derrida’s texts: Gayatri Spivak, Barbara Johnson, Peggy Kamuf, to name a few. There is a community of feminist academics, including historians, with a great interest in Derrida’s works, and reaching across disciplinary boundaries. It provides a unique forum for their disciplinary reflections. Thus, in a manner that could be compared to some intellectual historians (of course, one could find oneself as both a feminist and intellectual historian), the feminist

¹ Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the politics of history*, Rev. ed., (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 41.

historian can be one of those figures who, according to Peter Novick's metaphor, lives on the border lands, are conversant in multiple disciplinary languages, and who have divided allegiances.² This metaphor recalls one of the ways Derrida described deconstruction: more than one language.³

The theoretical reflections of feminist historians brought a new tone to historiography. We must distinguish between types of reflection here, for historians, of course, cannot be accused of being unreflexive before deconstruction. The traditions in intellectual history demonstrate this as well as many great historians. But the reflexive attention that feminist historians have brought to history has a specific quality. The intellectual historian seeks out theory in order to shore up their place *within the unity* of the discipline of history taken for granted. It is a *response* to feeling the historical traction of his subject matter start to slip on account of a proximity to philosophy. It has the place of a secondary reflection. In contrast, the feminist historian *begins by responding* to being excluded by that same unity. In order to even broach the subject of a women's history historiography itself must be breached. Thus the subversive character of theory for historians, and especially the kind of movement testified to by deconstruction, 'naturally' appeals to this predicament. Feminists have brought (and still bring) a new kind of reflection to historiography, one that problematizes the unity of the discipline. For some, this is learned in large part from deconstruction, for others Lacan or Foucault, and more besides.⁴ In any case, we can suggest that more than any other subset within the historical disciplines it is feminist historians who are most comfortable with theorising their task, notwithstanding our claim in the last chapter that it is the intellectual historian who acts as philosopher *for* the discipline.⁵

² See our discussion in ch.5 and, for Novick's account of the rise of women's history, *That Noble Dream*, 491-510.

³ See Jacques Derrida, *Mémoires: for Paul de Man*, trans. Cecile Lindsay, Jonathan Culler, Eduardo Cadava, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 15.

⁴ See Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989), 1-38.

⁵ Postcolonial history is a possible exception. Arguably, however, postcolonial history often does not find itself within history departments, but in separate centres, and departments of literature.

The intellectual historian self-consciously adopts a philosophical tone borrowed from his subject matter. The feminist historian, more often, is driven to theorise in the midst of grappling with problems thrown up by the difficulty of even *beginning to write* a women's history.⁶ Women's history can be conceived in a number of senses. In clarifying the object, purpose, and in confronting the preceding apparent absence of women in the field of the past, one is driven to speculate on the reasons for the existence of such a situation. Like Rousseau, when questioning the origins of inequality, one must hypothesise at a level that *precedes* and *precludes* factuality. It is the very presence of the facts, and what counts as a fact, and what makes a fact that is being placed under a question. Once sexual difference is admitted into *history*, as nature withdraws and masculinity and femininity are no longer conceived as its simple expression, there is a simultaneous advance *beyond* empirical fact. The facts can *support* a hypothesis, but cannot help explain themselves, for masculinity and femininity, and all of the concepts that they help to shore up have become a part of the historical milieu and differentiation that *produces* facts as such. Feminist history, for the historian and reader alike, dramatises the theoretical stakes of writing *all* history by dramatising its archaeological support, that is, the 'archive' (Foucault was a critical influence in this regard).⁷ The oppression of the history of gender has already taken place before any recording, any factuality. Or better, it is its inscription. Feminist history does not, therefore, merely *add* a new topic to historiography, it indicts *all historiography*. In which case we have to wonder about its relation to the figure 'woman', and the unity of its name as *feminist*. The determined figure of woman extends itself to cover and recover a new dimension of historicity. We will see that it corresponds to the law of the supplement. Always conceived of as mere addition or lack, the supplement is at the origin: in the beginning was the feminist critique.

Obviously, my proposition here concerns 'contemporary' disciplinary arrangements. It can, and probably already has, changed.

⁶ 'A search for *terms of criticism, conceptual reorientations, and theory* that are the *preconditions* for feminist rewritings of history,' Scott, *Gender and the politics of history*, 18. My emphasis.

⁷ See Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of knowledge*, (New York: Routledge, 2002), 145-8.

Women's history thus demands a theoretical articulation. Against a massive silence concerning women *in* history *and* undertaking historical writing, feminist historians worked hard to justify not only the simple presence in the historical field, but also the necessity that *all* historical writing thus required revision. The indictment, and the determination to overturn an unequal hierarchy found some obvious parallels in Derrida's work. Many feminists balk, however, at turning to Derrida's work, believing it to freeze political possibilities. But this would rest on misunderstanding. Derrida is certainly concerned with politics from the beginning, as Elizabeth Grosz notes.⁸ We have already seen the interest in sexual difference in the Rousseau essay (for example, in the prohibition of incest, or the history of love). Later texts on sexual difference, family, the feminine, woman etc., are well known. We do not go into these here, nor do we seek to respond to the very large body of work that already exists on feminism and deconstruction.⁹ What concerns us here, rather, is a frame provided by feminist historiography for the appropriation of Derrida specifically in writing history. We will focus on two works that have been considered exemplary in one fashion or another. Once again, the selection of these two rests upon our study of *History and Theory*, and related disciplinary discussions.

⁸ See Elizabeth Grosz *Time Travels: Feminism, nature, power*, (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2005), 57. With respect to our focus on *Of Grammatology*, see pp.58-62.

⁹ For sexual difference in the Rousseau essay, see Jacques Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 248-53, 373-8/174-9, 263-8. For a collection of feminist discussion of Derrida, see Nancy J. Holland, *Feminist Interpretations of Jacques Derrida* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997); Grosz, *Sexual Subversions*, 26-38, argues that Derrida is a pedagogical necessity for teaching feminist theory. See also Judith Butler and Joan Wallach Scott, *Feminists theorize the political* (New York: Routledge, 1992), and Diane Elam, *Feminism and Deconstruction*, (New York: Routledge, 1994).

Gender, a useful category in historical analysis?¹⁰

Marian Hobson writes that to write history is to be driven along by the way we grasp history.¹¹ Feminist historians needed to focus on that grasp, because something important was *not* grasped. Its symptom was the absence of women in history. The historiography *du jour* maintained that this situation was normal.¹² The problem was not therefore exclusively a matter of the failings of records, archives, or indeed the present-day practices of historians, but the *unity* of these things together, each implicating and reinforcing the other. This required an approach, therefore, that could not be deflected by the division between the investigating subject and their objects of inquiry. For example, one could maintain one's sources did not speak on the subject of women, or alternatively, the charge of avoiding women in the sources could be limited to the work of the individual historian. If subjective, the problem was individual, not professional; if objective, the problem was beyond one's control.

This situation means that it is very difficult for women's history to even begin. On the one hand, writing histories that showed that women did in fact appear in historical records, were historical agents, and formed significant parts of important events, did little to renovate the discipline as a whole. Another topic, another object, was *added*, another office at the end of the corridor, leaving its overall arrangement much the same.¹³ On the other hand, where social history in particular benefited from a focus on women's experience, it was nonetheless just another link in the chain that proved that the fundamental object was class or economic

¹⁰ A recent book devoted to Scott's work underlines that the famous title 'Gender: a useful category of historical analysis,' was first intended as a *question* rather than a statement. Judith Butler and Elizabeth Weed, *The Question of Gender: Joan W. Scott's critical feminism*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), see n.16 below and Joan W. Scott, 'AHR Forum: Unanswered Questions,' *The American Historical Review* 113, no. 5 (2008): 1422-30.

¹¹ Marian Hobson, *Jacques Derrida*, 63.

¹² Historiography would be 'a participant in the production of knowledge that legitimised the exclusion or subordination of women.' Scott, *Gender and the politics of history*, 26.

¹³ See *Ibid.*, 22, 29, and especially 33. Compare Kerwin Lee Klein, *Frontiers of Historical Imagination*, 211, 292. The metaphor of the additional room is a common one in historiography, and seems to come from Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*.

necessity. Either way, the central categories that determined the objects and practice of history were left largely untouched.¹⁴ A solution to this difficulty is found in a new articulation of the role of gender in historical analysis.

Joan Scott describes the acuteness of the feminist dilemma in *Gender and the Politics of History*. The book demonstrates an affirmative and productive feminist historical work that is able to negotiate the difficulties posed by setting forth a new articulation of gender that modifies both the practice of historians and the objects they seek to describe. Scott works with gender in a way that is informed by structures and arguments that she finds in Derrida. Her book was, and is, overwhelmingly identified as an example of 'deconstructive' history, and is a landmark for feminist scholarship, beyond the confines of history departments.¹⁵ But the identification is a strange one for the book is often labelled 'deconstructive' because Scott criticises other historical *writings*, and when she comes to writing history, engages in the perfectly normal discipline of source criticism. What Sewell and others see as (vaguely) *deconstructish* is the *attention to texts*. This could be construed as a moment of bad faith on Sewell's part, for he must define Scott as doing something that most historians do not do, to wit: reading texts. Except, well... they do! Sewell tries to distinguish the different *ways* that they read, but he obviously struggles to do so.

¹⁴ The inability to reach the deep structure of the discipline was true not only in the abstract. Among journals that aimed to pursue theory in historical disciplines, *History and Theory* and *CLIO* for example, editors struggled to obtain feminist contributions and feminist scholars on their boards. Meanwhile feminist debate flourished in journals that were internal to the feminist community. See *CLIO* editor Lynette Felber's plea for women contributors who still make up but 'a small percentage of our contributors', *CLIO* 'A Note From the Editor', Vol.25 no.1 (Fall 1994), 1-2. The lack of women contributors is a problem felt by the editorial board of *History and Theory* throughout the 1980's. Ann-Louise Shapiro is appointed an editor in 1991 as part of strategy to overcome this. Joan Scott joined the editorial board at about the same time.

