

New Media and Historical Narrative

1884 Japan

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Electronic technologies have been opening up new possibilities for the study and production of history over the past decade. We have increasingly rich databases and libraries from which we can draw data and images, and search systems that mine these archives have become more sophisticated. Numerous projects seek to take advantage of these new systems to better deliver the content of history. These projects are certainly critical to the preservation of our artifacts as well as ensuring that they remain accessible.

The possibility that I find in New Media for history is the opportunity for new ways of knowing about pasts. As scholars increasingly explore the interplay between visual, material, and textual materials in the writing of history, the inquiry often opens into questions about the past itself - how we know about the past, indeed, what the past is, and, how it relates to our understanding of the present (see for example, Ethington, Klein, and Thomas & Ayers). I have been struck by the similar goals of New Media with some of the more critical (dare I say critical theory) modes of inquiry in the humanities over the past two decades. Both interrogate the centralizing and homogenizing tendencies of existing frameworks, and emphasize some form of distribution, heterogeneity, and difference. Moreover, both have led to a re-examination of the past, of existing structures and practices that had often been considered as natural or common sense.

This essay has developed from what began as

what I thought would be an interesting, but straight-forward project, employing hypertext in the writing of history. Many have probably experienced this journey: my exploration began with an idea, 1884 Japan, which could be published electronically; it then leads to an inquiry into new possibilities; and then gradually shifts to the very frameworks of our current modes of scholarship. Jerome McGann hinted at the dual role of technology in this process in his meditation about the building of the Rosetti site. He writes, 'The simplicity of the computer is merciless. It will expose every jot and tittle of your thought's imprecisions' (McGann 2001: 142). McGann identifies a fascinating characteristic of digital media, as we explore the utility of computer technologies for history (and the humanities more broadly), we are learning that digital media not only facilitates existing practices, it also often exposes the assumptions embedded in our current practices.

I have reduced this problematic down to two basic issues that interrogate the basis of history: the hitherto unquestioned linkage between history (as the objective, chronological, replicable past); and narrative (a linear causal narrative). First, the simplicity of electronic media opens up questions about how we know about the past. The enhanced ways that we can now record and use information expands our archival and interpretive fields, but in doing so, we quickly learn that the numerous metrics of new technologies make us aware that time is a

reckoning of time, not some absolute metric independent of humans. Events, moments, 'facts', etc. must be considered in relationship to temporalities, not merely placed into a timeline. Second, the computer also provides various means of presenting information, forcing us to defend (or reconfigure) the linear narrative. Indeed, we are learning that 'reading' on the computer is different than from a printed text. Recent studies point out that the printed text facilitates complex and rich arguments, whereas the digital medium encourages exploration, archival and bibliographic depth, and heterogeneity (McGann 2001: 181; and Vess).

My goal is to use the strengths of both print and electronic media to think anew about knowledge of the past, its dissemination, and its utility. This goal has been simultaneously narrowed down to think of a new delivery system, a multi-linear essay, and broadened to inquire into new ways of conceiving and writing history (de Certeau). To think of a way that history in the digital realm can be more than texts ported to the internet, databases, images, and wiki's, I find Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin's notion of remediation apt. They write, 'Our culture wants both to multiply its media and to erase all traces of mediation: ideally, it wants to erase its media in the very act of multiplying them' (Bolter 2000: 5). Historians who study history frequently make similar comments, but about history as the media: Charles W. Hedrick, Jr. writes, 'For historians since the nineteenth century we the living are the phantoms, and truth is obtained on the condition that we exorcise ourselves from history' (Hedrick 2006: 2). Shorn of the ever-present adjective of modern society, 'new', New Media and history are forms of media that share numerous characteristics. And by understanding this commonality, New Media provides an opportunity to remediate the past, and thereby write history: in other words, the remediation of moments that become data, of categories of knowledge, and of how we link and write about them.

