CONTENTS

Iain McCalman
   Editorial 3

Ann Curthoys and John Docker
   Time, eternity, truth, and death:
   history as allegory 5

Stephen Muecke
   The sacred in history 27

David Blaazer
   Reading the notes:
   thoughts on the meanings of
   British paper money 39

Miriam Glucksmann
   A contingent transmission of sociology:
   encounters with Norbert Elias 55

1999 CCR staff 63
1999 HRC visitors 66
CCR activities 74
HRC activities 77
Forthcoming conferences 84
From the desk of the Librarian 85
This issue of *Humanities Research* responds to a well known challenge thrown down many years ago by the American historian Hayden White and the cultural theorist Dominick La Capra: both criticized modern historical practice for failing to break out of explanatory models and methodologies based on the nineteenth-century realist novel. By clinging unreflectingly or defensively to an illusion of a single knowable past evoked through realistic mimesis and by ignoring the metaphoric nature of historical language, historians were depriving themselves of a rich body of modernist and postmodernist literary experimentation. Of course there was a degree of exaggeration in these claims: even the sober nineteenth century produced the reflexive, polemical and many-voiced historical genius of Thomas Carlyle. Still, our critics were right that such subjective and imaginative styles of history writing were becoming increasingly rare in the 1960s: my own teacher, Manning Clark, was seen as eccentric by many of his contemporaries for continuing to teach Carlyle's prophetic 'pseudo-history'. Now, on the edge of the new millennium, we can point to some notable experimental histories. Simon Schama's part fictive *Dead Certainties*, Natalie Davis's filmic *Martin Guerre*, and, closer to home, Greg Dening's brilliantly poetic and theatrical Pacific writings, Donna Merwick's fascinating recent biography written in the present tense, and Paul Carter's influential postmodernist history *Road to Botany Bay*: all these come to mind.

The four essays in this issue argue, however, that there is room for more thoroughgoing exchanges with contemporary literary and cultural criticism. Ann Curthoys and John Docker, in an elegant duet, uncover deep-seated connections between history and literary allegory, suggesting and showing how we can open up our stories to alternative generic models such as Walter Benjamin's rococo and apocalyptic mourning plays, where expressionist excess prevails over classical restraint.

Stephen Muecke makes kindred points from different angles of vision, arguing for a return to the sacred and primitive in history writing—defined as ritualized moments of deep communal unity expressed in stark, simple terms. History's magical ability to recast the present, has, he argues, been richly demonstrated by the huge-selling and morally compelling writing of frontier historian Henry Reynolds. Perhaps, as Thomas Carlyle and Manning Clark both declaimed, it is time for the historian to regain the mantle of prophet.
But if this is to happen one of the most intractable bastions of unreflective scientism that must still be stormed is that of professional economics: David Blaazer strikes a clever blow with a fascinating deconstruction of British banknotes, showing how the most taken-for-granted medium of paper currency has evolved in complex visual and iconic relationships to changing constructions of national identity.

And finally we turn to a historical prophet long neglected in his own country, or at least his country of adoption, the sociologist Norbert Elias. Miriam Glucksmann gives us a moving personal testimony of her familial and intellectual relationship with this Jewish refugee and Leicester University academic whose brilliant first book *Civilizing Process*, carried three great handicaps: it was published in Switzerland, in 1939, and in German. Lack of English translations undoubtedly hampered subsequent knowledge of Elias's writings over the next fifty years, though his fame has soared in Continental Europe where he is now recognized as a thinker of the stature of Adorno, Benjamin, Marcuse, and Habermas. His 'figurational sociology' uses detailed historical case-studies to explore the large, shifting patterns of social interdependency through which humans are woven together in complex power balances, making him as important a source of historical theory and praxis as Marx or Weber. Moreover, Elias speaks particularly to our time in his transcendence of conventional political polarities and in his ability to link the private history of emotions with the public history of state formations. For those historians who have yet to read him, a prophet awaits you.

IAIN McCALMAN

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The personification of history is a woman robed in white, who stands with one foot resting on a square block of stone and looks backward. She writes in an open book supported on the back of a winged figure of Time ... In one hand he holds a pruning knife or sickle, and the serpent ring of Eternity.

'Historia', in Cesare Ripa, Iconologia, 1603

Scientists can fiddle their data, steal from one another, and defraud the public; only historians can betray all the generations of the dead.

Nancy Partner, 'Making Up Lost Time: Writing on the Writing of History', 1986

... they believe European culture is in a state of epistemological chaos. White people, they say, don't know what to remember and what to forget, what to let go of and what to preserve. They don't know how to link the past with the present...

Deborah Bird Rose, 'Hidden Histories', 1992

History is not just a science but also a form of memoration. What science has 'established', memoration can modify. Memoration can make the incomplete (happiness) into something complete (suffering) and the complete into something incomplete.

Walter Benjamin, 'Convolute N', Arcades Project
Ann: In Tony Hillerman's crime novels, the two detectives, Jim Chee and Joe Leaphorn, with different temperaments and skills, begin following clues to a mystery unbeknownst to each other, pursuing separate trails, only meeting towards the end with what they think they've worked out. Though this is an essay jointly worked out and worked upon, I start in the first person, introducing issues which lead us to bring together the concepts 'history' and 'allegory'. John will then explore allegory as an aesthetic, referring to Walter Benjamin's *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* and Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia*. I return to explore the ways in which an understanding of history as allegory helps us develop more complex readings of historical texts; I take as my example (and I could have taken practically any example) Australian historical writing on the convict past, especially the female convict past, a foundational story in white Australia's bizarre beginnings. We will then jointly conclude with some reflections on history's mimetic and fantastical character, relating historiography in its formative period to nineteenth-century desires to defeat time and death, either by preservation or by precision and exactitude of reproduction, as in Egyptology, taxidermy, photography, and in fin de siècle film. Through a focus on the nature and forms of historical discourse, in this case on its inescapable and complex allegorical character, our ongoing project is to try to specify the Westernness of Western historical writing—in Dipesh Chakrabarty's fine phrase, to 'provincialize Europe'.

**INTRODUCTION**

The act of remembrance through history, the desire to impose 'form on formless time', lies deep in our culture. Not in all cultures, as Lévi Strauss remarked: historical thinking is not necessary thinking, is not essential to our humanity. But in Western societies it is inescapable, we cannot think without or beyond distinctions between future, present, and past, and such thinking is deep in the classical and Judeo-Christian heritage. The Greek Hellenistic view of history, as in Herodotus and Thucydides, suggests that history can be a science, based on the omnipresent workings of repetition, causality, and continuity in society and nature. In Judaic thought, as in the story of Exodus, the figures of servitude in Egypt, flight through the desert, revelation on Mt Sinai, are conceived as historical; history is unpredictable, the messianic, or catastrophic, may occur at any moment, unrelated to previous patterns of events. In Christianity, the events of Christ's suffering, crucifixion, and resurrection are conceived as historical, the basis of Western calendrical time. The salience of Western calendrical time is also recurrently intensified by notions of the centurial, the fin de siècle, and the millennium, with an accompanying abundance of visions of utopia and dystopia, foreboding, dread, and hope.
The Western phenomenology of time is being within a substance (to borrow a term from Spinoza), entwinedly secular, sacred, and mythic, thick with notions of fall, redemption, revelation, incarnation, providence, prophecy, and miracle.

Unlike those societies that do not allow talk of the dead, regarding them as too powerful, Western societies, imbued with notions of eternal return, resurrection, the messianic, the apocalyptic, the millenarial, invoke and evoke them endlessly. The metaphysical importance of Western historiography, including biography and autobiography, is that on behalf of Western culture as a whole, it attempts to defeat death, to romance eternity, by bringing the people and places that actually existed in the past, and now do not, back to life. Western historiography is always attempting to perform the miracle of restoration.

If we historians sat back to think about it, we might find our project somewhat morbid, always talking about the dead, always having to confront the dreadful inexorability of the passing of time, and the radical difference between now and then. Yet it doesn’t seem morbid in our daily practice; and we rarely feel that we are engaged in a necromantic enterprise. Reading a history book is not like walking through a morgue; we do not think of the house of history as a necropolis. The people we research in the past are not dead to us—we read their words, or words about them, and study their likeness in painting and photograph, as if looking at living people. We write about them as if writing about the living not the dead, as if in the midst of a mutually understood mimetic game, as if they are with us in the room.

(As an aside, I note that in studying the very recent past, as I tend to do, most of the people we discuss are still alive, though we do witness the death of one after another actor in, or witness to, our story, as we write. Our task of rescuing the past from the finality of being past is in this case a little different, becoming an attempt to prevent people’s erasure before their death. Through oral history, we invite them to participate in this memorializing process, to help us determine just how they will survive their own deaths, how they will be remembered.)

If history, then, is a form of defiance, it can only succeed if we think of the stories it tells as verifiably true, a truth guaranteed by Western modes of cognition. The truths history establishes prove the past imperishable: in being objectively present, history saves the past from eternal death. Historians generally agree that the defiance succeeds, more or less, that their accounts and descriptions and evocations and analyses are basically true. What limits there are will be mainly to do with limits in the sources themselves or perhaps with the individual historian. But it is not to do with the nature of the historical project itself: historians can discover the truth about the past. This truth can be attained through the special powers and distinctive
sensibility of the professional historian: rigour, intelligence, judicious selection and interpretation of facts, patience, reason, and a common sense that after practice becomes almost instinctive. The search for historical truth has come to entail commitment, overtly or covertly, to a realist epistemology: an ideal of history as embodying objectivity and logic, demonstrating causality and continuity, enabling insight into what really happened. Historical writing also entails a commitment, thinking or unthinking, to a realist aesthetic, in particular to an affinity with the nineteenth-century realist novel and its omniscient author. It was not for nothing that Henry James urged novelists to 'speak with assurance, with the tone of the historian'.

Nietzsche, theatrically critical of Western metaphysics, was especially caustic about what was coming to be modernity's ideal historiographical mode and the historian's personality. Of historians who aspire only to describe the past as it was, he said savagely:

Their major claim is to be a mirror of events; they reject teleology; they no longer want to 'prove anything'; they disdain to act the part of judges (and in this they show a measure of good taste); they neither affirm nor deny, they simply ascertain, describe ... All this is very ascetic ... The modern historian has a sad, hard, but determined stare, a stare that looks beyond, like that of a lonely arctic explorer ... There is nothing here but snow; all life is hushed. The last crows whose voices are still heard are 'What for?' 'In vain' ... As for me, such a sight makes me furious, such 'spectators' embitter me against the spectacle more than the spectacle itself—meaning history, of course ... I have no patience with mummies who try to mimic life, with worn-out, used-up people who swathe themselves in wisdom so as to appear 'objective', with histrionic agitators who wear magic hoods on their straw heads, with ambitious artists who try to pass for ascetics and priests yet are, at bottom, only tragic buffoons."

If Nietzsche's rage and scorn is warranted, and the stories historians tell cannot be seen as true, if they are recognized as reflecting the times in which they are told rather than the times they attempt to bring to life, then the historian has failed in his or her bid to recover the past. It remains hidden, dead, gone, and the enterprise of history is proved impossible. The desire to free Historia, history personified as a young woman, from the dread knife of Old Man Time, has become a rescue fantasy; the distinctive powers of the historian, once so thoroughly believed in, are now seen as illusory; and only alchemy, or magic, can bring past and present together.

Nietzsche attempted to outrage historians' desired impersonality by foregrounding his own voice, positioning, feelings, reflections, by holding the mimetic desire up to ridicule. Yet historians were not deflected by his critique and mockery. They continued, and continue, amidst a profusion elsewhere of modernist and now postmodernist experimental play with form and genre, to adhere to a realist aesthetic. We stubbornly refuse to insert
into our narrative descriptions and evocations not directly sustainable from the documents; we are much more restrained than the historians of the early nineteenth century, those remarked on by Catherine Morland in Northanger Abbey. In a conversation with Miss Tilney on 'history, real solemn history', the sprightly young Catherine remarks:

Yet I often think it odd that it should be so dull, for a great deal of it must be invention. The speeches that are put into the heroes' mouths, their thoughts and designs—the chief of all this must be invention, and invention is what delights me in other books.

Miss Tilney replies:

I am fond of history—and am very well contented to take the false with the true ... If a speech be well drawn up, I read it with pleasure.19

This famous fictional conversation could not happen now. We historians would not allow invented speech in a history book, and where we do find it, regard it as extremely adventurous and postmodern.13

In most history-writing today, then, there continues to be an investment in mimesis: the notion that language can imitate reality.4 Generally historians would be generally irritated to be reminded how metaphoric their own language is, including their favourite terms, like 'document' (which teaches and instructs), 'source' (suggesting the springs from which a river begins to flow, a fluid origin), and 'evidence' (a visual metaphor indicating that from the vanished past which is brought back into sight).5 The tone of historical writing seems almost inevitably to require an authoritative and hidden narrator who asserts just how the past really was; who conceals rather than reveals the uncertainties, contradictory explanations, and unknowability of the past.

