

**Feminist Historiography and the Reconceptualisation of Historical  
Time**

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by

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis conducts a reconceptualisation of historical time as a means of reorienting feminist historiography and changing the ways that we construct and approach histories of feminism. Various feminist theorists have argued that feminist theory requires a multilinear, multidirectional model of historical time, to enable productive encounters and exchanges between past and present feminisms, and account for the coexistence of parallel, intersecting feminist trajectories. This is particularly crucial in light of the continuing dominance of the phasic ‘wave’ model of feminist history, which is bound to notions of linear succession and teleological progress, and severely curtails the ways in which diverse feminist histories can be mapped, understood and related to one another. However, whilst alternative, multilinear, multidirectional notions of historical time have been mooted, there is rarely any clarity or elaboration on what exactly what this might mean or how it might work. This, I suggest, is because ‘historical time’ is itself an under-investigated and under-articulated concept. My contribution in this thesis, therefore, is to offer a detailed study of historical time, which makes sense of the idea that historical time is multilinear and multidirectional. In the course of this investigation, I develop a ‘polytemporal’ model of historical time, arguing that historical time is generated through a mix of different temporalities and fields of time, including the ‘time of the trace’, ‘narrative time’, ‘calendar time’ and ‘generational time’. Analysing each of these ‘times’ in turn, the thesis offers a thorough and internally complex account of historical time, demonstrating how thinking history ‘polytemporally’ can work, and how historical time can be understood as multilinear and multidirectional. Further, it offers concrete suggestions as to how this reconceptualised model can translate into a more nuanced and effective feminist historiographical practice, which opens up conversations between past and present feminisms in order to positively transform our presents and futures.

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## THESIS INTRODUCTION

### Making History, Making Time

#### OVERVIEW

If there is a distinct feminist attitude towards tradition, it would usually be characterised as one of suspicion, skepticism and iconoclasm. Feminists have sought to unsettle tradition and the aura of inevitability it bestows, often by appealing to shifting historical patterns and paradigms to demonstrate the instability and contingency of traditional sociocultural ideas about sex and gender. In this regard, feminists have used history as a subversive tool to *undermine* tradition. Yet, as feminism *itself* has become a historical ‘tradition’, with ‘icons’ of its own, interesting and important questions have emerged for feminists to address: How can feminism draw on its own history for inspiration and strategy without passively conforming to the expectations of past feminisms, or setting the past up as a nostalgic ideal against which to measure and compare the present? Conversely, how can feminists usher in new ideas and approaches in light of new conditions and problems, without enacting a violent or needless negation of past feminisms? Moreover, how can feminists construct and narrate ‘feminist history’ without instating or reproducing a hegemonic master narrative?

Any response to these questions has to engage a conception of ‘historical time’, which governs the temporal logics we employ as we write and read histories of feminism, and the ways that we connect feminisms of the past to feminisms of the present and future. The dominant model of historical time within contemporary western historiography remains bound to notions of linear succession, teleological progress, and totality, and informs a hegemonic model of feminist history in the singular, presented as a progressive series of successive ‘phases’ or ‘waves’. This hegemonic model severely curtails the ways in which diverse feminist histories can be mapped and understood, as it functions by blocking out or

distorting trajectories which do not fit into the dominant frame. It also fosters restrictive forms of historiographical and theoretical practice, as the model of successive phases or waves implies that only one approach is possible at a time, and moreover, that older forms of theory and practice necessarily become obsolete and must always be overtaken by newer ones. The hegemonic model of feminist history thus relies upon a progressivist understanding of historical change through time, whilst also constructing an antagonistic relation between feminisms old and new.

Accordingly, various feminist theorists have begun to call for an alternative model of historical time: a model which is *multilinear*, and can therefore account for the coexistence of intersecting, parallel trajectories; and which is also *multidirectional*, and can therefore account for the ways in which the past affects and shapes the present, but also for the ways in which present perspectives can affect and shape our relation to the past. Such a multilinear, multidirectional model of historical time would enable a more heterogeneous understanding of feminist histories *in the plural*, and would also enable more fruitful interactions and conversations between feminisms of the past and the present. ‘Historical time’, however, is one of the most notoriously vague and under-investigated concepts within historiographical and philosophical discourse. Thus, whilst multilinear and multidirectional notions of historical time have been mooted, there is rarely any clarity or elaboration on what exactly what this might mean or how it might work. What does it mean, for example, to say that historical time moves in more than one direction, or to speak of ‘different times at the same time’?

My contribution in this thesis, therefore, is to offer a detailed study of historical time, which makes sense of the idea that historical time is multilinear and multidirectional. I develop a ‘polytemporal’ model of historical time, arguing that historical time is generated through a mix of different temporalities and fields of time, including the ‘time of the trace’, ‘narrative time’, ‘calendar time’ and ‘generational time’. Analysing each of these ‘times’ in turn, the thesis offers a thorough account of historical time as internally complex, showing that the temporalities involved in archival practice, narrative configuration, calendrical



mapping, and generational symbolics, are never reducible to one temporal determination, or one mode of temporal relations. In so doing, the thesis demonstrates how thinking history ‘polytemporally’ can work, and offers a much-needed elaboration of the concept of a multilinear and multidirectional historical time. Further, it offers suggestions as to how this reconceptualised model of historical time can translate into a more nuanced and effective kind of historiographical practice within feminist theory. My proposal is that a polytemporal model of historical time would generate a feminist historiography which is sensitive to different ways of configuring historical time, and which opens up conversations between past and present feminisms as a means of positively transforming the present and future.

The aim of this Introduction is to further explain and contextualise the rationale for the project, and to outline my methodology and polytemporal approach to historical time. The first section gives a definition of ‘feminist historiography’, whilst the second section positions the problems of contemporary feminist historiography within the context of the philosophy of history more generally, examining the legacy of Hegel and other speculative philosophies of ‘world history’ which continue to shape our concepts of historical time and the ways that we construct and write histories today. The third section outlines my own approach to the project of reconceptualising historical time as a means of reorienting and transforming feminist historiography. It offers a basic definition of historical time as a ‘lived time’, outlines the method of ‘pragmatic pluralism’ that the thesis implements, and finally, provides a preliminary sketch of the polytemporal model of historical time that is elaborated in the main body of the thesis.

## 1

### **WHAT IS ‘FEMINIST HISTORIOGRAPHY’?**

The term ‘historiography’ has two key meanings. In the first instance, it refers to a self-reflexive mode of historical practice: ‘a critical consciousness at work in the writing of history’ (Chandler 1998:77). In the second instance, it refers to a theoretical or philosophical

exercise that takes a step back from the writing of substantive history, in order to critically examine the ‘deeper’ underlying conceptual models and imaginaries that inform the kinds of histories we write, and the ways that we use and approach our histories. As this is a theoretical, rather than a historical study, I refer to ‘historiography’ primarily in the second sense, and use the term ‘feminist historiography’ to mean a theoretical meta-reflection on the way that feminists have constituted and conceptualised histories of feminism, and the effect that this has on feminist political and intellectual practice. In this sense, the study is politically, as well as philosophically, engaged. That is, whilst it does take a philosophical ‘step back’ from substantive history, it does not take a *disinterested* view on the dynamics and processes of feminist history-writing and history-making, conducting itself as a merely academic exercise. Rather, this kind of philosophical feminist historiography is a strategic, immersed kind of historiography, intimately linked to ethicopolitical concerns and discourse (La Capra 1985).

‘Feminism’, it must be emphasised, is a fluid, and moreover, a contentious term, particularly when associated with the universalising presumptions of certain strands of white western feminism<sup>1</sup>. Consequently, various terms such as ‘womanism’ (Walker 1983)<sup>2</sup>, ‘US third world feminism’ (Sandoval 2000)<sup>3</sup>, ‘black feminism’ (Mirza 1997), ‘third world feminism’ (Heng 1997), or ‘Mestiza feminism’ (Gillman 2011), have been formulated to emphasise geographical, cultural and historical specificity, and to mark a feminist

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Western’ is also a complicated and contentious term, yet it is retained in this thesis as a shorthand for denoting cultural fields and configurations which position themselves, and are positioned, as inheritors of European intellectual histories—including Greco-Roman philosophy and myth, European Christianity, and influential intellectual movements such as the ‘Renaissance’ or the ‘Enlightenment’—and moreover, have often been embroiled or implicated in European political and cultural colonialism from the sixteenth century to the present day. For a historical and geographical sketch of the ‘idea of the West’, see Bonnett (2004). For more on ‘western feminism’ and its ‘others’, see Mohanty (1991b).

<sup>2</sup> ‘Womanism’ was coined by Alice Walker, who defines a ‘womanist’ as a ‘black feminist or feminist of color’, and writes that ‘womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender’ (Walker 1983: xi).

<sup>3</sup> Sandoval uses this term to refer to work by US women of color that created a ‘a new feminist and internationalist consciousness’, a ‘deliberate politics organised to point out the so-called third world *in* the first world’, including, for example Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa’s collection *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981) or Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s essay ‘Cartographies of Struggle’ (1991a).

consciousness and practice that is attentive to differences between women as well as to shared circumstances and potential commonalities.<sup>4</sup> Whilst registering its range of meanings and its potentially problematic connotations, however, this thesis retains the term ‘feminism’ as a ‘placeholder’. I use it in its broadest sense to denote the plethora of organised groups and individuals engaged in challenging the subordination and oppression of women within male-dominated societies and communities, and the marginalisation of women’s knowledges, experiences and creations within androcentric discourses. This means adopting a pluralistic and problem-centered understanding of ‘feminism’, as opposed to understanding it as a coherent political identity or unified theoretical framework. Thus, I use the feminist ‘we’, not in presumption of a shared perspective, approach or experience, but rather, in presumption of a shared interest in a certain set of problems (Marder 1992; Bennett 2006; Wiegman and Elam 1995)<sup>5</sup>.

In the simple sense that ‘feminism’ means challenging patriarchal domination and control, and androcentric norms and imaginaries, the field of ‘feminist history’, (which I use throughout as a shorthand for ‘feminist histories of feminism’), necessarily overlaps with the field of ‘women’s history’, (i.e. ‘feminist histories of women’s lives’). The historical project of recovering female pasts and making women ‘visible’ in history, thereby displacing or complicating androcentric and patriarchal perspectives, is indeed a vital feminist practice (Lerner 1979; Bennett 2006). However, the idea of a distinct ‘feminist history’—separable from ‘women’s history’—has emerged in conjunction with the consolidation of the idea of ‘feminism’ itself, as a self-consciously articulated, organised intellectual and political movement, or coalition of movements<sup>6</sup>. As Susan Stanford Friedman explains, ‘the feminist

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<sup>4</sup> To consider the problem of appropriation of political action by women in the name of ‘feminism’ see, for example, De Groot on the case of Iranian ‘feminism’ (2010).

<sup>5</sup> For more on the ‘negotiating the status of the “we”’, see Lyotard (1989), or Carby (1997:52).

<sup>6</sup> For more on the various definitions or classifications of a social, political or cultural ‘movement’, see Cathcart (1980) or McGee (1980), both of whom argue that a ‘movement’ can be defined through its discursive or rhetorical form, as opposed to a more traditional historical materialist approach which defines a ‘movement’ as a social phenomenon, i.e. an organised series of coordinated, collective actions in the public sphere.

desire to “make history” entangles the desire to effect change with the desire to be the historian of change’. This means that ‘writing the history of feminism functions as an act in the present that can (depending on its influence) contribute to the shape of feminism’s future’ (Friedman 1995:13). In other words, feminist narrations of the history of feminism have themselves become part of the history of feminism (Scott 1996:18). My interest is thus in how feminists have sought to position themselves within histories of feminism and feminist legacies, thereby self-consciously and strategically building an intellectual and political tradition, and a historiographical field or community.<sup>7</sup>

In focusing on the ‘internal’ dynamics of feminist history,—i.e. on how feminists conceptualise, construct, and mobilise feminist histories—the thesis does risk a kind of feminist insularity. After all, one of the biggest problems facing feminists in contemporary ‘post-backlash’ contexts is how feminism is represented by the ‘*outside*’, for example within discourses declaring the ‘end of feminism’, or referring to ‘post-feminism’ as a way of marking the decline or obsolescence of feminism (Henry 2004:19).<sup>8</sup> Another serious problem is the appropriation and redeployment of feminist concepts, for example by advertising companies advising on what is ‘empowering’ for women (Faludi 1992; Power 2009). An inward-looking historiography could certainly be viewed as an evasion of the need to engage with these wider social issues and discourses, and tackle hostile exterior forces. Theories and narratives which are too internal to feminism, as Nancy Fraser points out, often ‘fail to situate

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, the statement of the 1970 black feminist ‘Combahee River Collective’, who named themselves after the campaign led by Harriet Tubman to free 750 slaves near the Combahee River in South Carolina in 1863. ‘It was a way of talking about ourselves being on a continuum of black struggle, of black women’s struggle’, explains founder Barbara Smith (1979:83-8). Or for another example, in 1969, the ‘New York Radical Feminists’ (founded by Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt) declared: ‘We are dedicated to a revival of knowledge about our forgotten feminist history, and to a furthering of the militant tradition of the old radical feminist movement’. They plotted a ‘reclaimed’ history which included women’s movements of the nineteenth in the US and UK, and also ‘feminist independents such as Simone de Beauvoir’ (quoted in Henry 2010:56).

<sup>8</sup> In narratives of ‘post-feminism’, the prefix ‘post’ usually indicates a rupture, pointing to a time after feminism – a time when feminism is no longer needed because its goals have been achieved. Paradoxically, then, the term can in fact signal ‘both failure and success, both an anti-feminist critique of the misguidedness of feminism and a pro-feminist nod to feminism’s victories’ (Henry 2004:19).

interior changes in relation to broader historical developments and the larger political context’ (Fraser 2008:101). Indeed, separating feminism off as its own field is a classic move of narrow white feminism, and can signify a failure to appreciate the various different pathways into and out of feminism, and the ways in which feminisms have arisen in tandem and coexisted with antislavery, antiracist, and anti-imperialist struggles, and also national modernisation and reform movements, or religious-nationalist/cultural-nationalist revivalisms (Roth 2004; Heng 1997).

However, by treating the ‘internal’ temporal dynamics of feminist history as an isolated or autonomous *topic*, I am not thereby arguing for the autonomy of feminism *per se*. Engaging with wider contexts, entangled legacies, and antifeminist discourses are all crucial feminist tasks. Yet, as Diane Elam insists, ‘while the backlash against feminism must be taken seriously... merely instituting protective measures against threatening patriarchal intruders would be too simple a solution to the problem. Rather... it is important to ask some serious questions about what is happening *within* feminism...’ (Elam 1997:55; see also Siegel 1997). That is, whilst on the one hand there is a pressing urgency to reclaim and reconstruct histories of feminism in response to the persistent erasure and misrepresentation of feminist histories by antifeminist political and cultural discourses<sup>9</sup>, this project must not be a simple resuscitation of the same old stories and historical models. This is because, in the words of Friedman, ‘our actions as feminists – including the productions of our own history – run the risk of repeating the same patterns of thought and action that excluded, distorted, muted or erased women from the master narratives of history in the first place’ (Friedman 1995:12). It is therefore important that feminist theorists conduct a reflexive investigation into the construction of feminist history, which in turn, requires a deeper philosophical enquiry into the conceptions of ‘history’ and ‘historical time’ that have informed feminist historiography as it has intersected with broader historiographical contexts and frameworks.

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<sup>9</sup> Indeed, there is plenty of empirical evidence of a surging interest in feminist histories, for example, the recent proliferation of ‘witnessing’ and archival projects, and conferences and workshops dedicated to feminist histories (see, for example, Calvini-Lefebvre *et al* 2010)<sup>9</sup>.

2**THE LEGACY OF SPECULATIVE PHILOSOPHIES OF  
'WORLD HISTORY'**

It has become customary to divide the philosophy of history within western scholarship according to two approaches. The first is the 'speculative' approach, which seeks to identify a pattern in historical events, extract a general principle or mechanism to account for this pattern, and posit an explanatory concept that imbues the historical process 'as a whole' with a *telos*: a purpose and meaning (Dray 1964:62-3). This speculative approach is predominantly associated with the 'brief flowering' of speculative philosophies of history in Enlightenment Europe during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (ibid). The second approach is the 'critical' or 'presentist' approach, which redirects attention away from the course of historical happening, and from all talk of mechanisms or meaning, towards the *writing* of history in the present. This critical approach can be sub-divided into two different schools: the Anglo-American 'analytic' school, which conducts epistemological enquiry into the status of historical knowledge, and the 'continental' or 'structuralist' school, which undertakes literary analysis of historical texts<sup>10</sup>. In this thesis, however, I pursue a third approach to the philosophy of history: an approach which focuses on the elusive concept of 'historical time' itself (Ricoeur 1988:104).

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<sup>10</sup> The speculative / critical distinction was in fact constructed by philosophers in the analytic school as a means of distancing themselves from the speculative tradition, defining their own approach against what they regarded as unwarranted and unsubstantiable speculative claims about the historical process (Dray 1964; O'Brien 1971). The analytic school has focused largely upon epistemological debates concerning certain historiographical terms, such as 'explanation', or 'causation', but without considering the relevance of these debates to wider theoretical discourse or historical existence. As such, whilst it offers useful clarifications, its utility to feminist historiography is limited. There is considerable merit in the continental, or structuralist approach, in that it draws critical attention to the role of not only literary conventions but also political practices in the construction of historical knowledges and imaginaries. However, as I argue in chapters 2 and, 3, taking an *exclusively* structuralist approach results in an impoverished conception of historical reality, and moreover, of historical time. For more on the analytic approach, see Danto (1965; 1995), and for more on the structuralist, literary approach, see Kellner (2000), Budd (2009), Vann (1995), or Rayment-Pickard (2000).

Several feminist theorists have argued that the concept of ‘historical time’ is irredeemably bound to notions of teleological progress and totality. Julia Kristeva, for example, in her renowned essay ‘Women’s Time’, describes ‘the time of history’ as the time of ‘project, teleology, linear and prospective unfolding’ (Kristeva 1986b:192). This conception of historical time has arisen due to the pervasive and continuing influence of those speculative philosophies of history mentioned above that emerged in Enlightenment Europe, including Kant’s ‘Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose’ (1991), Condorcet’s *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind* (1955), or Hegel’s *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* (1975). There is, of course, no singular or uniform ‘Enlightenment’ philosophy of history<sup>11</sup>. There are philosophers of the era such as Hamaan or Herder who repudiate not only Enlightenment narratives of progress, but further, the idea that one can understand human histories in unified terms at all (Herder 1969; Hamaan 1996a; 1996b)<sup>12</sup>. Moreover, those Enlightenment philosophers who do present a progressivist philosophy of ‘world history’, or ‘universal history’, differ in terms of the principles or ‘ends’ that they postulate, and moreover, their general philosophical systems of which their philosophies of history form a part (Hutchings 2008:39-46). Nevertheless, whilst it has been formulated in a variety of ways, the basic speculative thesis that history has

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<sup>11</sup> The term ‘Enlightenment’ or *Aufklärung* became widespread in eighteenth-century Germany particularly; the term was transferred from German into English in the second half of the nineteenth century, and has become common only in the latter half of the twentieth-century (Burns 2000). For elaborations on the meaning of ‘Enlightenment’, see the collection *What is Enlightenment?* (ed. Schmitt 1996), which presents a variety of perspectives from both the late eighteenth and the twentieth centuries, including Kant’s famous essay ‘An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?’ In this essay, Kant defines *Aufklärung* as a continuous process leading to emancipation from prejudice and superstition, and a capacity for independent thought and ‘mature’ judgment, rather than an already enlightened ‘age’ (Kant 1996).

<sup>12</sup> Herder, in his 1774 text *Yet Another Philosophy of History*, critiques the idea that one can ‘group into one mass the people and periods which succeed each other eternally like the waves of the sea’ (Herder 1969:181). Hamaan, in his 1784 letter to Christian Jacob Kraus, offers a political critique of Enlightenment philosophy which contends that the so-called ‘enlightened’ state simply replaces one politically dominant group with another, i.e. the ‘Enlighteners’ (1996b). Moreover, in his 1784 ‘Metacritique on the Purism of Reason’, he takes issue with Kant’s universalistic approach to philosophy, claiming that Kant imagines he can simply ‘invent’ a ‘universal philosophical language’, whereas in fact, words have meaning only in relation to the time and place where they are appropriate (1996b). Because of these challenges to the ideas of progress and universality, Herder and Hamaan are often described as ‘counter-Enlightenment’ thinkers, a term popularised by Isaiah Berlin (1997).

reason, purpose, and direction, and can be treated in the collective singular as ‘world history’ or ‘universal history’, has been a recurring and vital element of European Enlightenment philosophy, and has greatly influenced understandings of historical time over the past two centuries (Brown 2001:6; Koselleck 2004:9-25; Gray 2007:97; Nisbet 1980:171)<sup>13</sup>. Of all the speculative philosophies of history, it is Hegel’s that has arguably been the most philosophically influential, and indeed, is the most clearly and fully articulated philosophy of history of its kind<sup>14</sup>. It is expounded most explicitly in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, and is worth briefly outlining here, for its exposition of the ideas of ‘graduated progression’ and historical unity or ‘totality’, which, as we will see, continue to inform the temporal logics of contemporary historiography.

In the *Lectures*, Hegel claims that ‘world history’ represents ‘the development of the spirit’s consciousness of its own freedom and of the consequent realisation of this freedom’ (Hegel 175:138).<sup>15</sup> Freedom, or self-determination, is the *telos* within Hegel’s philosophy of

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<sup>13</sup> For more on the idea of progress in Enlightenment philosophy, see Nisbet’s *History of the Idea of Progress* (1980). The first half of the book surveys the idea of progress within the classical world, the early Christians, the Medieval era and the Renaissance, but his key argument is that the idea of progress ‘triumphs’ within western philosophy between 1750 and 1900. Nisbet discusses various formulations of ‘progress’ during this period, including the influential writings of Turgot, Edward Gibbon, Adam Smith, the Founding Fathers, Condorcet, William Godwin, Thomas Malthus, John Stuart Mill, Herbert Spencer, Saint-Simon, August Comte, Karl Marx, and of course, Kant and Hegel.

<sup>14</sup> It is important to distinguish here between Hegel’s philosophy *per se*, which covers a huge range of philosophical topics and concerns, and Hegel’s philosophy *of history*. Indeed, Hegel’s accounts of morality and politics, the relationship between freedom and the state, and the relationship between particularity and universality have informed feminist philosophy in various important ways. For investigations into feminist philosophy’s relationship to Hegelian philosophy more widely conceived, see Hutchings (2003), Mills (1996), Sandford and Stone (1999). For more on the impact of Hegelian thought upon contemporary philosophy more generally see Butler (1999), Rockmore (2003). For recent attempts to conceive of a ‘weak’ Hegelianism, or to rework a dialectical philosophy which abandons Hegel’s teleological account of world history, see Houlgate (2005), Malabou (2005), or Nancy (2002).

<sup>15</sup> Hegel writes that the realm of the ‘spirit’, as opposed to the realm of ‘nature’, is that realm ‘created by man himself’ and ‘encompasses everything that has concerned mankind down to the present day’ (Hegel 1975: 44; see also Hegel 1977). ‘Spirit’ is a complex term, but it is best understood as the world of intersubjectivity which is self-determining and self-changing. ‘Subjective spirit’ refers to individual self-conscious existence and experience, whilst ‘objective spirit’ refers to all that self-conscious existence has produced in terms of culture (including art, religion and philosophy), law, institutions, habits, and the ‘second nature’ of an environment produced through human labour (Hutchings 2003:39-40). In fact, as Hutchings explains, objective and subjective spirit may be analytically distinguishable but they are in fact inseparable and mutually constitutive in an ongoing process. Thus for Hegel, self-determination is ‘the truth of a complex, mediated and self-reflective whole rather than that of an individual agency’ (ibid).



history, as he posits that the immanent purpose or goal of history is for human beings to become conscious of themselves as freely and historically self-determining beings. It is also the principle or ‘mechanism’, as the emergence of such self-consciousness is what drives history forwards (Houlgate 2005:21-2). ‘Freedom’, in Hegelian terms, is not an a-historical phenomenon grounded in the will of individuals but rather, is only meaningful within institutionalised relations of mutual recognition (Hutchings 2008:44). The realisation of freedom, in Hegel’s account, is thus not simply about individual enlightenment; rather, he posits that the ultimate end of ‘world history’ is that spirit should ‘actualise’ or ‘objectivise this knowledge and transform it into a real world, and give itself an objective existence’ (Hegel 1975:64). As such, the rise of the (modern) state is vital to Hegel’s account of ‘world history’, whereby the state emerges as the self-conscious imposition of constraints by a community of autonomous individuals: an explicit realisation of history’s implicit principle and *telos*:

‘The state is the more specific object of world history in general, in which freedom attains its objectivity and enjoys the fruits of this objectivity. For the law is the objectivity of the spirit, and the will in its true expression; and only that will which obeys the law is free: for it obeys itself and is self-sufficient and therefore free. When the state or fatherland constitutes a community of existence, and when the subjective will of men subordinates itself to laws, the opposition between freedom and necessity disappears’ (ibid:97).

According to Hegel, all societies and cultural forms are working out this underlying logic, as ‘world history’ unfolds in a variety of determinate forms—different ‘nations’, ‘civilisations’ or ‘worlds’—which can be interpreted as different levels of self-conscious recognition of the meaning of social life as self-determination (ibid:51-54). Hegel speaks of

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four ‘worlds’ in his *Lectures*: ‘Oriental’, ‘Greek’, ‘Roman’ and ‘Germanic’<sup>16</sup>. Though tenuously linked to specific geographical areas and specific eras, these are better described as ‘world-outlooks’ which stand in a formal relation to one another (Rauch 1988:ix). Thus, Hegel writes that whilst there might be a coexistence of different principles or determinate forms, each *represents* a ‘particular stage of development, so that they correspond to epochs in the history of the world’ (Hegel 1975:64). This makes it possible for Hegel to delineate a temporal hierarchy in which particular places become identified with particular stages of historical development, and to posit that at any given time, there will be a culture or civilisation that is most ‘advanced’, for example, European modernity in his own time:

‘The aim of the world spirit in world history is to realise its essence and to obtain the prerogative of freedom... but it accomplishes this in gradual stages rather than at a single step... Each new individual national spirit represents a new stage in the conquering march of the world spirit as it wins its way to consciousness and freedom... the world spirit progresses from lower determinations to higher determinations and concepts of its own nature, to more fully developed expressions of its Idea’ (ibid:63).

For Hegel, then, ‘world history’ must be treated as a unity, even though different societies and cultures do not work out and ‘actualise’ the underlying logic of self-conscious self-determination at the same time or the same rate. Whilst a merely empirical study might suggest there is simply a plurality of human societies, cultures and histories, for Hegel, the *philosophical* perspective enables us to subsume this plurality under a higher principle of

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<sup>16</sup> Hegel writes that in the ‘Oriental world’—an extremely broad category stretching from Ancient Egypt to China—the ‘Orientals’ knew only that *one* person (the monarch) was free; the Greco-Roman world knew that *some* people are free; and in contrast, ‘our own’ knowledge, i.e. the modern ‘Germanic’ world, the world of Christian Europe, is that all people are free, in terms of the spiritual identity accorded to all individuals, which means all have the capacity for self-determination (Hegel 1975:54-5).

unity<sup>17</sup>. ‘The principles of the national spirits in their necessary progression’, he writes, ‘are themselves only moments of the one universal spirit, which ascends through them in the course of history to its consummation in an all-embracing *totality*’ (ibid: 65). Moreover, Hegel argues, whilst empirical studies may indicate that historical events arise and relate to one another in an arbitrary and haphazard way, the philosophical perspective reveals a rationally determinable pattern, principle and purpose within history. This perspective permits us to see beyond not only the apparent arbitrariness and disparateness of historical happenings, but also beyond historical injustices and atrocities, via the process of ‘intellectual reconciliation’. The ‘only thought which philosophy brings with it’, he claims, ‘is the simple idea of reason – the idea that reason governs the world, and that world history is therefore a rational process’ (ibid: 27). Accordingly, philosophy ‘transfigures reality with all its apparent injustices and reconciles it with the rational’ (ibid: 67).

As stated, Hegel’s is one among several ‘speculative’ philosophies of history formulated within eighteenth and nineteenth-century western thought. Within contemporary historiography, in contrast, it is very rare to find an advocate of the speculative approach. In the first instance, any philosophical claim postulating an overall ‘direction’ that history is taking is easily discredited when faced with the actualities of historical shifts and happenings. Hegel’s claim that reason and freedom are gradually becoming ‘realised’ within social and ethical life, for example, is difficult to defend in light of empirical evidence to the contrary. Moreover, Hegel’s insistence that ‘reason governs the world’ has been denounced as extremely problematic in light of the injustices and atrocities that have continued to occur throughout the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries. As Adorno famously declares,

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<sup>17</sup> This constitutes a significant difference from Kant who theorises the relation between empirical and philosophical history in much more ambiguous terms. Indeed, Kant writes in his ‘ninth proposition’ that ‘it is admittedly a strange and at first sight absurd proposition to write a history according to how world events must develop if they are to conform to certain rational ends’ (Kant 1991:51). In light of this tension between empirical and philosophical history, he casts the idea of progress as a regulative idea, rather than a guaranteed outcome. Nevertheless, elsewhere in the essay, he does tentatively make the claim that civil freedom is in fact ‘gradually increasing’, that enlightenment is ‘gradually arising’, and a universalistic, cosmopolitan ‘feeling is beginning to stir...’ (ibid:50-51). I discuss the Kantian approach of postulating historical progress and unity as a regulative idea further in chapter 7.

after Auschwitz it is impossible to claim that ‘the real is rational and the rational is real’ (Adorno 1973:306; see also Arendt 2006:86-88; and Ricoeur 1988:205). Speculative philosophies of history such as Hegel’s have therefore been largely abandoned: firstly on epistemological grounds, as we admit the impossibility of grasping human history ‘as a whole’ and determining an overall ‘pattern’; and secondly on ethical grounds, as we oppose reconciliatory attempts to ‘rationalise’ historical atrocities and injustices, or to consider human societies on the basis of which is the most or least ‘advanced’ (Young 1990).

However, whilst contemporary historiography has, in the main, *explicitly* refuted teleological and universalising speculative philosophies of history, the influence of these philosophies survives *implicitly* in the form of historiographical and temporal ‘logics’, in the sense that ‘logic’ refers to a means of working out, organising, relating and ordering thought and phenomena (Mink 1978; Megill 1995). Feminist historiography is a good example. Feminists rarely adhere to anything like Hegel’s speculative philosophy of ‘world history’<sup>18</sup>; indeed, feminists have often been at the forefront of the challenge to the presentation of history in terms of teleological progress and universality, insisting that there are diverse histories which do not all move in the same ‘direction’, and cannot be subsumed under universalising categories and temporal schema (Newton 1989; Lerner 1979; Kelly 1984; Scott 1986)<sup>19</sup>. Nonetheless, when it comes to narrating histories of feminism *itself*, feminists have frequently imported those very historical models and temporal logics that they have so vehemently criticised. As I demonstrate in chapter 1, feminist narratives of feminist history are frequently organised around a series of successive ‘phases’ or ‘waves’, and presented in

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<sup>18</sup> Exceptions notably include Shulamith Firestone’s ‘grand’ historical narrative, as presented in *The Dialectic of Sex*, which postulates that ‘the biological division of the sexes for the purpose of reproduction, which lies at the origins of class’ is the ‘mechanism’ driving the course of historical development (Firestone 1971:13). Firestone’s rewrites Engels’ formulation of historical materialism to claim that ‘the sexual-reproductive organization of society always furnishes the real basis, starting from which we can alone work out the ultimate explanation of the whole superstructure of economic, juridical and political institutions as well as of the religious, philosophical and other ideas of a given historical period’ (ibid:13-4).

<sup>19</sup> ‘Gendering’ history is premised upon the principle that differently positioned people experience and make sense of historical happenings and processes in different ways. Joan Kelly’s essay ‘Did Women Have a Renaissance?’ (1984) is a classic example of this kind of ‘gendered’ approach.

terms of a *progression*, which culminates in the author's position in the present, from where she has a purview of 'feminist history' *as a whole*. This hegemonic model of feminist history thereby imports two of the key characteristics of Hegel's philosophy of history outlined above: firstly, the idea of a 'graduated' progression which follows a 'series of successive determinations' or stages that progressively overcome one another (Hegel 1975:64; 138); and secondly, the idea that diverse and particular histories can be treated as instances of a more general pattern or unified historical trajectory (ibid: 65). Even Kristeva, who emphatically disavows the teleological, progressive, linear 'time of history', presents the history of feminism in these terms (Kristeva 1986b)<sup>20</sup>.

The legacy of speculative philosophies of history is thus more entrenched than might appear at first glance within contemporary feminist historiography, as narratives of feminist history continue to rely upon and reproduce a progressivist, stagist, totalising historical model. As I explain in chapter 1, the deployment of this model results in highly reductive and misrepresentative accounts, as feminist history is divided into rigid categories such as 'liberalism', 'Marxism', 'radical feminism' and 'poststructuralism', which are mapped onto a progressive chronology, and presented as different 'phases' or stages that oppose and come one after the another. It is true that different feminist approaches emerge in different eras, but this does not mean that they are entirely 'contradictory', or that they necessarily surpass one another, as the logic of sequential negation implies. For example, 'poststructuralist' feminist theory may have emerged at a later date than 'liberal' feminist theory and has challenged some of its core tenets; but in the process, liberal feminism has not simply *disappeared*. Rather, it persists and poses its own challenges to poststructuralist feminism in return. To present different feminist approaches as sequential historical stages can thus preclude a productive exploration of encounters between such coexisting and intersecting theoretical trajectories. Moreover, the totalising and teleological gesture of discerning an overall 'direction' to feminist theory results in universalising presumptions that all feminisms everywhere have gone through, or will go through, the same trajectory as hegemonic western

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<sup>20</sup> Kristeva's progressive, 'phasic' account of feminist history will be outlined in detail in chapter 1.

feminism and, as such, that certain kinds of feminism are more ‘advanced’ or ‘sophisticated’ than others.

The continuing influence of these sequentialist, teleological and totalising temporal logics suggests that a more radical ‘root and branch’ reconceptualisation of historical time is required, to inform a different kind of historiographical practice. As stated, for some feminist philosophers, the concept of ‘historical time’ is in fact *irredeemably* bound to notions of teleological progress and totality. This kind of claim is particularly common within feminist literature on ‘women’s time’, whereby ‘women’s time’ is positioned in *contradistinction* to ‘historical time’, which is characterised as a patriarchal, ‘phallogcentrically structured, forward moving time’ (Forman and Sowton 1989; Kristeva 1986b; Ermath 1992; Showalter 1985a). The discursive field of ‘women’s time’ studies, it must be affirmed, has proven to be a fruitful site for enquiry into women’s temporal perspectives and experiences, and has importantly challenged androcentric and patriarchal accounts of time-consciousness and temporal existence. Yet, to dismiss historical time as a ‘patriarchal’ time, and position ‘women’s time’ as a qualitatively different kind of time, is to ignore the important ways in which the idea of historical time has shaped, and continues to shape, women’s lives and feminist politics. It can also have the effect of de-historicising feminist struggles and women’s lives and practices, through structurally locating women outside history, that ‘linear’ time shaped by the actions of men (Watts 1988:14).<sup>21</sup>

It is certainly true that conceptions of historical time have been dominated by teleological, totalising models; however, my proposal is that the concept of historical time is not simply *reducible* to grand notions of teleological progress and totality. It has a much wider reach and range of meanings, as well as having value as a ‘large-scale’ time that

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<sup>21</sup> Problems have also arisen from the way in which ‘women’s time’ has consistently been depicted as ‘cyclical’ in opposition to the ‘phallogcentrically structured, forward moving time’ of men. This dualistic approach has come under critical fire, not only for its essentialist overtones (in equating ‘women’s time’ with the time of ‘nature’ or ‘biology’), but further, for its failure to acknowledge the ways that ‘linear time’ is lived by women as well as men. Felski draws parallels between the way that the temporality of non-western societies and cultures is portrayed as ‘cyclical’—closer to nature—in juxtaposition to the ‘linear’ time of the post-industrial West (Felski 2000). See also Gupta on this issue (1992).

enables the sharing of multiple pasts, presents and futures. Rather than abandoning the concept of historical time, then, this study argues for a reworked, enriched model of historical time as a basis for thinking and constructing feminist histories differently. This alternative model of historical time must be able to account for the coexistence of different feminist trajectories and approaches, and moreover, for multiple determinations of the time of feminism itself, given that feminism ‘does not fold a temporal vision into its very core’ (Felski 2002:22; see also Fernandes 2010; Roof 1997). In the sense that feminism is an emancipatory movement, there are indeed some basic features common to most formulations of ‘feminist time’, namely, the hope that the future will be ‘better’ than the past and present, and the conviction that oppressive gender regimes are not necessarily fixed for all time. Yet, there is no innate feminist vision of the temporality of emancipatory politics and processes, or core understanding of how the past, present and future are related or bound to one another. As the thesis will demonstrate, there are various ways of understanding the temporality of historical change and transformation.

First of all, however, it is important to clarify in a preliminary sense what we actually mean when we talk about ‘historical time’. For example: to what extent are determinations of historical time bound by metaphysical or physical models and concepts? What kind of ‘reality’ does historical time have? In light of such questions, the rest of this Introduction will outline my basic understanding of what ‘historical time’ is, and my method of investigation.

### 3

#### **WHAT IS ‘HISTORICAL TIME’?**

My conception of historical time depends upon two core theses: firstly, I contend that historical time must be understood and theorised as a *lived time*: a time that is lived by embodied, situated subjects, and which is dependent upon sociocultural systems of

representation and schemas of shared experience. Secondly, I argue for a *polytemporal*<sup>22</sup> or ‘composite’ conception of historical time, as a time that is generated through the intersection or mixing of various ‘times’ and temporalities. This conception of historical time—as lived and polytemporal—will be outlined below using the frameworks of ‘post-positivist’ realism and ‘pragmatic pluralism’.

### 3.1

#### *Lived Time and Post-positivist Realism*

As stated, my first core thesis is that historical time is a *lived time*. The notion of ‘lived time’ foregrounds the experiential, discursive and symbolic aspects of temporal existence, as opposed to scientific and metaphysical approaches which are interested in time as an objective condition or phenomenon of the world or universe. Scientific approaches of course differ from metaphysical approaches, in the sense that scientific approaches use empirical data or mathematics to develop physical, biological or astronomical theories of time, whilst metaphysical approaches use speculative reason to develop theories of time, often postulating that there is a gap between our empirical and cognitive grasp of the world, and the world as it is ‘in itself’. However, there is a certain amount of mutual ‘borrowing’, given that both scientific and metaphysical approaches share an interest in the objective realities of ‘time’, regardless of how time might be perceived or conceived in a sociological or personal sense<sup>23</sup>. The notion of ‘lived time’, in contrast, pertains to the way that different individuals and societies think, feel, behave and relate to one another according to their experiences of, and ideas about, time.

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<sup>22</sup> My conception of ‘polytemporality’ is primarily inspired by Dipesh Chakrabarty’s conception of ‘heterotemporality’ in *Provincializing Europe* (2000), and its adoption by Kimberly Hutchings in *Time and World Politics* (2008). However, due to the potentially heteronormative connotations of this term, particularly within the field of feminist studies where it could imply ‘heterosexual’ or ‘heterocentric’ temporality’, I have elected to use ‘polytemporality’ instead.

<sup>23</sup> For more on metaphysical and physical theories of time see Dainton (2001).



The turn towards lived time in philosophy has been greatly influenced by Kant's 'Copernican turn', which shifts away from a treatment of time as a mind-independent condition of the world, towards a treatment of time (and space) as a function of our minds and a framework through which we read experience (Kant 2007:67; Battersby 1998:61; Couzens Hoy 2009:6-7). This turn, as David Couzens Hoy explains, is the first step away from a physics and a metaphysics of time towards a philosophy of 'lived time' or temporality (ibid: 7). Yet in fact, Kant's transcendental idealist account itself does not offer a philosophy of lived time, because for Kant, time is not something that is itself known or experienced. Instead, he posits time as a *transcendental condition* of knowledge and experience. 'Time is not an empirical concept that has been derived from any experience', he writes, nor is it a 'discursive concept' (Kant 2007:74-5, A30/B46). Rather, time is an *a priori* 'intuition' or form that is imposed onto the 'manifold of sense experience' via three distinct modes: persistence or duration, simultaneity, and succession (ibid: 74-8, A31/B47)<sup>24</sup>. 'Different times', he claims, 'are but part of one and the same time', and thus cannot coexist but are necessarily sequential (ibid). Moreover, he describes time as the 'form of inner sense', which conditions the 'intuition of ourselves and of our inner state', and ultimately depends upon the 'transcendental unity of apperception' (ibid: 77). As such, in Kant's account, time itself is not something that is 'lived'; it is a transcendental *condition* of sensible and intellectual life. The Kantian account of time is thus of little utility in developing a theory of historical time as a lived time.

This study therefore approaches historical time neither in terms of time as an objective condition 'out there', nor in terms of time as a transcendental condition of subjective experience. As an investigation into lived time, it can be considered essentially 'phenomenological' in the very broadest sense that 'phenomenology' is the 'philosophy of experience' (Stoller 2009; Weiss 2011). Yet, as I argue in chapter 3, a subject-centered

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<sup>24</sup> Thereby presupposing a backdrop of stable substances or permanent bodies in space. For further exegesis of Kant's *Transcendental Aesthetic*, see, for example, Bird (2006), Ward (2006), Strawson (1995).

phenomenological framework cannot suffice, given that historical time is an intersubjective, ‘large-scale’ time that is determined and mediated through sociocultural systems of representation and experiential schemas (Chakrabarty 2000:74). Accordingly, I propose that historical time should be understood as a socially and culturally constructed form of time, which is generated through intersubjective ‘temporalisations’ of history. ‘Temporalisation’ connotes ‘an activity, a complex praxis of encoding Time’ which has various dimensions including the linguistic, the interpretative and the performative (Fabian 1983:74). By ‘temporalisations’ of history, therefore, I mean the practice of impressing a temporal structure on to conceptions of history, and relating past, present and future in politically significant ways (Koselleck 2004; Ricoeur 1988:104).

My first core thesis, then, is that historical time is a lived time that is generated through the intersubjective, sociocultural practice of temporalising historical trajectories and conceptions of history. To claim that historical time is a socially and culturally constructed time is not to say that historical time is not ‘real’. Rather, my account of historical time as a ‘lived time’ engages a notion of reality as ‘*lived reality*’, an approach which can be helpfully formulated through the epistemological framework of ‘post-positivist realism’. Post-positivist realists contend that what is ‘real’ stretches beyond the empirical world of objects, or the physical world of forces, to include the reality of ideas, relations and other things of an abstract character. From this perspective, the reality of an abstract idea exists in its effects, its manifestation in social practices, relations and structures, its role within conceptual schemas that give both content and form to social and individual experience. Accordingly, knowledge ‘is not simply out there in the world waiting to be apprehended’ but is always derived through embodied, socially and culturally mediated experience (Gillman 2010:6-7)<sup>25</sup>.

This post-positivist epistemology is informed by a pragmatic approach to reality and truth which stresses the interactivity of human subjects with the natural and social world of which they form a part (Gillman 2010:6; see also Haddock Siegfried 1996). In his

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<sup>25</sup> It thereby differs from the empiricist treatment of experience as a ‘basic unit’, and also from simplistic treatments of experience as ‘transparent’ or self-evident. I discuss this further in chapter 3.

*Pragmatism* lectures, William James explains that according to the pragmatic conception of knowledge and truth, truth is ‘made, just as health, wealth and strength are made in the course of experience’ (James 2000:96)<sup>26</sup>. The constructivist, contingent conception of truth, in turn, depends upon a mutable, processual conception of ‘reality’ itself, given that ‘truth’ means essentially the ‘agreement of an idea with reality’. For pragmatism, James writes, reality is not ‘ready-made’, but rather, is always ‘in the making,’ because our constructed conceptual schemas affect the way we live or experience reality, and moreover, because experience is always ‘boiling over’ such schemas of truth and knowledge, which means that our understandings of ‘reality’ must be continuously *re-made* (ibid: 87;123). Indeed, James speaks of ‘realities’ and ‘truths’ in the plural, because experience is never uniform and singular, nor are the truths or knowledges with which lived experience coincides. The pragmatic conception of truth and reality formulated by James in these lectures thus serves as an alternative to the metaphysical conception of ‘truth with a big T’ and ‘reality with big R’, whereby reality is singular, ‘ready-made and complete’, and truth is ‘found’ or ‘given’ as true (ibid: 27-30). It also offers an alternative to speculative metaphysical accounts such as Hegel’s, which postulate that there is an overarching principle or *telos* determining the ‘reality’ of life, even if reality and truth are unfolding and not statically given.

To claim that we ‘make’ our contingent truths and lived realities is not to say there are no restraining elements or, as James puts it, ‘resisting factors in every experience of truth-making’ (ibid: 117). This includes the body of our own prior beliefs, wider belief systems which pre-exist us, and also nonhuman and ‘natural’ elements as resisting and determining factors. For example, physical, biological and astronomical processes and temporalities unavoidably affect historical experience and knowledge, such as ‘time’s arrow’ or the ageing

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<sup>26</sup> I follow James’ formulation of pragmatism here, rather than its more rationalistic ‘systematic’ versions, as developed by Charles Peirce, for example. For an overview of different ‘pragmatisms’, their histories and current manifestations, see Bernstein (2010), or Malachowski (2004); for more on feminism and pragmatism, see Haddock Siegfried (1996), or Hamington and Bardwell-Jones (2012).

process (Koselleck 2004:1)<sup>27</sup>. Any notion of ‘historical time’, then, is not constructed in a vacuum free from the influence of ‘natural’ factors or sociocultural traditions. The crucial point, however, from a pragmatic, post-positivist perspective, is that the ways in which historical time is understood and experienced are dependent upon shifting constellations of truth and determinations of reality that are not fixed nor the same for everyone<sup>28</sup>. This epistemological approach to historical reality and historical time enables us to retain a critical view, and investigate why we conceive of historical time as we do, and moreover, our own role in configuring historical time in a particular way. It thereby resists an uncritical naturalistic positivism, which relies on scientific or naturalistic models to make claims about how historical time ‘really’ is, whilst also resisting an entirely voluntarist epistemology, where we are imagined to be free to make any kinds of truths and meanings we wish.

### 3.2

#### *Pragmatic Pluralism and the Polytemporal Model of Historical Time*

Theorising historical time as a ‘lived time’ requires us to move away from fixed conceptions of ‘Truth’ and ‘Reality’, and thus from ‘Time with a capital T’, and consider how historical

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<sup>27</sup> Indeed, this is the important lesson encapsulated by Adorno’s concept of ‘natural history’, i.e. the mutual imbrication and interdependence between the ‘historical’ and the ‘natural’, or rather, the material ‘excess of the object’ which exceeds the conceptual schemas that would try to contain it (Cook 2011).

<sup>28</sup> In focusing on discursively mediated constructions of time, my approach diverges from the ‘new materialist’ feminist philosophers who have taken a renewed interest in scientific theories of time to provoke a rethink of feminist politics and histories. Elizabeth Grosz’s recent work has been particularly influential, as she argues that feminism has left behind notions of nature and matter by focusing strictly on the ‘historical effects of sexual difference’, and suggests that the Darwinian model of evolution can provide a different and more promising model of history (Grosz 2004; 2005). As stated above, historical, cultural experience is of course connected to biological and physical temporal orders. It may also be true that ‘social constructivist’ feminist theory has tended to neglect the determinative importance of the biological (see also Battersby 1998:20-3; Moi 1999). However, the ‘new materialist’ thinkers often have a rather imprecise and undeveloped concept of *historical* time, and indeed of ‘history’ itself. Grosz, for example, tends to conflate ‘history’, ‘time’, ‘evolution’ and ‘change’, using them as interchangeable terms instead of distinct concepts with their own meanings, fields, and functions. The scientism and naturalism of the ‘new materialism’ also rather evades important critical questions about how ‘nature’ can be theorised or known in any immediate/unmediated sense, thereby risking importing an uncritical ‘germ of positivism’ in the turn to scientific paradigms to underwrite feminist knowledges, politics and methodologies (Howie 2002:193).

time is constructed, experienced and interpreted within specific social, cultural and political fields of discourse and practice. As such, a pragmatic post-positivist epistemology constitutes a valuable framework for describing in a basic sense what historical time 'is', i.e. a 'lived' time which is constructed through intersubjective temporalisations of historical experience and reality<sup>29</sup>.

The pragmatic conception of truth and reality, further, translates into a historiographical method, which can be termed 'pragmatic pluralism'. As we have seen, pragmatism has a thoroughly 'embedded' conception of enquiry, which opposes the 'spectator theory of knowledge', and is based instead upon 'an understanding of how human agents are formed by, and actively participate in shaping, normative social practices' (Bernstein 2010:19). The pragmatic method in philosophy therefore views ideas and theories as revisable 'tools', rather than seeking out one ultimate theory or final solution (James 2000:27-8). As James explains it, the guiding question for a pragmatic philosopher is to ask 'what difference would it practically make' if we adopted this or that alternative 'world-formula'? (ibid: 26-7). The pragmatic method 'appears less as a solution, then, than as a program for more work, and more particularly as an indication of the ways in which existing realities may be *changed*' (ibid: 28). Taking a pragmatic approach to historical time, accordingly, means exploring how historical time is constructed and put into practice within specific sociocultural contexts, and further, addressing the normative question of 'how best to relate to time and the optimal strategy for dealing with time on the level of the social and historical' (Couzens Hoy 2009).

The pragmatic approach also requires a *pluralistic* method of investigation, because if historical time is an intersubjectively produced, shifting configuration, it cannot be approached from only one angle or perspective. Rather, we need to draw on a variety of methods and approaches, (within the broad contours of a pragmatic epistemological

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<sup>29</sup> I am informed by this broad framework as I formulate a historiographical epistemology of 'indirect realism' in chapters 2, 3, and 4, which challenges the anti-realist position that 'brackets' the 'real past' from historiographical enquiry, and also challenges the naturalistic understanding of historical time in terms of a 'natural chronology'.

framework), to explore and make sense of the various ways of configuring historical time. ‘The time of our lives’, as Keith Ansell-Pearson asserts, ‘is not only an existential issue but also, amongst other things, a political one, a task for phenomenology to work through, a task for genealogy to complicate, and a problem for hermeneutics to decipher and interpret’ (Ansell-Pearson 2011:1). Given the complexity of the intersubjective praxis of temporalising history, then, a theory of historical time needs to draw on a plethora of resources, including: *phenomenological* accounts of the structures of temporal experience; *hermeneutical* accounts which consider its interpretative dimension; *literary or structuralist* accounts which examine the linguistic and discursive systems and schema that influence and shape the experiential and the interpretative; *genealogical* accounts which demonstrate the contingency of hegemonic models and thought patterns and trace alternatives; *cultural* accounts which explore the construction of temporal imaginaries through mythology, ritual and art; and *sociopolitical* accounts which consider how certain representations of time and institutionalised time-frames are used to determine and coordinate social and political relations.

Using this method of pragmatic pluralism, the thesis will develop a ‘polytemporal’ model of historical time. The polytemporal model that I articulate in chapters 2 – 7 rests upon the basic premise that there is no ‘one’ historical time or one temporal direction within which diverse histories are somehow all embroiled. On the contrary, I demonstrate that there will always be multiple, shifting configurations and conjunctions of historical time, as different histories have their own mixes of time and their own temporalities. In this sense, the polytemporal approach conceives of historical time as ‘composite’, generated through different temporal layers and strands, which combine and intersect in distinct ways to produce particular experiences and discursive formations of historical time. Once we understand historical time as an outcome of various temporalisations of history, it becomes difficult to separate the term ‘time’ from ‘temporality’ and ‘temporalisation’. However, I use the term ‘time’ in this thesis primarily to denote a particular field or ‘genre’ of time, and ‘temporality’ to denote the specificities of that time’s ‘temporal logics’: i.e. the way that it organises, orders

and relates past, present and future, and its rhythms, directions, and pace. The thesis focuses on four ‘times’ that consistently enter into constructions of historical time:

- The ‘time of the trace’, characterised by a ‘two-way’ temporality, as past events spill over into the present as ‘traces’, and conversely, through tracing the past we are oriented ‘back in time’.
- ‘Narrative time’, which generates temporal orders through marking beginnings, middles, ends, continuities, breaks, flashbacks, flash-forwards, returns and echoes.
- ‘Calendar time’, which dates and organises histories into timelines through temporal markers such as years, decades and centuries, as a means of orienting and anchoring historical understanding and imagination.
- ‘Generational time’, which is created through the connections and relations between different lives as they overlap through different times and ages.

By exploring each of these fields of time, using a variety of theoretical approaches and concepts, the thesis develops a composite, layered, and internally complex model of historical time as a traced time, a narrated time, a dated time, and a relational time. Moreover, it demonstrates the temporal complexity *within* each field of time: showing that the temporalities involved in archival practice, narrative configuration, calendrical mapping, and generational symbolics and relations, are diverse and never reducible to one temporal determination.

In focusing on these four different ‘times’, I am not suggesting that they are exhaustive of ‘historical time’ or that they must all be in evidence if we are to speak of historical time<sup>30</sup>.

Indeed, if we accept that there are multiple configurations and ways of living historical time,

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<sup>30</sup> This is a particularly important point with regards to how nonwestern cultures are so often described as not having a ‘sense of history’ because certain ways of conceiving of dealing with time presumed to be ‘essential’ to historical consciousness are observed to be missing (see, for example, Young 1990; Chakrabarty 2000). For these kinds of reasons, anthropologist Carol Greenhouse argues for an approach to time which does not presume in advance what ‘time’ is (Greenhouse 1996).

and that each history has its own mix of times and its own temporalities, we must admit the impossibility of giving an exhaustive or complete account of historical time. There will always be temporal logics and fields of time that escape our own fields of knowledge and experience or elude our understanding.<sup>31</sup> The model I articulate and develop in this study is therefore not intended as a complete or all-encompassing model or theory. Rather, it is intended as a partial account that demonstrates how a polytemporal approach can work, marking a ‘provisional orientation’ for a different inhabitation of the feminist historiographical field, to enable a different kind of historical practice (Brown 2001:4-5). Articulating a basic or partial ‘model’ of historical time in this way is, in the first instance, of critical, analytical value, as it helps us to be clear what we might mean when we speak of multidirectional, multilineal concepts of historical time. The idea of ‘nonlinear history’, or of ‘multiple times’, can certainly appear rather vague, and is often dismissed as a ‘postmodern flight of fancy’. It is helpful, therefore, to try and articulate exactly how such conceptions of historical time can work, which in turn, makes the idea of nonlinear histories and plural historical temporalities much more defensible and plausible. As well as having critical, analytic value, theoretical models such as this also have *transformative* value, in that they can alter a domain of reality through changing the language of investigation, helping us to think and act otherwise (Ricoeur 1984). Thus, I give content and detail to my ‘polytemporal’ model of historical time—rather than simply mooted it as an abstract idea or future possibility—through reference to the four ‘times’ identified above<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>31</sup> I discuss this further in the thesis’ Conclusion, as I identify fields of time which this thesis does not address, for example, sacred time or digital time.