¹⁵ See especially William H. Sewell, Jr., 'Review Essays,' review of *Gender and the Politics of History*, *History and Theory* 29, no. 1 (1990). Sewell's review was highlighted by *History & Theory*'s editorial board in its annual reviews as of particular achievement. See *HT*: Annual reports, June 1991. See also Mary Spongberg, *Writing women's history since the Renaissance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 4. Anna Green and Kathleen Troup, *The Houses of History: A critical reader in twentieth-century history and theory* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 257. Cf. Laura F. Frader, 'Dissent over discourse: Labor history, gender, and the linguistic turn,' *History and Theory* 34, no. 3 (1995).

Scott *does* indeed work with strategies she has learned from Derrida. The level, however, at which Derrida's work is operative in *Gender and the Politics of History* is in its background, its 'grammar', so to speak: its strategy and careful delineation of levels, concepts, categories. In execution, rather than in claims. Perhaps Sewell and others sensed this, and in trying to express it, pointed elsewhere. This doesn't concern us here. What does matter for us here is that the way in which we could *recognise* a 'deconstructive' history. As we shall see, it becomes important to distinguish between the demonstration of deconstruction, and disciplines that are capable of being consonant *with* that demonstration.

What is gender?

Gender, in Scott's definition, is not an object. She famously introduces it as a *category of historical analysis*.¹⁶ The confusing array of usages for 'gender', and an equal lack of clarity regarding its relation to other more established categories (such as class and race), mean that some work is required to establish it.¹⁷ If women's history was to not only *add* new positive content to the researches of historians, but itself to also *redefine and enlarge the premises* of existing historical work, 'the way in which this new history would both include and account for women's experience rested on the extent to which gender could be developed as a category of analysis.'¹⁸ It indicates work on two separate, but related levels. The role for gender is a dual one: both to include within its parameter's the experience called 'women's' (but also that named 'men's'), and also to provide a theoretical accounting of the range of such experience. Gender is not a polite or scholarly euphemism for women or feminism. The

¹⁶ The paper that has 'Gender: a useful category of historical analysis' as its title was first presented in December 1985, at the annual *American Historical Association* meeting. It subsequently appeared in the *American Historical Review* (Vol. 91, no. 5 Dec 1986), and then in Scott's 1988 book. The versions in the *AHR* and in *Gender and Politics* are the same, and my references will be to the revised (1999) edition of the book.

¹⁷ And even this is uncertain, as Scott's 1999 closing chapter to the revised edition of the book indicates.

¹⁸ Scott, *Gender and the politics of history*, 29. My emphasis.

frequent gloss of gender that Scott gives is that it is an *organisation* of social relationships, or sometimes, the knowledge of such organisations.¹⁹ Thus gender is a kind of *background dynamics* to any and every social relationship. It cannot be identified with any one instance, but neither is it abstract.²⁰ This description seems to us to exceed and resist much of the subsequent debates over sex, gender and sexual difference that have occupied feminist and queer theory.

The explicit definition Scott gives for gender runs as follows: 'Gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power.'²¹ The definition falls into two parts. Concerning the first section and according to the sex/gender opposition often used (that is, where sex is on the side of nature, and gender on that of culture), the phrase 'based on perceived differences...' apparently establishes a causal derivation from a natural category. A statement a little further on helps us to correct such a misreading, by showing the level at which gender is working: 'established as an objective set of references, concepts of gender *structure perception and the concrete and symbolic organisation* of all social life'.²² Although perception (of sexual identity) *seems* to precede gender, and so gender could be thought to be established upon that perception, gender is in fact within the very process of perception itself as a structural dynamic.

Thus we see that the 'based on' mentioned in the definition is actually deceptive. But this is not a fault of argument, for it is *the deception perpetrated by gender itself!* In perceiving sexual difference, gender *gives itself out as* those 'established' differences, *as* 'an objective set of references'. This is its 'constitutive' role, helping distribute the values which just are our understanding of ourselves, others, and almost anything else either in an explicit or tacit

¹⁹ These are not the same thing. It seems to me that descriptions of gender as 'an epistemological object' introduce a different (and Foucauldian), level.

²⁰ See Butler and Weed, *Question of Gender*, 2.

²¹ Scott, *Gender and the politics of history*, 42.

²² *Ibid.*, 45.

sexual light. It is not surprising, given this treacherous giving of itself, that 'gender' has been such a notoriously murky element in theoretical discussion. 'Gender' for us, therefore, refers to an *unpresentable* differentiation that only makes itself known in the marking of sexual difference. When rendered into distinct concepts by the language that precedes us and that we receive and grow up into, gender is that by which we just *see* women, men, family, and so on as *natural* and *objective* references. The *disorder* inherent in trying to conceptualise gender is demonstrated by the fact that 'natural' and 'objective' are not without tacit implication in this process. Scott seems to here escape some of the difficulties posed by the usual sex/gender distinction, which has so plagued our sexual politics and the academic fields, because she provides a definition that goes a long way to explaining those politics and confusions..

There is something analogous to the ontological difference occurring here. Gender is only visible in any one of its instantiations, but it must be distinguished from any and every instance of it. We can see this through examining a subset of the definition. This subset expands on the processes by which gender plays a constitutive role:

- a) The prevalent symbols of a cultural tradition are metaphors that evoke varying kinds of gendered representations. They often can contain contradictory possibilities, depending on context and use. For example: Eve and Mary in the Christian tradition, but also more subtle symbols such as light, dark, purity, innocence, childhood;
- b) Normative concepts already interpret the forgoing symbols, establishing thereby the limits of their *correct* use. For example, doctrines or orthodoxy in scientific, legal, religious, educational, institutions, typically taking the form of a fixed binary opposition asserting the meaning of male and female, masculine and feminine. Written history often presents such normative positions as the result of consensus rather than conflict;
- c) The normative concepts imply a political or organisational level to representations of gender well beyond the kinship level. For example, labour markets, education and the polity; and finally,

d) The substantive construction of the gendered subject. Here Scott urges both the helpfulness of Lacanian psychoanalysis, but also urges historians to be critical over Lacan's universal claims.²³

Through this elaboration of the mechanisms and institutions that are implicated in the workings of gender, Scott enumerates many possibilities for positive historical research. 'The point of new historical investigation is to disrupt the notion of fixity.'²⁴ Scott is able to immediately produce a large range of questions available for such research. The point of interest for us here is not to evaluate this potential rather than to identify its proper level and function, and what this implies for historical work.

As I have sought to show, 'gender' is not so much an object, but rather a part of the framework through which we perceive objects. This framework would itself possess a gendered positivity, but not coalesced into either a masculine or feminine *identity*. Concerning the sexual 'neutrality' of Dasein, Heidegger writes, 'sexlessness is not the *indifference* of an empty void, the weak negativity of an indifferent ontic nothing.' Rather, Dasein is 'the *primordial positivity and potency of essence*.'²⁵ Thus we say that gender operates at a pre-reflective level, participating in the structuring of perception.²⁶ This should inspire in us a caution as to locating it in this or that phenomenon. Would gender be limited to an anthropological subject or object? Whatever the case, we can see that for Scott, the purpose is to gain entry for gender into the framework *used by historians* to arrange and assess historical materials. This 'category' includes a series of terms that *orients* historical inquiry (for example, race, class, labour, geographical area, periodisation). The historical question is to be, henceforth, *a gendered question*. If the mode of the question in inquiry

²³ Ibid., 43-4.

²⁴ Ibid., 43.

²⁵ Martin Heidegger, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, Transl. Michael Heim, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 136-7. My emphasis.

²⁶ See, too, Derrida's reading of Heidegger's course just quoted. 'What if "sexuality" already marked the most originary *Selbstheit*? If it were an ontological structure of ipseity? If the *Da* of *Dasein* were already "sexual"?' Jacques Derrida, 'Geschlecht: sexual difference, ontological difference,' *Research in Phenomenology* 13(1983): 74. See also Elizabeth Grosz' comments on this debate, in 'Ontology and Equivocation,' in Holland, *Feminist Interpretations*, 85-95, especially p.94.

foregrounds the possible answers to it, and in feminist history, and especially here in Scott's book, *the historical question* is substantially revised, then Scott's achievement here is nothing short of an ontological revision of historiography.²⁷ It therefore corresponds quite precisely to what Derrida himself achieved with *Of Grammatology*.

This modification of the historical question is to be productive in two distinct ways. The first is to demonstrate that this new category would have positive results in the production of research, that is, an *addition*. The second is to have a corollary effect on the *present organisation* of the discipline, that is, it addresses something which is *lacking*. The analysis and organisation of historical content thus has a direct correlation with the organisation of the discipline. Gender therefore not only designates a distributive force in the past, but also has an implicit connection to the same (but not identical) distributive force at work in the 'politics' of the present day university and disciplinary system. These aims represent the arrangement and argument of *Gender and the Politics of History*. The title of the book, and the concept of gender it deploys, deliberately condenses an articulation of past and present and provides that access that was wanting, as? identified above: Access to the distribution of subject and object within the historical question. Neither the subject or any object is left unaffected by it.²⁸

²⁷ 'The real movement of the sciences takes place when their basic concepts undergo a more or less radical revision which is transparent to itself. The level which a science has reached is determined by how far it is capable of a crisis in its basic concepts.' Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 9.

²⁸ Once again, it seems to us that the confusion between levels of analysis is a source of both the power and the welter of differing types of analysis on the question of gender and sexual difference. It is, as Gayatri Spivak says, (and we will investigate below), the 'shadow of shadows'. Mostly, it seems to me, the balance is skewed towards positive research, rather than theoretical grounding. See, for example, Myra Marx Ferree, Judith Lorber, and Beth B. Hess, *Revisioning Gender* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1999).