Here lies the threat from postmodernism, why it seems to induce epistemological vertigo, shortness of intellectual breath, sense of convulsive death to the West. In its radical questioning of Western historical discourse, indeed of the ability of language itself to refer straightforwardly to a world external to it, it suggests that the past cannot actually be recovered, that the historical project is impossible, and that history cannot but live by its own fictions, its quixotic belief in its own truth. Recognizing this threat to their enterprise, their being, many historians attack postmodernism as ahistorical, a fatal betrayal, and reassert the possibility of history.16 If we cannot see an historical account as true, they ask, then why bother with the difficult and time-consuming process at all? Can the document teach us nothing? Other historians, and I would include myself here, respond to the challenge with a desire to explore the possibilities of a postmodern history, which seeks to relate multiple narratives; to accept, self-reflexively foreground, and find representational forms for our inability to tell a single true story; and to express an ironic awareness of the illusion of a single knowable past.
In an earlier essay on history and fiction, we explored the specificities of historical rhetoric, the methods by which historians convince their readers that what they say is not only possible, but actually happened. In this essay, we suggest that understanding the specificities of historical discourse can be approached via allegory, a mode of interpretation and figuration that has been important in European and Western history since antiquity, since its invention by Greek interpreters of Homeric myths and its subsequent influence in classical, Hellenistic, Rabbinic, and Christian thought, accumulating along the way a long and rich history of conflicting traditions and theoretical dilemmas.

Allegory is usually minimally defined as a form of indirect narrative, providing treatment of one subject under the guise of narrating another, and often presenting an abstract argument through a concrete example or personified figure or image or emblem. Yet this definition of allegory is also a definition of history. History, like allegory, relies on narrative, a temporal sequence. In an endless series of displacements between present and past, the past becomes a repertoire of allegories. History, that is to say, can be seen as a particular form of allegory, always and inescapably telling a concrete story about the past as a way of pondering and reflecting on, and acting and participating in, the present, the present that yet is always in wild contradictory motion, always already becoming the past.

**Benjamin's Baroque Allegory**

*John:* In his 1928 *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, evoking the seventeenth-century German baroque mourning play (Trauerspiel), Walter Benjamin creates a conversation between history and allegory, allegory as both mode of interpretation and as a specific kind of textuality.

In the 'Epistemo-Critical Prologue', Benjamin mixes Judaic and Greek figures of thought with Cabballistic notions of micro-interpretation. The prologue suggests conceptions that have become increasingly important in continuing conversations between historiography and literary theory. The prologue proposes that truth is always historical, it does not exist in a pure realm of ideas and concepts; historical truth cannot be directly apprehended in terms of epistemology, since the language of philosophy always involves representation (Darstellung); the search for truth is consequently always indirect, as it becomes aware of the intervening presence and workings of its own language, its own representations and figures. Like Nietzsche, Benjamin foregrounds his own language as necessarily metaphoric, and if metaphoric, why not highly, outrageously, shockingly, intriguingly so. Such thinking anticipates Hayden White's now familiar argument that we should subject historical discourse to an analysis of its figurative and rhetorical aspects, which help shape a text's historical explanations.
Benjamin finds in the baroque allegory of the mourning plays the basis for a new kind of history and methodology: philosophical, self-reflexive, and self-consciously figural. In the prologue he tells us that the methodology of his book will draw on the treatise of the Middle Ages. By this he means that it will be philosophical history of a certain kind: it may be didactic in tone but it will lack the conclusiveness of an instruction; it does not seek an uninterrupted purposeful structure; its method is representation, but representation as digression (Darstellung als Umweg). In pursuing different levels of meaning in an object, philosophical history has both the incentive to begin again and the justification for its irregular rhythm. Like the mosaic, it represents fragmentation into capricious particles, emphasizing the distinct and separate. What might be most valuable to investigate is the most singular, eccentric and extreme of examples, the most unusual or isolated; examples to be found even in the merest fragment, the minutest thing.

In the prologue Benjamin distinguishes features of the mourning plays that relate to aspects of early twentieth-century modernism, not least in affinities with the Expressionists: exaggeration, a violence of manner, extravagance of technique, neologisms, arbitrary coinings, archaisms, inducing in the spectator a characteristic feeling of vertigo.

In the first half of the book 'Trauerspiel and Tragedy', Benjamin says that the mourning plays were so long ignored because they were held to be a caricature of classical tragedy, offensive or even barbaric to refined taste. Rather, he suggests, the plays work on their own theory of drama, where the influence of Aristotle is notional or insignificant; in particular there is no unity of place, and any will to classicism is overwhelmed in wildness and recklessness, in highly baroque elaboration. The mourning play is historical, its main characters figures of the monarch, courtier, and intriguer. The monarch and his court become the keys to historical understanding. The monarch is an incarnation of history, the history of his society, holding the course of history in his hands like a sceptre. But he always leads his society towards disaster. In such baroque drama contented radiance is unknown; the baroque knows no eschatology, no ideal telos; the world is disturbed, like a cataract, imminently flowing over the edge into catastrophic violence, revelling in scenes of cruelty and anguish. As a theatre of extremes baroque drama was drawn to the exotic, to visions of absolute imperial power in the Orient or the theocratic empire of Byzantium. As tyrant the figure of the monarch evoked sympathetic wonder as holder of dictatorial power, even as he is surrounded by fratricide, infidelity, wife-murder, battering of children's brains; the paragon mythological figure here is Herod, figured...
as anti-Christ; Herod who erupts into madness and destroys himself and his entire court, his life ending in insuperable despair.  

Yet whether entirely good or entirely bad, whether as tyrant or martyr, the monarch will be destroyed: in the baroque theatre of cruelty history emerges as universal destruction, leading to a proliferation on stage of torture and death and corpses. In the baroque drama a young chaste woman, a princess, will represent the hope of restoration of order in the state as well as in the monarch's troubled soul and volcanic emotions; but she too will be victim. History is enacted as the hopelessness of the earthly condition without consolation or grace or salvation or redemption.  

In the second half of the book 'Allegory and Trauerspiel', Benjamin observes that the baroque drama, in its bombast and excess and explicit confrontations, is opposed to the ideal of harmonious inwardness in classicism, to the values of clarity, brevity, grace, and beauty. Benjamin also anticipates Paul de Man and the deconstructionist and postmodern reprise of allegory in suggesting that allegory in baroque drama opposes the romantic notion of symbol, where the beautiful is supposed to merge with the divine in an unbroken whole. Whereas in symbol the transfigured face of nature is fleetingly revealed in the light of redemption, in baroque allegory the observer is confronted with history as a petrified, primordial landscape. Everything about history that has been untimely, sorrowful, unsuccessful, is emblematically expressed in a face in the form of a death's head, *facies hippocratica*.  

Benjamin wishes to reprise the complexity of the modern form of allegory that developed in the sixteenth century. He notes that even great contemporary writers and theoreticians like Yeats still use the standard argument in neo-classical and romantic aesthetics alike that allegory is a conventional relationship between an illustrative image and its abstract meaning. If, however, says Benjamin, we look at the literary and visual emblem-books of the baroque period we can appreciate allegory as a distinctive mode of expression and writing that emphasizes riddle and enigma in pictorial signs, often perceived as akin to Egyptian hieroglyphs (though studied before the knowledge provided by the Rosetta Stone). The common hieroglyph emblem of the winged snake biting its own tail is used, for example, to signify the concept of time. Such emblematics might emphasize the grotesque, associating its effects with buried ruins and catacombs. In allegorical interpretation antinomies take plastic form in the conflict between cold, facile technique and eruptive expression. The didactic aspects that allegory might start out with become ever less clear as Egyptian, Greek, and Christian pictorial languages entwine. There is constant tension between the desire to codify, educate and instruct, and the baffling indirectness of exegesis.
The expression of an idea coincides, Benjamin points out, with a veritable eruption of images, giving rise to a chaotic mass of metaphors. In an interesting momentary touch of Orientalism, Benjamin writes that meaning, significance, rules through voluptuousness, like a stern sultan in a harem of objects.30

Connections between meaning and sign, idea and image, become bewilderingly obscure, as the one and the same object can just as easily signify a virtue as a vice, indeed can arbitrarily signify more or less anything. The image is never more than a fragment, a rune. Any false appearance of totality is extinguished. Personifications and emblems offer themselves to view in desolate, sorrowful dispersal.31

Benjamin relates the conception of history in the mourning plays to the baroque cult of the ruin in the iconography of allegorical emblem books. History is recognized only under the sign of eternal transience. The baroque took pleasure in juxtaposing the statues of idols and the bones of the dead. In this guise history assumes the form of irresistible decay, and Benjamin cryptically notes that allegory is beyond beauty, that allegories are in the realm of thoughts what ruins are in the realm of things. Nature is not seen in bud and bloom, but in over-ripeness and decay. Nature is always fallen. The baroque piles up fragments ceaselessly, without any strict idea of a goal, in the unremitting expectation of a miracle, which never comes. History—as fragments, remnants, images, metaphors, personifications—stays within ruins, which Benjamin refers to as the finest material of baroque creation; ruins which are consciously constructed.32

For Benjamin in the Trauerspielbuch history reveals no narrative of progress, and certainly nothing like a Hegelian dialectic. When, as Beatrice Hanssen points out, Benjamin suggests that there may be a redemptive promise in allegory even as it appears to fall into nothingness, he also admits that this may be allegory's last ironic dialectical trick.33 It is from fragments, unredeemed by totality or salvation, that we ceaselessly constitute and reconstitute allegorical histories.

HISTORIA

John: In another essay, we tracked metaphors in English historiographical writing, noting how often they are gendered and erotic (the male historian despairs that he cannot finally capture and penetrate the mysteries of the female past), and how often they destabilize the very argument they are meant to secure.34 In these historiographical works, the past is personified, implicitly, in allegorical terms, as Historia. Like any allegorical figure, Historia has a long and complex history herself.

When discussing early modern books of iconology, Benjamin refers to Cesare Ripa's remarkable Renaissance handbook,35 which has an emblematic
representation of Historia. In the introduction to his 1971 Dover edition, its full title Cesare Ripa, Baroque and Rococo Pictorial Imagery: The 1758–60 Hertel edition of Ripa's 'Iconologia' with 200 engraved illustrations, Edward A. Maser explains that Ripa, born in Perugia about 1560, published in 1593 in Rome his collection of allegories, personifications, and symbols, intended for artists, writers, poets, sculptors, theatrical designers, and builders of wedding and funeral decorations. At first it was in written form only, but from 1603 was illustrated. Various editions of Ripa's iconographic compendium spread throughout Western Europe, becoming the standard reference work for the representation of allegories. It made Ripa famous and he himself kept developing and expanding it for the rest of his life. The *Iconologia* was translated into many languages, French, German, Dutch, Spanish, and later editions would constantly add to and rework Ripa's original edition, which had, Maser suggests, a profound influence on literary and artistic thinking for over two centuries, only waning towards the end of the eighteenth century.

The Hertel edition of 1758–60, produced in Augsburg in Southern Germany, was, however, almost without written text and consisted of full-page illustrations. It drew on the ornamental engraving for which Augsburg in the eighteenth century was famous. The Hertel edition added new features, in particular the *fatto*, offering, in the background, an example of the main allegory in action in some well-known episode or personality. As well it added a Latin inscription and a German couplet explaining the story or personage used. The Hertel edition combined several alternative allegories into a single figure, as Ripa himself had suggested could be done. The plates were also framed with fantastical ornamental forms. Maser then tells us that in this his own edition he restores a short commentary drawing on the much longer commentaries that are included in many other editions, including Ripa's productions.

The palimpsestial mode of compilation and composition of the Dover edition can stand as a representation of the allegorical mode itself. In effect, there is no specifiable origin to an allegory. In his evocations of various allegorical figures, representing abstract ideas (of vices, virtues, characters, emotions) in visual terms, Ripa drew on a variety of sources—classical literature, the Bible, the bestiaries and encyclopedias of the Middle Ages, and books dealing with the pictorial writing of the ancient Egyptians. Later editions drew on Ripa and these and other sources, and added further commentaries and illustrations, emblems and *exempla*.36

In Benjamin's terms, we might say that in the iconography of Historia, history, as a perennially young woman, is connected to the ground of historical writing as the hope of fact, truth, and objectivity. Her relationship to time and transience, to death, cruelty, and violence (time is Saturn, or Chronos, eating the stone given him
instead of his son Jupiter, whom he
planned to devour) is openly displayed.
Eternity is connected to the sickle or
pruning knife. Behind Historia and Time
are ruins, perhaps suggesting the mighty
pagan empires brought low by Time's
scythe. Yet there is a Christian narrative as
well in the *fatto* with its representation of
Christ appearing to the two disciples
walking to Emmaus. How do we relate this
Christian story to the suggestion of Rome
in the statue of the soldier on the ruined
wall? Pagan and Christian representations
and histories enigmatically jostle side by
side. As Benjamin said, the multiplicity of
examples, in fragments, lying amidst
ruins, overwhelms any clarity and
certainty of interpretation.

The allegories in the Dover edition of
Hertel's edition of Ripa's iconography
suggest multiple layering, so that in
Benjamin's terms interpretation is always
starting again in an irregular rhythm. Such
can be likewise suggested of the allegorical
mode of interpretation that much
historical investigation reveals itself to be.

**CONVICT WOMEN: ALLEGORIES OF
MODERN AUSTRALIA**

*Ann:* This understanding of allegory as an
endless series of stories, of stories about
stories, can be applied to any specific
historiographical field. As a body of
historical work builds and diversifies, the
chances become increasingly remote of
achieving the ideal of a written history
with a mimetic relation to the past, of
getting ever closer to the past as it was, or
might have been. For as the historiography
grows, we have a palimpsest, stories about
the past that evoke and overlay and
connect with and critique other such
stories. The primary texts multiply, as
more research is done, and their possible
readings also multiply, as historians refer
to each other and back to the primary
texts, and to different parts of those texts,
in the process creating an increasingly
complex body of stories. Complicating
matters further, the written histories speak
not only to the primary texts, and to each
other, but to their own times and concerns
as well, so that we see in any series of
historiographical texts traces of more
recent times, speaking to and
contradicting one another. Our histories,
in this complex and intertextual way, even
when we attempt to respect the alterity of
the past, become allegories of the present.