<sup>32</sup> Using spatial metaphors and speaking in terms of ‘models’ of historical time, is perhaps to invite the Bergsonian criticism that in figuring or ‘spatialising’ time we aren’t ‘thinking in time’ at all (Bergson 2004, 2005; see also Guerlac 2006). However, the idea that ‘pure flux’ is a ‘truer’ conception of time than those informed by spatial metaphors is problematic from the perspective of lived time, in that time as it is known, and as it is felt, is often ‘configured’ in some respect. Indeed, as Adorno argues, the Bergsonian ‘flux’ operates as a kind of regulative ideal that implicitly retains a split between the conceptual, (operating in terms of space-time grids), and the ‘real’ of pure flux or becoming (Adorno 1973). I would also question whether it is possible to separate the spatial from the temporal in the manner that Bergson and neo-Bergsonians imply. Doreen Massey, for example, among other ‘radical geographers’, has insisted on the ‘inseparability of time and space, on their joint constitution through the interrelations between phenomena’. As such, she argues, ‘neither can be conceptualised as the



4**CHAPTER OUTLINES**

Chapter 1 gives a critical account of the ‘hegemonic model’ of feminist history, providing examples in the first section, including the ‘phasic’ account of feminism constructed in Kristeva’s ‘Women’s Time’ essay. Whilst there are of course variations in the specific content of the narratives examined, it is possible to identify a commonality of content, and moreover of form, as these accounts of feminist history are organised around a series of distinctly demarcated ‘phases’, and presented as a progressive trajectory. The chapter then moves on to clarify why this hegemonic model is problematic. Firstly, it considers the consistent and systematic misrepresentation that ensues from its deployment, focusing particularly on the model’s progressive structure. It then assesses the temporal logics of ‘sequential negation’ and ‘teleological totalisation’ underpinning the hegemonic model in greater depth, identifying their detrimental effects upon feminist historiographical practices. The chapter concludes by identifying instances within the critical literature where feminists have called for an alternative, multilinear, and multidirectional model of historical time through which to reconstruct feminist histories and reorient feminist historiography. The challenge is then set for the rest of the thesis, i.e. to articulate such an alternative model of historical time.

Chapter 2—‘The Time of the Trace’—begins this project of articulation by addressing what we mean when we speak of ‘history’. On the one hand, ‘history’ refers to ‘the course of events that really happened in the past’, and on the other hand, ‘history’ refers to ‘the stories we tell about what we think happened in the past’. The key aim of the chapter is to develop an adequate account of the complex relationship between these two senses of

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absence of the other’ (Massey 1992). Rather than seeing space and time as oppositional, then, and regarding the presence of spatial metaphors as the mark of a failure to ‘think in time’, my view is that we can quite legitimately turn to spatial metaphors and models as useful tools for conceptualising and articulating historical time.

‘history’: an account which can recognise the role that present perspectives and motivations play in determining our understandings of the past, whilst also affirming the determining influence of past events upon present perspectives and knowledges. The first two sections make a case against the structuralist or ‘narrativist’ school of historiography, associated primarily with Hayden White and Roland Barthes, which focuses exclusively on the writing of history, and adopts an ‘anti-realist’ epistemology that brackets all questions of the historical narrative’s referential link to the past event it purports to describe. I argue instead for an ‘*indirect* realism’, which posits that whilst a direct or objective knowledge of past realities is of course impossible, an indirect, dynamic link between the historical narrative and the past event can be defended. I outline this indirect realist position through reference to Paul Ricoeur’s work on the relation between language and event, and the reality of the historical past, drawing particularly upon his ontology of the ‘trace’. The final section then demonstrates how this model of indirect realism can inspire a form of historical practice that I term ‘restless revisionism’: a processual, reflexive model of revisionism, which forges a provocative relation between the empirical and the rhetorical aspects of historical practice, and seeks to continually disrupt established narratives and presumptions in the present through re-tracing feminist pasts.

Chapter 3—‘Narrative Time’—further investigates the relationship between interpretation and event, through undertaking a more detailed exploration of the relation between historical time and narrative time. The key argument here is that narrative temporalities can be understood as ‘internal’ to historical events, and thus to historical time. The chapter begins by challenging once again the structuralist or ‘narrativist’ approach, which treats narrative time as ‘external’ to historical time, and defines historical time in reductive terms as a ‘merely’ chronological sequence of events. To collapse this dualistic model, the second section considers the phenomenological approach to time and narrative taken by David Carr, which moves us towards a much richer understanding of the ‘lived’ temporality of historical events, and the ‘affinity’ between lived time and narrative time. Yet, the subject-centered phenomenological method he adopts is ultimately insufficient, given that historical

time is an intersubjective time, and narrativity is an intersubjective practice. Accordingly, the third section draws instead upon hermeneutical accounts of historical time and theories of ‘narrativity’, which foreground the role that narratives and narrative configurations play in temporalising intersubjective fields of experience and ‘horizons of expectation’. I turn initially to Reinhard Koselleck’s hermeneutical theory of historical time, to provide the basic theoretical framework, which I supplement with a ‘pluritopic hermeneutics’, and a feminist politics of narrativity, which compel us to appreciate and investigate the internal temporal complexity within any culture of time or narrative context. The chapter concludes by suggesting that these approaches also orient a flexible and experimental kind of narrative practice, seeking out narrative forms and techniques that can express more adequately the multiple voices and temporalities that feed into and out of feminist histories.

Chapter 4—‘Calendar Time’—considers the question of historical chronology in more depth, and adds another layer to the complex model of historical time that the thesis is developing. It argues for a qualitative approach to calendar time, which problematises assumptions that calendar time is a neutral, straightforwardly chronological or ‘linear’ time, and that ‘real’ historical time is *essentially* calendrical. The analysis begins by drawing on sociological and genealogical approaches to challenge naturalistic and reified understandings of calendar time, and to demonstrate that it is a socially specific constructed tool for coordinating, managing and orchestrating social, economic, political and cultural life. To elaborate the qualitative approach, the second section offers a selective reading of Heidegger’s analysis of ‘time-measuring’ and ‘time-reckoning’ in Division II of *Being and Time*, which illustrates that quantitative time-measuring frameworks emerge as such an *outcome* of qualitative, materially-situated processes of collective time-reckoning. The third section then addresses the ‘publicness’ of calendar time, drawing on Hannah Arendt’s pluralistic conception of publicness to develop a ‘deepened’ account of public time, as a framework which enables temporal coordination, but importantly, is not uniform in its meaning and effects. The final section shows that a qualitative understanding of calendar time can give rise to a more reflexive and sensitive way of approaching feminist timelines, which

recognises the value-laden nature of dated time. Further, it can initiate more creative ways of configuring and coordinating feminist histories through calendar time that generate a multiplicity of intersecting feminist timelines, rather than just one.

Chapter 5—‘Generational Time’—weaves in yet another temporal layer to my model of historical time, as it explores the temporal configurations and significations of feminist ‘generations’ and genealogies. It firstly gives a critical account of the dominant patriarchal or ‘Oedipal’ generational paradigms, which portray generational legacy in terms of hierarchical succession and competitive rivalry, and have detrimental effects upon feminist relations and politics. I argue, however, that whilst linear and patriarchal/Oedipal determinations may well be dominant, this does not mean that they are the only determinations that exist or are possible. To think feminist generations outside of the mainstream patriarchal/Oedipal models, the chapter goes on to consider Luce Irigaray’s work on reconstructing and reimagining female genealogies. Aspects of Irigaray’s work offer a promising route out of linear generationalism; yet her rather monolithic treatment of the ‘western symbolic order’ and ‘cultural imaginary’ limits the transformative potential of an Irigarayan approach. As such, the final section draws upon ‘postkinship studies’ in anthropology, which shifts us towards thinking in terms of not ‘one’, but ‘many’ symbolic orders and cultural imaginaries. To make the case for this kind of approach, I refer to Hortense Spillers’ and Madhu Dubey’s studies of matrilineal metaphors in the African American context, which demonstrate the importance of tracing different histories and symbolic orders, which open up different generational imaginaries and relational practices. The chapter concludes by endorsing the hermeneutic of ‘repetition with variation’, which offers a promising way of interpreting and understanding generational time, as it can attend to the complex interplay between continuity and discontinuity within the process of history-making and tradition-building.

Chapter 6—‘Repetition’—elaborates further on repetition as a historiographical concept that not only provokes a rethinking of the temporality of tradition and generationality, but further, provokes a reconceptualisation of historical processes and practices more generally. I draw particularly on Christine Battersby’s use of the Kierkegaardian concept of

‘recollecting forwards’ and the Nietzschean concept of ‘untimeliness’, which depict repetitive temporality in terms of a relational dynamism between past, present and future. The chapter then goes on to consider how this conception of repetition can translate into historiographical practice. In the first instance, I suggest that the idea of repetition can inspire a transformative historiographical practice, premised upon ‘repeating’ or re-activating forgotten ideas and methods that can be brought to bear on feminism’s present and its possible futures. In the second instance, the concept of repetition can foster a reflexive and critical form of historiographical practice precisely because it factors in the repetition of the undesirable aspects of past feminisms, as well as the more desirable aspects, which continue to repeat themselves in our own presumptions and discourses, even as we may think we left them behind. To expand on this idea, I turn to Dominick La Capra’s psychoanalytically-inspired concept of ‘historiographical transference’, as a way of understanding the process of repetition and displacement that occurs as a structural determinant of historical practice. The chapter concludes by discussing the notion of a ‘dialogue’ between past and present, as a way of positively and responsibly engaging with repetitions of the past in the present, of both the desirable *and* the undesirable kind.

The final chapter—‘Polytemporality’—considers the crucial question of how we can conceive of shared time and historical collectivity within a polytemporal model of historical time. My first aim is to challenge arguments that the concept of ‘totality’ is a necessary regulative idea or ‘methodological imperative’ for drawing together diverse histories and temporalities. Challenging both the Kantian argument put forward by Ricoeur, and the Marxian argument put forward by Fredric Jameson, I argue that there is nothing necessary about ‘projecting a totality’. Indeed, I contend that the concept of totality is detrimental to the project of generating a historiographical practice that is sensitive to plural determinations of historical time. This is because the thought of ‘totality’ invites a notion of historical time as a ‘container’: as a single time frame that we are all ‘in’ by default, whether we know it or like it or not. Against the higher ideal of ‘totality’, plural determinations are regarded as lesser approximations, rather than as *constitutive* of historical time. I suggest, therefore, that it may

be more productive to try and think ‘histories in the plural’ *without* the idea or specter of totality. To this end, the second section of the chapter draws on the work of Johann Fabian, Gloria Anzaldúa, and particularly Dipesh Chakrabarty, to consider how it can be meaningful to speak of shared historical time from a ‘polytemporal’ perspective, without ‘totality’ as a regulative guarantor. I develop a notion of ‘complex coevalness’, supported by a practice of ‘temporal translation’, which does not rely on an overarching temporal backdrop or a universal ‘third term’, but rather, operates through ‘barter-like’ exchanges and ‘porous’ encounters. On this model, it is possible to share time and forge collective histories without assimilating different temporal frameworks and perceptions into one, or homogenising the diverse ways of experiencing, imagining, constructing and reckoning with historical time.

## CHAPTER 1

# The Hegemonic Model of Feminist History

## INTRODUCTION

Feminist movements and trajectories have always been manifold and diverse, with crossovers and points of connection, as well as divergences and points of contention. ‘Feminism is not’, as Misha Kavka insists, ‘the object of a singular history, but rather, a term under which people have in different times and places invested in a more general struggle for social justice and in doing so have participated in and produced multiple histories’ (Kavka 2001: xii). Despite this diversity, however, it has become common to narrate ‘feminist history’ as a singular trajectory, which is divided into different sequential ‘phases’ and presented in progressive terms, with one phase overcoming another. Consequently, the ‘potentially enlightening and liberating spaces’ produced by feminism have gradually morphed into a ‘great hegemonic model’, which systematically misrepresents and curtails the ways in which feminist consciousnesses, methods and activisms can be conceptualised (Sandoval 2000:47). This chapter concentrates on outlining the ‘hegemonic’ model of feminist history, giving a critical account of its operation across a range of western feminism’s various institutional contexts and theoretical strands, and clarifying its problematic effects<sup>33</sup>.

Section 1 provides illustrations of feminism’s hegemonic model, referring firstly to Julia Kristeva’s influential essay ‘Women’s Time’ (1986b) as its key example, and also to recent analyses of storytelling trends within western feminist theory (Sandoval 2000;

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<sup>33</sup> ‘Hegemony’, in the sense proposed by Antonio Gramsci (1971), refers to the phenomenon whereby dominant groups maintain their dominance through ‘the negotiated construction of a political and ideological consensus which incorporates both dominant and dominated groups’ (Strinati, 1995:165). The intention behind Gramsci’s theory of hegemony is to try and explain why the majority continue to uphold the values of the dominant group and the status quo, even when these values reflect the interests and lives of just a small minority. ‘Hegemony’ is therefore an apt term to describe the dominant model of feminist history, because, as I will explain, feminists consistently subscribe to this model, even though we frequently recognise that it corresponds to only a very specific trajectory of feminism.

Hemmings 2005; 2011). The principal aim of this section is to establish that there *is* a dominant model of feminist history, even though this might not be immediately apparent. Whilst the examined narratives of feminist history may differ in terms of specific content, and in terms of the author's own theoretical position, there are similarities in terms of *general* content, and in terms of historiographical *form*. Whether an author presents three key 'phases' or four, or whether she uses the trope of 'phases', 'generations' or 'waves', a common storyline emerges, which is that feminist history has moved away from a theoretical concern with equality (the sameness between women and men), towards a concern for women's uniqueness (women's difference from men), and finally, towards an increasing concern for the differences *between* women (difference in general). Moreover, in each case, the structure or form is similar, as the examined accounts are each organised into a series of distinctly demarcated phases or stages, and presented as a steady progression from past to present.

Section 2 goes on to discuss the serious and systematic misrepresentation of feminist histories that ensues through the deployment of this hegemonic model, focusing particularly on its progressive structure. It shows that 'progress narratives' which portray feminist history as a singular trajectory that moves 'from sameness to difference' often rely upon a representational technique of 'temporal othering', whereby the positive representation of one's own kind of feminism in the present is secured through the negative portrayal of feminisms of the past. For example, 'third wave' feminist writings frequently secure an impression of the third wave as diverse, flexible, and heterogeneous, through projecting the *opposite* characteristics, such as narrowness, rigidity, and homogeneity, back in time on to 'second wave' feminism. Whilst the intention of such narratives is to embrace and emphasise feminist diversity, the effect is contrary to the aim, because by presenting a temporal juxtaposition between the 'heterogeneous' feminism of 'now' and the 'homogenous' feminism of 'back then', the progressive storyline is incapable of representing difference and diversity *throughout* feminist presents and pasts. A further effect of this progressive structure is the 'temporal containment' of different 'types' of feminist theory, as they are fixed to certain eras and designated as 'stages' on the pathway to the present.



Section 3 focuses in more detail on the ‘deeper’ conception of historical time that underpins and informs the hegemonic model of feminist history. It will be suggested that this hegemonic model relies upon two interrelated temporal logics: ‘sequential negation’ and ‘teleological totalisation’, which can be linked to the residual influence of the speculative philosophies of ‘world history’ discussed in the Introduction. The analysis in this section clarifies how these temporal logics work in reference to the examples already discussed, and outlines their detrimental effects. The logic of ‘teleological totalisation’, I argue, results in a closed-minded attitude towards the past and future, and moreover, in universalising and evolutionist presumptions that feminisms everywhere are working out the same trajectory, though at different ‘stages’ of development. Moreover, the related logic of ‘sequential negation’, I claim, precludes a productive exploration of the interconnections between different *coexisting* strands of feminism, and of the potential relevance that older strands of feminism might have within present contexts. In light of these problems, the chapter concludes by stressing the need for an alternative model of historical time within feminist historiography.

## 1

### OUTLINING THE HEGEMONIC MODEL:

#### ‘PHASES’ OF FEMINISM

Since the early 1980s, the ‘phase’ trope has become a conventional means of demarcating shifts in methodology and consciousness within intellectual histories of feminist thought. The idea of different ‘phases’ of feminism is perhaps most famously articulated by Julia Kristeva in her 1979 essay ‘*Le temps des femmes*’, first published in English as ‘Women’s Time’ in 1981.<sup>34</sup> The first half of this section gives an outline of the three ‘phases’ of feminism that

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<sup>34</sup> ‘*Les temps des femmes*’ appears in 1979 in *33/44: cahiers de recherche de sciences des textes et documents*, volume 5, 5-19. It was translated as ‘Women’s Time’ in *Signs*, volume 7(1), in 1981, and is reprinted in *The Kristeva Reader*, edited by Toril Moi, in 1986 (Moi 1986). I refer here to this latter reprinted version of the essay.

Kristeva demarcates in this essay<sup>35</sup>. My intention is to show that Kristeva's reliance upon a singular, phasic, progressive narrative of feminist history has the effect of undermining her stated aim of moving towards a more complex conception of 'women's time' and the time of feminism. The second part of the section will then discuss the entrenchment of the phasic account since the publication of Kristeva's essay.

### 1.1

#### *The Phases of Kristeva's 'Women's Time'*

In 'Women's Time', Kristeva outlines three key historical 'phases' through which feminism has passed, each characterised by a distinct attitude towards time and history, and a distinct way of positioning itself within space<sup>36</sup>. The first phase is characterised in this account by an 'egalitarian' ethos, and a commitment to a progressive concept of historical time. 'In its beginnings', Kristeva writes, 'the women's movement, as the struggle of suffragists and existential feminists, aspired to gain a place in linear time as the time of project and of history' (1986b:193). In fact, Kristeva regards this phase as inclusive of 'socialist' feminism as well as 'liberal' feminism, as she discerns an essential commonality between the two in terms of their shared ethos of egalitarianism and investment in a linear ideal of historical progress. Thus, as Kristeva tells it, even as feminists turned from liberalism to socialism in the quest for a more radical overturning of the social contract, feminists retained their focus

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<sup>35</sup> In fact, Kristeva's historical narrative of feminism functions in the essay as a way of framing her main argument, which concerns the possibility of transforming the 'symbolic order' from a productive to a reproductive economy. Theorists interested in this problematic will therefore focus more closely on this core argument, rather than upon the historical narrative that accompanies it. Indeed, from this perspective, Kristeva's gesture of tracing a history of feminism might well be viewed as a 'false counter' or a 'decoy' (Roof 1997:81). However, the 'phasic' history of feminism that she traces has been hugely influential, and as such, warrants being outlined here in isolation from the rest of the essay.

<sup>36</sup> I will pay more attention to the temporal/historical aspect of Kristeva's analysis than the spatial. For more on the relationship between history and geography, time and space, see Osborne (1995 17-20), Massey (1994), or Young (1990).

on equality with men and historical progress. However, she continues, the turn from liberalism towards socialism ultimately proved unsatisfactory, given the limited capacity of socialist/Marxist theory to account for sexual difference, or for relations of reproduction within the social and symbolic order. As such, socialist feminism exhausted its potential, making way for a 'second phase' of feminism guided by 'Freudianism': a phase which relinquished the egalitarian aspirations of the 'first phase' and began to investigate the deeper apparatuses of power, language and meaning (ibid: 195-7).

Kristeva identifies this 'second phase' or 'generation' with 'women who came to feminism after May 1968', and with those 'who had an aesthetic or psychoanalytic experience' (ibid: 194). This generation, Kristeva claims, sees itself as qualitatively distinct from the former, and is essentially interested in 'the specificity of female psychology and its symbolic realisations', exploring the '*dynamic of signs*', and thereby adding more subtle and complex problems to the demands made by the earlier generation of feminists (ibid: 194). By breaking off from the earlier generation's aspiration to progressive incorporation into the social contract, this more radical generation, Kristeva contends, operates according to an entirely different temporal mode. This new temporal attitude, she writes, can be characterised by an 'almost total refusal' of linear temporality, and as a consequence, an 'exacerbated distrust of the entire political dimension' (ibid). Accordingly, in Kristeva's depiction, the feminist struggle became no longer a quest for equality within the terms of the social contract, but rather, in its 'second phase', it became a separatist struggle with difference and specificity:

'By demanding recognition of an irreducible identity, without equal in the opposite sex... this feminism situates itself outside the linear time of identities which communicate through projection and revindication. Such a feminism rejoins, on the one hand, the archaic (mythical) memory and, on the other, the cyclical or monumental temporality of marginal movements' (ibid).

This ‘second phase’ of feminism is depicted by Kristeva as an improvement on the ‘first phase’, due to its more thoroughgoing investigation into the relationship of the subject to power, language and meaning, indeed, the very apparatuses of subjectivation itself (ibid: 196-8). However, whilst feminism has ‘at least had the merit of showing what is ... deadly in the social contract’, she claims, it has in fact reverted to another means of regulating difference, fabricating a ‘scapegoat victim’ (ibid: 209-10). This is the inevitable result of invoking a universal subject ‘Woman’ and ‘mak[ing] of the second sex a *counter-society*’ (ibid: 202). As a way out of this ‘inverted sexism’, Kristeva describes a new ‘third phase’ or ‘generation’ emerging in Europe, characterised by an ‘avant-garde’ attitude, enabling ‘aesthetic practices’ that bring out the singularity of every person and the multiplicity of every person’s possible identifications (ibid: 210). Her anticipatory hope is that having started with the idea of difference, feminism will be able to:

‘...break free of its belief in Woman, Her power, Her writing, so as to channel this demand for difference into each and every element of the female whole, and finally, to bring out the singularities of each woman, and beyond this, her multiplicities, her plural languages...’ (ibid: 208).

Kristeva contends that this ‘third’ attitude of avant-garde (post)feminism<sup>37</sup> does not exclude the previous two attitudes. Rather, she states, it makes possible ‘the *parallel* existence of all three ‘phases’ of feminism within the same historical time’ (ibid: 209). In other words, the previous two attitudes—‘insertion into history and the radical refusal of the subjective limitations imposed by this history’s time’—can be mixed or held together in the third attitude (ibid). This idea promises a much more complex understanding of historical time and existence, characterised by a multiplicity of temporalities (Jardine 1981). Kristeva also

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<sup>37</sup> I describe Kristeva’s ‘avant-garde’ feminism here as a (post)feminism, because whilst on the one hand she presents it in ‘Women’s Time’ as a continuation of feminist thought, the essay also implies that the avant-garde attitude is a *departure* from the ‘feminist project’, which she equates with either a naïve egalitarianism or a self-indulgent separatism which both fabricate a universal female subject.

suggests an interesting way of understanding the term ‘generation’, when she writes that it can imply ‘less a chronology and more a mental or ‘signifying space’ (Kristeva 1986b: 209)<sup>38</sup>. Yet, she does not develop these ideas in any depth or detail, and moreover, their promise is undermined by the historiographical effects of her own narrative of feminist history. By presenting the three ‘phases’ or ‘generations’ in terms of a singular, progressive trajectory—from egalitarianism to separatism to avant-gardism—Kristeva in fact simply repeats and reinforces the ‘linear’ model of history that she wishes to refuse. Claiming temporal complexity and multiplicity for *the third phase alone*, the essay effectively blocks the thought of a more complex kind of historical time where temporal complexity goes ‘all the way down’, instead of being seen in horizontal, epochal terms and restricted to a specific historical era. Her promising conception of ‘generation’ as a ‘signifying space’ is similarly undermined by her own presentation of the three ‘generations’ of feminism in successive terms, whereby each follows and overcomes the former. This only serves to reinforce the idea of a unilinear generational succession, even as she purports to deny the link between ‘generations’ and chronology.

Consequently, whilst Kristeva opens up the problematic of time as a crucial site for feminist exploration, and also the possibility of a different understanding of historical time, her own essay remains locked in a highly schematic framework in which distinctly bounded historical ‘phases’ negate and succeed one another in a singular progressive trajectory. She therefore ends up reproducing precisely the kind of historical model she wishes to overturn.

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<sup>38</sup> The problematic of feminist generations will receive a thorough treatment in chapter 5; therefore it will not receive much critical attention in this chapter, which focuses on the tropes of ‘phases’ and ‘waves’.

## 1.2

*The Entrenchment of the Phasic Model*

The phasic, progressive model of feminist history has gradually gained hegemonic status within western feminist theory since the publication of Kristeva's essay. This is due not only to the influence of Kristeva, but also to the influence of several phasic classificatory typologies constructed by prominent U.S. theorists in the 1980s, as Chela Sandoval demonstrates in her recent survey of hegemonic western feminism (Sandoval 2000:47). Alongside Kristeva's essay, Sandoval cites texts by Alison Jaggar (1983), Gayle Greene and Coppélia Kahn (1985), Hester Eisenstein (1985), Eisenstein and Alice Jardine (1980), Elaine Showalter (1985b), Cora Kaplan (1985), and Lydia Sargent (1981), as being key in entrenching the phasic account, which she describes as feminism's 'great hegemonic model' (ibid). The different 'phases' outlined by these different authors, it must be emphasised, may differ in number and may not be exactly equivalent. As such, it is not immediately evident that a 'hegemonic model' exists at all. The point, however, is that 'manifestly different types of hegemonic feminist theory and practice are, in fact, unified at a deeper level into a great structure' (Sandoval 2000:47).

A comparison between Kristeva's account in 'Women's Time' and the influential typology formulated by Alison Jaggar in *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (1983) can demonstrate this point effectively. Kristeva, as we have seen, identifies three 'phases' of feminism, which can be summarised as: (1) 'egalitarian' (including both liberal and Marxist/socialist), (2) 'separatist' (radical/cultural), and (3) 'avant-garde'. In contrast, Jaggar's account identifies *four* phases of feminist theory: (1) liberal (2) Marxist (3) radical and (4) socialist.<sup>39</sup> Kristeva's three phases and Jaggar's four phases thus do not exactly map on to one another. Unlike Kristeva, Jaggar does not subsume liberal, Marxist and socialist

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<sup>39</sup> I want to stress here that I am referring specifically to Jaggar's account in *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (1984). In her other works, for example, *Living with Contradictions* (1994), Jaggar places more emphasis on the ambiguities and crossovers within feminist theory.

feminisms together within one phase of 'egalitarian' feminism. Rather, she separates out liberalism and Marxism into two distinct types, and also distinguishes between Marxist and socialist feminism, presenting socialist feminism as the last 'phase' in her account: a recent development which she hopes will 'synthesise the best insights of radical feminism and of the Marxist tradition and that simultaneously will escape the problems associated with each' (Jaggar 1983:123)<sup>40</sup>. Whilst Kristeva characterises the feminist present in terms of an 'avant-garde' attitude that can 'bring out the singularities of each woman', Jaggar identifies the feminist present with a 'socialist' feminism that can register the significant differences between women, (such as class and race), whilst maintaining a focus on challenging the inequitable social and economic structures of capitalist patriarchy.

Despite the significant differences between Kristeva's and Jaggar's respective accounts, however, we can identify a *general* commonality of content, in that both authors portray feminist history as a singular trajectory which begins with a universalistic egalitarianism, moves on to explore the uniqueness of women's perspectives and experiences, and finally, arrives at a realisation of the need to take the differences *between* women into account. Moreover, there is a similarity in form, as both authors present their narratives as a phasic, progressive trajectory which culminates in the author's own theoretical position in the present. Kristeva presents her preferred 'avant-garde' (post)feminism as an 'emerging' phase of feminism; similarly, Jaggar presents her preferred 'socialist feminism' as a 'developing' theory which has emerged out of Marxist and radical feminisms and is moving beyond them. In both cases, the author's theoretical position is accorded superiority through being designated as present or 'emergent', surpassing all the other 'phases' that feminist theory has 'passed through' in order to arrive at this present moment of theoretical sophistication and promise for the future. The comparison between Kristeva and Jaggar is therefore instructive, as whilst there are differences in content, both narratives are organised around a 'common code' that classifies feminist thought according to a phasic developmental taxonomy,

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<sup>40</sup> This is how 'socialist feminism' is usually presented, i.e. as a synthesis of Marxism and Radical feminism (see, for example, Howie 2010).

representing higher and higher levels of historical, moral, political and aesthetic development (Sandoval 2000:47). As such, both of these leading theorists have played a role in securing the entrenchment of feminism's 'great hegemonic model', despite their very different theoretical allegiances and spheres of influence.

Clare Hemmings' recent research study into historiographical trends within western feminist theory in the 1990s and 2000s further attests to the growing dominance of the 'phasic' model, extrapolating from a broader geographical range, and from more current samples of feminist writing (Hemmings 2005; 2011)<sup>41</sup>. Since the late 1990s, Hemmings demonstrates, the hegemonic phasic model has become crystallised around decade-specific periodisations—the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s—and more concentrated around questions of racial and cultural difference. In the accounts that she surveys, '1970s feminism' is consistently associated with universalising and essentialist perspectives, and represented as largely white and middle class. Feminism in the 1980s is associated with 'challenges' to those perspectives by black and US third world feminists, and characterised as the era of 'identity politics'. Finally, the 1990s is associated with the rise of a more 'sophisticated' form of feminist theory, most notably poststructuralism, and an embrace of difference and diversity. Once again, a phasic account emerges, which is slightly different in terms of content, but nevertheless, follows a general storyline that moves 'from sameness to difference', and is organised around a series of phases that progressively overcome one another in a steady succession.

Hemmings contends that this common storyline is generally told from three different vantage points in the present. The first views the rise of poststructuralism as a positive

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<sup>41</sup> Hemmings' research is based upon a range of extracts taken from feminist journal editions from the 1990s and 2000s, including: *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*; *Feminist Review*; *Feminist Theory*; *Nora: Nordic Journal of Women's Studies*; *European Journal of Women's Studies*; and *Australian Feminist Studies*. All of these extracts are in English (including articles that have been translated into English), though there is a range in the geographical location of the journals, including the UK, the US, Australia and Western Europe. Hemmings' method for this research was to analyse a series of extracts from these journals which give 'common sense glosses' of the development of western feminist theory. She deliberately highlights extracts that are tangential to the author's main argument such as introductions or segue paragraphs. She also cites the *source* of the extracts she analyses—the journal and the year—rather than the individual author, a tactic that is intended to emphasise the role of 'journal communities' in establishing dominant feminist knowledge practices (2011: 22).



phenomenon, and thus tells the story as a ‘progress narrative’: a developmental trajectory that moves away from problematic assumptions of unity and essentialist understandings of ‘woman’ (1970s), through a transitional phase consisting of ‘critiques’ of such essentialist categories (1980s), and finally towards a greater theoretical sophistication and openness to ‘difference’ in the poststructuralist present (1990s and 2000s). The second vantage point casts the rise of poststructuralism in negative terms, whereby the purported increase in theoretical sophistication is portrayed as a movement away from the political efficacy and vibrancy of 1970s feminism, into a de-politicised, institutionalised feminist present governed by an arcane theoretical hegemony. From this perspective, the story is told as a ‘loss narrative’, whereby the 1970s is cast as ‘good’ unified, politicised feminism, the transitional 1980s as the last bastion of political feminism, and the poststructuralist 1990s as ‘bad’ apolitical academic/institutionalised feminism. Hence, Hemmings observes, progress and loss narratives tell a similar story, using similar markers and rehearsing similar shifts, but the loss narratives perform a reversal of values. ‘Progress and loss narratives are... locked into a mutually reinforcing battle for meaning with a common storyline’ (Hemmings 2011:61). The third vantage point that Hemmings identifies tells the story as a ‘return narrative’, which again follows a similar storyline that begins with a naïve universalising materialism and moves through a ‘cultural’ or ‘linguistic turn’, but the return narrative adds on a new ‘emerging’ phase of ‘new materialism’. This is presented as a synthesis of the ‘earlier’ focus on the material, and the ‘later’ focus on the cultural and the linguistic, within a ‘new materialism’ that can take us forward into the future (ibid: 97)<sup>42</sup>.

It is not always easy to categorise these academic narratives according to the three types Hemmings proposes. As such, she suggests, they ought to be considered as overlapping rather than entirely distinct. The key point, however, is their reliance upon a common historiographical structure, which moves successively from phase to phase, and compels

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<sup>42</sup> For examples of feminist ‘new materialism’, see the collection *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, which includes essays by prominent ‘new materialist’ theorists Jane Bennett, Rosi Braidotti, and Elizabeth Grosz (ed. Coole and Frost 2010).

feminist subjects to occupy a singular perspective on the past and a theoretical cutting edge in the present (ibid: 3). For example, even though the ‘new materialist’ narratives of ‘return’ propose ‘a nonlinear methodology that transforms the past rather than relinquishing or returning to it’, Hemmings argues that this proclaimed epistemological openness often masks their schematic historiographical structure, which follows a familiar phasic trajectory appropriated from hegemonic or ‘common sense’ narratives of feminist history (ibid: 108; see also Ahmed 2008)<sup>43</sup>. A comparison can be drawn here with Kristeva’s ‘Women’s Time’ essay, which promises a more complex understanding of historical time and the time of feminism, yet falls back on exactly the kind of progressive, singular model of history that she disavows.

As a final illustration, feminism’s ‘great hegemonic model’ is also pervasive within narratives of feminist ‘waves’.<sup>44</sup> Once again, there are differences to register. Firstly, whilst academic accounts of feminist theory tend to refer to ‘phases’, the ‘wave’ trope is in fact the preferred term within wider cultural discourses about feminism generated outside the academy, including media accounts of feminist history.<sup>45</sup> A second distinction is that

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<sup>43</sup> In her article ‘Imaginary Prohibitions’ (2008), Sara Ahmed makes a similar argument to Hemmings. Whilst affirming that there is much useful and insightful work being undertaken under the name of feminist ‘new materialism’, Ahmed, like Hemmings, calls into question its ‘founding gesture’, which is to point to feminism as being routinely anti-biological, or habitually ‘social constructionist’: a gesture which has been taken for granted and in turn offers a false and reductive history of feminist engagement with biology, science and materialism. ‘You can only argue for a return to biology by forgetting the feminist work on the biological, including the work of feminists trained in the biological sciences. In other words, you can only claim that feminism has forgotten the biological if you forget this feminist work’ (2008:24-27).

<sup>44</sup> For an example of a forceful proclamation of a second ‘wave’ of feminism, see Greer’s *The Female Eunuch* (1970), which proclaims that ‘this book is part of the second feminist wave... The new emphasis is different. Then genteel middleclass ladies clamored for reform, now ungentle middle-class women are calling for revolution’. For examples of ‘third wave’ writings see Walker (1995), Heywood and Drake (1997), Dicker and Piepmeier (2003) and Baumgardner and Richards (2000).

<sup>45</sup> It is significant, for example, that the coining of the term ‘second wave’ is generally traced not to an academic text but to a 1968 article written by journalist Martha Weinman Lear for the *New York Times* magazine on the rise of ‘The Second Feminist Wave’ (Hewitt 2010:1). Similarly, the term ‘third wave’ feminism first gained attention when it was used in an article written for *Ms* magazine by Rebecca Walker, entitled ‘Becoming the Third Wave’ in 1992 (Henry 2004:23). Henry points out that the term ‘third wave’ was in fact used in the academic journal *Feminist Studies* five years earlier, by Deborah Rosenfelt and Judith Stacey in an article entitled ‘Second Thoughts on the Second Wave’. However, the fact that it is Walker that is generally credited with coining the term perhaps

academic narratives of ‘phases’ tend to construct feminist history as an intellectual history, whilst narratives of feminist ‘waves’ tend to construct feminist history more as a sociopolitical history, taking a broader view of feminism and including feminist activism outside, as well as inside, the academy. ‘Wave’ narratives therefore tend to focus more upon ‘on-the-ground’ activism and specific political goals and historical events than the academic accounts of feminist theory do<sup>46</sup>. Thirdly, the temporal implications of ‘phases’ and ‘waves’ are slightly different. The ‘waves’ trope connotes a surge or swell of activity followed by a decline: a dynamic of ‘ebb’ and ‘flow’, whilst the ‘phases’ trope implies a more continuous transition from one phase to another without ‘gaps’.

However, whilst there are features which render the ‘wave’ trope distinct, ‘wave’ narratives do tend to present shifts in feminist consciousness and method very similar in content to those shifts presented in the phasic accounts of academic feminist theory cited above. The ‘first wave’ is generally associated with an egalitarian consciousness and a reformist approach, the ‘second wave’ with a consciousness of sexual difference and a revolutionary approach, and the ‘third wave’ with a consciousness of diversity and a pluralistic approach. Further, the ‘wave’ narratives, like the ‘phase narratives’, tend to present their demarcated waves in progressive terms, as each self-designated ‘wave’ has tended to view themselves as ‘both building on *and* improving’ the wave(s) that preceded them (Hewitt 2010:2, emphasis added). Despite the ebbs and flows, then, ‘wave’ narratives, like the ‘phasic’ narratives of academic feminist theory, tend to unify ‘feminist history’ into the collective singular, and then divide it into sequential stages within a developmental, progressive account.

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demonstrates that the term ‘third wave’ feminism is associated with feminist activism more generally speaking, rather than with a primarily academic approach.

<sup>46</sup> For example, the beginning of the first ‘wave’ in the US is conventionally marked by the women’s rights convention in Seneca Falls, New York, 1848, with its ‘ebb’ being marked by the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920 (Hewitt 2010:3). The beginning of the ‘second wave’ is similarly marked within wave narratives by socio-cultural currents and significant political events, such as the rise of the Civil Rights movement and counter-cultural protests in the U.S. and Europe, or the passing of the Equal Rights Amendment (Dicker and Piepmeier 2003:9-10).

In summary, whilst there are differences in the specific content of the examined accounts, and between the positions of individual authors, it is possible to identify a common phasic, progressive trajectory that has become entrenched across a wide range of feminist theory over the past thirty years. The ‘phasic’ model has become ubiquitous, as feminist theorists consistently chart a historical course from one phase to another, culminating in an author’s own position in the present, whether it be ‘avant-garde’ (post)feminism, ‘socialist feminism’, ‘poststructuralist feminism’, ‘new materialism’, or ‘third wave feminism’.

## 2

### **THE PROBLEM OF MISREPRESENTATION: TEMPORAL OTHERING AND TEMPORAL CONTAINMENT**

The ‘phasic’ model of feminist history has become ubiquitous across a wide range of feminist discourse. This is not to say, however, that this hegemonic model has become absorbed without contention. Several edited collections, monographs, and special journal editions have appeared since the late 1990s which challenge the hegemonic phasic model on the grounds that it is highly reductive and misrepresentative<sup>47</sup>. This section draws on this critical literature to give an account of why the hegemonic model results in such serious and systematic misrepresentation, attending particularly to the progressive structure of those narratives that chart feminism’s supposed trajectory ‘from sameness to difference’.

As illustrated by the selected examples above, feminists have become increasingly concerned to represent their own kind of feminism in terms of ‘difference’ and diversity. Kristeva’s ‘third generation’, she hopes, can ‘bring out the singularities of each woman, and beyond this, her multiplicities, her plural languages...’ (1986b:208). The language of ‘multiplicity’ or ‘diversity’ is equally crucial for the success of the ‘progress’, ‘loss’, and

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<sup>47</sup> See, for example, Gillis, Howie, and Munford (2004); Hewitt (2010); Kaplan and Looser (1997); Hemmings (2011); Henry (2004); and special journal issues of *Women: a Cultural Review* (ed. Calvini-Lefebvre *et al*, 2010); *Feminist Studies* (ed. Hewitt and Liu, 2002; ed. Raitt and Phillips, 2008); *Australian Feminist Studies* (ed. Spongeberg, 2009); and *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature* (ed. Laird 2002).

‘return’ narratives that Hemmings describes. Whilst progress narratives lay claim to diversity and vibrancy—in juxtaposition to the ‘singular’ notion of womanhood that supposedly permeated earlier feminisms—so do loss narratives, depicting older feminisms as diverse and vibrant, and the feminism of today as dominated by a singular and dry theoreticism (Hemmings 2011:65). Return narratives similarly claim diversity, multiplicity and vibrancy for the ‘new materialism’, purporting to surpass the singularity and stasis of both ‘old’ materialism and poststructuralism. Spokeswomen for the ‘third wave’ also consistently present themselves as ‘broader in their vision, more global in their concerns, and more progressive in their sensitivities to transnational, multiracial, and sexual politics than earlier feminists’ (Hewitt 2010:2).

In what follows, I am not criticising the embrace of diversity or the advocacy of pluralism. Indeed, the ‘polytemporal’ model of historical time I go on to develop in the following chapters is driven precisely by my insistence on registering and affirming differences in experience, interpretation and method. My argument, rather, concerns the misrepresentation that occurs when ‘difference’, ‘diversity’ and ‘plurality’ can represent *only the present* in the case of ‘progress narratives’ (or *only the past* in the case of ‘loss narratives’)<sup>48</sup>. In other words, the concern for theoretical diversity and difference expressed within progressive phasic and ‘wave’ narratives is frequently undermined by the temporal organisation of their storylines, because when difference or diversity ‘belongs’ to one phase or era, it is denied in another. To explain this argument, I focus below on two representational techniques that are crucial to securing the progressive representation of feminist theory’s history. The first I describe as ‘temporal othering’, whereby an author represents their own kind of feminism as ‘heterogeneous’ through assigning the *opposite* characteristic—‘homogeneity’—to a different era, an ‘other’ time. This goes hand in hand with what I term ‘temporal containment’: a form of periodisation which fixes different kinds of feminism as transitional ‘phases’ that have been superseded along feminism’s developmental way. Both

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<sup>48</sup> My focus in this section, however, will be on progress narratives.

representational techniques achieve the impression that it is the feminist present alone which is truly diverse and can deal adequately with ‘difference’.

The representational technique of ‘othering’—whereby one’s own identity is secured through hierarchical binary oppositions—will be highly familiar to feminist and postcolonial theorists<sup>49</sup>. Within progressive phasic and third wave feminist narratives, as stated, it is *past feminisms* that are ‘otherised’, such that all those characteristics an author wishes to define her own position in the present *against* are projected backwards in time, for example, on to ‘second wave’ or ‘1970s feminism’<sup>50</sup>. This can be aptly described as a technique of ‘temporal othering’, or, to borrow from Johann Fabian, ‘temporal distancing’ (Fabian 1983:30). The first problem with this kind of ‘otherising’ gesture is that it frequently leads to the work of feminists of earlier eras being dismissed in an uncritical manner as ‘essentialist’ or ‘universalising’ without even having been read (Henry 2004). For instance, the progress narratives that define themselves against 1970s ‘essentialism’ rarely contain any direct citations from texts written in the 1970s, relying instead upon generalising secondary sources (Hemmings 2011). An example of this kind of juxtapositional presentation of ‘old’ and ‘new’ feminism can be found in Alison Piepmeier and Rory Dicker’s introduction to their anthology of ‘third wave’ feminist essays, where they write that ‘[whilst] many of the goals of the third wave are similar to those of the second wave, some, such as its insistence on women’s diversity, are new’ (Piepmeier and Dicker 2003:10). The claim here that ‘insistence on women’s diversity’ is something ‘new’, something that belongs to ‘third wave’ feminism, implies that (old) second wave feminist theory did not address the issue of women’s diversity, or consider it important, without offering any arguments or citational evidence for thinking that this was the case.

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<sup>49</sup> For compelling depictions of this technique of ‘othering’, see Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) or Genevieve Lloyd’s *Man of Reason: ‘Male’ and ‘Female’ in Western Philosophy* (1993b).

<sup>50</sup> As noted, in the case of ‘loss narratives’, it is the other way round, and feminism of the present is made to bear all those characteristics that supposedly were not present in the idealised feminist past.

The extent to which ‘third wave’ authors stress continuities or discontinuities between the ‘third wave’ and the ‘second wave’ is admittedly variable. Indeed, many ‘third wave’ writers, including Piepmeier and Dicker, are keen to emphasise the continuities between the second and third waves in terms of both strategy and theory (see also Heywood and Drake 1997). However, whilst links between ‘second’ and ‘third’ might well be acknowledged, the idea that there *is* such a thing as a ‘third wave’ rests ultimately upon its *differentiation* from a ‘second wave’. This requires a reduction in the complexity of the so-called ‘second wave’, as it is posited as ‘a definable phenomenon, as embodying a more or less coherent set of values and ideas which can be recognised and then transcended’ (Bailey 1997:23). Moreover, as stated, it is a framing device through which claims about the heterogeneity of the present are secured through juxtaposition with the supposed homogeneity of the past. ‘Since no monolithic version of “woman” exists’, write Piepmeier and Dicker, ‘we can *no longer* speak with confidence of “women’s issues”; instead, we need to consider that such issues are as diverse as the many women who inhabit our planet’ (2003:9, emphasis added). Through ‘time-loaded’<sup>51</sup> statements like these, second wave feminism is consistently made to bear all those characteristics that the third wave defines itself against and ‘*no longer*’ perpetuates, including universalism, essentialism, racism, ethnocentrism, heterosexism, sexual prudishness, humourlessness and authoritarianism.

To challenge this kind of gesture is not to deny that the frequent characterisation of the so-called ‘second wave’ as racist or ethnocentric, for example, contains many grains of truth. Many feminist texts written by white feminists in the 1970s (and before and since) have indeed been implicitly and/or explicitly racist, or seemingly oblivious to the differences that ‘race’ makes. In an essay ‘Double Jeopardy’ published in 1970, Francis Beale was already describing the ‘second wave’ of US feminism as a ‘white women’s movement’, because of its insistence on organising around the division of male/female alone, and widespread refusal to grasp the significance of racial and class divisions for the theorisation of sexual politics

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<sup>51</sup> The term is borrowed from Shumei Shih (2002).

(Beale 1970). White women's writings and activism, moreover, have received much more attention from outside and inside feminist circles, rendering it a white-dominated or 'white-washed' discourse and movement (Roth 2004:6). Accordingly, the depiction of the 'second wave' as 'white' and 'homogenous' within third wave narratives is intended as 'an acknowledgement of the dominance of white feminists, and the secondary status given to black feminists or 'feminists of color' during the last forty years of feminist theory and movement' (Henry 2004:33). This gloss by Kristina Sheryl Wong in Piepmeier and Dicker's anthology serves as a good example:

'First and second wave feminisms sought to empower women as a united front. Although they offered a political voice for women as a whole, they didn't acknowledge the varying agendas and experiences of individual women. Third wave feminism was a response by women of color and others who felt homogenised by a movement defined by the goals of middle-class, white women' (Wong 2003:295).

The gesture of repudiating 'second wave' feminism in this manner, however, often engenders the opposite of its intended effect. This is because when 'second wave' feminism is consistently represented as white and middle-class, the presence of nonwhite, non-middle class women in 1960s and 1970s feminism *remains erased*. As Lisa Marie Hogeland writes, 'it's become a truism that the second wave was racist, for instance, no matter that such a blanket argument writes out of our history the enormous contributions of women of color in the 1970s' (Hogeland 2001:110). So, although the *intention* of 'third wave' progress narratives is to embrace and celebrate difference and diversity, the progressive 'sameness to difference' storyline makes it impossible to represent differences and diversity *throughout* feminist pasts, presents and futures. Because it is a progressive chronology, 'the differences represented by... women of color', Sandoval observes, 'only become visible in the last phase'



(Sandoval 2000:50).<sup>52</sup> As such, the centrality of the feminisms of women of colour in the ‘second wave’ goes missing from these progress narratives, as does the history of white antiracist feminism, which has been intertwined with, and fuelled by the feminist theory and activism among women of colour (Thompson 2010:39).

To be fair, several of the third wave narratives do in fact position ‘third wave’ feminism as an ‘inheritor’ of multiracial and multicultural feminisms from earlier times. Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake, for example, introduce their anthology on ‘third wave feminism’ by asserting that ‘the definitional moment of third wave feminism has been theorised as proceeding from critiques of the white women's movement that were initiated by women of color, as well as from the many instances of coalition work undertaken by U.S. third world feminists’ (Heywood and Drake 1997:2). The intention underlying this gesture is to affirm the significance and influence of women of colour and U.S. third world feminists, to give this work a key role in the narrative. But yet again, through telling this story as a progressive, phasic account, the effect is contrary to the aim. In the first instance, to describe this work as ‘*critique*’ of white ‘second wave’ feminism, (i.e. as *coming after*), is once more to erase black feminisms from the ‘second wave’. Moreover, in positioning this work as a *precursor* to ‘third wave’ feminism, such narratives end up representing black feminism as a ‘gateway’ sandwiched between the two ‘waves’: a transitional, contained phenomenon which has now been surpassed. This can be described as ‘temporal containment’: a form of periodisation whereby certain kinds of feminism are fixed as *transitional* ‘phases’ leading up to the present, and by implication, as phases which are now over. Accordingly, even when certain feminist theories or practices are affirmed as a positive legacy—rather than as ‘bad’ feminism of the past versus ‘good’ feminism of the present—they are nevertheless represented as a ‘moment’ that has been surpassed by the (ultimately superior) present.

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<sup>52</sup> As I will argue in chapter 6, the deflection of racism and ethnocentrism onto the past can also lead to a rather uncritical attitude in the present, where it is presumed that racial bias is no longer an issue because it was a thing of the past.

To illustrate, feminists such as Gloria Anzaldúa or Audre Lordes are the contemporaries of many white feminists who are associated with the ‘second wave’; yet their work is consistently positioned as *responsive* or *corrective* of the ‘second wave’ and thus as inaugurating a ‘new era’ of inclusive ‘third wave’ feminism (Fernandes 2010). The decadal representation of feminist theory, as Hemmings’ study shows, plays a particularly important role here in positioning black feminism within the ‘transitional 1980s’, the era of ‘identity politics’. This positioning—between the ‘essentialist 1970s’ (second wave) and the ‘poststructuralist 1990s’ (third wave)—not only removes feminists such as Anzaldúa and Lourdes from the ‘second wave’; it also implies that their time is now over, as the torch has been passed on to the ‘third wave’. Further, it leads to a frequent typecasting of the work of black feminists as ‘identity politics’, an approach that is usually characterised within feminist theory as an improvement on the universalising tendencies of ‘1970s feminism’, but which nevertheless remains grounded in rigid and static identity categories (Fernandes 2010:110)<sup>53</sup>. Whilst it is often acknowledged that ‘black feminism’ and ‘poststructuralist feminism’ share a common concern with ‘difference’, the two camps are frequently imagined to be composed of ‘different writing subjects’, and it is ultimately ‘poststructuralism’ that is credited with the move away from essentialist notions of ‘universal womanhood’ and treated as *contemporary* (Hemmings 2011:46).

This process of temporal containment applies equally to lesbian feminism, as the ‘transitional’ 1980s is cast not only as the era of black feminism, but also as the era of the ‘sex wars’, in which debates about sexuality and ‘pro-sex’ arguments supposedly inaugurate a departure from the ‘repressive’ attitudes and sexual essentialism of the 1970s, whilst also serving as a precursor to the queer theory of the 1990s (Hemmings 2005; 2011). Once again reducing 1970s feminism to a singular perspective, (sex-negative and heterosexist), this repeated periodisation erases the presence of lesbian feminism in the 1970s, such that it becomes embroiled within a generalised ‘pro-sexuality’ movement of the 1980s, and is finally

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<sup>53</sup> Fernandes argues that, in fact, much of the work produced by black feminists and feminists of colour in the 1980s, such as Anzaldúa, represents a theoretical *challenge* to the ‘logic of identification’ that supposedly characterises black feminist ‘identity politics’ (Fernandes 2010).

superseded by the queer theory of the 1990s. In consequence, the radicality of the lesbian challenge to heteronormativity is frequently overlooked or underestimated, through being temporally contained within a distinct era that has been supposedly surpassed (Hemmings 2005; Jackson 2010).

Alongside ‘temporal othering’, then, the ‘sandwiching’ effect of ‘temporally containing’ black feminisms and lesbian feminisms in the ‘transitional’ 1980s helps to entrench the idea that ‘1970s feminism’ was ‘homogenous’ and ‘essentialist’ and needed to be counterbalanced and ‘critiqued’. It also secures the idea that only very recent forms of feminist theory and practice have the tools, awareness, and nuance to deal adequately with ‘difference’. ‘Difference’, therefore, ‘loses much of its power by being seen in epochal terms... subsumed within a familiar story of evolution from sameness to difference, from the one to the many’ (Felski 2000:3).

### 3

#### **THE TEMPORAL LOGICS OF FEMINISM’S HEGEMONIC MODEL**

Feminism’s ‘great hegemonic model’, I have argued, leads to serious and systematic misrepresentations of diverse strands of feminist theory and practice. The progressive storyline which moves ‘from sameness to difference’ often relies on a technique of ‘temporal othering’, as feminisms of previous eras are made to bear all those characteristics that feminisms of *now* define themselves against. This not only leads to the earlier work of a wide range of feminists being uniformly dismissed as ‘essentialist’ without being read; it also erases the presence of many diverse strands of feminism from earlier eras of thought and activism. It also subjects certain kinds of feminisms to ‘temporal containment’, whereby they are positioned within a neatly bound and packaged era that is presented as a completed ‘stage’ or ‘gateway’ leading up to the (more sophisticated) present. Truly ‘diverse’ feminism is presented as a new phenomenon, and it is implied that only feminist theories formulated in the very recent present can register the significance of ‘difference’. The progressive storyline

therefore blocks the same kind of nuanced vision that the authors in question want to apply to their own kind of feminism in the present (Davis 1995:282).

The problem, however, is not simply one of historical representation, i.e. with the storyline or schema itself.<sup>54</sup> A historiographical analysis of feminism's great hegemonic model must attend, further, to the 'deeper' conceptions of history and historical time which inform and underpin these kinds of feminist narratives and periodisations. Or as Fredric Jameson puts it, 'above and beyond the problem of periodization and its categories... the larger issue is that of the *representation of History itself*... of the historical sequence in which such periods take place and from which they derive their significance' (Jameson 1981:28, emphasis added). As stated in the thesis' Introduction, the model of 'graduated' historical progression through stages or phases can be traced to speculative philosophies of history such as Hegel's, which have exerted a significant influence over our understandings of historical time for the past two centuries. My aim in this final section is to clarify the key problems which arise from the continuing employment of this model of graduated progression, through attending to its two core, interrelated, temporal logics: 'teleological totalisation' and 'sequential negation'.