Gender in action

Scott puts her category of gender to work in her own area of specialisation, French labour history. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 of *Gender and the Politics of History* form a partial history of the gendering processes evident in the garment trades of Paris and other French cities in the 1830s, 40s and 50s. Criticism of the book had suggested that Scott's history writing is diverted into 'intellectual history', or that it focuses only on 'texts', not the *experience* of the working poor.²⁹ Reading the history chapters, on working identities, locations of workplaces, relationships between family and work, conditions for working women, and the terms that organised political debate on these concerns, it is hard to understand how this criticism was arrived at. Was not the description of the miserable role of *appièceurs*, working around the clock to churn out enough pieces to generate a decent pay, not 'experience'? Or the description of how the Paris Chamber of Commerce juggled the digits and fudged the categories so as to misrepresent the numbers of working poor and the aggressions of sweatshops not an invocation of the frustration and indignant anger felt by activist workers when the supposed objectivities of moral science were used to stifle them all the more? However, Scott does not leave experience unquestioned; it comes under her gaze already in *Gender and the Politics of History*, and indeed, this is clearly implied in her definition of gender. Gender helps construe *experience* in a certain way. This construal can be brought, through patient analysis, into historical writing. Let us try, then, to see gender at work, in the historian's work. The labour history of 18th and 19th century France and Britain is, of course, overdetermined for social historians, feminists and Marxists, and as a result, much of the historical discipline. Much, therefore, rides on the success of these chapters.

²⁹ Sewell, 'Review Essays,' 79, 80ff. 'Experience' was a regular appeal made by historians keen to resist 'the linguistic turn'. The most prominent example is John Toews, 'Intellectual History after the Linguistic Turn: The Autonomy of Meaning and the Irreducibility of Experience,' *American Historical Review* 92, no. 4 (1987). But see too Scott's response, 'Experience,' in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, ed. J. Butler and J.W. Scott (New York: Routledge, 1992).

The three history chapters outline a history, and are designed to showcase the concrete potential of the framework that has been outlined. They give a thorough picture of the relation of gender and work identity in a small slice of historical space and time. The field of labour history is not necessarily strongly oriented to a narrative, a story with some event in mind, and this suits the gender analysis. Scott's studies are not organised according to a *chronological sequence* which would serve to designate a before and after of an event. If the chronological 'centre' is roughly the February revolution of 1848, this comes in for no direct discussion itself. It functions more as a sign post, a contextual reference, less for Scott than for the historical actors that Scott has in view. The subject matter—the organisation of labour, and in particular the garment trades, the shifting forces of sexual differentiation in a specific historical locale and the gendering of identities there—does not answer to a sequential narration.

The analysis works by establishing a comparison across two different axes. The first is the differentiation in labouring roles, and the second is the difference between men's and women's differentiations. A complex grid emerges. Across a range of sources, political experience, events and debates are situated according to opponents, genealogical sources, political organisation, and 'on the ground' working conditions. The first chapter (that is, chapter 5) establishes the positions of the *ouvriers tailleurs* (tailors) in contrast to the ostensibly less skilled *appièceurs*. These are faced with the threatening challenge of *confectionneurs*, mass-producers of ready-made garments. *Appièceurs* serviced the latter by assembling quantities of pieces that had been cut to a set scale. The reader witnesses the development of casual labour forces, sweatshops and outsourcing. But the categories do not hold very tightly, they are fluid. According to season and demand, an individual tailor can move back and forth across labour designation.³⁰

³⁰ Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, 98-9. Jacques Rancière vividly illustrates that even the hours of days and nights can demonstrate these fluid and sometimes conflicting designations of destiny, in *The Nights of Labor: The Workers' Dream in Nineteenth-Century France*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989).

Enter female workers, so easily designated in French grammar (*ouvrières*). Women also ran the gamut of working positions in the garment industry. Women's positions, however, were distinguished according to different rationales than those of men. Professional position could be complicated once more if, as was common, they were married to someone in the same industry. Whereas the distinction of skill supported the *fraternal* association of craftsmen, the history of *confection* had confounded this possibility among women workers by employing large numbers of women, of varying skill, all working in the same space. Women were more likely to be distinguished by area of speciality, such as *couturières* (dressmakers), and *lingères* (generalists).³¹

The distinctions between skill and gender were directly correlated to the spatial organisation of the industry, as the example of *confection* shows. The independent workshop could foster the skilled master tailor, whereas the sweatshop or large workroom devalued or rendered near invisible the individual's skill. When one considers that homes often abutted workshops, and were a venue for apprenticeship, and large workrooms might be serviced by residences that grouped (unmarried) women together, then we are beginning to get a sense that tracing gender also tracks the very *concrete* carving up of the garment worker's world.

Like the tailors, so too seamstresses had their own political associations. Such associations published their own pamphlets and papers, lobbied for worker's rights and especially for increased rates of pay. When this framework is compared to the terms of radical and utopian theorists with whom both women's and men's associations allied themselves and engaged with, the picture is sharpened again for the reader. Ideals of male and female workers are clothed with the real voices and the real conditions of the industry. In the fluidity of positions available on the grid mapped out, the result could be a surprising one for the feminist historian. Where one might expect quite oppressive and fixed dichotomies, there was rather a broad range of possibilities. 'On issues of skill, character, and emotion, men and women

³¹ *Gender and the Politics of History*, 103.

were thought to be different, but the dichotomy did not neatly or consistently oppose work and family, producer and childbearer, economic and domestic, public and private, husband and wife'.³² A surprisingly versatility is highlighted by the category of gender, resisting the seduction of easy oppositions.

Chapter 6 is a masterful display in source criticism. It carefully enquires into the production of statistical report by the Paris Chamber of Commerce following February 1848, *La Statistique de l'industrie à Paris*. Scott reconstructs the political argument which *was* the *Statistique*, its supposed scientificity claiming the moral weight of scientific objectivity. The chapter *also* constitutes a warning and criticism of *historian's* naïve use of such statistics.³³ The examination of the *Statistique* builds on the previous chapter because the Chamber's report is an attempt to *fix* categories that Scott has demonstrated to be in relatively constant flux. The *Statistique* both observes contradictions and smooths them over.³⁴ It presents a picture of Parisian industrial life that would sooth investors ruffled by the political climate. It simultaneously sought to refute the political claims of the revolution and throwing cause for the February disturbance back at the feet of the workers. Workers were implied to be of dubious morality, rather than victims of an unjust economic system. It is intended as a scientific argument against socialism.³⁵ Because of the intimate involvement of the home in the distribution of labour, family roles feature explicitly in the terms of the *Statistique*. The report's vision of family, with distinct roles for women and men, puts sexual difference at the heart of its political argument.

Once again, gendered distinctions are highlighted as they work over the world of work. In the *Statistique*, for instance, there is confirmed a supposed 'law' of female labour: Men's wages are fixed at rates which 'include' the costs of the reproduction of the labour force, that

³² Ibid., 111-2.

³³ Joan Scott first and foremost points the finger at herself for the irresponsible 'harvesting of facts', Ibid., 242, fn. 6.

³⁴ See especially Ibid., 127.

³⁵ Ibid., 126, 133.

is, of maintaining a family. Women's wages, on the other hand, are fixed at rates deemed as only ever supplementing a family's income. Wage earning itself did not contradict the women's status, but its terms were constricted according to other gendered aspects. Work outside of a family-like situation was labelled dangerous, carrying the hint of prostitution, irregular and immoderate desires and ambitions.³⁶

This final figure of the independent woman, *la femme isolée*, neither wife nor mother, is expanded upon in the following chapter (chapter 7). Here, the discourse of political economy is displayed in its compulsive representation of the *femmes isolées* as a privileged example of poverty and immorality. The dilemma of the *ouvrières*, in whom could be discerned the 'natural law' of women's wages.³⁷ Women who for whatever reason needed to be self-sufficient were in direct competition with women who were dependents, only needing to 'supplement' an income. Their wages were thus forced down, and the independent woman was at a distinct disadvantage. Again there are contradictions in the sources which expose the gendering aspect of the distinctions at work. By presenting the academic discourse of the period, Scott has not accidentally strayed into intellectual, rather than labour history, as some reviewers thought. Rather, this aspect *completes* the reconstruction underway in the previous chapters. By noting the array of contrasts and roles that find their way into the academic discourse, this gender and labour history of Paris traces the realities of the gendered division of labour into the forms that allow it to be transported elsewhere in Europe and the western world. It also allows Scott to herald one of the first women to enter the academic debates in political economy, Julie-Victorie Daubié.³⁸

In each chapter, what Scott writes is orthodox, *good*, history. She contextualises by providing detailed comparisons of a range of viewpoints. In doing so, we catch at least part of the very real carving up of the world for the Parisian garment workers, of which we do

³⁶ Ibid., 129, 136.

³⁷ Ibid., 143.

³⁸ Ibid., 152ff.

indeed see that gendered values were a crucial part. A class is shot through with the forces of gender, complicating any picture of economic determination. The analysis certainly makes good on the promise of a productive category for historical analysis. This status nonetheless results in confusion for some readers, who puzzle over why, if this is such good history, we need the emphasis on theory and especially deconstruction.³⁹ *Gender and the Politics of History* does indeed emphasise the importance of the theoretical stage in historical work where definitions are at stake. But the 'emphasis' on deconstruction is in fact quite muted, or indeed, is not an emphasis *as such*.⁴⁰ Her comparisons are positioned by a couple of references to Derrida early on in her book; but Lacan gets a longer discussion, and Foucault's histories of sexuality have many more references and are apparently closer in topic.⁴¹ Apart from the detailed elaboration of gender in her definitional chapter, Scott doesn't provide extended theoretical discussion. Of course, it informs her work greatly, and we do indeed suggest that Derrida plays a large part in the genealogy of her book. However, looking closely at Scott's historiography, we are led to make a critical distinction between deconstruction, and historical work that is informed by it or consonant with it. That is, we should understand by 'deconstruction' a particular demonstration of a certain situation, not an affiliation to a movement, or the application of theorem. The demonstration has its own particular form, which is philosophical and historical, but not exhausted by either, as we shall see. In turn, history indeed must have its own philosophical aspects, as Scott demonstrates so well, but is nonetheless mostly given over to positive research. The consonance of historiography with deconstruction, then, will depend on its relation to the

³⁹ See Linda Gordon, who manages the feat of placing reviews of *Gender and the Politics of History* in two separate journals, 'Book reviews,' *Signs* 15, no. 4 (1990), and 'Reviews of Books,' *The American Historical Review* 95, no. 4 (1990). The *Signs* review is the more expansive one.

⁴⁰ Indeed, it may be so in anticipation of opposition. See the essay that Joan Scott contributes to a tribute to Jacques Derrida in the feminist journal *Differences*. Here, Scott, criticising herself once more, writes against this self-censorship, suggesting it plays into the hands of conservative, reactionary politics that is seeking to gag academic freedom in America's universities, Joan Wallach Scott, 'Against Eclecticism,' *Differences: A journal of feminist cultural studies* 16, no. 3 (2005).

