

TEMPORAL FOUNDATIONS IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF HISTORY: TWO ESSAYS

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ABSTRACT: The two essays included here are parts of a longer study of temporality, and the genesis of the “religious.” The first part, “Multiple Nows,” depicts a universe in which a present to past relation is establishable from any and every point in consciousness. The resulting perspective differs from that offered by the linear timeline of chronological history. Remembering where I put my glasses is an historicizing act, as fully as is remembering when the Battle of Zama was fought or who won there. On this alternate view of temporality the genesis of the historical perspective is the historicizing subject. The second essay, “The History of a House,” places the observer before an historical structure, then asks where the historicity in the structure is. We discover that the historicity is put there by the observer/subject. This discovery resembles our earlier discovery that historicity is generated by an infinite sequence of nows. The two essays converge on a description of historical cognition as subject-generated.

KEYWORDS: Temporality, history, knowing, subjectivity, Paiutes, Monemvasia, historicity, truth, referent.

INTRODUCTION

The two essays which follow are interrelated parts of a longer study of time. The first essay, “Multiple Nows,” sketches a view of the relation of present to past which diverges sharply from that of linear history, with its assumption of a single past-to-present and present-to-past directionality. The view of “Multiple Nows” is of a free floating temporality, in which present and past are generated in infinitely diverse combinations whenever a new now establishes a past for itself, whenever an old now establishes a present for itself. “The History of a House” pursues the same issue as “Multiple Nows.” This time we stand before an historical structure, a mediaeval house, and ask what about that object is its “historicity”? The answer is “nothing.” The historicity of the house is ascribed to it by the historian/perceiver who is standing before the house.

Both of these “notes” on history portray aspects of a non linear, perceiver generated temporality. The second essay adds to this perspective, from a viewpoint which will become central to the larger work embracing these notes. The absence of temporality, from the house of Part two, is understood as a negative, a potential for temporal/spatial “filling in,” which undergirds the historical object, the house.

ESSAY 1

MULTIPLE NOWS

I will be several places today: waking in bed, in Barnes and Noble drinking coffee; at the dining room table tonight. Each venue will be a now, a unique time view point from which a past and future extend. From each of these three nows the history of, say, the Paiute people--or of my left toenail, or of the cultivation of cloves in Zanzibar--deploys itself differently, with a different tone, weight, thickness. There's a different "tone" to each of these three historical deployments. If I direct attention to them, the Paiutes will seem distant or near, indifferent or touching, according to the light in which the moment presents them. I use the word *seem* with care. Is the history of the Paiutes really dependent on the mode in which it deploys itself from my now? Seem can mean appear, in the sense of not be; he seems to be sick, but in fact he is faking. Or seem can mean appear in the sense of come into appearance, become visible. That's the sense in which Paiute history will deploy itself as near or far, etc., will seem near or far.

Will the history of the Paiutes be different at three different times today? That is the question here. *Something* in that history will not be different at three different times today. The "real chronology," the Paiute historical "timeline," will be the same in face of all three of today's nows. Or so it seems. But will that really be the case? Will the timeline really be the same at all three times? The sequence of facta that compose "Paiute history" will be the same throughout the day despite the multiplication of nows from which Paiute history deploys itself from me today? Of course even that is not quite true. Historical facta are forever being added and subtracted or redescribed: a new Ming dynasty palace adds itself to the timeline registry, thanks to the accident of a Beijing dig to prepare the Olympic stadium; a Piltdown forgery will be unmasked, leading to a redescription of a sequence in prehistory; a new pottery sequence is discovered near Danger Cave, and the Paiute timeline is enriched. Certain events in any historical timeline will be highlighted by certain interest groups: Soviet Russian historians will highlight the uprising of Spartacus; American consular officials will keep Bury my Heart at Wounded Knee in a locked drawer. Timeline debates--what goes where, what effect a given addition has--are the daily fodder of the classroom historian, and often modify historical sequences. By and large, though, the timeline is not subject to the kind of tonal or affective account I mentioned above, by which Paiute history takes on a different quality "according to the light in which the moment presents it."

Then what conception of the nature of history are *we* looking at here? Are we looking at two different kinds of history? Timeline history on the one hand, and on the other an affectively shaded history governed by the "multiple nows" we began with? Will the timeliner deride affective history? Is not the affective historian--the timeliner will ask--opening up the search for historical reality, for *wie es eigentlich gewesen*, to a myriad of fragmented mini histories? Doesn't the multiple now perspective undermine the key doctrine of chronology, the positing of a unitary past-to-present-to-future movement

in human time? Why should Paiute history be affectively shaded, so that it is different tonight from what it is this morning? Isn't the construction of chronology the primary function of thought within the temporal? To all of which, of course, the envisioner of alternative times has an answer. Shouldn't the timeliner have anticipated these attacks against an inherited temporal system which has nothing but the shaky (and often self-interested) factor of institutional memory to give it ontological dignity? And once the door is opened to multiple nows, aren't questions legitimately bound to pour forth? What kind of now does orthodox history presuppose, anyway? Is this history always the same, whether deriving from the present, past, or future? If time can be fractured into the deployment of multiple nows, can the rigid past-present-future linearity of the timeline be sustained? Does it not now--on a newer perspective--become possible to imagine a now which is "deeper into the past" than the events deploying out from it; in other words, is it not possible to imagine a reversal of time's arrows? (The Battle of Zama is not only the terminus of reflections from my chair this morning in Iowa, but it is the genesis of new confidence and power in Rome, and growing Roman control over North Africa.) Cannot the present be seen as the past of the past, the element that gives meaning to what was once the present, but is now itself called "the past."? If so, don't we open the door to yet another compromise of the timeline perspective? When we link the past to the existential condition of the knower, don't we let the element of passion, or at least compassion, into the historical enterprise? We are both the children and the parents of our pasts. There it is, truly, the affective dimension of a new multiple nows historiography. The implications of such a reversal of perspective are huge.