### 3.1

#### *Teleological Totalisation*

'Teleological', as explained in the thesis' Introduction, is a term usually associated with speculative philosophies of history that postulate an *inevitable* progression in 'world history' towards ever-greater freedom and enlightenment. Such teleological philosophies of history are rooted in metaphysical meta-narratives which imbue the course of 'history as a whole' with an overarching or immanent meaning or purpose, for example, theological conceptions of 'providence', or in the case of Hegel, an immanent conception of 'spirit' or human nature

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<sup>54</sup> Challenging the model on the grounds of misrepresentation is more the preserve of feminist historians, (rather than historiographers), who are offering substantive historical studies which contradict and subvert the dominant model. Hewitt's collection includes several good examples of this substantive historical response (Hewitt 2010).

as self-conscious self-determination (Dray 1964:62-3). Yet, ‘teleology’ can also have a more restricted application, denoting the retrospective designation of a particular course of events as a developmental, unified trajectory, which has culminated in the present of the narrator, and will continue on in this direction in at least the immediate future. That is, teleological reasoning focuses on the end as a means of explaining and justifying the course of historical development (Hutchings 2008:51). The term ‘totalisation’, similarly, need not only be used in the ‘grand’ Hegelian sense of speculatively making ‘history as a whole’ into a ‘complete picture’ (Dienstag 1994). Rather, I use the term to refer to the practice of totalising a designated ‘segment’ of history—in this case ‘feminist history’—from the perspective of a feminist standpoint in the present. Allan Megill describes this as the difference between a ‘grand narrative’ of history as a whole (informed by a ‘meta-narrative’ of human meaning or purpose), and a ‘master narrative’ of a specific segment or field of history (Megill 1995)<sup>55</sup>. To claim that the hegemonic feminist narratives examined above are ‘teleological’ or ‘totalising’ thus does not mean that they adhere to anything like Hegel’s grand teleological, totalising narrative of ‘world history’ as the inevitable realisation of reason/freedom in history. However, these narratives do import teleological and totalising *logic* into their accounts.

The logic of ‘teleological totalisation’ is evident in all of the hegemonic narratives examined above, which each tell a master narrative about the past from the vantage point of a (superior) present, thereby discerning an overall ‘direction’ in feminist history that has culminated in the present, or is set to do so in the (predictable) future. In the examples provided in section 1, the authors in question accord their own present with a diagnostic privilege, as they identify a singular trajectory leading from the past to the present moment, totalising the past from the perspective of a knowing present and portraying their own approach as ‘last and best’ (Spencer 2004:9) Both Kristeva’s and Jaggar’s accounts, for

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<sup>55</sup> According to Megill’s, taxonomy, a ‘master narrative’ claims to offer the authoritative account of a particular segment of history and a ‘grand narrative’ claims to offer the authoritative account of history generally, whilst a ‘metanarrative’ (most commonly belief in God or an immanent rationality) is what serves to justify the grand narrative (Megill 1995:152-3)

example, oscillate between the retrospective and the predictive or anticipatory, with the present being endowed with the epistemological capacity and clarity of vision to identify the meaning and ‘direction’ of the past, and further, to predict or stimulate a future direction. Thus, both authors offer an evolutionary amalgamation of feminist thought and practice up to this point, whilst designating their own position in the present (‘avant-garde’ (post)feminism for Kristeva or ‘socialist feminism’ for Jaggar) as the beginning of a new direction for a better future. This triumphant tone is also detectable within ‘third wave’ narratives where the author tends to be positioned as a ‘heroine of the past, present, and future of Western feminist theory’ (Hemmings 2011:5).<sup>56</sup>

The first problem with this teleological logic resides in its alignment with the representational technique of ‘temporal othering’, as discussed in section 2, whereby the past is cast in a negative light as a narrator’s present is portrayed as an improvement, as more ‘enlightened’. It also gives rise to a sense of implacable certainty that we know what the past was all about, what it has meant, and what it has to teach us. The relentless movement forwards means that even when authors see this teleological trajectory in negative terms, the present position of hindsight is always granted with superior authority. Whether we reject the recent feminist past for being ‘essentialist’, or whether we mourn the loss of past political practices, in either case we think we already know what we have overcome or what we have lost. This sense of epistemological security in the present leads to a certain *closedness to the past*: a resistance to letting the past interrupt our secure subject positions and perspectives in the present, and our sense of the possible. The teleological treatment of the past as a complete story that has led up to the present also leads to a certain *closedness to the future*, as it encourages us to think that the identified direction will continue. This logic is detectable even

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<sup>56</sup> It is missing in the case of the ‘loss’ narratives, given that they are laments. Nevertheless, the *logic* of teleological totalisation is still apparent in the loss narratives. That is, the author performs a retrospective totalisation of feminist history from a position of wisdom and superior knowledge in the present, charting feminism’s supposed decline and descent into theoretical impasse. Indeed, as Hemmings observes, many loss narratives not only perform totalising diagnoses of the past and present, but further, orient themselves towards future *prediction* when they suggest that the only hope for the future is a return to feminism’s glorious past.

in the ‘return’ narratives that Hemmings analyzes, which proclaim not only a ‘new materialism’ but also a new relation to time. Whilst many of these narratives affirm the ‘radical unknowability’ of the future, there is nevertheless a sense of assurance that the future of feminism does in fact lie with a single epistemological and ontological formulation, i.e. that offered by the ‘new materialism’ (Hemmings 2011:113)<sup>57</sup>. The future is ‘open’ and ‘unpredictable’, but it seems this openness and unpredictability can only be welcomed by embracing ‘new materialism’.

Alongside bolstering an inflated sense of epistemological certainty, the second key problem with the logic of ‘teleological totalisation’ is its embroilment in universalising and evolutionist presumptions. That is, teleological models lend themselves to universalising evolutionism because it is presumed there is an inevitable logic being worked out in local instances. As we have seen, Hegel’s hierarchical treatment of diverse cultures and societies as representative of different ‘stages’ of historical development depends upon his thesis that different cultures and societies are all working out the ‘underlying’ logic of self-conscious self-determination (Hegel 1975:51-4). In the case of feminism, the legacy of this kind of teleological, universalising thought is evident in the common presumption that the supposed trajectory of western feminist theory is *the* trajectory of feminist theory, and thus, that feminisms everywhere have gone or will undergo the same patterns, vacillations and ‘phases’, and move from a concern with legal equality and reform, towards a more ‘sophisticated’ exploration of the processes of subjectivation and the significance of difference.

The attempt to universalise historical trajectories specific to Anglo-American and Western European feminist movements has resulted in western scholars often treating the ‘first’ and ‘second waves’ of feminism in the west as precursors to feminist movements in other parts of the world (Tripp 2006:54). Accordingly, the universalisation of ‘time-charged terminologies’ such as Kristeva’s three-stage theory of feminist consciousness has led to

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<sup>57</sup> This is why, Hemmings argues, the ‘emergent’ concern for materiality is portrayed, on the one hand, as already happening and urgently required, yet at the same time, the time of new materialism is portrayed as *deferred*. For an example of this, see van der Tuin (2009).

assumptions and judgments that non-western feminisms are ‘stuck’, for example, in the liberal stage or the ‘nationalist stage’ (Shih 2002:98). The teleological aspect of feminism’s ‘great hegemonic model’ thus converts easily into universalising evolutionism and the logic of ‘First in the West, and then elsewhere’ that has functioned as a cornerstone of colonial philosophy and policy (Chakrabarty 2000:8; see also Young 1990). This evolutionary logic is further fuelled by the ‘inclusion paradigm’, which positions nonwestern women as *outside* feminism, in need of the ‘recognition’ or ‘inclusion’ of the ‘third wave’s’ embrace (Fernandes 2010). The presupposition, as Fernandes argues, is that feminism is a phenomenon and product of white western society that is ‘imported’ to the nonwestern world (ibid).

A clear example of this kind of universalising outlook is evident in Kristeva’s text *Des Chinoises*, or ‘About Chinese Women’ (Kristeva 1986a), in which Kristeva struggles to determine the status of Chinese women according to ‘the usual temporal hierarchy of the West over China’ (Shih 2002:98). Chinese women were legally more equal to Chinese men, than women in European countries were to European men, in the 1950s and after, which subverts the usual temporal hierarchy whereby the west is more ‘advanced’. Yet Kristeva’s attitude towards this state of affairs is highly ambivalent due to the presumptions underlying her own temporal topography. In Kristeva’s text, as Shumei Shih points out, the advanced legal status of Chinese women is ‘both the site of envy and anxiety... For Kristeva, Chinese women were both liberated under Mao and embodiments of the silent, primordial Orient’ (ibid). Whilst Kristeva is forced to register Chinese women’s formal status, her analysis remains rooted in presumptions that nevertheless, European theory and modes of subjectivity and sociality are still ‘ahead’. Gayatri Spivak similarly observes that Kristeva’s text leans heavily on the assumption that the theoretical paradigms of ‘French High Feminism’ are appropriate within such an extremely different situation of political specificity (1981:160-1). The extension of a certain kind of French feminism into an ‘international frame’ thus constructs a position for Kristeva as high judge and bringer of avant-garde radicalism, whilst positioning Chinese feminism as less theoretically sophisticated.



## 3.2

*Sequential Negation*

The logic of teleological totalisation frequently goes hand in hand with the logic of sequential negation, as teleological, progressive accounts are often presented as a ‘*graduated* progression’, whereby a ‘series of successive determinations’ are organised into an ascending order as each negates and overtakes the former (Hegel 1975:138). As we have seen, this is one of the key features of the hegemonic model of feminist history, as hegemonic narratives divide feminist history into a series of phases or waves, with each overcoming the former. The major problem with this logic of sequential negation is that it cannot grasp the *coexistence* of supposedly ‘oppositional’ or ‘contradictory’ approaches and perspectives. Different feminisms of course emerge at different times, and there are certainly disagreements between different kinds of feminism. Poststructuralist feminist theory, for example, informed by theorists such as Kristeva, Lacan, Derrida or Spivak, has indeed emerged at a later time than liberal western feminist theory, informed by earlier theorists such as Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill as well as more recent liberal thinkers. Moreover, there are fundamental points of dispute between poststructuralist and liberal feminists. Yet, liberalism has not simply melted away following the advent of poststructuralist theory, and those points of disagreement and debate have not been ‘won’ by one side of the other. Indeed, feminist theorists often insist upon the *productivity* of such disagreements, debates and arguments (Howie and Tauchert 2004; MacCormack 2009). The logic of sequential negation, however, seeks to contain and manage these debates through the imposition of a neat sequential order from one ‘phase’ to the next, as one comes after and displaces another.

This implies that the debate is closed, and moreover, presumes that there *are* neatly bounded ‘positions’ or ‘types’ of feminist theory in the first place, and that feminist theorists and practitioners can only have one theoretical allegiance at a time (Bastian 2011). Whilst some feminists do indeed describe their feminism in distinctly ‘titled’ terms, (e.g. ‘Marxist’, ‘liberal’ or ‘poststructuralist’), feminists of different times and places have in fact consistently

moved 'between and among' different approaches and strategies, especially given feminism's interdisciplinary nature. Sandoval describes the operational mode of US third world feminism, for example, in such terms, functioning 'like the clutch of an automobile, the mechanism that permits the driver to select, engage and disengage gears in a system for the transmission of power' (Sandoval 2000:57). This kind of methodological fluidity and coexistence cannot be grasped by the logic of sequential negation, with the consequence that productive explorations of the interrelations between different approaches and histories are often precluded. Indeed, such logic results in the imposition of divisive breaks within an already beleaguered feminist movement (Gillis and Munford 2004).

A related problem with the logic of sequential negation is that it carries an implication that perspectives and approaches derived at an earlier time are deficient or obsolete. We therefore effectively confine them to the 'dustbin of history' or treat them as a 'historical artefact' rather than as a project or part of a living body of work (Weeks 2011:117). This way of treating the past is a consistent feature of modern 'historicism', whereby a given text or theoretical paradigm is treated as 'not only *of* its time – developed within a particular political conjuncture and conceptual horizon – but as *only* of its time' (ibid). In other words, the gesture of 'locating' a text, idea or practice within a historical context often comes with a presumption that this is where it should stay, that it has no purchase or relevance outside of this context. As in the examples of 'temporal containment' given above, 'each contribution is fixed to a linear time by a logic... that marks, seals, and divides each moment' (ibid).

To be clear, there is of course a necessity for feminists to 'keep up to date', and attuned to changes in social, economic and cultural conditions in which feminisms operate. Indeed, the most promising aspect of many of the 'third wave' narratives, I would argue, is their commitment to facing up to changing conditions. Heywood and Drake, for instance, are particularly keen to outline the economic determinants of third wave feminism in the US, emphasising that 'transnational capital, downsizing, privatisation, and a shift to a service economy have had a drastic impact on the world these generations have inherited' (Heywood

and Drake 2004:13). The claim is that the ‘new world order’ necessitates an ‘overhaul’ of feminism, as we come to recognise that ‘global capitalism is overtaking many of the social structures under which second wave feminists operated’ (Sidler 1997:37-8). ‘Third wave feminism’, as Piepmeier and Dicker contend, thus represents:

‘...a reinvigorated feminist movement emerging from a late twentieth-century world... third wave feminism's political activism on behalf of women's rights is shaped by—and responds to—a world of global capitalism and information technology, postmodernism and postcolonialism, and environmental degradation. We no longer live in the world that feminists of the second wave faced’ (2003:10).

This is undoubtedly true, and it is important to highlight the pragmatic materialist strain of the third wave narratives, because it shows that proclaiming a third wave is ‘not a case of daughterly rebellion for its own sake’ (Spencer 2004:11). Rather, in most cases, the formation of a ‘third wave’ ought to be viewed as a genuine attempt to grapple with the ‘specificity of our historical situation’ (Heywood and Drake 1997:4), to rethink what feminism means and what it can do within specific social and cultural conditions. Having said this, however, there is a marked tendency within third wave literature to present the theoretical outlook of the third wave as an inevitable bi-product of its historical moment (Henry 2004:35). For instance, Dicker and Piepmeier write that ‘just as it is interested in a multiplicity of issues, the third wave operates from the [theoretical] assumption that identity is multifaceted and layered’ (2003:10). The suggestion here is that as feminists have ‘expanded’ their focus to include a ‘multiplicity of issues’, feminist theory has shifted accordingly – towards a pluralistic theoretical understanding of personal identity informed by post-Lacanian psychoanalytic and poststructuralist theory. Yet, this is a problematic claim, as it is perfectly possible to juggle a diverse range of interests, or to engage with complex social, economic or technological phenomena, whilst holding an integral and holistic concept of personal identity.

The point here is that there is no easy correlation between the context, the problem, and the type of theory that is required, as third wave narratives often seem to suggest. Gillian Howie describes this kind of slippage as a tendency to confuse the ‘logic of intellectual debate with the condition of the world’, for example, when poststructuralism or postmodernism is mapped onto post-fordism as the next historical stage (Howie 2010b:5). This leads to assumptions that only ‘postmodern’ theory and logic is able to contend with the ‘messiness’ of globalised late-capitalist conditions, when in fact, it is equally possible to argue that ‘postmodern logic’ is part of the problem rather than the solution. Such ‘slippages’ or presumptions are fuelled by the logic of sequential negation, whereby approaches of the past must be ‘superseded’ by those more recent. The result of this sequentialist logic is that feminist ideas and approaches of the past are frequently dismissed without even being considered or explored, as they are presumed to be out-of-date, and thus of no possible use or pertinence to the present or future.

## CONCLUSION

The aim of this chapter has been to provide illustrations of feminism’s ‘great hegemonic model’, and further, to highlight the problems which result from its deployment, in terms of the way that feminist theory conceives of, and relates to, its own diverse history. The hegemonic model leads to the imposition of reductive schematic and progressive frameworks, which systematically and seriously misrepresent the diversity of feminist movements and trajectories, by implying that diversity within feminism is something new, and can only be grasped by a single theoretical approach. Moreover, the hegemonic model’s ‘temporal logics’ result in unproductive attitudes towards history, which fail to grasp history’s subversive and transformative potential. In the first instance, the logic of teleological totalisation results in a *closedness to the past and to the future*, as we believe that we already know what the past has to teach us and what the future will hold. We thereby restrict the possibilities for the past to interrupt the present and provoke a reorientation of our thinking and acting. Secondly, the

logic of teleological totalisation results in *universalising and evolutionist presumptions*, where it is presumed that feminisms everywhere are working out the same trajectory, though at different ‘stages’ of development. Thirdly, the logic of sequential negation leads to the imposition of reductive typologies, and to the idea that *only one approach is possible at a time*, which precludes productive explorations of interconnections between different coexisting strands of feminism. Accordingly, fourthly, *fixing certain types of theory to certain times* leads to the treatment of theory and strategy from previous times as obsolete, of no relevance to feminist predicaments and problematics in the present.

If the hegemonic model of feminism is supported and sustained by a progressivist, phasic or ‘stagist’ model of historical time, there is a crucial need for a critical feminist historiography that can identify and challenge its teleological and sequentialist temporal logics whenever they are in evidence. This chapter, for example, has undertaken such a critical exercise. However, to anticipate my argument in the following chapter, whilst critical analyses make a vital contribution by helping to identify and diagnose the problem, feminist historiography ultimately requires a more thoroughgoing philosophical intervention. Indeed, a familiar criticism of feminist theory is that it has become increasingly adept at refining critiques of those models already in existence, but less so at thinking creatively and developing alternatives. As Wendy Brown observes, ‘whilst many have lost confidence in a historiography bound to a notion of progress... we have coined no political substitute for progressive understandings of where we have come from and where we are going (2001:3). Thus, alongside critical approaches and methodologies, feminist historiography must also undertake the *constructive* project of building alternative models of history and historical time.

The appetite for this kind of positive, thoroughgoing historiographical reorientation is certainly discernible within recent feminist writings:

‘Feminist thought... requires a conception of history that can contain both the insights of the past and the potential breakthroughs of the future within the messy,

unresolved contestations of political and intellectual practice in the present (Fernandes 2010:114).

‘Can we conceive of time as multidirectional as well as linear? Can we conceive of cause and effect going both ways?’ (Roof 1997:86)

Yet, whilst there have been repeated calls for alternative conceptions of history and historical time, the conversations around exactly what such conceptions might look like, or how they might work, are often rather tentative and vague. This can be attributed, I suggest, to an underdeveloped conception of what we mean by ‘historical time’, or indeed, by ‘history’. When we speak of ‘history’, are we referring to a course of past events, or to the stories we tell about past events? And when we speak of ‘historical time’, are we referring to a sequential time ‘in which’ historical events occur, or to discursive conceptions of historical time? In order to develop greater clarity, and to give content to the idea of a multilinear, multidirectional model of historical time that is being mooted in the passages quoted above, the rest of the thesis will address these kinds of questions, beginning with the question of what we mean by the term ‘history’ in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 2

### The Time of the Trace

#### INTRODUCTION

There is a burgeoning discontent amongst feminists with the hegemonic model of feminist history. This model systematically misrepresents diverse feminist movements and trajectories, and the temporal logics that it employs result in unproductive historiographical orientations and practices. What is therefore required is an alternative model of historical time to inform a more productive and nuanced feminist historiography. The project to develop such an alternative, however, currently remains under-explored and under-articulated. I suggested in the previous chapter that this can be attributed to a vague and ambiguous notion of what we actually mean when we speak of ‘historical time’, and moreover, ‘history’ itself: a term which has two distinct, though intersecting, meanings. On the one hand, ‘history’ refers to clusters and series of past events or happenings: to ‘what really happened in the past’, which we can term ‘history A’. On the other hand, ‘history’ refers to the narratives we construct and accounts we give of ‘what we think happened in the past’, which we can term ‘history B’<sup>58</sup>. This chapter will address the epistemological and ontological questions and tensions which are produced at the overlap of these two senses of ‘history’. In so doing, it will offer a more robust understanding of ‘history’, and further, will develop an account of the temporality of historical practice and the *‘time of the trace’*.

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<sup>58</sup> As a clarificatory note: my use of ‘history A’ and ‘history B’ here is different to Dipesh Chakrabarty’s deployment of the terms ‘History 1’ and ‘History 2’ in *Provincializing Europe* (2000), where he uses ‘History 1’ to refer to grand historical narratives, and ‘History 2’ to refer to subaltern and ‘minor’ historical narratives which intersect with but continually interrupt History 1. I will be discussing Chakrabarty’s work further in chapter 7.

Since the 1960s, there has been a decisive and thoroughgoing shift away from ‘objectivism’ within academic historiography, i.e. from the notion that historians can offer neutral and disinterested accounts of what objectively, ‘really’ happened in the past<sup>59</sup>. It has become widely accepted that linguistic conventions, institutional contexts, and the specific situations and interests of the narrator in the present, always orient and shape the kinds of histories we search for and the kinds of histories we write.<sup>60</sup> Few historiographers today, therefore, would subscribe to an ‘objectivist’ or ‘direct realist’ epistemology, and take seriously Leopold von Ranke’s incitement to reconstruct the past *wie es eigentlich gewesen*, or ‘as it really was’.<sup>61</sup> The challenge to objectivism or direct realism in historiography is thus not a particularly controversial issue. The point of debate, rather, concerns the epistemological and ontological *implications* of this challenge.

For the structuralist school of historiography, often described as ‘narrativism’, the challenge to objectivism/direct realism in historiography results in an ‘anti-realist’ epistemology, whereby ‘history’ in the sense of ‘what really happened in the past’ (or ‘history A’) is regarded as the ‘impossible object’ of historical discourse. From this anti-realist perspective, ‘[the] real past plays no role in the practice of history; what we know of the human past we know only by means of the discipline of history... There is no way to jump outside the framework of that discipline to a real past of any sort’ (Goldstein 1980:429). Narrativist historiographers therefore focus exclusively upon the linguistic and literary

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<sup>59</sup> Howie, borrowing from Thomas Nagel, uses the term ‘objectivism’ to refer to the ‘ideology of objectivity’, as distinct from ‘objectivity’: a term to describe the ‘thing-ness’ of the mind-independent material world (Howie 2010a:5-7).

<sup>60</sup> In fact, as Judith Lowder Newton points out, the role of feminist theory as a progenitor of this kind of thinking is often overlooked within the historiographical field. For example, accounts of the ‘New Historicism’ usually give the impression that it is ‘post-modernism’ or ‘post-structuralism’ that has come up with these kinds of ideas, and feminism has ‘responded’ (see Newton 1988:153).

<sup>61</sup> Von Ranke’s aim was to avoid injecting histories of past events with the ‘spirit of the present’, and his empiricist method consisted in relying as far as possible on the most ‘immediate documents’ such as eye-witness accounts. He was entirely opposed to the Hegelian philosophy of history with its *a priori* projections of rationality or ‘spiritual’ determinations. This is not to say that Ranke was opposed to the idea of constructing a ‘world history’; but for Ranke, empirical study always takes precedent. We ‘must always inquire into *what really happened*’ and only then can we discern if there is a development of unity and progress (Ranke 2000:90-1; Burns 2000).



frameworks and protocols which condition the writing of history in the present (or ‘history B’), and bracket the *referential* function of historical narratives and their claim to represent a past event that ‘really’ happened. This anti-realist epistemology gives rise to an ‘anti-revisionist’ stance within narrativist historiography, such that critical linguistic analysis of the ‘historical text’ is presented as a more defensible and indeed, more radical alternative to revisionist projects, which seek to construct counter-narratives about what ‘really’ happened based on new archival research.

This chapter, however, will argue that these two steps—‘anti-realism’ and ‘anti-revisionism’—are *not* a necessary consequence of ‘anti-objectivism’. As an alternative to the anti-realist approach, the chapter outlines an ‘*indirect* realism’: a historiographical epistemology premised upon the claim that whilst a direct or objective knowledge of past realities is indeed impossible, an indirect link between the past event as it is ‘constituted’ by historians in the present (‘history B’), and what has ‘really’ happened in the past (‘history A’) can be defended (McCullagh 1980). This, in turn, supports a historical practice that I term ‘restless revisionism’, which entails both textually reflexive and proactively revisionist elements. Bearing in mind Fernand Braudel’s criticism of ‘event-based’ historiography—i.e. that it conceives of historical change in terms of point-like, exceptional, individual acts (Braudel 1995)—the chapter adopts a very broad sense of ‘event’<sup>62</sup>. An ‘event’, as I use the term here, refers to ‘happenings’ of the past, which can include bursts of activity, such as an organised or spontaneous act or performance, but also more sustained periods of activity and intellectual endeavour. The advantage of retaining the term ‘event’ is that it conveys a strong sense of the actual *happening* of the past (‘history A’), even as we recognise that our

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<sup>62</sup>Braudel is an influential figure in the ‘Annales’ school of historiography, which studies long-term historical structures or *la longue durée*, combining geographical and sociological approaches with historical studies, and downplaying the importance of specific events and individuals. Braudel’s study of *The Mediterranean*, for example, is organised according to three different levels of time. The first level is slow, almost imperceptible geographical time; the second level is the long-term time of social, economic and cultural history; the third level of time is the history of individuals and specific events, which for Braudel is the most superficial (1995).

knowledges and reconstructions of past events and conditions will always be mediated by the linguistic and interpretative schemas permeating our present contexts.<sup>63</sup>

The structure of the chapter effectively works ‘backwards’, outlining in section 1 the problematic *effects* of ‘anti-revisionism’, and then, in sections 2 and 3, showing why anti-revisionism and anti-realism do not necessarily follow on from anti-objectivism. Section 2 revisits the anti-realist arguments that underpin the anti-revisionist stance, as articulated most eminently by Roland Barthes (1970; 1982) and Hayden White (1973; 1978; 2009). The aim here is to demonstrate that we require a much richer understanding of historical ‘reality’ than is offered by both objectivist *and* by narrativist historiographies, to enable us to grasp the vital link between interpretation and happening. To develop such an understanding, section 3 goes on to build a case for an ‘indirect’ historical realism. Here, I turn predominantly to Paul Ricoeur’s work on the relation between language and event, and the ‘reality of the historical past’, drawing particularly upon his account of ‘metaphor’ and ‘split reference’, and his ontology of the ‘trace’ (1978; 1984; 1988; 2009). The processual account of historical reality offered by Ricoeur gives rise to an indirect realist historiography, which postulates an ‘indirect’ referential relationship between historical narratives and the past events that they attempt to describe and account for. Section 4 then shows how this indirect historical realism opens up a process-oriented, reflexive conception of historical practice, which I describe as a ‘restless revisionism’. Finally, the conclusion draws out the implications of the discussions in this chapter for our understanding of historical time, explaining how ‘indirect realism’ and ‘restless revisionism’ implicitly entail a multilinear, multidirectional understanding of the ‘time of the trace’ and historical practice.

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<sup>63</sup> To further clarify: in speaking of ‘actual’ past events, I differ from Deleuzian theorists who treat ‘the event’ in transcendental terms as the virtual ‘event’: an opening on to a ‘nonhistorical past’ (Colebrook 2009a), the condition or ‘immanent feature of all actualisation’ (Boundas, 2006:82). For more on the ‘virtual’ approach to history and ‘becoming’, see edited collections by Grosz (1999), or Colebrook and Bell (2009b). I undertake a critical analysis of the ‘virtual’ approach elsewhere (Browne 2011).

1**THE PROBLEM WITH ‘ANTI-REVISIONISM’**

The textually reflexive turn brought by structuralist or ‘narrativist’ approaches has in many ways been extremely valuable within feminist historiography. By becoming more aware of how narrative techniques and linguistic conventions shape the kinds of stories we tell about the past, we can become more critically aware of how these narratives work, and their effect on the reader in the present (Hemmings 2005; 2011). The reflexivist approach becomes more problematic, however, when it is presented as a self-sufficient *alternative* to revisionist projects and the quest for counter-narratives. This section will outline this argument with reference primarily to Clare Hemmings’ recent ‘anti-revisionist’ interventions into feminist storytelling (2005; 2007; 2011)<sup>64</sup>.

Hemmings’ textual analyses of hegemonic narratives of feminist history, (as referred to in the previous chapter), serve as an illuminating demonstration of the kinds of insights that the textually reflexive approach can bring to feminist historiography. She identifies several textual techniques that are consistently used within these hegemonic historical narratives, such as the ‘mobilisation of affect’ through the rhetorical tone of the narrative, which operates to create a certain affective state in the reader (Hemmings 2011:24). The celebratory tone of progress narratives, for example, achieved through the deployment of adjectives such as ‘interesting’, ‘exciting’, ‘far-reaching’, ‘generative’, and ‘creative’, provides ‘little room for dissent’ (2001:20-1). Another textual technique is the use of the present or past tense to secure the temporal structure of the narrative, for instance, when black feminist ‘critiques’ are referred to *in the past tense*, in contrast to ‘poststructuralist’ approaches which tend to be described *in the present tense*. The effect, as discussed, is that black feminism is depicted as a ‘phase’ which has passed, and poststructuralism, in contrast, is portrayed as ‘linguistically

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<sup>64</sup> Using Hemmings’ texts in this way, as ‘representative’ of a certain philosophical position, admittedly risks doing violence to the subtleties and singularities of Hemmings’ work, and of turning her into a ‘straw woman’. It is helpful in this instance, however, to unpack the philosophical logic that leads to the anti-revisionist attitude, to examine the steps that can lead from textual reflexivism to anti-revisionism, and to be clear about what is at stake in such a move.

alive and present' (2011:46). Hemmings' semantic analysis thus offers some highly useful insights into how and why the hegemonic narratives work so effectively, which can help us recognise when we are deploying such textual techniques to tell our own stories, and to identify such techniques at work in the writings of others. Her argument, however, is not simply that a focus on language and 'the technology of Western feminist story telling' should lead the feminist theorist and historian to an increased self-reflexivity. She argues, further, for an anti-revisionism, which she presents as an unavoidable outcome of an anti-objectivist, textually reflexive approach.

Hemmings' case against revisionism is premised upon an anti-objectivist epistemology, which recognises that there is no, and can be no, ultimate, complete, objective historical truth. 'Since it is impossible to tell a full story about the past... accounts are always selective ones that do precise work in the present' (2007:69). For Hemmings, this axiomatic anti-objectivist claim is *implicitly disavowed* by revisionist projects, which, she contends, are inherently aligned to a fantasy of historical objectivity and neutrality. When the revisionist asks 'what *really* happened?', Hemmings argues, she presents herself as innocent of what she might find out, thereby 'prevent(ing) attention to the political investments that motivate the desire to know, and that generate a writer's epistemological and methodological practices' (Hemmings 2005:118). Accordingly, the newly revised story 'erase[s] its own construction' (2007:73). Her second argument is that the revisionist project is inherently wedded to a *linear* model of historical knowledge-building, where the story is corrected 'in a linear fashion – that is from past to present'. Revisionism, she claims, thus 'implicitly tends towards the construction of new master narratives—a consensus and synthesis of perspectives—which effects a closing down and fixing of the past' (2007:72).

Given this revisionist 'fantasy of objectivity' and implicit tendency towards master narratives, Hemmings argues, we should *resist* a revisionist response, which would 'go back to the archives' to get at 'what really happened' in the recent feminist past, thereby 'intervene[ing] at the level of truth-telling'. Instead, she presents the 'textually reflexive' approach—based upon critical textual analysis, 'methodology over content', and 'textual

strategies’—as an *alternative* to the revisionist approach (2007:72-4). In the first instance, Hemmings sees critical textual analysis as a transformative practice in itself, because it instigates a ‘temporary break in the monotony of the repeated’ (2011:189). And secondly, she suggests that by instigating such breaks and pauses, we can open ourselves up to different ways of telling and ‘re-narrating’ feminist stories: Textual strategies of ‘re-narration’, she writes:

... ‘start from textual and political absences in the stories we already participate in, explicitly folding these back into the narrative in order to refigure the political grammars of Western feminism. They offer ways of approaching feminist stories and politics over the temptation to produce a more correct account’ (2011:27).

Textual analysis and textual strategies such as ‘re-narration’ are therefore presented by Hemmings as an alternative to revising or telling a new story. The only way of remaining faithful to the acknowledgement that ‘all histories are motivated and selective histories’, she suggests, is to experiment with ‘how we might tell stories differently rather than telling different stories’ (ibid: 16). It is questionable, however, whether this reflexivist, textual approach *alone* could ever be enough to interrupt and overturn the hegemonic narratives of feminist history, narratives which—as Hemmings herself points out in such careful detail—have become so deeply entrenched. Indeed, a reflexivist strategy that ‘re-narrates’ narratives already in circulation risks securing the dominant stories even further (Torr 2007:65-6). This kind of problem can be viewed as part of a wider problem within feminist theory, which arises when textual analysis is treated as sufficient *in itself* as an oppositional methodology. Shumei Shih suggests that the textual or ‘deconstructive turn’ in feminist theory can be read as effectively a ‘displacement’ of the need to attend to the substantive complexities of nonhegemonic histories and lived experiences. ‘The deconstruction of Western universalist discourse’, she writes, ‘ends up exercising the muscles of Western universalist discourse... after all, if we want to study power and hegemony, we should study the West, right?’ (Shih 2002:96). Shih’s broader point here is applicable to our more specific problematic of

countering feminism's 'great hegemonic model'. That is, keeping the dominant narratives of feminism in the central analytic frame—to be formally analysed and 'renarrated'—can be viewed as a 'displacement' of the more pressing need to generate *counter-narratives*. Attending to 'the multiple erasures... of the present' and 'clearing conceptual space' is certainly a fruitful starting point for reconsidering what kind of history might be necessary and useful (Hemmings 2007:73). Yet, open spaces *in themselves* are not generative, and intervening at the level of narrative form and technique *alone* arguably cannot provide enough impetus to the project to interrupt the hegemonic model of feminist history.

This strategic problem is, further, related to a problem of accountability. Hemmings' reflexivist approach quite rightly forces us to revisit and interrogate 'what we *think* has happened' in western feminist theory in the recent past, through analysis of how these stories are produced and maintained (2011:133, emphasis added). This is certainly crucial. But if we follow Hemmings, we *still* do not need to ask—indeed we should resist asking—'what *has* happened' and tell new stories according to what we find. This is problematic because feminists need to be accountable for the *content* of the stories we tell, as well as for their form, and consider ways in which truth claims in the present about what 'really' happened in the past can be evaluated in addition to a textual analysis of their claims to authority. Without such a framework for evaluating truth-content, it is difficult to respond to charges of historical relativism, and give an adequate defence of why the hegemonic narratives of feminism are misrepresentative and *wrong*, and why different ones are required. 'Keeping meaning open', as Hemmings argues, is indeed a 'primary responsibility of a feminist theorist' (2007:74). But the responsibilities of the feminist *historian*—a role we all take on, even momentarily, when we tell stories about feminism—include being accountable for the content of those stories as well as their form. This imperative demands a commitment to questioning and tracing 'what happened', rather than stopping short at interrogating our 'technologies of the presumed', and 're-narrating' a story we have already been told second, third, even fourth-hand.

In short, then, textual strategies alone are not enough. In the first instance, we need to generate alternative narrative content as well as alternative narrative techniques in order to

disrupt the hegemonic narratives of feminist history. Further, we need to be accountable for the content of the stories we tell, as well as for the way in which we tell them. Reflexivism without revisionism thus constitutes a rather timid or partial response to the call for a radical challenge to feminism's great hegemonic model. On the other hand, however, revisionism without reflexivism—a 'naïve' revisionism—does indeed, as Hemmings claims, risk presenting the feminist historian or historiographer as an 'innocent' observer or investigator, and further, risks creating a new master narrative that simply 'corrects' the previous in a linear fashion and 'closes down the past'. As such, I propose, feminist historiography needs both revisionism *and* reflexivism. To challenge the idea that they are mutually exclusive, then, I need to demonstrate that reflexive attention to linguistic conventions and techniques does not (as Hemmings suggests) *preclude* a revisionist approach which seeks out alternative knowledges and narratives through undertaking new archival research. Moreover, I need to show that revisionist projects need not be aligned to a 'fantasy of objectivity', nor need they result in master narratives and thereby 'close down' the past.

The rest of the chapter, therefore, is devoted to demonstrating the compatibility of reflexivism and revisionism, at both a theoretical and a practical level. The first task is to challenge the move that narrativist historiographers make from anti-objectivism to 'anti-realism', which underpins the refusal of revisionism. Accordingly, the next section will revisit and problematise the case against historical realism as found in the influential historiographical writings of Roland Barthes and Hayden White (whom Hemmings cites as a key influence). The problem, as we shall see, lies with the impoverished understanding of historical 'reality' that accompanies the 'anti-realist' position.

2

**THE PROBLEM WITH ‘ANTI-REALISM’**

The key move of anti-realist, structuralist historiography, as stated, is to bracket the question of ‘what really happened in the past’, thereby re-describing ‘history’ as, essentially, a literary exercise. A consideration of this anti-realist stance is impossible without acknowledging the influence of Fernand de Saussure’s linguistic theory. Indeed, the anti-realist position within historiography can essentially be understood as a historiographical application of Saussurean linguistic theory. For Saussure, the linguistic ‘sign’ is a ‘two-sided entity’ comprised of the ‘signifier’ (the sound-image) and the ‘signified’ (the thought or concept), which may have an external ‘referent’, but this is beyond the linguist’s purview. Saussure’s insistence on the ‘arbitrariness’ of the sign leads him to claim that language can be analysed as a formal, self-contained, enclosed system (*langue*), considered separately from the series of communicative speech acts which make use of this grammatical and semiotic system (*parole*), and moreover, from its material ‘referents’ (Saussure 1970)<sup>65</sup>. In the historiographical context, this idea translates into a re-description of history as a ‘system of signs’, rather than a system or series of ‘events’ (Rayment Pickard 2000:275).

The Saussurean influence is clearly evident, for example, in Roland Barthes’ essay on ‘Historical Discourse’ (1970), in which he famously claims that ‘historical discourse does not follow reality, it only signifies it; it asserts at every moment: *this happened*, but the meaning conveyed is only that someone is making that assertion’ (Barthes 1970:154). For Barthes, history is simply one ‘species of narrative’, and what distinguishes historical narrative as a ‘genre’ is not its referential links with an external ‘real’, but rather the literary and discursive features which produce the ‘*effet du réel*’, or ‘reality effect’, signifying or coding the text as ‘history’ rather than fiction (1970:154). In support of this claim, Barthes draws on Nietzsche’s argument that ‘for a fact to exist, we must first introduce meaning’, by which he means that we can only designate something as a ‘fact’ if we already possess the

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<sup>65</sup> For more on Saussure’s *Course in General Linguistics*, see Culler (1976) or Harris (1987).



interpretative framework by which to categorise it as something ‘factual’ as opposed to fictive (ibid: 153). The ‘fact’, he argues, can only exist within language, as a term in a discourse. Yet historical discourse behaves ‘as if it were a simple reproduction of something on another plane of existence altogether, some extra-structural “reality”’ (ibid: 153). Indeed, Barthes questions any kind of ‘realism’ in literature or narrative, historical or otherwise. ‘The function of narrative’, he writes, ‘is not to “represent”, it is to constitute a spectacle... not of the mimetic order... “What takes place” in a narrative is from the referential (reality) point of view literally *nothing*; “what happens” is language alone, the adventure of language’ (Barthes 1982:294-5)<sup>66</sup>.

Hayden White’s work similarly formulates an anti-realist epistemology, yet White concentrates more closely on the implications that the anti-realist epistemology has for understanding historical practice and method. ‘It is sometimes said’, he writes, ‘that the aim of the historian is to explain the past by ‘finding’, ‘identifying’ or ‘uncovering’ the ‘stories’ that lie buried in chronicles, and that the difference between ‘history’ and ‘fiction’ is that the historian ‘finds’ his stories, whilst the fiction writer ‘invents’ his. This conception of the historian’s task, however, obscures the extent to which “invention” also plays a part in the historian’s operations’ (White 1973: 6-7). Linguistic tropes and interpretative modes, White argues, underlie not only the ‘emplotment’ of the story, but also underlie what are usually considered to be the ‘primitive elements’ of the process of history-writing, i.e. the processes of selecting and arranging ‘unprocessed’ historical data<sup>67</sup>. Although this level of

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<sup>66</sup> The extent to which Barthes’ ‘structuralist analysis of narrative’ ought to be understood as fixed or exhaustive is a contested issue. Some commentators argue that by the end of the 1960s, there is a significant shift in Barthes’ work, from the desire for all-encompassing structural models towards an affirmation of multiple structural possibilities in a text. Sanford Freedman and Carole Anne Taylor, for example, emphasise Barthes’ *S/Z*, in which Barthes’ concept of ‘différance’ attempts to reconcile evaluative criticism with plural readings of a text, drawing us ‘aesthetically towards the extension of meaning’, and ‘narrative flux’. As such, they argue, ‘Barthes’ interest is no longer in fixing the meaning of texts but instead mapping their movement’, and *différance*, an idea that Derrida also takes up, ‘underlies all discussion’ (1983:xx-xxiii). Susan Sontag also emphasises this shift from textual system to textual play (1983). What is unequivocal, however, is the radical epistemological challenge Barthes’ work poses for historiographers in his disconnection of the historical narrative from the ‘referent’ or past event.

<sup>67</sup> White defines ‘trope’ as ‘manner’, ‘mood’ or ‘style’, and ‘tropics’ as the process by which language constitutes fields of experience within a specific mode of identification and description. The key

understanding and description is ordinarily seen as essentially pre-interpretative, he claims, ‘descriptions of events already constitute interpretations of their nature’ (White 2009:361). Echoing Barthes’ Nietzschean point, White argues that even when we think we are simply identifying or describing sets of events that we ‘find’ within historical records and archives, there are figurative tropes at work which dictate the way in which those events are described, as ‘facts’ or otherwise. For White, this implies that linguistic conventions must therefore be given historiographical priority in the analysis of historical discourse: firstly, because language protocols are required for the understanding of anything, and secondly, because the choices we make regarding the linguistic models we use to mark out a terrain of analysis should ideally be self-conscious rather than unconscious ones (White 1978:22).

Barthes’ and White’s challenges to ‘outmoded’ objectivism and ‘naïve’ realism in history have provoked a much-needed scrutiny of the assumptions about fact and interpretation that we bring to the idea and practice of history. ‘We should no longer naively expect that statements about a given epoch or complex of events in the past “correspond” to some preexistent body of “raw facts” (White 1978: 47). However, whilst these challenges to the objectivist conception of historical reality are to be welcomed, my contention is that neither theorist offers an adequate *alternative* means of conceiving of historical reality. ‘Historical reality’, I agree, ought not to be construed as a complete sum of ‘raw facts’; but it does not follow that ‘historical reality’ is therefore simply an effect of language. When narrativist historiographers consider a ‘referential illusion’ as a simple ‘meaning effect’, the problem concerning the ‘reality of the historical past’ is not thereby resolved or abolished. It is simply bracketed or ‘set aside’ (Ricoeur 1984:79).

White, in fact, takes a less extreme or cavalier approach to the question of historical reality than Barthes. Barthes’ reduction of the status of ‘historical reality’ to an ‘*effet du réel*’ entirely dismantles the distinction between historical and fictional literature, in that he treats them simply as different genres (Rayment Pickard 2000: 275). In contrast, White is careful to

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‘tropes’ he identifies, as I will discuss further in section 3, are ‘metaphor’, ‘metonymy’, ‘synecdoche’ and ‘irony’.

stress that he is not denying that there *is* a ‘real’ referent which makes historical narratives *historical* rather than fictional (White 2009: 354). On the other hand, however, White’s core argument is that what should interest the historiographer is the ‘*literature of fact*’: the techniques or strategies that language uses to constitute an event as factual or fictive. Indeed, because ‘there are no apodictically certain theoretical grounds on which one can legitimately claim that any one representative mode is more ‘realistic’ than another’, he claims, ‘the best grounds for choosing one perspective on history rather than another are ultimately aesthetic or moral rather than epistemological’ (1973:xii). According to his ‘tropological’ approach, then, the only way historical narratives can be critically assessed is in terms of their linguistic or tropological characteristics. Thus, whilst White wants to preserve the distinction between historical and fictional events, he does not offer any means to distinguish between them, other than by construing *the way they are described* as different figures of speech.

The referent on the ‘other side’ of the narration, I contend, thereby hovers in White’s work as a shadowy figure. It functions as the term that prevents history from sliding wholesale into fiction, but which cannot be brought into the critical frame. This performs an essentially Kantian move, by according the past event a ‘noumenal’ status as *that which must be thought but cannot be known*, thereby severing the link between ‘history A’ (‘what happened’ in the past), and ‘history B’ (the account we give of ‘what we think happened’), and pushing ‘history A’ outside the boundaries of legitimate enquiry and critique. Hemmings does something similar, as she claims that feminist narratives are ‘haunted’ by past events that they exclude, whilst at the same time confining the critical field to an analysis of textual techniques and knowledge politics of the present. As with White, the gesture is towards something that really happened, something that makes a historical narrative *historical*, and that makes existing historical narratives inaccurate and inadequate. But from this narrativist perspective, the ‘past event’ cannot be taken up into historiographical enquiry, which remains fixed on the form rather than the content.

My core argument, then, is that narrativist formulations of ‘anti-realist’ epistemology rely upon a highly impoverished notion of ‘historical reality’. In Barthes’ work, ‘historical

reality' is reduced to a linguistic 'reality effect'; in White's work, 'historical reality' is reduced to a kind of regulative idea, i.e. an idea which must be thought (in order to maintain the history/fiction divide) but its reality cannot be known. To be clear, the anti-objectivist claim that there are no 'raw historical facts', and that there can only ever be 'events under description', is not the problem (Mink 1978:146). Historical events will always be symbolically mediated and subject to various interpretations, both in retrospect and at the time of their occurrence. The problem, rather, lies with the implication that because a past event is symbolically or 'tropologically' mediated, its 'reality' cannot be 'known', and thus must be bracketed from historiographical analysis. In doing so, anti-realist historiographers construct a pre- or extra-discursive notion of the historical 'real' that is akin to the Kantian noumenal, or indeed the Lacanian Real<sup>68</sup>. This is a highly impoverished or abstract notion, as it implies that historical reality is a realm which is somehow made inaccessible, or blocked out, by the conceptual frameworks and lenses through which individuals and groups interpret and shape the worlds that we inherit and the lives that we live. Yet what would 'historical reality' be, if stripped of its symbolic, interpretative determinations?

Accordingly, we need a more complex and much richer notion of historical 'reality', to serve as an alternative to the objectivist idea that past reality is a reservoir of 'raw facts' waiting to be discovered, *and* to the narrativist idea that past reality is an effect of language, or an 'external' realm somehow 'beyond' the symbolic frameworks through which historical discourses and knowledges are shaped. This shift can be accomplished by turning to the broadly 'pragmatic' conception of 'lived reality', outlined in the Introduction, which affirms that lived reality is always mediated through symbolic structures. More specifically, a richer understanding of the 'reality of the historical past' can be reached through the historiographical approach of 'indirect realism'.

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<sup>68</sup> In Lacan's account, the order of the 'Real' (into which we are born) has no differentiation, no boundaries or borders, no 'lack'. It is outside language and the order of the Symbolic, which in contrast, is constituted in terms of oppositions, e.g. presence/absence, and a differentiated set of signifying elements. The Real is impossible to integrate into the Symbolic order, utterly resisting signification (Evans 1996). I discuss the Lacanian approach further in chapter 5.

## 3

**INDIRECT REALISM**

If ‘history’ is to be understood as something more than a literary genre, we need a more adequate account of the relation between the past event or ‘what really happened’ (‘history A’), and the historical account that conveys ‘what we think happened’ (‘history B’). An ontological account of this relation is required, (rather than stopping short at an epistemology of history-writing in the present), because, as Ricoeur points out, the epistemological question about the status of historical knowledge often masks or deflects the ontological question: what is it knowledge *of*? (Ricoeur 2009:366). As argued above, in deflecting this question, anti-realist historiographies promulgate a highly impoverished conception of historical reality. Essentially, then, we need a theory of the ‘reality of the historical past’ which accounts for the happening of the past, and also, for determinations of the past through historical narratives. This will underpin an epistemology of ‘indirect realism’, which preserves the referential function of historical narratives and takes seriously the commitment to seeking historical ‘truths’, even whilst recognising that truth-telling or truth-making is dependent upon linguistic conventions and political motivations in the present, and moreover, is a process that can never be fixed.

To articulate such a theory, this section turns predominantly to Paul Ricoeur’s work on the relation between language and event, and the reality of the historical past. The analysis focuses firstly upon Ricoeur’s dynamic theory of ‘metaphor’, ‘split reference’, and ‘mimesis’, which offer promising ways of articulating the referential relationship between past events and historical narratives<sup>69</sup>. The section then elaborates further by drawing on Ricoeur’s concept of the ‘trace’, which establishes a dynamic model of the reality of the historical past,

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<sup>69</sup> It must be stressed here that this discussion bears no pretension to offering a thorough philosophical or linguistic treatment of the nature of metaphor. The intention, rather, is to demonstrate that reflexive attentiveness to language does not require an ‘anti-realism’, and to offer a richer historiographical understanding of historical reality as a symbolically mediated reality.

premised upon an ‘asymmetrical interdependence’ between past and present, between ‘history A’ and ‘history B’.

### 3.1

#### *Metaphor, Split Reference, and Mimesis*

To illustrate Ricoeur’s theory of metaphor and its pertinence to historiography, it is instructive to stage an initial comparison between Ricoeur’s approach (1978; 2009), and the ‘tropological’ approach taken by Hayden White (1973; 1978). The difference between White’s and Ricoeur’s theories of metaphor can be explained in broader terms of the difference between the *literary* approach to metaphor and the *philosophical* approach. ‘The *via philosophica*’, Jonathan Culler explains, ‘locates metaphor in the gap between sense and reference’, whereas ‘*the via rhetorica*... situates metaphor in the space between one meaning and another’ (Culler 1974:219). Or as Judith Roof puts it: ‘While philosophy rightly worries about the productive propensities of metaphorical thinking, structural linguistics is concerned with metaphor’s status and operation as a basic linguistic operation’ (Roof 1996:20). Ricoeur’s philosophical approach, I will argue below, is more adequate to the question of historical reference and reality than White’s ‘tropological’ approach, because it accords a much stronger role to the *happening* of the ‘event’, which provokes metaphorical expression and the ‘need for narration’ in the first place.

As we have seen, White stresses that every history is determined or shaped by its ‘metahistory’: the interpretative framework upon which it is grounded. His ‘tropological’ approach classifies different kinds of discourse, including historical discourse, according to the linguistic modes that predominate in them, rather than by reference to their contents or referential function (White 1973:3-4). In *Metahistory*, White claims there are four linguistic ‘master tropes’ governing the construction of historical discourse: metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony (ibid:31-8). The ‘master tropes’ are immanent in the language the historian must use to describe the events, White states, even prior to constructing them into a story. In its metaphorical mode, for example, historical discourse is essentially

‘representational’, asserting a relation of resemblance between the event and the narrative, whilst metonymy is ‘reductionist’, synecdoche ‘integrative’, and irony ‘negational’ (ibid: 34). Strictly speaking, however, White claims that metonymy, synecdoche, and irony are *all kinds of metaphor*, in that each trope seeks to ‘*liken*’ the described event to ‘some form with which we have already become familiar in our literary culture’ (White 2009:358). In this sense, the master tropes governing historical discourse are variations on a *metaphorical continuum*, despite the different kinds of illuminations they aim at on the figurative level (1973:34). Although irony can, in fact, be viewed as ultimately ‘metatropological’, representing a stage of consciousness in which the problematic nature of language itself has been recognised, in contrast to the ‘naivety’ of the other tropes, which presuppose the capacity of figurative language to grasp the nature of reality (ibid: 36-37).

In some respects, Ricoeur is a fellow traveller with White, in that both are concerned to bring the problem of representing the past event ‘to language’ (Ricoeur 2009:371). In Ricoeur’s view, White helps us to clarify the paradoxical nature of the historical operation: ‘The intention is certainly oriented toward what really happened in the past, but the paradox is that one can designate what it is that precedes all narrative only by *prefiguring* it’ (ibid: 370). Further, argues Ricoeur, White is correct to understand the ‘reality’ of the historical past as metaphorical in nature (Ricoeur 1984:81). Where Ricoeur departs from White, however, is in his understanding of the nature and function of metaphor. For White, the metaphorical significance of historical discourse is entirely linguistic. His description of the metaphorical operation, as we have seen, is restricted to giving an account of the way in which the events under description are ‘likened’ to ‘some form with which we have already become familiar in our literary culture’ (White 2009:358). In White’s exposition, therefore, historical representation is a phenomenon inside language, and as such, all we can legitimately learn from the statement ‘this really happened’ is that the described event has been linguistically or metaphorically coded as a historical event as opposed to a fictive event, through a tropological analysis. In contrast, Ricoeur insists that language ‘does not constitute a world for itself. It is not even a world’ (1984:78). His ‘ontological presupposition of reference’,

rather, is that ‘because we are in the world and affected by situations, we try to orient ourselves in them by means of understanding; we also have something to say, an experience to bring to language and to share’. Language is thus oriented beyond itself; it says something *about* something, and crucially is not a self-sustaining system (ibid)<sup>70</sup>.

This basic premise guides Ricoeur’s core argument in *The Rule of Metaphor*, which postulates that the metaphorical statement or utterance functions in ‘two referential fields at once’: not only the referential field of language but also the referential field of affective experience and activity (Ricoeur 1978:299).<sup>71</sup> Whilst White’s tropology treats metaphor as simply ‘a function of transference common to a diverse range of (figurative) tropes’, Ricoeur argues that a ‘living metaphor’ brings an ‘unknown referential field towards language’, telling us something new about reality, and thereby providing an extension of meaning (ibid: 299-300). This gain in meaning is not to be thought of as a conceptual gain, (as it is yet to be brought under the requirements of the concept), but rather as a ‘semantic shock’: a shock that produces the need for interpretation in the first place (ibid: 296). A ‘living metaphor’ is an ignition, a flaring, a bringing of something new. The notions of ‘split reference’ and ‘living metaphor’ thus give a different sense to the etymological meaning of ‘metaphor’ as ‘transfer’ (ibid: 298). Indeed, Ricoeur argues, the tensional situation of metaphor’s ‘split reference’ has ontological implications, as expressed within the metaphorical copula, in which ‘is’ is a kind of ‘being-as’:

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<sup>70</sup> One of Ricoeur’s key influences here is the linguistic theorist Èmile Beneviste, which differentiates him from theorists such as Barthes who follow Saussure. Beneviste preserves the referential function of language, whereas Saussure, as we have seen, insists on the arbitrariness of the sign and focuses on the signifier and signified, treating language as effectively a self-contained, enclosed system (Ricoeur 1984:77-8).

<sup>71</sup> The notion of ‘split reference’ is taken from Roman Jakobson who claims that ‘the supremacy of poetic function over referential function does not obliterate the reference but makes it ambiguous’, (quoted in La Capra 1983:126). La Capra in fact questions Ricoeur’s reading of Jakobson, but my argument pertains to Ricoeur’s *historiographical* use of the notion, which I find to be a useful means of preserving the referential function of historical narratives.



‘Being as... means being and not being. In this way, the dynamism of meaning allows access to the dynamic vision of reality which is the implicit ontology of the metaphorical utterance’ (ibid: 297).

Ricoeur’s philosophical theory of metaphor and ‘split reference’, I suggest, can be usefully deployed to articulate an indirect realism, which upholds the challenge to objectivism, (the belief that there can be a neutral and disinterested account of ‘reality’), whilst also upholding the thesis that there *is* a referential link (albeit indirect) between the historical metaphor and a fluid historical reality that defies direct description. Ricoeur concurs with White that there is no unmediated truth to be told about historical reality, that ‘being-in-the-world’ is to be in a world that is always already marked by linguistic practice. Yet his model of ‘discourse’ is different from White’s, as Ricoeur moves away from the focus on discursive *forms*, and restores the etymological meaning of ‘discourse’ as a *movement* ‘to and fro’: a referential movement, backwards and forwards between textual mediations, and a material, affective, dynamic world (Ricoeur 1984:78). He describes this as a dynamic ‘dialectic of event and meaning’ governing the semantic autonomy or ‘distanciation’ of the text (ibid). Whilst it could be argued that Ricoeur’s presentation of ‘split reference’ can tend towards a dualistic depiction of event and language, on my reading, the concepts of ‘split reference’ and ‘living metaphor’ effectively express the *interdependence* between event and language. On this model, we can acknowledge the mediated nature of historical events, whilst also affirming the existence of historical happenings which exceed their conceptual framing and cross ‘*through* the tropics of discourse’ (Ricoeur 2009: 371). Ricoeur’s dynamic theory of metaphor thus enables us to affirm the ‘eventness’ of history, whilst also affirming its discursive dependences and determinations. As Reinhard Koselleck explains:

‘Historical events are not possible without linguistic activity; the experience gained from these events cannot be communicated except through language. However, neither events nor experiences are exhausted by their linguistic articulation. There are

numerous extralinguistic factors that enter into every event, and there are levels of experience that escape linguistic determination. ... Stated more generally, language and history depend on each other but never coincide' (Koselleck 2004:22).