⁴¹ I recognise that a related problem exists here: the monolithic impression of 'French theory' that has had much recent discussion, would see Derrida, Lacan, and Foucault as all pretty much the same. Although this is certainly a real difficulty with some literature on deconstruction, it seems to me that it marks mainly the more superficial engagements, which aren't our focus here.

situation of deconstruction, which will show itself in the decision on what the object of historical research is to be.

Is deconstruction a useful strategy in the analysis of historical categories?

Scott is able to communicate something of the very *real* way in which working men and women of Paris in the 1840s carved up their lives into roles, times, spaces and social groups. If the analyses offered are designed to distinguish carefully between the claims, especially for worker's rights, of working women, men and the business élite, so that we can see that the tailors trade strategy was one thing, while the seamstresses trade strategy was another, a more important finding is produced in the demonstration. This finding is the 'dynamic grid' through which the Parisian workers differentiated their lives in gendered ways. For example, garment workers 'did not neatly or consistently *oppose* work and family, producer and childbearer, economic and domestic, public and private, husband and wife', in the ways that historians might customarily generalise. The movement of distinctions according to concepts of gender is much more diverse than expected. The contradictions and confluences of categories that Scott describes just are the kinds of negotiations that make up life. They call for differentiation, navigation, and decision. This is politics. The question we must also ask, now, is: 'is it deconstruction?'

As I already mentioned, Scott makes several very brief references to Derrida and deconstruction.⁴² However brief, their location and import do provide an important role in

⁴² The most explicit is Scott, *Gender and the politics of history*, 41, cf. 7, 9, 167-177.

the structure of Scott's book, organising and orienting its strategy. So, perhaps the overwhelming identification of Scott's book as a product of deconstruction is correct. But this an important distinction. Those responses work according to statements of affiliation. They take conscious, explicit representation and use them to categorise. Of course, authors do seek to provide true representations of their work. Nonetheless, Derrida, and simply reading, urges us to distinguish between conscious genealogical claims and those that are not.⁴³ The latter comes without firm assurances and is only laboriously established in the midst of ongoing dialogue.

An informing principle for all of Scott's work, and one we suggest she shares with deconstruction, is that of an *affirmative* stance. To criticise is a positive project. Scott constantly invites criticism of her own work, her own categories. Her criticism moves in the fold of productive *self*-criticism. To submit to question, then, is *not* to simply oppose, but to run forward in *hope*, and try to provide the chance that things could be *better*. This strategy seems to be misunderstood by too many historiographical readers. I have tried to spend time adequately describing Scott's methods of creating an integrated piece of historical writing. This is because, whatever the status of its allegiance to deconstruction, Scott is working at producing an original mode of history work. To do this justice, it cannot be the mere *application* of a formula, the plugging in of historical values to a theoretical program. Suffice to say this would be a travesty of both historical and philosophical work.

The method that Scott's text follows develops a *grid* or *scheme*, through rigorous attention to comparisons, contradictions and conflations of categories and statuses.⁴⁴ She thematically

⁴³ See Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 150/102. The question of a genealogy for Scott's work could be further specified by a study of Jacques Derrida and others, 'Women in the Beehive: A seminar with Jacques Derrida,' *Differences: A journal of feminist cultural studies* 16, no. 3 (2005). This is the transcript of a seminar with Derrida and chaired by Joan Scott, at the Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women at Brown University. One can recognise some of the vocabulary and style of *Gender and the Politics of History* in this text. It is important to note, with respect to the question of genealogy, that Derrida described the seminar as 'authorised but authorless'. See also the comments on the Pembroke Center in Scott, *Gender and the politics of history*, 1.

⁴⁴ See in particular *Gender and the politics of history*, 145, 149, 151, 154.

uses the identities produced through gender ('family', different masculine and feminine designations, etc.) to develop this, but this, it may be said, is suggested by the sources themselves. It is not a question of *imposing* categories; the process is much more refined. It allows the differences that rise up from the grid to establish their meaning. The approach is designed to afford some insight into the categories of perception, the level at which Scott has suggested gender works. And the view afforded, of a much more variable flux of differentiation, is then allowed to retrospectively impact the investigating historian's own set of categories which are likewise made visible through the difference. It is a nuanced scholarship that is not so much an 'application' of what is called deconstruction as one that operates according to a shared spirit.

Gender and the Politics of History thus can be said to be *consonant with* deconstruction, and this is not the same as the *demonstration* of deconstruction. Deconstruction is, as we have tried to show, not something done by an author, but is a 'process', or better, a movement that just is what takes place. What we emphasise here is the quality of the history writing in Scott's book, and not only her 'contextualisation'. Context, we have seen, cannot be the sole historical discipline. There is also a *philosophical* acuity with respect to the identification of objects, distinction of levels and handling of categories. Such *vigilance* becomes, effectively the 'context' of *contexting*, if this word can be allowed. The action of providing a context breathes according to the historian's tacit philosophy, and it is one of Joan Scott's accomplishments to make this visible. This suggests not only that histories informed by Derrida's work can be both productive *and* excellent scholarship, as defined by the *existing* disciplinary measures, but *also* suggests new ways of conceiving those disciplinary boundaries. They are no longer considered absolute. For example, a good history will also have more than a little good philosophy in it, too. Philosophy, on the other hand, never does without some history. This should have very real consequences for the pedagogy in each discipline. We can make all of this clearer through discussion of a comparison.

A comparison

We can find another example of ‘deconstructive’ historiography in the work of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. A comparison will be instructive, although the point is not to *oppose* these two authors. Rather, the comparison will allow certain differences to come to light with respect to the work of deconstruction. Now Spivak’s name is irrevocably associated with Derrida, through her introduction to, and translation of, *Of Grammatology*. But, of course, Gayatri Spivak’s work should be treated in its own right, and is an extraordinarily complex interweaving of many different disciplines and discourses. Spivak is, nonetheless, always quick to identify herself as a literary critic, and not as a historian or, indeed, a philosopher.⁴⁵ The example we shall look at below is, however, a brief historical narrative, constructed from archival sources, and engaging with historiographical literature, as well as theorising its own practice. The historical work is actively pursued as an allegory of a certain political situation. It is certainly an *interested* history, but its declared interest does not seem, to us, to compromise its historical rigour. For our purposes here, it is instructive first because it is an *explicit* attempt to bring deconstruction to bear in an historiographical context. Second, because, through the mixing of disciplinary statuses, it helps us bring into view the precise structures we are interested in, those of gender, and the relationship between a historical study and the work of deconstruction.

⁴⁵ See, for example, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 198, as well as the preface.

The Rani of Sirmur

If we were to construct a study of the reception of deconstruction in *History and Theory* and base it upon word searches performed through a search engine, Spivak's essay 'The Rani of Sirmur', would not appear, at least well down the list of results. It simply uses little of the terminology that we might expect. Nonetheless, it crosses the threshold of our latent history of *History and Theory*.⁴⁶ Spivak has made explicit claims on behalf of a deconstructive *historical* enterprise with respect to the *Subaltern Studies* group, and the 'Rani of Sirmur' essay is a part of Spivak's attempts to set deconstruction 'to work' in a historical, postcolonial and feminist manner.⁴⁷ The essay is presented as work in progress in 1985.⁴⁸ It is about the figure of the Rani (a tribal 'queen') of Sirmur, a small kingdom in rural India. Spivak discovers this figure in the archives of the *East India Company*, and attempts to track her story. The difficulties in finding out more about the Rani are posed as 'almost allegorical'. They are illustrative, for Spivak, of forces at work in the creation of an archive. We have already seen similar kinds of forces at play, for example, in the creation of the *Statistique*. It also happens that 'The Rani of Sirmur' engages with the arguments of Hayden White and Dominick LaCapra in justifying its approach, and so it places itself within the unfolding of our thesis in more than one way.

The Rani of Sirmur is the mother and sometime guardian of a boy-king in colonial India. The time is around 1815, and the *East India Company* is consolidating various holdings in rural

⁴⁶ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives,' *History and Theory* 24, no. 3 (1985). A revised version of this paper appears as part of ch. 4 of *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*. Gayatri Spivak visited Wesleyan University (home of *History & Theory*), where she gave a version of the paper (it had been written and presented for a conference at the University of Essex, 1984). Editor Richard Vann liked the paper very much, and pursued its publication. See *HT: Correspondence*, Richard T. Vann, 17 May 1985.

⁴⁷ G.C. Spivak, 'Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography,' in *In Other Worlds* (New York & London: Methuen, 1987 [1985]).

⁴⁸ See Spivak, 'The Rani of Sirmur,' 247 n.1. The book in question was then titled 'Master Discourse, Native Informant.' It eventually appeared much later and with a different name (see n.47). The version in the latter book is changed in only a few, but sometimes significant ways. This will be clear in my footnotes. I will quote from the *History & Theory* version except in cases where the later version provides a helpful addition.

India that ensure its market and supply channels. The Rani appears in the company archives as an agent and instrument of 'industrial capitalism's nascent empire'.⁴⁹ The 'Company' is in the *de facto* business of empire building, and have recently claimed entitlement to the area. A part of this *ad hoc* process: one Captain Geoffrey Birch is riding about the Simla Hills, drawing maps and acquainting their residents with the truth of their new-found overlords. It is an account writes Spivak, thinking of Heidegger, of the *worlding* of the so-called 'Third World'.⁵⁰ Spivak interprets the Captains movements as follows:

Birch on horseback passing through the country sees himself as a representative image. By his sight and utterance rumour is being replaced by information, the figure of the European on the hills is being reinscribed from stranger to Master, to the sovereign as Subject with a capital S, even as the native shrinks into the consolidating subjected subject in the lower case. The truth value of the stranger is being established as the reference point for the true (insertion into) history of these wild regions.⁵¹

The stake for the Company is to establish and extend its trading rights and market. The Company has conquered the ruling Gurkhas of Nepal, and now claims entitlement to the high country states of which Sirmur is one. Through this, some small kingdoms first cross the scene of European history. The Company is restoring some states to their native kings, who thereby come to be obliged to the European intruders. The local kings regain in the same movement nominally sovereign of their own country and nonetheless all the more subject to the Imperial power.⁵²

One should not, Spivak warns, consider the colonial power as a homogenous or monolithic power. There is a growing conflict between the State and the economic interest, the Company. The latter is *paranational*. It certainly establishes authority, its political domain,

⁴⁹ Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 201.