TIME'S ARROWS

In cosmology there is dispute about whether time has a direction. Is linear time a property of the natural world? In the world of human affairs normal usage assumes that time is unidirectional. Mesopotamian clay tablets customarily indicate the date in their past when they were made, as do paving stones in Mount Vernon, Iowa. School historians operate on the assumption that we who think of history are the alpha points of it. Does the obsessive readiness, with which our answers fit the past-present-future timeline implication, spring from the structure of the brain? Is that readiness not itself a by-product of self-interest? *Can* we really do what we played at describing in the previous paragraph; can we introduce a new historical map of time, an affective time?

Let's see!

I'm writing a book about the history of the Parthenon; Plutarch's comments about Pericles' building projects are part of the evidence I'm dealing with. Starting to reread this old Modern Library edition of Plutarch is the beginning of a chain of pursuits in the mind which will lead me farther "back into the past," and then again pull me "farther up toward the present." I am here/now; Plutarch is "back there" commenting on Pericles; Pericles is even *farther* "back there." Look at the way my present now has generated another now, that of Plutarch looking back. Plutarch was looking back through tradi-

tional historical glosses furnished by his time. That looking back was part of his now. And recognizing that is the point where we must start re-evaluating the directionalities of the entire historical process. In fact we are into more than geometrical reversals now. We have to ask ourselves a fraught question about active and passive roles in historical thinking. Was Pericles the passive and reified object of Plutarch's historical glance? Am I under Plutarch's scrutiny? Do passive and reified properly describe the kinds of presence once living actors assume in the historical web? historical dating

The issue of historical dating, implicit in my history of the Parthenon, springs out at me. What is a date? How and why do we assign them? I telephone an old historian friend. I ask him how to find out more about the history of historical dating. My friend refers me to a colleague who is an expert on Mesopotamian history and its dating practices. I speak by phone with her, and "learn a lot"; I am still thinking back to the time scale she provides me. In the midst of trying to understand *her* I remember what my wife said yesterday morning: don't forget to buy milk. I had forgotten. I entertain this obligation even while discussing Assur bani a pal, even while trying to remember whether my wife's request or the Professor's information came first. Each of these products of historical memory addresses me existentially this morning. My friend himself becomes for me this morning in a fresh now; so does his colleague, so does my wife, so does Assur bani a pal. The now in question is a Schein, a cropping up, in which a certain historical past lives. Of each of those croppings up it is relevant to say, as I did of Pericles, that it engages in a reciprocal relation with my identity that knows it; as well as with a vast cross section of collateral "historical events," which I frequently know along with it. (Ashur bani apal has, as part of this network, acquired a fresh relationship to my wife's comment about coffee.) Historical "dates" begin to seem like participants in a transhistorical, causality-free lattice work, which knows no past.

POSSIBILITIES

Possibility: 1) time's arrows may move in two directions, backward toward the past, or from the past toward the present; 2) past, present, and future are terms without stable referents, the past coming under consideration as a present, the future as a past, as it becomes part of an actuality in, say, a present which can be viewed from the past, as Plutarch can be "read by" Pericles, I by Plutarch, and my grandson by me. Possibility: 3) the temporal element is in some way illusory, or compacts itself into an identity in which past, present, and future lose their time-layering functions.

AFFECTIVE TIME'S LANDSCAPE

Welcome to the topography of affective time--its landmarks, distancings, black holes, energy zones. We start to see through new lenses, as did Galileo when he looked at the mountains of the moon through the thirty magnification lens he made from cast-off tubing. Our lenses disclose new landmarks: from the construction of the Great Pyramid, to a night at Christmas with the flu, to the memory of a record playing "Strangers

in the Night.” Each now reads the others. The past, or shall we say the present created by memory, is crowded with historical inceptions. In *The Past is a Foreign Country*, David Lowenthal surveys the ways his multi-nowed past pervades the present. We all live with the past at every moment. Between us attending to it, and the Neolithic cave painting of the Sorcerer of the Dordogne, six thousand years evaporate in a puff. Perceiver-perceived relationships somersault over one another. Macchu Picchu, eight hundred years old, is taking a picture of me among the Japanese camera crew who came to photograph it. The history of my left foot or the history of your arthritis have lived us, you might say, for some time now. Nor is the past simply crowded, so crowded that at some times it seems there is no room left for us.

Affective history is a landscape pitted and scarred and humped beyond description. The Roman victory at the Battle of Zama will filter to me distantly through memory like the light from another galaxy; this event will be the barest foothill in my affective time/space. Zama rarely lives me. The sorrow of the loss of my dog looms like a mountain in any twist of historical light. My humiliation, at forgetting the perfect of the Greek verb *luo* in a sunny morning class at Dartmouth, stays.

DIMENSIONS OF PASSION

To approach a multi-directional flow of time, parting that fabric’s web from the far as well as the near side, reflecting on time as a being-made chronon as well as a fait accompli, is to suffer with the outflowering flow of time, as well as to wonder at the vastness of what has become in time. To cast your eyes over time’s valences is to feel the huge asynchronous inner web of the temporal which is driving you into the corner of the instant, then opening through you from that instant. In your disclosure to the power of the past, with which you are at every instant inter-creating, your compassion is driven into the open, as it can never be in a survey of chrona linking past to future by a causal chain. Which is not to say that the causalists Gibbon or Prescott do not shed compassionate understanding onto vast swathes of chronology; but that they do so from within their perspective; in which though the past is over and done with, the historian’s magnanimity accords new life to all it touches.