PROBLEM OF HISTORY

We must recognize that history as we practice it today is a remediation. Those who study historiography have long known that the understanding and representation of the past, indeed, the very articulation of the past as past, was completely transformed around the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This can be illustrated through two comments made during the early nineteenth century. Thomas Carlyle writes in his essay 'On History' (1930), 'things done were not in a series, but in a group' (Quoted in Staley 2003: 13). He chastises historians for writing as if life were successive rather than simultaneous, interactive, and chaotic. On the other hand, the then young historian Ludwig von Ranke writes in his first major work, *Histories of the Latin and Germanic Nations* (1824), what becomes his most famous - and misused - phrase: 'To history has been given the function of judging the past, of instructing men for the profit of future years. The present attempt does not aspire to such a lofty undertaking. It merely wants to show how, essentially, things happened' (Ranke 1973: 137).

In these two statements we can see the transformation of the understanding of the relation between the present and earlier events. Today, most historians accept Ranke's statement as obvious, but perhaps outmoded. It is a deceptively complex statement that still encompasses the practice of history. Ranke is claiming to consider history anew according to a different reality principle (what essentially happened). As Carlyle implies, that reality principle is based on a linear understanding of time. Ranke articulated this temporality in 'On the Character of Historical Science', a manuscript written in the 1830s.

Events which are simultaneous touch and affect each other; what precedes determines what follows; there is an inner connection of cause and effect. Although this causal nexus is not designated by dates, it exists nevertheless. It exists, and because it exists we must try to recognize it.

(Ranke 1973: 40)

What 'exists' for Ranke is an absolute time where synchrony and diachrony determine relationality; a new reality is established. The previous is relocated to a past, distinct from the present (and dead), and relocatable according to a metric that is independent of places of occurrence. Chronology not only provides that metric to map successive events, now developmental (or in most non-Western places, the lack of), it also provided new modes of organization that enable the verification of events. Documents written by those who acted, such as royalty and political elite, diplomats, and military officers, were placed in archives, the 'facts' that serve as the basis for historical narratives. It is no coincidence that modern archives were established during the nineteenth century (Richards, Steedman). Moreover, the subject of this new reality changes. Ranke has shifted history from an emphasis on morals, ideals, and didactic messages to what he calls a pragmatic history, the 'real motives' that lay buried in documents. It is a shift from what people said to what documents inform us about what people did.¹ This is the performative nature of nineteenth century history, to create a structure that naturalized new ways of knowing into categories of states or nation-states (politics, economics, and their key institutions) that serve as the basis of our knowledge system.

The history that we practice today, indeed, our very understanding of the past is largely the result of this remediation. This point is not new; if one looks, historians have long questioned this reformulation of the past. Michel de Certeau offers a particularly brilliant and concise description,

It appears to me that in the West, for the last four centuries, 'the making of history' has referred to writing. Little by little it has replaced the myths of yesterday with a practice of meaning. As a practice . . . it symbolizes a society capable of managing the space that it provides for itself, of replacing the obscurity of the lived body with the expression of a 'will to know' or a 'will to dominate' the body, of changing inherited

traditions into a textual product or, in short, of being turned into a blank page that it should itself be able to write.

(deCerteau 1988: 6)

This critique of history maps beautifully onto Bolter and Grusin's three main traits of New Media - remediation, immediacy, and hypermediacy.² If we accept their definition of media as 'that which appropriates the techniques, forms, and social significance of other media and attempts to rival or refashion them in the name of the real' (p. 65), then history too is a media that has shifted from 'myths of yesterday' to a 'practice of meaning' that claims to describe the real. Indeed, that is the difference between Carlyle and Ranke. Immediacy in history is less the visual representation to 'make the viewer forget the presence of the medium' (pp. 272-73) than the 'blank page' that obscures the transformation, instead claiming an objective past, 'as it actually happened'. Hypermediacy, which 'reminds the viewer of the medium' (p. 272) is not the collage, heterogeneity, and multiplicity of the graphical user interface (GUI), but the scattered interpretive tools of the historian to construct the book and essay (and make the text boring to the lay reader). And finally, remediation is less the refashioning of prior media forms into digital displays, but the reconfiguration from the 'lived body' to the knowledge that dominates the body and from inherited traditions to data, now divorced from both its immediate context as well as the present.