⁵⁰ Spivak, 'The Rani of Sirmur,' 247, 253.

⁵¹ Ibid., 254.

⁵² Ibid., 255, 257.

but only in an *ad hoc* way, responding to the chances and necessities of its terrain.

Meanwhile the British state aimed at, and eventually succeeded in, bringing the Company under its control, from 1784. A Board of Control was established, which could now exercise a controlling hand in the company, with that hand representing the State's interests.⁵³

Spivak's focus, however, is not on the history of the State and its regulation of enterprise.

'My focus is the necessary but almost incidental or clandestine state-formation that accompanied this process.'⁵⁴

The Rani of Sirmur can be found in the archives, then, because of the commercial and territorial interests of the East India Company.⁵⁵ In the case of Sirmur, however, the restoration project did not apply.⁵⁶ Its king was deposed (he was syphilitic), and the Rani is appointed guardian of her son, the minor king. In secret correspondence available in the archives, it is apparent that the region Sirmur is to be 'dismembered', the eastern half annexed immediately, and the rest to follow. This would secure the Company's interests close to Nepal.⁵⁷ The Rani assumes the role of guardian because it is thought she would be more easily controlled in this situation than would a male relative of the king. It is this figure, and the circumstances, upon which Spivak will focus:

This, then, is why the Rani surfaces briefly, as an individual, in the archives; because she is a king's wife and a weaker vessel. We are not sure of her name. She is once referred to as Rani Gulani and once as Gulari. In general she is referred to, properly, as the Ranee by the higher officers of the Company, and 'this Ranny' by Geoffrey Birch and [another cartographer] Robert Ross.⁵⁸

⁵³ Ibid., 256, 259, esp. 261.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 259.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 263.

⁵⁶ See Ibid., 263-265 for the procedures by which regions were designated 'original' rulers to whom the restoration would be given.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 266. Cf. *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 231. In 1985, Spivak seems a little unsure of her argument. The hesitations are removed in the later version.

⁵⁸ Spivak, 'The Rani of Sirmur,' 266.

The itinerant Captain Birch finds himself in the household of the Rani, asked to supervise her authority. Her actions appear in correspondence if they cost money. 'We imagine her in her simple palace separated from the authority of her no doubt patriarchal and dissolute husband, suddenly managed by a young white man in her own household.' The Rani has entered into the vision of Captain Birch, in his *worlding* peregrinations. In *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, Spivak adds these sentences: 'There is no romance to be found here. Caught thus between patriarchy and imperialism, she is in a representative predicament, a woman whose "exchange," from "feudal" to "modern," as the agent of her subject-child, will establish historicity.'⁵⁹ Spivak is interested in the Rani because her fleeting image in the archive renders visible for her certain structures of historicity. Such structures will not be exhausted by theories of transitions to modernity, race or class, but must also call up that 'shadow of shadows', gender.⁶⁰

Suddenly, in a conversation between the Rani and Captain Birch, the Rani declares her intention to be a *sati*, a self-immolating widow, following her husband in a fiery death. From statements of her devotion to her husband, and that their lives were one, Geoffrey Birch concludes that she is resolved to sacrifice herself at her husband's death. Birch, apparently not a man given to affected statement (we wonder what welter of thoughts passed through his mind at this moment), urges her to devotion and love, to live for her son.⁶¹

Birch reports these things to the Company Resident in Delhi. He seeks permission to intervene should the circumstance arise. The matter attracts the attention of the Governor General, whose Secretary corresponds with the Resident. It is 'signified' to Captain Birch that the interests of the minor king were paramount, and superseded any wish of the deposed Rajah. In the same breath as dictating Captain Birch's interposing himself between the Rani

⁵⁹ Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 234.

⁶⁰ Spivak unites these discourses according to a Freudian model that is not our explicit interest here, where Spivak's historiographic constructions are modelled on the analysis of the over-determined images of a dream-text. See 'The Rani of Sirmur,' 257-8.

⁶¹ Ibid., 267-8.

and death, it was also stipulated that this was ‘without the consent of the Governor General in Council’.⁶² The situation calls for delicate handling, and although Birch was ordered to intervene, the authority of the Governor General distanced itself from his actions. It seems in further discussion in correspondence, the Company treats the Rajah with caution, deferring any judgement, and not attempting to move him further from his wife. Almost, Spivak notes, as if to not test the Rani’s resolution. And then, the archival ‘trail’ goes cold. ‘And there the matter is dropped,’ the Rani disappears from the archives, disappearing from ‘the space of imperial production.’⁶³

Why, and of what, does Spivak present the Rani as an *example*? Her argument is not strictly a case of finding out what happened, or of placing the Rani in the wider system of an Indian context. She explicitly notes it as *supplementary* to the official narrative of India’s accession to nationhood.⁶⁴ Although Spivak is also quick to admit that she is no historian, this is perhaps a little disingenuous—her procedures seem rigorous and perfectly respectable. She interacts with main texts in Indian colonial history, but not in specialist academic debate. The Rani is a figure on the margin of history, (that is, European history). It is precisely the *elusiveness* of the Rani that Spivak points up. Neither a class, nor race, narrative will do for explaining the Rani’s presence in the archives. Gender, the ‘shadow of shadows’ is called upon: and it is precisely under *gender* that the Rani ‘fades’ out of history. I assemble here several instances of this description:

We are proceeding, then, on the assumption that *women outside* of the mode of production narrative mark *the points of fadeout* in the writing of disciplinary history even as they mime ‘writing as such,’ ‘footprints of the trace’.⁶⁵

⁶² Archive sources quoted in *Ibid.*, 270.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 259.

⁶⁵ *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 244.

I attend to these figures because they continue to impose the highest standards on our techniques of retrieval.⁶⁶

What emerges on the figure of the Rani is interpretation as such; any genealogy of that history can see her as no more than an insubstantial language instrument. She is *as unverifiable as literature*, and she is written in, indeed, permits the writing of, history as coloniality—so that the postcolonial can come to see his ‘historical self-location’ as a problem.⁶⁷

To retrieve her as information will be no disciplinary triumph. Caught in the cracks between the production of the archives and indigenous patriarchy, today distanced by the waves of hegemonic ‘feminism’, *there is no ‘real Rani’ to be found*.⁶⁸

The argument rests on the degree to which the Rani can be established as providing a ‘representative predicament’, and one that not only relates to the production of the colonial discourse, but one that also seems to be a problem for ‘modern’ feminist discourse.⁶⁹ Representative of what? And why is gender the ‘shadow of shadows’? It would seem to be because of the assumption, the choice that Spivak declares that certain women who fall outside of the existing historical narratives ‘mime’ Derrida’s arche-writing, they are ‘footprints’ of the trace, and ‘gender’ would be the kind of discourse under which to approach such ‘fade-out’ points.

It is important to proceed carefully here. Having already seen Derrida’s criticisms of empiricist haste, it is important to slow down and take some time. If we were content with categories such as ‘reception’ and ‘influence’, it is easy to show that Scott and Spivak, among others, ‘use’ Derrida’s works in writing histories. But to leave things at such a point would be to give up any chance of testing what such ‘use’ in fact is and what kind of

⁶⁶ Ibid., 245-6.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 246 fn.74.

⁶⁸ ‘The Rani of Sirmur,’ 271. These two sentences, on the penultimate page of the *H&T* essay, do not appear in *A Critique*. I discuss this below.

⁶⁹ Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 234. In the *H&T* essay, Spivak writes ‘almost in an allegorical predicament’, ‘The Rani of Sirmur,’ 267.

relationship it has with Derrida's work. Whether, indeed, the act of history-writing is changed by it, and so of understanding whether or not there is anything to say about deconstruction and history.

'Woman'; that is, which level are we talking about here?

The description of the Rani as a 'fadeout', and that there is no Rani to be found, could be understood to be saying that the Rani will always lie beyond our empirical resources, she has escaped, fallen out of reach, and it is simply a matter of *fact* that she could not be recovered. It is the pathos of the unrecoverable absence. This may well be the case. But if so, it would be unremarkable. Many other cases can be reported. Indeed, were *everybody* recorded in the official archives, the world would be drowned in them. Nietzsche is correct: to have history, we must also forget. We cannot, however, imagine the Rani as having existed in some whole state, if we could but reach her. Spivak's point does not seem to be an empirical one, but an ontological and epistemological one. 'There is no real Rani to be found.' To pose her as real is to succumb to the nostalgic embrace, to pose a feminine essence, or to assent too quickly because she has become a vehicle for our political desires. In fact, Spivak accuses *herself* of so much. Almost every other page of *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* calls attention to moments of excess, haste, over-reaching, or revision.⁷⁰ It is the Rani's 'non-reality' that Spivak interprets as allegory.

⁷⁰ See Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 2 and especially fn.3. Cf. p.308. Here we must suggest that *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, which ambitiously articulates philosophy, literature, history and culture in a general framework, demands serious research that would try to read it for its general implications for these disciplines, not simply for those subfields connected by the name of 'postcolonial'. Spivak's writing always gives the impression of constantly moving, reassessing itself, correcting itself. It is therefore very difficult to analyse without risk. But perhaps that impression is also a calculated defence. See, for example, 'Notes toward a tribute to Jacques Derrida,' *Differences: A journal of feminist cultural studies* 16, no. 3 (2005).

These things are made clear for us in the essay 'Deconstructing Historiography', which was published in the same year as the 'Rani of Sirmur'. This essay clarifies some of the theoretical stakes of the Rani essay. Spivak argues that the methods and aims of the *Subaltern Studies* group, historians dedicated to analysing the becoming -colonial of India and the emergence of insurgent or subaltern resistance, is productively understood by being considered an instance of deconstruction.⁷¹ This group of scholars did not, up to this point present themselves in this way, rather, Spivak notes, they describe themselves as dialecticians. But Spivak is suggesting, rather, that 'deconstruction' is in fact a better description of the kind of historical work that they do. So, for our interests, we have a potential example of a concrete historiography that matches up with deconstruction.