Heading into the desert, somewhere east of Tonopah, my archeologist friend Sam starts to discuss Paiute history. He talks of weaponry, basketry, burial practices, and language deposits. He will do his best, he says, to give substance to the empty spaces on the map, and on the map of history. He will introduce me to Paiute skills easy to master in retrospect, but which, like all skills, will when seen from the far-side-approaching-us have to be viewed as *considerable achievements*; especially when those skills have to be exercised in a bone dry desert, with limited tools, and on a skimpy wild life supply. “By 1500 B.C.,” Sam says, “bow-making technology was underway. For the best of bows the Paiutes would pick a short piece of mountain juniper, three or four feet in length”--he il-

lustrates with his hands--“backed with sinew. To attach the backing they had to have at least rough scrapers, grinding stones, and some sharpened adze blades. Different technologies, from different periods, came together at 1500 B.C., just at the point of creation of this bow. This bow is a point of historical intersection,” he continues, “at which a variety of skills were joined. Look how much more becomes possible, when you get to this stage of construction. You can make a strongly graspable elliptical handgrip, bow tips curved backwards a half inch til they slot into the nocks. And then, and then...” At this point Sam starts in on the issue of the wood itself. He tells me that, once the bow wood had been fastened by cords to another wood piece, to hold it firm, the bow-wood was put aside in a dark, dry corner, where it might remain for months or even years. Sometime around 1000 A.D. this curing technique reached perfection. I am all ears! I look at the man closely!

Sam may think I need to be convinced of the truth of his facts. Maybe he's *that* kind of historian, convinced that he's the responsible guardian of a verifiable truth. But in fact I'm not questioning his truth. I don't care about his truth. Rather I yield to his detail. I'm ready to concede accuracy to his account of the bow-making process, no contest; it all did happen once, and he knows something about what happened and when it happened. Sam seems relieved to hear my yielding, as though somehow the new affective view of history, which he knows I am trying out on him, would be put to rest by the introduction into his historical account of time-depth and precision. But he has nothing to fear from me on that score. I am not seeking a new depth of any kind, to which I should think him a poor guide. Nothing of the sort. I am in no way fretting at some supposed shallowness or vagueness in Sam. Isn't he, after all, responsibly historicizing the Paiutes, trying for completeness, exhausting the factum?

What I most want is freedom from the claustrophobic “to be repeated” of human time. Time as closed circuit maddens me! That's why I smile whenever Sam steps around to the rear of the time dog, rubbing the nap from past to present, making me glimpse aspects of atlatls or bows *in the making*. Even that rubbing-tidbit isn't enough for me. It turns out I want more than just a sense of the inner texture of temporality. I want the affective integument of the historical. I am hungry for the emptinesses of time, as well as for its date-laden corpus. Emptiness seems to me the internal ally of the hard work of making history.

Vast limits of time

As I absorb, then wander in mind to the rear of the atlatl event, as I try to imagine the process of diffusion that brought this innovation within range of Paiute practice, and greatly increased the tribe's hunting yield, I think; *what narrow words Sam the archeologist and I are spreading on the wind*. What are these vast sums of time, and these ingenious inventions the Paiutes employ into the winds of their future? We can begin to answer by regressing in mind, from us back to the atlatl. We can do the atlatl backwards, starting from that rudimentary bow, then going further “backwards.” We can give ourselves the sense that in this “regressing” we are filling

some of the “gaps in our timeline.” We can proceed “backwards” to basketry and grinding stones and trace elements of linguistic development; we can thus fill our time, between Logan and Salt Lake City. And we will be doing what, if I correctly interpret my friend? We will be working back and forth across arid maps full of names and numbers, ascribing predictable arrows of past-present energy. But will we be confronting the emptiness of historical time?

“I’m going to let you carry me back,” I say to Sam, “arrow by arrow, to the point where, well, we “know nothing”...beyond Danger Cave, beyond the atlas, to the brink, going “back,” of eventless time, which is simply time for which there is no tangible record, into which no, or almost no, data can be inserted, or only enough to ensure us that the Paiutes (say) were still there, as though we had any doubt...I can see, I believe, that even when I stroll with you back to 6000 B.C., the “date” of a cave like that of the painting of the Sorcerer of the Dordogne, I will, well, not have gotten anywhere beyond the lip of, well...”

I am not chafing only at the “to be repeated” but at the entire realm of quantity, and Sam knows it. He hits me broadsides. “You say you’re only looking for a new way to honor history, and to let the words of our mouths recite the deeds of our past? You’re going to fit me out with a new system for achieving that? I suspect your revisionism is the work of a poet, not much more than a remapping metaphor.”

He goes on to talk about the realm of quantity and its devotees. He mocks me. I flare up. “My solidarity with the Paiutes, from my friend the mailman Dave back through the banishment to the Reservation sites one hundred fifty years ago, from there back to”...and suddenly I realize that I am answering him in his own terms. I need to put my speech where my thinking has been. “Sam,” I say, “the square kind of speech you historians thrive on is nothing speech...it is words--mind you I’m not challenging the fit of language to reality--it is words aligned stringently along a string of date beads, it is words taking each event as a factum, without its history and its futurity in it. It is a hollow pretence at depth and a simplification of the arrow of time...”

I grow breathless!

Hardees? Why not?