There is a critical difference, which is connected to their moments of becoming. Centuries ago, history was being formulated to reconfigure knowledge according to the newer technologies, of the late-eighteenth century, rationality and temporality (progress). History should be considered one component of the 'modern literary system' described by Carla Hesse in her essay 'Books in Time'.³ History helped stabilize heterogeneous places, people, and events by organizing them within recognizable categories within the same, unified system:

¹ This shift is made possible by an absolute time that allows the mapping of events as if that is the natural way. He writes, 'Where the events themselves speak, where the pure composition manifests the connection, it is not necessary to talk of this connection at length' (Ranke 1973: 41).

² Bolter and Grusin do not argue that New Media is new, but find 'the same process throughout the last several hundred years of Western visual representation' (p. 11).

³ Hesse writes, 'The modern literary system, the 'modernized civilization of the book', that emerged from the democratic revolutions of the eighteenth century represents a particular vision of cultural life which embodies the ideals of the autonomous, self-creating and self-governing, property-owning individual, universal access to knowledge, and the assurance of cautious public reflection and debate' (p. 28).

the time and rationality of modernity. R. G. Collingwood writes, 'The scope of historical thought was vastly widened, and historians began to think of the entire history of man as a single process of development from a beginning in savagery to an end in a perfectly rational and civilized order (Collingwood 1993: 88).

But today we know (though we have compartmentalized this knowledge into discrete realms) that this absolute time, what is now called classical time, has been superseded (in physics) by a different understanding of time, that of Einstein's theory of relativity (see for example, Mermin 2005). It is, of course, difficult to imagine a conceptual structure based upon timespaces rather than a geometric grid. A challenge for us is to recognize that we operate within an epistemology that has attempted to unify all humans into a system that claims universality, but that this universality is based on a notion of time that has been empirically disproven. Nevertheless, it is the system upon which our knowledge systems as well as political, economic, social, and cultural institutions are organized. Thus it is 'real'. But this 'real' is historical, based on a mythical idea.⁴

In the rest of this essay I will explore one way that New Media enables us to remediate history. Importantly, we must be mindful that this remediation encompasses two processes simultaneously: the descriptive and performative nature of history. Historians of history have long recognized these two components and have sought to alter practices, to resolve some of the numerous contradistinctions that exist in our craft. We must remember that Ranke was one of the major figures in refashioning inherited knowledge and practices, that is, the formal logic and methods by which historians organize pasts into history. This history (more accurately History) has grounded new conceptual structures that reorient the relation among humans and between humans and their environment. It is important to remember Certeau's warning above, that we be mindful of a

key conflation that lurks in our current notion of history: history as description embeds, even occults, history as performance. This is what I take Hedrick to mean when he says that we (historians) 'are the phantoms' who 'exorcise ourselves from history' (p. 2). To invoke Bolter and Grusin, this is characteristic of 'immediacy' in historical practice.

Finally, a word on my object, 1884 Japan. My overall goal is to think of structures that facilitate a multiplicity of connections. I have chosen a synchronic slice to write this node-based essay.⁵ There are certainly other possible topics; one that intrigues me is a biography of objects.⁶

1884 is not a particularly significant year, yet, it is a fascinating object because it falls in the middle of a period of revolutionary change in Japan. During the Meiji period (1868-1912) the space of the archipelago was completely reorganized, time was reckoned differently, science and rationality became the dominant epistemology, constitutional government was adapted to the political system, the economy began its shift from one based on small-scale agriculture to one based on heavily capitalized industry, and the people were told how to be Japanese. By focusing on a year (it could have been any year), this moment incorporates the many competing, alternate, and autonomous forms that coexisted; and, importantly, was what people sought (or did not) to adapt to the new conditions of the Meiji era.