The concepts of 'split reference' and 'living metaphor' aptly capture the noncoincidental interdependence that Koselleck describes, and offer two ways of conceptualising the 'indirect' referential function of historical narratives, i.e. in terms of a noncoincidental interdependence between past event and historical language. Ricoeur's conception of 'mimesis' plays a similar role within his *Time and Narrative* volumes, where he argues that 'the mimetic function of narrative poses a problem exactly parallel to the problem of metaphorical reference' (Ricoeur 1984:xi). Here, Ricoeur uses 'mimesis' in the Aristotelian sense of 'imitation of action... and of life' (Aristotle 1996:11), or as Ricoeur explains it, the 'refiguring of the order of action' (ibid: 54). 'To narrate is to remake action', Ricoeur contends, because narrative is always foregrounded in the world of action, with its practical structures *and* its symbolic resources. A narrative emerges from within 'the whole set of conventions, beliefs and institutions that make up the symbolic framework of a culture', which confers an initial 'readability' on action by providing the rules of meaning—the cultural codes, manners, norms and customs—that make it possible to interpret particular actions and behaviours. A narrator can communicate a particular meaning to a reader because they share this 'pre-understanding' of both the *practical* field, and the *symbolic* field through which the practical field is endowed with meaning and communicability (ibid: 57). Like metaphor, then, narrative 'mimesis' can be thought of as a 'relay station' between two reciprocal, interwoven referential fields: the field of language, and the field of practice and event (Ricoeur 1988:27).

The concept of 'mimesis' thus demonstrates another way of affirming that linguistic and conceptual frameworks always mediate action and experience, whilst also preserving something of the materiality and the happening of the referent (Clark 1990:154). Taken

together with ‘living metaphor’ and ‘split reference’, these aspects of Ricoeur’s work can take us further towards an indirect historical realism, which preserves the referential function of historical narratives, but without reverting to historical objectivism. To claim that our theories and narratives are tied to ‘real’ events or states of affairs is not the same thing as claiming that they are ‘objective’ (Howie 2010:4). We can affirm the partial and mediated nature of our historical knowledge and understanding, without abandoning the referential function of historical narratives to link realities of the past with realities of the present. To elaborate further, the discussion below turns to Ricoeur’s concept of the ‘trace’, as another way of articulating the dynamic, referential relationship between past events and historical narratives. The concept of the ‘trace’ is particularly important, as it gives a stronger account of the *temporality* of the ‘history A’—‘history B’ relation, capturing the relationship between past and present as one of process and reciprocity.

### 3.2

#### *The Trace*

The notion of the ‘trace’ is vital to Ricoeur’s indirect realism, because the constraint imposed upon the historian by the ‘trace’ of the past is what makes *historical* narratives distinct from poetic or *fictive* interpretations of reality. In its most basic sense, he explains, the ‘trace’ refers to the empirical documents and artefacts of the historical archive, which incur a kind of debt to the past upon historical discourse and ‘demand an endless *rectification* on its part’ (2009:371).<sup>72</sup> White would object here that Ricoeur’s notion of a ‘debt’ to the past inclines history towards a backward-looking conservatism, via a commitment to the ‘dead truths of the past’ (Kellner 2009). Moreover, as feminist historiographers have consistently pointed out, the archive is ideologically formed: it conserves what meets the criteria of visibility and

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<sup>72</sup> ‘Archive’ he defines as an ‘authorised deposit’, an organised body of documents; whilst ‘document’ takes on the role of a warrant, ‘nourishing history’s claim to be based on facts’, informing us about the past and enlarging the scope of our collective memory (Ricoeur 1988:116-7).

worth, as determined by those with the power to authorise and preserve. However, Ricoeur's concept of the trace does not depend solely on the empirical trace as embodied in the existing archive or document. The source of the authority of the archive and the historical document, he contends, stems from the *ontological presupposition* that 'the past has left a trace, which has become the archives and documents that bear witness to the past' (1988:184). The trace, Ricoeur explains, is thus a more 'radical phenomenon' than the document or archive (ibid.) In coming to *stand for* the past, claims Ricoeur, the trace is a 'representation' of the indirect referential link between past and present. The 'reality of the historical past' consists in this analogical substitution of the past by the trace which it leaves behind:

'Inasmuch as (the trace) is *left* by the past, it *stands for* the past, it "represents" the past, not in the sense that the past itself would appear in the mind (Vorstellung) but in the sense that the trace takes place of (Vertretung) the past, absent from historical discourse... (Taking-the-place-of) characterises the indirect reference specific to knowledge through traces and distinguishes from any other the referential mode of the history of the past. This referential mode is inseparable from the work of configuration itself: for it is only by means of the unending rectification of our configurations that we form an idea of the inexhaustible resources of the past' (Ricoeur 2009:365).

The ontological status of the trace is thus essentially paradoxical. On the one hand, the trace is visible to present perception as a vestige or empirical mark. 'The passage is no longer is but the trace remains' (Ricoeur 1988b:119).<sup>73</sup> On the other hand, however, it is a

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<sup>73</sup> Ricoeur acknowledges his debt to Levinas' essay on 'La Trace' here (1972). For both philosophers, the trace is distinguished from all the signs that get organised into systems because it 'signifies something without making it appear', and therefore disarranges some 'order'. It is always a *passage* that it indicates, rather than a possible presence. As such, both 'underline the strangeness of the trace'. Despite the influence of Levinas here, however, Ricoeur's concept of the trace in fact differs from that of Levinas, as the Levinasian discussion of the trace is an enquiry into the possibility of an ethics, whereas Ricoeur is enquiring into the conditions of historical knowledge and the reality of the historical past. Moreover, Levinas' 'past of the Other' is an 'absolute past', whereas Ricoeur does not

marker of absence, as it ‘indicates the pastness of the past without showing or bringing to appearance what passed’. Moreover, whilst the trace is a representation of the *survival* of the past into the present, it is nevertheless dependent upon the work of configuration to become absorbed into the meaningful reality of the present. The trace, Ricoeur writes, is therefore ‘one of the more enigmatic instruments by which history refigures time... it does so by constructing the junction brought about by the overlapping of the existential and the empirical in the significance of the trace’ (ibid:125-6).

Insofar as the significance of the trace consists in an ‘overlapping of the existential and the empirical’, a key advantage of Ricoeur’s concept of the ‘trace’ is that it is not simply an abstract notion, but rather, has a practical grounding. It is empirical traces or ‘marks’, and the practical construction of a historical narrative on the basis of these, which keep the reality of the historical past in play. ‘If the trace is a more radical phenomenon than the document or the archive’, Ricoeur writes, ‘it is nevertheless the use of documents and archives that makes the trace an *actual operator* of historical time’ (ibid:184, emphasis added)<sup>74</sup>. On the other hand, by extending the notion of the trace beyond the merely empirical, Ricoeur affirms the more ‘radical’ significance of the trace as a historical ontology. ‘The past event’, he writes, ‘however absent it may be from present perception, nonetheless governs the historical intentionality’ (Ricoeur 1984:82). The sense that ‘someone passed by here’, that something happened, provokes and affirms the intentionality to somehow grasp past realities, even when no empirical traces or marks have survived into the present as ‘marks’ or ‘sign-effects’. Writers of feminist and ‘women’s history’, for example, have consistently had to contend

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place the absent in an immemorial past, outside of any memory (Ricoeur 1988:125). In this respect, Ricoeur’s conception of the trace also differs from that of Derrida, who like Levinas, speaks of the trace as a *condition* of the empirical, whilst Ricoeur speaks of the trace in historiographical terms as both an existential condition *and* an empirical mark. For Derrida, the trace does not appear as such, but can be understood rather as an ‘opaque energy’ that propels the chains of traces: the trace is the aporia or slippage between absence and presence that is the condition of all appearing (Derrida 1988:65).

<sup>74</sup> Accordingly, I would suggest that Ricoeur’s concept of the trace is of more utility to feminist historiography than Levinas’, which remains on the level of the ‘transcendental’.

with the absence of documentation of women's lives<sup>75</sup>. Nevertheless, feminist historians have developed a sophisticated and creative engagement with 'traces' embedded in purportedly banal or trivial events and acts, and indeed, in archival absences or silences themselves, which after all, tell us something about past realities. Such versatility in pursuit of the 'traces' of women's pasts testifies to the significance of the more 'radical' sense of the trace as a historical ontology.

Ricoeur's ontology of the trace—with its overlapping existential and empirical aspects—thus aptly captures the movement of history between presence and absence, providing an alternative account of the reality of the historical past, and demonstrating the *indirect* referential mode of historical narratives. On Ricoeur's account, the reality of the historical past is not conceived as a complete sum of unmediated 'raw facts', but neither is it reduced to a linguistic 'reality effect'. Rather, it consists in the interplay between the fragmentary and indeterminate traces of past happenings that spill over into the present in the form of empirical marks or 'sign-effects', and the 'work of configuration' which keeps those traces, and thus the reality of the historical past, in play. This process, I suggest, can be theorised as an 'asymmetrical interdependence' between historical happenings, and historical interpretation. On the one hand, the way in which a happening or event is interpreted is itself *part of the event*, constituting part of the event's truth and meaning. This requires a reflexive awareness around what we bring in the present to historical enquiry and the writing of history. But on the other hand, the past event will always exceed any specific interpretation or conceptualisation. What it means, what it meant—and therefore what it 'was' or 'is'—is always ambiguous and in process. Shoshana Felman writes eloquently of this process, arguing that history (in the sense of the happening of the event) 'outruns narrative, as though the narrative did not quite have time to catch its breath and catch up with history, to catch up with

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<sup>75</sup> Ricoeur himself, I acknowledge, does not make enough of the political issues of absence and authority when it comes to discussing the role of the archive and the construction of dominant historical narratives.

the full significance as well as the abruptness, the overwhelming aspect of the crisis and of the change that history has meant' (Felman 2000:264).

The temporality of this dynamic model of historical reality—whereby the present narrative configures the past event but is nevertheless 'outrun' by it—is much richer and more complex than the 'presentism' of the 'narrativist' approach. White, for example, claims that the historical past is '*constituted backwards*', because 'history is only ever written as part of a contest in the present 'between contending poetic figurations of what the past *might* consist of' (White 2009:363). However, this claim implicitly disavows the historicity of one's linguistic and interpretative framework, which has not simply materialised out of thin air in the present. Moreover, White places a great emphasis on the capacity of the historian to *choose* the linguistic model they adopt to represent historical reality, thereby overstating the extent to which the present can distance itself from, and thus 'choose' a perspective on, the past. In contrast, an indirect realist perspective, guided by an ontology of the trace, accords a determinative role to the past as well as to the present. This means that neither can be treated independently of the other, as there is a mutual determination of the present by the past and the past by the present. We can conceptualise this as a 'two-way temporality', whereby the historical past is constituted through a 'backwards-forwards' movement between past and present.

Ricoeur's account of the 'trace' thus greatly enhances the project of building an indirect realism. It offers another means of conceiving of the noncoincidental and asymmetrical interdependence between historical happenings and historical narratives, and further, brings out more clearly the dynamic two-way temporality of historical reality, aptly capturing the fluid and reciprocal relation between past and present. Ricoeur's account of the trace also gives a useful account of the relation between the empirical traces of the past and the more radical sense of the trace as a historical ontology. In this regard, it gives us a means of rethinking historical practice, which the final section will demonstrate, showing how the indirect realism sketched here can translate into a process-oriented conception of archival and historical practice that I term 'restless revisionism'.

**4****RESTLESS REVISIONISM**

Ricoeur's notions of 'metaphor', 'mimesis', 'split reference', and the 'trace', I have argued, are useful in developing an indirect historical realism, which can take on the insights of textual reflexivism whilst preserving the referential function of historical narratives. Conceiving of historical reality in dynamic and processual terms—based upon a noncoincidental, asymmetrical interdependence between event and language, happening and interpretation—means that we can uphold the challenge to objectivism or direct realism, whilst nevertheless allowing for a continuity or link between historical narratives constructed in the present and events as they happened in the past. The indirect realist approach thereby preserves the crucial interconnection between *historical research*, based on a commitment to the archive and to somehow grasp the reality of the historical past, and *historiographical theory*, which enquires into the interpretative and conceptual frameworks that inform historical practice. It enables criteria for accountability that are not restricted to methods or techniques of storytelling, and moreover, leaves room for revisionist projects that can coexist with, and mutually inform, critical historiographical methodologies focused on representative models and techniques.

This kind of revisionism is different to the 'naïve' revisionism that Hemmings warns us against. Hemmings, we can recall, makes two key arguments against revisionism. In the first instance, she claims, revisionist projects implicitly disavow the selective nature of history-writing, positioning the revisionist as an 'innocent' enquirer and obscuring the politics motivating the desire to know. The newly revised story, she writes, 'erase[s] its own construction' (Hemmings 2007:73). Her second argument is that revisionism leads to the reinstatement of master narratives and a fixed perspective on the past, as revisionist accounts seek to 'correct' the previous. 'Revisionism, she claims, 'implicitly tends towards the construction of new master narratives—a consensus and synthesis of perspectives—which effects a closing down and fixing of the past' (ibid:72). The implication is that an anti-



objectivist perspective implicitly entails an anti-realist and an anti-revisionist historiography. However, the *indirect* realist account developed above gives rise to a different kind of revisionism, which is not aligned to a fantasy of innocence or objectivity, and nor does it tend towards master narratives which ‘close down’ the past. I describe this as a ‘restless revisionism’, which operates according to three historiographical modes: *active*, *reflexive*, and *receptive*.

The *active* mode of ‘restless revisionism’ consists in taking the initiative and asking ‘what really happened?’ in order to generate alternative historical narratives. As argued in section 1, this is crucial for disturbing the hegemonic narratives that have had such a strong and problematic influence over feminist theory and discourse. According to the dynamic theory of metaphor proposed by Ricoeur, ‘dead’ or ‘worn-out metaphors’, enshrined in catalogued meaning, can be disrupted and broken apart through ‘living metaphors’, which ‘tell us something new about reality’ and provoke fresh perspectives (Ricoeur 1978:291). So if the ‘wave’ metaphor, for example, is a worn-out metaphor which constricts the way that feminist narratives are constructed, it can be broken apart through staging archival encounters, which unleash traces and glimmers of the past, as meaning is generated anew through the ‘transfer’ between past and present. To try and create ‘living metaphors’, we need to seek out forgotten traces and fragments of feminist pasts, rather than simply ‘re-narrating’ stale and sedimented stories from a new perspective.

Informed by the indirect realist model sketched above, however, this kind of active revisionism does not construct a new narrative as a ‘finished product’. As Ricoeur puts it, the documents and artefacts of the historical archive ‘incur a kind of debt to the past upon historical discourse and demand an endless *rectification* on its part’ (2009:371). Though the term ‘rectification’ used here by Ricoeur does perhaps suggest replacement, or an increase in ‘correctness’, I want to emphasise the term ‘*endless*’ instead, which recasts the project of revisionism in processual terms. This processual understanding of historical practice emerges from the processual conception of historical reality given above, as on this account, the meaning of historical reality or a historical event is dependent upon the ongoing work of

interpretation: what it 'is' or 'was' cannot be settled once and for all. Moreover, whilst traces of the past spill over into the present, the past is not given directly as 'raw fact'; nor is it given in the same way for everyone. Taking the 'indirect realist' view of the historical past—whereby traces of the past are given differently to different subjects in the present—therefore leads to a *pluralistic* model of historical knowledge, rather than an *aggregative* model. On an aggregative model, the sum of different perspectives and narratives add up to give a fuller, more complete account (Joyce *et al* 1995:257). The aggregate model of historical knowledge and practice thus correlates with a conception of the historical past as a complete set of objective facts. A pluralistic model, in contrast, correlates with a different account of 'historical reality', conceived in terms of the interplay between the fragmentary, indeterminate traces of past happenings that spill over into the present, and the complex and contestatory 'work of configuration' which keeps those traces in play. From this perspective, different perspectives and narratives do not need to aggregate into a comprehensive master narrative in order to be valuable or meaningful, or to tell us something 'real' about feminisms of the past.

To recognise that past traces are not given 'immediately', nor given in the same way for everyone, moreover, demands a *reflexive* mode of historiography, grounded in an awareness of the role that the historian plays in shaping the historical past she investigates and narrates, and thus of the selectivity of historical narratives, which always do 'precise work in the present' (Hemmings 2007:69). Indeed, premised upon an ontological and epistemological framework which implicitly recognises the interdependence of interpretation and happening, this kind of revisionism is forced into reflexivity. Accordingly, 'restless revisionism' does not present the revisionist as 'innocent', nor does it erase the constructedness of the revised account. Rather, this kind of historical practice fosters a 'mutually provocative relation between the empirical and the rhetorical as equally necessary aspects of history-writing' (La Capra 1985:21). It is not only an *active* revisionism that seeks to continually refresh the content of the stories it tells; it is also, and just as importantly, a *reflexive* revisionism in that it continually seeks to interrogate the way it tells them.

Revisionist projects, therefore, need not aim to set the story straight ‘once and for all’, or treat archives as fixed containers of truth, but instead, can aim to practice what Deborah Withers has described as ‘engaged interpretation’, (as opposed to ‘removed interpretation’), which is fully immersed in the knowledge politics that permeate historical work, and attentive to the selective and partisan nature of historical practice. This kind of engaged interpretation is well exemplified by Withers in her recent project ‘Sistershow Revisited’: an exhibition about an agit-prop feminist theatre troupe based in Bristol in 1973-1975 (Withers 2011)<sup>76</sup>. One of the key effects of revisiting Sistershow is its troubling of hegemonic narratives which present ‘second wave’ and ‘1970s’ feminism in a puritanical light or a heterosexist frame. By identifying ‘queer tendencies’ and ‘camp aesthetics’ within Sistershow performances and practices—which are usually associated with ‘third wave’ or ‘1980s’ feminism—Withers’ archival revisitings ‘jam dominant trajectories’ and subvert the ‘straighter’ hegemonic narratives of the women’s movement (Withers and Chidgey 2010:312). As such, she enables ‘Sistershow happenings’ to expand the ‘conditions of existence of contemporary feminism’, through unleashing the traces of these past feminist events within the present. Withers’ project serves as a demonstration that ‘revisionism’—following traces and ‘going back to the archives’—need not proceed according to a linear correctivist model, as she is not claiming that the *Sistershow* story she (re)constructs—of a small collective of mostly white women in Bristol—is in any way ‘definitive’ or that it should ‘replace’ existing stories. The point, rather, is to disrupt the dominant master narratives, and moreover, to stimulate a restless desire to keep on revisiting feminist histories, to make us think again about what feminism has been and can be.

In this sense, then, as well as harnessing the *reflexive* and *active* aspects of historical practice, a restless revisionism also operates according to a *receptive* mode. This ‘receptiveness’ is not an ‘innocence’, but rather, a willingness to being *transformed* by encounters with past feminisms and allow ‘what we think we know’ to be radically altered by

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<sup>76</sup> Sistershow was a ‘situationist-feminist cabaret’, which included a wide breadth of creative expressions such as song, film, dance, events, sketches and parodies.

events or ideas we had never heard of or even imagined. As we have seen, the model of historical reality that emerges from Ricoeur's ontology of the trace accords an effectivity or determinative role not only to the present but also to the past. The reality of the historical past is indeed constituted through a *backwards movement* i.e. through the way we frame and narrate the past in the present, and our active pursuit of the past, but also through a *forwards movement*, i.e. through the overflow of the past into the present, as traces of past events and ideas interrupt the present and provoke new ways of thinking or acting. When historical practice models itself on this two-way temporality, which oscillates back and forth between past and present, it therefore cultivates not only an active and reflexive attitude, but further, a *receptivity* to the past. We are, it is true, never innocent of what we might find; but we *can* be surprised by it, hence the subversive power of history.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has examined the relation between the two senses of the term 'history', and argued that the historiographical upheaval which feminism requires can only be achieved through forging a provocative interrelation between the two. On the one hand, the narrative representation ('history B') can be understood as *part* of the 'happening' of history ('history A'). The ways in which events are recorded and reported are caught up in the 'happening' of the event at the time, and further, significantly determine the ways in which past events are then received and reactivated in the present. Indeed, the 'events' of history always belong to an interpretative chain of telling and retelling; as I discuss in the following chapter, every lived, narrated event is part of a wider narrative web. This is not, however, to claim that linguistic mediation exhausts history to the extent that 'history B' is all that need concern us. The idea that history is merely a system of signs and symbols encloses language and literature 'in a world of its own' and leaves us unable to account for the way that history *moves*. Accordingly, I have argued for an indirect historical realism staked on a dynamic historical ontology that I have theorised in terms of a noncoincidental, asymmetrical interdependence

between happening and interpretation. The thought that past events always ‘outrun’ or exceed our capacities to narrate and represent them, I have argued, enables a ‘restless revisionism’: a historical practice that is alert to textual techniques and knowledge politics in the present, yet is equally committed to pursuing the traces of the past, according to the promises and constraints of the archive, and moreover, to being transformed by the encounter.

I want to end now by drawing out more clearly the implications of the discussions above for a theory of *historical time*. In one sense, as Hayden White argues, history is indeed constituted ‘backwards’, according to the kinds of questions we ask and the interpretative frameworks that predominate in the present. Yet, by bringing the ‘past event’ back into the frame, I have reconceptualised the process of historical enquiry as not only a movement ‘backwards’ from present to past, but more of a two-way ‘backwards-forwards’ movement between past and present, as the past event spills over into the present in the form of a trace: a ‘sign-effect’ that, in turn, orients us ‘back in time’. This not only challenges the ‘presentist’ model which confines historiographical enquiry to the workings of the present, but further, challenges the linear model of revisionism whereby historical knowledge moves ever ‘forwards’ as it grows inevitably more expansive and sophisticated. Rethinking revisionism as a restless process, via the time of the trace and archival time, thus disrupts both the ‘linear’ model of historical knowledge-building, *and* the ‘presentist model’, as it encourages a receptivity and openness to the past, as well as an awareness of how we shape and direct our understanding of the past from the position of hindsight in the present. This chapter has therefore explained one way in which history can be temporalised in a multilinear and multidirectional way, i.e. through a model whereby historical knowledges and understandings are generated through the dynamic oscillations between the interpretative workings of the present and the provocative traces of the past.

The chapter has also given us our first indications of historical time as an enacted, lived, practical time. This is implicit in Ricoeur’s claim that whilst the trace is ‘a more radical phenomenon than the document or the archive... it is nevertheless the use of documents and archives that makes the trace an *actual operator* of historical time’ (1988b:184, emphasis

added). Ricoeur does not elaborate much further on this claim, but the idea that historical time is something that is 'operated' indicates a model of historical time as a kind of time that is activated and *put into practice*. I build on this idea in the following chapter, where I further consider the role that narrative plays in configuring historical time.

## CHAPTER 3

### Narrative Time

#### INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter focused on the referential function of historical narratives, as I outlined an epistemology of ‘indirect realism’, and a practice of ‘restless revisionism’, premised upon the dynamic, noncoincidental, asymmetrical interdependence between interpretation and happening. On the one hand, I argued, the trace of the past event will always exceed and ‘outrun’ the narrative. Yet, on the other hand, interpretations and narrations are caught up in the ‘happening’ of the event at the time, and moreover, significantly determine the ways in which past events are received and reactivated in the present. This chapter delves deeper into narrative functions and forms, as I consider further the connection between historical time and ‘*narrative time*’: the time of beginnings, middles, ends, flashbacks, flash-forwards, turning points, ruptures and returns. The principal aim is to demonstrate that narrative time can be understood as ‘internal’ to historical time, through examining the role played by narrative in shaping the temporality of historical events and the shifting configurations of historical time.

There are two prevalent ways of theorising the relationship between historical time and narrative time within the field of historiography. The first is a structuralist approach adopted by ‘narrativist’ historiographers such as Barthes and White, who regard the narrativisation of historical events as a secondary, ‘external’ literary device, which cannot be attributed to historical reality as it ‘really’ occurs. From this perspective, ‘we do not *live* stories, we *tell* stories’, and thus, historical time and narrative time are treated as separate temporal orders. The aim of section 1 is to challenge this dualistic approach. In the first instance, it fails to grasp the integral role that narrative plays in temporalising lived historical realities, by treating narrative as a secondary ‘artifice’. Further, it leads to a highly

impoverished notion of historical time itself, which is conceived in these structuralist analyses in terms of mundane chronology or ‘mere sequence’. The argument here therefore builds on and extends the critique of structuralist historiography advanced in chapter 2.

The rest of the chapter seeks to articulate an alternative approach to the relation between historical time and narrative time, which treats historical reality as a ‘lived reality’, and therefore, historical time as a ‘lived time’. From this perspective, we *do* ‘live stories’, not only because narratives play a hugely significant role in determining our perspective on the world and place in it, but further, because we frequently live through courses of events according to a sense of ‘narrative’ temporal configuration, i.e. in terms of beginnings, ends, turning points, and so on. In this regard, narrative time can be understood as ‘internal’ to the temporality of historical events, and thus to historical time. Within this broad theoretical understanding of historical time as a ‘lived time’ however, there are two possible approaches: firstly, the phenomenological approach which uses a subjective first-person methodology grounded in the structures of ‘internal time-consciousness’; and secondly, the hermeneutical approach, which examines historical time as an intersubjective time at the level of the sociocultural.

Section 2 examines the phenomenological route, focusing upon the Husserlian account of the temporal structures of consciousness and experience offered by David Carr (1986). Carr’s phenomenological account goes a long way to collapsing the dualistic model set up by structuralist historiography, positing an ‘affinity’ between lived time and narrative configuration at the most basic level of time-consciousness and lived events. Yet, whilst phenomenological analyses can give a partial account of how narrative time can be understood as ‘internal’ to historical time, the subject-centered method of Husserlian phenomenology alone is insufficient, given that historical time is an intersubjective time, and narrating is an intersubjective practice. Accordingly, the following section develops an account that starts from intersubjectivity, rather than the subjective standpoint, considering how the shifting patterns and configurations of historical time are generated through intersubjective interpretative activity and ‘narrativity’.



Section 3 draws firstly on Reinhard Koselleck's hermeneutical account of historical time (2004), which offers a useful preliminary framework for theorising the role played by narratives and narrative configurations in temporalising the relation between intersubjective 'spaces of experience' and 'horizons of expectation'. Then, in order to grasp the significance of multiple and competing narrative determinations of historical time, I modify Koselleck's approach through turning to 'pluritopic hermeneutics' (as articulated within postcolonial and feminist philosophy), and the paradigm of 'narrativity' (as articulated within narrative studies). Finally, having developed a theoretical account of the relationship between narrative time and historical time, I consider the methodological implications for feminist historiography in section 4. 'Pluritopic hermeneutics' and the 'narrativity' paradigm, I suggest, can orient a flexible and experimental practice of history-writing and reading, using multi-stranded and 'fractured forms', and engaging in 'contrapuntal reading', as a means of uncovering and expressing the diverse narratives and temporalities at work within the field of feminist history.

## 1

### **THE STRUCTURALIST APPROACH:**

#### **NARRATIVE TIME *VERSUS* HISTORICAL TIME**

In chapter 2, I challenged the 'anti-realist' epistemology adopted within structuralist or 'narrativist' historiography, which focuses exclusively upon historical language and re-describes history as essentially a literary discourse. The anti-realist approach, I argued, results in a highly reductive and impoverished conception of '*historical reality*', as either a 'language effect' or a regulative idea akin to the Kantian noumenal or the Lacanian Real. This section will identify a further problem with the anti-realism of the structuralist approach, which is its reliance upon a reductive conception of '*historical time*'. As we will see, the structuralist effort to bracket out all talk of 'historical reality' and 'real time' is not always successful, which means that structuralist historiographers often fall back upon naturalistic, 'common

sense' presumptions about 'real' historical time. This reductive notion props up the dualistic structuralist model, which positions 'narrative time' on one side, and 'historical time' on the other.

The dualistic model of 'narrative time versus historical time' can be found in the work of both of the structuralist historiographers examined in the previous chapter. Barthes, for example, in his essay 'Historical Discourse' proposes a friction between two time-scales: 'history's and the history book's' (1970:147). He describes the 'time of history' as a simple, even 'chronological sequence', which the 'time of the history *book*' disrupts, through 'organisational shifters' which reconfigure the 'chronologically ordered subject matter' within a complex, nonlinear matrix of semiotic temporal 'structure' (ibid). Examples of such 'organisational shifters' include 'performative openings' where the historian's voice interrupts the sequence being related, or the preface, which operates as either a prospective or retrospective meta-statement. 'Transposition into the mode of sui-referential meta-statement', Barthes argues, 'serves not so much to enable the historian to express his subjectivity, as is commonly supposed, but rather to de-simplify the chronological Time of history by contrasting it with the different time-scale of the discourse itself' (ibid:148). This claim about the chronological 'time of history', however, is in fact at odds with Barthes' own 'anti-realist' epistemology, which purports to confine itself to the text and remain agnostic about matters of historical reality and real time. In 'The Structural Analysis of Narrative', for instance, Barthes insists that 'both narrative and language know only a semiotic time, "true" time being a "realist", referential illusion... It is as such that structural analysis must deal with it' (Barthes 1983:271). Yet, despite claiming to bracket out 'real time' from his historiographical and narratological analysis, the distinction Barthes draws between 'the time of history' and the 'time of the history book' *does* smuggle in a presumption that historical time is '*really*' and simply chronological, prior to being reconfigured within a semiotic temporal 'structure'.

A sharp distinction between historical time and narrative time is also discernible in Hayden White's work, as he consistently suggests that narrative imposes a temporal order upon sets of events that *in themselves* they do not have. Like Barthes, White paints a picture

of two temporal orders: the chronological, meaningless order of historical time as ‘mere sequence’, and the nonlinear, meaningful order of narrative time. We can recall from chapter 2 that White dramatically reduces the epistemological and referential function of historical narratives, arguing that no mode of historical representation can claim to be more ‘realistic’ than another. Yet at the same time, he disobeys his own dictum, when he suggests in an essay on ‘The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality’ that non-narrative histories, which ‘refuse to tell a story’, in fact come closer to representing the ‘real’ nature of events unfolding in time (White 1980). As such, he argues, it is *annals* and *chronicles* rather than historical *narratives* that come the closest to representing reality as it ‘presents itself’: either ‘as mere sequence without beginning or end or as sequences of beginnings that only terminate and never conclude’ (ibid: 27). Narrative representations of reality in the form of a story, he claims, are ‘marked by a desire for a kind of order and fullness in an account of reality that remains *theoretically unjustified*... wear(ing) the mask of a meaning, the completeness and fullness of which we can only imagine, never experience’ (ibid: 20-24). In other words, meaningful temporal sequences, with chains of significance, turning points, or the sense of an ending or beginning, are pure fiction.

There are two fundamental problems with the arguments put forward here by Barthes and White. The first lies with the idea that historical events unfold or are ‘given’ in ‘mere sequence’; and the second lies with the idea that we ‘never experience’ reality in the form of narrative configuration. As stated, the idea that historical reality unfolds or ‘presents itself’ as mere sequence, and that meaningful temporal configurations of reality are a literary invention, reveals a naturalistic prejudice whereupon ‘real’ historical time is equated with the idea of a ‘natural chronology’(Carr 1986:19). This can be attributed to the structuralist attempt to simply evade the question of historical reality, with the result that these theorists end up reproducing naturalistic ‘common sense’ presumptions, which ultimately enable positivistic and objectivist models to retain a monopoly on how to construe and deal with ‘reality’ (Ricoeur 1984). Historical events and conditions will of course be related to natural temporal orders, which can provide an idea of a ‘natural chronology’ based upon biological,

astronomical, or physical models (Koselleck 2004:105). Yet, ‘natural chronology’ is not the same thing as ‘*historical* chronology’, which is a specific mode of organising historical events and experience. This means that ‘to elicit historical chronology, even for events, “structuration” is needed’ (ibid: 106; Greenhouse 1996:34). The idea that historical events are ‘given’ in chronological ‘mere sequence’, and are then given ‘structure’ at a later stage of narrativisation, is thus rather disingenuous, as historical chronologies are always ‘structured’, albeit in a different and more seemingly simple way than historical narratives. Distinguishing between a naturalistic model of chronological sequence or ‘natural chronology’, and a distinct concept of *historical* chronology, therefore brings into question the ‘common sense’ presumption that annals and chronicles are somehow ‘closer’ to ‘real’ historical time than narrative representations. Instead, if chronological and narrative configurations are both understood as distinct, interrelated, modes of organising historical events, then each will depend upon a specific kind of historical experience and understanding, and as such, neither can claim to be a more ‘authentic’ or faithful configuration of ‘real’ historical time<sup>77</sup>.

This line of argument also begins to shift us away from the idea that historical events simply happen or unfold ‘in time’, towards a conception that *historical events are temporal*, with their own ‘internal’ temporal structures which can include, but also exceed, the serial ‘before and after’ temporality of historical chronology. ‘Every history’, Koselleck writes, ‘bears out that acting subjects perceive a certain duration: of inauguration, high points, peripeteia, crises, and termination’, and accordingly, these internal conditions ‘determine the sequence of events’ (ibid: 106). That is, we often *go through* historical events with a sense of beginnings, endings and middles, (or are troubled by the lack thereof), even if a ‘complete’ narrative account can only be provided in retrospect. Moreover, the way we experience historical reality is deeply influenced by the specific narratives which govern our social and personal lives. Not only do we tell stories, but ‘stories tell us’ (Bennett and Royle 1995:41). White’s claim that we ‘never experience’ historical reality in terms of meaningful temporal

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<sup>77</sup> I investigate the configuration of historical chronologies in further detail in the following chapter on ‘calendar time’.

configurations, and that narrative only comes *after the event*, is thus, once again, rather disingenuous. On the contrary, narrative configurations play a crucial role in determining how historical events are lived and experienced, at the time of their occurrence, and also as they become absorbed and retold as part of a broader cultural and historical memory. This sense of narrative configuration determines how historical events unfold, and as such, both chronological and narrative temporalities are ‘demonstrable within historical events’ (Koselleck 2004:94).

The idea that ‘lived events’ have their own internal conditions and temporalities gives rise to a preliminary understanding of narrative time as ‘internal’ to historical time, rather than being ‘external’ or extraneous. From this perspective, historical chronologies and annals do not provide a ‘truer’ representation of historical time than historical narratives. Rather, the way historical time ‘*really is*’ depends upon how it is lived, and thus upon the ‘internal’ temporalities of historical events, which can include chronological *and* narrative configurations. The turn to ‘lived experience’, ‘lived events’, and ‘lived time’ will therefore be crucial to the rest of this chapter, as I further explicate this claim that narrative time is ‘internal’ to historical time. But as we will see, these concepts of ‘lived experience’, ‘lived events’, and ‘lived time’ can in fact be theorised in two different ways: firstly, in phenomenological terms of first-person subjective experience; and secondly in broader terms of intersubjective, ‘experiential fields’, shaped by social relations and practices and cultural configurations. I will ultimately argue that the latter approach yields the most fruitful approach to historical time as a lived time, as it recognises the constitutive importance of intersubjective relations and cultural models in determining experienced relations to historical time. But before doing so, the next section will explore the phenomenological account of the ‘affinity’ between narrative time and lived time at the most basic level of ‘internal time-consciousness’.

2

**THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH:**

**THE AFFINITY BETWEEN LIVED TIME AND NARRATIVE TIME**

The claim that narrative is ‘internal’ to historical time moves us away from the structuralist approach, which reductively equates ‘real’ historical time with simple sequence or chronology. This section will consider this claim in further detail, by drawing on the subjective phenomenology of time-consciousness, focusing particularly on the account given by David Carr in *Time, History and Narrative* (1986). The principal aim of Carr’s study is to overcome the dualisms of the structuralist model by demonstrating the ‘affinity’ between narrative time and ‘lived time’ at its most basic subjective level. To do so, he draws upon the Husserlian account of internal time-consciousness, in particular Husserl’s concepts of ‘retention’ and ‘protention’, as he seeks to demonstrate that there is a kind of rudimentary ‘narrative structure’ within certain ‘prefigured’ features of time-consciousness and action, out of which fully-fledged literary and verbalised narratives arise (Carr 1986:16). He then attempts to extend this thesis to explain the connection between narrative time and historical time.

In his lectures on *The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness* (1964), Husserl contends that the structures of time-consciousness are essentially ‘retentional’ and ‘protentional’, as conscious temporal experience is constituted through ‘retentions’ of the ‘just passed’—the ‘comet’s tail’ of what has been perceived—and ‘protentions’, or ‘immediate’ anticipations of what *will* be perceived (Husserl 1964:44-57). ‘Retention’ and ‘protention’, unlike secondary ‘recollections’ and ‘expectations’, which come and go, belong to all experience (ibid: 68-71). Husserl describes this retentional-protentional process as a ‘sinking’, ‘shading’ or ‘running-off phenomenon... a continuity of constant transformations... not severable into parts which could be by themselves nor divisible into

phases, points of the continuity' (ibid: 48)<sup>78</sup>. The famous example Husserl gives is of hearing a melody, an experience which consists in the retention of the tonal phase that has 'just' passed, and the protention or immediate anticipation of the imminent phase (ibid: 43). 'The temporal phases of my hearing', as Carr explains it, 'stand in the same part-whole relation to each other as do the notes of the melody I hear. Just as each note is experienced as part of the melody as a whole, so the experience of it is lived through as part of the complex experience of the melody' (Carr 1986:27-8).

The first important point to draw from the Husserlian account is that phenomenological temporality, at this most basic level, is qualitatively different from serial, chronological temporality. By introducing a 'longitudinal intentionality' into the phenomenological present, Husserl renders the phenomenological present entirely distinct from the point-like instant of serial or chronological time (Husserl 1964:107). According to the Husserlian account, our experience is 'directed towards, and itself assumes, temporally extended forms in which future, present and past mutually determine one another' (Carr 1986:31). Unlike the point-like instant, then, the phenomenological present contains the 'totality of the temporal spectrum within itself' (Osborne 1995:49-50). As such, the phenomenological schema of past, present and future, as 'modes of temporal orientation', is not reducible to, or even mappable on to, a serial succession of instants in relation to a 'before' and 'after' (Husserl 1964:48).

Indeed, not only does the phenomenological account fundamentally differentiate experiential temporality from the serial temporality of simple chronology; it also raises the question of whether a 'mere sequence' of events, whilst thinkable or conceivable in an abstract sense, is in fact *experientable* at all (Carr 1986:24). According to Husserl, the idea of a simple succession of instants is a secondary, conceptual construction that arises when the

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<sup>78</sup> It is a common criticism that Husserl pays much more attention to 'retention' than to 'protention'. Indeed, this is one of the fundamental points of Heidegger's critique of Husserl, along with his claim that retention and protention are not symmetrical counterparts, but rather, are fundamentally asymmetrical (Heidegger 2009). For further critical accounts of Husserl's analysis of time-consciousness, see *The New Husserl: a Critical Reader* (ed. Welton 2003), particularly the essays by Lanei Rodemeyer and Dan Zahavi.

present, which serves as the ‘perpetual source’ of the retentional-protentional series, is abstracted from the durational continuity it establishes (Husserl 1964:50; see also Osborne 1995:50). On this account, the idea of a chronological historical time can be theorised as a ‘secondary’ or ‘derived’ temporality, in contrast to the phenomenological primacy of retentional-protentional lived temporality. From the phenomenological perspective, then, the reality of our temporal experience is that it is complex and ‘configured’. Thus, Carr contends, ‘it is the “mere sequence” that has turned out to be fictional, in the sense that we speak of a “theoretical fiction”’ (Carr 1986:25).

Whilst there are problems with trying to derive an account of chronological time entirely through the ‘phenomenological reduction’<sup>79</sup>, the Husserlian analysis of ‘internal time-consciousness’ does serve as a useful counterpoint to the structuralist proposition that complex temporal configurations are a secondary literary phenomenon. For Carr, moreover, the Husserlian account is not only valuable in challenging reductive sequentialist models at the most basic level of temporal experience; it can also explain the link between historical time and narrative. This is because the phenomenological account can demonstrate that temporal ‘configuration’ inheres in experience itself, and thus in lived *events*, just as temporal configuration is essential to narrative structure. The idea of an ‘event’, Carr claims, is already of something that has ‘temporal thickness’, and ‘events are experienced as the phases and elements of other, larger-scale events and processes. These make up the temporal configurations, like melodies and other daily occurrences and happenings, that are the stuff of our daily experience. Even though as temporal they unfold bit by bit, we experience them *as* configurations thanks to our retentional and protentional “gaze” which spans future and past’ (ibid: 24). Accordingly, he argues, there is an ‘affinity’ between narrative configuration and

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<sup>79</sup> Husserl’s attempt to bracket the ‘naturalistic’ standpoint’ altogether is doomed to failure, as natural temporalities always determine time-consciousnesses to a certain extent. Indeed, Ricoeur contends that Husserl himself ‘borrows’ from objective determinations in his ‘primary’ phenomenological descriptions of lived time, for example, when uses the phrase ‘at the same time’, which is based upon a notion of objective simultaneity, or objective equality between intervals of time. Moreover, ‘the perception of duration never ceases to presuppose the duration of perception, and hence a time to which the subject is subjected, as much as a time which it constitutes’ (Ricoeur 1988:24).



the temporal configuration of simple lived events, which are the basic stuff or ‘building blocks’ of history.

Carr’s argument depends upon an extension of the concepts of ‘retention’ and ‘protention’ beyond the Husserlian account, which considers pre-reflective or ‘passive’ experience only, to include the temporality of our active, practical, lives as well. Like ‘passive’ experience, Carr argues, action can be considered as an event that the actor ‘lives through’, and whichever stage of the action she is ‘located’ in, she has ‘a kind of ‘prospective’ and ‘retrospective’ “grasp”’ of the past and future elements of the action (ibid: 34). This ‘grasp’ effects a kind of ‘closure which articulates time by separating the given temporal configuration (action or event) from what goes before or after’ (ibid: 41). The example Carr uses here is of a person serving a tennis ball: an action where the different ‘phases’ are integrated into one another and cannot be reduced to a chronological sequence. ‘The intimate and complementary interrelation of present, future, and past... is an important part of action, or at least of a relatively short-term action such as that of hitting a tennis ball’ (ibid: 34). In this sense, Carr contends, the temporality of action is *comparable* to the temporality of pre-reflective or ‘passive’ experience; hence, the concepts of ‘retention’ and ‘protention’ have a wider applicability than the phenomenology of internal, ‘passive’ or ‘pre-reflective’ time-consciousness, and pertain to our active, practical lives.

Beginning his account at the level of small-scale actions and subjective experience, then, Carr’s analysis demonstrates that ‘the bedrock of human events is not ‘mere sequence’ but ‘configured sequence’ ... [which] inheres in the most basic of lived events and actions’. If configured temporal structures inhere in phenomena at this most basic level, he argues, then ‘it cannot be maintained that they are imported from outside’ and achieved ‘only at the hand of literary invention’ (ibid: 49). Instead, Carr posits an affinity or ‘kinship’ between the ‘configurational character’ of basic everyday lived events and the primary features of narrative structure. However, whilst there may be a demonstrable ‘affinity’ between narrative time and lived time at this basic ‘small-scale’ level, ‘narrative’ is not associated with only such basic actions and experiences as Carr describes, such as hearing a melody or serving a

tennis ball. The function of a narrative is not only to describe or report simple, everyday phenomena, but rather, to convey complex sequences and complex configurations that involve more than just one experiencing and acting individual. Historical time, moreover, is a large-scale time that involves multiple people and stretches far beyond individual experience and basic action.

The utility of subjectivist phenomenology in explaining the relationship between historical time and narrative is therefore limited. We can certainly affirm that narrative and historical time do depend upon the subjective structures of individual time-consciousness, inasmuch as they depend upon the interrelation between past, present and future as ‘modes of temporal orientation’, and the capacity of individuals to think the past through the present and future, the future through the present and past, and the present through the past and future. Yet, whilst Carr manages to effectively overturn the structuralist idea that at some basic or fundamental level, human events are ‘merely sequential’ in their temporality, his method of beginning with a phenomenology of ‘internal time-consciousness’ and only then moving ‘outwards’ towards a theory of intersubjective *historical* time runs into difficulties. The move from subjectivity to intersubjectivity, or ‘from I to We’, requires an extension of the notion of experience, such that an individual can speak of ‘our’ experience, even if she has had no such experience directly (ibid: 133). In the case of historical time, this is particularly crucial, as the ‘we’ both predates and survives the individuals that constitute the ‘we’ at any given time. Yet, when we try to reach a universal collective singular—‘we’—through a first-person methodology, we tend to think in singular, reductive and generic terms about intersubjective historical experience and historical time-consciousness<sup>80</sup>. Or as Johanna Oksala puts it, the

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<sup>80</sup> For example, Carr attempts to extend his account ‘outwards’ by adopting the viewpoint of a ‘common subject’ or ‘*we-subject*’: a viewpoint ‘which is still first person but is plural’ (Carr 1986: 133-4). Carr insists that the ‘we-subject’ is not simply ‘a larger-scale I’, yet he claims that ‘the ‘we-subject’ displays *the same temporal structure* of ‘experience, action and life’ that is associated with the individual subject (ibid:149). The communal ‘we’, he writes, operates on a plane of ‘higher synthesis’ where the group can think and act as one, projecting a unified vision of ‘a future before us and a past behind us’ (ibid:168).

subject-centered methodology often results in the ‘patronising assumption that we are the entire structure’ (Oksala 2006:239).

Feminist theorists have become particularly aware of the problems that arise when we try and move ‘outwards’ from the subjective level of individual consciousness and experience to the intersubjective and the general. This kind of method has resulted in generalising presumptions about ‘women’s experience’, based upon the experiences of just one individual or distinct group of women (Mohanty 1995; Mulinari and Sandell 1999). Feminists have also been sharply critical of the ‘epistemological foundationalism’ that ensues when we treat experience as a source for knowledge that needs no further interrogation or interpretation (Scott 1991; Stoller 2009)<sup>81</sup>. Cultural theorists and historians alike have argued that ‘experiential facts’ always come with an ‘interpretative overlay’, thereby stressing the need to theorise and interpret the sociocultural norms, institutions and practices that shape ‘experience’ (Battersby 2006:209). Just as importantly, feminist psychoanalytic theorists have stressed the role of *unconscious* structures and attachments (Brennan 2000; Minsky 1996). As such, ‘experience’ must not be taken as an unproblematic foundation for knowledge, but rather, as a complex and intersubjective *field* to be critically considered and interpreted (Stoller 2009).

Consequently, a theory of historical time as a ‘lived time’ needs to give due weight to the constitutive importance of intersubjective relations and encounters, and to sociocultural norms, institutions and practices, as well as to the structures of ‘internal time-consciousness’<sup>82</sup>. The following section, therefore, will attempt to explicate the link between

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<sup>81</sup> Indeed, the concept of ‘experience’ has come in for such heavy criticism that it has become rather ‘discredited’ within feminist theory (Martin Alcoff 2000:44). Joan Scott, for example, concludes that historians and historiographers should change our object of study from historical ‘reality’—as it is experienced through lived events—to the discursive systems that shape, codify and configure experience (1991). My own view, however, is that to disengage from ‘events’, ‘reality’, and historical ‘experience’ (thereby re-describing historiography as essentially an exercise in literary or textual analysis), makes it difficult to make claims about historical happenings as the basis for political claims. Moreover, the concept of experience is fundamental to any theory of ‘lived time’, which requires that we modify and broaden our approach to ‘experience’, rather than simply abandoning it altogether.

<sup>82</sup> Many feminist phenomenologists have turned to the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty as a means of exploring the intersubjective determinations of individual experience and consciousness, as Merleau-

historical time and narrative time through intersubjective ‘experiential fields’, rather than adopting a phenomenological methodology which places the subject at the centre.

### 3

#### **THE HERMENEUTICAL APPROACH:**

#### **INTERSUBJECTIVE NARRATIONS OF HISTORICAL TIME**

Treating historical time as a ‘lived time’ takes us away from the dualistic and reductive model of narrative time *versus* historical time, and enables us to argue that narrative is ‘internal’ to historical time. The theoretical shift towards lived time can initially be made through turning from a structuralist approach to a phenomenological approach. I have argued, however, that a subject-centered theory of lived time can only give a *partial* account, because historical time is an *intersubjective* kind of time, which requires a different kind of analysis and a different set of theoretical tools. In communicating with others, we engage in an interpretative activity, and through this intersubjective engagement, ‘a new dimension of time is established’ (Shutz: 1982:219; see also Weiss 2011:182). The relationship between historical time and narrative thus cannot be theorised through the individual consciousness or experience alone. ‘Experience’, as Silvia Stoller insists, ‘is always embedded in a field of experience’ (Stoller 2009: 716). Accordingly, this section abandons the first-person phenomenological method, and examines the intersubjective, interpretative activity of configuring and narrating historical time.

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Ponty stresses that subjectivity is grounded within a fundamentally intersubjective experience (Weiss 2011:177). This is not, however, to suggest that feminist phenomenologists have uniformly abandoned Husserl. For examples of feminist re-workings of the Husserlian framework, see, for example, essays by Heinämaa and Schües in the edited collection *Time and Feminist Phenomenology* (2011), or work by Alia Al-Saji, who argues that Husserl’s phenomenology of touch can be stretched beyond its initial ‘methodologically solipsistic frame’, to be of use to feminist phenomenologies of embodiment (2010).

To pursue this intersubjective, interpretative approach, I initially turn to the hermeneutical account of historical time given by Koselleck in *Futures Past* (2004)<sup>83</sup>. Like Carr, one of Koselleck's key concerns is to demonstrate that historical time is not reducible to chronology. 'All experience' he writes, 'leaps over time; experience does not create continuity in the sense of an additive preparation of the past' (Koselleck 2004: 260). Yet, Koselleck's hermeneutics of historical time take us further than Carr's phenomenological approach, helping us to ground a notion of historical time as a lived time that is neither reductively chronological, nor singular and subjective. In the first instance, Koselleck's hermeneutical account offers a notion of 'lived experience' as a shared, discursively determined, interpretative field, rather than the 'private experience' model of subjectivist phenomenology. In the second instance, it offers a means of explaining the crucial role that narrative plays in configuring the shifting patterns and intersubjective determinations of historical time. The broad theoretical framework provided by Koselleck requires modification, however, if we are to grasp the significance of multiple and competing temporalisations of history. This can be achieved, I suggest in the second half of the section, through fusing a 'pluritopic' approach to hermeneutics with pluralistic theories of 'narrativity'. Taken together, these two approaches compel us to appreciate and investigate the internal temporal complexity within any culture of time or narrative context.

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<sup>83</sup> Feminism and hermeneutics, it must be noted, do have a vexed relation, particularly the hermeneutical philosophy articulated by Hans Georg Gadamer. The three key problems with Gadamer's hermeneutical philosophy, from a feminist perspective, are: firstly, that Gadamer's account entails a highly conservative attitude towards 'tradition', which fairly unquestioningly accepts the legitimacy of tradition, and treats the tradition of a culture or society as unified and homogenous; secondly, that the goal of Gadamer's hermeneutics is inherently conservative, in seeking 'understanding', rather than transformation; and thirdly, that Gadamer's notion of 'understanding' as a 'fusion of horizons' appears as a form of assimilation, a subsumption of different viewpoints to the detriment of the less powerful. However, whilst there are aspects to be avoided and reasons to be suspicious, there are many aspects of hermeneutical philosophy which are useful to feminist historiography, given that the basic issue at the heart of hermeneutical philosophy is one's consciousness of historicity and historical locatedness, and the question of how to interpret the past in relation to the present, and vice versa. Ricoeur uses the term 'traditionality', rather than 'tradition' (i.e. the transmitted content), to refer to the dynamic interplay between reception and innovation within the transmission and construction of knowledge and culture (Ricoeur 1988). And as we will see below, feminist and postcolonial theorists have developed critical, pluralistic hermeneutical approaches, which cannot be accused of conservatism. For more on the question of feminism and hermeneutics, see the edited collection of *Feminist Interpretations of Hans Georg Gadamer* (ed. Code 2003).

### 3.1

#### *Shifting Patterns of Historical Time*

Koselleck's hermeneutical account of historical time pivots around two 'meta-historical' concepts: the 'space of experience' and the 'horizon of expectation'. They are 'meta-historical' concepts, he explains, in the sense that they can be taken as 'anthropological givens' and thus constitute the 'condition of possible histories' (2004:259). His key thesis is that the interrelation between these two concepts offers a 'hermeneutical key' to registering the shifting and complex configurations of historical time. Before explaining this thesis, I should stress that Koselleck's 'meta-historical' concepts of the 'space of experience' and 'horizon of expectation' are not 'phenomenological' in the sense of referring to 'internal time-consciousness'. They are intended, rather, as intersubjective categories, which do incorporate the subjective consciousness, but importantly, are not subject-centered. The *space* of experience and *horizon* of expectation operate at a different level to personal experience, indicating intersubjective fields that both exceed and precede those of the individual. Koselleck takes into account the 'element of alien experience contained and preserved in experience conveyed by generations and institutions', and also the role of *unconscious* determinations of temporal experience. 'Within experience', he writes, 'a rational reworking is included, together with unconscious modes of conduct which do not have to be present in awareness' (ibid: 259) Accordingly, we have moved from a subjective model of 'internal time-consciousness' and experience to a model of intersubjective, shared 'fields of experience', shaped by discursive systems, social norms, and traditions.

The 'space of experience' concept, Koselleck explains, refers to the dimensions of both *past* and *present* existence, because experience is 'specified by the fact that it has processed past occurrence... experience based on the past is assembled through many layers of earlier times' (ibid: 260). In contrast, the 'horizon of expectation' concept refers to the futural dimension of historical existence, and is described as 'that line behind which a new space of experience will open, but which cannot yet be seen' (ibid: 260-1). In many ways, he

concedes, ‘experience’ and ‘expectation’ presuppose and are entangled within one other. For example, ‘new experiences might open up other experiences’, or new hopes or disappointments can enter into old experiences with retroactive effect (ibid: 262). Moreover, expectation of the future always takes place in the present and past, such that expectation can be described as ‘the future made present’ (ibid: 259). In this sense, then, the ‘meta-historical’ concepts of the ‘space of experience’ and the ‘horizon of expectation’ enable us to demonstrate the complex interdependence between present, past and future (ibid: 258).