I take as my example the emblematic
figure of the convict woman in Australian
historiography. We can see the convict
woman as a continuing ironic double of
the official allegorical figure of Australia
as New Britannia. On the south side of the
Sydney Town Hall there is a stained glass
window created by Lucien Henry (a
communard exiled to New Caledonia, who
had come to Sydney after an 1879 amnesty)
to celebrate the 1888 centennial of New
South Wales. In its central panel is
Australia, a portrait of a young woman,
standing on top of the upper part of the
globe with Oceania inscribed on it. Behind
her head glow the rays of the sun. She
looks boldly at the future. She holds a trident and a miner’s lamp, with fleece and ram horns on and around her hair. Her iconography suggesting the colony’s wealth in wool and minerals and its connections to the treasures of the sea, Australia radiates confidence as emblem of settlement, development, and progress.37

Such confidence is absent from the haunted historiography of the convict woman, a figure who undergoes multiple transformations and reversals. Historiographical debates about the convict woman have been waged on a number of fronts, some of them rather curious for serious historical inquiry: her sexual morality, degree of criminality, and general character; her value as a worker and as a mother; her experiences of transportation and life as a convict and an ex-convict; her relations with state authority, and especially her transgression and rebelliousness, individual and collective; her relationships with officers, employers, and convict men; and her influence on subsequent gender relations in Australia.

The convict woman did not emerge as an historical figure until the 1950s. In the immediate aftermath of the convict period, as the convict past was put behind the growing colonies, there was little on the convict system included in most later nineteenth-century histories. While the notion of an evil system was elaborated in fiction in a popular tradition representing convict life as hell on earth—as in Australia’s most famous nineteenth-century novel, Marcus Clarke’s For the Term of His Natural Life, and the stories of Price Warung—these, too, had little to say about convict women.38 And when in the early twentieth century written histories began to appear which were relatively sympathetic to the convicts, as in the work of George Arnold Wood, female convicts had still scarcely entered the story at all.39

The convict woman enters the historiography with the work in the 1950s of historians such as Manning Clark, Lloyd Robson, and A.G.L. Shaw, each of whom emphasized the criminality of the convicts. In their histories, the convict woman was a professional prostitute, evoked in highly moralistic terms as degraded, debauched, and drunken: a picture drawn from a range of sources written during the convict period by officers, surgeons, and other middle-class observers. From such sources an enduring lurid portrait emerged of the convict colonies constituting one large brothel, which, the contemporary observers thought, should be closed immediately.

Enter the feminist historians, especially Anne Summers’ best-selling Damned Whores and God’s Police, a foundational text for Australian feminist historiography. Speaking from the perspective of early 1970s women’s liberation, Summers accepted the verdict of her predecessors of the convict system as Gothic, but reversed the sympathies. The women were all
prostitutes, but this was the fault of an evil order which permitted them no alternatives. The colonies were a place of debauchery and sexual coercion of various kinds: again, early New South Wales as a giant brothel, run by the 'imperial whoremaster'. The convict women, though, could offer resistance, and did so in the Female Factories established to house those unable to work on assignment. Another feminist historian writing at the same time, Miriam Dixson, saw the convict women as the victims of victims, prey to low self-esteem, 'a deeply crippled self vision', which has been passed on through generations of Australian women since. In the same vein were the Australian film Journey Among Women (1977) and the TV mini-series Against the Wind (1978), made soon after the appearance of these books, both depicting a brutal system, especially dangerous for convict women. There is something of the notion of a Gothic island of horrors in all these texts, whether we take the viewpoint of the male contemporary commentator or mid-twentieth-century male historian recoiling with distaste from the convict women they see, or whether we take that of the feminist historians which took the side of the women, seeing them as victims of a vicious patriarchal system.

Meanwhile, a different historiography was developing, some of it rethinking the convict system as a whole. Michael Sturma pointed out that all this historiography, men's and women's, was based on a misunderstanding of the use of the term 'prostitute' in the original sources, for it meant simply unmarried sexual relations, including monogamous cohabitation, as well as sex for sale. John Hirst, in Convict Society and its Enemies, also warned against uncritical use of nineteenth-century descriptions of convict society. He pointed out how often the picture of corrupt masters, a brutal system, and degraded convicts, was drawn by opponents of transportation setting out to discredit the entire system. It is from these critical observers that we gain the image of New South Wales as a giant brothel, run by, in Anne Summers' wonderful allegorical personification, the 'imperial whoremaster'. A group of women historians began to rehabilitate the convict woman, emphasizing her effectiveness as a worker, and as wife, companion, and mother, so that the first generation of non-indigenous native born were generally agreed to be healthy, non-criminal, and hard working. Portia Robinson and others wanted to rescue the convict woman from the epithets of harlot, strumpet, and whore that the male commentators and historians had allocated her. The convict woman, they wanted to say, conformed rather better to middle-class norms and values than has been generally recognized. Whatever her life in Britain, she became a more or less reformed character in the colonies.

Robert Hughes' The Fatal Shore (1987) combined elements of all previous scholarship. Hughes uses sources he
himself suggests are suspect to create his own painting of hell, a lurid portrait of lust, drunkenness, and degradation. On the voyage out, as he depicts it, the women had frequent intercourse with the seamen and marines. After quoting a ship's surgeon's description of such scenes, Hughes comments: 'It sounds like bedlam, and probably it was.' When the women landed at Sydney Cove, two weeks after the men, and the convict men and women could get together for the first time, there were scenes of riot and debauchery all night. This was accompanied by a storm, the women floundering through a 'rain-lashed bog', pursued by male convicts intent on rape, as 'a lightning bolt split a tree in the middle of the camp and killed several sheep and a pig beneath it'. He goes on: 'And as the couples rutted between the rocks, guts burning from the harsh Brazilian aguardiente, their clothes slimy with red clay, the sexual history of colonial Australia may fairly be said to have begun'.

Hughes described the ship-board selection of women convicts to be servants as a 'slave market', and emphasized the helplessness of the women just as Anne Summers had done. The Parramatta Female Factory was a scene of 'disgusting squalor'; women were subject to degrading language, and — now sounding like Miriam Dixson — he feels that 'the pervasive belief in their whorishness and worthlessness must have struck deep into the souls of these women'. He paid special attention to Norfolk Island, a place of secondary punishment: 'In such an amoral environment, although male convicts had some rights (however attenuated), the women had none except the right to be fed; they had to fend for themselves against both guards and male prisoners.' While flogging of women was rare in New South Wales and Tasmania, it was common on Norfolk Island, and Hughes devotes time to describing the chief gaoler's 'love of watching women in their agony while receiving a punishment on the Triangle'. By far the best known of any of these texts, The Fatal Shore thus combines, with an evident appreciation of the spectacle, the moral condemnation of the nineteenth-century male commentators and twentieth-century male historians, with an older popular tradition which saw the convict system as entirely evil, with a feminist sympathy for the powerless and exploited convict woman.

The convict woman has continued to fascinate historians in the 1990s. Deborah Oxley's Convict Maids vigorously attacked the whole historical tradition of trying to decide if the convict women were 'good' or 'bad', as if that were a proper historical question. 'Convict women', she writes, 'have been divided into two camps, the wholesome and the depraved, paralleling the divide between casual and undeserving which in turn reflected women who were either passive or aggressive. This is a preoccupation with character, but does character matter? Character is not independent of circumstances.' Oxley then explores the
textual sources of the negative views of the male historians of the 1950s, Clark, Robson, and Shaw, arguing that they were especially influenced by Henry Mayhew, whose *London Labour and the London Poor*, then recently reissued, drew a sharp distinction between honest worker and member of a special criminal class. When this dichotomy was applied to women, it led to a view of convict, 'criminal', women as abandoned prostitutes. As she puts it, recalling Benjamin and Hayden White's stress on history as representation: 'Mayhew enters the stage on the third page of Robson's book, and never leaves.' She also demonstrates that in terms of occupational skills and experience, the female convicts were similar to the rest of the society from which they came. In her history, convict women become ordinary working-class and rural women, whose crimes emerged directly from their situation.48

Joy Damousi in her poststructuralist history *Depraved and Disorderly*, influenced by Foucault's focus on discourse, looks again at the nineteenth-century male observers, returning their gaze. Damousi detects in their accounts of the convict woman various sexual and other anxieties, a mixture of repulsion, fear, and fascination. She quotes the comments of Godfrey Charles Mundy, after a visit to the female factory at the Cascades, outside Hobart, in January 1851; referring to a young pretty convict woman in a solitary cell, he describes her as 'very beautiful in feature and complexion—but it was the fierce beauty of the wild cat!' She notes these observers' preoccupation with women's 'filth' and disease, and with the women's sexuality—in Damousi's terms its 'assertiveness, power and danger'.49 Damousi also looks for examples of transgression and resistance, through song, dance, joke, laughter, and rude language, and at times organized riot and rebellion.

In *Convict Women* (1998) Kay Daniels also focusses on the rough culture of convict women, and their engagement with the state, the forms of authority they encountered as convicts. In her very historiographically reflective book, Daniels opposes the notion of a coherent system or colonial policy, emphasizing the practical limitations on the vision and power of the convict administration. Officials, she points out, had to grapple with the presence of women in a largely male penal colony, constantly meeting problems and issues—for example sexual relationships between the convict women—with which they were ill-equipped to deal. While drawing attention to the means whereby convict women contested state authority, Daniels also maintains an emphasis on their substantial vulnerability—'economic, sexual, legal, domestic'.50

All these histories tell stories about the past as a way of pondering the present. All create the emblematic convict woman to suit their own times, in ways that might be clear, or may be obscure and eccentric.
The debauched whore of the 1950s and 1960s may be a figure of the imagination of male historians similar in some ways in class and outlook to the male observers whose accounts they relied on, and confident enough—and perhaps distanced from their society enough—to say unpleasant things about the convicts. The sexual slaves of the feminist imagination of the 1970s might express the anger of young feminist historians at their own treatment in their society, searching for a reason and a history for that inequality. The good wives and mothers of the women's historians of the 1980s gave women a history not to be ashamed of, incorporating convict women within a popular pioneer legend. The rebellious and economically valuable women engaged with the confused and contradictory forces of state power who emerge in 1990s histories perhaps allow dreams of transgression in the past where little seems effectively possible in the present. All these women are ultimately allegorical figures, bearing complex relations to the historical sources and to each other. An allegorical reading of the texts in which they appear enables a richer reading than might otherwise be possible.

CONCLUSIONS

Ann and John: The girl and boy detectives of clues and traces of remnants and ruins finally meet, and have only inconclusive final fragments to offer. A final digression (Methode ist Umweg).

Conventional Western historiography has stubbornly aligned its project and being with classical ideals of writing (not necessarily brevity, but there has been some interest in grace and beauty, and certainly clarity). Conventional Western historiography has placed itself high on the neo-classical hierarchy of genres that established itself from the later seventeenth century, whereby, in terms of Benjamin's Trauerspielbuch, baroque allegory was relegated to dusty desuetude, though recovered and transformed in early twentieth-century expressionism. As Bakhtin argues, genres like the carnival-grotesque, satire, fable, and popular stage burlesque were also considered low, as other to true art and knowledge; though many such genres have been revisited in late twentieth-century postmodernism. Where so much twentieth-century writing has betrayed or outraged neo-classical ideals, conventional Western historiography has, in its loyalty and fidelity, positioned itself as their true and abiding and increasingly lonely heir.

In its formative period in the nineteenth-century conventional historiography drew on, and has stubbornly continued to draw on, a realist epistemology and the realist novel. Yet it was and remains realism for the purposes of illusion, the illusion that first the documents and then the historian can tell us what actually happened. If the desire for 'lifelike representation' seemed to the scholarly writers of the eighteenth century, and to many in the twentieth, a contradiction in terms, it held a growing
fascination in the nineteenth. Various manifestations of this desire to represent, to faithfully replicate, the real, of which History was one, emerged around the same time: as Stephen Bann points out, the 1820s saw the publication of a major foundational text on the art of taxidermy, Niepce's first photographic image and Daghuerre's historical diorama, as well as Ranke's famous preface urging historians to 'show only what actually happened'. Taxidermy—the curious art of preparing and mounting animal skins in a lifelike manner—was a major scientific activity of the nineteenth century; as an act of collection and representation, it at once depended on, and aimed to transcend, death itself. History and taxidermy both attempted, in the words of Tom Griffiths, 'to reinvigorate the dead skin of the past so that it could represent, even make a monument of, ephemeral reality'.