FIGHTING BACK: WHAT I THINK

i

Affective history is a malleable gel, in which there are as many nows as there are conscious humans living in an event world. When are those nows? Are they affixed to the moments in which they were actively being nows? Does the death of a consciousness that was a lifetime of nows eradicate those nows? Or are those nows inscribed in “the nature of things” All these questions pour forth. One goes too far, too fast, with the issue of nows. But the issue is that rich. Or richer. Now’s imply then’s. This implication has a “spatial” element to it, for we tend to track temporal regress in spatial terms. “Then” suggest “back there.” (This is the basic process of timelining, which is a string of beads concept, going from here to back there.) We should resist this spatialization, even while using it, for

it disfigures the character of temporal experience.

When we bring the affective perspective to bear on the history of the Paiutes, we find it equal to the number of consciousnesses times the number of elapsed instances operative as the Paiute now-field. Only an infinitely small number of those conditions of awareness will be non-trivial; those of Sam and me, for instance, being among the rare cases. Such an account is a far more precise symbolic equivalent, to Paiute history, than is the timeline chronometer, which postulates a universal now and a universal then.

ii

Has time a direction? If so, where does its arrow point? Cosmologists dispute the question. It is imaginable that physical time moves both backward and forward. Psychological time can move both backwards and forwards. We can dawdle into the past or actively recover the past. We can fill the present with the anxieties and dreams of the future. But the time under discussion here, affective historical time, is distinct from psychological time. We are discussing a time as real as the time of physics or psychology. The time we are discussing is medium and occupant of a unique realm of variable past-present relationships. This time is susceptible to diverse directional arrows. You, Sam, have showed me both directions in talking about the bow. You discussed this weapon from the stand point of a self looking back; you also invited me to consider the procedure of making the bow--and it was through that aperture that I saw to the bi-directional movement that appears to regulate the "flow of time."

iii

Affective time is graspable as a whole, but not as the "historical whole" understood in chronometric history. The great system thinkers in the philosophy of history--Vico, Spengler, Toynbee--have sought to embrace the totality of the human experience. Affective time presents a different kind of challenge to the holistic thinker; he/she must factor in a mathematical dimension, a calculus of the multiple relationships between any nower/knower and the past, a flexibility to include the bi-directional character of time. He/she must have some susceptibility to geometrical relations, as they play out in transhistorical relations. But the skill set required of the affective time historian is not formalistic; he/she must be able to appreciate, inside the calculus of relationships, the privileged, the indifferent, and the meaningless/null category of juxtapositions.

I wimped out

What Sam thought of this Hardees mini- history I was never to know, for our trip pressed us forward; Salt Lake City by midnight! Furthermore Sam was tired. He had offered me, slyly, a whole compendium of informational accesses to the history of the Paiute people. I had only just let him get into the bow issue, a bit of the atlatl, then I had wimped--on linguistic traces, normally my forte, basketry, ho hummh, and sherds, yawn. It was not good of me. But as you see, I have disengaged a concealed motive for my waywardness. I have a new way to look at history.

"Let me tell me you a personal story, Sam. Twenty years ago I went to British Honduras. I took transportation in the back of a fruit van, with fifteen others, and for twenty four hours we rattled along the coastal road. We visited every pothole we could, we fell in and out of sleep, and eventually we came to a river we couldn't cross. Recent flooding. So the

driver shoveled us out onto the roadside about ten kilometers from Stanns Creek. We started walking, moms and kids and some itinerant fruit pickers from the North. It was a desolate moment, still before six in the morning, only a trace of sun on the muggy horizon, mosquitoes breeding in our faces, the works. It was a little after seven when we got into Stanns Creek. When I was young I used to dream of travel, as a way of adding place names to the list of my experiences. I was a middle class experience freak. On my first trip to Europe, as a teenager with my Mom, I thought that continent splendid and stylish. Back in Indiana I digested the trip. I suspected there was a psychological mechanism at work, inflating the European experience. Europe was on a list and by God I was going to check it off. Stanns Creek was also just part--though what a different part-- of my list!

On the streets, yawning men were rubbing their eyes and straggling into Dorothea's restaurant for Nescafe and hot peppers. Little kids were running this way and that, fetching water, slipping in the mud. Broken down cars were everywhere, fleets of mosquitoes, the occasional fat belly sitting in front of his block house listening to a transistor which buzzed with Belize City news. Talk about desolate moments! Talk about the anti-Europe!

I look across at Sam, checking him out. He says nothing. "I've seen a world stuck at that Stanns Creek level, in southern Nigeria. Just stuck. Poverty, sure, but that's not it. That's only the surface. You can be happy with poverty. I'm not talking happy or unhappy, just stuck. Paiute stuck. Stuck like that Mexican seaside village Graham Greene dissects at the beginning of *The Power and the Glory*. Know what I mean?" "Know, yup," says Sam, not quite comfortable. Am I trying out a version of pc on him, implying he comes from a history made of and by the top dogs? Can I reassure him?

"Sam, I ain't no friend of humanity. I've just noticed that most of the world, most of the time, falls below the level of an historical account. Of course it's not quite that simple. Some crew cut grad student at Princeton will write a dissertation on the coastal economies of Central America, and he'll spend a year in Stanns Creek, and the knowledge factory will grind this bit of humanity up in its mills. But once the momentary knowing process has passed, it's like this bit of humanity was never there. Having been known is like having been glanced at one afternoon on the street. I'll say it again"--now he's starting to squirm--"I ain't on nobody's side. I'm not p.c. Quite the opposite. I'm a man of the Fall--cast a cold eye; *curavi, humanas actiones non ridere, non lugere, neque detestari, sed intelligere*--but what I do know is that your orthodox timelines history, which sure as hell won't include Stanns Creek, is by that the weaker. He smiles. It's like he's patting my hand. He's heard it all before? He feels he can meet my charge by insisting that the timeliner must select? He sees nothing in what I've said that throws its weight behind "affective history"?"