On the other hand, however, whilst the ‘space of experience’ and the ‘horizon of expectation’ do presuppose and mutually constitute one another *to an extent*, they are not ‘symmetrical complementary concepts which might mutually relate past and future’. On the contrary, experience and expectation are of different orders. Expectation itself, or the *prospect* of the future, is certainly experienced in the past and present, in the form of raised hopes and anxieties for example. Yet, ‘the intended conditions, situations, or consequences of expectation are not themselves experiential entities’ (ibid). The ‘legibility of the future’, Koselleck writes, ‘despite possible prognoses confronts an absolute limit, for it cannot be experienced... an expectation can never be entirely deduced from experience because it directs itself to ‘the not-yet, to the nonexperienced, to that which is to be revealed’ (ibid: 260-1). Accordingly, whilst experience and expectation do partially ‘presuppose’ one another, they are in fact asymmetrical, ‘dissimilar modes of existence’, which do not coexist in a symmetrical or static relation (ibid: 261).

Koselleck’s key thesis, therefore, is that the tension and interrelation between these two ‘meta-historical’ concepts offers a ‘hermeneutical key’ to registering the shifting patterns of historical time, as they redouble past and future on one another in an unequal manner. The ‘space of experience’ expands or contracts in relation to an expanding or contracting ‘horizon of expectation’, thereby producing specific temporal configurations of history (ibid: 263). This hermeneutical formula opens up a methodology for Koselleck: a ‘semantics of historical time’, which studies the graduation of social and political concepts—such as ‘tradition’,

‘revolution’, ‘progress’, ‘development’, ‘crisis’, ‘liberation’, or ‘stagnation’—according to the relationship between the ‘space of experience’ and ‘horizon of expectation’ which these concepts convey. For example, we can interpret the historical temporality of societies or cultures premised upon ‘tradition’ according to an ‘almost seamless transference of earlier experiences into coming expectations’, as those living in the present subsist almost entirely by the experiences of their predecessors (ibid. 264). In contrast, the ‘progressive’ understanding of history can be interpreted as a contraction of the ‘space of experience’, and a concomitant expansion of the futural ‘horizon of expectation’, as ‘expectations that reach out for the future’ become detached from ‘all that previous experience has to offer’ (ibid: 267-7). In this case, the horizon of expectation is ‘no longer limited by the space of experience’, as it is believed that the future will be both different from, and an improvement upon, the past.<sup>84</sup>

The hermeneutical account thereby offers a means of theorising and interpreting the shifting patterns of historical time, as a ‘large-scale time’ that transcends the limits of our personal existence, and enables us to conceive and communicate shared pasts and collective futures. Whilst the structuralist account separates historical time from discursively produced configurations of time, Koselleck’s hermeneutical account proposes that historical time *is* discursively produced, through intersubjective, interpretative activity which is determined by, and determines, specific ways of living history. This is why ‘historical time’ is not simply an empty definition, but is rather, ‘an entity that alters along with history and from whose changing structure it is possible to deduce the shifting classifications of experience and expectation’ (ibid: 259). Moreover, the hermeneutical account offers a means of explaining how *narrative time* can be understood as ‘internal’ to historical time, given that narrative plays such a vital role in configuring and reconfiguring the past-present-future relation, and therefore in generating the ever-shifting patterns of historical time. Narrative configurations

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<sup>84</sup> Drawing on Koselleck’s theory, Ricoeur argues that if Enlightenment conceptions of history dominate discussions of historical time, this is because the Enlightenment brings these metahistorical categories governing historical consciousness *to* consciousness. In other words: ‘the variation in the relationship between the horizon of expectation and the space of experience was so apparent that it could serve as revelatory of the categories in terms of which we think about this variation’ (Ricoeur 1988).



can broaden and open out the 'space of experience' or the 'horizon of expectation', or alternatively, narrow and close them down, thereby determining how historical time is discursively produced, imagined and experienced. Through narrative, we configure past and present experience, and negotiate expectations, carrying the past into the future, or conversely, retroactively transforming our accumulated memories of the past.

However, whilst Koselleck's theory allows that there are shifting determinations and patterns of historical time, he arguably does not pay sufficient attention in his own work to the struggles for meaning and articulation that produce particular hegemonic narratives and temporalisations of history. He tends towards 'broad brush-stroke' analyses of 'time cultures' such as the 'Renaissance' or 'modernity', which overlook the differences *internal* to these particular cultures of time. This kind of analysis has been consistently challenged by feminist and postcolonial theorists, who have questioned the characterisation of entire societies, cultures and eras according to a single cultural 'experience' or consciousness of historical time. Joan Kelly's renowned essay 'Did Women Have a Renaissance?', for instance, argues that women as a group, especially among the classes that dominated the Italian urban elite, experienced a contraction of social and personal options during this era, which the men of their classes did not experience as markedly. The quality of women's historical and temporal experience during the 'Renaissance' thus differed considerably from that of men as a group (Kelly 1984: 20). Similarly, feminist and postcolonial theorists have insisted on differences within 'the time of the modern', and considered nonhegemonic forms of 'modern' temporal experience such as black 'counter-cultures of modernity' (Lyon 1999; Bhabha 1994; Gilroy 1993; Felski 2000). In *The Black Atlantic*, for example, Paul Gilroy undertakes a formal analysis of black popular music as a means of interpreting the nature of modern temporality as a complex blend of innovation, tradition, cross-cultural, and cross-historical continuities, which complicates accounts that treat the 'time of the modern' as synonymous with the 'time

of the new', or set the temporality of the modern wholly against the temporality of tradition (Gilroy 1993:74)<sup>85</sup>.

Studies such as these demonstrate that different groups and individuals experience changes in their modes of temporality in distinctive and uneven ways, and moreover, draw attention to the *politics* of time that attend the rise to prominence of certain narrative configurations and forms of historical time-consciousness (Felski 2000:25). Accordingly, we cannot presume that there is a single unified 'space of experience' or 'horizon of expectation'. Whilst Koselleck's theory offers a rudimentary 'hermeneutical key' to registering the shifting patterns of historical time and the role played by narrative, it needs to be supplemented by approaches which can register the significance of multiple, competing narratives within experiential fields and temporal horizons.

### 3.2

#### *Pluritopic Hermeneutics and Narrativity*

Historical time, Koselleck contends, is constituted through the interrelation between the 'space of experience' and 'horizon of expectation', as the tension between these two contracting/expanding domains generates ever-changing patterns of historical time. This idea, I have suggested, offers a useful basic framework for making sense of the claim that narrative time is 'internal' to historical time, given the crucial role that narrative plays in configuring and reconfiguring lived patterns of historical time. Yet, although Koselleck provides the basic theoretical tools, his hermeneutical analysis needs pushing a little further, because if historical time is generated through intersubjective, interpretative activity and a variety of overlapping, competing narratives, there can be no single historical-consciousness or unified culture of time.

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<sup>85</sup>For another interesting study which challenges accepted definitions and understandings of 'modernity' and modern time-consciousness, see Nye (1993), who argues that the apparently anachronistic idea of 'honour' is what enables us to make sense of modern forms of western masculinity.

One promising direction for a hermeneutics of historical time is opened up by the idea of a ‘*pluritopic* hermeneutics’, as it has been articulated within postcolonial and feminist philosophy (Mignolo 2003; Martín Alcoff 2006). To outline this approach, Walter Mignolo draws a comparison in *The Darker Side of the Renaissance* (2003) between ‘*pluritopic* hermeneutics’, and the ‘*monotopic*’ hermeneutics expounded and practiced by conservative hermeneutical philosophers such as Hans Georg Gadamer. A ‘*monotopic*’ hermeneutics, Mignolo explains, presumes a universal interpretative framework or horizon understood by a universal subject who ‘speaks for the rest of humanity’ (Mignolo 2003:11; Gadamer 1975). Or in respect to the discussion above, a ‘*monotopic*’ hermeneutical perspective would presume that a given ‘space of experience’ or ‘horizon of expectation’ is unified, i.e. that it is interpreted and understood in the same way by all those living within the same cultural field. In contrast, a ‘*pluritopic*’ hermeneutics presupposes more than one interpretative tradition or horizon within any experiential and cultural field, emphasising the ‘locus of enunciation’ and challenging the presumed universality of the understanding subject (ibid: 16-17). The need for a *pluritopic* hermeneutics, Mignolo argues, is crystallised and made most apparent within colonial situations, which involve a plurality of traditions and interpretative horizons (ibid: 19). Historical processes of migration and colonialism have indeed led to increasing levels of interconnection between events in apparently disparate times and places. Yet, on the other hand, ‘we are a very long way from having a shared framework and experience of time and history, in terms of which it might be possible to arrive at a single evaluation of those events’ (Hodge 2011:209-21)<sup>86</sup>.

Linda Martín Alcoff’s account of ‘*pluritopic* hermeneutics’ in *Visible Identities* (2003) emphasises even further the challenge that the *pluritopic* approach presents to a presumed uniformity of social and cultural experience, and indeed, to a presumed uniformity of individual experience. One’s own hermeneutic horizon, she writes, is always ‘*pluritopic*’, because ‘multiple others are constitutive aspects of our interpretative horizon’, offering

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<sup>86</sup> Despite the fact that the ‘globalisation’ paradigm appears to provide such a unifying interpretative horizon. For more on globalisation, plurality and ‘world-making’, see, for example, Karagiannis and Wagner (2007).

alternative and in some cases competing background assumptions and interpretative practices. Accordingly, ‘we cannot assume that any hermeneutic horizon... is in fact coherent or closed to other horizons’ (2006:125). The approach of ‘pluritopic hermeneutics’ postulated here by Mignolo and Martín Alcoff prompts us to rethink and modify Koselleck’s hermeneutical theory of historical time, such that it can register significant interpretative differences that exist *within* particular societies and cultures of time. Rather than a ‘monotopic’ hermeneutics that presupposes an internally consistent ‘space of experience’ and unified ‘horizon of expectation’, pluritopic hermeneutics presupposes overlapping spaces of experience and multiple horizons of intelligibility and meaning.<sup>87</sup>

Another promising way of theorising the multiple interpretations, narrations, and lived experiences of historical time is opened up by the paradigm of ‘narrativity’, which has become prevalent within the field of narrative studies. ‘Narrativity’ theorists treat narrative as above all a discursive *practice*, referring to ‘the work that narrative does, and its effects’, rather than to the formal structures and purely figurative dimension of narrative (Smith 2000). ‘To produce a narrative’, Martin Macquillan states, ‘is to make a moment of inter-subjective experience knowable, or discernible as such, through communication’ (MacQuillan 2000:8). As such, theorists of ‘narrativity’ seek to embed any specific narrative within ‘the specificity of a textual practice where it is materially inscribed’ (de Lauretis, 2000:211).<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Whilst the imagery of ‘pluritopics’ is indeed spatial, rather than temporal, I affirm that spatial metaphors and imagery such as ‘horizons’, ‘spaces’, and ‘topics’ are indispensably useful tools for thinking and articulating historical time. In this sense, as explained in a footnote in the Introduction, I reject the Bergsonian critique of ‘spatialising’ time.

<sup>88</sup> From a linguistic perspective, we can understand the distinction between the formal, structuralist analysis of ‘narrative’, and the performative paradigm of ‘narrativity’, in terms of the Saussurean distinction between ‘*langue*’ and ‘*parole*’, wherein ‘*langue*’ refers to the linguistic system of signs and grammatical rules, and ‘*parole*’ refers to the series of speech acts which make use of this grammatical and semiotic system in order to communicate (Smith 2000). Privileging the performative paradigm of ‘narrativity’ over a formalist analysis of the ‘text’ does admittedly invite the Derridean criticism of perpetuating the ‘metaphysics of presence’, by apparently entrenching a model of communication founded on the immediacy of the spoken word and the face-to-face presence of a speaker and listener to one another<sup>88</sup>. In response to such possible objections, however, I would argue that the paradigm of ‘narrativity’ can stretch the historiographical imagination far beyond a simple communicative model based on a face-to-face encounter in the here-and-now, because it points us towards webs of

There are two key advantages to connecting a pluritopic hermeneutics of historical time with the paradigm of narrativity. In the first instance, the narrativity paradigm casts narrativity as a fundamentally plural affair: an ‘interconnected series of performances’ grounded in intersubjective encounters and relationships (Ricoeur 1988:260). Indeed, the paradigm of narrativity is entirely oriented by the recognition that ‘every life is bound up with other lives from the very beginning, and thus every story is always bound up with the stories of others’ (Butler 2005:27)<sup>89</sup>. In this sense, ‘narrativity’ theorists conjure images of dynamic and intersecting narrative matrices, theorising narrativity in terms of interlocking, overlapping narratives, within which we are embroiled, and upon which we depend for conducting and constituting ourselves as social, historical subjects. This means that the work of interpretation and narrativisation must be understood as a complex and ongoing process, rendering unthinkable a definitive interpretation that could unify the many different narratives together into one over-arching master narrative or aggregate account.

The ‘narrativity’ paradigm, I contend, therefore guards against presumptions that certain societies or communities have *one* single narrative determination of historical time; rather, it invites us to think in terms of multiple intersecting narrations of historical time. Because it is rooted in the complexity of lived context, the narrativity paradigm can also take account of the limitations and contingencies of narrative. Not everything can become part of a communicable story or be taken up in a hermeneutical circle. Traumatic events, for example, may escape the dynamics of ‘readable’ remembrance and recuperation, persisting rather as

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interconnected lives and stories which always exceed and precede the purview of any individual subject, or groups of subjects, at a given moment.

<sup>89</sup> Adriana Cavarero’s model of ‘reciprocal narration’ articulated in *Relating Narratives* (1997), for example, draws on Hannah Arendt’s concept of ‘natality’ to underscore the *relational* underpinning of narrativity, and expose the insufficiency and contingency of the autobiographical standpoint. I am dependent on others for my ‘life story’, Cavarero insists, most importantly because I am not a witness to the beginnings of my life, of which I have no reflexive cognition at the time, and cannot subsequently remember. Moreover, throughout my life I am not necessarily in the best position to judge what the meaning of my life and actions has been or will be. Thus, within scenes of ‘reciprocal narration’, my story might be given back to me in a new form or new light, as the ‘other’ witnesses and registers, discerning narrative threads and meanings where to me, they are invisible or opaque (Cavarero 1997:80).

unarticulated or unarticulable events that continue to influence and disturb in opaque and unconscious ways (Halsema 2011:116). Moreover, as argued in chapter 2, the enigmatic and elusive nature of past ‘traces’ always exceed and resist being fixed by a narrative ‘grasp’, but rather, re-emerge at unexpected moments to interrupt any attempt at a completed narrative account.

The second key advantage of the narrativity paradigm is the emphasis it places on the *politics* of narrativisation. Narrative, as Judith Butler argues, is not only caught up in the emotionally laden scene of address; it is also fundamentally ‘caught up in the sphere of normativity and the problematic of power’ (Butler 2005:27)<sup>90</sup>. Like the pluritopic hermeneutical approach described above, theories of ‘narrativity’ reflect on the very process of constructing and ordering, and emphasise ‘the social and human interests in the act of telling a story as a political intervention’ (Mignolo 2003:15). Above all, this means acknowledging the significance of *competing* narratives, and the political uses and effects of particular narrative configurations. For example, narratives can be used to link and draw people and experiences together within a temporal-historical continuity, enabling us to share time through bridging different experiences and horizons. Yet, on the other hand, this ‘bridging’ is not always successful, given that temporal concepts and horizons may not be meaningful or even intelligible to those living in the same social or cultural space (Leland 2001:120; Weiss 2011:173). Moreover, narratives can separate and exclude, inducing a sense of temporal disorientation or estrangement, as certain narratives can become hegemonic and dominant, whilst others are eclipsed or subsumed. Taken together, then, theories of ‘narrativity’ and ‘pluritopic hermeneutics’ direct us to conceive of ‘*spaces* of experience’ and ‘*horizons* of expectation’ in the plural, and further, to recognise that these spaces and horizons

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<sup>90</sup> Whilst Butler brings out this political dimension very clearly in *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005), it is not considered in any great depth by Cavarero in *Relating Narratives* (1997). Cavarero sets up an idealised narrative scene or speech situation which cannot take account of instances of refusal to hear or ‘receive’, as certain voices drown out others, or certain narratives gain ascendancy. Thus, whilst she gives a useful account of narrative plurality, her approach to the *politics* of narrative is rather unsatisfactory.

are mediated by multiple narrations of historical time, which are fraught with contest over meaning and authority.

#### 4

### FRACTURED FORMS AND CONTRAPUNTAL READING

The preceding three sections have developed a theoretical account of the link between historical time and narrative time. I have argued that narrative time is ‘internal’ to historical time, in the sense that historical time is a *lived time*, and that narrative forms and practices shape lived temporal experience. I have also argued that historical time is an *intersubjective* time, generated through the tension between shifting ‘spaces of experience’ and ‘horizons of expectation’, and configured through interpreting and narrating shared pasts, presents and futures. Finally, I have claimed that because there are always multiple narratives and interpretative ‘horizons’, historical time is narrated and configured in multiple and internally complex ways, which have a political dimension and significance. Yet, whilst it has been important to give a theoretical account of the relationship between narrative time and historical time, it is also important to consider how these theoretical discussions can inform feminist historiography in more practical terms, and influence the way we write and read histories of feminism. The problem of historical communication and experience, as Peter Osborne argues, is not just philosophical; it is also a problem of cultural form (Osborne 1996:133)<sup>91</sup>. In this regard, the challenge lies in considering how formal narrative configurations might express more adequately the multiple voices and temporalities that feed into and out of historical narratives and configure the shifting patterns of historical time.

In some respects, narrative as a cultural form presents problems for the feminist theorist or historian seeking to express multiple narrative trajectories and temporalities within the field of feminist history, because narrative structure so often works to mask the intersubjective interdependence I have described, and the ambiguities of historical

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<sup>91</sup> Osborne attributes this insight to Walter Benjamin.

interpretation. Once we have arranged past events into a recognisable narrative form, the past seems comprehensible and settled, making a depicted course of historical events appear finished and inevitable, and thus closing down alternative accounts. The linear and synthetic properties of narrative, and the authority of the narrative voice, for example, can have the effect of sealing up or masking the restlessness of the past, transforming indeterminacy and contingency into determinateness and finality. However, whilst the classic Aristotelian ideal of narrative form, which requires a holistic beginning-middle-end structure, is certainly pervasive (Aristotle 1996:13), this kind of narrative configuration is not exhaustive or inevitable. Indeed, as Genevieve Lloyd points out, there are many resources in narrative that go ‘beyond the tightly structured telling of a unified story with a beginning, middle and end’ and the limitations of the continuous narratorial voice or perspective (Lloyd 1993a:10-11). What is required, then, is not only a philosophical account of historical time and narrativity to inform our historiographical understanding, but also, an appreciation of the flexibilities and possibilities of narrative form and technique. Literary theorist Helen Carr poses the question as such:

‘If we are coming to see that cultures can be understood as collections of narratives, not only stories into which we are born... but also stories we learn to tell, how do these fractured forms explore the competing and conflicting narratives we meet in our culturally diverse society? (Carr 2011:321).

This kind of question gives rise to an immanent approach of working *with* and *within* narrative, trying to turn narrative’s figures and operations against oppressive or detrimental narrative determinations (Roof 1996a). Carr suggests that whilst nonlinear narratives emerge from the destabilising effects of traditional hierarchies of power, these ‘fractured forms’ can, in turn, work to interrupt and fissure those very master narratives which support these hierarchies (Carr 2011:322). In this regard, feminist literary theory offers many interesting insights and approaches to feminist historiography, as affirmed in chapter 2, as feminist



novelists and critics have uncovered and developed various techniques for creating ‘decentered’, ‘restive’ and ‘interactional’ narratives within women’s fictional writing, which challenge the authority of the single narrator and the autobiographical voice, and also linear organisations which perform a narrative ‘closure’ and finality<sup>92</sup>. Such alternative narrative techniques can be used to portray discontinuities, repetitions, silences, and irresolvabilities, as a way of expressing ambiguities and variant interpretations<sup>93</sup>. The novelist Jeanette Winterson articulates this kind of approach nicely, suggesting that:

‘When we tell a story we exercise control, but in such a way as to leave a gap, an opening. It is a version, but never the final one. And perhaps we hope that the silences will be heard by someone else, and the story can continue, and be retold’ (Winterson 2011:8).

Feminist historiographical writing itself also includes some examples of experimentation with dialogic narrative structures and nonlinear formats. One example is Diane Elam and Robyn Wiegman’s introduction to their edited anthology *Feminism Beside Itself* (1995), written as two narratives in two side-by-side columns. The stories that each author tells intersect and echo each other, but by splitting the introduction into two, the authors force a recognition of the contested and polyvocal nature of feminist storytelling, and refuse a neat synthesis of perspectives. Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa’s feminist anthology *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981) presents an even more thoroughgoing challenge to linear, narrative closure, as it intersperses more traditional ‘stories’ with essays and poetry, snapshot reflections, ‘stream of consciousness journal entries’, speeches, statements, dialogues, and letters. ‘One voice is not enough, nor two, although this is where

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<sup>92</sup> Though of course, feminism as a genre has in many ways bolstered the authority of the narrative voice, and in particular the autobiographical voice, given that personal testimony and the ‘confessional’ style have been so prominent in feminist writing.

<sup>93</sup> The special issue of *Women: a Cultural Review* on ‘Disrupting the Narrative: Gender, Sexuality and Fractured Form’, offers several illuminating examples (ed. Carr 2011).

the dialogue begins' (Moraga 1981:34). The created effect is one of multiple voices, styles and 'cultural tongues', emerging from a web of intersecting lives and stories that cannot be captured or subsumed within one overarching narrative or temporal schema.

As well as prompting experimentation with different ways of constructing and *writing* feminist histories, the idea of multiple 'narrative webs' and temporal horizons can also orient an alternative practice of *reading* feminist histories. This practice of reading is informed by an understanding that the historical and narrative context is always excessive of the singular narrative that would seek to give a definitive account of it. It may well be that a 'narrative' is 'totalising' in strictly formal terms, because, as Mink argues, it generates its own distinctive and bounded 'imaginative space' (Mink 1978). This, after all, is why we describe a narrative in the singular as *a* narrative. Yet, to think in terms of 'narrativity' is to recognise that singular narrative 'wholes' are only *temporary* closures, which are always incomplete and entangled with many other narratives. In other words, the production of a singular narrative depends upon the experience of a 'communal narrative-matrix' out of which it arises, and which it cannot fully express, even if it tries to disguise this through the figure of closure (MacQuillan 2000:23-4). This theoretical account gives rise to a practice of reading that Edward Said describes as 'contrapuntal reading', whereby the 'readerly subject' extends their reading of texts to 'include what was once forcibly excluded', seeking out counter-narratives and recognising that the singular narrative only exists as an activity of production within a larger discursive and material context (Said 1993:79). MacQuillan extends this idea of 'contrapuntal reading', arguing that it is necessary to not only seek out excluded material and counter-narratives, but also, to discern the excluded material or 'resisting strands' *within* the material that the narrative presents. In this sense, he claims, counter-narratives can be thought of as structurally integral to any singular account (MacQuillan 2000:24).

From the perspective of 'narrativity', then, if historical narratives are constituted through intersubjective encounters and relations between subjects with different temporal orientations and horizons, it is inevitable that historical narratives will express that multiplicity of perspectives and experiences of historical time, 'even when they *appear* to be

unified and coherent' (Weiss 2011:174). Even within more 'traditional' narrative formats, there are always breaks and slippages that reveal a multiplicity and an indeterminacy behind narrative coherence and apparently seamless structure. To illustrate: Lynn Segal's feminist memoir *Making Trouble* (2007) is constructed in the traditional autobiographical format, as the authorial voice guides us through her own political journey and simultaneously diagnoses the changes of the times. There is, however, an arresting passage when the author jumps out of her own narrative account into another's narrative, which includes an account of Segal herself (depicted using a pseudonym 'Marie'). Segal quotes this passage (with displeasure) in her own book:

'She drew an ... [un]flattering sketch of me at the time... as she saw us all within the collective household... We are easily recognisable, my name changed, incongruously, to Marie:

There was Marie who darted around the borough on political errands... Marie, up to her neck in local politics...' (Segal 2007:77)<sup>94</sup>.

Segal is quick to resume her autobiographical narration, yet this opening out on to a different narrative has enacted a rupture that disturbs and unsettles the authoritative narrative voice. The sudden switch to biography, and then back to autobiography again, evokes a sense of 'temporal strangeness' through what we might term a 'doubled retrospection'. Through seizing on such moments of temporal strangeness, and reading 'contrapuntally', we can tease out the relational, political and temporal dynamics that underpin any singular narrative, as we are offered a fleeting glimpse into alternative narrations and rememberings of a shared history.

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<sup>94</sup> Segal is quoting from Alison Fell's *Every Move You Make* (1984: 22).

## CONCLUSION

The key aim of this chapter has been to develop an understanding of ‘narrative time’ as ‘internal’ to historical time, which enables us to explore the variety of ways that narrative practices and forms configure historical time. This argument depends upon a shift away from naturalistic ‘common-sense’ understandings of historical time as a ‘simple sequence’ of events. If historical time is understood, instead, as a ‘*lived* time’, we see that historical events have their own ‘internal’ temporalities, which are not limited to chronological sequence, but are also significantly shaped through narrative framings and configurations. One way of explaining the ‘internal’ relation between narrative time and historical time is via a phenomenological account, which demonstrates that lived time, or experiential temporality, cannot be reduced to the sequential temporality of ‘before-and-after’. Yet, whilst a phenomenological account can demonstrate an ‘affinity’ between the temporal structures of basic experience and narrative configuration, the phenomenological approach is in fact rather limited when it comes to accounting for historical time as a large-scale, intersubjective time. Accordingly, I have argued for a hermeneutics of historical time, which understands historical time as a narrated, interpreted time that mediates across experiential fields and temporal horizons. Hermeneutical theories bring narrative time to life, rather than confining it to the text, and reveal the poverty of the presumption that narrative time is an external ‘artifice’, imposed upon historical time from without. Moreover, the hermeneutical approach can be deepened and pluralised through drawing on ‘pluritopic’ hermeneutics, and the paradigm of ‘narrativity’, which posit multiple interpretative horizons within any experiential, interpretative context, and a complex of narrative matrices and palimpsests which make possible, and always exceed, any single narrative. This pluralistic theoretical framework can orient a flexible and experimental practice of writing historical narratives, exploring the

possibilities of multi-stranded and fractured forms. It can also inform a practice of ‘contrapuntal reading’, which detects and draws out multiple histories and lived times between and behind narrative closures.

The account of ‘narrative time’ given here, therefore, not only contributes to an internally complex conceptual model of historical time, it also affirms the possibility of expressing such complexity through cultural form and within historical practice. In addition, it has importantly challenged ‘common-sense’ presumptions that historical time is ‘*really*’ linear and chronological. However, as the first section of the chapter has acknowledged, historical chronologies do play a crucial role in configuring historical time, just as historical narratives do. The following chapter will therefore examine the temporal dynamics of historical chronologies and timelines in more detail, as I turn to the question of ‘calendar time’.

## CHAPTER 4

### Calendar Time

#### INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, I challenged the ‘common-sense’ equation of ‘real’ historical time with an idea of ‘natural chronology’ or ‘mere sequence’. Through investigating phenomenological and hermeneutical accounts, the chapter moved us towards a richer understanding of the temporality of lived events and trajectories, and demonstrated how narrative time can be understood as ‘internal’ to historical time. The question of chronology, however, has not been exhausted, as I am yet to address in any detail an important dimension of historical time: ‘*calendar time*’. This is the time that organises histories into chronological order through temporal markers such as days, months, years, decades and centuries. Calendar time interweaves and intersects with the time of the trace, and with narrative time; indeed, what the trace or narrative signifies often depends to an important extent upon the markers inscribed in calendar time (Ricoeur 1988:108). Accordingly, calendars can aptly be described as ‘time maps’, which orient and anchor historical understanding and imagination.

Despite its practical utility, however, calendar time is often viewed as an obstacle to developing creative and nuanced approaches to history. This is because the quantitatively configured calendrical grid or timeline ‘flattens’ historical time out into a framework of measurable intervals and periods, and thus appears incapable of capturing the complex, qualitative dynamics of historical events and trajectories. Consequently, feminist writings on time and temporality often imply that whilst dates and decades are perhaps necessary to historians, philosophy should be getting beyond them in order to reflect on ‘deeper’ or more meaningful temporalities (Ermath 1992; Colebrook 2009). The problem, however, with dismissing calendar time as a ‘vulgar’ or mundane kind of time, is that in doing so, we

overlook its philosophical significance as both a practical and a public time. The task for feminist historiography, therefore, is to engage more deeply and critically with calendar time on a philosophical level, and to consider how it might be deployed to map out feminist histories *without* resulting in bland chronologies and reductionisms, or swallowing up different temporalities which are irreducible to its numerical points and ordinal positions. As such, the key aim of this chapter is to make the case for a *qualitative* approach to calendar time: an approach which subverts the idea that calendar time is a neutral and straightforwardly chronological or ‘linear’ time, and which generates more critically reflexive, and creative calendrical practices.

Section 1 begins the chapter by challenging reified understandings of calendar time. Calendar time is often reified as a natural kind of time, such that we presume that ‘real’ historical time is *essentially* calendrical: i.e. a homogenous ‘mere series’ of successive instants or quantifiable, measurable points. However, this section draws on sociological, anthropological and historical studies of calendar time to support an alternative understanding of calendar time as a socially constructed tool for coordinating, managing and orchestrating social, economic, political and cultural life. The reification of calendar time, I contend, is problematic, because it ‘covers over’ the constructed character of calendar time, and thus the way in which particular calendrical conceptions and configurations support certain kinds of social or historical orders. The rest of the chapter thus seeks to develop a qualitative approach to calendar time, as an alternative, which foregrounds the complex temporal dynamics and sociopolitical processes ‘underpinning’ calendar time, and the ways in which it used to organise, map and coordinate diverse histories.

To work towards such a qualitative approach, section 2 makes use of the distinction that Heidegger draws between ‘time-measuring’ and ‘time-reckoning’ in Division II of *Being and Time*. I argue that a selective reading of Heidegger offers a qualitative account of calendar time as a socially constructed measuring system, demonstrating that quantitative time-measuring frameworks such as calendars are not simply ‘there’, but rather, are an *outcome* of qualitative, materially-situated processes of collective time-reckoning. A

Heideggerian approach to calendar time, however, can only take us so far, due to Heidegger's 'thin' conception of public time, which presumes that public time is a meaningless, homogenous time, experienced in the same way by all those in its orbit. Accordingly, section 3 moves away from Heidegger as it enquires further into the nature of calendar time as a public time. I draw here upon Hannah Arendt's pluralistic concept of publicness as a basis for developing a 'deepened' account of public time: an account that is not premised upon assumptions about neutrality, universality and uniformity, but rather, upon the need and desire for temporal coordination and time-sharing within and across diversity.

The fourth and final section then brings these theoretical discussions to bear more directly on the problem of coordinating diverse feminist histories through calendrical points and frames of reference. I argue for a critical understanding of dating and periodisation as an interpretative, normative practice, and an approach that is reflexively attuned to the ways in which dates operate as 'sticky signs', and as 'hot' and 'cold' chronologies. Finally, I gesture towards a more constructive approach to configuring feminist timelines, showing that calendar time can play a valuable role in the project of overturning the hegemonic model of feminist history, through seizing on anachronisms, and using the specificity of the date to guard against reductive generalisations.

## 1

### **THE REIFICATION OF CALENDAR TIME**

The arguments in this chapter rest upon a base claim, which is that calendar time is a socially and culturally specific creation: a mechanism for organising and coordinating time, which is mediated through the temporality of lived experience and the regulatory practices of a common social and cultural life (Osborne 1996:66). This claim that calendar time is a 'social construct' may initially seem a little far-fetched, given that calendar time does appear to be the most natural and universal of temporal frameworks, governed as it is by solar, or lunar, rotation. Even though technological changes and mechanisation have led to increasingly



abstract and ‘artificial’ ways of telling the time, (such that marking a ‘day’ has become possible without any reference to the position of the sun in the sky), the ‘day’, nevertheless, can seem to be the most ‘natural’ of measures. Yet, as sociologist Eviatar Zerubavel insists, a ‘day’ is *always* at root an ‘artificial’ segmentation of time, whether measured by a sun-dial, a mechanical time-piece such as a watch, or marked by a number in a calendrical grid.

In the first instance, the calendar ‘day’, ‘month’ and ‘year’, can only ever be approximate representations of the ‘physiotemporal’ relations between the earth and the sun, or in the case of lunar calendars, between earth and moon (Zerubavel 1997:110). The key point, however, is not about physiotemporal or astronomical *accuracy*<sup>95</sup>. The point, rather, is that temporal measures are not natural measures that simply exist; rather, they are *constructed* measures that are decided upon and utilised within specific sociocultural situations and arrangements. It has to be established within an intersubjective context, for example, ‘what minimum planetary cycle has to be supposed and recognised before it is possible to transform the temporalities of the stars into an astronomically rationalised, long-term, natural chronology’ (Koselleck 2004:95-6). In this sense, whilst calendar time may be *based* on ‘cosmological time’, calendar time does not belong to nature, in the sense of being ‘out there’, ‘waiting to be discovered’. Rather, calendar time can be construed as a ‘*calendrisation* of cosmological time’ (Osborne 1995:67). This does not mean that calendar time is somehow ‘unreal’, but more precisely, that calendar time is a temporal order that belongs to social, lived reality. It is a temporal system devised to regulate the way we reckon with, coordinate, live and share time.

There is a wide range of sociological and anthropological work demonstrating this theoretical point that calendars are socially and culturally specific ‘versions’ of cosmological time, rather than being straightforwardly natural or universal measures. Such studies, for example, show that certain societies and cultural communities may use several calendars at once, for different social, economic, agricultural, cultural and religious purposes (Adams

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<sup>95</sup> For interesting historical accounts of calendar customs and the quest to determine an ‘accurate’ calendrical year and month, see, for example, Blackburn and Holford-Stevens (1999), or Ewing (1998).

1995; Greenhouse 1996; Mughal 2008). They demonstrate, further, that the institutionalisation of a particular calendar depends upon a certain level of political authority to regulate social, cultural and economic life according to specific calendrical arrangements. Calendars can be used to facilitate and promote social coordination, or conversely, to establish social or cultural boundaries, through marking out one community or society's difference from another (Zerubavel 1982; 1982b).<sup>96</sup>

Calendrical 'temporal reference frameworks' must therefore be understood not only as socially and culturally specific, but further, as embroiled in power relations and dynamics, as they arise out of specific economic and sociopolitical processes. This is well illustrated by considering the rise of modern western temporal reference frameworks—including the Gregorian calendar, the Christian Era, and 'International Standard Time' (based on GMT)—which have attained a nigh-on global hegemony in conjunction with changing economic and communicative practices, imperial expansion and domination, and the rise of global capitalism<sup>97</sup>. Historical sketches of the ascendancy of modern 'clock time', for example, chart this ascendancy in tandem with the rise of the factory and the advent of modern market relations and wage labour in sixteenth and seventh-century Europe, of railway transportation and shipping, and of telegraphic and telephonic communication (Giddens 1990; Kern 1983; Toulmin and Goodfield 1977). The expansion and institutionalisation of the Gregorian calendar and the seven-day week has been similarly embroiled within geopolitical processes

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<sup>96</sup> Key examples of this phenomenon include the Gregorian reform of the Julian calendar in 1582, which exacerbated the split between Catholics and Protestants for more than a century, or the French Republican calendrical reform of 1793, which contributed to France's isolation from the rest of the world. Another illustration is Stalin's introduction of five and six day weeks between 1929 and 1940, as a means of disrupting church-attendance (Zerubavel 1982b).

<sup>97</sup> By 1855, 98% of all public clocks in Great Britain were set to GMT; in 1883, 'standard railway time' in the US, (based on GMT), was put into effect; and in 1884 the 'International Meridian Conference' was held, which inaugurated the international standardisation of 'International Standard time', based on GMT, though it is still not universally observed (Zerubavel 1982b).

of modernisation and globalisation<sup>98</sup>. Accordingly, as Andrew Hom argues, the increased levels of temporal coordination enabled by modern clock time and calendar time have been integral to securing the ‘edifice of political modernity’ (Hom 2010).

It is often ‘forgotten’, however, that modern standardised frameworks of calendar time and clock time have been actively forged as a response to the desire and logistical need for temporal coordination within changing socioeconomic circumstances and shifting cultural dominions. Such ‘forgetting’ can be understood as a process of *reification*, whereby universalised modern calendar time and clock time has come to be taken for granted and presumed to be natural or simply ‘there’: a ‘given’ backdrop to changing political, economic and social conditions. This can be linked to the common presumption, as discussed in chapter 3, that ‘real’ historical time is *essentially* calendrical or chronological, i.e. a ‘mere sequence’ or series of successive instants. The idea of a mundanely chronological or ‘chronotic’ time as a homogenous backdrop against which the diverse lives of individuals and societies play out and can be plotted is not, it must be stressed, a conception unique to western modernity (Hutchings 2008). Yet, within western modernity, the notion of ‘chronotic time’ has become deeply entrenched, not only through conceptions and theories such as Newton’s theory of ‘absolute’ measurable time<sup>99</sup>, but further, as stated, through the thorough institutionalisation and standardisation of calendar and clock time, which have become integral to how modern social and economic relations are organised (Thompson 1974; Osborne 1995:35)<sup>100</sup>.

The entrenchment of the modern notion of chronotic time, therefore, might best be grasped in terms of a two-way process, whereby the Newtonian scientific conception has

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<sup>98</sup> For more detail on calendrical reforms and standardisation processes, see Blackburn and Holford-Stevens (1999).

<sup>99</sup> Newton, like Aristotle, proposed an ‘absolute time’, which, as Stephen Hawking explains it, means that he believed in time’s absolute separation from space, and that ‘one could unambiguously measure the interval of time between two events, and that this time would be the same whoever measured it, provided they used a good clock’ (Hawking 1988:18).

<sup>100</sup> Standardised clock and calendar time is fundamental to modern capitalism as it enables the coordination of complex systems of production, distribution and exchange. E.P. Thompson’s essay on ‘Time, Work Discipline and Industrial Capitalism’ is the classic text on this (Thompson 1974).

provided the basic conceptual foundation for conceiving time as a homogenous medium that can be divided up and counted, and in turn, the thorough *institutionalisation* of this way of organising time—via standardised calendars and clocks—fully ingrains the idea that this is how time ‘really’ is. On the one hand, the Newtonian conception of time ‘conditions the possibility of counting time by means of the technologies of calendars, clocks and timetables’, because it presumes time *is* something that is essentially measurable and countable (Hutchings 2008:4-5). Chronotic time is therefore ‘not *reducible* to the way it is accessed via calendars or clocks’ (ibid: 6, emphasis added). Yet on the other hand, the implementation of increasingly universalised and standardised systems of clock and calendar time has reinforced the chronotic understanding of time as quantitative and ‘calendrical’ to such an extent, that the presumption that this is how historical time ‘*really is*’ persists today, in a world in which Newtonian science has been largely abandoned. The grand-scale efforts that have gone into the institutionalisation of modern clock time and calendar time have been ‘forgotten’ or ‘concealed’, such that this rationalised, even, homogenous time appears as natural, simply ‘there’, even without scientific theoretical support.

This reified conception of calendar time is problematic, in the first instance, because it ‘covers over’ the constructed character of calendar time and its role as a socially devised coordinating system. Though hegemonic calendrical arrangements may have begun as a proposition among alternatives, once they become reified and taken for granted, it becomes difficult to challenge them and argue for a different kind of temporal coordination (Hom 2010:1149). The reified conception of calendar time is also problematic in light of its intimate connection with progressive constructions of ‘world history’. At first glance, the progressive conception of history seems to be at odds with a quantitative, calendrical conception of historical time, given that any conception of ‘progress’ involves *qualitative* judgments, as history is divided ‘according to principles of comparative value, in which some times become seen as more significant, better or worse, than others’ (Hutchings 2008:7). In fact, however, several theorists have argued that progressive theories and narratives of history go ‘hand in

hand' with the 'dated grid of a homogenous empty time' (Chandler 1999:131; Benjamin 2007; Hutchings 2008; Chakrabarty 2000).

This is firstly because the capacity to compare and rank different periods or 'stages' ultimately relies on the presumption of a '*transparent*' or homogenous time 'through which one can see the difference between stasis, progress and regress, and may identify the principles governing change' (Hutchings 2008:7). Moreover, the idea of a total 'world history' relies upon the idea that diverse histories and temporalities can all be encompassed 'within' the same homogenous historical time. As Dipesh Chakrabarty explains it, this time is homogenous because 'it is not affected by any particular events; its existence is independent of such events and in a sense it exists prior to them. Events happen in time but time is not affected by them' (Chakrabarty 2000:73). The reified calendrical chronology thereby functions as the medium in or through which different times and temporalities can be merged, in a 'higher-order calculus that can calibrate uneven and diffuse temporalities' (Chandler 1999:132). In this sense, the idea of a single human history is entirely dependent upon a 'homogenous, secular, calendrical time', with its implication that '*irrespective of a society's own understanding of temporality*, a historian will always be able to produce a time line for the globe, in which for any span of time, the events in areas X, Y and Z can be named' (Chakrabarty 2000:74, emphasis added)<sup>101</sup>. The reified notion of a homogenous, calendrical 'time-within-which' can thus be considered as a basic framework for progressive, universalising constructions of 'world history', which have been inextricably bound up with overseas imperial expansion and the idea of 'uneven development' (Koselleck 2004:245-6; Chandler 1999:131).

The imperative for the rest of the chapter, therefore, is to overturn the reified conception of calendar time, which has arguably been complicit in securing progressivist and universalising approaches to 'world history', and conceals the constructed character of calendar time as a *devised system* for coordinating social life and mapping out histories. To be

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<sup>101</sup> I return to this argument in chapter 7, where I further consider the concept of 'totality'.

clear: challenging reified, naturalised understandings of calendar time does not entail a claim that historical time can or does exist independently of physical or cosmological dynamics and patterns, or of scientific theories, which always condition historical knowledge and experience<sup>102</sup>. The point, rather, of distancing my discussion of calendar time from conceptions of ‘natural time’, and from scientific theories, is to foreground the social, political and cultural *work* that goes into constructing and using calendar time, and its role in configuring certain kinds of time-concepts and historical narratives. The rest of this chapter thus seeks to develop a qualitative approach to calendar time, which gives priority of focus to the complex temporal and sociopolitical dynamics which ‘underpin’ calendar time, thereby pushing us to probe further than the seemingly indifferent face of the calendrical grid. In effect, this will entail a *reversal* of the model whereby the quantitative underlies the qualitative, positing instead that the qualitative underpins and produces the quantitative. One way of developing such an approach is to draw a distinction between the quantitative process of ‘time-measuring’ and the qualitative process of ‘time-reckoning’.

## 2

### **THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN ‘TIME-RECKONING’ AND ‘TIME-MEASURING’**

The reified notion of calendar time works to ‘cover over’ the constructed and conventional character of calendar time, and further, can be conceptually linked to progressive and universalising constructions of history. A more complex, qualitative understanding of the temporal and sociopolitical dynamics which ‘underpin’ calendar time is therefore required, which will guard against its reification and the concomitant idea that humans exist in a single frame of homogenous calendrical time that can encompass all individual histories and

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<sup>102</sup> Indeed, one way to refute the understanding of calendrical time as a homogenous all-encompassing ‘backdrop’ to lived history would be to demonstrate how the ideal of homogenous or absolute time entertained by Newtonian science breaks down in light of Einsteinian theory (Chakrabarty 2000). My key point here, however, is not simply that the Newtonian understanding of time is *wrong*. It is rather, that calendar time needs to be understood as a socially specific creation or ‘version’ of cosmological time.

qualitatively different temporalities. To open up a qualitative approach to calendar time, this section draws upon Heidegger's hermeneutical method of 'tracing back' to the interpretative, interactive processes of 'time-reckoning' which give rise to formally configured calendars. Focusing exclusively on the chapter on 'Temporality and Everydayness' in Division II of *Being and Time*, the key argument is that Heidegger's distinction between 'time-measuring' and 'time-reckoning', and his concepts of 'datability', 'spannedness' and 'significance', offer a useful starting point for beginning to think through calendar time in qualitative terms. Towards the end of the section, however, I will argue that this analysis must be isolated from the wider project of *Being and Time*, due to its hierarchical designation of the different levels of temporality, and Heidegger's 'thin' conception of public time.

In Division I of *Being and Time*, Heidegger describes the basic structure of *Dasein*'s<sup>103</sup> everyday 'Being-in-the-world' as 'Care' or 'Concern' (*Sorge*), which can be defined as a condition or state of social and material embeddedness, and practical engagement with the phenomena or entities around us. In Division II, in a chapter on 'Temporality and Everydayness', Heidegger claims that 'time is first discovered' in this structure of Care or Concern. Indeed, 'reckoning with time is constitutive for Being-in-the-world' (2009:382). Practical, materially-situated existence, or 'Concernful Being', he explains, is all about 'reckoning up, planning, preventing, or taking precautions', all of which are grounded in temporality. Concern expresses itself through the 'then' as 'awaiting', through the 'now' as 'making present', and through the 'on that former occasion' as 'retaining' (ibid: 459).

These Concernful temporal orientations—awaiting, making-present, and retaining—are not to be understood in isolation from one another, Heidegger argues, but rather as interconnected and mutually constitutive. This can be understood as a version of the basic phenomenological idea that within the 'then' lies the 'now-not-yet', and within the 'on that former occasion' lurks the 'now no longer' (ibid). Yet, Heidegger takes this phenomenological temporality in an interesting direction, when he characterises the

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<sup>103</sup> 'Dasein' means literally 'there-being', or oriented being, and is Heidegger's term for 'the being of humans', and also the 'entity or person who has this being' (Inwood 1999:42).

interrelated framework of the ‘now’, ‘then’ and ‘on that former occasion’ as a framework of ‘datability’. Datability, he stresses, is not to be confused with the practice of assigning a formal numerical date using an actual or ‘factual’<sup>104</sup> calendar. ‘Even without ‘dates’ of this sort’, Heidegger stresses, ‘the ‘now’, the ‘then’ and the ‘on that former occasion’ have been dated more or less definitely’ (ibid: 459). In other words, an event is ‘datable’ by virtue of its relation to a lived ‘now’, a ‘then’ and an ‘on that former occasion’, prior to its being formally dated as a numerical instant. ‘Datability’, for Heidegger, thus takes ontological priority over the formal, numerical ‘date’, in the sense that the assignation of a date to an event depends upon an event’s initial grounding in the everyday temporality of Concern. Moreover, the temporal structure of datability is qualitatively different from the succession of isolated instants or ordinal now-points that constitute actual, numerical calendars, because it is a fundamentally *relational* temporality, where the ‘now’, the ‘then’ and the ‘on that former occasion’ are interconnected and mutually determining. As we have seen in the previous chapter, these phenomenological modes of temporal orientation are not reducible to, or even mappable on to, a serial succession of instants in relation to a ‘before’ and ‘after’ (Husserl 1964:48; Osborne 1995:49-50).

A further reason that datability does not entail a sense of time as a succession of instants or moments, claims Heidegger, is that every ‘now’, ‘then’ and ‘on that former occasion’ has, along with its relational datability-structure, its own ‘spanned character’ (Heidegger 2009: 462). This ‘spannedness’ is understood as something which endures across any series of ‘points’, because everyday time is a time *for* something, in relation to a ‘for which’, or ‘for the sake of which’ (ibid: 467). Thus, Heidegger writes, ‘we say ‘now’—in the intermission, while one is eating, in the evening, in summer; ‘then’—at breakfast, when one is taking a climb, and so forth’ (ibid: 462). This immersion in the event means that ‘when Dasein is ‘living along’ in an everyday, Concernful manner, it just never understands itself as running along in a Continuously enduring sequence of pure ‘nows’ (ibid: 462). Moreover,

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<sup>104</sup> ‘Factual’ is a term Heidegger uses for ‘being-already-in-a-world’; ‘factual’ calendars by implication are those actually existing calendars which we use as ‘equipment’ on a day-to-day basis (Inwood 1999:58).



the ‘now’ is datable, claims Heidegger, because it has ‘the character of appropriateness or inappropriateness’: a ‘*significance*’ in terms of the relation it has to the ‘for which’ or ‘for the sake of which’. In the everyday mode of Concernful Being, then, Dasein’s way of ‘reckoning time’ is fundamentally relational in two senses: firstly, in the sense that a ‘now’ is only ‘now’ in relation to a ‘then’ and an ‘on that former occasion’; and secondly, in relation to encountered entities, situations, and tasks to be undertaken, which is what gives everyday time its ‘spanned’ character and its ‘significance’. Heidegger thus depicts time-reckoning as a complex temporal process that occurs within specific, materially-embedded situations. ‘What remains decisive’ Heidegger insists, is Dasein’s way of ‘reckoning with its time’: a way of reckoning which must be differentiated from the practice of quantitative time-measurement (ibid: 456).

Having foregrounded the process of time-reckoning, however, Heidegger’s key argument is that this fundamental work of time-reckoning gets ‘forgotten’ or ‘covered over’ within the ‘everyday’ or ‘ordinary’ mode of interpretation. In the ‘ordinary understanding of time’, he contends, the ‘nows’ are shorn of their relations and ‘leveled off’, such that time comes to be understood as something that is essentially countable: ‘time shows itself as a sequence of “nows” which are constantly ‘present-at-hand’, simultaneously passing away and coming along (ibid: 474). ‘In obtaining the measurement, we, as it were, forget what has been measured as such, so that nothing is to be found except a number and stretch’ (ibid: 471). When time is characterised as pure succession, ‘datability’, ‘spannedness’ and ‘significance’ are ‘missing’ or ‘covered over’. In other words, we become so engaged with the (quantitative) product that we overlook the (qualitative) process and what it *means* to measure time in a specific way. Or as Ricoeur explains it:

‘When we speak of time as a system of dates... we quite simply forget the work of interpretation by which we moved from making-present, including all that it awaits and it retains, to the idea of an indifferent “now”’ (Ricoeur 1988:82).

Whilst his polemic against the ‘ordinary concept of time’ is not without flaws<sup>105</sup>, it is possible to read Heidegger’s critique of the ‘forgetting’ of the interpretative work of ‘time-reckoning’ as a philosophical critique of the reification of calendar time and clock time. Moreover, I suggest, his concepts of ‘datability’, ‘spannedness’ and ‘significance’—as embedded in the process of ‘time-reckoning’—gesture towards an alternative, qualitative conception of calendar time. In the first instance, Heidegger’s account of datability illustrates that calendar time depends upon much more complex temporal dynamics than is commonly supposed, as the points on the calendrical time-grid are functional and meaningful only because of the work of ‘making-present’, ‘awaiting’ and ‘retaining’. Put simply: calendars are usable and readable because we look backwards and look ahead, to distinguish ‘today’, ‘*this* year’, ‘*that* decade’ or ‘*this* century’ (ibid: 107). Heidegger thereby recovers traces of the phenomenological and interpretative dynamics underpinning calendar time, which can often be obscured by the ‘linear’ configuration of its structure. In so doing, the Heideggerian account implicitly gestures towards a more complex understanding of the temporality of the date, which goes beyond the simple before-and-after ordinal relation. As I demonstrate in section 4, dates can have temporal resonances and logics that exceed, and can even contradict, their position on a chronological, calendrical timeline. This is possible because a date marks a historical event in two ways. Firstly, it orders historical time along chronological lines by assigning a singular moment to a specific event, positioning it within a before-and-after relation. But secondly, the calendar makes events ‘available all at once to memory and interpretation’ (Lampert 2006:71). This means that we can not only mark out and follow

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<sup>105</sup> Heidegger’s polemic against the ‘ordinary’ conception of time is flawed in several respects, not least because it reductively equates scientific conceptions of time with the Aristotelian concept of time, i.e. as expressed in Book IV of *Physics*, where he defines time as the ‘number of change in respect of the before and after’ (Aristotle 1987:125). The reason for Heidegger’s dismissive treatment of science, Ricoeur explains, is that he ‘takes for granted that science has nothing original to say that has not been borrowed tacitly from metaphysics’, which in turn, is a highly reductive conception of western metaphysics as essentially Aristotelian (Ricoeur 1988b:88). This conflation is disingenuous, as not only is it a reductive treatment of western metaphysical accounts of time, but it is also a reductive treatment of the complex and diverse scientific theories of the multiple ‘times of nature’, including quantum time, thermodynamic time, the time of galactic transformations and the evolution of the species. It is important, therefore, to read the ‘ordinary conception of time’ as exactly that: a reified understanding of what time is ‘really’ or ‘objectively’ like, which may have *affinities* with certain scientific or metaphysical perspectives – such as Newtonian physics or Aristotelian metaphysics– but is not to be confused with ‘the scientific conception’ or the ‘metaphysical conception’ *per se*.

histories according to a chronological order, but importantly, that memory and interpretation will always operate on a different and more complex temporal level. Historical knowledge, understanding, and imagination do not extend over a continuous, chronological line of time, but rather, oscillate back and forth between past, present and future. Thus, whilst the quantitative calendrical time frame is ‘a datum against which temporality can be registered’, a calendar can only be read and used precisely because we do not think or experience historical existence in a straight chronological line (Tribe 2004: xi). What a date means or signifies will always exceed its ordinal position in a chronological sequence.

As well as helping to recover the complex temporal and significatory dynamics ‘underpinning’ calendar time, Heidegger’s concepts of ‘datability’, ‘spannedness’ and ‘significance’ also help to articulate the date’s function as a kind of ‘material anchor’ which locates an event or text within the conditions of its occurrence. ‘Every ‘then’, Heidegger writes, ‘is a ‘then, *when...*’; every ‘on that former occasion’, is an ‘on that former occasion, *when...*’; every ‘now’ is a ‘now *that...*’ (2009: 467, emphasis added). A numerical calendar date is premised on a ‘reckoning’, which is always already embedded in a socio-material context. In Heidegger’s account, dating frameworks arise because time is reckoned with *collectively*. Alongside ‘datability’, ‘significance’ and ‘spannedness’, Heidegger therefore cites ‘publicness’ as one of the key features of Dasein’s everyday ‘within-time-ness’. ‘In the ‘most intimate Being-with-one-another of several people’, he writes, ‘they can say ‘*now*’ and say it ‘together’... The ‘now’ which anyone expresses is always said in the publicness of Being-in-the-world with one another’ (ibid: 411). This is because ‘*Mitsein*’ or ‘Being-with-others’, is a fundamental aspect of Dasein’s ‘Being-in-the-world’. The creation of a calendar or the assignation of a date marks the interpretative, creative, qualitative act of ‘reckoning time’, and also the fact that to be in time is to be with others.

In some respects, then, there is a commonality between Heidegger’s philosophical method of ‘hermeneutical phenomenology’, which seeks to ‘reactivate the work of interpretation’, and sociological and anthropological theories of calendar time, which emphasise its social, material basis and the need for a qualitative approach. Clifford Geertz,

for example, claims that a social calendar ‘cuts time up into bounded units not in order to count and total them but to describe and characterize them, to formulate their differential social, intellectual and religious significance’ (Geertz 1966:45). Zerubavel makes a similar case: ‘The social equalization of mathematically unequal durations and the unequalization of equal ones’, he contends, ‘certainly presupposes the ability to view time from a perspective other than the traditional physicomathematical one. It involves conceiving of time as a qualitative, and not merely a quantitative, dimension’ (Zerubavel 1979:4-5). Yet, when it comes to considering the question of calendar time as a social, public time in more detail, the Heideggerian approach is ultimately insufficient, due to Heidegger’s ‘thin’ conception of public life and public time.