History may also have been influenced by the Egyptology, not to say Egyptornania, of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as Nietzsche's dismissive comment about historians—'I have no patience with mummies who try to mimic life'—suggests. In Egyptology we find a less clearly realist tradition, a desire to defy death which was at once literal—the preservation of the mummified body—and fantastical. Such Janus-faced desire has been profound both for history and for other major cultural forms of modernity, such as film. As film historian Antonia Lant points out, nineteenth-century Egyptology had a long history before film, in lantern shows, panoramas, dioramas, photographs, and photographic criticism. In the subsequent development of silent film there was, Lant argues, a perceived association between the darkness of the cinema and that of the Egyptian tomb, with film as a ghostly world that speaks a pictorial language, a hieroglyphics revealed by light; there was an alliance between modern sexuality, particularly female screen sexuality, and myths of the sphinx and its silent unreadability, as well as the mysteries of Isis, offering possibilities of non-normative Eros. Egypt paralleled cinema in serving as the portal to the revelation of mystery and the fantastic. Egyptology offered to modernity a realist ideal of the representation of the dead as alive. But Egyptology also offered modernity excess and uncertainty and instability of meaning. As Lant suggests, the association with Egypt gave to cinema its enduring 'twin realist and fantastic character'.

The impulse to realism from Egyptology continued in post-World War II film. Noted for his realist theory of cinema, Jacques Bazin proposed in 1945 that the origin of all the plastic arts might be a mummy complex, a fundamental psychic need to reverse the finality of death. Bazin urged cinema to strive for the greatest evocation of reality possible. He therefore opposed non-realist aesthetic movements, in German Expressionism, Soviet montage, surrealism, abstraction. He championed filmmakers who placed their
faith in reality rather than the image. He impugned metaphor. He recognized, however, that he was proposing a contradiction: for when cinema became identical with reality it ceased to exist as cinema. But cinema, Bazin felt, had to follow an essential human drive, to preserve life by the presentation of life, and the harbinger of such preservation in history was Egyptian embalmment; for Bazin, the process of image making was equivalent to forming a death mask, a mould.

If cinema has a twin realist and fantastical character, as Lant suggests, so too has the historiography of Western modernity. Like the realist film, conventional historical discourse exhibits a desire for mimesis, seeking to make historical writing itself disappear as a presence on the page. Yet historical writing, because it is writing, is always associated with conventions (citations, references to other historians, discussion of sources) and with features of language (metaphor and rhetoric and allegory) that lead to narrative and interpretive excess: the artifice of historical writing itself; the artifice that is, says Benjamin, a major feature of the baroque allegorical tradition.

In a long romance with the mummy complex, conventional Western historiography embodies a desire to search into the darkness of the past in order to bring to light its past figures as if mysteriously still alive. Yet that past, so often conceived as female, always refuses to reveal itself fully. In the prologue to the Trauerspielbuch Benjamin makes play with the implications of the Platonic declaration that truth is beautiful. Truth, he thinks, is not so much beautiful in itself; as for whomsoever seeks it. Though truth as beauty provokes pursuit by the intellect, "beauty will always flee: in dread before the intellect, in fear before the lover". In similar terms we can say that Historia always flees the Western historiography that pursues it and tries to possess it within a realist cognition and aesthetic. Historia shimmers between multiple contradictory images of time, death, and ruins; it appears in many forms and guises, not just as hoped-for helpful Clio, but as riddling Sphinx, mysterious Isis, angry Medusa—kaleidoscopic Convict Woman—threatening bafflement and death to mimesis' singleness of vision, purpose, desire.

Allegory, as both a tradition of interpretation and a body of textuality, brings out into open theatricality and reflexivity the irreducible enigmatic doubleness of historiography as mimesis and fantasticality.

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NOTES

7 Partner, 'Making Up Lost Time', p. 92.
11 The Genealogy of Morals, § xxvi, 1887.
14 Partner, 'Making Up Lost Time', p. 97
15 Partner, 'Making Up Lost Time', pp. 94, 105, for 'evidence'.
Brodersen, Walter Benjamin ... , pp. 144–57, tells the story of the rejection of Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels as an Habilitation thesis, thus ending any hopes Benjamin might have had for an academic career.


Benjamin, The Origin of German Tragic Drama, pp. 54–56.


TIME, ETERNITY, TRUTH, AND DEATH


60 Benjamin, The Origin of German Tragic Drama, pp. 172–3, 184.


62 Benjamin, The Origin of German Tragic Drama, pp. 177–80, 182, 222.


65 Benjamin, The Origin of German Tragic Drama, pp. 169, 247 n.21.


74 Hughes, The Fatal Shore, p. 79.

75 Hughes, The Fatal Shore, p. 88.

76 Hughes, The Fatal Shore, p. 89.

77 Hughes, The Fatal Shore, pp. 258, 261.
Deborah Oxley, Convict Maids: The forced migration of women to Australia (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 86, 224.


Benjamin, The Origin of German Tragic Drama, p. 164.


Benjamin, The Origin of German Tragic Drama, p. 82.

Benjamin, The Origin of German Tragic Drama, p. 31.
Australia’s major national foundational history, centred on the sacrifice at Gallipoli in the First World War, has been contested in recent years by historians interested in the Aboriginal wars which are arguably more foundational. With the violence characteristic of the founding of many states, these wars mark original invasion and settlement, yet they have scarcely been memorialized at all. In 1998, Governor-General Sir William Deane took up this debate in strong terms saying there were ‘no official memorials to the Aboriginal Australians “slaughtered in the black wars” last century’. He was speaking on a ‘sacred’ day at the War Memorial in Canberra (Remembrance Day) launching Ken Inglis’s book, Sacred Places: War memorials in the Australian landscape.

This essay will investigate that sacred which is history’s cultural ‘excess’, and which is not investigated (despite the title) in Inglis’s thorough survey of war memorials. The sacred has, however, been taken up by others such as Gelder and Jacobs, and Taussig; it seems that the sacred and the magical have begun to reassert themselves even in the modern nation-state. A focus on the sacred in time, in history, will build on two simple questions: One: can we continue to take for granted the secularization of society? The assumption was that the major religions would continue to decline in influence, and, concurrently, the languages we use to discuss our social lives would continue to become more distant from the authority of central organizing principles (logocentrism), distributing concepts and categories according to more democratic geographies of difference. Two: are the strange and popular beliefs we are surrounded by as trivial as they seem? There are millions, apparently, who believe that Elvis is an immortal god and worship his image at shrines. There is the re-emergence of ritual in the form of various New Age cults which sometimes attach themselves to indigenous ideas and peoples. The link with primitivity is highly important for definitions of the sacred, but I caution that primitivity is not to be simply associated with the indigenous. I define a primitive idea as one whose truth is its simple assertion (‘this is the ways things are’, ‘nothing has ever changed’, ‘there can be no debate’, etc.), so the Elvis example is one of a modern primitivity.
For me, the sacred is a communication between the primitive and the civilized, arching across these poles as 'sudden flares of sacral discharge'. To the extent that history works to maintain this difference, demonstrating our progress away from barbarism, the primitive must always be there in counterpoint, the potential difference giving history its power or cultural force. The frontier barbarism of colonial violence also gives way to the serenity of its representation in writing. Far from being expunged, primitivity, or at least its ghostly representation, is therefore at the heart of the modern nation-state. And in Australia, the pattern of continually aligning Aboriginality with primitivity has obscured other primitivities, making some forms of political power continue to work along racial lines.

The sacred no doubt means many other things. It is also a community effect. Georges Bataille defines the sacred as 'perhaps the most ungraspable thing that has been produced between men: the sacred is only a privileged moment of communal unity, a moment of the convulsive communication of what is ordinarily stifled.' In this convulsiveness, the sacred partakes of energy; it is an expenditure of social energy, which makes it belong to that superstructural domain we call the cultural. It is uneven in its effects, it depends on crisis and on ritual to work. While Prime Minister John Howard would like 'equality before the law' to be a 'very sacred principle' it cannot be, for the sacred is what makes religions distinct from domains such as the law, for the same reason that a government activity like taxation or census-taking cannot be sacred. The sacred, it seems, could have a lot to say about how contemporary Australia is culturally defined, which is what Gelder and Jacobs's Uncanny Australia, sets out to show. The sacred has also helped Henry Reynolds to transform Australia's cultural identity through history writing.

In a recent issue of Humanities Research, Dipesh Chakrabarty talks of what he calls "subaltern pasts", pasts that cannot enter history as belonging to the historian's own position. The processes by which various minority histories are included in a national history are part of social democracy in general and the disciplinary renewal of history in particular, he argues. The Australian debate around Aboriginal history can be taken up from this point. The 'bringing forward' of Aboriginal histories in recent years has had such important effects in law, politics, and culture that definitions of Australian nationhood, while hotly contested, have nonetheless significantly changed. A progressivist would argue that the form and social effects of history can change further (under the influence of Aboriginal histories), and that the seed for this change lies in something that the positivist/empiricist definition of history tends to obscure: the practice of history has a sacred dimension: privileged moment[s] of communal unity' as Bataille says.
Chakrabarty speaks philosophically, yet as an historian, when he gives the example of a Marxist historian, Ranajit Guha, taking a peasant revolt of the Santal people in nineteenth-century Bengal as an instance of revolutionary consciousness at work, while the peasants themselves insisted that they were acting under the inspiration of their god, Thakur. Their actions and their history have a supernatural dimension, which we moderns can nevertheless understand: 'we have a pre-theoretical, everyday understanding because the supernatural, or the divine, as principles, have not disappeared from the life of the modern'. Now while the imperative to revolt had a sacred motive ('I did as my god told me to do'), and this was normal for the pre-modern Santals of the nineteenth century, such a motive cannot enter the language of current professional history, because 'the idea of historical evidence, like evidence allowed in the court of law, cannot admit of the supernatural except as part of the non-rational (i.e.: somebody's belief-system)'.

These are part and parcel of the anthropologizing and historicizing evening-out strategies of contemporary intellectual discourses which maintain their critical distance on their objects of study, and might resurface to rationalize wayward moments of the sacred or superstitious in everyday modern life, interruptions, in effect, to rational progress and equitable judgement. Chakrabarty argues, in conclusion, for the complexity of time to be written into historians' accounts, and for the peculiar contemporaneity of others to become part of understandings giving rise to heterogeneous histories and 'forms of democracy that we cannot yet either completely understand or envisage'.

The power of history, I would suggest, is not just in its secular making-sense. Rather, its effective magic is its ability to recast our conception of the present: 'every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irrevocably', says Walter Benjamin in his thesis on the philosophy of history.

Heterogeneous histories, then, would be temporally heterogeneous. For instance, rather than relegating the Santal or the Aborigines to a primitive then, we would have to recognize the sparking of primitive-modern nexuses then and now, in 'their' rituals and in 'our' rituals.

Aboriginal history, narrated by whitefellas, has most conventionally constructed its power by trading at the liminal portal between the modern state and a pre-state otherness: encountering untranslatable subaltern pasts, which cannot enter histories themselves fully formed in this past but are there greeting the evolving narrative in its political present, greeting its outcomes with a smile at the exit, so to speak, in a rhetorical and redemptive twist giving the narrative its national and cultural justification. The conclusion to This Whispering in Our Hearts reads like this:
If true reconciliation is ever consummated in Australia and justice is not only done but seen to be done, the moment will no doubt be applauded from beyond the grave by all those men and women who hoped in their own time that such an outcome might eventually result from the European colonization of the continent. And then, after two hundred years, the whisper in the heart will be heard no more.\textsuperscript{16}

Henry Reynolds is usually careful to say that he is addressing European Australians because he knows he is dealing in their forms. Yet, as Greg Dening wrote recently, ‘there are few academic historians who have changed Australian history as much as Reynolds.’\textsuperscript{17} Reynolds has had to do his work without the subaltern voices which might upset too much the form, content, ritual, tone, and genre of the way historians in Australia write. \textit{This Whispering in Our Hearts} contains accounts of humanitarian figures like George Augustus Robinson, Mary Bennett, and John Gribble, and the authorial figure, Reynolds, becomes aligned with this humanitarian tradition as a counter-discourse to colonialism. Reynolds was recently described by Marilyn Lake as a ‘secular priest’, in a popular article whose main point was to establish Reynolds’s work as religious-like in its moral purpose.\textsuperscript{18}

Writing history so that the sacred effect can happen means using a discursive structure where depictions of suffering, for instance genocide stories, supply the civilizing pole, the discourse of the state, with its concrete objects; ghostly images of blacks locked in a birth-of-the-nation struggle: and dying, still haunting Europeans until they attribute to them the sacred rituals that are their due; ‘they will bring their dead with them and expect an honoured burial’, Reynolds warned his white readers in his first book so many years ago.\textsuperscript{19} This is the mobilization of feeling for the sake of the nation which is the whispering in the hearts, joining forces for eventual collective and orgasmic displays (‘sudden flares of sacral discharge’): a ‘sea of hands’ at Bondi beach and outside parliament (an instance of ‘cultural activism’\textsuperscript{20} where coloured plastic hands, signed by individuals, were planted in the ground), and communal meetings of grass-roots organizations.

Culture thus performs its magic in ways historians can only allude to by speaking of ‘leaps of imagination’.\textsuperscript{21} The forces bound up and then released in the events of our lives are multi-coded and inflected. How can they be described? Their most salient feature is not the \textit{formal}, textual, transformations beloved of structuralists, nor the displacement to \textit{causes} of the functionalists, and nor is the search for \textit{meaning} likely to be the ‘native’ participants’ main aim. Signs, forces, and bodies are all essential elements that \textit{combine} in ritual processes and need to be more fully described if one is to understand how cultures work.