Spivak argues that the *Subaltern Studies* historians propose a theory of change. The kinds of changes in mind are the feudal to capitalist, and the becoming-colonial. The distinctive element of this theory is that the agency of change is located with the insurgent or 'subaltern'. Change is therefore a conflict, rather than a peaceful transition from one state to another.⁷² The subaltern is mostly indicated in a negative way, against a more organised and stronger colonial authority. Insofar as any historiography of these violent changes relies upon the archives produced by the élite strata, it to participates, is necessarily complicit with (however unwillingly), in this negative construal.⁷³ The situation is addressed by the idea of a subaltern 'negative consciousness' as a strategic theoretical fiction. What, then, is this 'negative consciousness? It is the 'effaced', 'never fully recoverable' consciousness of the subaltern, always 'askew' of any description.

Although 'negative consciousness' is conceived of here as an historical stage peculiar to the subaltern, there is no logical reason why ... this 'negative', rather

⁷¹ Spivak, 'Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography.'

⁷² Ibid., 197.

⁷³ See the somewhat murky description at Ibid., 199.

than the grounding positive view of consciousness, should not be generalised as the group's methodological presupposition.⁷⁴

Spivak suggests reading this generally, so that the subaltern becomes a general model for consciousness. Because 'subaltern' always calls forth an 'élite,' Spivak argues that we have here a representation of the deconstructive position. The predicament is recognised by only ever using the idea of a subaltern consciousness as a strategic fiction. Again Spivak generalises, and this becomes an allegorical predicament of *all* thought.⁷⁵ The argument is certainly a difficult one, especially when the reader is less familiar in this case with the history of Indian colonialism, and because Spivak compresses an extraordinary amount of theoretical material. Nonetheless, it does concern our topic of gender, and its position with respect to the allegory described above.

The task of recovering a subaltern consciousness, writes Spivak, utilises historiographic methods as a *strategy*: 'a strategic use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest'.⁷⁶ The point is not to objectify the subaltern. The subaltern can only be posed *negatively* against the consciousness of an élite. Spivak generalises this moment into a general theory of consciousness.⁷⁷ The *Subaltern Studies* group show the *failures* of the colonial or nationalist (élite) *subject* in various movements of change, failure that is, to successfully account and ally with a politicised peasanthood, the subaltern. This also, argues Spivak, cancels out the possibility of seriously proposing an inalienable subaltern *consciousness* that could be recovered for a postcolonial agenda.

The subaltern's persistent emergence into hegemony must always and by definition remain heterogeneous to the efforts of the disciplinary historian. The historian must persist in *his* efforts in this awareness, that the subaltern is necessarily the absolute limit of the place where history is narrativised into logic. It is a hard lesson to learn,

⁷⁴ Ibid., 203.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 204.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 205.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 203.

but not to learn it is merely to nominate elegant solutions to be correct theoretical practice.⁷⁸

The subaltern becomes the limit at which history becomes visible and narratable. And the historian, on this view, must live in the awareness of this limit, which thus characterises historiography as pointing up this inability to recover the subaltern. We are interested here in why Spivak italicises the *his*. Spivak emphasises this moment in order to later return to it: ‘*male subaltern and historian* are ... united in the common assumption that the procreative sex [woman, that is] is a species apart, scarcely if at all to be considered apart of civil society.’⁷⁹ Spivak is saying that compared to the subaltern, the subaltern *woman* is a negativity scarcely even mentionable. For Spivak, the figure of the woman is the ‘syntax’ of history, even as she is the dissimulated condition of history, a blank historicity.

This allows us to return to gender, that ‘shadow of shadows’ that we have been tracking, and we are beginning to see the reasons that Spivak has for calling it thus. The limit described here is not one of *empirical* finitude.⁸⁰ The movement of being ‘narrativised into logic’ indicates entry into what is, in the terms of our previous chapters a determined *schema*, a ‘diagram’ of thought. The subaltern has become a *figure* of historicity for Spivak. But she always chooses anthropologised figures to represent this historicity. Whereas, our interpretation of Derrida has suggested that historicity is not, strictly speaking, even anthropological. Derrida’s *trace* precedes every entity, and structures the whole field.⁸¹ Historicity precedes, as its ‘impossible’ condition, any figure of the diagram, and is therefore only perceived in terms of the diagram trying to perceive the impossible. Anthropological entities are already caught within the graphic, and this remains one of its determined figures.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 207.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 217.

⁸⁰ We recall that Derrida discusses the two types of finitude (and infinity) in Lévi-Strauss in terms that are applicable here. See Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 288-9. We have also discussed this in the chapter on the diagram, above. See the section ‘Thus to infinity’

⁸¹ See Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 69/47.

And so why *woman*? The final stages of 'Deconstructing Historiography', considering the place of *woman* in the work of the Subaltern Studies group, are consonant with the argument in the 'Rani of Sumur'. Woman appears in both works under a certain cloud of mystery, written over according to the instrumental uses to which patriarchal discourses, native and colonial alike, put them to.⁸²

The Rani is not a subaltern because she is a queen.⁸³ She is, however, given the same allegorical value as the subaltern woman. It seems, then, that for a moment there is confusion here where 'woman' merges with the unseeable of historicity. In which case, we don't know who or what a woman is! Are we are no longer simply writing history? It seems to me that Spivak does not ease the discomfort for her reader. She is, ultimately, committed to establishing the woman as a subject of history, a project we certainly do not wish to deny. But to use the name of woman as a figure of historicity bursts the bounds of 'woman',⁸⁴ and necessitates a kind of careful work which could not straightforwardly be called 'historical', or would at least try to justify keeping this name. This is, as we have seen, exactly the difficult movement among levels that we have tried to chart in the *Grammatology*. On the other hand, we have argued, and this was one of the main points of the diagram, one never simply does *just* history in any case.

I hasten to say that I am not dismissing Spivak's writings here. But it is clear that these difficulties require significant caution. A proper account of these levels at work in Spivak's continuing body of work demands its own separate analysis, with careful attention paid to her debts to Derrida, especially on the question of 'woman'.⁸⁵ Indeed, the very title of A

⁸² Spivak, 'Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography,' 216-8. It seems to me, then, that the conclusions reached in 'Deconstructing historiography' are the premises and taking off point for the investigation broached in 'Rani of Surmur'. See especially p.219 of 'Deconstructing historiography'.

⁸³ Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 308.

⁸⁴ But perhaps—to second guess myself—is this simply the inverse of using 'man' to name the universal in men and women? Is my discomfort here simply being habituated to the one and not the other?

⁸⁵ It is interesting, in light of this, to note how cautious Derrida is when he approaches feminism, 'woman', and sexual difference. The withering sarcasm of the opening pages of 'Geschlecht I'

Critique of Postcolonial Reason immediately announces an important negotiation—the Kantian reference—to attend to. I do not pretend to do this here; it is a point for further research. Nonetheless we have identified a significant issue. Is historicity, in the last analysis, something that is *human*? Derrida's answer seems to be 'no'. How would this then change historiography? How *could* it?

Our discussion of the Rani, therefore, illustrates for us once again the difficulties involved with respect to the distinction of levels and questions required in any historical appropriation of Derrida. Spivak emphasises a kind of *complicity* between the subaltern, and the historian addressing them. For our part, we have suggested (and Spivak has, too) that perhaps Spivak is complicit with a feminist discourse that too quickly assimilates Derrida's work to privileging an (even negatively posed) feminine consciousness. What we found refreshing in our interpretation of Scott's theory of gender is the distance it took from any concept of the feminine. Scott, too, remains sensitive to the 'complicity' that gender can produce, acknowledging that it continues to inspire some of the problems it was introduced to solve. This idea of 'complicity', however, will help us to realise a further step for understanding the precise relation between the discipline of history (feminist or not) and the situation that is deconstruction.

(perhaps another point directed at Foucault) puts us on guard. Geoff Bennington also displays a similar caution in his section on the 'mother'. See also Geoffrey Bennington, *Jacques Derrida*, 205-7.

Complicity: why 'is it deconstruction?' is the wrong question to ask

Spivak ends up emphasising the *complicity* between historian and object, which conspires to dissimulate woman.⁸⁶ The problem we have been tracking all along, that of the impossible diagram of history, turns out to imply that history, as caught in the 'impossible diagram' implies at least some form of complicity. Geoffrey Bennington writes often of it, allied to a 'just is', a basic description of being.⁸⁷ He speaks of a 'necessary complicity called history', a '*certain* inevitable complicity.'⁸⁸ Derrida does indeed use the word, notably in the section titled 'The rebus and the complicity of origins', the final section of *Part I* of the *Grammatologie*. We will quote from it in a moment.⁸⁹

First, however, let us return to Joan Scott's *Gender and the Politics of History* to locate a thought of complicity there, too. In the revised edition of that book, Scott notes some of the ground that has been covered in the intervening decade. Seemingly *against* the arguments of the book to which it is appended (but actually, we suggest, against the misreadings of it), eleven years later, the final chapter notes the ongoing confusion and lack of clarity regarding sex, gender and sexual difference.⁹⁰ Always the threat is a renaturalisation, of reimposing an essence of femininity, such that the 'category' of gender, introduced to disturb the seemingly natural value of the sexual opposition, has in fact led to a re-entrenchment of it.⁹¹ (This was the very deception that we saw gender perpetrates by itself.) The situation mirrors many of

⁸⁶ Spivak, 'Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography,' 201, 211, 213, 221. See also 'collusion' (p.218), a 'sharing' (p.219), and 'irreducible compromise' (p.198). See, too, 'The Rani of Sirmur' 250, 272, and the final paragraph before the Postscript (271) which describes a complicity without using the word or any synonym. Also *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 3-4, esp. 309.

⁸⁷ The 'just is' seems to us to be a kind of signature of Bennington's. Tied to history, it gives the sense of 'well, here we are...' and 'the situation is just this...' This would link it to Derrida's statement of the radical empiricism of deconstruction, which is the 'larger' history of the text, in which the diagram falls, 'we must begin wherever we are... in a text where we already believe ourselves to be.' Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 232/162.

⁸⁸ Bennington and Derrida, *Jacques Derrida*, 202, 203. The emphasis is Bennington's.