As discussed, Heidegger claims that ‘time is first discovered’ in the mode of Care or Concern, i.e. within everyday embeddedness in the material and social world (Heidegger 2009: 382). However, the overall aim in Division II of *Being and Time* is in fact to argue for the ontological primacy of the ‘ecstatic temporality’ of the individual Dasein as the ‘source’ of all other kinds of temporality, including the time that seems to belong to the ‘world’ or to the ‘public’. Whilst the social, practical temporality of everydayness does have an ‘existential’ or ontological significance for Heidegger, the guiding idea of *Being and Time* is that the individual Dasein progressively clarifies its understanding of itself by working *away* from the ‘everyday’ world of Concern and Being-with-Others in search of a more ‘originary’ form and a more ‘authentic’ experience of time (2009: 277-8).<sup>106</sup> A key aspect of Heidegger’s argument here is that public time is essentially ‘inauthentic’.

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<sup>106</sup> Indeed, he reserves the term ‘temporality’ exclusively for ‘ecstatic’ temporality: the temporality which interprets itself’ (2009:460). It would be tangential to delve too deeply here into Heidegger’s intricate and flawed arguments regarding the ‘originary’ nature of ‘ecstatic temporality’, and the ‘authentic’ mode of ‘Being-towards-death’, given that this chapter is about calendar time. Suffice to say that they are two basic problems: the first concerns the argument that all kinds of temporality are ‘derived’ from ecstatic temporality, including the sense of an independent nature-time or ‘world-time’. On both an intuitive and a theoretical level, the argument that the notion of a natural or cosmological time is simply a ‘flattened out’ version of the ‘temporality which interprets itself’ is hardly a credible thesis. As noted in the previous chapter, the Husserlian attempt to entirely ‘bracket’ the naturalistic standpoint runs into similar difficulties. The second problem with Heidegger’s project lies with the distinction he draws between authenticity/inauthenticity, which in turn, rests upon the problematic existential/existentiell distinction. ‘Existentiell’, as Heidegger uses it, refers to the concrete choice of a way of being in the world, whilst ‘existential’ refers to any analysis that aims at explicating the

The public time of everyday Concern is positioned at the bottom of Heidegger's hierarchical organisation of temporal 'levels', because, according to Heidegger, it is the most likely to become 'snared in the present' and 'leveled out' in the 'ordinary' conception of time, due to its practical nature. The immersion of everyday temporality in the 'ready-to-hand', and the 'present-to hand'<sup>107</sup>, Heidegger argues, means that the accent is often placed on the 'making-present' at the expense of 'awaiting' and 'retaining', such that the 'now' gains a prominence and easily slides into a homogenous conception of time as a series of 'now-points' (ibid: 278). This propensity of practical, everyday time to slide into the ordinary conception of time is exacerbated, in Heidegger's account, by the fact that public life is itself a realm of inauthenticity, uniformity and homogeneity, where individuality, nuance and meaning become swallowed up by the dictatorship of the 'they' (Heidegger 2009:163-8):

'Publicly, time is something which everyone takes and can take... The only time one knows is the public time which has been leveled off and which belongs to everyone—and that means, to nobody' (ibid: 477).

This notion of public time as a meaningless, homogenous, anonymous time, however, is highly reductive. It is true that public time always precedes and exceeds us: we are born into, and live according to, time structures that are not of our own making. 'The world is always given to me from the first as an organised one' (Schutz 1971:9). In this sense, measuring frameworks always preexist and shape how different groups and individuals

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structures that differentiate Dasein from all other beings. Yet, as Tina Chanter argues, there is a series of normative presumptions and biases built into Heidegger's 'ontological' method that cover over its own prejudices. From this critical perspective, we can legitimately ask 'whether the entire analysis of temporality is not tied to the personal conception Heidegger has of authenticity, on a level where it competes with other existentiell conceptions' (Ricoeur 1988b:67).

<sup>107</sup> The 'ready-to-hand', and the present-to-hand' can be understood as two modes of being or types of entity. 'Present-to-hand' is the term Heidegger uses for neutral or natural entities, whilst 'ready-to-hand' refers to artifacts or things that serve human purposes in some way. In fact, in Heidegger's account, we are disposed to see things as ready-to-hand before we regard them as present-to-hand or neutral. Both modes of being, however, are to be distinguished from the mode of being of Dasein (Inwood 1999:128-9).

experience and think about time; they themselves are part of the temporal circumstances to be ‘reckoned’ with. But this does not mean that all of the individuals or groups within the orbit of organised public time structures experience them in the same way, or that they have a uniform or universal meaning. Indeed, Heidegger’s own characterisation of the time of everyday Concern demonstrates that the intersubjective, qualitative process of ‘time-reckoning’ is always rooted within the specificities of situation. Arguably, then, Heidegger does not make enough of his own distinction between time-reckoning and time-measuring in his account of public time. Whilst the practical, public temporality of everyday Concern may have a *propensity* to become ‘leveled out’ in the ordinary conception of time, Heidegger’s own method of ‘tracing back’ to the interpretative nature of time-reckoning shows that time-reckoning is always ‘prior’ to the quantitative temporal reference frameworks that are used as public reckoning-instruments. ‘What remains decisive’, Heidegger has claimed, is ‘Dasein’s way of reckoning with its time’: a way of reckoning which, at the level of everyday Concern, draws its significance from our immersion in a particular event and context and depends upon a complex interconnection between past, present and future.

Heidegger’s quickness to conflate public time with the ‘ordinary’ conception of time thus seems rather simplistic in light of his own careful analysis of reckoning and measuring and the difference between them. If we follow Heidegger’s own reasoning, public time cannot be reduced to the ordinary, quantitative conception of time, even though it may make use of quantitative time frames to structure and coordinate public life, and we may well ‘forget’ the interpretative work of time-reckoning that underpins and gives rise to these frameworks. Consequently, whilst Heidegger’s distinction between time-measuring and time-reckoning can serve as an initial basis for developing a qualitative approach to calendar time, this depends upon a *selective* appropriation which extracts the discussion of ‘time-measuring’, ‘time-reckoning’, ‘datability’ ‘spannedness’ and ‘significance’ from the wider project of *Being and Time*. The illuminating aspects of Heidegger’s analysis include his articulation of calendar time as pragmatically engaged in a world of meaningful Concern, and his demonstration that time-reckoning is distinct from, and irreducible to, time-measuring.

However, to develop a ‘deeper’, more adequate account of calendar time as a public time, we need to reject the reductive sociological content of Heidegger’s own analysis of everydayness, his dubious quest for an ‘originary’ temporality, and his hierarchical designation of different modes of living as more or less ‘authentic’.

### 3

#### **A DEEPENED ACCOUNT OF PUBLIC TIME:**

##### **COORDINATION AND DIVERSITY**

Moving away from reified notions of calendar time necessitates a qualitative approach, which seeks a complex and nuanced understanding of how calendar time works to coordinate and configure historical time. Heidegger’s distinction between time-measuring and time-reckoning, and his concepts of ‘datability’ ‘spannedness’, and ‘significance’, can provide the initial basis for such a qualitative conception. Firstly, he demonstrates that the temporality of calendar time is not reducible to the straightforward chronology of the timeline or calendrical grid, but rather, is rooted in the interconnectedness of ‘awaiting’, ‘making present’, ‘retaining’. Secondly, he shows that that calendar time is materially embedded and related to things or phenomena we are ‘concerned’ with, and is therefore interested and ‘significant’. Thirdly, he shows that calendar time is a social, public time, grounded in a ‘being-with’. However, whilst he underscores the fundamentally social and public character of calendar time, Heidegger in fact falls back on a ‘thin’ and reductive conception of public time, which undoes his insightful analysis of ‘time-reckoning’. Accordingly, we need to formulate a ‘deepened’ conception of public time, as a crucial aspect of our qualitative approach to calendar time (Leland 2001).

Considering the ‘publicness’ of calendar time requires the balancing of two equally important points. The first of these is the importance of standardisation as a coordinating mechanism, given that standardising temporal reference is an integral component of social life. ‘Time could not be a major parameter of the social world if it could not be related to in a

standard way which is shared by a collectivity' (Zerubavel 1982:85). History as a public discourse requires standardised time frames, in order for historical materials and narratives to be accessible and sharable. Dating frameworks enable us to follow and 'map' traces of the past, and to share and coordinate diverse narratives, by providing common temporal references. The problem, therefore, is not with standardness *per se*, because the creation of temporal reference points and frameworks is an important means of attaining temporal coordination. The problem, rather, emerges when common, standard temporal reference frameworks become reified, or are presumed to have the same meaning or value for every individual or group whose lives are affected by them. Whilst people share public or standard time measures as an integral component of social life, they often attribute completely different meanings to these measures, or indeed, discern a 'lack of fit' between their own experience of a particular time span and its public measure (Hutchings 2008:5; Weiss 2011:171). The second key point, then, alongside the importance of coordination, is the inevitability of social diversity, which means that no two people ever experience or 'live time' in the same way, including public time (Weiss 2011:171-2).

As we have seen, Heidegger's 'thin' conception of public time takes for granted that public time-frames and measuring devices are encountered and lived in the same way by everyone. Indeed, this thin conception of public time is informed by Heidegger's thin conception of the 'public' more generally as a 'uniform mass', which rules out any detailed consideration of significant differences between individuals within a public, and obscures the way in which groups can be differently situated within a given social and cultural realm (Leland 2001:112)<sup>108</sup>. This 'thin' understanding of publicness therefore precludes any

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<sup>108</sup> This interpretation of Heidegger's notion of *Mitsein* and publicness, it must be noted, is contested within Heidegger scholarship. Charles Guignon, for example, claims that the concepts of 'authenticity' and 'inauthenticity' refer to the ways in which one takes up one's cultural heritage, and thus that 'authenticity' is not an individualistic conception in Heidegger's work. 'Authentic Dasein', he writes, 'remembers' its rootedness in the wider unfolding of its culture and shared history (Guignon 1993). Yet, whilst there is some textual support for this reading, much of Heidegger's own language and assertions in *Being and Time* contradicts the picture that Guignon paints. For example, he clearly states that 'the Self of the everyday Dasein is the they-self, which we distinguish from the authentic Self... As *they-self*, the particular Dasein has been dispersed into the 'they', and must first find itself



consideration of how public time serves different interests, and how it impacts differently according to specific social positions and situations. What is required, then, is an alternative, ‘deepened’ conception of the ‘public’ upon which to base a conception of ‘public time’: a conception which can register the importance of standardised public reference frameworks in terms of enabling shared communication, but which can also register that these frameworks do not have the same meaning or effects for everyone.

To this end, I suggest, we can fruitfully draw upon Hannah Arendt’s pluralistic conception of the public, which manages to balance the importance of public institutions, frameworks and structures, with a recognition of the inevitable diversity amongst those who constitute a public. This is articulated, for example, in her account of the ‘public’ in *The Human Condition* (1998). On the one hand, Arendt’s account here affirms the profound importance of the public realm, which ‘gathers us together’ and relates us to one another. The term ‘public’, she explains, means that ‘everything that appears in public can be seen and heard by everybody’, and the presence of others who see what we see and hear what we hear assures us of the reality of our world (Arendt 1998:50). As such, the public can be construed as ‘the common world’ itself, as constructed through human activity and conceptual frameworks, and is distinguished from ‘our privately owned place in it’ (ibid: 52). Yet, whilst affirming the value and necessity of the public, here and throughout her work Arendt expresses a keen awareness of the dangers inherent in conceiving of the common world as a ‘mass society’ and presuming a “‘common nature’ of all men who constitute it’ (ibid: 57). She therefore places a vehement emphasis on the fundamental *plurality* of the public realm, or common world:

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(Heidegger 2009:167). As a *re-interpretation* of the concept of *Mitsein*, Guignon’s account is more convincing.

‘The reality of the public realm relies on the simultaneous presence of innumerable aspects and perspectives in which the common world presents itself... For though the common world is the common meeting ground of all, those who are present have different locations in it, and the location of one can no more coincide with the location of another than the location of two objects. Being seen and being heard by others derive their significance from the fact that everybody sees and hears from a different position’ (ibid. 57).

For Arendt, then, the common world is fundamentally dependent upon plurality, as without a plurality of perspectives, the diversity of this common world could never ‘appear’ and be shared. As such, the first key lesson to be learnt from Arendt is the need to affirm and protect the heterogeneity of communities and societies. Attempts to overcome that plurality and multiplicity, Arendt warns, must result in ‘the abolition of the public realm itself’ (Honig 1998:114). The second key lesson is the importance of cultivating spontaneity, imagination, openness, and creativity within public political life (ibid: 103). This emerges from Arendt’s ‘agonistic’ conception of politics, which again, depends upon a plurality of perspectives and voices within a common public context. The example of a truly ‘political’ public realm that Arendt repeatedly returns to throughout her work is that of the Ancient Greek *polis*. Arendt’s writings on the *polis* envisage public, political space not only as a competitive space in which ‘moral and political greatness, heroism and preeminence are revealed, displayed and shared with others’, but more fundamentally, as a ‘space of exposure’, where different subjects offer themselves up to others, exposing their uniqueness yet also their dependence upon the others with whom they communicate (Benhabib 1998:69; Cavarero 1997). Though Arendt has been criticised for what has been interpreted as her nostalgic lionisation of Greek political culture (and moreover for her insistence on a public/private dualism<sup>109</sup>), many feminist theorists of

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<sup>109</sup> In fact, however, Bonnie Honig argues that the Arendtian emphasis on resistability, openness, creativity and incompleteness—the ‘*sine qua non* of Arendt’s politics’—means reading Arendt against Arendt and resisting any *a priori* determination of a public/private distinction (Honig 1998).

the public have used her pluralistic, ‘agonistic’ conception of public, political life as a way of contesting liberal or cosmopolitan ideals of universality and neutrality, and emphasising instead the uniqueness of different public subjects, and the open-ended, ‘contestatory and power-laden’ dimension of the public (Fraser 1990; Benhabib 1998).<sup>110</sup> In this sense, Arendt enables publicness to ‘navigate through wider and wilder territory’ than usual within political theory (Ryan 1998:8).

Arendt’s conception of public life thereby offers a way of registering the importance of the public or common world in ‘gathering us together’, whilst at the same time affirming the inevitability and value of plurality. Although Arendt is all too aware that public life can so easily collapse into a ‘dictatorship of the ‘they’’, her solution is not to follow Heidegger and seek a more ‘authentic’ way of life for the individual. Instead, she seeks to develop a more adequate conception of public life itself: a conception of publicness without concomitant presumptions about uniformity, universality or neutrality, which is rooted in the value and necessity of plural perspectives and positions. This is one reason her work has been of such inspiration to many feminist political theorists of the public. Whilst feminists have been sharply critical of models of the public sphere premised upon ideals of universality or neutrality, feminism nevertheless implicitly *values* publicness, in the sense that publicity enables critical communication, collective practices, the sharing of time, and the linking of ideas. A crucial task for feminist political theory is therefore not to simply critique or abandon the ideal of publicness, but rather, to *reconstruct* a notion of the public which does not

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<sup>110</sup> Seyla Benhabib, for example, argues that Arendt’s agonistic’ conception of the public offers an alternative to the liberal model of publicness, which is premised upon certain kinds of conversational constraints, with the fundamental constraint being *neutrality* (Benhabib 1998; see also Barber 1988:151). She further contends that it offers an alternative to Habermas’ Kantian cosmopolitanism. Whilst Habermas moves away from the liberal criteria of *neutrality* towards the criteria represented by the idea of a ‘practical discourse’, feminist theorists have seriously challenged the presuppositions of Habermas’ abstract, universal, rationalistic model of the public sphere. Nancy Fraser, for example, challenges the occlusion of nonliberal, non-bourgeois and competing public spheres within Habermas’ historical sketch of the rise of the public sphere, (Habermas 1989), which means that he overlooks the ways in which counter-publics have always contested the exclusionary norms of the bourgeois public sphere. Ultimately, then, he ends up idealising the Enlightenment ideal of a unified, single public sphere, at the expense of a ‘multiplicity of publics’ (Fraser 1990; see also Young 1987).

‘masquerade’ behind universality and neutrality, but rather can take differences and diversity into account (Landes 1998:143; Young 1987; Fraser 1990)<sup>111</sup>.

Accordingly, I propose that Arendt’s pluralistic conception of the public can be redeployed as we seek to develop a ‘deepened’ account of public time: an account that is not premised upon assumptions about neutrality, universality and uniformity, but rather, upon the desire for temporal coordination and time-sharing within and across diversity. It must be acknowledged that Arendt’s theorisation of the public and the political categorically privileges the spatial over the temporal, as she posits the concept of public or ‘political *space*’ as a means of defending and protecting the distinctiveness and particularity of specific fields of political discourse and activity, against the generalised understanding of a universal, ‘infinite’ historical time. Yet, in fact, we can find nascent ‘seeds’ for developing a deepened, qualitative account of calendar time in Arendt’s writings. In her essay on the ‘Concept of History’, for instance, Arendt is highly critical of the emphasis upon quantitative ‘time-sequence’, and the ‘modern computation of historical dates’, which presents the adoption of a uniform dating system centered around the ‘CE’ marker as a ‘mere technical improvement’ to facilitate the ‘exact fixing of dates... without referring to a maze of different time-reckonings’ (Arendt 2006:65-7). She regards this adoption of a neutralised, uniform dating system as deeply complicit in the rise of a reified sense of a general historical time or ‘process’ in which the singularity of specific phenomena, and the uniqueness of different perspectives and experiences, are lost within universalising frameworks and grand historical narratives (ibid).<sup>112</sup> What looks like a ‘Christianization of world history’, she argues, is in fact the establishment of a homogenising time-framework that eliminates or subsumes all religious

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<sup>111</sup> For further feminist readings of Arendt, see *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt* (ed. Honig 1995).

<sup>112</sup> This forms part of her wider argument concerning the reifying imbrication of the ‘social’ and the ‘natural’ within modern social and political science, such that social and historical sciences become conflated with the natural sciences which leads to totalising efforts to ‘manage’ human relations through ‘treating man as an entirely natural being whose life processes can be handled the same way as all other processes’ (2006: 59).

and qualitative time-concepts and temporalities within its all-encompassing reach, or ‘twofold extension toward infinity’ (ibid: 68; 81).

Thus, whilst Arendt’s primary solution is to reclaim the *spatial* as a means of restoring the ‘political’, her strong critique of reified conceptions of calendrical, homogenous historical time does offer critical tools for developing a qualitative notion of calendar time that can register its constructed character. Moreover, Arendt’s pluralistic conception of the ‘public’ can give rise to a different orientation towards, and deepened account of, public time. The pluralistic conception of publicness helps us to explain and affirm the significance and value of public dating frameworks in enabling the sharing, co-creation, and ‘exposure’ of historical experiences and narratives; yet it also requires an acute attentiveness to the variety of meanings and values that temporal reference frameworks can carry, and to the complex social and political dynamics that attend their operation.

#### 4

### **STICKY SIGNS, HOT AND COLD CHRONOLOGIES, ANACHRONISMS, AND SPECIFICITY**

Calendar time plays an important historiographical role as a temporal coordinator and connector. Dating frameworks arise through the process of ‘reckoning’ time within shared situations, and make it possible for ‘mnemonic communities’ to correlate pasts, presents and futures (Zerubavel 1997:101). Yet, as ‘deepened’ accounts of publicness and public time indicate, reckoning time is not a smooth or even process, and public temporal reference frameworks do not have the same value or significance for all in their orbit. Feminist historiography therefore requires a qualitative approach and a critical reflexivity when it comes to the dating frameworks and timelines through which we organise and construct feminist histories. This final section will extrapolate from the theorisation of time-reckoning and public time above to consider how a qualitative approach might influence the way that feminist historians and theorists use dating frameworks and configure feminist timelines.

First of all, taking a qualitative approach means regarding the practice of dating and periodising as not simply a *descriptive* practice, but further, as an interpretative, *normative* practice. The choice of significant dates to serve as beginnings, turning points, or cut off points, is always selective and interested, motivated by a specific interpretation of the conditions and events being marked out. The dates and periodisations which we employ are not a neutral backdrop to our historical narratives, rather, they are deeply embroiled and complicit in securing them. We thus need to enquire into the normative status, and associative dimensions that specific dates and bounded ‘periods’ have, and ask ‘what could explain the choosing of a date or a date period’, as well as what it could explain (Chandler 1998: 32-3). To argue that demarcating periods and timelines is an interpretative, normative practice is not to diminish or dismiss the work that calendar time does in anchoring historical happenings and ideas within the contexts in which they occur, thereby aiding efforts to understand the specific socio-economic and cultural conditions of their emergence (Fraser 2008:106-8). However, the defence that calendrical periodisation marks out an ‘objective’ context or situation is extremely problematic if unaccompanied by a reflexivity around the temporal framing of the context or situation that demands to be reckoned with. Temporal framing is never a neutrally ‘descriptive’ act, because the way we frame an object makes us read the object differently (Chandler 1998:77). Moreover, a date itself can carry specific resonances and value-laden associations.

Building on Heidegger’s point about the ‘significance’ of dating, I therefore suggest that dates can be understood not only as ‘material anchors’, which locate an event or text within the conditions of its occurrence, but also, borrowing from Sara Ahmed, as ‘sticky signs’. Ahmed describes ‘sticky signs’ in terms of the resonances and affective value they accumulate through repeated associations (Ahmed 2004b:90-1). ‘The sign’, she explains, becomes a ‘sticky sign as an effect of a history of articulation, which allows the sign to accumulate value’ (ibid: 92). A paradigmatic example of a ‘sticky’ date, for example, would be ‘1968’, which carries a plethora of affects and associations, ‘standing for a moment of genuine revolution and inspiration as much as standing for a moment of ‘undercooked’

idealism and failure' (Berlant 1995:300-1). '1968' therefore functions as both a material anchor and a sticky sign. A text dated 'Paris 1968' anchors it in its specific conditions of production, in a time and place. But the date-sign '1968', *in itself* carries associations, resonances and affects. Thus, the date assigned to an event or a text does *more* than simply contextualise it, or 'insert it within a state of affairs' (Lampert 2006). The date-sign carries a value, which will guide and shape historical inquiry. '1968', 'the 1970s', or 'the twenty first century' conjure different associations, according not only to geographical location, but further, to particular histories of articulation and repetition, and to one's distinct social and cultural location. Indeed, certain signs become so sticky that it becomes difficult to determine what makes something sticky in the first place, because 'stickiness involves such a chain of effects' (Ahmed 2004b:91).

Ahmed's notion of 'sticky signs' thereby helps to demonstrate that the date is not an indifferent instant or a neutral sign. This is not to say, however, that date-signs are value-laden or 'sticky' in the same way for all interpretative communities. '1968' might have little significance in certain contexts and thus as a temporal reference point it is not always effective or particularly meaningful. Lévi-Strauss' conception of 'hot' and 'cold' chronologies offers a useful way of considering this:

'We use a large number of dates to code some periods of history; and fewer for others. This variable quantity of dates applied to periods of equal duration becomes a gauge of what might be called the pressure of history: there are 'hot chronologies' which are those of periods where in the eyes of the historian numerous events appear as differential elements; others, on the contrary, where for him (although not of course for the men who lived through them) very little or nothing took place' (Lévi-Strauss 1962: 259)<sup>113</sup>.

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<sup>113</sup> To clarify, whilst this notion of 'hot' and 'cold chronologies' is helpful, I do not accede to Lévi-Strauss' structuralist approach to history and historical time more generally, for reasons outlined in Chapters 2 and 3.

To illustrate, the usual ‘hot chronologies’ within hegemonic accounts of western feminism periodise the ‘boom times’ of the ‘second wave’ as occurring from the mid-1960s until the late 1970s, with the 1980s being treated as a period of decline and backlash (Faludi 1992). Yet, Becky Thompson argues that retelling the story of ‘second wave’ US feminism from the vantage point of multiracial feminism compels us to rethink some of the usual periodisations of western feminism. ‘The 1982 defeat of the ERA’, she contends, ‘did not signal a period of abeyance for multiracial feminism. In fact it flourished during the 1980s, despite the country’s turn to the right’ (Thompson 2010:48). From this perspective, the 1980s is not such a ‘cold chronology’ after all. Marisela Chávez similarly throws the usual feminist timelines off-kilter, by retelling the story of US feminism in the twentieth-century from the Chicana perspective, citing the 1940s and 1950s, (usually regarded as fallow feminist periods), as particularly ‘hot chronologies’ for Chicana women’s activism (Chávez 2010:8). Unsettling feminism’s ‘great hegemonic model’ therefore requires us to reconsider what have been presumed to be the ‘hot’ and ‘cold’ chronologies of feminism, and generate alternative and multiple timelines.

In this respect, it is helpful to delve deeper into the complex temporality of the date, as a way of enabling not only a critical reflexivity around the normative practice of dating, but further, a more constructive and strategic use of dates and periodisations. The temporal logics of the dated timeline, I have argued, are more complex than simple chronology, as dates can have temporal resonances and logics that exceed, and can even contradict, their position on a chronological, calendrical timeline. Consider how, for instance, ‘1970s’ feminism is frequently coded within feminist discourse as ‘out-of-date’, with texts such as Kate Millet’s *Sexual Politics* or Shulamith Firestone’s *Dialectic of Sex*—both published in 1970—being dismissed without necessarily being read. Yet, at the same time, a text whose publication date comes *before* these feminist texts, such as Gilles Deleuze’s *Difference and Repetition*—published in 1968—is so often coded as cutting-edge and ‘contemporary’.

This example shows how anachronistic logic can work *against* feminism, when the temporality of feminism *itself* is value-coded as anachronistic, outdated and outmoded,



behind ‘the times’. Yet, the example also highlights the potential of the date to disrupt the dominant timelines and their coding, particularly when we consider the ‘shock value’ that can attend the citing of a date. In this example, the fact that ‘1970’ comes *after* ‘1968’ works to jolt and disturb the usual narratives about ‘contemporary’ poststructuralist theory coming along *after* supposedly ‘outdated’ feminists like Millett or Firestone. As another example: “women’s suffrage rights were only granted in Switzerland in 1973” is frequently cited as a ‘shock’ statement, because it disturbs the usual paradigm of ‘first the West, then the rest’. On one level, this is problematic because it is presumed that the response *will* be one of surprise (i.e. that we all *do* think that the West is ‘ahead’ of the rest, hence the ‘*only*’). But it does illustrate the potentially subversive purposes to which dating can be put, when dates are used to *disorient*, to engender surprise and initiate a thinking-again.

Using dates to emphasise incongruities and contradictions can therefore help to disrupt dominant feminist periodisations and timelines, and can be used as a catalyst for replotting and reframing. Finally, in addition to the ‘shock’ factor, dating can also be used to challenge the *reductionism* that attends periodisation, by moving to smaller-scale, more specific markers such as the year, rather than larger-scale levels of the decade or the century. In the field of Literary Criticism, for example, the choice of a particular year to set the level of specificity is a fairly common tactic in response to the problems of generalisation and reductionism that attend the practice of grand-scale periodisation<sup>114</sup>. Following this annualising model, and choosing a particular year as a calendrical coordinator, I suggest, could help feminists achieve greater levels of specificity, and highlight the diversity of coexisting practices and events occurring within a very specific time frame.

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<sup>114</sup> Some influential examples of the ‘annualised’ model of periodisation include essays which emerged from a series of conferences held at the University of Essex on the ‘Sociology of Literature’, each devoted to different dates (see Barker *et al* 1986).

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has outlined a qualitative approach to calendar time, which does not take calendar time at face value as a neutral or straightforwardly chronological, 'linear' time. Drawing on sociological and anthropological studies, and also upon Heidegger's distinction between 'time-measuring' and 'time-reckoning', I stressed that measuring frameworks emerge as an outcome of qualitative, materially-situated processes of collective time-reckoning. Once we register that the quantitative, dated grid is the outcome of a more complex process of time-reckoning, we see that calendar time is in fact just as 'significant' and indeed, as temporally complex as other fields or aspects of historical time. The qualitative conception of calendar time opened up by Heidegger can also be enhanced by a 'deepened', pluralistic account of public time, which recognises its value in enabling temporal and historical coordination, whilst also recognising that dating frameworks and timelines are diverse in their meanings and effects. This implies that our use of dates and timelines requires as much reflexivity as does our use of language. Moreover, in uncovering the more complex temporal dynamics 'underpinning' calendar time, the qualitative approach opens up some potentially creative and constructive ways of using calendar time to coordinate and re-map feminist histories.

Above all, however, foregrounding the process of 'time-reckoning' requires an acknowledgement that calendar time emerges as just *one way* of 'reckoning' and coordinating historical time. Many temporalities and time-measurement frameworks are simply not convertible into generalised calendar time units. Indeed, as Michelle Bastian argues, one of the most crucial tasks for theorists of time and temporality is to displace the idea that quantitative 'linear time' is the only means of attaining temporal coordination and belonging (Bastian 2011). To take a qualitative approach, then, is to recognise the multiplicity of temporal reference frameworks and temporal orders, which may overlap and entangle with dated grids and calendrical orders, but cannot be subsumed by them. One such temporal order is that of 'generational time', explored in the next chapter, where we will see that although

generational or genealogical temporalities can be mapped against a timeline, they are far more complex than the quantitative demarcation of 'generations' according to dated parameters.

## CHAPTER 5

### Generational Time

#### INTRODUCTION

This chapter will explore ‘*generational time*’: the time that connects feminists of different eras and ages through generational and matrilineal temporal orders. The generational paradigm is frequently treated with suspicion within feminist theory. This is due to its association with unilinear and unidirectional notions of historical time, as the idea of a generational succession conjures images of feminism being ‘passed on’ or ‘handed down’ from one generation to the next. The generational paradigm is also criticised for its association with patriarchal, authoritarian models of tradition, structured around the tropes and logics of patrimonial endowment and debt, patrilineal succession, and Oedipal rivalry and rebellion. From this perspective, depicting feminist histories in terms of generational or matrilineal legacy and inheritance is just patriarchy with an ‘M’.

Female-to-female inheritance, it is true, has always been problematic within patriarchal societies and cultures in which ‘the legacy passed from male to male is understood as natural and of central importance’ (Spencer 2004:10). Yet, whilst linear and patriarchal determinations of generational time may well be dominant, this does not mean that they are the only determinations that exist or are possible. Indeed, to dismiss generational paradigms as *wholly* ‘linear’ or ‘patriarchal’ is to miss the multiple meanings and temporalities that they can express and enact within feminist discourse and practice, thereby allowing patriarchal and linear frameworks and symbolics to overdetermine our analysis. The aim of this chapter, therefore, is to argue for a more nuanced approach to generational time, and to demonstrate that generational and matrilineal orders can be temporalised in various ways, according to specific contexts and historical trajectories.

Section 1 begins the chapter with a critical analysis of the dominant paradigms of generational time, focusing particularly on the arguments put forward by feminist theorist Judith Roof that the generational paradigm is irredeemably linear and patriarchal (1995; 1997). Whilst Roof provokes a necessary scrutiny and de-naturalisation of the ‘generations’ concept, the claim that generational paradigms, in all their variation, are *irredeemably* or inevitably linear and patriarchal is an insupportable generalisation. Accordingly, I propose a broader approach, which focuses on the temporal ambiguities within the concept of ‘generations’, and the variety of significations it can carry within different contexts. To consider how feminist generations and genealogies can be temporalised and practiced in nonlinear, non-authoritarian ways, section 2 turns to the work of Luce Irigaray on female genealogies (1993a; 1993b; 1993c; 1996). Irigaray’s intention is to rethink ‘woman-to-woman sociality’ in ways which subvert the stronghold that patriarchal/Oedipal models have over intergenerational relationships, symbolism and imagery, and her psychoanalytic interventions and mythic re-imaginings offer a promising route out of linear generationalism. However, this promise is underdeveloped in her work, due to her uniform treatment of ‘western history’, the ‘symbolic order’, and the ‘cultural imaginary’, which ultimately accords too much weight to mainstream models.

In light of the shortcomings of the Irigarayan approach, section 3 takes inspiration from ‘postkinship studies’ in anthropology instead, and shifts towards thinking in terms of not *one*, but *many* ‘symbolic orders’ and ‘cultural imaginaries’, as a way of opening up a much more heterogeneous and nuanced approach to ‘generational time’ within feminist historiography. The section draws particularly on the work of Hortense Spillers (1987) and Madhu Dubey (1995) on matrilineal metaphors in the African American context, to consider how tracing different histories and symbolic orders opens up different generational imaginaries and relational practices. It concludes by suggesting that Dubey’s hermeneutic of ‘repetition with variation’ offers a promising way of interpreting and engaging with generational time, as it can attend to the complex interplay between continuity and discontinuity within the process of history-making and tradition-building.

1**GENERATIONAL ANXIETIES**

Generational paradigms have become increasingly prevalent within narratives of feminist history over the past forty years, as tracing feminist genealogies has itself become an orderly and continuous historical tradition (Scott 1996:1).<sup>115</sup> Feminists have constructed generational histories and continuities not only to build intellectual and emotional connections between women of different ages and eras, but also to counter the persistent ‘erasure of women’s political and historical past, which makes each new generation of feminists appear as an abnormal excrescence on the face of time’ (Rich 1995:9-10). Yet, whilst the intention of such generational and matrilineal symbolism is to build constructive connections between feminists across time, feminists have become increasingly concerned that these paradigms are in fact having divisive effects.

Criticisms of the generational paradigm tend to focus upon the related tropes of anxiety and conflict. In the first instance, envisaging feminism as a singular journey, whereby each generation builds on the gains of the previous, can lead to anxieties over one’s own contribution and an unease about contingency. Judith Roof describes this as the ‘parent’s angst’, premised upon the ‘fear of a barren history’, i.e. a fear that the next ‘generation’ will refuse to follow in the footsteps of their foremothers and continue in the projected direction, or will ‘[reject] their mother’s model entirely and [commence] a new and different battle’ (Roof 1997:70). Such ‘parental’ anxiety is not unfounded, as the model of linear generational succession can indeed provoke a desire in younger feminists to break out of the chain, negate older feminisms, and begin anew, as they experience the burden of legacy in negative terms

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<sup>115</sup> The idea of feminist generations became particularly entrenched through influential feminist texts in the 1970s such as Firestone’s *Dialectic of Sex* (1971) and Kate Millett’s *Sexual Politics* (1970), both of which begin by offering an account of feminist history reaching back at least one century. Roof also gives the example of Alice Rossi’s *The Feminist Papers* (1973) —‘fully devoted to the project of describing a feminist history’—and Jane Rule’s *Lesbian Images* (1975) - ‘primarily about foremothers’ (Roof 1999:70).

(Henry 2004; Looser 1999). The matrix of generational legacy and precedent can thus instill a sense of generational anxiety among both older and younger feminists, giving rise to a conception of feminist history as a struggle between competing generations (Roof 1997:69-70; Howie 2010b:4). This is not to say that without generational paradigms, feminism would be an entirely harmonious field. The point, rather, is that symbolic familial or mother-daughter tropes have exacerbated tensions, and can prevent feminists from exploring the complex intellectual reasons for conflicts within fields of feminist praxis and discourse, and from looking to larger institutional and cultural forces that 'perpetuate sexism, foster rivalry and undervalue women's work' (Roof 1997:85).

The critical 'generations' debate within recent feminist theory has been crucial in highlighting the problematic effects that generational and matrilineal paradigms can have upon how feminist discourse is conducted and perceived. Moreover, the debate has provoked a penetrating theoretical investigation into the very concept of 'generations' itself. For some, such as Roof, the concept of historical generations is inextricably linked to patriarchal, traditionalist models of history and linear models of historical time, which means that feminists must abandon generational and matrilineal paradigms altogether. In an influential essay on 'Generational Difficulties' (1997), Roof argues that the concept of generations is intrinsically connected to familial structures and images, which tend towards 'Oedipal' modes of relating and communicating. Although the central theme of the Oedipal drama is the father-son relationship, in more general terms it depicts intergenerational relationships through the lens of rivalry, prohibition, frustration, repression, deferral, rebellion, and entitlement. Roof's claim is that the familial paradigm of 'feminist generations' inevitably imports the 'full force of Oedipal rivalry, recrimination, and debt' into relations between feminists, which means that tensions and conflicts between feminists are over-interpreted in terms of unavoidable tension between 'overbearing mothers' or 'undutiful daughters' (1997:71). Even when the familial symbolism is not apparent, she contends, the concept of generations is implicitly dependent upon a biologicistic 'reproductive logic' of historical change, which presumes that 'the past produces the future as parents produce children'. This

reproductive logic is made most explicit in cases where the mother-daughter metaphor is in use, because it literally takes us to reproduction as the site of historical change (ibid).

As well as being wedded to a reproductive logic and an Oedipal familial model, claims Roof, the concept of 'generations' instils an onerous concept of legacy, because it is bound up in 'the metaphor of the patriarchal family in the throes of its illusory battle with mortality' (ibid: 86). Propagating generational paradigms, she states, is a way of staking a claim in history, making one's mark and ensuring one's contribution is not forgotten, trying to direct the future to fulfill the goals and dreams of the past (ibid: 75). From this perspective, the generational trope functions as a totemic guarantee of historical continuity, representing a patrilineal figure of control 'that prevents unruly 'Others' escaping the law of legacy and debt' (ibid). As such, the establishment of a generational order 'connotes a certain fear about a failure of cohesion, the dissolution of heritage, and the loss or defection of heirs that might dispel the myths of impossible continuity' (ibid: 85). Generational logic, according to Roof, also imports patrimonial understandings of exchange, based upon ideologies of property and ownership, whereby ideas and practices are regarded as property that is not shared but 'handed down' and endowed on the next generation (ibid:75)

Consequently, Roof argues, the concept of 'generations' both presumes and reinforces a unilinear, unidirectional understanding of historical time, which in turn fosters hierarchical, patriarchal models of communication and relationality. She concludes, therefore, that if we challenge 'the very notions of time and history that ground these ideas, *generation* becomes an insignificant term in the creation, re-creation, sharing and proliferation of feminist knowledges' (ibid: 86). Her argument, however, warrants closer scrutiny. Is the concept of 'generations' necessarily bound up in a reductive biologicistic 'reproductive' understanding of historical change? Is familial symbolism necessarily 'Oedipal' or patriarchal? Is there only one generational temporality?

One of the most useful aspects of Roof's critique is its provocation of a thorough de-naturalisation of 'generations' as a historiographical concept. In some respects, 'generations' is of course bound up in 'reproductive' systems, given that the idea of generations refers, in



its most basic sense, to several 'brute facts' about human biology and the life of the species: birth, aging and death. There is reproduction: parents produce children, and those children produce children and so on. And this process is indeed unidirectional in the sense that my children cannot give birth to me. However, whilst it connects the idea of history to the 'life of the species', the concept of 'generations' does not belong to the biological as a given. It is a sociocultural formulation, or a 'sociological projection', of the biological process of reproduction (Ricoeur 1988:109). As such, Roof is right to contend that there is nothing inevitable about interpreting or organising historical change around the concept of 'generations' or a generational succession, as there are various ways we could conceptualise the processes of birth, ageing and death at a cultural level.

Yet, whilst de-naturalisation underscores the contestability and contingency of 'generations' as a cultural, discursive concept, Roof's claim that it is inherently wedded to a patriarchal, linear model of historical time is more problematic. Indeed, a deeper analysis of 'generations' at a cultural and conceptual level entreats us to explore its *variety* of significations and its ambiguities. On the one hand, it is certainly possible to argue that the concept of generations has propped up a traditionalist linear ideal of history. According to the traditionalist model, the 'continuity' of species reproduction is supposedly reflected within community and kinship structures, as 'generations' provide the conduit for transmission of the past and thus the straight line of history from past to present to future (Osborne 1996:127). Yet, to focus solely on these aspects of linear continuity is to overlook the fact that the concept of 'generations' implicitly carries both *continuity* and *discontinuity* as core components of its meaning. Relations between overlapping 'generations' *can* be the medium of historical continuity, but also of rupture and discontinuity, due to the disruptive potential of demarcating a new 'generation' and the fact that 'new generations' do not always do what they are told or are expected to do, as Roof herself observes (*ibid*: 135). In this sense, I suggest there is a fundamental *ambiguity* at the core of generational time, as its temporalisation depends upon the dynamic interplay between continuity and discontinuity, as generational links and/or ruptures can be enacted and emphasised to varying extents, within

different situations. My initial proposal, therefore, is that taking a broader, more extensive perspective on the 'generations' concept will enable us to explore this temporal ambiguity in greater depth.

In its broadest sense, generational time can be conceived as a created time that mediates between the realms of people living before, during and beyond one's own lifetime. In this sense, it makes possible the lived experience of receiving and forming historical memories and anticipating or imagining future historical time (Ricoeur 1988:112-4; Stiegler 2010). For example, the idea of 'predecessors' instils a sense of connection to earlier lives and times and transmitted memories, whilst the idea of 'successors' stretches out futural horizons, denoting those likely to outlive us and the anonymous 'future generation' who have not yet been born (Ricoeur 1988:112-4). Once again, it is helpful to draw a distinction between a quantitative approach and a qualitative approach. The quantitative approach to 'generations' charts cycles of birth, aging and death, calculating average intervals of procreation and life-spans to construct a generational model in purely quantitative terms. But to grasp the meaning of symbolic generational orders we must ask qualitative questions about the social dynamics of constituting a diverse group of people as a distinct 'generation', interconnecting 'generations' with one another, and endowing this process with cultural values and meaning (Mannheim 1952; Ricoeur 1988:110-111). This qualitative approach guards against the reductive presumption that all those who belong to a 'generation' of people born within the same dated parameters share a distinct, cohesive perspective or experience, or animate a 'generational *geist*' (Heller 1997:209). Moreover, it enables us to focus on the *diachronic* aspect of the 'generations' concept and the function of generational time as a relational time that enables connections between lives through or across time and a 'large-scale' temporal imaginary. Indeed, the etymology of 'diachrony'—meaning 'through' or 'between' time—supports the idea that diachronic relations are not a one-way or mono-causal process, but rather, more of a two-way, dialogic process back and forth through time and between people.

If generational time is understood in this broad sense as a fundamentally *relational*, connective time, it follows that its temporalisation depends upon certain ways of relating and making connections. In other words, the extent to which we emphasise or enact ‘generational’ continuities or discontinuities is dependent upon the way we relate and communicate with one another, which in turn, will depend upon specific contexts and historical trajectories. The same goes for matrilineal paradigms, which are invested with multiple meanings and connotations, have different modes of symbolic expression within different societies and communities, and can be played out and temporalised in various ways.<sup>116</sup> Patriarchal and Oedipal models may well dominate cultural and social understandings of familial structure and relationships, yet it is too much of a generalisation to equate any kind of familial or matrilineal symbolism with patriarchal relational models and Oedipality.

Rather than abandoning all generational or matrilineal thinking at the outset, then, the rest of the chapter will seek to explore further the temporal ambiguity of generational time, and consider the variety of ways that generational or genealogical time can be configured and understood. It is necessary to be critically aware of the potentially problematic effects of generational rhetoric and symbolism, to interrogate our assumptions around, and reliance upon, generational paradigms and anxieties. Yet, if we take a broader and more nuanced perspective, we see that historical change need not be linked to ‘generations’ in its crudest quantitative sense, in terms of the division of history into thirty-year intervals (Mannheim 1952), nor need generational time be understood in terms of an Oedipal familial paradigm, or a unilinear order of succession. The crucial question then becomes how to think ‘generational time’ outside the dominant paradigms, and to cultivate a more productive and contextually attentive approach.

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<sup>116</sup> Indeed, generalising claims about ‘familial’ paradigms and their political value and meaning risk echoing the universalising claims made by some white American feminists such as Firestone and Millet, for example, that denounce ‘the family’ as the locus of women’s oppression, when the right to live together as a family comes with a very different history for African Americans than for white Americans (Carby 1999:51-2).

## 2

## OEDIPUS INTERRUPTED

The recent debates around feminist ‘generations’ have drawn vital critical attention to the divisive, anxiety-inducing effects that generational and matrilineal symbolism can have within feminism, and moreover, compel a thoroughgoing critical analysis of ‘generations’ and ‘generational time’ as cultural conceptions. A specific *kind* of generational paradigm is problematic, aligned to Oedipal models of relationality, and patriarchal, traditionalist, linear models of historical time. Yet, whilst the concept of generations *can* bolster patriarchal and linear models, it is not *necessarily* bound to them. As an initial means of reducing the influence of these dominant models, I have suggested that the notion of historical generations can be understood in its broadest sense as a conceptual or symbolic means of linking overlapping lives through time, which is open to various kinds of temporal configuration. Once we have opened out the field in this way, it becomes possible to consider a different kind of generational or genealogical order, outside of patriarchal, Oedipal and linear determinations.

To explore the possibility of a different generational dynamic between feminists, and hence, a different generational temporality, this section turns to the work of Luce Irigaray on female genealogies.<sup>117</sup> Irigaray, like Roof, is critical of the dissipation of debate among women into hierarchies of social power ‘tied to a prevalence of genealogical familial authority’ (Irigaray 1996:13-14). Yet unlike Roof, Irigaray stresses that the problem is with patriarchal monopolisation and colonisation of the genealogical, rather than with the concept of ‘genealogy’ or ‘generations’ *per se*. Indeed, she insists that female genealogies and a sense of ‘verticality’, or connection through time, are crucial components in building strong female

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<sup>117</sup> I want to acknowledge here the problem of conflating ‘female’ and ‘feminist’. Addressing the issue of ‘between-women sociality’ is a crucial dimension of the feminist project to rethink generational communication; yet, depicting the ‘receiver’ of feminist legacies as *de facto* female runs the risk of capitulating to the notion that feminism is a women-only affair that does not need to trouble or implicate men. As such, I move towards a broader approach to generational time towards the end of the chapter, advocating a hermeneutic of ‘repetition with variation’ which is non-gender specific.

identities and relations between women (Irigaray 1993a:94; see also Cornell 2002). As such, she seeks to subvert and challenge the dominance of patriarchal generational and genealogical models, through a series of psychoanalytic interventions, and performative engagements with mythic representations of female relations. This aspect of Irigaray's work, I suggest, is useful to feminist historiography in its affirmation and demonstration that it is possible to think outside patriarchal and linear determinations of generational and genealogical symbolics and imaginaries. Yet, towards the end of the section, I argue that Irigaray does not fulfill her own promise, due to her monolithic treatment of the 'western symbolic order' and 'cultural imaginary'.

## 2.1

### *Psychoanalytic Interventions*

In *Sexes and Genealogies* (1993b), Irigaray begins by painting a rather gloomy picture of female genealogies and 'woman-to-woman sociality'. Relations between women are stifled, even impossible, within patriarchal culture and society, she claims, because its kinship structures separate women from one another and subordinate them to male authority. In a culture structured upon patriliney and patrimony, women's own genealogy is severed and lost, as they are 'abducted from their ancestors', 'torn away' from their own mothers, and transplanted into the genealogy of male partners. 'It must be made apparent', she stresses, 'that we live in accordance with exclusively male genealogical systems... Patriarchal power is organised by submitting one genealogy to the other... Mother-daughter relations in patrilinear societies are subordinated to relations between men' (Irigaray 1993b:16). In *je, tu, nous* (1993c), Irigaray paints a similar picture, explaining that the Oedipal paradigm is the emblem and mechanism of this genealogical and reproductive order because of its division of genealogy into 'one or two family triangles, all sired by the male'. As the patriarchal family serves the interest of male power and property, the female is reduced to the realm of raw 'nature' and 'uncultured' reproduction (1993c:3).

For Irigaray, then, the ‘between-men culture’ of patriarchy can offer no suitable ways of symbolising and cultivating ‘between-women’ cultures, socialities and genealogies. From this perspective, the ‘political matricide’<sup>118</sup> that pits younger feminists against older feminists arises because there is no adequate cultural alternative to the patriarchal, hierarchical rules and meanings governing genealogical and inter-generational relations. That is, to conduct themselves in social life, women are forced to mimic patriarchal kinship patterns and relationships modelled on genealogical descent, Oedipal rivalry and debt. Women ape these patterns and paradigms, Irigaray contends, because ‘we lack values of our own’ (1993c:4). Despite painting this seemingly bleak picture of genealogical relations between women under patriarchy, however, Irigaray goes on to make an enticing claim, which is that ‘the Oedipal paradigm only seems like the only order possible because it refuses to regard itself as myth’ (1993b:23). Granted, the Oedipal myth is not simply a fantasy, but rather, can be seen as a ‘symptom’, in that it has a ‘symbolic logic that accounts for a real mode of functioning, a real structure of relations’ (Felman 1987:151). Nevertheless, Irigaray’s claim here dramatises the vital idea that whilst Oedipal modes may well have dominated familial and generational relationships under patriarchal conditions, their symbolic logic and mythic manifestations can, in principle, be interrupted and unsettled.

Irigaray’s work undertakes such interruptions in two key ways. The first is through a psychoanalytic intervention. One of her guiding ideas is that if social relations between women are to improve, we must look at psychic determinations of the social, rather than taking a purely socioeconomic perspective<sup>119</sup>. In fact, for Irigaray, feminism has ‘failed’ precisely because it has failed to adequately investigate and unravel the symbolic structures, imaginary identifications and psychic attachments that underpin social organisation

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<sup>118</sup> Madeline Detloff attributes the term ‘political matricide’ to Louise Bernikow (Detloff 1997).

<sup>119</sup> Friedrich Engels, for example, argues that patriarchal kinship systems are determined solely by economic shifts and the introduction of private property, and therefore that patriarchal cultural norms and genealogical systems based on patrimony and patriliney are an effect of this economic organisation (Engels 2010).

(1993b:10-11). From Irigaray's psychoanalytically-oriented perspective, then, if intergenerational relations between feminists are manifesting Oedipal tendencies, we can read this as symptomatic of a deeper problem of women's relationship to 'the symbolic': i.e. the set of linguistic, sociocultural rules and norms that order, support and regulate our sense of reality and cultural intelligibility, including gendered relations and kinship structures. 'How can we govern the world as women if we have not defined our identity, the rules governing our genealogical relations, our social, linguistic, cultural order?' (1993c:51). Women's repositioning of themselves as socio-symbolic subjects, Irigaray argues, must first take place by questioning our symbolic and imaginary relation to the mother. This, above all, requires us to challenge the psychoanalytic idea, as entrenched by both Freud and Lacan, that entry into the 'symbolic' order of language and culture depends upon the paternal intervention and thus the exclusion and 'forgetting' of the maternal.

In Lacan's account, the mother and child initially exist in a relation of fusion and undifferentiation, a state which needs to be broken up by the 'Paternal Metaphor' and the 'Law of the Father' if the child is to enter into the cultural order, to represent and conduct themselves through language, and thus to become an individuated, encultured subject to themselves and others.<sup>120</sup> Lacan, it must be registered, insists that it is the father's *name* or 'paternal metaphor' that is the fundamental 'support of the symbolic system', rather than the literal father. This marks a decisive shift away from the biologicistic orientation of Freud's account of Oedipalisation, where it is the literal father that prohibits the desire for the mother

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<sup>120</sup> The child, Lacan claims, is born into the order of the Real, a realm of 'pure plenitude' and fullness, a continuum in which there are no boundaries and no lack. The child has no sense of its own corporeal boundaries, and no sense of inside and outside, subject and object, self and other. In this phase, the child exists in a syncretic unity, a joyous fusion, with the mother. This 'hermetically sealed unit' of fullness and completeness begins its dissolution with the onset of the 'mirror stage', in which the child begins to recognise lack or absence (of the mother or gratification of needs) and concurrently, to recognise its distinction from the mother and its environment. This is the realm of the Imaginary, in which the ego is primitively established through fantasised identification with others, particularly the mother. Lacan associates this dyadic, mutually defining, identificatory structure primarily with the mother-child relation in the mirror stage, which, if left to itself, 'would entail a vicious cycle of imaginary projections, identifications, internalisations, fantasies and demands that leave no room for development or growth' (Grosz 1990:50). Exchange is impossible because there is no third term, hence the equation of entry into the symbolic order of language and culture through the paternal.

and ensures entry into the cultural order of prohibitions and taboos<sup>121</sup>. However, feminist theorists have argued that the Lacanian account is equally problematic from a feminist perspective, because it still depends upon the idea that the mother-child relation has to be mediated via a third term if the child is to successfully enter cultural life. That is, although Lacan shifts the grounds of our understanding of patriarchal power relations and their social reproduction away from the biologicistic orientation of Freud towards socio-linguistic processes, he nevertheless formulates this structure on the basis of a universal or ‘inevitable law’ that the maternal relation always has to be sacrificed and left behind. Thus, in Lacan’s work, as Elisabeth Grosz argues, ‘patriarchal dominance is not so much challenged as displaced, from biology to the equally unchangeable socio-linguistic law of the father’ (Grosz 1990:15). Like Freud’s Oedipus complex, then, the Lacanian account of ‘Oedipalisation’ is premised upon the necessity of the ‘paternal’ or ‘third-term’ intervention into the mother-child relation, as the condition for culture and communication. The idea that the Name and Law of the Father is a necessary regulator of desire and inter-subjective communication therefore makes patriarchal authority and patrilineal/patrimonial kinship structures seem inevitable.

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<sup>121</sup> In Freud’s account, the Oedipal complex describes a transition in the (boy) child’s life whereby his primary attachment to, and desire for, the mother must be regulated and re-directed. It is the father that prohibits the boy’s (sexual) access to the mother, and thus the boy perceives the father as an unbeatable rival, and moreover, construes the father’s prohibitions as castration threats. In the (successful) resolution of this complex, the boy represses his primal desire for the mother, deferring or redirecting his desire towards the future when he will be rewarded, by having a woman of his own. In *Totem and Taboo*, Freud attempts to account for the origins of this ‘patriarchal pact’, through reference to the ‘primal myth’ of parricide: the killing of the father figure by the fraternal horde (Freud 1950:141). This ‘original sin’ founds an inexorable law of debt ‘through which the subject binds himself for life to the Law’, as founded on the Oedipal incest taboo and patriarchal kinship structures which regulate desire and familial relationships. As Lacan points out therefore, the power of the Oedipus complex in Freud’s system rests not so much upon the personage of the father figure, but rather on the authority of the dead or absent father (Grosz 1990:69). Indeed, Lacan stresses that paternal authority is always already symbolic, because paternity (at least traditionally) is uncertain and thus requires representation through the *naming* of the father. The ‘Law-of-the-Father’ refers to the kinship systems which forbid sexual access to those who have been *named* as family. It is the ‘Name-of-the-Father’ which thus becomes central to Lacan’s reinterpretation of Freud’s psycho-biological Oedipus model in linguistic and socio-cultural terms.