Consider the ritual central to Australian nation-forming history. A piece of music is played on a brass instrument by a lone man at dawn. It is a trace of rhythmic
energy emerging from a body and entering every sympathetic, permeable body in the listening host, and in its life-movement alternates inside and outside, self and other, sound and the whisper of breath. The sound swells, other forces come together and intensify into something highly ritual. Its performance is designed to increase or maintain culture by uniting subjective feeling and national myth. So as the final tone of 'The Last Post' fades on the breeze, there is hardly a dry eye at the Shrine of Remembrance. This 1920s shrine is described by Greg Dening as 'harsh and heavy, like some pillbox standing in Flanders fields, it is all contradiction in architectural design, a ziggurat on top of a columned temple ... through the ziggurat is carved a shaft. At the eleventh hour on the eleventh day of the eleventh month every year, the light of the sun beams through this shaft directly on the Unknown Soldier's tomb'. Dening adds, wistfully, as he describes yet another kind of magic: 'Or it used to, before daylight saving. It is all done with mirrors now'. Even if the older magic was more à la Stonehenge, cultural events were always 'done with mirrors'; the necessary seductive illusion which is part of their force.

The crowd gathered there re-creates the nation every time with this myth of origin. The force of this myth lies not just in its meaning construction, rather it derives from the power of death as a vital force, this derivation as complex as the seeming necessity for music on this occasion and others like it, and it is also the transformation of the bodies of those present at this ritual. Michael Taussig talks of the 'magical harnessing of the dead for stately purpose' the state's 'attraction and repulsion, tied to the Nation, to more than a whiff of a certain sexuality reminiscent of the Law of the Father and, lest we forget, to the specter of death, human death in that soul-stirring insufficiency of Being'.

There is a vitalism that can be read into the analysis of foundation myths and rituals as the condensation of positive forces in the transformation of bodies in space. Death is a positive force, to the extent that it makes gifts to the living, and in return the living must make sacrifice, which of course literally means 'make sacred'. There is no greater sacrifice, we are told, than the gift of one's life for the Nation: the 'unknown soldier' stands for the universal and arbitrary grandeur of this gift. The state, relentlessly secular in its definition, maintains nonetheless the highest form of the sacred-in-death ('the horror of the mute-absurd of the violence upon which all states are founded'). Blood has been spilt. The political stakes for the sacredness of the state are high. The political question, then, in a multi-racial and multi-cultural nation, is whose dead will count on the roles of honour? Normal political calculations of numbers and representation would suggest the Aboriginal people, now 2% of the population, should be a minor part of national life, but this fails to calculate the cultural forces of the sacred in history.
In an earlier version of this essay\textsuperscript{26} I gave an example from Strehlow's 1947 *Aranda Traditions* which narrated a ritual where Aranda people had sat in a circle and opened their veins to enable them to travel in a subterranean river of blood under dangerous territory. I was criticized by anthropologists for using material that might be 'too sensitive', meaning sacred, even though it had been published before. As Gelder and Jacobs suggest, an important part of the sacred is non-disclosure, that is, the secret. Traditionally anthropologists have conjoined secret-sacred, but I think we are now in a position to see the secret not as something to be revealed, but as the 'business' of different social categories (women, men, etc.).\textsuperscript{27} So, unlike the sacred which exceeds representation (a symbol is sacred to the extent that it 'means more' to people than just a sign), the secret may simply be a gloss for business relatively transparent in its meanings to those allowed to participate.

My use of the text was a way to pluralize my account and to carry 'the montage principle over into history', as Walter Benjamin said,\textsuperscript{28} not to anthropologize, nor historicize (we think this, they believe that; we used to think this, etc.) but to mobilize the rhetorical force of its otherness and the poetic truth (the leap of imagination) and 'sacral discharge' in a 'ritual for country'. Desacralizing the Aboriginal primitive by treating it as 'matter of fact' needs to go hand in hand with sacralizing the everyday modern and rediscovering the primitive there. The political principle here is that sacredness needs to be more equitably distributed, because keeping traditional Aborigines as emblematic of the Australian sacred perpetuates the possibility for racist divisions.

Could it be that the promise that was Aboriginal history has failed theoretically but succeeded practically? Australian history has changed, but understandings of history have not. Was it such a gift to Aboriginal peoples that their history was brought into being as a pre-history to European settlement? That in the early eighties 'twenty thousand years' became a mantra of truth? Nevertheless 'Captain Cook' histories of exploration and discovery have been displaced, and with that triumphalism deflated, history, anthropology and the law combined in a powerful way to create the conditions whereby the 'Mabo' judgement could become a reality and *terra nullius* denied.

My argument would have to concede that Aboriginal peoples, prior to invasion, had no history in the Hegelian sense; history as a set of texts setting out a linear chronology of events. There certainly was a sense of time, a sense of past events, and ways of connecting past events to ones taking place in the here and now. This historical attitude was not just produced as a set of texts, oral or written, it was produced rather more ritually or ceremonially. More thorough examinations of Aboriginal experiences of time, through textual analyses and
discussions with Aboriginal intellectuals, will perhaps provide material for the reinvention and renewal of Australian history:

Every culture is first and foremost a particular experience of time, and no new culture is possible without an alteration of this experience. The original task of a genuine revolution, therefore, is never merely to 'change the world', but also—and above all—to 'change time'.

So it may be true that time changed in the early eighties in Australia. For some people this experience was ephemeral, for others it was deeply felt, but in any case the germ of a new Australian culture was born. Many remember the discovery of ancient human cremation at Lake Mungo, and at about the same time Henry Reynolds forged his reputation as a pioneering historian with the publication of *The Other Side of the Frontier* in 1981. 'Twenty thousand years' as an activist slogan had the effect of stretching national time back into the distant past, crossing an intellectual frontier (just as the 'real bush' frontier was disappearing), indigenizing history, and creating new beginnings for the national story. This process has not gone all the way to completion; further steps could be taken, steps which would broaden the process, and in some ways make it less the business of historians, and more the business of philosophers.

The production of cross-cultural historical knowledge is not just an epistemological problem, concerning the foundations for knowledge, but also an evolving one which occurs and is repeated in rituals like 'writing an historical paper'. It is therefore crucial for Aboriginal history to continually contrast accounts of ways in which indigenous Australian peoples come to know things with ways in which Europeans institutions organize knowledge rituals. There is another example in Strehlow where he reports an account of a promising pupil of Aranda knowledge, about fifty years ago:

The old men took me apart from the other young men of my own age at an early date. They showed me many gurra ceremonies which they withheld from the other members of my bandicoot clan because they were still too young. I remember their teachings well. I often had my veins opened to supply blood for the ceremonies. I dutifully paid large meat-offerings for the instruction that I had received. Some of the ceremonies were too secret to be shown even to ordinary men of the bandicoot clan ... My elders kept repeating these ceremonies time and again in my presence: they were afraid that I might forget them ...

Now while university students don't come to seminars with 'large meat-offerings' or open their veins (the state bleeds them with tuition fees), it is more significant that the exhortation here is to remember the sacred text exactly, through excessive mimeticism, constant repetition. In university seminars the students are instead urged to put the text in their own words, to contribute, eventually, to the endless proliferation of commentary which is the European way of sacralizing texts, to renovate the classic text by
making it 'mean something' in the contemporary context, coordinating the responses of other commentators, finding a new relevance for a theory by attaching it to a new object, in other words: displacement. So what is interesting for me in both cases is not core knowledge as such, but ways of practising knowledge, keeping it alive. If I were to risk a generalization I would say Aboriginal philosophies, as ways of life, are all about keeping things alive in their place.

We could therefore ask a similar question of ways of knowing a thing like Australian history as a way of life for practising scholars. Which is more important, the existence of Manning Clark's history, or the way in which (parts of it) get activated as social memory through rituals like annual final-year school examinations as rites of passage? Or, indeed, does the Gallipoli episode get reinforced as an Australian foundation myth more through the annual ritual of the ANZAC Day dawn services and the veterans' march, or through the books and films?

Ritual as the repetition of the sacred and as 'privileged moments of communal unity' is so unlike the hermeneutic tradition of displacement, taking meanings elsewhere, observation from a distance. A ritual, like initiation, has to be taken on its own terms so that it is not understood, but performed: it means what it does via immediate relations between objects, things, feelings, words, music ... so multiple in its heterogeneous codes and forces that this immediacy is not any shutting down into primitivity.

In this context José Gil advocates taking seriously traditional people's own words to describe things (a well-accepted anthropological practice), but formulates a new approach in terms of forces:

to stop giving prime attention to the meaning of signs, to their representational contents, in order to focus instead on their practical effects. To give up trying to decode the significance hidden behind symbols, but to ask what forces they draw on or shore up, and through which mechanisms they are likely to trigger certain effects ... In other words, and we must stress this notion, it is not a question of studying forces (magical, religious, prestigious or whatever) according to their representational contents, but to grasp them in the way they function in their own right, that is, in the way they may differ from the signs and symbols that are attached to them.

So many Aboriginal stories culminate in metamorphoses of this kind, beings turn into trees, stars, or tracks. But these are not everyday stories, they are magical stories underpinned by strong beliefs and rituals that function to intensify the (bodily) energies of the participants in the ceremony. A ritual performance is an event where codes (music, dance, myth, organization of space), which are normally quite separate in everyday life are brought together and condensed so that actual transformations can be brought about on the bodies of the participants, or a single participant: an initiate to be made into a man and imbued with knowledge, a sick
person to be cured, etc. These bodies 'turn into' the body of the ancestor-snake, or the pain in the body is transformed into a shard of quartz, etc.

For palaeontologists one of the first signs of human societies is the ritual treatment of the dead: charred remains of bones. Funerary rites attribute power to the dead, cast a magical protective veil between the community of the living and the dead, accept the gift of their moral legends, and generate ancestral prestige in the form of honour. This primal ritual is the one being contested between the dead of the post-imperial wars and the Aboriginal wars.

In this essay I have tried to show that the secular state finds in its foundation myths and rituals the same magico-religious forces observable in the rituals, the poiesis, of non-state societies. Accounting for the force of the cultural means accounting for the persistence of ritual in state societies, not to mention the persistence of others' rituals in these societies in their radical plurality:

The history of the State in the West has been a long process of disengagement of political power from its religious roots, while at the same time seeking out a new sacred foundation for its authority. This would be an interminable task. Where is the transcendence of the secular State to be sited, if it is away from religious or divine sources?

It seems that no modern State has satisfactorily resolved this question. But history is revealing: in the absence of being able to give itself a religious foundation, the State will transfer aspects of its sovereignty and authority towards the 'nation'; and the latter will be founded on the power of the dead.

The resurgence, in recent years, of the power of Aboriginal cultural formations in the context of Australia as nation emerges not just as a consequence of calculations about politics and justice, but also because of the resurgence of the power of Aboriginal rituals and Aboriginality in rituals. This would be most significant in revisions of history and nationhood seeking to pay homage to the Aboriginal dead. Making the unknown soldier in a shrine of remembrance a body from the original local wars would be the radical gesture to honour all dead and those particular dead. It would change the site of our foundation myths to this country (rather than overseas wars) and create the possibility of seeing in Australia's Aboriginal wars the horror and violent legitimacy of sacrifice and gift.

In the domain of the cultural, 'primitive' and 'modern' spark in their connectedness and their contradictions. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people have different feelings about events and the ways in which their histories are understood, lived and performed. But if social processes that matter are not understood as purely secular, and history is a practice that changes things like national identity, then histories like Henry Reynolds's partake of the sacred. Unreflective about current debates or his own historiographical practice, Reynolds is a 'just do it'
A simplicity which announces ‘these are all incontrovertible facts from the past’ has a paradoxically greater claim on moral and political transformations of the present. This is just one of the strange potencies of historical rituals. Another is a prose composed of the subtle and poetic interweavings of narrative and argument, as well as public performance as both storytelling and ritual. It is thus connected to cycles of renewal, cycles that can be sited in, for instance, a country where sacredness need no longer be a past religiosity we have transcended, but particular instances of the present where communal feelings are intensified.

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NOTES

¹ Henry Reynolds, *The Law of the Land* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1992), pp. 1–2, notes that while the possible twenty thousand Aborigines killed in the course of settlement were not ‘in a legal sense, foreign enemies ... a few were shot down during periods of martial law’ that ‘most were murdered—nothing more nor less’. See Howard Pedersen and Banjo Woorumurra, *Jandamarra and the Bunaba Resistance* (Broome: Magabala Books, 1993) and my discussion in ‘Experimental history? The “Space” of History in recent Histories of Kimberley Colonialism’, *The UTS Review*, 2.1 (1996), pp. 1–11, in relation to ‘guerilla’ resistance.


¹² Chakrabarty, ‘Minority Histories ...’, p. 27.

¹³ Chakrabarty, ‘Minority Histories ...’, p. 23.


Henry Reynolds, The Other Side of the Frontier (Townsville: James Cook University, 1981), p. 16.


Henry Reynolds, 'Beyond the Frontier' (interview with Heather Felton), Island, 49, (Summer 1991), 30–37, p. 33, quoted 'in writing about the past we have to be able to make imaginative leaps ... History, by definition, has to be able to make that leap across barriers of time and culture'. Mark Gibson, European Journal of Cultural Studies, 1.1 (January 1998), p. 147, quoted 'Henry Reynolds and Aboriginal History: Postcolonialism and the claiming of the past'.

Stephen Garton, The Cost of War (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1996), a book on returned soldiers, wrote partly out of this feeling: 'I have no experience of war, nor any real knowledge of military history, but few things move me more deeply than remembrance ceremonies, and few pieces of music wrench the heart more than 'The Last Post' (p. 8).


Taussig, The Magic of the State, p. 3.


Thanks to Dipesh Chakrabarty for bringing this point to my attention.