The basis of this essay will be a database; the data entry, here, is akin to a historian's old tool, the notecard. At present, the entries have been primarily selected from newspapers, the new media of the time. I have attempted to include a broad cross-section of entries of things recorded, not to be representative, but to illustrate the range of issues and events. Each entry will serve as a node from which readers can move to other similar events, things that happened around the same time, description, and historical essay. From these links, the reader can bring up new nodes through which

⁴ I don't think of myth as false, but as Joseph Mali recently describes, simply as 'a story that has passed into and become history' (xii). Two books that have been important to my understanding of myth are Blumenberg (1990) *Work on Myth* and Mali (2003) *Mythistory: The Making of a Modern Historiography*.

⁵ For a study that uses Los Angeles to develop a series of narratives (especially visual) see Ethington (2000).

⁶ I am indebted to Lorraine Daston (2000) for this idea in her stimulating book of essays, *Biography of Scientific Objects*.

one explores the myriad happenings of this year.

These entries will be accessible through three related interfaces: annals, repetition, and linkages. Each will serve as an entry point to read the essay.⁷ These will be described below. Through this structure I hope to remediate history by reformulating its very basic components: data, categories, interpretation. Perhaps the greatest challenge, however, is dealing with the codes and practices that centuries of print have institutionalized in our society, especially the habits and expectations of the readers. To ignore this issue is to work within the concept of authorship that is central to the print world. Thus I hope that annals (chronology), repetition (categories), and linkages (interpretation) provide the reader with sufficiently familiar codes, despite the unfamiliarity of my conceptual structure.

ANNALS

Today we are accustomed to think of history and pasts as if they are the same and can scarcely imagine history without linear, homogeneous time. Yet the past as separate from the present and history as a linear chronology were not the basic or 'natural' ordering structure of histories until recently. (Wilcox, White, Koselleck, Certeau) Numerous scholars have demonstrated that prior to the eighteenth century, developmental time was not the principal organizing structure; for example, Hayden White has written about other narrative forms employed to describe the past, and D. R. Wilcox has argued that place and episodic time provided the organizing principles.

As one form of remediation, I have organized entries into an annal form. The annals are a basic, perhaps even 'primitive', form of organizing material.⁸ The value of the annals form is that its structure (passage of time and data entries) is familiar to the reader. The order of entries is based on occurrence; like chronology it is sequential. The reader can access the events, choosing to

read them sequentially, or for their synchronicity.

But while the list is linear, it is not chronological. It does a number of things that raises questions about the naturalness of classical time. First, successive entries and simultaneous happenings are not necessarily connected. A quick perusal makes it difficult to presuppose that sequence or simultaneity (that is the same moment) necessarily leads to some connection and relation.⁹ Indeed, there is a rupture between the sequence of entries and any linear explanation. It is possible to infer or develop a narrative explanation, but here, it is left to the reader.

Second, this listing shows the confines of the notion of a 'fact'. As one reads through the list, the annals show richness and heterogeneity, not order and development. We find that entries are mixed with items that strike us today as insignificant, silly, and quaint. Not all are 'real', such as the accounts of ghosts and wonders, but their prevalence show that they were central to decision-making, frequent in representations of current affairs, and part of the beliefs at the time. This listing has the potential to recover what was eradicated by history, the feelings, desires, and ideas of people at the time.

Third, a key difference between the annals form and chronology is the lack of central subject.¹⁰ Normally, history is written to describe (or to map) how some particular place fits into that development of mankind described by Collingwood. The potential of the annals is to present data before the principals of significance embedded in this subject determine orders of 'importance'. In contrast to chronology,¹¹ through the annals we can imagine different social forms coexisting and competing versions of 'common sense' amid this time of change (Mink 1978: 129).

Such multiplicity should bring greater scalability to history. People apprehend events depending on how they fit into their inherited understanding. Here, perspective is multiple, and it should be possible to show the

⁷ A note on reading might be in order. The current practice of reading a print text silently, from beginning to end, is a practice that emerged in Western society after the printing press. Before texts were read out loud, and books and codices were often read in a fragmented fashion. See for example, Eisenstein (1983); Hesse (1997).

⁸ I am relying on Hayden White's distinction between annals and chronicle in his 'Narrativity in the Representation of Reality' (1987).