DARK PRINT, WHITE SPACES

Chronometric time punctuates the void with dark black print and figures to match. We concentrate on the black print, of course, and beam as we add a few new subheadings. Certain actions would never be recorded in print, like Jim's eating a fish sandwich at MacDonald's yesterday, or Assur bani a pal tripping over a log.

Chronometric history has a place for such events--it could fit Stanns Creek in--but has limited interest in them. Why? Is it because they fall below the limit of significance? Or *is* that the reason for the lack of interest? Is the reason that there is not time, paper, or evidence enough to fill in all these spaces? Is it that chronometric history runs into a limit on its project? When it comes to eventless time--cyclical/ritual time, the time of simple endurance--Stanns Creek time--chronometric history is mute.

What, then, about "affective time?" Affective time has no master project. It does not aspire to fill in all the blanks, nor does it address the time of the human past as though it were a grid. For affective time Assur bani a pal's tripping is as historically embedded and significant as the dropping of the Hydrogen bomb on Hiroshima. Breakfast at Dorothea's can not only occupy a central role in affective history, but can serve as an inception of that history, or a final chapter in a history written from a particular standpoint--that of a Jamaican emigrant who ends up in British Honduras, and goes on to become the proprietor of Dorothea's.

I rag at the guy! "A timeline is useful, like a shopping list. You can determine where you are in it, what's been done and what needs to be checked into. In fact the whole apparatus of humane scholarship, which entered Western culture with positivism, quantification, and the search for an undiscoverable *wie es eigentlich gewesen ist*, has its chief use as an ordering principle, a useful check-in table. We should not ask more of the bitch than she can give, and we should not cry out like Nietzsche, that history rarely gives us anything to help us live better. That's not the job of history. History has nothing to do with making us better.

"Playing with time's arrows is a good way to surround the object of historical knowledge, viewing it now from its not quite yet side, now from its fait accompli side, looking back. Is there any incoherence to viewing the future as the creator of the past, which makes the meaning of the past stage by stage clearer? From the knower's viewpoint, furthermore, the simple romp from one side to the other of the bow-making process, seeing it now "ahead" now "behind," is a good strategy for ruffling the hair on the temporal hound.

"The "play with time's arrows" intersects the adoption of "multiple nows," place-events from which we springboard ourselves one way or another through the past. For most of us, most such historical directional sallies are null/categories. I rarely "think of" Tongan history, you rarely think of the history of Champaign County, Illinois, where I grew up. Nonetheless interest groups spring up--scholarship is a waltz of intersecting interest groups--which bring tectonic shifts of attention now here, now there. The unstable now lives its access to former nows of the self, not to mention its access to "restored" former nows of the past: I can never be Dave my Paiute mailman, but I can make trial runs at being his now; just as I can make a trial run at being Victor Cousin's now, as he confronts a text of Plato. The labile historical dimension of the now founds the glowing cursor of human consciousness, which lives as a restless scan. As the now makes its scanning rounds it surfaces now here, now there, eyeing the course of historical time from every possible angle.

"Coursing the text of the past, the now consciousness forever stumbles on black holes, empty spaces. These spaces are the white page that separates the bolded date-faces in the historical timeline. These are spaces where 'nothing happens,' where a man sits eating peppers outside a café in Stanns Creek at seven in the morning. These spaces occupy most

of the 'available area' of time, and proliferate where recorded time has not yet set its print.

"Finally, the topic of the passions. They won't save the world, but then neither will chronometric history, which locks us into the breathless space of a 'this has been done.' Affective time *will*, though, open at now/points and from the life of the knower. As life promptings rise in the midst of the passions, and rinse themselves cleaner with the age and experience of the historian, there is eventually room for the growth of compassion. And what is that? It is the dry fruit of the fall, steeped in the awareness of human limit. It may not be true that none deserve our compassion more than such as the Paiutes or the British Hondurans of Stanns Creek, but it is true that none receive more of our hearts that those we find by the side of the road, rejects of the long march to 'progress.'"

ESSAY 2

THE HISTORY OF A HOUSE

1. We're in Monemvasia, the Gibraltar like rock off the East Coast of the Peloponnesus. Many narrow passages wind through its residential quarter, up and down the small town of churches, forts, and private dwellings. I go up to one of these "old houses." I read about it and its part of the town, carbon date its foundations, make sketches of it, photograph it. I touch it. I become as familiar as possible with the house. I surround it with all my knowing and recording equipment.

Does the historicity of this house--it seems to have been completed on April 6, 1372--appear in the list of things I come to know in knowing this house? Is there an "historicalness" to the house? I don't mean "does some historical reference enter into things I would say to describe the house?" It probably does so enter. I mean: "Is there any aspect/feature of the house before me that in itself is, or even declares, some temporal situation about itself? Is there any aspect of what is before me that is historical? There is an inscription with a date, but it offers a date rather than temporality itself."

Historicity doesn't leave a mark. Whatever exists in time is always present, existent in time, although it can exist as a "reference to time."