⁸⁹ Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 131/87ff. See also pp.54, 78 /36, 53.

⁹⁰ Scott, *Gender and the politics of history*, 199ff.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 205, 206, 212.

the confused responses to deconstruction, whereby the very anxiety produced by the exposure of the origin results in it being all the more held in place. In this final chapter, the ‘category’ that was raised at the beginning of the book—gender—is necessarily, emphatically, returned to history. Scott explicitly highlights that her use of the word ‘category’ in particular should be subject to question. The moment is complex. But this is not a retraction. It is rather an emphasis of phase and level. Gender is not immune from history, nor did Scott ever propose it to be. But the distinctions that she and others proposed did not play out in the way that they had thought they might.

This is *not*, however, a defeat, but is an occasion for Scott to reaffirm the vitality of the line of *questions* she asked, and the need for further questions and attention to particular instances. As much as Scott deplores terminological confusion, it only calls for a renewed vigilance:

When ‘gender’ assumes the prior existence of sexual difference, indeed is based unproblematically upon it, then sharp conceptual distinctions between sex and gender are impossible to maintain.

But maybe it isn’t necessary to maintain those distinctions, maybe it’s more useful to accept the lack of precision ... If sex and gender are both taken to be concepts—forms of knowledge—then they are closely related, if not indistinguishable. If both are knowledges, then gender cannot be said to reflect sex or to be imposed on it; rather sex becomes an effect of gender. Gender, the social rules that attempt to organise the relationships of men and women in societies, produces the knowledge we have of sex and sexual difference (in our culture by equating sex with nature).⁹²

We are interested here in the confusion described between sex and gender, and the affirmative stance taken towards that conceptual confusion, and that is aimed at understanding, but not simply accepting it. It seems to us that Scott repeats the historical task

⁹² Ibid., 201.

here with a new nuance.⁹³ Through ‘gender’ Joan Scott envelopes the historian with her toolbox of categories and questions within a larger history. In doing so, she renders ‘particular’ each configuration (we could say *schema*) that is produced, and points, without supposing to be able to render present, to a more radical kind of analysis. This radical history is not available directly as an object for historians, because it is precisely what renders possible both the position of historian and her object. Scott says it clearly in the final sentence of the book. It is to open this schema to a history that is not assured, nor certain of its place in time: ‘we open ourselves to history, to the idea and possibility that things have been, and will be, different from what they are now.’⁹⁴

Now, having seen Scott’s ‘complicity’, let us turn to that of Derrida. We translate here a long quotation from ‘The rebus and the complicity of origins’ with the intention of illustrating the problem concerning levels and empirical history that we have been slowly working on. Gender is not insignificant in what follows, but the problem is just as obviously larger, we think, than what Spivak has implied.

The context of the quotation here is this: Derrida is arguing against the histories of writing that have construed the Western phonetic alphabet as the ‘most intelligent’ of scripts. Having carefully noted how the *rébus* (a representative graphic) can also come to be endowed with a phonetic value, so that *pictorial* writing systems can also *phonic* ones, Derrida observes that this destroys any idea of linear historical progress among different scripts. Our own phonetic alphabet cannot, therefore, be normative, for other cultures. It cannot be, for example, what Chinese writing had ‘not yet’ evolved into, or had run aground ‘before’ achieving a ‘true’

⁹³ Elizabeth Weed has described this nuance as, indeed, a productive *aporia*. Referring back to the title of Scott’s famous essay, and the resolute withdrawal of gender, she writes that there is a movement from the ‘useful’ to the ‘impossible’. Weed implies, without explicitly saying so, that Scott’s formulation of gender has the same status as one of Derrida’s possible-impossible *aporias*. Indeed, although we cannot go into this now, Scott will go on to show, after *Gender and the Politics of History*, that an *aporia*, is also a real, historical category, and not something that occurs in books, but something that people *experience*. See, for example, Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 168.

⁹⁴ Scott, *Gender and the politics of history*, 218.

phoneticism (our own, that is). Writing thus disturbs (once again) the value of speech. And if *logos* is likened to the sun, the king, the father (Derrida thus prepares for 'Plato's Pharmacy'), then what must writing be? The necessary shake-up by situating this system through the *complicity of origins* cannot be a scientific, (which includes a disciplinary-historical), or philosophical act. The text follows on:

Que l'accès au signe écrit assure le pouvoir sacré de faire persévérer l'existence dans la trace et de connaître la structure générale de l'univers ; que tous les clergés, exerçant ou non un pouvoir politique, se soient constitués en même temps que l'écriture et par la disposition de la puissance graphique ; que la stratégie, la balistique, la diplomatie, l'agriculture, la fiscalité, la droit pénal soient liés dans leur histoire et dans leur structure à la constitution de l'écriture ; que l'origine assignée à l'écriture l'ait été selon des schèmes ou des chaînes de mythèmes toujours analogues dans les cultures les plus diverses et qu'elle ait communiqué de manière complexe mais réglée avec la distribution du pouvoir politique comme avec la structure familiale ; que la possibilité de la capitalisation et de l'organisation politico-administrative soit toujours passée par la main des scribes qui firent l'enjeu de nombreuses guerres et dont la fonction a toujours été irréductible, quel que fût le défilé des délégations dans lesquelles on a pu la voir à l'œuvre ; qu'à travers les décalages, les inégalités de développement, le jeu des permanences, des retards, des diffusions, etc., la solidarité reste indestructible entre les systèmes idéologique, religieux, scientifico-technique, etc., et les systèmes d'écriture qui furent donc plus et autre chose que des « moyens de communication » ou des véhicules du signifié ; que le sens même du pouvoir et de l'efficacité en général, qui n'a pu apparaître en tant que tel, en tant que sens et maîtrise (par idéalisation), qu'avec le pouvoir dit « symbolique », ait toujours été lié à la disposition de l'écriture ; que l'économie, monétaire ou prémonétaire, et le calcul graphique soient co-originaires, qu'il n'y ait pas de droit sans possibilité de trace (sinon, comme le montre H. Lévy-Bruhl, de notation au sens étroit), tout cela renvoie à une possibilité commune et radicale qu'aucune science déterminée, aucune discipline abstraite, ne peut penser comme telle.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 141/92-3.

That the access to the written sign assures the sacred power of preserving existence within the trace and of knowing the general structure of the universe; that all clergies, exercising political power or not, would be constituted at the same time as writing and by the organisation of graphic ability; that strategy, ballistics, diplomacy, agriculture, tax systems, and penal law would be tied in their history and in their structure to the constitution of writing; that the origin assigned to writing had been according to analogous designs⁹⁶ or chains of mythemes in the most diverse of cultures and that this would have communicated in a way, complex but regulated, with the distribution of political power, as with the family structure; that the possibility of capitalisation and of politico-administration would be always passed through the hand of the scribes who had set the stakes of numerous wars and whose function has always been irreducible, such that whatever the parade of parties in which one could see the work; that traversed the gaps, inequalities of development, the play of permanences, of delays, diffusions, etc., the solidarity between the ideological, religious, scientifico-technological, etc., systems and the systems of writing which were more or less other than ‘means of communication’ or vehicles of the signifier; that this same meaning of power and efficacy in general, which could not appear as such, such that the sense and mastery (by idealisation), appears with the power called ‘symbolic’, had always been tied to the organisation of writing; that the economy, monetary or pre-monetary, and graphic calculation would be co-originary, that there would be no law without possibility of trace (if not, as H. Lévy-Bruhl shows, of notation in the narrow sense), all this refers to a possibility common and radical which no determined science, or abstract discipline, can think as such.

I have quoted such a long section (all of p.141 in the French edition!), to show that Derrida does indeed locate a place for the positive disciplines. Indeed how can he not? It is *imperative* for him to find a way to associate the concrete historical exercise of power with the science and technology *and* the systems of writing. How many different historical questions are located here! The footnote, at the end of the paragraph, appends a long bibliography of such research, noting that it provides ‘an infinite mass of content’. Amongst this mass, we pick out the reference to the articulation of political power with family

⁹⁶ Spivak’s translation drops one of the key words we have insisted on: ‘schèmes,’ reading: ‘according to chains and mythemes.’

structure. He is trying to account for the histories of the ‘most diverse’ of cultures. Here, we suggest, we might find not only justification for the historical questions that Joan Scott and Gayatri Spivak pursue, but also a whole realm for positive research that would link entire fields of culture with seemingly disparate structures. Is there any doubt that what is proposed in the *Grammatology* constitutes a novel philosophy of history?

Nonetheless, Derrida clearly states that the *demonstration* of the movement of this enormous structure is outside of the *competence* of both the positive sciences (including history), *and also philosophy*.⁹⁷ This larger movement, which is none other than that larger history, a historicity we have been tracking, is also the *adventure* of writing. Disciplinary history *and* philosophy are situated within this adventure, are determinations from within it, and are thus incapable of thinking this adventure through, though they may think in line with it. They are certain *schemata*, unable to wholly think their diagrammatisation. Thus, to take the case of the feminist history we have been discussing, although there is every possibility of it being consonant with the movement of deconstruction, as the long list quoted above shows, this is not the same as demonstrating that movement itself. In that case, asking about a ‘deconstructive’ history is misleading, as is the thought of an ‘applied’ deconstruction. Deconstruction is already its application, and history as a discipline is included within it. It can seek to move with it, in its groove, and point beyond itself, but should not be mistaken for the whole.

In the paragraph immediately before the one copied out above, Derrida observes that the adventure of phoneticisation mingles with those of science, religion, politics, economy, technics, law and art. In establishing each region in its history and as a science, they *become* rigorously separated. This is a necessity and not a historical contingency. We recall here Hegel’s image of the chain, as the dialectic articulates the distinct regions of the sciences.

⁹⁷ Derrida, *De la Grammatologie*, 142/93, ‘One must understand here this *incompetence* of science which is also the incompetence of philosophy, the *closure* of the *episteme*.’