Chris Healy, From the Ruins of Colonialism: History as Social Memory (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).


Gil, Metamorphoses of the Body, p. 52–3

Dening, 'Past Imperfect', p. 4.
On 27 October 1997, the British Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown, set out the newly elected Labour government's position on Britain's entry into the European Monetary Union (EMU). The Chancellor had the difficult political task of neutralizing EMU as a political issue before it could cause the same ruinous divisions within the ranks of the government and its supporters as it had created in its conservative predecessor. His discursive strategy was clear: to itemize the measurable economic and financial considerations arising from EMU in such a thoroughly empirical manner as to relegate all but the most marginal objections to his program to the realm of the purely emotive. While conceding the incontrovertible point that the delegation of monetary policy to a European body is a major 'pooling of sovereignty', Brown did not engage on any level the arguments concerning national identity that have underlain much debate over the issue. Wisely, he chose not even to ridicule them.

Brown's statement constituted a refusal to give any kind of hearing to the visceral fear of the effacement of national identity, which feeds much British hostility to EMU. For many people the only obvious manifestation of EMU will be the eventual replacement of British notes and coins with European notes and coins, and thus, to use the words of one television commentator, 'the end of the good old British pound'. The objects themselves, as much as the power to determine the quantity in which they are produced and the price at which they are hired, have come to be seen as crucial markers of national identity.

Yet the attribution of a necessary and ancient link between the nation and its banknotes is a classic instance of what Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger have called 'the invention of tradition', which process Hobsbawm has described in the following terms:

a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past ... However, insofar as there is such reference to a historic past, the peculiarity of 'invented' traditions is that the continuity is largely factitious.
This paper scrutinizes the words and pictures on English and British paper money— and some of the discourse surrounding it—in order to show how it has come to be regarded as a 'traditional' symbol of British national identity. To do so, it is necessary to explicate three interlocking processes: paper money's transformation from a mere representation of money into money itself; its development as an item of mass consumption; and the intermittently increasing use of the notes themselves as sites for the articulation of versions of English, and occasionally British, national identities.

As late as the eve of the First World War, English paper money was largely devoid of national significance. It was still the same as what it had been since its appearance in the seventeenth century as a regular product of the business of banking. The 'bank note' was literally that: a written note from a bank representing minted coin to which the bearer of the note was entitled. It was not money. Every banknote made that very clear by promising to 'pay the bearer': that is, give the bearer money in exchange for the note, with the obvious corollary that the note itself was something other than money. When English people spoke of 'paper money' before the First World War, they used the term much as we use 'plastic money'. As their Oxford English Dictionary told them, 'paper money' meant (as it had since 1691) 'Negotiable documents used instead of money, esp. bank-notes'.

The magnitude of the sums represented by notes ensured that they were still exclusively for the elite and the business classes, as they had originally been intended. In 1914, the lowest denomination note permitted by law was £5, roughly equivalent to £220 (A$550) at today's values. The great mass of the people never possessed such sums; instead they used coins ranging from the £1 gold sovereign, milled and stamped so as to ensure that the bullion it contained equaled its face value, to the copper farthing worth 4,800 times less than the smallest banknote. Few retail transactions required a £5 note, let alone the £100 or £1,000 notes which were also available. Even for the elite the use of banknotes was confined to business transactions, the purchase of durables and luxury items, and the settlement of some tradesmen's accounts.

The limited use and conceptual paradigm of banknotes called for little complexity in their visual appearance. As items for the use of the elite, it was unnecessary for banknotes to employ colours or pictures to help the illiterate distinguish denominations and verify authenticity. All that was necessary was a written text on a white ground nominating the note's value, and a few features to create difficulties for forgers. Almost all banks used highly ornate script, watermarked paper, and a finely engraved vignette of some allegorical figure or local scene or symbol. As well as these, the Bank of England used a 'sum block': a solid black irregular
rectangle with the note’s denomination
etched in white in distinctive script with
tiny deliberate flaws (figure 1). As private
documents representing money it was
inappropriate for banknotes to contain
national symbols, even the Britannia
vignette which appeared on Bank of
England notes can barely be construed as
such. Like most banks, the Bank of
England used its seal as the basis of its
notes’ vignettes, and like many businesses,
the bank—at its foundation in 1694—
adopted a seal which symbolized both its
business and its location. As Madge
Dresser has shown, Britannia by the
seventeenth century was being
represented in a large variety of guises,
drawing on the iconography of a number
of classical goddesses, as well as the Virgin
Mary. But of all the contemporary
representations of Britannia, the
representation of her seated beside a pile
of money with an olive branch in one hand
and a spear in the other, which the Bank
adapted from a contemporary coin, was
surely one of the least overtly nationalistic.
The First World War saw the first notes in
England to have a national content, to be
designed for mass consumption, and to
claim to be money rather than its
representation. These £1 and 10s ‘currency
notes’ (as opposed to banknotes), which
were issued by the government rather
than the Bank of England, broke with
every traditional English practice of
producing paper money, and instituted, or
at least prefigured, all of the developments
with which this article is concerned.

**Figure 1:**
1848 £30 note, D. Byatt, Promises to Pay, p. 97.
It was vital to the wartime government that its currency notes gain ready acceptance among the masses. Desperate to avoid even a hint of financial crisis, the government of 1914 did not follow its 1797 predecessor by 'suspending payment', and the formal right to demand gold for notes that survived the war. The government's notes therefore required popular goodwill for their initial acceptance, and so were self-consciously designed to appear as items of mass consumption. Unlike any banknote previously seen in Britain, they were printed in colour. Their pictorial content was far greater than any English banknote, and became progressively greater in each of the three series issued. Indeed, so strong was the wartime government's commitment to coloured pictures that it was willing to use scarce resources to print them on the backs of the third series of notes, producing the first two-sided paper money ever seen in Britain. At 127 x 63mm (5" x 2.5") currency notes were far smaller than banknotes, and so could be carried more easily in the purse or pocket while one worked. Their written text emphasized their status as mass objects. In contrast to the highly individualized statement of banknotes—'I promise to pay the bearer ...', currency notes—like soldiers—had no individual identity at all, and derived their power from their collectivity. Each stated that 'These notes are a legal tender ...' or, 'Currency notes are a legal tender ...'. It is significant that the government rejected the Bank of England's own design for low denomination notes. By the time war broke out the bank, whose notes then constituted more than 98% of all English banknotes, stood ready with its own design for a £1 note. The note was interesting for the ways in which it attempted to meet the new circumstances, and striking in the ways it failed to do so. The new design differed from the bank's existing issues in only two respects. At 160 mm x 95 mm (6.3" x 3.7"), it was just a little over half the size of the bank's existing notes, although still noticeably larger than the currency notes. It also had a modified promissory clause, presumably intended to address more socially and nationally diverse users. Instead of merely promising to pay the bearer, it spelt out that payment would be 'in Standard Gold Coin of the United Kingdom'. The note made no other concession to its intended new users. Like every other Bank of England note, it was printed on one side only in black and white; its surface was almost entirely taken up by the written text, and its only pictorial content was a small vignette of Britannia such as had appeared on all the bank's notes since the seventeenth century. In strictly practical terms, the Bank of England's proposed note was probably adequate to the needs of its new working-class users, even given their unfamiliarity with paper money. Only a few of the elderly were illiterate, and would have had trouble distinguishing denominations without the aid of differences of colour or size. In an age of mass-newspaper circulation, very few people would have
had any more difficulty checking the authenticity of a predominantly textual note than a predominantly pictorial note. The government's preference for coloured pictorial notes during the First World War clearly cannot be explained purely in terms of the practical needs of users, but rather, as I have suggested, in terms of the government's need to make the note attractive.

Another technique by which the government attempted to deflect any possible desire of holders to convert the notes to gold was by proclaiming the notes themselves to be money rather than its representation. Currency notes did not derive their value from their convertibility to gold, dependent in turn upon the solvency of a bank, but were money by virtue of the unlimited sovereign will of their issuing authority, or, as the notes themselves said: 'under Authority of Act of Parliament'.

The notes' images signified their status as money as surely as their written text. To place the king's profile on the notes was simply to continue a tradition begun on British coins in the time of Edward the Confessor. This practice was extended in the second series of notes, issued only two months after the first, which had been designed and printed (on paper intended for postage stamps) in enormous haste. On the new notes the king was joined by a picture of St George slaying the dragon; a device which had made a brief appearance on the coins of Henry VIII, and had been in continuous use on British coins since 1817. Unlike later efforts of the Bank of England, as we shall see, these notes were not merely aping coins: the representations of the king and St George were original, not copies of those on the coins.

King and saint together bound the notes pictorially to the nation and thus provided patriotic reasons to accept them. Indeed, all the spurs of patriotism were deployed to that end, not only on the notes themselves but in the discourse surrounding them. Even before they were issued, Lloyd George, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, made refusal of the notes a species of treason by declaring that 'anyone who ... withdraw[s] sums of gold and appropriate[s] them to his own use ... is assisting the enemies of his native land, and he is assisting them more effectively probably than if he were to take up arms'.

As well as reporting Lloyd George's statement widely, newspapers also dug in the spurs from different angles. The Daily Mail simply presumed that 'people will doubtless have the sense ... to prefer paper to gold, knowing that the state had better have the metal', but for those short on 'sense' the Mail made it clear that 'To have gold instead of letting the banks have it will be a disgrace'. The day after the notes appeared the Daily Express and the Daily Mirror were anxious to stress that the notes had indeed found full acceptance, the latter with this patently fanciful report:
One paying teller informed The Daily Mirror yesterday that many customers when asked the stereotyped question 'How'll you have it?' answered 'Let's have the new £1 notes and not much gold, thank you.'

The Express was anxious that its readers understand that no Englishman, nor any properly fulfilled English woman, could have any qualms about the notes:

There was no rush, no excitement, and no unreasonable demand for gold. It is true that at the Bank of England the crowd in the courtyard grew to large dimensions, but there were many foreigners in the queue—hatless Jewesses from the East End, worried-looking Germans, a negro, and a number of timid-looking ladies of the maiden aunt variety.

Such heavy-handed attempts to render fear or doubt of the notes the exclusive preserve of the treacherous, the marginal, the inferior, and the ludicrous, are a measure of the traditional popular hostility to paper money that the government and its supporters had to overcome. That hostility had its origins in the monetary events of the French wars, when a shortage of gold obliged the government to allow the Bank of England to suspend payment, that is, to stop giving gold in exchange for its notes. To meet the resulting shortage of gold in circulation during this so-called 'bank restriction period' banks were authorized to print £1 and £2 notes. For the first time significant numbers of illiterate and semi-literate people found themselves in possession of banknotes, with terrible consequences. Unlike a few provincial banks, which significantly increased the pictorial content of their notes for the lower denominations, the Bank of England made virtually no concessions to the needs of its new consumers. Indeed, the demand for notes was so great that the bank actually lowered its standards of production in the interests of quantity, making life easier for forgers and correspondingly more difficult for people with no experience of scrutinizing written text, and who were now required—on pain of financial loss or criminal penalty—to distinguish between the genuine and the spurious. In an environment in which it was possible to pass a note headed 'Bank of Engraving', it was relatively simple to pass serious forgery (figure 2).

The bank's response to these problems was to use the criminal law in the orthodox manner of the time. Forgers themselves were made to act to the full their part in the legal system's theatre of terror, the bank even going so far as to pay £78/12/6 (over £6,500 or A$16,000 at today's values) to cover the expenses of having the execution of four forgers relocated from Warwick to Birmingham, solely for the purpose of attracting a bigger crowd. Against most of those who attempted to pass forged notes the bank preferred to press the charge of possession, rather than the capital charge of uttering. Those of the illiterate poor who attempted to save themselves from the financial disaster of
losing a pound thus enjoyed the bank's 'mercy', being liable merely for transportation rather than death. These events elicited a powerful cultural response. George Cruikshank's 1818 'Bank Restriction Note', depicting people hanging from a gibbet and a vignette of Britannia devouring (her) children was the most direct and popularly accessible attack on the bank's and government's treatment of forgers (figure 2). But that treatment can only have created a highly receptive audience for the more generalized attacks on paper money on economic and moral grounds made by writers such as William Cobbett. By 1914, with the use of paper money by the masses a distant but nonetheless painful memory, it was essential to pull out all the stops to ensure its acceptance. Patriotic urgings were important but insufficient. It was necessary that the notes themselves proclaim their national identity and patriotic significance. The more persuasive efforts of the second series currency notes went so far as to replace the 'Old English' script, which could be seen as German, with a modern font. Moreover, as well as St George, the notes incorporated into the watermark the symbols of all four nations of the Union: the rose, shamrock, thistle and daffodil. In part these symbols merely acknowledged the notes' unprecedented legal tender status throughout the United Kingdom. But in the context of the Irish Home Rule crisis, they also reflected the necessity to maintain the problematic loyalty of both

**Figure 2**

*George Cruikshank's 1818 'Bank Restriction Note', Promises to Pay, p. 52.*
Nationalist and Unionist Irish. The fact that non-English symbols were relegated to the watermark, and that the only conspicuous symbol apart from the king was the purely English St George, perhaps sheds some light on the British state's ultimate failure to construct a transcendent 'United Kingdom' national identity.