2. When I say that the house in front of me was built on the date named in the date marker inscription, have my words about the building's date no referent? Am I just talking into the air? My words "about history" have no referent, at least in the correspondence sense of reference; in the sense that a referent is a determinable guarantor of the thought or statement; a gold standard against which the thought can be minted.¹ My words about the house's historicity involve no thought (expression, assumption)

1. "The meaning of a statement lies in the fact that it expresses a conceivable (not necessarily existing) state of affairs. If an (ostensible) statement does not express a (conceivable) state of affairs, then it has no meaning. It is only apparently a statement. If a statement expresses a state of affairs then it is in any event meaningful; it is true if this state of affairs exists, false if it does not exist." *Pseudoproblems in Philosophy*, p. 325 in *The Logical Structure of the World and Pseudoproblems in Philosophy*, Berkeley, 1969.

directed toward the gold standard of a referent. Or so it seems. But is this dismissal plausible? Is the whole weight of ordinary language, with its assumptions about temporality and a “real past,” not too powerful to be dismissed? Isn’t some other meaning of reference of interest to us here? Isn’t there some other suitable field of reference, by measuring against which I can say that the date indicated on the house is “referring to something real?”

When I claim that the house before me was constructed on a certain date in 1372, I run into a problem as soon as I try to locate a referent, “out there in history,” to which my claim can apply. What happens if I refer to myself as the reference point of the statement? Can I be the guarantor for my own statement about the date of the house’s construction? Isn’t it I who have *asserted* the date of the house? Isn’t it I who have established and who support the historical reference field--actually the swinging rope ladder of linear history--in terms of which the house acquires its historicity? Am I not the guarantor, the responsible, of linear historical time? Doesn’t the date of the house depend on me, who date it, or, the same thing in effect, who corroborate some inherited dating system? Can we take this route to rescuing a meaning for the house’s foundation inscription?

This theory of reference might offer some (cold) comfort to us in our search for a grounding of linear time; for evidence that the historicity of the Monemvasia house can refer to something, can in that sense “mean something.” This alternate theory provides a guarantor, you/me, who has drafted the army of official historians as his/her temporal frame makers and frame fillers. A guarantor? Well, yes, a team-player guarantor. A guarantor who has bought into the reigning team ethos, the ideational network that constitutes linear history. Can so many assistants be wrong? Can I as data-guarantor not take comfort here? Not feel reassured that Profs X and Y have backed up my date-giving, which in turn backs up the presumption of historicity in the house? Maybe, maybe I’ve found a variant defense for the idea of reference. and found some work for the historical nature of my Monemvasia house to do. The “cold” in “cold comfort” is because of that bottomless present, across which this whole rope-ladder of time has been extended--by me. I may have team support in my enterprise, but that doesn’t mean we couldn’t all fall through the bottom together. The reference-establishing drama could be as simple as the following: while falling through the bottom of existence, a man stretches a rope of time above him, with which he can pull himself back up out of the pit. The linear historical past is a highly respectable fiction, which is created by a man standing in a well.

3. Let’s go back to that house at Monemvasia. Let’s talk about what was indubitably present there, what I found when I approached the house, reading about it, making sketches of it, carbon dating it. There was a formation of matter, which appears in various transformations of the house’s physical/chemical structure. This matter, like the linear rope ladder “history” I want to attach it to, is also a construct. It does not contain its meaning in itself. To evaluate the meaning of this *matter* I require a referent, as much as I require one when I conceive of the historicity of the house. The matter may have

a life of its own, which it occupies without me. But when I appear, the matter takes on meaning. It becomes some kind of matter; that is it acquires meaning by being related to what it deeply is. Yet I don't see or touch what underlies this matter, what defines the matter, the underlying physical/chemical structure. It's true that before me I see color, shape, a corner of lintel, a dissymmetrical gray cornice. The ever morphing physical-chemical underlying structure is in a sense making itself into what I see. But I cannot get behind the phenomena of that matter, to its own ground. Perhaps the house's material grounding is guaranteed by me/you from the same bottomless pit of the present, which assured the grounding energies of linear time. The underlying physical structure of the Monemvasia house may lay claim to existing, every nano second, at a different point in the continuum of linear history; but only because that physical (like the temporal) structure is sustained by me and you who conceive it. It has been said that fundamental nature, the elemental of physics, is always in the year one, accumulates no time around it; if so, that would be a state in which nature enjoys the company of linear "history," which like nature is a construct.

4. Nature, like history, is sustained by an imperiled guarantor. *Can* I serve as material nature's referent? Of course. I can father matter, as I fathered time. But in that case what do the atoms and their nuclei mean apart from my naming-guarantee of them? What kind of fathering is this? What are the elementary physics particles in my account except my account drained of my account, until all that is left is what my account was about?

5. Keep me in front of that house in Monemvasia, or in front of what's left of it--after we've unplugged it from nature and time, and plugged it into ourselves. What's left of it is exactly what was there before I started asking what kind of historicity of the house would survive analysis. I pretended that the survivor, among historical and material accounts, might be myself--humanity the namer--sustaining the accounts both of the history of human affairs, and of the history of molecular affairs within the house. Did I deprive the house, or the history of the house, of anything, by taking over from it this guarantor or reference role? Did my undermining of conventional historical or physical analysis do anything to the house which is standing there opposite me? The house still seems to be there. I can touch it and think about it and write about it. I can hit my head against it. I can ask when it was built and what it was built of. Have the accounts of which the house's authorship has been denied not been essential parts of the house itself?