⁹ Siegfried Kracauer writes, 'If events belong to two cultures or civilizations between which no interaction takes place, the fact of the succession or simultaneity of these events in chronological time is entirely irrelevant' (1969: 140).

¹⁰ Strictly speaking, my listing is between annals and chronicle; one can find the beginning of a central subject, Japan, and stories that reinforce its authority and development. Yet, I have chosen the annals because there are many other subjects and stories that call into question the centrality of a Japan.

¹¹ In one of my favorite passages of his important work, de Certeau calls chronology an 'alibi of time, a way of making use of time without reflecting on it' (1983: 145).

¹² For a discussion of this scalability, see Ricouer (2004).

¹³ At present, my project has a limitation that perhaps contradicts part of that argument. The entries are limited to the geocultural unit, Japan. Our habits of mind make it difficult to conceive of the multiplicity of timeforms coexisting, in 1884, but that unit was still in a state of becoming. Many of the entries are about region or locale, rather than as part of the nation-state. As the database becomes more robust, I hope these issues are reduced.

connections (as well as lack of) between different units - individuals, families, communities, large companies, and the various organs of the state. These micro and local histories are not themselves new, but they have generally been marginalized in history as of lesser importance.¹² The potential of this scalability is to depict whether and how 'important' events/news operated on people at the local, everyday level.¹³

Finally, the presentation of this listing brings more steps of the craft of history to the reader. We must remember that the narrative text is the final act of this craft. Here, the reader can peruse the many events that also occurred at that time, but are usually omitted from histories because they are 'unimportant', not relevant, or even contradictory. In addition, we must recognize that narrative history, by its very definition, is divorced from most readers; one reason being that the narrative is written according to abstract principles rather than human experiences. The annals include entries that are more story-like. Reports need not be filtered for significance, connections to theory, or debunked for simple-mindedness. Instead, the reader can read reports, 'important' and bizarre, as they were recorded at the time.

REPETITION

The listing of things in the annals are not yet facts or data. They are in process of becoming documents, or of being forgotten. They were significant enough then to merit recording and publication. To become facts, they must be made meaningful; they must be given a new locus - storage and classification - and a name that establishes their relation and importance. Yet, to be placed in a category of the backward, or worse no category at all, relegates events to the insignificant or oblivion.

Many scholars have written on the rise of archives in the nineteenth century. One of my favorite descriptions is by Certeau,

In history everything begins with the gesture of setting aside, of putting together, of transforming

certain classified objects into 'documents'. [. . .]

In reality it consists in producing such documents by dint of copying, transcribing or photographing these objects, simultaneously changing their locus and their status. This gesture consists in 'isolating' a body - as in physics - and 'denaturing' things in order to turn them into parts which will fill the lacunae inside an a priori totality.

(1988: 72-3)

This is a critical process of modern historical practices, the transformation of things into documents. In the context of my essay, Certeau is describing the remediation of lived practices into a past that can serve as the data for history. It is a process of isolating events and moments and placing them into categories that have a meaning to modern history, not necessarily the world from which they came. But if we return to Ranke's remediation of reality, we must realize that the principal of significance by which his reality exists is based on some higher ideal or idea; in short, the state (see for example, White, pp. 28-31). The standard categories (which are always subdivided) conform to the structure and goals of the state - politics, foreign policy, economics, industry, society, and (finally) culture.

These categories, though institutionalized, are historical and have come to be accepted as if they are natural. There are other ways of organizing pasts. I have chosen to combine entries based on their repetition. On a conceptual level my reasoning is little different than standard taxonomies; they come into being because of repetition. In his powerful meditation on time, Michel Serres writes, 'Basic time is a tatter, a patchwork or a mosaic, it is a distribution, through which, at times, redundancy passes. A multiplicity marks and shows some redundancy, it becomes spatial when this repetition increases' (Serres 1995a: 116). From this passage I understand places and knowledge categories in modern society to be certainties carved out of time (see also Harvey and Lefebvre). This does not, of course, mean

that they do not exist, but that they are historical.