The third series of currency notes showed patriotic fever at its highest pitch. The £1 note, first issued in 1917, featured possibly the most triumphalist St George ever produced. Allegedly based on Benedetto Pistrucci’s design for the 1817 gold sovereign, the 1917 design differed from it in absolutely crucial respects. In Pistrucci’s design the issue is still in doubt, the dragon is rearing up, looking at St George, whose short sword has as yet made no contact. In 1917 the dragon faces away from St George and towards the ground, expiring, skewered on St George’s newly-acquired spear. The 10s note, issued in the last month of war, carried an equally bellicose Britannia. Unlike the successive Britannias of coins and Bank of England notes she did not carry an olive branch to balance her weapon, nor did she sit. Rather, she took on what both Madge Dresser and Marina Warner have identified as her late nineteenth-century form of a quasi-Athena, who could stand as an emblem of a spectacularly successful (maritime) imperial nation. On the 10s note she stood on a beach, feet apart, chest out, her trident planted firmly in the sand, looking out defiantly across the waves. The appearance of the three crosses of the Union on Britannia’s shield, while a continuation of the nation-building rhetoric of coins since 1674, included Scotland and Ireland only by subsuming them. If the appropriation of an Irish symbol to an English allegory were not sufficient, the filling of the back of the note with a picture of the Houses of Parliament left no doubt as to the government’s ideas about the relative places of the nations of the Union. Coming chronologically between the Easter rebellion and the furore over Irish conscription, and while an Act establishing an Irish parliament stood passed but not enacted, it expressed symbolically the British wartime government’s extreme insensitivity to Irish nationalist aspirations.

It was to be four decades after the appearance of the third series currency notes before the Bank of England was to break radically with its own design traditions and produce a note with a similar rhetoric to that of the currency notes. The highly pictorial 1957 £5 note was the first English banknote to be designed as a national item of mass consumption, and to present itself, albeit ambiguously, as money rather than its representation. As we might expect, the note appeared just as the big ‘fivers’, still with their ‘traditional association with the plutocrat’ were beginning to appear in the pay packets of ‘some high wage..."
industrial firms', although still rarely enough to warrant mention in the national press. Although workers may have welcomed the reduction from the octavo size of the old notes to a more manageable 160 mm x 90 mm (6.3" x 3.5"), coloured pictures were obviously completely unnecessary to enable them to identify and authenticate the notes. Even more than during the First World War, the change requires some other kind of explanation, and as in that war, the explanation may be found by scrutinizing the pictures (see image on front cover).

The 1957 £5 note was an orgy of nationalist symbolism. The front of the note is dominated by a bust of helmeted Britannia at left, whose Aryan (Saxon) beauty and blonde curls could equally well have graced a note of the Third Reich. At the bottom centre an armoured, helmeted, and haloed St George skewers the dragon only slightly less fearlessly than on the 1917 currency note. On the back, a large lion holding a double-sided key (allegedly to secure and release the nation's treasure) stands on a plinth facing the watermark silhouette of Britannia. None of these specific representations had appeared on any coin ever minted, although all of the subjects, the lion's key aside, had done so. Both of the Britannias were of the warlike, Athena-type, and thus so different from every other Britannia on English banknotes that they were, in effect, a different figure. It was perhaps fitting that this Athena-Britannia, familiar from coins, should appear on the bank's first new design as a nationalized institution, now institutionally more akin to the royal mint than to a private bank. The small, colourful, pictorial note intended for mass circulation was unequivocally money and not its representation, and like all of the money of the previous millennium, it claimed its legitimacy directly from that of the nation itself, represented by known symbols of national power. In keeping with the change, the now entirely vacuous promissory clause had been reduced to vestigial size and, along with the rest of the written text, appeared in a modern font which made no pretence of being handwritten.

1957 was not the Bank of England's first opportunity to produce such a note. In 1928 currency notes were replaced by the bank's own low denomination notes. Although the bank followed the precedent of the currency notes by using colour and printing the reverse sides, the bank was uncertain of how to produce notes for the use of the masses and whether to regard them as money or their representation. Following the express wish of the directors, the front of the notes looked much as the white notes had done for more than a century: Even the colour, although it covered most of the note, still gave the effect of sections of colour printed on a white note. The Britannia vignette was the same as that which had appeared on the white notes since 1855, and was framed by the same acanthus leaves. Britannia had, it's true, grown slightly in relation to the size of the note,
dropped to a position somewhat closer to the vertical centre, and was for the first time balanced by a medallion showing the note's denomination numerically; but her shield still bore only the cross of St George, despite the note's legal tender status throughout the United Kingdom. The central feature of the note was the same text as on the white notes written in the same script, with almost identically eccentric capitalization ('I Promise to pay the Bearer on Demand the sum of £1 [108]'). The sum block was also a clear continuation of the style of the white notes (figure 3).

If the fronts of the notes displayed a reluctance by the bank to depart significantly from its established design formula, the reverse sides attested to a striking lack of imagination. On both notes most of the back was mere filler, in the form of a design 'worked up from the acanthus leaf device surrounding the seated Britannia on the face'. The £1 note

Figure 3
1928 £1 note, front and reverse, D. Byatt, Promises to Pay, p. 127.
also carried a picture of the facade of the Bank of England's head office. While a number of provincial banks had included small vignettes of their head offices on their notes during the nineteenth century, the Bank of England's choice was made in the very specific context of the appearance of the Houses of Parliament on the back of the third series currency notes. The message was clear: the usurping government, which had not merely printed its own notes against the bank's wishes, but had offended so far as to buy its paper from someone other than Portals, the bank's supplier for over a century, had been deposed. The business of note issue had reverted to its rightful place. In this respect then, the appearance of the bank's building on the note was a deliberate repudiation of the modern concept of a banknote as a national commodity bearing national meanings, and a reassertion of the concept that it was a private representation of money. It is little wonder that the *Daily Mail* thought the notes lacked 'that distinctively British air which belonged to the old £1 and 10s Treasury notes'.

Another feature of the back of the £1 note told the same story, even as it subverted it. Amid the acanthus leaves appeared two identical medallions of St George and the dragon copied precisely from the reverse of the gold sovereign. St George clearly was a national symbol, but the notion that the note was a representation of money, and not money itself, could hardly be more clearly conveyed than by including a picture 'exact to size' of the money which the promissory clause on the front of the note still feigned to offer in exchange for itself.

In 1928, the notion that banknotes could, in principle, be exchanged for gold was even more important than it had been before the war. After abandoning the gold standard during the war, the government had restored it in 1925, at least in part as a matter of national prestige. The policy was problematic, controversial, and, as it turned out, unsustainable. The 1928 attempt to mimic pound notes to the unobtainable gold sovereign may be read as an attempt to assert what many desired but few believed: that pre-war monetary stability based on circulating gold could be willed back into existence. Paradoxically then, it was consistent with national policy that the bank produce notes which ignored the immediate precedent of the currency notes and eschewed national symbolism, just as it was consistent with national policy that the new notes should eschew any claim to be money rather than a representation of gold. By 1957, however, any allusion to gold was irrelevant, as the value of the pound was expressed not in terms of gold, but in terms of other currencies, most notably the US dollar.

It is remarkable that the bank issued its first nationalistic note in 1957, rather than during the Second World War. The most significant change then was the withdrawal, after 1943, of all denominations above £5 in order to keep a tighter rein on currency exchange and to
make life more difficult for big operators
in a cash economy that undermined the
rationing system. No new designs
appeared. As a protection against German
forgeries, however, the bank issued £10s
and £1 notes with a metallic thread for the
first time. In order to make clear that the
notes were authentic, but slightly altered,
the bank also changed their colour
schemes. Conspicuously, the opportunity
was not taken to produce new and
bellicose notes à la 1917, or indeed, 1957.

While it is very difficult to explain a non-
ocurrence, it is tempting to hypothesize
that the Second World War, and the period
immediately following, was a time when
money occupied an unusually minor place
in the national culture. The very muted
response to the 30% devaluation of the
pound in 1949, in contrast to the hysteria
about Britain's national strength and moral
worth surrounding the 14% devaluation in
1967, or the similar anxieties over the gold
standard in the interwar period, suggests
that this was a period in which the pound
could not easily be pressed into service as
a metonym of the nation. The
invulnerability of the Beveridge proposals
and the Labour Party's post-war program
to critiques built around their effects on
national finances points towards a similar
conclusion, but takes us into issues beyond
the proper scope of this paper.

The national status of banknotes was not
finally sealed until 1960, when a new £1
note appeared which carried a portrait of
the reigning monarch for the first time.
The representation of Britannia on this
note returned to the style of the bank's
early vignettes: helmetless, seated, and
proffering an olive branch while casually
supporting a slender spear. Her only
armour was the shield leaning against her
chair, emblazoned, of course, with the
cross of St George. The Athena-Britannia
figure had made her last as well as her first
appearance in 1957. Indeed, even then it
was understood that her role was, so to
speak, merely to keep the seat warm for
the queen, whose place on future notes
had been reserved before that note was
issued. Interestingly, the bank's traditional
Britannia not only dominated the reverse
of the 1960 note, she also appeared on a
medallion which slightly underlapped the
medallion containing the queen's portrait
on the front—a display of nostalgia for the
bank's and its notes' private status on a par
with the retention of the promissory
clause.

Despite these nostalgic elements, the
symbolic force of the queen was such that
the notes were universally read as national
objects. The unprecedented volume of
press comment, including letters, shows
unmistakably that the notes were
therefore regarded as legitimate objects of
public scrutiny and comment as no other
banknotes had ever been. Naturally the
bulk of comment, almost all of it hostile,
was focussed on the portrait of the queen.

While banknotes were unequivocally
national by 1960, the bank had not yet
learned to use their space for complex
articulations of national identity. In 1970 it
began to do so by depicting figures from
the English past on the reverse of its notes. While it is not in the least surprising that the identity propounded on the notes is white, uniformly English, Protestant, and overwhelmingly male, it is remarkable that the bank clearly imagines this version of English national identity to be completely unproblematic, as it has gone to great trouble to ensure that its choices shall be as anodyne as possible. Charles Darwin, for example, was rejected out of hand by the governor in 1988 on the grounds that he might be 'controversial'.

The bank’s avoidance of controversy extends beyond the choice of individuals to the ways in which the chosen are represented. Beside the portrait of the historical figure each note bears a scene, or scenes, representative of that aspect of the person's life and achievements considered the least controversial and the most politely English. The Duke of Wellington skirmishes with the French in Spain; he does not inflict one of the worst defeats in French history at Waterloo, still less does he fight English reformers.

Shakespeare stands before the balcony scene from *Romeo and Juliet*—the writer of a tragic love story, not a story of treason, regicide or megalomania, nor least of all usury. Florence Nightingale is the embodiment of feminine nurture caring for the grateful wounded at Scutari, not a tough campaigner doing battle with male establishments in governments, armies and hospitals. Strangest of all, Charles Dickens does not write about poverty, debtors’ prisons, snobbery, Chartism, revolutions, hypocrites or criminals, but about that most vapidly English of all male activities—a village cricket match (figure 4).

Despite continuing with these complex articulations of national identity, the Bank of England’s most recent notes evince a startling nostalgia for the days when note issue was a private concern. The £50 note issued in 1994 marked the bank’s tercentenary by featuring a portrait of Sir John Houblon, its first governor (figure 5). Houblon’s appearance is the revival of a scheme which reached the proof stage in

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**Figure 4**

1933, but was abandoned in 1950 as inappropriate for a nationalized institution. Within the current series of notes the Houblon note is thus richly ambiguous; simultaneously completing and breaking the circle of representation which links the notes to the past. On the one hand, by placing the bank’s first governor in a space which is now ‘traditionally’ reserved for figures from the national pantheon, the bank is claiming the antiquity and necessity of its own place in the nation; on the other hand it is showing that in the era of privatization, the private may colonize the public at will, much as it could in the bank’s early years. Equally in tune with the spirit of the times, all of the notes in the current ‘E’ series carry a copyright notice on both sides, not to provide an extra disincentive to forgers, but to protect the Bank’s proprietary right to the designs. It is ironic that while many fear for Britain’s national identity in the face of the likely replacement of the pound by the Euro, the Bank of England should provide such reminders that the English banknote’s life as a national symbol has been but a short one.

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NOTES
3 By ‘English and British’ I mean paper money which has circulated throughout England,
and paper money which has circulated throughout the United Kingdom. I discuss the very different histories of Scottish and Irish notes in a forthcoming article.


House of Commons debates, 5 August 1914.

Daily Mail, 6 August 1914, p. 2.

Daily Mirror, 8 August 1914, p. 3.

Daily Express, 8 August 1914, p. 8.

Grant, The Standard Catalogue, pp. 11, 46, 51, 83, 88, for examples of the more pictorial provincial notes.

Douglas Hay, 'Property, Authority and the Criminal Law', in D. Hay et al., Albion's Fatal Tree (New York: Pantheon, 1975), for the legal system's use of terror and mercy.


Byatt, Promises to Pay, p. 57.


According to Pick (1990), there was contemporary criticism of the 'German' appearance of the script, but I have been unable to find any.

Hewitt & Keyworth, As Good as Gold, p. 117, claims the likeness.


Economist, 23 February 1957, p. 66–68.

The Times, 14 March 1957, p. 4.


Byatt, Promises To Pay, p. 117.

Daily Mail, 23 November 1928, p. 12. More specifically, the Mail thought that the notes looked 'as if they had been designed and printed in the United States'.

J.M. Keynes, The Economic Consequences of Mr Churchill (London: Hogarth Press, 1925). Britain left the gold standard forever in 1931, in consequence of the international financial crisis of that year. See Keynes for the most famous critique of the return to the gold standard.