For Irigaray, Lacan's psychoanalytic theory is useful in that it helps to demonstrate the fundamentally patriarchal foundations of western culture. 'What is now termed the Oedipal structure as access to the cultural order is already structured within a single, masculine line of filiation which doesn't symbolize the woman's relationship to her mother' (Irigaray 1993b:16). Yet, although psychoanalytic theory has propped up the patriarchal symbolic order by making it seem inevitable, Irigaray argues, it in fact offers valuable tools for the task of *rethinking* female relationships and genealogies and challenging the 'erasure of the maternal'. Thus, instead of simply accepting the story of originary mother-child fusion, and the need for separation from the mother,<sup>122</sup> Irigaray uses psychoanalytic concepts and methods to try and find a place for maternal genealogy within the symbolic and assert that 'there is a genealogy of women' (1993c:19).

One example is Irigaray's postulation of a 'maternal order' founded on a 'placental economy' (1993b). Whilst the patriarchal imagination has represented the relation between mother and child *in utero* as one of fusion that needs to be broken up and regulated by the paternal function, Irigaray suggests that by paying attention to the mediating role played by the placenta, we can formulate an alternative psychoanalytic account whereby the mother and child are already separate, though conjoined. Irigaray draws here on the work of biologist Helène Rouch, who likens pregnancy to a 'natural transplant' (1993b). The difference between pregnancy and an organ transplant, she explains, is that the placenta stops the defence mechanism against the (half-foreign) foetus. It thereby facilitates 'regulating exchanges' between mother and foetus, negotiating between the mother's self and the 'other within'. So whilst Lacan claims that genuine exchange depends upon the intervention of the paternal third term, the figure of the placenta implies that the 'third term' is already there.

'Culture' is yet to give 'interpretation to the model of tolerance of the other within and with a self that this relationship manifests', Irigaray claims, and as such has failed to recognise or appreciate the 'almost ethical character' of the fetal relation and the placental economy (1993b). But it provides a promising ground for a 'maternal order' which does not

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<sup>122</sup> As, for example, does Lacanian Ellie Ragland Sullivan (1987).

depend upon the intervention of 'Paternal Law' for the formation of subjectivity and intersubjectivity, and hence for the conditions of communication. The 'placental economy', Irigaray states, is an organised economy 'which respects the one and the other', and is far removed from the economy of patrimonial and patrilineal exchange. As such, the posited 'maternal order' does not need to be transcended in order to make cultural relations possible, but rather, contains the seeds of communication and psychic relations already within:

'Were there a way for a child to symbolise its relations to the mother's body, and were that relationship imagined as always already separate and at the same time life sustaining, the whole fantasy of fusion, triangulation, law, loss, and refusal of loss would be interrupted...' (Weed 2010:27).

The idea of a 'maternal order' and 'placental economy' is not developed in much detail in Irigaray's work, but its value lies in gesturing towards an alternative psychoanalytic account which does not depend upon a transcendence of the maternal. Through psychoanalytic interventions such as this, which open up alternative models of relationality, individuation and enculturation, Irigaray thus begins to interrupt and unsettle the Oedipal dynamic, showing that it is one possible account among many. Moreover, as Howie posits, her postulation of a 'maternal order' can help reorient and introduce a different ethical sensibility into intergenerational relations between feminists (Howie 2010b). If Oedipal psychoanalytic theory seals and shores up patriarchal genealogical orders, then the maternal order offers a way of re-imagining the maternal relation, where the maternal does not need to be sacrificed or negated, but rather, plays a vital role within psychic development and cultural life. By removing the necessity for daughters to turn away from their mothers, the notion of a maternal order invites a non-conflictual understanding of the mother-daughter relation and relations between women more generally, thereby initiating new 'pathways through feminisms and between feminists' (ibid: 10). As Howie argues, this can inaugurate a relational and communicational model that has a different logic and temporality: an

antecedence of an ethical relationship, or a ‘new covenant’ for a woman-to-woman sociality that ‘offers a way to hear the past in light of the new without anxious displacement’ (ibid: 8).

This is not to say that we must ‘embrace the truth of the placenta’ as an emblem for woman-to-woman sociality, or that all forms of relations between women should be reduced or assimilated to an idealised version of the maternal relation (Weed 2010:27). The point, rather, is that the theory of ‘Oedipalisation’ is not incontrovertible, that it is possible to think beyond patriarchal paradigms and imagine genealogical relations and temporalities in a way much more conducive to forging productive feminist relationships.

## 2.2

### *Mythic Reimaginings*

Irigaray’s psychoanalytic interventions interrupt and unsettle Oedipal and patriarchal paradigms, by opening up alternative accounts of individuation and enculturation which do not depend upon a suppression of the maternal, and as such, do not equate culture with patriarchy, or genealogy with patriliney and patrimony. In this regard, her work demonstrates that taking a pragmatic approach to psychoanalytic theory can be beneficial to feminist theory and historiography, as we seek to develop more constructive and adequate models of genealogy and intergenerational communication<sup>123</sup>. Alongside Irigaray’s psychoanalytical interventions, there is a second dimension to Irigaray’s work on female genealogies which operates on the level of the ‘cultural imaginary’, as she explores different ways of culturally representing female genealogies through myth.

The ‘Imaginary’ is a term used by Lacan to describe the realm of identification and imagistic representation of relations, in which the ego is primitively established through

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<sup>123</sup> As stated in the introduction, the pragmatic approach to truth is based upon the question of what practical difference it would make to think in a particular way. Taking a pragmatic approach to psychoanalytic theory, then, is to regard different theories and methods as ‘toolkits’, rather than as fixed theories which have a universal applicability.

fantasised identification with others<sup>124</sup>. The ‘cultural imaginary’ within psychoanalytically-inflected cultural theory is an extension of this term to designate the cultural realm of identification and representation through social and cultural systems of image, narrative and fantasy (Roof 1996:10). The relationship between the symbolic order and the cultural imaginary is complex, given their deep intertwining, but the cultural imaginary can be essentially understood as a ‘symptom’ or expression of the symbolic order, which in turn, gives structure to the imaginary and makes it intelligible (ibid; see also Ragland Sullivan 1987:156). A key component of the cultural imaginary is myth, which Irigaray describes as a ‘historical expression’ of the symbolic, sociocultural rules and psychic structures which permeate the dominant socio-symbolic system at a given time.

As Irigaray understands myths to be expressions of symbolic rules and psychic structures, much of her work on myth takes place in a diagnostic vein, as she reads certain myths as symptomatic of a patriarchal symbolic, using them to demonstrate that ‘western culture and civilisation’ is fundamentally built upon an ‘originary’ matricide<sup>125</sup>. Irigaray focuses primarily on myths of Ancient Greece, as she claims that ‘our imaginary still works according to the schema set in place by Greek mythology and tragedy’ (1993c:12).<sup>126</sup> For example, in Irigaray’s reading of Aeschylus’s *Oresteia*, the murder of Clytemnestra by Orestes is a mythic expression of the symbolic rule that matricide is the ‘originary’ of patriarchy: the sacrifice of the mother and the ‘severing of the genealogical link between women’ (Schwab 2010:80; Irigaray 1993a:78). Irigaray’s readings of Greek myths, however,

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<sup>124</sup> Particularly the mother (hence the need for the ‘paternal intervention’).

<sup>125</sup> ‘Originary’ is a Heideggerian concept which Joanna Hodge deploys to clarify the status of ‘matricide’ in Irigaray’s thought. For Heidegger, Hodge explains, an originary event does not take place at the beginning of a sequence of events, from which the sequence then proceeds. Rather, ‘the originary from which a particular discursive formation emerges has to be repeatedly enacted and reinscribed if the formation is to stay in place... (it) articulates itself as an omnipresent and recurrently affirmed set of parameters that open up certain lines of possibility while closing off others’ (Hodge 1994:192).

<sup>126</sup> This treatment of myth as a kind of ‘collective unconscious’ is reminiscent of Jung’s notion of ‘archetypes’ and the ‘collective unconscious’ (1981).

are not exclusively aimed at revealing the ‘originary matricide’ upon which patriarchy rests. Some of her readings are recuperative, as she ‘returns’ to prominent myths that represent and give cultural expression to the mother-daughter relation, a relation, which she claims is ordinarily the ‘least cultured space of our societies’ (1993b:47). Although patriarchal traditions have ‘wiped out’ traces of mother-daughter genealogies, Irigaray insists, repressed ‘gynocratic’ orders nevertheless resurface in myth. For example, Irigaray reads the Demeter-Persephone myth not only as a story of destruction and loss, but also in affirmative terms, as it demonstrates a powerful vibrant bond between mother and daughter which the myth shows to be ‘indispensable to the survival of the earth, the human race and the gods...When the link between mother and daughter—the intergenerational link between women—is lost, life does not flourish’ (Schwab 2010:85).

Irigaray’s reconstructive and affirmative mythologising also takes place through her evocations of a gynocratic ‘prehistory’<sup>127</sup>. The myth of matriarchal or ‘gynocratic’ prehistory, it must be stressed, is not widely regarded as a credible historical thesis (Eller 2000).<sup>128</sup> Nevertheless, Irigarayan scholars argue that Irigaray embraces the myth *as myth*, using it to emphasise that patriarchy need not be regarded as universal or inevitable, and to imagine how western cultures might have developed differently. Indeed, Irigaray claims that skeptical attitudes and disregard for ‘prehistory’ proliferate precisely because ‘patriarchy is mistaken for the only history possible’ (Irigaray 1993b:24). The intended effect of such claims is to de-naturalise and unsettle the stronghold of the patriarchal symbolic, to insist that ‘the coming of patriarchal law is not that “always already” taken step from nature into culture’ (Schwab 2010:90).

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<sup>127</sup> She refers particularly to the work of nineteenth-century mythologist Johann Bachofen, which draws on classical Greek sources to postulate an era of matriarchy ending in classical times with the rise of male rule and the ‘male principle’. Though Irigaray uses the term ‘gynocracy’ rather than ‘matriarchy’, to stress that a ‘gynocentric’ socio-symbolic structure would be completely different and not simply an inversion of patriarchy, she accedes to Bachofen’s method of reading prehistory in myth.

<sup>128</sup> The end of the nineteenth century saw a brief flourishing of the myth of matriarchal prehistory, with anthropologist Herbert Spencer among its more famous proponents, and it is taken up by Engels in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (2010). Most anthropologists dropped the idea at the turn of the century due to sketchy evidence, though Soviet anthropologists stuck close to the myth until at least the 1950s (Eller 2000).

It can of course be objected that recuperative 'origin stories' project idealised images of the female and the feminine, or depict myths as repositories for timeless truths or a 'beautiful past.' Yet, Irigaray's defenders argue that her positing of 'mythic origins' is intended as a provocation to think through unrealised conditions of possibility, rather than a claim to a lost 'truth'. Moreover, through emphasising the psychoanalytic underpinnings of her work, we can draw a parallel between Irigaray's 'performative engagement' with myth and the psychoanalytic scene of transference, where the point is 'less to construct the precise details of the story than to establish another possibility for communication' (Butler 2005:57). Psychoanalysis, therefore, is not about recovering the 'origin' of neurosis, or simply reproducing the past, but rather, is about *reworking* past and present in a relationship with another. Irigaray's 'return' to mythology, argues Samantha Haigh, can be interpreted in precisely these terms, not as a bid to 'recover a lost, authentic, femino-centric 'origin'...' but in order to reread, to (re)invent and reappropriate:

'This move... parallels exactly the psychoanalytic move of return and reworking, the way in which, during the transference relation, it is not the 'narrative's forgotten origin' which is primary but the 'active process of constructing a text'' (Haigh 1994:63).

In the sense that Irigaray's 'return' to Greek myths can be interpreted as a process of reworking and reinvention, it functions as a performative demonstration of interruption, of trying to think outside the dominant Oedipal and patriarchal paradigms, by uncovering alternative representations of mother-daughter relations within the cultural imaginary. From a purely psychoanalytic perspective, it must be stressed, Irigaray's engagements with myth and the cultural imaginary alone are unsatisfactory, as they do little to intervene into psychoanalytic theory, or the theory of the symbolic order of which the cultural imaginary is

supposedly a ‘symptom’ (Weed 2010).<sup>129</sup> As Laura Green writes, ‘we need to be clear about the maternal contribution to subjectivity *first* if we are to repair what Irigaray calls the female *genre*’ (Green 2012:6). We also need to question Irigaray’s seeming ‘confidence in the capacity of new myths and images to be socially transformative’ (Deutscher 2002:58). Yet, from a historiographical perspective, Irigaray’s mythic re-imaginings can serve as a valuable starting point, in their affirmation that a different model of ‘woman-to-woman sociality’ and intergenerational communication is possible: a model that is not ‘enslaved to the past’ and premised upon a hierarchical order of transmission, but rather, ‘offers itself as an opening to a field of communication, as a world of the creation and exchange of thought and culture...’ (Irigaray 1996:46).

Having said this, however, the project of uncovering and building alternative genealogical and generational temporalities remains underdeveloped in Irigaray’s own work — more of a promise or a ‘glimmer’. This is due to her totalising treatment of ‘western’ culture and mythology, as she elevates Greek myths and Oedipal paradigms as *the* governing myths of ‘western’ culture and history. ‘With a few additions and subtractions’, Irigaray writes, ‘our imaginary still works according to the schema set in place by Greek mythology and tragedy... The mythology that underlies patriarchy has not changed’ (1993c:12). Irigaray’s style of making generalising claims about ‘western culture’ and thought in this manner results in a restriction of her own radical project, as it forces her to push the transformative potential of female creativity and expressivity towards a future ‘still to come (or to come again?)’ via a repressed gynocratic prehistory (Battersby 1998:101)<sup>130</sup>. By essentially equating the western cultural imaginary with the world of Greek myth, Irigaray

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<sup>129</sup> Laura Green also argues that Irigaray’s call to use symbolic archetypes as ‘identificatory supports’ is actually a kind of projection theory, in which women are expected to consciously project ideals of femininity onto ‘ego ideals’. This is problematic because projection is primarily a *defence mechanism*. ‘What Irigaray identifies as a problem relating to the infant’s failure to *introject* the maternal other — rather than incorporating her as a Symbolic figure... — cannot be solved by means of ‘projection’ (Green 2012:6).

<sup>130</sup> And, I would add, lead her to exoticise nonwestern forms of communication and conceptualisation, particularly in her later work such as *Between East and West* (2002).

leaves herself little to work with; indeed, given that the mythic feminine characters Irigaray ‘returns to’, such as Demeter and Persephone, are supposed to be projections of the patriarchal imaginary, it is difficult to see her mythic ‘reclamations’ as an especially radical move (Green 2012:6). Moreover, her generalising, universalising purview blocks out the transformative potential of alternative myths, narratives and cultural representations, which already exist within the shadows or crevasses of the dominant culture, but are consistently overlooked and ‘forgotten’ (Battersby 1998:101-2; 2007:157-159).

Irigaray’s evocation of ‘history’ is just as homogenising and universalising as her evocation of western mythology and culture. Her writings abound with sweeping references to grand historical ‘stages’, ‘eras’ and ‘periods’. Such historical depictions are, indeed, often reminiscent of Hegel’s division of history into epochs and eras that can be summed up by a theme or single idea, and at times her words seem to echo the Hegelian move of positing a retrospective *telos* as a way of ‘making sense’ of history. ‘Perhaps we needed to go this far’, Irigaray writes, ‘in order to understand that we must go back to the origins of the decline of our culture’ (Irigaray 1993c:122).<sup>131</sup> It is possible to read Irigaray’s authoritarian style and her big-sweep treatment of history as deliberately ‘mimetic’, or as a rhetorical strategy deployed to enforce her key point that sexual difference is yet to be really *thought* (Irigaray 1993a:5). Similarly, we can interpret Irigaray’s claim that ‘our imaginary still works according to the schema set in place by Greek mythology and tragedy’ as a ‘mimetic’ strategy which ‘lets the myth recount its own interruptions’ (Athanasίου and Tzelepis 2010:5). However, universalising allusions to western history or western culture in the singular, even if they are deliberately ‘mimetic’, mean that within Irigaray’s work, particular histories, and particular myths, which may well subvert the dominant paradigms, go unnoticed:

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<sup>131</sup> Indeed, we might attribute Irigaray’s big-sweep approach to history to an *excess* of mythic thinking, such that she renders history itself in mythic or epic dramatic terms, as an eternal struggle between maternal and paternal, feminine and masculine, female and male.



‘There is no place ... for the particular histories of others to emerge... no place for the plurality of representations of difference: for the foreign, the ecstatic, the enslaved, and the colonised which are always there, haunting the imaginary of the tragiics and our own’ (Varikas 2010:243).

Consequently, whilst Irigaray’s work opens up and affirms the possibility of re-imagining and reconstituting genealogical orders and temporalities, her style of making generalising claims about western culture and history ultimately grants too much to the dominant patriarchal paradigms. Her insightful critique of Lacanian psychoanalysis is essentially that it remains complicit in maintaining the patriarchal symbolic order by not examining its own historical determinants (Weed 2010:18)<sup>132</sup>. This line of critique points to the radical possibilities opened up by taking a historiographical perspective. Yet, arguably, Irigaray does not take this line of critique far enough, as her own historical proclamations are so generalising that she effectively equates ‘western history’ with the history of certain kind of patriarchy, and ‘western culture’ with a monolithic set of myths. Even if we interpret Irigaray’s grand historicising and mythologising as a kind of ‘mimesis’, the effect is the same: myths and histories which do not fit into the master narrative are once again overlooked. As I have argued previously: it is not enough to interrupt and trouble already-dominant narratives and myths. We need to find and tell different ones.

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<sup>132</sup> In fact, Lacan himself does intimate that he does not intend his psychoanalytic model as a timeless theory, affirming that when something new comes to light that forces a complete rethink, ‘another structural order emerges’... (quoted in Weed 2010:18). Nevertheless, the presentation of his theory of Oedipalisation as *the* condition for entry into order of language, society and culture is difficult to reconcile with this apparent affirmation of historical determinants.

3**MANY GENERATIONAL SYMBOLIC ORDERS AND IMAGINARIES**

Irigaray's insight that 'the Oedipal paradigm only seems like the only order possible because it refuses to regard itself as myth' offers an opening into rethinking generational and familial symbolism within historiography (1993b: 23). The Oedipal drama has been foundational to the conception of social relations and cultural transmission within western cultural theory, primarily due to the influence of Freud and Lacan, and also structuralist anthropologists such as Claude Lévi-Strauss (Lévi-Strauss 1969). These theories and rubrics offer useful insights into how patriarchal cultural logics and structures maintain and reproduce themselves. Yet, by granting them too much explanatory and imaginary power, we allow them to overdetermine our analyses. As we have seen, in Lacanian theory, 'Oedipalisation' is cast as *the* inaugural structure of language and subjectivity, whereby the Law and the Name of the Father intervenes in the mother-child 'fusion' to mark the child's entry into the realm of the Symbolic. If we accept this theory, then Oedipus becomes the very mark and normative condition of culture itself (Butler 2002:34). This implies that the wide social variability of kinship and genealogical patterns has little or no efficacy in rewriting the symbolic order – an order that is regarded as not only pervasive but as inevitable (*ibid*). Irigaray's psychoanalytic interventions and mythic reimaginings go some way to interrupting this seeming inevitability of 'Oedipal' relations; yet her big-sweep, monolithic treatment of 'the western symbolic', 'western culture' and 'western history' rather dims the transformative and subversive power of her thought.

Accordingly, this section takes its cue from the more radical approach towards generational and genealogical symbolics and imaginaries that can be found within an emerging anthropological field which Judith Butler describes as 'post-kinship studies' (Butler 2002; Franklin and MacKinnon 2001; Schneider 1984). This body of work theorises kinship as 'a kind of *doing*', which does not reflect a prior or reified structure but which can only be understood as a practice that enacts a specific assemblage of significations as it takes place

(Butler 2002:34-6)<sup>133</sup>. In this sense, ‘kinship’ is a mobile classificatory technology, which is generative of, and responsive to, ‘the kinds of material, relational, and cultural worlds that are possible or livable, and for whom’ (Franklin and MacKinnon 2000:278). This mobile, performative conception of kinship, argues Butler, takes us away from an understanding of the symbolic order of genealogical kinship patterns as a hypostatized, reified structure of relations that underwrites and ‘lurks behind any actual social arrangement’. It permits us instead to ‘consider how modes of patterned and performative doing bring kinship categories into operation and become the means by which they undergo transformation and displacement’ (Butler 2002:34). Ultimately, then, ‘post-kinship’ theorists relax the distinction between the symbolic and the social, because the presumption that social relations and practices have the power to undermine and transform the symbolic order of ‘rules’ governing those social relations implies, finally, that ‘the symbolic does not precede the social and... has no independence from it’ (ibid: 38)<sup>134</sup>. This means that hegemony is ‘eminently challengeable at the level of social, political and historical practice’ (ibid: 35).

The ‘post-kinship’ approach thus gives the concept of a ‘symbolic order’ much more substance and historical determination than it often receives within Lacanian or Irigarayan-inspired feminist theory. The ‘post-kinship’ paradigm also shows that symbolic orders can be understood as shifting structures, which fluctuate and mutate due to changing historical determinations. This implies that instead of there being one monolithic symbolic order, or indeed one cultural imaginary, there will be as many symbolic orders and cultural imaginaries as there are forms of social practice and relations. This final section, therefore, will demonstrate how the thought of ‘many’ symbolic orders and cultural imaginaries, rather than ‘one’, can enable feminists to think through the significations of generational and matrilineal paradigms in a much more nuanced and heterogeneous manner, considering the variety of

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<sup>133</sup> This argument is put forward by anthropologist David Schneider in *A Critique of the Study of Kinship* (1984). See also Franklin and MacKinnon (2000 and 2001).

<sup>134</sup> For more on Butler’s critique of the ‘quasi-timeless character’ of the Lacanian notion of the symbolic order, see *Antigone’s Claim* (2000:20-21).

different narratives and imagery at our disposal, and the different ways that generational logics and temporalities are configured and enacted according to specific contexts and historical trajectories and resonances.

### 3.1

#### *Shifting Symbolics and Historical Resonances*

The importance of tracing out different symbolic orders through different historical trajectories and geographical contexts is made apparent in Hortense Spillers' illuminating work on genealogical symbolics within the African American context. In her seminal essay 'Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe' (1987), Spillers traces a very different history of 'the symbolic order' to that traced by Irigaray in her more Hegelian moments, as she discusses the impact of the Atlantic slave trade upon the kinship patterns and gendered subject-positions which structure African American life in the United States. 'The symbolic order that I wish to trace', she writes, 'begins at the "beginning", which is really a rupture and a radically different kind of cultural continuation.... We write and think, then, about an outcome of African American life in the United States under the pressure of those events' (Spillers 1987:68).

Spillers' core argument is that the intertwinement of kinship relations and property relations under slavery shows that gendered subject-positions and structures of kinship 'adhere to no symbolic integrity' (ibid: 66). Indeed, she writes, if 'kinship' were possible among captive persons, the property relations and rules of slavery would be undermined, because the children of enslaved persons would then 'belong' to a mother and father (ibid: 74). This is of course not to say that African peoples in the New World did not maintain emotional connections and imagined continuities, which are what make blood-relations meaningful in the first place (ibid). Her point, rather, is that histories of slavery demonstrate that the meanings of 'family', 'genealogy' and 'kinship' are shifting and contingent, at the mercy of property relations determined by racialised symbolic structures:

“Family” as we understand it “in the West”—the *vertical* transfer of a bloodline, or a patronymic, of titles and entitlements, of real estate... from fathers to sons in the supposedly free exchange of affectional ties between a male and a female of *his* choice—becomes the mythically revered privilege of a free and freed community... The point remains that captive persons were *forced* into patterns of *dispersal*, beginning with the Trade itself, into the *horizontal* relatedness of language groups, discourse formations, bloodlines, names, and properties by the legal arrangements of enslavement... We might choose to call this connectedness “family” or “support structure”, but that is a rather different case from the moves of a dominant symbolic order, pledged to maintain the supremacy of race. It is that order that forces “family” to modify itself when it does not mean family of the “master”, or dominant enclave’ (ibid: 74-5).

This differential symbolic history, Spillers contends, has resulted in a unique position for the African American woman, which ‘places her out of the traditional symbolics of the female gender’. Legal enslavement removed the African American male from the prevailing social function of the Name and Law of the Father, therefore setting a ‘dual fatherhood’ in motion, comprised of ‘the African father’s *banished* name and body and the captor father’s mocking presence’. Under such conditions, Spillers contends, a ‘dual motherhood’ is also established, whereby ‘motherhood as female bloodrite is outraged, is denied, at the *very same time* that it becomes the founding term of a human and social enactment’ (ibid). On the one hand, then, the perceived absence of the Father’s symbolic mark upon the African American family has resulted in persistent pathologisation of the African American family and its supposedly ‘matriarchal’ structure.<sup>135</sup> Yet on the other hand, the unsettling of the Law and the

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<sup>135</sup> As Spillers shows in her analysis of Moynihan’s 1965 ‘Report on the “Negro family’’. In fact, claims Spillers, when the power of the African American female is described as ‘matriarchal’, it is misnamed, because historically, a captive mother had no right to claim her child, and further, motherhood is a subjugated form of cultural inheritance.

Name of the Father within the context of enslavement gives way to a potentially ‘monstrous’ symbolic position: ‘a female with the potential to “name”’. As Spillers explains:

‘The African American woman, the mother, the daughter, becomes historically the powerful and shadowy evocation of a cultural synthesis long evaporated—the law of the Mother—only and precisely because legal enslavement removed the African-American male not so much from sight as from the *mimetic* view as a partner in the prevailing social function of the Father's name, the Father's law’ (ibid: 80).

By tracing a different symbolic history, Spillers’ essay thereby reveals Irigaray’s monolithic representation of maternal genealogies and ‘woman-to-woman’ sociality to be biased towards a certain *kind* of cultural system and experience, bringing to light the obfuscation of race and slavery in Irigaray’s analysis of patrilineal genealogies and patrimonial exchange relations. For instance, Irigaray claims that under western patriarchy, women’s genealogical links are severed because of patrimonial and patrilineal kinship structures under which women are ‘abducted from their ancestors’, exchanged between patriarchal family units, and reduced to the ‘natural’ function of reproduction. Yet Spillers’ historically sensitive analysis shows how genealogical relations can be severed and shaped in different ways, as slavery forced the separation of children from both their mother and father, instigating a ‘traumatic symbolic destruction of the social significations of kinship, gender, and name’. This legacy, as Ewa Ziarek points out, still threatens to ‘disarticulate the very conception of gender and kinship’ that Irigaray depicts as uniform in its effects upon women’s identity and genealogical relations (Ziarek 2010:210).

Spillers’ essay also makes apparent that Irigaray’ strategy for transforming women’s relation to the symbolic is rather narrow. Irigaray, as discussed, engages with psychoanalytic theory and myth—primarily ‘the Greeks’—as a means of unsettling patriarchal symbolic structures and opening up a place for the maternal. But by tracing a different symbolic

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history, Spillers shows that different histories and legacies can yield representational potentialities and ‘texts for empowerment’ that Irigaray is unable to consider because of her blanket approach to history, symbolic structures, and mythic reimaginings in ‘the West’. Spillers argues that in the absence of the symbolic patriarchal figure, the ‘monstrosity’ of a strong maternal figure offers a potentially radical social and identity position for African American women:

‘This different cultural text actually reconfigures, in historically ordained discourse, certain *representational* potentialities for African Americans... and it is our task to make a place for this different social subject...Actually claiming the monstrosity (of a female with the potential to “name”) which her culture imposes in blindness, “Sapphire” might rewrite after all a radically different text for female empowerment’ (Spillers 1987:80).

The subtleties and complexities of Spillers’ essay thereby require that feminist theorists think twice before making grand claims about the cultural meaning and symbolic logics of generational and familial paradigms. Instead, we need to consider how different histories yield different representational and relational potentialities for different groups and individuals. As Madhu Dubey argues, the history of black motherhood gives the matrilineal paradigm its ‘special resonance’ within contemporary black feminist criticism, where ‘chosen kinship’ can be interpreted as a strategy for overcoming a specific and brutal history of dislocation and disinheritance by means of fictional familial and cultural connection (Dubey 1995: 245). In contrast to white women, she argues, ‘neither a cultural nor a familial lineage was available as a seemingly natural given’ for black women in the US. Dubey’s analysis thus rather complicates Roof’s dismissal of the naturalised ‘reproductive logic’ of generational paradigms, as Dubey argues that it is ‘precisely this *lack* of a naturalised tradition that motivates the impulse to naturalise tradition and that paradoxically exposes the constructed status of the natural in black feminist discourse’ (ibid, emphasis added).

Being sensitive to ‘special’ historical resonances does not require suspension of a critical perspective. Dubey herself is keenly aware of the hazards of using generational and matrilineal metaphors within feminist literary criticism, discussing the dangers of consolidating and idealising a fragmented past, of positing the maternal figure as a guarantor of temporal continuity and an ‘authentic black feminine identity’, and of conflating the wide range of female relationships into the mother-daughter matrix. However, whilst recognising the potential pitfalls of matrilineal configurations, Dubey, like Spillers, pays careful attention to the ways in which histories of slavery have shaped experiences of black motherhood and familial relations in America and thereby conditioned the project of black cultural reconstruction (ibid: 246). This is made possible through a theoretical perspective that is attuned to the specific historical resonances and meanings that generational and matrilineal paradigms can carry within different feminist contexts.

### 3.2

#### *Repetition with Variation*

Working on the presumption that there are ‘many’ shifting symbolic genealogical orders and cultural imaginaries, rather than just ‘one’, complicates any attempt to formulate a singular perspective on feminist genealogies and generational relations. Different symbolics and different imaginaries offer different cultural ‘texts for empowerment’ and representation, and different ways of interpreting and constructing generational and matrilineal orders. Thinking in terms of many symbolic orders and cultural imaginaries, rather than one, also requires that we take a much more nuanced approach to generational *time*.

As stated in section 1, we can regard generational time in a broad sense as a relational time that connects us with those living before, during and beyond one’s own time. If we understand generational time in this way, it follows that the extent to which we emphasise or enact generational continuities or discontinuities is dependent upon the way we relate and communicate with one another, and the way we negotiate questions of authority, innovation



and control. Tradition-building and history-making is inevitably a ‘scene of struggle between competing and often incommensurable desires’ (Dubey 1995:247). For example, desire for posterity and control over the future can coexist with a desire to relinquish control and enable others to take over. Desire to begin again can coexist with a desire or yearning for a connection with the past. The particular mix of desires, and the way that they are relationally played out, will result in different and specific temporalisations of generational time, with varying degrees of continuity and discontinuity, connections and ruptures. Accordingly, we need a generational hermeneutic that can attend to these complex mixes of desires, and the temporal interplay between continuity and discontinuity which ensues<sup>136</sup>. My concluding proposal here is that a hermeneutic of ‘repetition with variation’ can be usefully deployed as a means of thinking through the temporal ambiguities and nuances of generational time.

This hermeneutic is aptly put into practice by Dubey, in her reading of Gayl Jones’ blues novel *Corregidora* (Jones 1988). Whilst this is a fictional, rather than a historical text, it offers illuminating insights for feminist historiography, as fictional narratives can express insights and inscribe a range of mother-daughter tropes and intergenerational intersubjectivities which stimulate new ways of thinking (Rye 2006). *Corregidora* recounts the experiences of blues singer Ursa Corregidora and the relationships of three generations of her maternal ancestors with their Portugese slave owner, Corregidora. Structurally, the novel oscillates between the narrator Ursa’s reflections on her present situation, and passages which express the flood of memories of stories told to her by her mother, grandmother and great-grandmother about their pasts: a flood which shapes and constantly interrupts Ursa’s present and her orientations towards the future. As Dubey describes it, ‘the novel’s structure so thoroughly fuses Ursa’s story with the history of her foremothers that any distinction between

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<sup>136</sup> Indeed, an important criticism of Irigaray’s work is that whilst she opens out the possibility of a different kind of generational or genealogical temporality, she arguably simply displaces the issue of conflict between women on to patriarchy and offers an overly harmonious imagery (Deutscher 2010:257; Stone 2010:171-172). ‘The placental emblem’, writes Deutscher, does not allow for a ‘negotiation of aggressive affect, encroachment, or violent intent in the mother-fetal relationship, nor in relations between mothers and children, and women and others more generally’ (Deutscher 2010:253).

past and present becomes inoperative' (Dubey 1995:252). In this regard, the novel effectively demonstrates the imbrication of past, future and present, overturning any conception of a neatly bounded generational perspective, or a step-by-step generational succession. By means of the novel's nonlinear structuration and the complexity of its characters' relations, Jones 'interrogates the means by which a matrilineal or any other tradition achieves its cohesion and authority... refusing the 'synthesizing, totalizing impulse of matrilineal tradition building' and the hierarchical arrangement of a linear succession of influence and 'handing down' (ibid: 263-4).

Alongside this temporal ambiguity, the novel also gives a strong sense of the emotional and relational ambiguity that underpins the process of tradition-building and cultural inheritance (ibid: 250). In many respects, Jones depicts the matrilineal legacy as a debilitating burden, as 'Ursa's fragmented memories of the stories told to her by her maternal ancestors repeatedly erupt into her narrative, stalling her attempt to transcend history and to create a new story for herself' (ibid: 252). As such, Dubey argues, Jones challenges the assumption that 'the mother's past should provide the ground for the daughter's utterance' (ibid: 253). Nevertheless, even as she dwells upon the onerous and potential hazardous aspects of generational legacy, Jones does not fall into the 'trap of privileging sheer contradiction' and discontinuity. Rather, her novel manages to admirably negotiate the interplay between continuity and discontinuity within the genealogical relationship, through its structural reliance on the 'blues method' of 'repetition with variation', or 'repetition with difference' (ibid: 264):

'Always articulating contradiction within a structure of relation, this method engages the past in a manner different from both an Oedipal model of tradition based on generational rivalry and the matrilineal model with its affirmation of generational unity... The novel's structure of repetition with difference denies an exclusive privileging of either generational conflict or continuity and offers instead a model of

tradition that holds the past and the present in a state of creative disequilibrium' (ibid: 264).

The model of 'repetition of variation' thus does not accede to the linear order of succession, but equally, does not set up a dualistic juxtaposition between 'continuity' on the one hand, and 'discontinuity' on the other. Accordingly, 'repetition with variation', or 'repetition with difference', moves us beyond the idea that all instantiations of continuity are always and inherently patrilineal and pernicious, and also beyond overly naïve or romanticised notions of feminist continuity across time. In relation to the variable workings of repetitive temporality, as Dominick La Capra argues, 'notions of simple continuity and discontinuity are deceptive, for "continuity" involves not pure identity over time but some mode of repetition'. The idea of repetitive temporality 'directs inquiry toward the specific and variable articulations of repetition and change or "continuity and discontinuity" over time' (La Capra 1994:174). As such, 'repetition with variation' can facilitate a nuanced, sensitive approach to generational time within feminist historiography, as a hermeneutic that can grasp the discontinuities and differences that are as necessary to the development of a living tradition as are continuities and historical resonances.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has argued for a nuanced, contextualist approach to generational time, which appreciates the various ways that generational time can be temporalised through cultural symbolism and imagery, and different relational practices. This means rejecting arguments that generational and genealogical paradigms are inherently unilinear and unidirectional, or inherently authoritarian, traditionalist and patriarchal. It requires us to consider instead the interplay between continuity and discontinuity within the temporalisation of generational time, and to recognise that there is no singular symbolic determination ('patriarchal') or temporal order ('linear') governing the use of generational or matrilineal paradigms. On the

contrary, generationalism and matrilinearity have complex, specific meanings and temporalities within different fields and traditions of feminism, operating within the orbit of multiple symbolic logics and historical resonances. To orient us towards this nuanced and contextualist understanding, I have argued for a paradigm of ‘many’ symbolic orders and cultural imaginaries rather than just ‘one’, and for a hermeneutic of ‘repetition with variation’, which enables us to think through the multiple significations and ambiguities of generational time. The following chapter will elaborate on the concept of ‘repetition’ in more detail, as I begin to draw together some of the themes and ideas that have themselves recurred through the thesis.

## CHAPTER 6

### Repetition

#### INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, I evoked Madhu Dubey's notion of 'repetition with variation', as a way of thinking about generational relations and tradition-building which does not accede to the linear order of succession, but equally, does not set up a dualistic juxtaposition between 'continuity' on the one hand, and 'discontinuity' on the other. The idea of 'repetition with variation', I proposed, captures the delicate and precarious interplay between continuity and discontinuity within the temporal dynamics of generational time and the process of tradition-building, and can accommodate and articulate contradictions, fragmentations, and ambiguities, as well as resonances and links between feminisms of the past and feminisms of the present. This chapter will further elaborate upon 'repetition' as a historiographical concept, drawing together various ideas and themes that have been discussed in previous chapters. The aim is to show how 'repetition' enhances the multidirectional, multilinear model of historical time I have been developing through the thesis, at both a conceptual and a practical level.

When we think of historical progress in terms of a unilinear, continuous progression, 'history repeating itself' can only be thought in negative terms, as a sign that transformative efforts have failed and progress has stalled. This negative concept of repetition—as a step backwards or a waste of time—has a demoralising impact within feminism, leading to a sense of frustration or defeat (Browne 2012). The intention here, however, is to demonstrate how this negative concept can be overturned when we think in terms of 'repetition with variation' or 'repetition with difference', which recasts repetition in history as a potentially creative and productive phenomenon. Indeed, this alternative understanding of repetition overturns the

unilinear, progressivist models of historical time and change that classify repetition as a negative phenomenon in the first place.<sup>137</sup> To demonstrate this alternative conception, section 1 draws on the work of feminist philosopher Christine Battersby, who establishes a unique model of historical time that operates through repetition and ‘echo’ (1989; 1998; 2007). I focus particularly on Battersby’s appropriation of the Kierkegaardian concept of ‘recollecting forwards’ and the Nietzschean concept of ‘untimeliness’, which she uses to depict repetitive temporality in terms of a relational dynamism between past, present and future. This gives rise to an insightful account of ‘vertical’ or diachronic relations, and to a process-oriented conception of historical truth and reality, which can build on my own discussions of indirect realism, narrativity, and generational time in earlier chapters.

Section 2 then considers how this alternative conception of repetition can translate into historiographical practice. The first half of the section extends the discussion of Battersby’s work, as I show how the thought of repetition can translate into a transformative historiographical practice, which works through ‘repeating’ or re-activating forgotten ideas and methods that can unblock feminist thought in the present, and bring positive change. The second half of the section takes a more critical perspective, as whilst it is important to rethink the temporality of the historiographical process and the productive aspects of ‘repetition’, it is equally important to acknowledge that repetition is not always a positive phenomenon. There are ideas and presumptions that we would rather *weren’t* repeated, but which nevertheless persist and resurface within feminist discourse in the present, often unconsciously. My proposal here is that the concept of repetition can inspire a reflexive and critical mode of historiographical practice, alongside the more affirmative mode, precisely because it makes us realise that the ‘bad bits’ of past feminisms cannot be simply left behind, but rather, often

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<sup>137</sup> The idea of ‘repetition with variation’ or ‘repetition with difference’ has become a reasonably common theme within feminist theory and can be drawn from various sources: for example, from Derrida’s notion of *différance* (see e.g. Schor, Weed and Rooney (2003)), or from Deleuze’s work on virtual self-differentiating temporality (see e.g. Colebrook and Buchanan (2000)). This chapter, however, in keeping with the theoretical framework of the rest of the thesis, develops a conception of repetition grounded in the interpretative, experiential, and relational depths of historical time as a lived time, and the politics and patterns of social remembering. As such, it draws on theorists whose work is also grounded in these thematics.

repeat themselves in our own presumptions and discourses. To elaborate, I turn to Dominick La Capra's psychoanalytically-inspired concept of 'historiographical transference' (1984; 1854; 1994; 2004), as a way of understanding the process of repetition and displacement that occurs as a structural determinant of historical practice. I conclude by advocating the notion of a 'dialogue' between past and present, as a way of positively and responsibly engaging with repetitions of the past in the present, of both the desirable *and* the undesirable kind.

## 1

### RECOLLECTING FORWARDS AND THE UNTIMELY EVENT

In his essay on 'Repetition', Kierkegaard writes that 'genuine repetition' does not signify a simple remembrance of a past event, or a recurrence of the same. It refers, rather, to the process whereby the possibilities generated by the past are taken up and actualised in the present, which Kierkegaard describes as a process of 'recollecting forwards':

'Repetition and recollection are the same movement, only in opposite directions, for what is recollected is repeated backwards, whereas genuine repetition is recollected forward' (Kierkegaard 2001c:115-116).

In *The Phenomenal Woman* (1998), Battersby uses this idea of repetition as 'recollecting forwards' to provoke a complete reconceptualisation of the relation between past, present and future. The account she gives of lived time as a repetitive temporality helps to elaborate the multidirectional, multilinear, internally complex conception of historical time that this thesis is seeking to develop. In the first instance, the idea of 'recollecting forwards' requires us to move away from a conception of the past as a fixed, determinate foundation—which exists as 'objectively true'—towards a more fluid and fragmentary model in which the past is ambiguous and indeterminate, and can be 'repeated' in the present in various ways. As I argued in chapter 2, there is no direct access to a past that is 'given' as 'true' to all parties,

and as such, there *can* be no simple ‘re-take’ of the past (Battersby 1998:209). To illustrate this point, Battersby turns to Kierkegaard’s rendering of the story of Antigone in *Either/Or* (Kierkegaard 2001a). Here, Kierkegaard presents an Antigone racked with uncertainty about the extent to which her father Oedipus knew about his guilt and his fate, particularly following his death, as she loses all opportunity to ask him. Her uncertainty and anxiety regarding her family’s past are thus taken up into her life as a ‘secret’: an ambiguous relation to a past that she cannot change, but which necessarily escapes her. Indeed, Battersby writes, ‘it is ‘anxiety’—a temporal relationship that binds future to present and that endlessly reworks the past—that becomes the mark of Antigone’s own singularity’ (ibid: 154). In one way, Antigone’s ‘sad fate is like the echo of her father’s’; however, in Kierkegaard’s hands, that echo is ‘a form of repetition that transforms the present; it does not simply repeat a past or a destiny that is fixed (fated) in the manner of the Greek tragedies’ (ibid: 169).

This conception of the past as an enigmatic or ‘elusive precursor’—which repeats and echoes in the present yet cannot be definitely grasped and known—has significant implications for how the present itself is conceptualised (ibid: 182). On this model, the present is not an omniscient moment of complete insight; but nor is it simply a passive conduit or link in the chain from past to future. Instead, Battersby describes the present as a ‘generative caesura’, a ‘nook’ where the many different paths from the ambiguous past intersect in a ‘deepened present’, to produce multiple interpretations and possibilities that stretch into the future. This image makes it impossible to think of the ‘moment’ in terms of a ‘single, linear series of ‘nows’ that are linked together through one uniting history’. On the contrary:

‘The present is birthed within a multiple play of possibilities. The ‘now’ emerges in a ‘nook’ of intersecting paths, all of which contribute to the present and to the individualised egos and objects that emerge in this meeting’ (ibid: 150-1).



Such reconceptualisations of past and present, in turn, have a significant impact on the way we think about the future and the process of historical change. Within this framework, it is repetitions, echoes and ‘feedback loops’ that create the change, a process that continually defies the expectations of the present and past. Recollection ‘loops round on itself in ways that allow new patternings and novelty to emerge from thematic resonances’ (ibid: 175). Battersby’s interpretation of repetition as ‘recollecting forwards’ thus offers an alternative to thinking about repetition as something antithetical to change and ‘progress’, when imagined as a straight line towards a predetermined goal. Rather, according to this model of lived temporality and transformation, we ‘recollect forwards’ towards a future that is continually being re-opened and called into question, as novelty emerges through the productive use of resonance and echo (ibid: 210). ‘Recollecting forwards’, as Rachel Jones explains, can be understood as ‘a kind of echoing which does not passively repeat but actively transforms past and present simultaneously’ (Jones 2009).

There are many themes and ideas within Battersby’s reworked account of repetition and the past-present-future relation that resonate with my own discussions in previous chapters. One aspect of particular interest to my project is Battersby’s stress upon the ‘vertical’ relationships that develop diachronically through time via echo and repetition, creating temporal layering and depth. To illustrate the vertical or diachronic relation, Battersby draws on Kierkegaard’s rendering of Antigone, as we have seen, and also on his version of the Abraham/Isaac story in *Fear and Trembling* (Kierkegaard 2001c), focusing on the way he uses repetition in this text as a narrative technique to create a complex temporal framing of the events and characters.<sup>138</sup> He ‘tells and retells the story’, she explains, ‘but alters details so that throughout, the reader (and narrator) is left with an ambiguous past... we are presented with alternative Abrahams; alternative ‘facts’; alternative realities; alternative narratives in which we could fit this singular event’ (Battersby 1998:169). The identities of

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<sup>138</sup> It must be emphasised that Battersby’s reading of Kierkegaard is selective. For example, she is explicit that her use of Kierkegaard focuses on the philosophy of repetition and temporality which emerges from this text, and is not endorsing Kierkegaard’s intention that Abraham be judged in ‘religious’ terms, in which it is necessary to forgive one’s father/god, even if he is a rapist or a murderer (Battersby 1998:171).

Abraham and Isaac, Battersby claims, are thus ‘given resonance and temporal depth in much the same way that Kierkegaard’s (modernised) Antigone works and reworks her relationship with the past’. From this perspective, individual selves and identities are shaped by the past, but not in a deterministic sense. We are not simply products of our past or our environment; but, on the other hand, we cannot escape them to be entirely self-determining. Instead, selves are shaped in ‘temporal loops, harmonies and scores’, as echoes and feedback-loops link an (uncertain) past to an (undetermined) future (ibid: 175). In this sense, repetition operates as a kind of ‘double consciousness’, as ‘the past is reworked by the individual’s consciousness, but this consciousness is itself dependent on an otherness that preceded it’ (ibid: 173).

Through emphasising the temporal layering, looping, and depth that comprises the diachronic relation, this approach invites us to explore the internal complexity of historical time, as it emerges through diachronic relations between historical subjects. Moreover, by foregrounding the vertical relation, Battersby’s Kierkegaardian model of intersubjective relations is fully able to grasp the *power dynamics* and struggles with hierarchies that inevitably attend and govern the processes of inheritance and identity-formation. According to Battersby’s account of the ‘patterning’ of identity, intersubjectivity and ‘otherness’ are always constitutively primary: a theoretical ‘absolute’ that is common within feminist phenomenology, hermeneutics and political theory alike. Yet the strength of Battersby’s ‘vertical’ analysis is that she resists the temptation to theorise this intersubjectivity in an overly harmonious or ‘horizontal’ manner. Rather, the multiplicitous temporal order that she extracts from Kierkegaard emerges not only through temporal loops and flashbacks, but also through *competing* ‘takes’ on past, present and future (ibid: 183).

This conception of power-laden ‘vertical’ relationships and competing narratives links with my own previous discussions about narrativity and generationality, where I have argued that there can be no simple ‘passing on’ of feminist legacies, as we negotiate relations of authority and dependence, and competing interpretations, experiences and narratives, to chart different courses through our feminist pasts and presents. Unlike Irigaray’s rather

utopian re-imaginings of female genealogies<sup>139</sup>, Battersby's vertical relational model depicts female genealogies and historical legacies in terms of complex contestations, and negotiations of continuity and discontinuity. This helps us to conceptualise the process of configuring historical time through narrativity, dating frameworks and generational symbolics as a process that is fraught with tensions and points of rupture and disconnection, as well as being made possible through the resonances and connections between different narratives, timelines, ethical imperatives, and political visions. As Dubey's analysis also shows, the idea of 'repetition with variation' or repetitive temporality can aptly grasp the coexistence of discontinuities and differences alongside continuities and resonances, within the process of history-making and tradition-building.

Alongside this important focus on temporal depth, relationality and power dynamics, another aspect of Battersby's interpretation of 'recollecting forwards' that can enhance my own model of historical time is the process-oriented conception of historical truth and reality that it offers. In chapter 2, I developed a model of indirect historical realism, proposing the notion of 'asymmetrical interdependence' as a way to understand the relationship of interpretation to happening. On the one hand, I argued, the way in which a happening or event is understood and interpreted is itself part of the event – constituting part of the event's truth and meaning. But on the other hand, the event will always exceed any specific interpretation or conceptualisation. What it means, what it meant—and therefore what it 'was' or 'is'—is always ambiguous, contingent, and contestable. Whilst the historical meaning or 'truth' of the past event is determined to an extent by interpretative frameworks and problematics in the present, the past can never be fixed through the historical accounts we construct and narrate.

Similarly, in Battersby's account of repetitive temporality, there is no fixed historical truth, only a 'temporally enfolded complex of symbols, traces, feelings, moods that invite us to confront the 'givens' that are made mysterious via encodement with the multiplicity of paths that might have led from the past' (ibid: 171). This means that actuality and reality cannot be established through an appeal to a transparent experience or memory, nor an appeal

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<sup>139</sup> For critiques, see Deutscher (2010) or Stone (2011).

to consensus or coherence. For example, Antigone's fate is not an 'absolute truth' to be discovered, 'a true self... to be revealed and corroborated by others' (ibid: 169). Likewise, the 'repetitions' of Abraham and Isaac's story mean that we are never left with a final, 'true' underlying meaning of the story (ibid: 169). As with Kierkegaard's Antigone, the past is taken up into the present to give a temporal depth, but there is 'no privileged access to that depth' via the mechanisms of memory or a transparent and fully thematisable experience: 'There are no 'ultimates' or absolutes'—experience itself is suspect—but there is nevertheless a (fluid, shifting, dynamic) 'real' that is composed by the way the self is positioned in the complex dynamics of multiple self-other relationships' and the 'secrets' of the past (ibid: 168-170).

Battersby further develops this processual conception of historical reality and truth in *The Sublime, Terror and Human Difference* (2007), where she draws upon the Nietzschean conception of the 'untimely' event.<sup>140</sup> Her exposition focuses on a key passage from *Beyond Good and Evil* (Nietzsche 2006a), where Nietzsche claims that the most transformative events cannot be grasped at the time of their occurrence:

'The greatest events and thoughts are understood last. The sexes, generations or races<sup>141</sup> that are simultaneous with them do not live through such events – they live right past them' (quoted in Battersby 2007: 185; see also Nietzsche 2006: 358).

Such events pass us by because they defy our existing frameworks of understanding. But they are not simply negated or relegated to a fixed and frozen past: over and done with but never understood or realised. Rather, as Battersby explains it, 'there is an 'event' (*Ereignis*) and a

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<sup>140</sup> Once again, it must be stressed that Battersby's reading of Nietzsche is selective. She registers the dangers of adopting a Nietzschean approach, for example, positing that his underlying model of life and 'health' prevents him from theorising a less antagonistic self-other relation (Battersby 2007:186-7).

<sup>141</sup> Battersby points out that Nietzsche uses the term '*Geshlechter*', which can mean 'generations', 'sexes' and 'races'. She uses the 1966 Walter Kaufman translation, but for a slightly different translation of this passage, see the more recent *Nietzsche Reader*, edited by Ansell Pearson and Large (2006).

‘something’ (*Etwas*) awaiting the encounter... an indefinite something already there – waiting to be registered’ (Battersby 2007:186). The idea of ‘untimeliness’ thus carries a logic of ‘delay’, but this is not a delay in the sense that the untimely event contains an absolute or fixed truth that ‘fits better’ with the present or future, rather than its ‘own time’. Instead, untimely events defy all accepted, expected, or pre-determined patterns of history, lurking in the fringes of cultural memory, and re-emerging and ‘repeating’ at unforeseen moments, to break apart and disrupt the sedimented time frames and syntheses that cannot entirely suppress or contain them. In this regard, Battersby argues, Nietzsche affirms the capacity of forgotten and untimely events and ideas to ‘re-emerge as the self looks back at the past from the perspective of the future and a differently oriented ‘now’’ (ibid: 185).

This conception of the ‘untimely event’ offers another way of elaborating the process-oriented approach to historical reality and truth, which complements and enhances my dynamic model of historical happening and reflexive, indirect realism. To ‘reconfigure truth as an event’ is to adopt a process-oriented conception of historical truth, whereby the truth of the past is not determined through agreeing and settling on the truth of a course of events once and for all, thereby fixing them in time. Instead, truth is always being reworked, as the echoes and repetitions of past ideas and events re-emerge from within the folds and layers of history, and transform our conceptual frameworks and sense of the true, the real, and the possible. This is not to be taken as an agnostic or relativistic position on historical truth. According to the indirect realist position I have proposed earlier, we are not free to invent any historical truth or narrative we wish, due to the constraint of the archive and the historical imperative of truth-telling guided by the ontological presupposition of the trace (Ricoeur 1988:184). The turn to the ‘untimely’, rather, enables us to cultivate an extended meaning of the ‘event’ and further make sense of a dynamic account of historical reality and truth, premised upon the opacity and ‘unfinishedness’ of the past. Within the framework of ‘recollecting forwards’ and ‘untimely’ resurfacings, the present and future are shaped by the past, but not in a deterministic manner, as the past is repeated in the present and future in unpredictable and unexpected ways.

## 2

### REPETITION IN PRACTICE

The previous section has outlined an alternative conceptualisation of historical repetition, recasting repetition in terms of ‘recollecting forwards’ and ‘untimely’ resurfacings that provoke fresh understandings of past, present and future. On this model, repetition is not a simple retake of the past, nor a step backwards or waste of time when measured against a linear, teleological ideal of progress. Instead, repetitions, resurfacings and ‘feedback loops’ are the very *mechanism* of change and transformation. This account of repetition adds further insights and images to my multilinear, multidirectional and internally complex model of historical time, enabling a dynamic account of the past-present-future relation, a processual model of historical truth and reality, and a temporally rich account of diachronic relations and ambiguous, contested inheritance. In this section, I propose that this reworked concept of repetition opens up not only an alternative philosophy of historical time; it also opens up a form of historiographical *practice*, which is both transformative and critical. The first half of the section draws further on Battersby’s work, which demonstrates the transformative aspect of ‘repetition in practice’ through ‘remembering’ difference and ‘others within’, as a means of overturning hegemonic paradigms, and offering new pathways through the present via the past. The critical aspect will be outlined in the second half of the section, which makes reference to La Capra’s model of historiographical ‘transference’.

#### 2.1

##### *Historical Blind Spots and Remembering Others Within*

Throughout her work, Battersby shows how the uncovering of forgotten or neglected texts and artworks can trigger the re-emergence of ignored or forgotten ways of thinking and living, which can open up possibilities in the present, and unsettle reified ‘truths’ that have

come to appear as fixed or natural, but are in fact contingent.<sup>142</sup> Crucial to this project is the notion of historical ‘blind spots’, which result from the sedimentation of received ideas and conventional modes of judging and perceiving, and render us incapable of registering elements which controvert these sedimented cognitive and interpretative frameworks. ‘We are positioned in history and located in overlapping power structures and spaces’, Battersby explains, ‘in such a way that certain things become so self-evident that they produce blind spots in our vision and effectively screen out that which, at present, cannot be noticed’ (2011:126).

This notion of historical blind-spots is chiefly inspired by Nietzsche’s account of concept-formation in his essay ‘On Truth and Lies in a Non-Moral Sense’:

Every concept arises through the equation of unequal things. Just as it is certain that one leaf is never totally the same as another, so it is certain that the concept ‘leaf’ is formed by arbitrarily discarding these individual differences and by forgetting the distinguishing aspects... We obtain the concept, as we do the form, by overlooking what is individual and actual (Nietzsche 2006c:117).