6. Both matter and accounts of temporal interactions with it seem built to survive being interpreted away. So I'm the guarantor of historical time and the micro-structure of nature? Me and my fellow namers, fellow human analysts? Big deal! Maybe "guaranteeing," "giving accounts" is *not* such a powerful establishing act. Are we giving the guaranteeing-account its due? Should we consider alternative ways of interpreting the account itself? Should we, like some postmodernists, take the turn of prioritizing the account, of insisting that all is account, all our talk about the world a kind of narrative.²

2. Derrida turns to a passage from Montaigne--"il y a plus affaire à interpréter les interprétations qu'à

(After that level of demystification, all that would remain would be to attach the ac-counter to a super accounter; God? And God to...? There would be no point of rest in the regression, which however conceals the threat of becoming infinite.) We might have made a move that could have led toward the postmodern. That would have been the beginning of one strategy for recovering the validity of our accounts, for fighting off the insulting suggestion that our accounts were impotent. But going that close to the postmodern, in accounting for the account, would mean something we are not up for here: saving the reliability of language or other symbol systems by decentering them, by making all accounts into new versions. To follow that saving move would mean agreeing that the efforts to name the historical or the micro-atomic, of the building at Monemvasia, are cut off from the designatum by the gap between explanation and designatum, are forever giving fresh accounts and themselves becoming subjects of new accounts. The accounting enterprise would be turned into a game of infinite regress, making a mockery of the existential stakes put in play by our effort to know.

Let's recap. Recourse to the guarantee-establishing self leaves much to be desired as an account of the source of our descriptive systems. But we need to remember the distress that led us to our recourse. We could not find the "historical" or the "physical" element in the Monemvasia house itself, because there was no foundation for either of those descriptive categories. That's why we brought in the self as guarantor. But we didn't want to commit, thereby, to the total "unknowability" or "unnameability" of the house-object. We didn't want to remove the house from the world. We balked at the particular notion that all is an account. That premise seemed to dissolve into endless language skeins the legitimate desire to know the house/object in question. We only wanted to make it difficult to explain how that notion was not completely satisfactory.

7. We are talking about getting to know an object in *time*. How do we know the temporal placement of the House in Monemvasia? We have slashed at the roots from which grows the tall tree of linear history. We are also talking about getting to know a object in space, an object in its material presence. Yet we have slashed at the roots from which the space tree grows: the supposed hard reality of matter-filled space. We have at the same time, while attacking the solidity of the self as guarantor, raised serious doubts about even that last-resort gold standard for historicity. Are we not left with a universe in which a surprising perspective forces itself on us, a perspective in which such attributes as the spatial or temporal dimension of things can only be understood as the not-yet-named or the not-yet-knowable? Cannot the history of the House in Monemvasia be best thought of, after all, as "to be added"? Are these negative compounds--the not-yet-named, the-not-yet knowable--going to be our wonder path out through the bush, into what is once again the light of truly denotative statement? Are we going to settle for a kind of apophatic epistemology, in which not knowing, or being in process toward knowing, is the only way to know?

interpréter les choses"--to herald his essay, "La Structure, le Signe et le Jeu dans le discours des sciences humaines" (1966; in *L'Écriture et la différence*, Paris, 1967; pp. 409-428.) In that essay Derrida uses the centrality of accounting as part of his fine tuning of structuralism, and of his analysis of the work of the *bricoleur*.

So it may be, and at such a point we may indeed now find ourselves, in our quest for an historical and spatial field of reference, yet there is more to say about this perspective that has forced itself on us. We have not only discovered a realm of the not-yet-named and not-yet-knowable, but we have come upon a crucial distinction which needs to be made between two kinds of not-yet-named and not-yet-knowable. We need to agree on exactly which kind of knowing process we are making a place for. On the one hand there is the not-yet named which negates globally, which negates the class of *all those things*, like things with temporal or spatial tags, which cannot be named. This kind of not-yet-named oversees the entire expanse of knowing and designating. This not-yet-named is “all of the above” when it comes to what temporal or spatial element is disproportionate to whatever we might want to call it. Then there is the not-yet-named, not-yet-known which is the obverse of particular objects or event-horizons, which is the shadow inside reality of “things,” the coat those things are seen from the inside of its tailoring. This is the not-yet-named that holds descriptive promise for our need to name, to date in historical time or to plumb physically. We need to name the precise inside of what we cannot name. We need and want to name the specific not-named.

Let’s go back to the house in Monemvasia. It has a date, it is composed of this or that material, it is of this or that form; all nameable, datable, all knowable--though in fact, as we’ve tried agreeing to see, the house appears, precisely in the acts of being known or named, to be itself *not* what the knowing or naming would have it be. There is no elementary particle structure or temporal designation to be named in the house. The house itself is not anything you can name or know, although it is precisely, and in congruence with its specific nature. The house is the way the house is precisely what you can’t name or know. The two halves of that discrepancy fit each other exactly, as in the fine work of a tailor the outside and the inside of a coat fit each other exactly.

8. Naming and dating accounts are seen to be byproducts of the ever vanishing self of the moment. These accounts include both a global panorama of the not-known or not-named in general--the unnameable universe; and a panorama of all the specific not-yet named, not-yet-knowable shadow obverses of all the specifics naming and knowing could not embrace. It is this second panorama which promises to legitimate at least a very precise kind of naming/not-naming. The insinuation: *the intelligible life of a thing or person or concept--a nameable or numerable-- lies along the fault line between the nomenclature of that entity and its shadow obverse, the silence that underlies it.* It is that shadow intelligibility that we can approach to name.

9. Let’s return to the house in Monemvasia. Before me it stands, before it I stand. From a point in myself I can confer a time-marker, a style development marker, a material composition marker--appointing to each aspect of the house its term and coordinates. The house itself--much as we have highlighted it, by standing before it and knowing/dating/analyzing it--is *in* this whole experience only as an unnamable which is unique to this particular act of not knowing/ knowing or not naming/ naming. No wonder the house remaining there is in some sense “silence,” secure in its awareness that I or you can only know it as this house you or I cannot know.