Byatt, Promises To Pay, p. 219.

Byatt, Promises To Pay, pp. 132, 159.
My path has crossed with Norbert's many times, sometimes directly and at others indirectly; during certain periods we saw each other frequently, but there were also gaps of many years. Our points of contact were both personal and intellectual, a criss-crossing of accidental strands over the years through which I became familiar with many of his theories and absorbed some of his ways of thinking, but without ever consciously studying his writings. In the big picture Norbert undoubtedly contributed, albeit contingently, to my becoming a sociologist.

In a sense I have always known Norbert. He and my father had been close friends long before my birth, having met originally in Breslau in 1922. Though younger than Norbert my father also attended a 'humanistisches Gymnasium' in Breslau, receiving like Norbert an extremely thorough grounding in the classics and in cultural history. Like Norbert he also studied medicine in Heidelberg, where he was influenced by an outstanding Professor of Anatomy, Kallius. After giving up medicine to concentrate on philosophy Norbert maintained his strong interest in biological processes whilst my father retained his interest in philosophical questions despite specializing in embryology. Their friendship was consolidated in Heidelberg where they often talked while walking along the Philosophenweg, discussing their many shared and overlapping interests in philosophy and science, concerns to which they returned for many decades afterwards.

My father came to England in 1933, securing a research position in Cambridge the same year that he was thrown out of his job as a lecturer in Heidelberg. Visiting Paris in the mid-thirties, he was horrified by the destitute condition in which Norbert was living, and was determined to bring him to England. This involved both persuading a reluctant Norbert, who felt no connection with this side of the Channel, and, since my father did not yet have British citizenship, arranging for someone to act as guarantor in sponsoring Norbert to the immigration authorities. Patrick Murray, an Australian zoologist colleague of my father (and nephew of the Oxford classicist and H.G. Wells supporter Gilbert Murray) willingly assumed the role and Norbert duly arrived in England.
My father and Norbert remained in close contact in the years before and during the Second World War. They were interned together in 1940 on the Isle of Man, and at the end of that year Norbert acted as witness at my parent’s wedding. The first time my mother (also a medical researcher) met Norbert he enchanted her with the history of the fork, describing its changing use in renaissance Venice and under Henry VIII, and explaining to her how the number of prongs had increased with the development of table manners. It was a story and an occasion she remembers to this day, and one which was frequently retold to me as a child, though at the time she thought it was somewhat odd for a guest to expound at table on the utensils he was eating with.

Norbert spent much of the war in Cambridge. The London School of Economics was evacuated and Cambridge became the home for a wide circle of emigrés and social scientists who appear, from my parents’ accounts, to have led a buzzing intellectual and active social life with discussion groups and rounds of parties. My mother remembers a day on the river with my father and Norbert when ‘Asik’ and Grebenik, students of Norbert’s, swam along behind their punt, and clung on to its side while Norbert fed them all the sandwiches she had made! On another occasion they walked to Granchester; it was a depressing day—very grey and rainy, but Norbert was telling my mother the history of noseblowing or some aspect of courtly society that was to appear in The Civilizing Process and she forgot all about the weather. Norbert’s shoes, however, were completely wet through. She loved to listen to him; an inspiring storyteller, he had the capacity to hold his audience and lift them out of themselves. She recollects with fondness that, unlike many male intellectuals of his generation, he talked to her as an equal. He took her own work seriously and encouraged her, much as he did with me forty years on.

There were also other characteristics that cast a different reflection. Whenever my father lent Norbert his flat in Union Road, seemingly a frequent occurrence, he would invariably return to find all the saucepans burnt. In spite of his outlook on culinary culture, Norbert could not cook and relied on heating up tins of processed food. Either he forgot to add water, or while they were warming he became so engrossed in a more intellectual pursuit that he completely forgot all about them. Another instance: like all the other ‘friendly aliens’ Norbert had to register with the police every week. This was something he detested (no doubt a humiliating experience) to such an extent that he tried to avoid going anywhere near Cambridge police station on any other occasion, or he would run past it if he really could not avoid St Andrews Street. My mother maintains that Norbert was nervous of the police, and had a special aversion to a certain Sergeant Wilson. It was as if he found it difficult to assimilate his own maltreatment.
Norbert was thus a presence in my childhood. A signed copy of the original German 1939 edition of Über den Prozess der Zivilisation (the Preface includes an acknowledgement to A. Glucksmann, D. Med.) sat in my father's bookcase, next to volumes on the history and philosophy of science, to be joined very much later by English translations of Norbert's other publications. I grew up with a vague understanding of what Norbert meant by figurations and developmental processes though I would not have been able to express them in my own words. I thought of him as a rather eccentric elderly man with his check-tweed jacket and thick glasses, wagging his finger at me while animatedly telling a story about some quite everyday thing which seemed more significant than I could grasp. Perhaps this was because I was a bit nervous of him too, on account of what I took to be his glass eye, replacing the eye he had lost in a skiing accident. But he seemed so old (in fact he must have been in his late fifties) that it was hard to imagine him skiing, diving, or even swimming.

The next regular set of encounters with Norbert was not until the early 1970s when I became a lecturer in the Sociology Department at Leicester. As a student at the London School of Economics I was very impressed with his article on 'Problems of involvement and detachment', arguing in a second-year undergraduate essay that its distinctive perspective on the issue of objectivity offered a way forward and out of the sterile debates that were then raging about value freedom. It was pure coincidence (or was it?) that I ended up in the same department as the old family friend. 'Don't hesitate to sparkle a bit when you come here' Norbert wrote in a congratulatory letter after I got the job. He enclosed a copy of Was ist Soziologie? and asked if I would be interested to take on the translation. 'It's a good book, if I say it myself,' he wrote, 'but few people understand what it is all about'. It was perhaps fortuitous, given the problems that eventually beset the translation of Norbert's works into English, that my German was nowhere near being up to the task.

By this time my outlook on sociology was very different from Norbert's. My PhD thesis was on structuralism; I was involved in the student and Vietnam movements, was 'third worldist' and about to become a feminist while at Leicester. From where I stood, the scholarly nature of Norbert's sociology, his configurational framework, and his encyclopaedic knowledge were undermined by being so determinedly apolitical. I disagreed with his insistence on the detachment of sociologists and I could not conceive of 'a civilizing process' as anything other than evolutionary and eurocentric, since I imagined (incorrectly) that it must counterpose a presumed 'backward' or 'primitive' state to a more civilized western/capitalist one. It also seemed difficult to view the twentieth century, especially from a life trajectory such as Norbert's, under an overarching
perspective of civilizing and individualizing sociogenesis.

The differences between us were, however, no obstacle to discuss; on the contrary, they were the substance of much stimulating debate. For his part Norbert attempted to convince me of the sterility of structuralism, emphasizing that social process was both the core of society and of the analysis of society. We agreed on the importance of conceptualizing patterns of social relations, but his were processual and developmental while mine were elaborated as series of interconnected structures and contradictions. Throughout the discussions, though, he always listened to what I had to say and treated my views with respect, even if he had little time for Lévi-Strauss or Althusser. I did not feel that my ideas were being dismissed by Norbert as misguided youthful arrogance. However, there was always that niggling impression that you were being enlisted as a potential convert to Elias's sociology. There were not many problems that Norbert had not already thought about, if not already solved! In 1972 a colleague and I at Leicester put on one of the first Women's Studies courses in Britain. Departmental opposition meant that it had to be voluntary for both staff and students. When I told Norbert that I now wanted to research and write about women's subordination cross-culturally and historically his face lit up with enthusiasm. He had always thought that gender relations were a basic feature of social structure, he told me, even if this had been ignored by most mainstream sociology. But the real question for me, he insisted, should be the changing balance of power between the sexes. I was delighted at such encouragement, which contrasted so strongly with the far more common derisory reaction. But the delight was soon tempered by the sensation that my project was in danger of being taken over, and depoliticized in the process. In fact, Norbert told me, while we were walking across Victoria Park away from the university, he had already written a book on the subject himself, in which he had developed a longue durée historical analysis. But, by great misfortune, the manuscript had been left in a pile of papers on the floor and incinerated (At the time I took this story with a pinch of salt though subsequently it turned out to be entirely true). Nothing remained apart from some fragments about ancient Rome, and as we walked round and round the park he expounded on marriage, property relations, and the state in classical antiquity. How typical, I thought to myself, that he already knows it all, better than I ever could.

Norbert's interest in young people was genuine and this attracted them to him. He engaged with their work, encouraged them, supported them in new or unfashionable avenues of research, and inspired many with a confidence they were otherwise lacking. Curiously, his conviction in the value of his own work
was combined with a generosity towards the less well worked out ideas of young scholars. He was as quick to acknowledge a good point as to criticize a bad one.

The Leicester department was amongst the most vibrant during the 1960s and 1970s and numerous eminent sociologists passed through it during those years; all will have their own memories of the place and interpretations of its internal dynamics. By the time I arrived, Norbert and Ilya Neustadt were already on bad terms, though Norbert was very careful not to line anyone up 'on his side' against Ilya. Nor was there ever any overt conflict. The departmental seminar was the occasion for the most open airing of their differences, or so it seemed to me. I felt sorry for the poor unfortunate invited speaker whom the two men treated as a vehicle for their own debate. Each would make criticisms and ask questions from his own position which were really aimed at each other while being directed at the sometimes bewildered football in the middle. It was such a waste that two colleagues who went back such a long way should have come to this impasse. It also seemed out of character that Norbert, who tolerated, with such little rancour, the lack of interest in his work by British sociology at large, should take offence at what was really a much more parochial slight.

During the later 1970s and 1980s, after we had both left Leicester, Norbert continued to send me copies of his books which were now being published thick and fast, but still mostly only on the continent. Once on holiday in Switzerland I turned on the radio to hear quite by chance an hour long program about Norbert and his work. By this time he was steadily gaining the recognition he deserved, and a significant following, in the Netherlands, Germany, and even France. Britain continued to lag behind. It seems deeply ironic that appreciation by British sociology came so belatedly and only after other countries had already given their seal of approval. Suddenly people were discovering Norbert's insights into the body, violence, appetite, games, and the interconnection between cultural, social, and physical processes, and so forth. Yet all these were available to an earlier generation if only they had been interested, and Elias could have been claimed as a major British sociologist. The history of Norbert's forty years in Britain says far more about Britain than it does about Norbert, highlighting a half-hearted welcome of foreigners and grudging acceptance that they might have something to offer. Never accepted as 'one of us', I often wondered how Norbert resisted the temptation to include something about his own treatment in his work on 'established-outsider relations'.

By the time of his ninetieth birthday celebrations in Apeldoorn and Amsterdam Norbert's standing was assured, and he was showered with official honours as well as the accolades of European and North American sociologists. But he remained solicitous and welcoming to everyone he had invited, no matter their renown. He talked with me at length about my father
who had died two years previously (although he was eighty, Norbert saw this as a very premature death) and arranged for presents to be bought for the young daughter of a colleague who came along to the parties and whose birthday was on the same date as his.

When working recently on gender and temporality I read Norbert's *Essay on Time* for the first time, and wondered again at the skill with which he integrates physical, social, historical, and cultural processes. It was a truly exciting read, the analysis of the development of the calendar was quite brilliant. Perhaps most impressive of all was his attempt to theorize time. Virtually all the other authors I consulted had included time merely as part of an attempt at 'grand theory', a total conceptual framework for interpreting 'society' as such. Time appeared as an epiphenomenon of the overall framework, devoid of substantive content, and it was a simple matter to predict in advance the analysis of time that would 'go with' any given theoretical framework. Unlike Norbert who really does take time seriously as a problem in itself, despite the connection he makes between the civilizing process and developments in the control over and measurement of time.

Always developing theory on the basis of substantive material; analysing the cultural, individual, emotional, social, and political as necessarily interconnected and mutually defining dimensions of life; insisting on process, structure, and change. These are amongst the important lessons to be learned from Norbert's approach to sociology. His capacity to see the big stories in apparently small events and 'little' things is no less important, and equally to be emulated. Norbert's interests were enormously wide-ranging. Whether it was fox hunting, spitting, embarrassment, or personal pronouns, Norbert was always able to interpret and explain his subject matter in a way that revealed a significance one might never have imagined. Others would have dismissed much of Norbert's material as unworthy of serious investigation, but he was interested in everything and could illuminate even the most unlikely topics, causing his audience to see them in a completely new way.

In my first encounters with Norbert as a child I had not been wrong to suspect that he saw the significance of mundane things, although I could not appreciate then the importance of this capacity. When Norbert historically situated the notion of 'genius', such as Mozart's, as a social phenomenon which could only first arise at a particular time and place, as an interlocking of personal and social trajectories, I sometimes wonder how he saw and understood the vicissitudes of his own twentieth-century life, his own cultural production and transmission.3 Perhaps, the way our intergenerational
lives criss-crossed at different and peripheral points in his personal trajectory, is what makes me want to ask him the question.

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NOTES


2 'Asik' was the nickname of Rado Mysler, a sociology student who later committed suicide. Eugene Grebenik went on to become Professor of Sociology at Leeds University.

3 Norbert Elias, Edmund Jephcott (trans.), Reflections on a Life. In the 'Biographical interview with Norbert Elias', there are some quite striking disjunctures between his intellectual projects and life circumstances. He describes himself (pp.52–53) as 'deeply involved' in writing his book on the civilizing process at the very time that Jews were being deported to concentration camps, including his own beloved mother, whose fate he never came to terms with.