The categories I have selected are familiar but perhaps a bit off; again the content is often unexpected. My use of groupings that emerge from repetition within the year is an attempt to exorcise what Ranciere calls the evil of homonymy that exists in modern historiography (1994: 33). This process is the effort to make sense of happenings by substituting 'things for words', but in the process 'has let itself, in this very operation, be trapped by words' (1994: 33). To be 'trapped by words' is a tendency among historians to organize data and our interpretations around our categories. In other words, our names now give meaning to the objects, not vice versa. In this naming there is a homogenization, but it is a reduction of many forms into a category that has meaning to the nation-state. For example, among the repetitive categories are several variations of the past, practices, beliefs, anachronisms, and old things. These can all be grouped as the past, the cumulation of earlier moments of the development of a Japan. In this case, the 'evil of homonymy' is the conflation of the various ways that existing things, practices, and ideas have been discarded, reshaped, and renewed, as well as how new pasts are being created. A singular, dead past occludes the many ways that pasts function in (and indeed are a living part of) the present. Here, I hope that this remediation moves us toward histories that discover not 'what the texts mean but what they might be imagined to mean or to have meant . . .' (McGann 2001: 152). Repetition allows groupings that are located in the immediate, through the places and timeforms in which people on the archipelago understood their world. In today's language, it is akin to the 'folkonomies' of Web 2.0.

LINKAGES

The potential of the digital medium that I am exploring is, at root, how we link of data. Forsaking the printed text makes it possible to

think of alternate types and sequencing of 'pages'. Lev Manovich points out that a 'motivated' interface, an integration of content and interface, must be created.¹⁴

In a sense, I have already been discussing linkages of data. Once classical time is properly historicized, we open the possibility for writing more diverse and distributed notions of pasts.

I agree with Paul Ricoeur that interpretation is included in the level of documents and of categorization as well as the interpretive structure of narratives.¹⁵ Annals and Repetition serve as two different ways to link data, and I hope that they open up the possibility of depicting history as timespaces - a recognition that an event and understanding of it is constituted by and constitutes moment and place - not a chronology of a spatial form (May & Thrift). In this section I continue to explore the performative nature of history by offering descriptions and interpretations. This brings out the other aspect of history, the narratives about the past. Johannes Droysen describes this relationship beautifully, 'It is only in appearance that the "facts" in such a case speak for themselves, alone, exclusively, "objectively". Without the narrator to make them speak, they would be dumb' (Droysen 1967: 52-3).

I have written two types of narratives that give meaning to the data. In Histories, topics are connected to interpretive issues in the broader fields of history of Japan and history more generally. In this section, it is possible to read a series of texts that combine into an essay, a social history, about 1884. This would be the more standard form of history, the linear text, using the data (accessible by hyperlinks) to explain its significance. I generally use standard historical categories and discuss events in relation to other historical works and interpretations.

But other narratives are also possible. We must remember that 'Every document, every moment in every document, conceals (or reveals) an indeterminate set of interfaces that open into alternate spaces and temporal relations'

¹⁴ Lev Manovich writes, the 'choice of a particular interface is motivated by a work's content to such degree that it can no longer be thought of as a separate level. content and interface merge into one entity, and no longer can be taken apart' (2001: 67).

¹⁵ He writes, 'For me, there is interpretation at all three levels of historical discourse: at the documentary level, at the level of explanation/understanding, and at the level of the literary representation of the past' (p. 185).

(McGann 2001: 181). When we recognize that our history removes events from their immediate context into broader (more 'significant'), even universal, frameworks, then a glance into the pre- or non-modern provides hints of other narrative forms. One that I have chosen is the episodic time that Wilcox finds in the writings of Herodotus and Thucydides. Wilcox describes this temporality 'where the events had a temporal dimension but where the chronological order of specific events within an episode had no particular meaning and where one event in the episode could not be treated as the efficient cause of another' (pp. 52-3). This temporality is neither solely linear or synchronic, but one which emphasizes the event within its own meaning structure that might be both linear and synchronic. In short, it is discontinuous, local, and specific; it is not described through structures that transcend it. Entry points to these episodic narratives is through the button on each data point:

Explanation. I decided not to create a separate entry point, because these are more specific to the event, not vice versa.