10. What, then, *is* discourse about the nature of things in the world, and about the placing we give them in the world? In *An Essay on Man* (1944),³ Ernst Cassirer argues that mankind is before all a symbol-maker. Cassirer recapitulates some then current comparative studies of ape/human mental development, and concludes that human advances in the sciences and arts, in social development, in speculation are all derived from our superior capacity to handle symbols. That was seventy-five years ago. We no longer formulate the denoting process in the manner of Cassirer or Suzanne Langer. But even in a more recent cultural movement like Postmodernism, the belief remains that what-is is nameable. The pre-established harmony between naming and named may undergo scrutiny. Accounting may be consigned to a process of infinite regress. There may be much talk about decentering and slippage (*mou*). But that naming and named are in a ballet of correspondence with one another is not questioned. Naming acts have termini, which are at the same time morphs into fresh reference.⁴ Unlike Cassirer and, say, Jacques Derrida, I am engaging a view which butts forcefully against the assumptions of the “symbolizers.” I lean to the view that what is there to name, date, or locate is not to be designated by language or other symbol systems. I am dubious of the power of homo symbolicus, even of man the decenterer. I have isolated an object-surrogate which can be named, but it is only a surrogate, and to read by its light is to read “in negative territory.”

Am I drifting toward a *doctrine* of silence?

11. Silence? The denotative meaning of the Monemvasia house, in front of which I stand, crashes against the object itself...fecklessly. Ensured by the obverse coverage of it, by the meanings addressing it, the house not-nameable, not-datable, not-placeable hunkers like an alternate universe inside the meaning that seeks it. The silence in question, surrounding the house, is the silence unique to the house in question, and not a fractal of that undifferentiated ocean of silence in which we have our being, as a sustaining condition of our reality; or to which the inward human turns as to a source. The parallel silent universe of which we speak is not the “rich silence of being,” but the implicit obverse of denotation. If we called this silence “logical silence,” an “inevitable interior predication,” we would be closer to the principle in question, than if we enriched our discussion.

This logical silence carries with it no mandates. It doesn't change or shape our world, because “our world” has no need of our silence; “our world” is by nature satisfied with the representations of reality that facilitate our social comforts, our explorative

3. Cassirer, *An Essay on Man* (New Haven, 1944), p. 24: “Between the receptor system and the effector system, which are to be found in all animal species, we find in man a third link, which we may describe as the *symbolic system*. This new acquisition transforms the whole of human life. As compared with the other animals man lives not merely in a broader reality; he lives, so to speak, in a new *dimension* of reality.”

4. I dealt with this issue of language and its relation to the named, in an early essay, “From Naming to Fiction Making,” *Giornale di Metafisica*, 1958, XVI, 569-583. That essay takes up the issue of the mimetic factor in works of literary art. Are those works “about” anything? I pursue the quest, for a convincing description of “how we name”, in *The Fact of Literature* (Amsterdam, 1973). The evolving personal shadow of these studies, leading toward the perspectives of the present essay, can be traced in Frank Shynnagh's *Song Broken, Song: The Work of Frederic Will* (Mellen, 2008).

adventures, our capacity to seek and receive help. Still the logical silence in question here exercises its own unremitting pressures. This silence guarantees that we can live ourselves under the illusory sign of cosmic adjustment.

12. The secret life of what cannot yet be named or known, by our designations, except that...it is as though our designations derived from attaching a mathematical negative to all our efforts to name. Have we here a key to entering this undisclosed negative universe? Just add the negative sign?

The *yes* we answer is our sign of solidarity with the life-giving ever-implicit. What can better sustain our enterprise of thinking and naming, the life that defines us as humans, than the negative reserved meaning our sign-systems imply?

We return to the house on its street in Monemvasia. We have been raised on the difficulties of “knowing” such an object. What does that knowing mean? What is it we are hungry for? We derive an answer from the kind of difficulty the knowledge object has, in fulfilling itself. The knowledge object swims before the interpretations of it. It *is* the interpretations of it. The realm of silent logic is where the energy of statement resides. The realm of silent logic is the birthplace of the life-giving negative.

13. What can we learn by thinking of *our* life-point as the intersection between denotative sallies and the silence implicit in them? We can enrich our pleasure in the incompleteness of our role, as “introducers of the symbol,” and meaningful actors in the world. Far from “realizing ourselves,” by flowing outward into anyone’s symbol-making account of us, we can condemn ourselves willingly to the human strain of silence. Cassirer salutes man’s symbol making powers as a source of human achievement. Even Derrida, though radically recasting the strategies of language use, avoids doubting the value of the symbol system itself.⁵ I am doubting that value, flying in the face not only of the mandarins of language analysis and use, but of evolutionary biology, given as it is to seeing survival value in human symbol systems. I am trying to put the negative in that place of honor it deserves, governor as it is of the province of silence.

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5. For Derrida, the writer is the language user par excellence, and Derrida dissolves the observer/observed view of the writer/world relationship. Derrida substitutes for that view the idea of the writer as written by the world. “*Le sujet de l’écriture n’existe pas si l’on entend par là quelque solitude souveraine de l’écrivain. Le sujet de l’écriture est un système de rapports entre les couches: du bloc magique, du psychique, de la société, du monde.*” (*L’écriture et la différence*, p. 335, Paris, 1967). Yet there is here no radical questioning of the symbolic effectiveness of language.