Voilà, le schéma. But this is, Derrida reminds us, always an abstraction, which also means that it is a *reduction* from history in the larger sense, out from the milieu of *différance*. What is required is an awareness of this abstraction, and a constant *vigilance* towards the complicity of origins. The complicity cannot be done away with, but it can be attended to. It seems to us that Joan Scott has illustrated this well, as, too, does Spivak, our reservations notwithstanding. Scott's ambitions are formed within an understanding of the closure of historical science, but an awareness of the impure origin sends her off in search of, for example, the question of universal rights, supposedly neutral—from the perspective of sexual difference.⁹⁸ Understanding this complicity, she understands that history cannot do away with philosophical rigour, but must try hard to be more than a little philosophical, all the more to be itself.

⁹⁸ See, for example, (the first reference already in the original publication), Scott, *Gender and the politics of history*, 25, 214ff.

Conclusion

Having so strongly identified the theme of history in the *Grammatology*, and argued against any idea of Derrida 'leaving history behind' and moving on to something else, we now face questions of where these themes go in subsequent work. Indeed, we have already seen that Derrida refers to it in later work. In another sense, Derrida's later work is also where we have come from, for example, with a quotation from *Specters of Marx*. In the Rousseau essay, but also in the *Introduction*, Derrida notes that history always begins at the end before travelling back. But if not back to an 'origin', then to what? At least something that throws up the appearance of an origin. Let us review our results.

We began by reviewing aspects of Heidegger's and Levi-Strauss' thought. Both thinkers devoted energy to theorising history but not so that they would become historians. Rather, Heidegger tried to think through what he felt was one of the deepest problems possible: that our sense of being was not only subject to change, but also could be arrested into an 'epoch'. For Heidegger, repetition was crucial. It was thoughtful repetition of the legacies that we inherit that was the authentic approach to history. For Derrida, repetition became even more explicit, to the point of even disrupting some of the critical categories of Heidegger's thought.

The anthropologist, on the other hand sought to explain human development. But even if, with his model of a gamblers game, he removed history from being the possession of any one particular group, and focused on the relations that were established, his structuralist method, wedded to a synchronic description, was incapable of explaining the inheritances of history when he needed to. Derrida's innovation was to make the structuralism more dynamic, by combining it with insights from Heidegger. But also to suggest that Heidegger's being was also more subject to history than he thought.

We then moved to Rousseau, and Derrida staged both a way of inquiring into the genealogy of anthropology, as well a parallel demonstration and tacit dialogue with Heidegger. But if the Rousseau essay somehow traces a parallel course to Heidegger's analytic of Dasein, which is what we have suggested, could one systematically reconstruct such a dialogue? We have not accomplished that yet. Moreover, the continuous, repetitive relationship between Heidegger and Derrida require an almost endless enquiry between the two thinkers will take place.

So we traced the unfolding of a theory of an impossible diagram. This diagram was also a theory of history in several ways. First, it was developed by plotting Rousseau's concept of history. Second, it posed an impossible transcendental question to that diagram, asking the question of the origin of history. What it displayed with elegant simplicity was that the condition of the diagram could not itself appear in a diagram. Undoubtedly the illustration is relatively simply, and has definite limits. But what is not simple, and what it is difficult to describe, are the limits of, the consequences that are drawn from it.

Firstly, what are the consequences for the diagram's own transcendental question? The decisive point was that the question was addressed from a point within the diagram (this is also the point that one begins at the end). This was the purpose of Derrida's calling attention to the technological and historical situation from within which it became possible to give to something 'everyday' like writing a transcendental level.

Thus Derrida also underlines the fact that the diagram, in the range of levels in which he wants to maintain, is also impossible. The 'impossible diagram' is, it appears, an early version of the aporia, the possible-impossible constellation. It makes interpreting Derrida difficult, because of a constant dual register, an oscillation between its levels. But it is also exciting to read, for it throws hitherto unknown aspects of thought into relief. By his later works, Derrida had refined his sense of these aporias to a delicate balance, but here in the

Rousseau essay, it seems to me that we have one of Derrida's 'laboratories' for the initial development of this startling thinking. Is it Hegelian? Or Nietzschean? Or Rousseauian? Or Heideggerian? All and none of the above. Derrida has accomplished a truly astonishing range of reference with this feat.

According to Derrida's very specific incarnation of dialectic (and should we call it that?), the movement of history never succeeded in completely gathering together a truth of reason, a truth of history. The diagram never completely returns to itself, but calves off, splitting like a cellular mitosis, into more and more histories. History is proliferation; dissemination, we might say. This does not mean that there are no stories. Rather, it means that there are more stories than one can tell, and each story is a moment of provisional equilibrium, regulation, and compensation, in a tide of supplements.

One of the most interesting facets of this aspect of the diagram was the connections that Derrida makes to the research of André Leroi-Gourhan. For one of Derrida's explicit points about the impossible diagram of history was that it defined humanity without being restricted to humanity. The process of supplementation was anterior to humans, and indeed, in several passages he suggests it as a principle for all life, from the amoeba onwards. The line between nature and history is blurred. So, we might think that Derrida provides a version of a universal history, perhaps a kind of philosophical underwriting of David Christian's 'big history'.¹ But I imagine that Derrida would be extremely reserved about this, and would want to exercise a strict caution. Once again with Leroi-Gourhan, it was a case of being able to conceive of an anterior state, for example, 'face' and 'hand', in a way that was not simply based upon what we are familiar with as our face, our hands.

¹ David Christian, *Maps of Time: An Introduction to Big History*, (Berkeley: University of California Press), 2004.

By giving ‘impossible’ names to what is conceived as an ‘ultra-transcendental’ condition—conditions which produce the ‘illusion’ of the regular transcendental of being, of presence—Derrida can be seen to be revising Heidegger’s thesis of ontological historicity, the history of Being. Even the word of Being is produced, or caught, in the diagram, even if it also in some fashion helps describe it. At the same time, by giving empirical and technical names like writing to this transcendental revision, Derrida has also inspired many new areas of study in the human sciences.

But what of history—arguably the oldest of the human sciences? This is the direction we took our discussion in. A phenomenology of history helped us see not only how narrative can have an ontological basis, but also how Derrida’s thought could conceivably describe our social and individual histories, our own narrations of life. History as a discipline usually does not concern itself with the huge scales implied in Heidegger’s ontological historicity. But in fact, Derrida’s histories were not all at this vast level. For they are also the way in which the personal and the philosophical coincide—one more way in which Derrida mixed the empirical and the transcendental.² David Carr’s phenomenology showed that the aporias of the impossible diagram are also at work within the individual life, and in fact are the principle which makes a coherence of life possible. The whole viewed from the part, and its restless movement, the *nachträglich* time of memory, and the body’s spatio-temporal awareness all can be brought into communication with Derrida’s theory. Without the repetition of the trace, we would not experience time and movement, or be able to put ourselves in the shoes of another, listening to their stories, as they listen to ours. We move through limitless numbers of histories everyday. Perhaps historians are not best placed to tell them, for what ‘facts’ would they leave? But imagine if one tried!

² See, on this note, Jean-Philippe Deranty, ‘Adorno’s Other Son: Derrida and the Future of Critical Theory,’ *Social Semiotics*, 16, no. 3 (2006): 421-433.

In following Hayden White's work, we also attempted to deepen it and show how historians perform a crucial critical role in the communal aspects of story-telling. If there is a 'politics of time,' as Jack Reynolds and Peter Osborne both argue, then it is to historians interests to participate in the conversations over time.³ Are not historians key players in the politics of time? But why are they so rarely involved in the philosophical discussion over it?

With the history of ideas we moved into territory where historians have most comfortably approached Derrida, and for good reason, we argued. But very quickly, Derrida's work turns out to intervene with a serene cataloguing of ideas at the end of history. His work plunges back into the thick of history. History is never over for him. And is it not exciting for us to be taken with him? How many other historians of philosophy make their subject so exciting? But Derrida has had too little effect in this regard, we think.

Finally, with gender, the 'shadow of shadows', we approached some history writing more directly. Analysing historiography in a way that doesn't either tell a parallel history, or pose an alternative one is difficult, on account of the fact that historians rarely bring their conceptual commitments into the limelight. But Joan Scott's *Gender and the Politics of History* is different in this regard, and so we dwelt on the way in which she brought a theoretical framework for gender together with empirical research. Turning to Spivak's 'Rani of Surmur' heightened the challenge, with colonial dynamics added to the mix. But we were soon lost in the shadow of where woman was posed as an allegorical predicament for all thought. My nerve failed here, I confess, trailing off and second guessing myself. But the challenge is there.

Surely one of the great difficulties of doing philosophy with history is the difficulty of both learning many histories, and not disrespecting them in the process of doing philosophy. The

³ Jack Reynolds, *Chronopathologies*; Peter Osborne, *Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-Garde*, (London and New York: Verso, 1995)

truly great element of Derrida's work is to take concrete aspects of history, and hotwire them into the great philosophical traditions. This makes both 'ends' of the tie more lively. But it also creates numerous difficulties in trying to respect both ends of the spectrum. In tying them together, Derrida has enlarged our sense of history. He has shown the curious and adventurous way that surprise developments can impact the most deep seated characteristics of the human. But he has also shown the incredible power of those human schemas, the richness of thought, its openness to the infinite variety of history, the weight of its ideas, and the steadiness of its equilibrium. But little by little, the supplements occur. Another history, and another. I hope here, in my own little supplement, that I have been able to present a different Derrida here for my reader. A Derrida not of slippery texts, but one of science and story, the human, the animal, and the rich diversity of life. A thinker of the burden, and the freedom, of history.

Appendix: Final ethics approval

Bibliography

Archives and interviews

I consulted two sets of archives, as well as conducting a number of interviews and conversations with people who knew Derrida, or were involved with *History and Theory*, and philosophy of history more generally. The interview project was approved by Macquarie University's Ethics Review Committee, and the reference no. is cited in the Statement of Candidate at the beginning of this thesis.

I thank the interviewees here for their time and generosity in speaking with me. Interviews were granted by Lynn Hunt, David Hollinger, Hayden White, Mark Bevir, David Carr, Allan Megill, Brian Fay, Julie Perkins, Ethan Kleinberg, and Joan Scott.

The first archive was the Jacques Derrida papers at Irvine. The second set of archives was the 'working files' for *History and Theory*, which the journal editors kindly allowed me to consult. Given that these files are still in use, they are not categorised like a regular archive collection. I have tried to be as descriptive as possible in the references I have given.

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