The separation of explanations and histories is not just a way to bring out the alternate possibilities within history, to 'complexify' the past. It is also to think about how it fits together. We must be careful in providing alternate possibilities that we are not consumed by the conceit that our 'new' is a complete separation from the past. Reinhart Koselleck (1985) has written a wonderful essay on the word modern, describing the way that the idea of new (as modern) has changed over the centuries. This is a place to caution ourselves that we are truly 'new'. Indeed, that is part of Bolter and Grusin's message. Here, I am not arguing that an acceptance of a multiple temporality eschews the linearity that has guided the past. We must recognize that in 1884 Japan (and in non-Western places confronting modern imperialisms) there is a homogenizing epistemology that is sweeping this archipelago, that it is part of the modern literary system, and

that history is part of this system that gives conceptual structure to the transformation of a region of many diverse and often unconnected places into a unified nation-state. I prefer to think of the multiple times that exist in this moment through Serres' metaphor of turbulence. He describes this complex temporality:

Time does not always flow according to a line . . . nor according to a plan but, rather, according to an extraordinarily complex mixture, as though it reflected stopping points, ruptures, deep wells, chimneys of thunderous acceleration, rendings, gaps - all sown at random, at least in a visible disorder.

(Serres 1995b: 57)

Serres' metaphor of turbulence brings in the modern linear temporality and its effort to establish that absolute, homogenous time. A key phrase in this statement is 'Time does not always flow . . .'. In other words, there is recognition of some kind of flow, the homogenizing forces of an absolute time that is the foundation of the nineteenth century Western unification of the world into an international system. But this flow is not uniform, like a clock, nor is it unidirectional. Turbulence also recognizes heterogeneity, the 'stopping points, ruptures, deep wells, . . . acceleration, rendings, gaps'. But in this case, they are not described through some category of incompleteness or primitiveness, but as both singular and possibly connected. Serres writes, 'The turbulent state mixes or associates the one and the multiple, systematic gathering together and distribution, and disappears there, distribution appears there in the system and disappears there' (Serres 1995a: 109).

ENDING

The mixture of data, categories, descriptions, and histories, is an attempt to write a history that both represents this flow, or the transition to the modern, and the turbulence that existed simultaneously. I believe that it is a more appropriate and accurate metaphor for thinking

about change than a linear one. Readers will encounter some discomfort because of the accumulation of practices and critical tools that reinforce the linear narrative. I have tried to offer signposts that are familiar, though the underlying framework is different. But we must remember that Ranke's reality is what Lefebvre calls an 'alternative reality'.¹⁶

Today, interestingly, technology opens up the possibility of revisiting human inter-relations and the knowledge structures that facilitate and confine. Scholars have been calling for this reformulation for decades now. For example, the sociologist Norbert Elias writes:

'An enquiry into "time" . . . is a useful point of departure for the great spring-cleaning that is long overdue. There is always a need for it when an intellectual tradition providing the basic means of orientation within its societies has run its course for several centuries, as ours has from the (so-called) Renaissance to the present time.'

(Elias 1992: 93-4)

One of the things that has hampered this 'spring cleaning' has been the unity between thought and media, the modern literary system. Technology offers the opportunity to break (or at least question the assumptions of) that unity. But a spring cleaning is not wholesale change, but an inquiry that examines whether current structures are still apposite, or whether we might formulate new ones.

If there is anything 'new' here, I hope that this exploration leads to further inquiry into re-invigorating history with the richness of the pasts. We must realize how much our current mode of practice has bracketed sections of the past apart from history and relegates others to its margins. Electronic technologies provide opportunities for bringing in diverse, often contradictory, pasts, not as fragmented and separate, but in ways that show the relationships (as well as disconnects) to other more 'important' forms.

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¹⁶ Lefebvre writes, 'Within this reality an alternative reality emerges, another world within our own. What alternative reality? What other world? Technology and control over nature' (1995: 181).

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