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<sup>142</sup> In this sense, Battersby’s methodology has affinities with Foucault’s historical-critical method of ‘genealogy’ (Battersby 2011:126). However, whilst Battersby’s approach is in many respects congruent with Foucault’s, there is an important difference, which I argue makes Battersby’s work a more fruitful resource for feminist historiography than Foucault’s. This difference lies in Battersby’s recognition of the importance of not only recognising and seizing on discontinuities and fragmentariness, but also, the importance of building continuities as a relational practice and a strategy of resistance (Battersby 1989:231). Foucault’s stress on discontinuity stems from his distrust of totalising visions of continuity and sequentially coherent change in culture (Foucault 1984:88). This is a distrust that I share; indeed, my entire thesis is intended to overturn this totalising and teleological model of historical time, which has had such a detrimental effect within feminist theory. Yet, whilst it is necessary to disrupt this model, forging historical continuities remains an important strategic aspect of feminism, helping to provide inspiration and to foster solidarity. Further, I do not necessarily equate continuity with teleology or totality, because, as demonstrated in chapter 5, this chapter, and the following, different kinds of continuities can coexist with discontinuities, within frameworks of repetition and ‘polytemporality’, rather than teleological or totalising models of historical time.

For Battersby, this passage perfectly illustrates the subversive power of Nietzsche's thinking, which lies in his idea of 'forgetting'. This is because 'forgetting' implicitly holds the possibility of *remembering* what has been discarded or forgotten during the formation of truths and hegemonic interpretative frameworks. The mind 'forgets' material differences and singularities as it forms general concepts, Nietzsche claims; yet, according to the 'untimely' model, forgotten differences and singularities are not simply negated. Rather, they remain on the 'fringes of consciousness', and as such, there is always the possibility of a new encounter with such forgotten differences, which then transforms our conceptual understanding of 'reality' (Battersby 2007:188), or as Nietzsche puts it, 'smashes it to pieces' (Nietzsche 2006:117).

The key to Battersby's use of this passage of Nietzsche's lies in her extension of his account of 'forgetting' and 'remembering' in the formation of concepts, to draw an analogy with the historical process. To conceptualise and thematise history, she argues, we 'forget' all the differences and singularities which do not fit within our overarching schemas and narratives. Consequently, our framework of assumptions about our past and present 'stops us from seeing' or registering things which do not conform to our expectations and dominant ways of living (Battersby 2007:189). Nevertheless, what is excluded or forgotten remains on the fringes and in the folds of cultural memory, re-emerging at a later moment to disturb historical 'truths' and established perspectives on the past. This 'shattering' of conceptual understanding through the remembering of forgotten differences can help us think more productively about 'others within', those who are not outside the dominant symbolic order but nevertheless 'vanish within its folds' (1998:188):

'Knowledge systems can be transformed by an encounter with an 'other' that is not forever unknowable and unrepresentable - even if that 'other' has eluded



consciousness so completely as to fade into invisibility and inaudibility at some localised conjunctures of historical time' (2011:138).<sup>143</sup>

These two notions of historical 'blind-spots' and of 'others within', I contend, are of methodological value to feminist historiography, firstly, because they demand a critical interrogation of the hegemonic narratives and interpretative and cognitive frameworks that govern one's theoretical practice, forcing us to consider the 'blind spots' they induce, i.e. what might be blocked out, silenced or distorted. Moreover, they encourage us to seek out alternatives, and to adopt an open attitude towards the past, suspending judgment and allowing for the possibility that we might be surprised and reoriented by what resurfaces. In this sense, the thought of 'repetition' can inform a historical practice which encompasses the three modes of 'restless revisionism' that I proposed in chapter 2: a form of practice which is 'reflexive' in its interrogation of blind spots, blockages and silences, 'active' in its quest for alternative and 'forgotten' traces and fragments, and 'receptive', in its cultivation of a more open attitude to history and a willingness to being *transformed* by the encounter with the past.

This kind of practice is well exemplified in an essay on representational strategies and 'cultures of birth', in which Battersby considers how birth-giving and artistic creativity can be reconsidered through seeking out subversive female voices within 'minor' arts or 'minor' literatures (2006).<sup>144</sup> 'If only we know how to look', she writes, 'we can already find women artists representing maternity, birth, creativity and procreativity in ways that disrupt

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<sup>143</sup> There are also affinities with Adorno's method of 'non-identity thinking', which affirms that forgotten singularities are capable of emerging from unstable groupings, or 'constellations' of schematised particulars. Like with her reading of Nietzsche, Battersby draws a parallel between Adorno's account of sensory experience and concept-formation, and the process of historical remembering and forgetting within the formation of social identities and norms. Even though 'constellations' might constitute a temporary conceptual or historical 'blind-spot' that prevents us from seeing or registering differences, Battersby claims, 'patterning of individual differences in the 'constellation' are not lost, but remain in ways that allow them to impinge on consciousness in flashes... in which what re-emerges is those differences that reason 'forgot' (Battersby 1998:139).

<sup>144</sup> The term 'minor' is taken from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*, where they explain that the difference between minority and majority is not simply quantitative. Rather 'minor' indicates a subversive language or literature that '*send[s] the major language racing*' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:116).

the dominant traditions of western modernity' (2006:294). With reference to three women artists whose oeuvres span almost the entire twentieth century—Paula Modersohn-Becker (1876-1907), Frida Kahlo (1907-1954), and Helen Chadwick (1953-1996)—Battersby shows how female artists have consistently confounded hegemonic depictions of motherhood and notions of artistic creativity within the 'canonical' western tradition, thereby pointing to 'blind spots' within the hegemonic discourses which have 'set mothering outside culture' and reserved artistic production for males. Moreover, she argues that through these 'minor' works, we can find alternative artistic strategies for representing 'the problem of the subject who births' (2006:307).<sup>145</sup> Her earlier work *Gender and Genius* (1989) similarly explores how neglected artworks by women offer tools for reimagining and rethinking the female, overturning those very frameworks that would seek to relegate their work to the margins, and moving 'forward via the female past' (1989:222).<sup>146</sup>

My suggestion here is that as well as helping to overturning wider andocentric models and discourses, the notion of 'blind spots' and 'untimely repetitions' could make feminists more receptive to the transformative possibilities opened up by feminism's *own* forgotten or 'hidden' histories: histories that we have 'lived past' because they have defied the norms of hegemonic feminisms, but are beginning to re-emerge and make us think again about what feminism is, has been, and what it can do. This kind of approach to feminist history can be found in the interdisciplinary anthology *Black Women's Intellectual*

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<sup>145</sup> Battersby uses a similar technique in *The Sublime, Terror and Human Difference*, where she turns to German poet Karoline von Günderode (1780-1816) in order to formulate a new way of thinking the sublime that does not conform to the 'egotistical' conception of the sublime as a transcendence of materiality (2007:119-127). She also turns to various female artists including Evelyn Williams Dorothea Tanning, Kay Sage, Mona Hatoum and Anne Katrine Dolven (ibid: 137-156).

<sup>146</sup> Battersby's key argument here is that in light of the discontinuities and fragmentations imposed upon and between women's creativity under patriarchy, there is a strong case for a feminist project of tradition-building that forges continuities between disparate female works and artists – offering 'tricks in perspective' and tracing 'new patterns of inheritance' as a strategic practice that prompts a rethink of aesthetic values and female creativity (1989:221-31). Battersby's appeal to tradition-building has attracted criticism (see for example Felski, 1995), and there is certainly a danger in overplaying the beneficial aspects of building continuity and coherence in the face of fragmentation. However, I submit that whilst Battersby's project in *Gender and Genius* is certainly risky, the risk is mitigated by the stress she places in her later works upon the inevitability of cracks and discontinuities, and indeed, the necessity of being alert to 'others within' and affirming the transformative power of 'remembering' forgotten or suppressed differences and discontinuities.

*Traditions: Speaking Their Minds* (2007), which revisits the lives and works of nineteenth-century African American women writers and activists including Maria Stewart, Sojourner Truth, Francis E.W. Harper, Pauline Hopkins, Anna Julia Cooper, Ida B. Wells, and Mary Ann Shadd Cary<sup>147</sup>. The editors Kristin Waters and Carol B. Conaway begin by stating, in language reminiscent of Nietzschean untimeliness, that ‘this anthology is a step toward reclaiming the legacies of Harper and other nineteenth-century black women whose lives we otherwise might have “walked past” without knowing and appreciating their remarkable contributions to the traditions of black thought’ (Waters and Conaway 2007:1–2). The language of untimeliness here casts the anthology’s objective as much more than a retrospective recognition or a straightforward correction of a previously inaccurate history. Bolder than the desire for recognition, or for accuracy, their ‘untimely’ approach is fuelled by a desire to allow these forgotten theoretical contributions to *act* on the present and future.

This is achieved by the anthology in two key ways. Its first important intervention, as outlined by Regis Mann, lies in drawing attention to sites of loss, to the blind spots of western feminist theory and all that has been ‘forgotten’ (Mann 2011). Mann is referring here to the specificities and complexities of black women’s theoretical contributions to western feminism, which have been overlooked and ‘lost’ (Mann 2011:582-3). The figures of black women, she claims, have functioned overwhelmingly as ‘apparatuses through which to clarify and make “viable” theoretical concepts legible, rather than as sites of knowledge production’ (ibid: 577-578). As an example, Mann refers to the way in which Sojourner Truth has been co-opted, appropriated and ‘fetishised’ as a symbolic figure, with her actual words and their epistemological import rarely acknowledged (ibid: 579). Or when her ideas and words have been heeded, they have frequently been ‘translated’ into the theoretical language and terminology of the day, for example, when Denise Riley ‘translates’ Truth’s words from ‘Ain’t I a Woman?’ into ‘Ain’t I a Fluctuating Identity?’ (Riley 1987; see also McDowell 2007). The particularities of Truth’s contributions have thus been covered over by a

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<sup>147</sup> Shadd Cary was in fact American-Canadian.

sedimented interpretative framework and theoretical language which blocks out what she actually said or might have meant.

To ‘go back’ and uncover such lost words draws attention to these blind spots and sites of loss, thereby highlighting and disrupting western feminist theory’s ‘continual elision of the historical specificity of black women’s lives and epistemologies’ (Mann 2011:582). But more than this, an ‘untimely’ revisionist practice creates new opportunities for dialogue within the field, through recovering and reactivating forgotten histories and ‘lost epistemologies’ that provoke fresh approaches to the predicaments of the present. This, Mann explains, means allowing the past and present to ‘inhabit the same space as a framework for imagining and creating feminist futures’ (ibid: 584). For example, R. Dianne Bartlow’s contribution to the collection of essays makes links between Maria Stewart’s writings and acts in the nineteenth-century, and contemporary feminist work by theorists and activists including Patricia Hill Collins. She identifies areas of shared concern, such as educational disenfranchisement and institutional racism, and also similarities in approach, for example, between Stewart’s and Collins’ similar conceptions of critical social theory and knowledge production ‘as a way to survive’ (Bartlow 2007:74; see Collins 1998). As the editors of the collection describe it, Bartlow ‘weave[s] the past into the present by following the threads developed by Stewart into contemporary discourse’ (Waters and Conaway 2007:5). The essay thus does not simply pay tribute to Stewart, nor does it stop short at a critique of hegemonic feminist theory’s blind spots and elisions in ‘forgetting’ her. Its intention, rather, is to *reactivate* the past within the present, through putting the ‘intellectual episteme’ of this nineteenth-century writer and activist into conversation with contemporary feminisms, as a means of refreshing and strengthening feminist theory (Mann 2011:587).

For another illuminating example of how feminist histories can be ‘recollected forward’ to transformative effect, we can turn to Kathi Weeks’ re-visitation of the ‘Wages for Housework’ movement in her recent monograph *The Problem with Work* (2011). ‘Wages for Housework’—a theoretical framework and political programme articulated in a number of texts in Italy, the UK and the US between 1972 and 1976—has rarely been taken seriously as

a feminist movement, and is typically portrayed in histories of feminism as ‘a rather odd curio from the archive of second-wave feminist theory’ (ibid: 114). Weeks’ return to these texts is not a straightforward rehabilitation or rescue mission, as she acknowledges that the *Wages for Housework* literature tends towards universalising analyses and an essentialising identity politics (in which women are addressed as ‘housewives’), and appears to propagate a dualistic model of productive versus reproductive labour (ibid: 126-7). Her aim, rather, is to recover some of the ‘lost dimensions of the project’ that can speak to the conditions of the present and inspire contemporary and future feminist movements. In this sense, Weeks conceives of *Wages for Housework* as a ‘living legacy rather than as a dead relic’, and her interest is in ‘remaking’ it, rather than ‘preserving its memory’ (ibid: 116). For example, focusing particularly on texts by Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James (1973) and Nicole Cox and Silvia Federici (1976), Weeks extracts an important critique of the capitalist work ethic. This strain of ‘antiwork’ politics has frequently been glossed over or missed in the *Wages for Housework* literature, but Weeks argues that it has a lot to offer to feminist theory in the contemporary context of the post-Fordist ‘work society’ with its unremitting glorification of hard work and cooptation of nonwork time<sup>148</sup>.

Weeks also unearths an insightful analysis of the ‘utopian demand’ within these texts, which she presents as a refreshing antidote to the anti-utopian strains that have come to predominate in feminist politics as a result of cultural and political backlashes and economic crises. In response to backlash politics, Weeks observes, it is common for feminists to scale back the scope of their political demands, ‘their commitment to revolutionary change giving way to an absorption in struggles to hold the ground already won’ (ibid: 183)<sup>149</sup>. Yet, we can learn something about expanding our horizons and making ‘utopian demands’ from the *Wages for Housework* texts, Weeks contends, which serve as an example of ‘utopianism

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<sup>148</sup> In so doing, Weeks importantly re-emphasises the links between the ‘*Wages for Housework*’ movement and ‘autonomist Marxism’, usually associated with Mario Tronti, Paolo Virno, Antonio Negri (Weeks 2000:123-6).

<sup>149</sup> For more on this, see Wendy Brown’s essay on ‘Resisting Left Melancholy’ (Brown 1999).

without apology', and as a provocation to imagine, postulate, and instigate postcapitalist, postpatriarchal futures (ibid: 174). Whilst backlash logics and rhetorics tell us feminism has gone too far and demanded too much, the *Wages for Housework* texts suggest, on the contrary, that 'the danger is not that we might want too much, but that we do not want enough' (ibid: 225). Thus, Weeks shows that through turning to the past to inspire a more radical political imagination in the present, we can turn to the future with renewed hope, energy and imagination, reactivating the insights and spirit of a 'half-remembered hope and failed dream' and bringing the past to bear on feminism's present and its possible futures (ibid: 114-7). 'The point', she writes, is to become more open to 'the lost possibilities from which we might learn', to 'go back in order to bring some of the insights from the 1970s forward' (ibid: 118).

The examples referred to here show how repetition and 'recollecting forwards' can be understood not only in conceptual terms, but also in practical terms as a feminist *strategy*: a productive use of echo and repetition which can bring change within the discursive and political landscapes of the present. This can work both with regard to overturning wider androcentric discourses, but also with regard to overturning hegemonic histories of feminism itself. Having emphasised the positive, transformative potential of 'repetition in practice', however, the reflexive, critical aspect must now be examined in more detail. Otherwise, we risk fostering a naïve affirmativism which singles out the 'good bits' of forgotten feminist histories and risks glossing over the more problematic aspects of those texts or events we wish to 'repeat'. Further, an overly affirmative approach risks overlooking repetitions of the less desirable kind, for example, of racist, colonialist, ethnocentric, or heterosexist sentiments and practices that we may have presumed to belong to feminisms of the past, but which persist and re-emerge within present presumptions and discourses.<sup>150</sup> The discussion below

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<sup>150</sup> Indeed, this is the criticism I would make of Elizabeth Grosz's Bergsonian historiography, which tends to treat transformation and novelty as values in themselves (ignoring the fact that change can be for the worst), and also, skims over the problematic *content* of feminist histories, depicting feminist pasts primarily in terms of untapped potential or 'virtuality', without addressing the normative aspect of feminist historiography and politics. 'The astute feminist historian', Grosz writes, stands on the cusp

will therefore focus more closely on these problems, and finally, will show how the idea of repetition can lead us towards a ‘dialogic’ relation to the past.

## 2.2

### *Historiographical Transference and Dialogue*

The major obstacle to realising the potential pertinence of past feminist ideas and approaches to present conditions, as discussed in chapter 1, is a sequentialist, progressive notion of history, which constructs clear breaks between one historical phase and another, as each overtakes and leaves the other behind. Embedded in this understanding of the historical process is an overly secure epistemological confidence that one’s present is separate from, or has transcended, the problems of the past. This results in a presumption that past perspectives and approaches are deficient and of no relevance to the present, and as such, it blocks out the potentially positive and transformative kind of ‘repetitions’ discussed above. Moreover, the confidence that the present has transcended the past, and is necessarily an improvement upon the past, blocks out an awareness of the more *problematic* ways in which the past continues to repeat itself in the present.

This kind of treatment of the present can be identified, for example, in the two main approaches that have predominated within feminist literary criticism. To illustrate, literary theorist Jennifer Fleissner gives a survey of the critical treatment of white American female writers of the 1880s such as Sarah Orne Jewett, Edith Wharton, Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Kate Chopin, over the past forty years of feminist criticism (Fleissner 2002). The first approach Fleissner identifies can be described as ‘affirmative’, as it aims to build affinitive bridges between the past and present, and concentrates wholly on appropriating the ‘good

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of the folding of the past into the future, beyond the control or limit of the present’ (2000:1016). As a methodological imperative, this is arguably rather flimsy when it comes to the question of how one might actually approach and interpret feminist acts, ideas and texts of the past, which may express (explicitly or implicitly) racist, colonialist, ethnocentric or heterosexist sentiments.

bits' of these texts in line with feminist thought in the present<sup>151</sup>. The second can be described as a 'historicist' approach, which aims at a 'critical distance', 'locating' the texts within their particular historical moment or context, and interpreting them according to the norms and practices of their day<sup>152</sup>. Clearly, these two different approaches postulate a different kind of relation between past and present. The affirmative approach constructs a continuity between (certain aspects of) these women's writings of the past and the feminist present, whilst the historicist approach set up a break, as the writings are fixed or located in their historical 'moment'. Nevertheless, each approach can be shown to depend upon the presumption that the present has 'transcended' the past. Whilst the affirmative approach posits an affinity between past and present, Fleissner argues, the underlying presumption, nevertheless, is that the present has essentially overcome the problems of the past. The implicit idea behind these readings of Jewett or Gilman, she contends, is that 'looking back, we are able to construct a better perspective that keeps the good while rejecting the bad' (Fleissner 2002:49). The historicist approach may appear to be preferable to the affirmative approach, as it seems to disentangle itself from the politics of historical interpretation and selectivity in the present by 'stepping back' to make judgments according to the texts' own historical contexts. Yet in fact, historicist criticism often rests upon equally problematic epistemological presumptions, in that the past is treated as a finished stage of history, which the present has overcome and moved beyond. For example, in the historicist readings that Fleissner examines, 'the authors are made to represent their era's worst excesses of class snobbery, racism, cultural imperialism – all the things that the scholars who uncovered them would wish only to leave behind' (ibid: 46-6). She proposes, therefore, that 'the historicist insistence on rendering writers more dead than alive may be a screen, a way of covering over the ways in which they do still live, the ways in which critic and author are not as distant from one another as it might appear' (ibid: 52). Indeed, this can be regarded as a form of 'temporal othering' or 'temporal

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<sup>151</sup> For an example of an 'affirmative' or 'empathetic' reading of Jewett, see Marcia Folsom's essay on *The Country of the Pointed Firs* in *Critical Essays on Sarah Orne Jewett* (ed. Nagel 1984).

<sup>152</sup> For an example of a negational 'historicist' reading of Wharton, see Elizabeth Ammons' essay on 'Edith Wharton and Race' in *The Cambridge Companion to Edith Wharton* (ed. Millicent Bell, 1995).



distancing’, as discussed in chapter 1, whereby negative aspects are projected back in time in order to carve out a distinct and superior position for an author in the present.

In each case, then, there is a presumption that the ‘bad bits’ of the feminist past can be, or have been, left behind, as we position ourselves as ‘having moved temporally “beyond” them to a place of greater sophistication and understanding’ from which to judge (*ibid*). The question of critical judgment, however, does not need to be polarised between ‘a sympathetic rendering of the past and a critical distance from it’, both of which depend upon an overly secure, hierarchical division between past and present (La Capra 1985:41). This kind of presumption can be avoided, I propose, through taking the pathway opened up by the temporality of ‘repetition’. As discussed above, the idea of ‘repetition’ disturbs the epistemological security of the present through making us attentive to ‘others within’ and open to ‘repetitions’ that ‘trouble the folds of our feminist projects’ (Jones 2009). Moreover, the idea of ‘repetition’ can also make us recognise the ways in which less desirable elements are already repeating themselves in the present, without us being aware.

An instructive way to consider this kind of unconscious repetition is through the framework of ‘historiographical transference’, proposed by Dominick La Capra. Within psychoanalytic theory, ‘transference’ refers to a ‘repetition-displacement of the past into the present’, an unconscious redirection of desires or feelings towards a new ‘object’ or ‘other’ (La Capra 2004:72). ‘Transference’ is therefore bound up with a notion of time not as simple continuity or discontinuity, but as ‘repetition with variation or change’ (*ibid*)<sup>153</sup>. In the clinical context, the aim is for the analyst and the analysand to work through such transference displacement in a manner that does not ‘blindly replicate debilitating aspects of the past’. This

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<sup>153</sup> Freud called this temporality ‘Nachträglichkeit’, which translates as ‘afterwardsness’, or ‘deferredness’, referring to the way in which a repressed memory only becomes a trauma after the event, through forms of repetition and restaging. These repetitions indicate the trauma's disturbing sway over the present, thereby problematising the idea of a clean break from the past, and showing that the past is always ‘unfinished’ (La Capra 1994).

means facing up to fears of possession by the past and loss of control of it, but also resisting the narcissistic temptation to assert *full* control over the ‘object’ (ibid.).

The idea of ‘transference’, La Capra suggests, has purchase beyond the psychoanalytic field and clinical context, and is highly pertinent to the historiographical question of how to conduct an ‘exchange’ with the past as an ‘other’ (ibid: 75). In the previous chapter, we saw how the psychoanalytic idea of ‘working through’ or ‘reworking’ the past-present relation is taken up in Irigaray’s work on female genealogies and mythic imaginaries. In La Capra’s work, it is the historiographical context which becomes the site in which fears, desires and investments are ‘worked through’.<sup>154</sup> There is always, he contends, a ‘transferential’ relation between practices in the past and historical accounts of them, as the problems at issue in the ‘object’ of study reappear or are ‘repeated with variations’ in the work of the historian or historiographer (La Capra 1985:72-3). Indeed, we are often attracted to certain aspects or events of the past precisely because they trouble us or disturb through an eerie sense of familiarity. Accordingly, if repetition and displacement of this kind is simply a structural determinant of historical work, then it is crucial that historians and historiographers are able to critically negotiate this ‘transferential’ relation to the past.

The problem of historiographical ‘transference’—or repetition-displacement of the past into the present—is circumvented or simply repressed in the idea of an affirmative communion with the past, and also in the historicist idea that the text can be fixed in its ‘moment’ and understood at a distance. These seeming alternatives, La Capra argues, are not really alternatives, in that they both ‘share a disavowal of the process of displacement as a complex interaction of repetition with change; they also disavow the complex nature of one’s implication in and tendency to repeat aspects of the processes one studies’ (La Capra 1994:177-8). That is, in each case, it is denied that the repetition of the issues in the ‘object’ of study are in fact being repeated and worked through in the historian’s or historiographer’s present, as they try to assert full control over the ‘object’ through assigning a predetermined

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<sup>154</sup> Though we should not play down the need for psychoanalytic considerations within the field of feminist historiography. As Deborah Withers points out, feminist thought and practice often takes place within fragile psychic relations and in the ‘vicinity of trauma’ (Withers 2012).

categorisation, a definitive interpretation, or a fixed temporal framework which distinctly distinguishes the present from the past.

As a genuine alternative, La Capra's suggestion is that the unsettled 'transferral' relation to the past can be best handled through envisaging historical practice as a 'dialogical exchange'. The dialogic approach, as La Capra describes it, is sensitive to transferral displacement, recognising transferral tendencies as a means of resisting an uncritical identification with the 'other', and also of resisting the temptation to claim a total distance and separation. In this regard, it aids the 'reflexive' mode of historical practice I have outlined previously, and also the idea of 'working through' and 'reworking' the past through the present and the present through the past. Moreover, the 'dialogic' relation between past and present can also be understood as a provocative interaction, whereby the 'voices' of the past are allowed to 'speak back' to the present (La Capra 2004:79). As such, the idea of a 'dialogue' between past and present also links back to the 'receptive' mode of historical practice discussed earlier, which attempts to suspend or scale back the judgmental and interpretative frameworks of the present, in order that we might open ourselves up to the challenges of the other's 'voice' and subsequently be transformed by encounter with past. A 'dialogic' approach, therefore, not only enables new pathways from the past to emerge in the present, but also allows us to test current views by 'listening attentively to possibly disconcerting 'voices' from the past' (ibid: 37).

In the interest of a transformative, and also a critical historiography, then, it is a 'useful critical fiction to believe that the texts or phenomena to be interpreted may answer one back and even be convincing enough to lead one to change one's mind' (La Capra 1985:72-3). It must be acknowledged that the past cannot always 'speak back' in the way that the dialogic model suggests. Any kind of 'dialogue' with the past within historiographical studies takes place within a larger social, political, economic, and cultural context that places conditions and restrictions upon it (La Capra 1984:42). La Capra's own key concern here is the barriers between elite and popular cultures, and the difficulties that ensue in enabling critical 'dialogues' between a popular text and a scholarly reading of that text (La Capra

1994). Other issues that arise include the *absence* of recorded ‘voices’ of the past to dialogue with; indeed, this is one of the central problematics of both feminist and subaltern historiography (Spivak 1999:206-7)<sup>155</sup>. Despite these caveats however, I support La Capra’s proposal that ‘transference’ and ‘dialogue’ are useful historiographical concepts, which ensure that the past remains open and unsettled, that we resist the urge to deflect or categorise away those aspects of our feminist pasts and presents that we would rather forget about, at the same time as engaging with those aspects that inspire us and demand to be rethought and reconsidered in light of changing circumstances and perspectives. Within the framework of transference and dialogical relations, there is no secure present that is free from what Elizabeth Freeman has described as ‘temporal drag’ – the ‘pull of the past upon the present’ (Freeman 2011:256). Rather, the dialogic approach acknowledges that the parts of certain feminist texts or practices that we find compelling cannot be ‘wholly severed from those we find disturbing, as they constitute those very issues that ‘remain ‘alive’ because unsettled, not fully categorised away, today’ (Fleissner 2010:54).

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has outlined how ‘repetition’ can be understood as a philosophical concept which supports a multilinear, multidirectional model of historical time, and also as a practical paradigm which supports both transformative and critical forms of historical practice. The conceptual framework of ‘repetition with variation’, ‘recollecting forwards’, and ‘untimeliness’, I have argued, enhances the indirect realist approach developed earlier in the thesis, which posits a dynamic interrelation between past and present, whereby the past is not fixed or finished, but rather, continues to echo and repeat in the present, as it is taken up in various, and contested ways. As such, the framework of repetitive temporality not only

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<sup>155</sup> As Spivak remarks in her account of her archival quest to learn something of the life of the Rani of Sirmur, of whom there are scarce archival records or traces: ‘I should have liked to establish a transference relationship with the Rani of Sirmur. I pray instead to be haunted by her slight ghost, bypassing the arrogance of the cure’ (Spivak 1999:207).

facilitates a dynamic understanding of the past-present-future relation and their mutual imbrication, but further, a process-oriented model of historical reality and truth-making, and an insightful account of diachronic relations and ambiguous, contested inheritance. The historiographical turn to repetition also has a practical applicability, as stated. In the first instance, 'repetition' can be undertaken as a strategic, transformative historical practice, which works by retrieving and reactivating forgotten fragments and bodies of work as a means of breaking through the blind spots and blockages of the present. Moreover, the idea of repetition can inform a critical, reflexive historical practice, through making us reflexively aware of how 'bad bits', as well as 'good bits' of past feminisms, resurface and repeat in the present and remain unsettled and provocative. This means rejecting presumptions that the present is separate from, and has transcended the problems of the past, or that we can 'move on' from the past in a simple linear fashion. Instead, the framework of repetitive temporality, and the paradigm of a 'dialogic' relation between past and present, require both an openness to the transformative potentials of the past, and a commitment to reassessing one's own presumptions and interpretative criteria in the present. The question of how we can relate more productively and sensitively to our shared feminist pasts, presents and futures will be considered further in the final chapter, where I consider the question of bringing diverse histories together and sharing historical time within the framework of 'polytemporality'.

## CHAPTER 7

### Polytemporality

#### INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapters have each explored different fields and dynamics of historical time. Taken together, these chapters demonstrate that historical time is ‘polytemporal’ or ‘composite’: comprised of many ‘times’ and temporalities, which are interrelated but not reducible to one another. Moreover, I have argued that different feminist histories are configured and reconfigured according to different ‘mixes’ of time and temporalisations. This gives rise to a vital question that until now has been suspended: has historical time been unraveled to such an extent that all talk of temporal togetherness and coordination has become meaningless or impossible? On what grounds can we speak meaningfully about ‘feminist history’ and ‘feminist historiography’ as a field of collective practice and temporal belonging, if feminist historical time is so diverse, if there is no ‘one historical time’ of feminism? In light of such questions, the aim of this final chapter is to consider how we can conceive of shared time and shared histories according to the paradigm of ‘polytemporality’.

The first part of the chapter is devoted to challenging the concept of ‘totality’, which is often summoned as a means of imagining and forging historical and temporal togetherness. A distinction must be drawn between *speculative* ‘totalisation’ and the *regulative* sense of ‘totality’ as a heuristic or guiding idea. The speculative sense of ‘totalisation’ refers to the quest to devise a total theory or ‘grand narrative’ that can account for the movement, mechanism and meaning of history ‘as a whole’. In contrast, in its *regulative* or heuristic sense, the concept of ‘totality’ is understood as a guiding idea or a figurative device that orients the historical imagination and historical enquiry. As stated in the Introduction of the thesis, it is rare to find a speculative theory of ‘history as a whole’ within contemporary

historiography and historical studies. Yet, this does not mean the *idea* of totality has been abandoned. Indeed, various philosophers and historiographers, including Paul Ricoeur (1988) and Fredric Jameson (1988), argue that the idea of historical or temporal totality is what compels us to connect diverse and fragmentary histories and temporalities together, and to invest collective historical practice with liberatory hope and aspiration.

The first key aim of section 1 is to contest the argument put forward by Ricoeur that the idea of ‘one’ history, and ‘one’ historical time, must be postulated as a historiographical correlate to Kant’s transcendental axiom that ‘time’ is ‘one’ (Ricoeur 1988). I emphasise that the idea of ‘one’ total historical time is itself a socioculturally and historically determined idea, rather than a transcendently necessary one. As such, I claim, theories of historical time are not required to follow or ‘respond’ to Kant’s transcendental idealism. This means that the idea of historicotemporal ‘totality’ must be assessed on entirely pragmatic grounds, i.e. in terms of its value and effectiveness in forging a productive sense of temporal togetherness and historical collectivity. My pragmatic argument here, *contra* Ricoeur and Jameson, is that the idea of historicotemporal ‘totality’ is not only unnecessary; it is also detrimental to the project of generating a historiographical practice that is sensitive to polytemporal determinations of historical time. This is because the thought of ‘totality’, even in a ‘deflated’ sense as regulative or figurative idea, invites a notion of historical time as a ‘container’: a single time that we are all ‘in’ by default, whether we know it or like it or not, which effaces all the different ways of configuring and conceiving of historical time. Against the higher ideal of ‘totality’, such plural determinations are regarded as lesser approximations, rather than as *constitutive* of historical time. I suggest, therefore, that it may be more productive to try and think through the question of historical collectivity and relatedness *without* the idea or specter of totality.

To this end, section 2 proposes two alternative ways of conceiving and approaching historical collectivity and shared historical time, under the pluralistic rubric of ‘polytemporality’ rather than a regulative or figurative idea of ‘totality’. The first half of the section develops a notion of ‘complex coevalness’ as a created mode of shared time. Turning

to the work of Johann Fabian (1983), Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) and Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000), I demonstrate that it is possible to conceive of and create a shared historical ‘moment’ or present without integrating or flattening qualitatively different temporal frameworks, experiences, and perceptions into one. The second half of section 2 then addresses in more detail how ‘complex coevalness’ can be practiced, i.e. how different temporalities can be ‘translated’ and related to one another without a regulative ideal of totality. To consider this question, I contrast the ‘higher ideal’ of translation (which attends the idea of totality), with the alternative ‘barter-like’ model of translation proposed by Chakrabarty. This model puts forward a way of relating different historical temporalities which does not entail assimilation or absorption, but equally, does not simply declare relativity or incommensurability. The chapter concludes by drawing a parallel between the polytemporal approach to history and the coalitional approach to politics, which theorises political relations and practices in terms of complex ‘bottom-up’ and intersectional processes provoked through shared problems, rather than appealing to universal ideals or horizons of totality.

## 1

### AGAINST ‘TOTALITY’

To challenge ‘totality’ as a regulative historiographical concept, this section will refer primarily to the defence of ‘totality’ put forward by Paul Ricoeur (1988). In developing my internally complex, polytemporal model of historical time, I have frequently drawn on Ricoeur’s *Time and Narrative* volumes (1984; 1985; 1988), which offer many illuminating insights into the different times and temporalities that I have been discussing, i.e. the time of the trace, calendar time, narrative time, and generational time. Yet, whilst Ricoeur’s discussions in these volumes offer many fruitful resources for opening out a pluralistic, polytemporal model of historical time, he himself is reluctant to pursue such a path. His final gesture towards the end of his long study is to reign in this temporal plurality, as he ultimately returns to an idea of historicotemporal totality, of historical time as ‘one’.



Towards the end of Volume 3 of *Time and Narrative* (1988), Ricoeur considers the question of historical totality in a chapter entitled 'Should We Renounce Hegel?' (1988:193-206). It is impossible, Ricoeur acknowledges, to speak of a speculative 'total mediation' of history within a post-Hegelian philosophical context. As discussed, Hegel's teleological account of an underlying rationality underpinning 'world history' is easily discredited on ethical grounds when faced with the actualities of historical happenings and consequences. 'Before so many victims and so much suffering as we have seen', Ricoeur writes, 'the dissociation Hegel introduces between consolation and reconciliation has become intolerable' (ibid: 205). Moreover, the speculative attempt to decipher the 'supreme plot' of 'History' and determine 'the basis upon which the history of the world may be thought as a completed whole', has also been abandoned, as we admit the 'finitude of interpretation' (ibid: 206). We must therefore, he claims, renounce the possibility of a 'total mediation', and accept that the temporal mediations performed by the historical consciousness are open and imperfect (ibid: 261).

However, it is with a heavy heart that Ricoeur 'renounces' Hegel. 'For what readers of Hegel', he asks, 'once they have been seduced by the power of Hegel's thought as I have, do not feel the abandoning of this philosophy as a wound?' (ibid: 206). Moreover, whilst he accepts that the *speculative* totalisation of historical time at the level of 'world history' is no longer a viable option, Ricoeur nevertheless insists that the *idea* of a total historical time must not die with Hegel's philosophy of history. This idea cannot be abandoned, he argues, because historical thinking must face up to the 'unavoidable' notion of time conceived as a totality, as a collective singular. After all, he says, 'we always speak of "time"' (ibid: 250). Ricoeur's influence here is Kant, for whom the oneness of time is an *a priori* 'intuition' that cannot be threatened by the plurality of determinations of time, (linked to the plurality of schemata), at the level of experience (Kant 2007:185-6, A145/B184). As Kant writes in his 'Transcendental Aesthetic': 'Different times are but parts of one and the same time' (ibid: 75, A31/B47). And again: 'the infinitude of time signifies nothing more than that every determinate magnitude of time is possible only through the limitations of one single time that

underlies it' (ibid, A32/B48). It is thus 'as *a priori* that the intuition of time is posited as the intuition of one unique time' (Ricoeur 1988b:251).

Ricoeur's final question then, at the very end of *Time and Narrative*, is to ask how historiography 'responds' to this transcendental 'axiom' of Kant's, once it has been accepted that Hegel's speculative 'total mediation' of history is a distant dream. What corresponds on the side of historical consciousness to the Kantian axiom that 'different times are just parts of the same time'? (Ricoeur 1988:257). Can historical thinking provide a response to this 'unavoidable intuition' of the totality of time, even whilst we recognise the many different ways of configuring and conceiving historical time? It is here that Ricoeur recognises the limitations of the central thesis of *Time and Narrative*, which is that the 'poetics of narrative' provide a response to the philosophical 'aporias' of time. He concedes that narrative cannot constitute an adequate 'reply' to this particular aporia—the totality of time—because 'the notion of plot gives preference to the plural at the expense of the collective singular in the refiguration of time' (ibid: 256). As argued in chapter 4, there are always multiple plots for the same course of events, and these diverse narratives are always articulated in terms of different and fragmentary temporalities. Ricoeur, however, is dissatisfied with the implication that his articulation of historical time is 'a mere multiplication of mediations between time and narrative', and thus persists in his quest to find the historiographical 'version' of Kant's axiom of the 'oneness' of time (ibid: 241).

He initially considers the Heideggerian solution to the problem of temporal totality, which is to subsume the multiple levels of temporal experience within the radically privatised temporal totality of Being-towards-death (Heidegger 2009:279-311)<sup>156</sup>. Yet, Ricoeur concedes that Heidegger's analysis of Being-a whole as Being-towards-death is a highly inadequate basis from which to derive the collective time-concepts and temporal frameworks required by history (Ricoeur 1984; 1988). Ricoeur's aim, therefore, is to move beyond both the Hegelian solution (which posits a speculative totalisation of historical time at the level of

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<sup>156</sup> As Heidegger describes it, death is Dasein's 'ownmost' possibility. My death is 'mine', in that no one can die my death for me (2009:307).

‘world history’), *and* the Heideggerian solution (which posits a temporal totalisation at the level of individual ‘primordial’ temporality). To do so, he turns, finally, back to Kant himself, arguing that Kant’s conception of the ‘regulative idea’ holds the key to formulating a historiographical ‘reply’ to the transcendental axiom of the totality or ‘oneness’ of time.

The ‘solution’ to the ‘aporia of totality’, Ricoeur claims, can be found in the Kantian notion of the regulative idea, because it enables us to rethink the idea of ‘history’ *itself*—in the collective singular—as a ‘regulative idea’ that ‘stands over and against’ the axiom of the oneness of time. ‘To think of history as one is to posit the equivalence between three ideas: one time, one humanity, and one history’ (1988:258). Ricoeur’s inspiration here is not the Kant of the first *Critique* but rather, the *Critique of Practical Reason*, because, he argues, historical thinking requires a horizon of historical totality as a guiding idea of historical *practice*, rather than speculation. It is on the plane of collective practice that the ‘imperfect mediations’ between expectation (future), traditionality (past), and initiative (present), require the horizon of a single history, which in turn, ‘corresponds to the axiom of a single time’ (ibid: 259). The idea of one history and one historical time is therefore not ‘an empty and lifeless transcendental’, Ricoeur argues, because it intends the ‘principle of hope’ that underpins the fundamentally *practical* historical interest in collective memory, anticipation and communication. This argument echoes Kant’s own suggestion in the ninth thesis of his ‘Idea for a Universal History on a Cosmopolitan Plan’, which is that even if the idea of a universal, purposeful history may well be impossible to verify, philosophy must nevertheless interpret history *as if* this were the case (Kant 1991:52). Indeed, Ricoeur contends that the equivalence between the ideas of ‘one time’, ‘one history’, and ‘one humanity’, is in fact the implicit ‘presupposition’ behind Kant’s cosmopolitan philosophy of history (Ricoeur 1988:258).

According to Ricoeur’s final conclusion, then, historical thinking takes us ‘beyond the limits’ of narrative: from plural and ‘imperfect mediations’, to the regulative idea of a historicotemporal totality (ibid: 259-60). My own argument, however, is that it is not only unnecessary, but also undesirable, for historical thinking to try and move beyond plural

configurations of historical time towards the thought of a ‘higher’ historical or temporal totality. My first point of contention lies with Ricoeur’s insistence that historiography *must* ‘respond’ to Kant’s transcendental axiom of the ‘oneness’ of time and find an equivalent or corresponding idea of its own. The central claim in this thesis has been that historical time is a sociocultural, created time, constituted through reckoning with archival fragments and traces of the past, constructing narratives, making calendrical coordinations, and creating relational genealogies. If historical time is a socioculturally constituted kind of time, then it follows that the idea of ‘one’ historical time, and indeed, ‘history’ in the collective singular, is itself a sociocultural, historically contingent idea, not an ‘intuitively’ or ‘transcendentally unavoidable’ one (Reé 1991:976). As Koselleck contends in his historical study of historical time:

‘Only from around 1780 can one talk of “history in general”, “history in and for itself”, and “history pure and simple”, and as all elaborations on this theme indicate, there was an emphasis on the departure of this new, self-referring concept from the traditional histories in the plural. If anyone had said before 1780 that he studied history, he would have at once been asked by his interlocutor: Which history? History of what?’ (Koselleck 2004:194).

If we accept that the ideas of ‘one’ history in the collective singular, and ‘one’ historical time, are historically and socioculturally, rather than transcendently, determined, there is no reason to accept Ricoeur’s argument that it is necessary for a theory of historical time to ‘respond’ to the axioms and aporias generated by Kant’s transcendental idealism. The question then becomes a pragmatic one. Even if it is not transcendently unavoidable, is the idea of historicotemporal totality nevertheless practically or methodologically indispensable, as Ricoeur claims? The implication of Ricoeur’s argument is that without the regulative idea of totality—‘one history, one time, one humanity’—it would be impossible to create and conceive of collective, effective, shared histories at all; rather, there would simply be a ‘mere

multiplication' of historical temporalisations and individual histories, an inoperative temporal pluralism (Ricoeur 1988:258). Fredric Jameson also defends the idea or figure of totality as a 'methodological imperative' guiding historical and textual interpretation, though from a Marxian rather than a Kantian perspective<sup>157</sup>. Jameson is clear, like Ricoeur, that whilst we may strive or aspire towards totality, it cannot be attained in a theoretical or speculative sense. 'Totality is not available for representation, any more than it is accessible in the form of some ultimate truth' (Jameson 1988:55). Instead, for Jameson, 'totality' is a figurative means of imaginative and cognitive 'mapping', where to 'totalise' is to 'to project a totality greater than the surface appearance of things'. It is necessary to 'project a totality' and push 'the horizon of our vision outward to include ultimately the totality of human experience', he argues, because relationality is 'only explained at the highest level, from the perspective of the whole'. The appeal to some 'ultimate underlying unity of the various "levels" supplies the rationale and philosophical justification for that more concrete and local practice of mediation' (ibid: 40).

For Jameson, then, the idea of totality guarantees or underwrites the project to relate, connect, and translate or 'transcode' distinct texts and phenomena within fields of collective thought and practice. It is impossible, he claims, to invent 'local codes' for interpretation 'except against the background of some more general identity' (ibid: 41-2). In this regard, totality functions within Jameson's work as an epistemological and aesthetic prescription to 'strive constantly to relate and connect, to situate and interpret each object or phenomenon in the context of those social and historical forces that shape and enable it, and ultimately with respect to the entire set of its conditions of possibilities' (Hardt and Weeks 2000:22).

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<sup>157</sup> Jameson's defence of the concept of totality, as advanced in *The Political Unconscious* (1981), is in fact three-pronged. The first reason that the concept of totality is necessary, he claims, is because of the expansive nature of capital and the tendency of the capitalist mode of production to 'make of the world a totality'. An analysis of capital, therefore, must strive towards totality. His second reason is that it is necessary to enable relationality and 'transcoding': the forging of connections and relations between disparate but interrelated ideas, texts and phenomena, through the processes of communication and translation. His third reason is that the political impetus to grasp the vital claims made upon the present by the past can only be provided by the thought of a single, unified history. It is the second and third arguments that will receive attention here, as my research question concerns the possibility of collective history and temporal belonging, rather than the challenge of tackling capitalism.

Moreover, he insists that it provides the political and ethical *impetus* for generating critical and transformative histories. According to this line of argument, only the thought of totality carries the requisite power to inspire us to join collective forces and disparate narratives, to trace patterns and face up to the ‘big’ issues that drive political and ethical thought and practice. ‘These matters can recover their urgency’, Jameson writes, ‘only if they are retold within the unit of a single great collective story; only if, in however disguised and symbolic form, they are seen as sharing a single fundamental theme... only if they are grasped as vital episodes in a single vast unfinished plot’ (Jameson 1988:19-20).

As stated, if ‘projecting a totality’ is recast as a methodological imperative, then the pragmatic question is whether it is a useful one, which requires an interrogation of its results. My claim here is that the idea of totality is not of utility to feminist historiography, as it imports certain assumptions about historical time which underwrite totalising narratives and approaches to history, even when a totalising theory or narrative is not being attempted. That is, the thought of an ultimate or higher ‘totality’ is complicit in sustaining the idea that historical time is a homogenous ‘time-within-which’ plural histories and temporalities are played out. As we have seen in chapter 4, the implicit and presumptuous idea behind this ‘time-within-which’ is that, whatever the particulars, and independent of culture or consciousness, people automatically exist in the same one historical time (Chakrabarty 2000:74). Within such a framework, it is difficult to value and consider the plural determinations of historical time, because ‘totality’ encourages us to think that these plural temporal determinations are only approximations of a greater totality, which might not be available to representation, but nevertheless exists as an ‘absent cause’ or at a ‘higher level’ of completeness. Thus, from the perspective of totality, temporal plurality can only be regarded as ‘incomplete’ or ‘lacking’, rather than *constitutive* of historical time (ibid).

In making this argument, it is important to reiterate that the heuristic *idea* of a single, total ‘history’ must be distinguished from totalising, speculative theories and narratives of history, and moreover, from the political practice of totalitarianism – a conflation that Jameson has described as ‘baleful’ (Jameson 2000:284). Another important distinction to

register is the difference between a ‘closed totality’, where everything is subsumed under the order of a single, central controlling force or idea, and an ‘open totality’, in contrast, which has no fixed or pre-given end, but rather is always ‘moving and growing’, staying ‘open’ because of the ‘unpredictable efficacy of the new’ (Hardt and Weeks 2000:22). Nevertheless, even if the historical totality ‘projected’ by Jameson is open and ‘always moving and growing’, and even if it is a ‘figurative device’ and not a speculative theory, it still invites the thought that historical time is a homogenous ‘container’ for diverse histories and temporalities, albeit an open and expanding one. The problem with Jameson’s rallying call for us to ‘always historicize!’, then, as Chakrabarty argues, lies with the term “always”, because it fuels the presumption of a ‘continuous, homogenous, infinitely stretched out time that makes possible the imagination of an “always”’, a presumption that everything is ‘historicisable’ according to the terms of modern historicism (ibid: 111).

I suggest, therefore, that a ‘polytemporal’ model of historical time ought to resist the temptation to subscribe to a regulative idea or methodological imperative of ‘projecting a totality’ as a means of bringing diverse historical temporalities together and conceiving of shared historical time. Indeed, thinking in terms of ‘totality’ is arguably antithetical to thinking in terms of polytemporality, because it effaces the constitutive plural determinations of historical time. The task, then, is to find an alternative theoretical framework, which challenges the claim that ‘relationality is only explained at the highest level, from the perspective of the whole’, and that only the thought of totality fuels the project to create transformative collective histories. In light of the previous chapter’s argument concerning the persistence of the past in the present, I should stress here that I am not trying to claim that we can wholly ‘cut off’ or surpass the idea of a ‘total’ historical time. Engaging a ‘dialogical’ model with the past—as I advocated in chapter 6—makes it impossible to simply declare a break from this kind of thinking and claim that feminist historiography can straightforwardly move ‘beyond’ it. We thus need to realise our entanglement in the analytics and imaginaries of ‘totality’ and the extent to which we are conditioned by it as continues to influence historical thinking. Nevertheless, whilst recognising its persistence, my point is that there is

no need to be ‘mournful’ regarding the demise of the Hegelian project to speculatively determine a total history, and further, that there is no need to insist on the idea of ‘totality’ as a regulative idea or methodological imperative guiding historical and historiographical practice. On the contrary, the waning of the influence of Hegelian and Kantian philosophies of history over historiographical thinking presents an opportunity for generating alternative models and methods, that can be put into ‘dialogue’ with Hegelian and Kantian models and methods, and might well prove to be more politically effective and inter-relationally productive for feminist theory and practice.

## 2

### **POLYTEMPORALITY**

The previous section rejected arguments that the idea of ‘totality’ is a necessary regulator or guarantor of historical thought and practice. I emphasised, firstly, that the idea of ‘one’ total historical time is socioculturally and historically contingent and as such, that there is nothing ‘necessary’ about it. Secondly, I argued that the idea of historiotemporal ‘totality’ is incompatible with the polytemporal model of historical time that I am proposing, as it helps to maintain the reified notion of historical time as a universal, homogenous ‘time-within-which’, which effaces and undervalues the diverse determinations of historical time. Accordingly, this section will examine ways of conceiving of shared time and collective histories under the pluralistic rubric of ‘polytemporality’, rather than against an idea or projected horizon of ‘totality’. The first half of the section expounds a conception of ‘complex coevalness’: a mode of shared historical time which does not absorb qualitative temporal difference into temporal oneness. The second section then develops a model of ‘temporal translation’ that can support complex coevalness on a more practical level, contrasting the ‘analytic’ model of translation with a ‘barter-model’ of translation, which dwells in heterogeneity, rather than trying to overcome it through a universal, neutral ‘third term’.



## 2.1

### *Complex Coevalness*

Once we have claimed that there are multiple pasts, presents and futures, which are lived and conceived according to different temporal schemas and concepts, we need to develop a framework or language of ‘sharing time’, which can register and work with this temporal plurality. How can we speak of shared historical ‘moments’, or indeed of a ‘present’, in which we share stories of our pasts and presents, and our visions and hopes for the future?

It is important, first of all, to distinguish between what scientists might mean when they speak of sharing a ‘moment’ of time, and what it might mean in an existential or sociological sense. To this end, Johann Fabian draws a helpful distinction between three terms: ‘synchronous’, ‘contemporary’ and ‘coeval’. In Fabian’s usage, ‘synchronicity’ refers to events occurring at the same physical time, whilst ‘contemporaneity’ refers to co-occurrence in ‘typological’ time (i.e. ‘periodised’ time)<sup>158</sup>, and ‘coevalness’ refers to the active ‘occupation’ or sharing of time (Fabian 1983:31). It is this last term ‘coevalness’, I propose, that holds the key to conceiving of a shared ‘moment’ of historical time from a polytemporal perspective. ‘Coevalness’, Fabian explains, ‘is a mode of temporal relations. It cannot be defined as a thing or state with certain properties. It is not “there” and cannot be put there; it must be created or at least approached’ (ibid: 34). The reason that coevalness must be created, Fabian argues, is that coevalness is the condition for communication. ‘The term *coevalness*’, he writes, ‘marks a central assumption, namely that all temporal relations... are embedded in culturally organised praxis’. If social interaction presupposes intersubjectivity, then intersubjectivity, in turn, is inconceivable without assuming that the participants are

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<sup>158</sup> In a quantitative sense, the word ‘contemporary’ refers to all that belongs to a society or culture at a particular point on a shared calendar; however, in a qualitative sense, it is a term used to engender a specific kind of temporal relation, because to designate something as ‘contemporary’ is often a way of saying that it is novel or ‘cutting edge’.

coeval, i.e. that they share time. ‘Communication’, then, is ‘ultimately, about creating shared Time’ (ibid: 34).

This basic definition of ‘coevalness’ as a condition for communication can be taken as a pragmatic presupposition, which, within the historiographical context, means that if coevalness is a necessary condition for communication, then it is a necessary condition for historical and historiographical discourse. If we accept my argument that historical time is generated through intersubjective ‘temporalisations’ of history, then it follows that coevalness, as a ‘mode of temporal relations’, is a necessary condition for historical time itself. In other words, there would be no ‘historical time’ without temporal relations, without the practice of sharing time, even indirectly or diachronically ‘through’ or ‘across’ time. This is essentially a *reversal* of the idea that being ‘in’ a homogenous historical time is what makes the sharing of time possible, as I am claiming, instead, that sharing time, or forging temporal connections, is what makes the idea of ‘historical time’ itself possible.

Having emphasised the necessity of creating coevalness, however, Fabian’s second key argument is that whilst *in theory*, coevalness is a necessary condition of communication, *in practice*, coevalness is often ‘denied’. Fabian describes the ‘denial’ or ‘refusal’ of coevalness as a technique of ‘temporal distancing’, which appears in his own field of anthropology as the ‘persistent and systematic tendency to place the referent(s) of anthropology in a Time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse’ (ibid: 31). Whilst on the one hand, he argues, anthropologists recognise *in a theoretical sense* that productive empirical research is only possible when the researcher and the researched share time through communicative praxis, on the other hand, this coevalness is denied *in practice*, as ‘the discourse that pretends to interpret, analyze, and communicate ethnographic knowledge to the researcher’s society is pronounced from a “distance”, that is, from a position which denies coevalness to the object of enquiry’ (ibid: 73). Fabian is referring to the discipline of anthropology, yet his reflections apply equally well to the field of feminist history and historiography. As we have seen, narratives of feminist history frequently employ techniques of ‘temporal othering’ or ‘temporal distancing’. Feminists of different ages,

theoretical schools or ‘generations’, who have collectively produced histories of feminism, and who share the same discursive, relational spaces, nevertheless distance themselves from one another through setting up temporal barriers and boundaries.

Yet, whilst Fabian’s argument regarding ‘temporal distancing’ is congruent with my own argument concerning the ‘temporal othering’ that occurs within feminist discourse, his argument regarding the ‘denial’ of coevalness does in fact pose a significant challenge to my own polytemporal model of historical time, which is this: how can we postulate *multiple* or plural historical temporalities, and multiple pasts, presents and futures, without ‘denying coevalness’? On the one hand, I am claiming that coevalness is a necessary condition for the intersubjective construction of ‘historical time’; yet on the other hand, I am claiming that there are multiple historical times, a claim which, taken on its own, simply *evades* the problem of coevalness. That is, simply declaring that there are ‘multiple times’ circumvents the question of how different times and temporalities coexist within communicative, discursive fields that depend upon temporal relations and shared time. Indeed, as Fabian contends, the idea of ‘multiple times’ can lead to a debilitating cultural relativism – ‘walling-in the Time of others so that it cannot spill into ours’ (ibid: 52). The challenge, then, is to find a way of conceiving, creating and practicing coevalness, whilst appreciating temporal and historical plurality and difference.<sup>159</sup> ‘Somehow’, as Fabian insists, ‘we must be able to share each other’s past in order to be knowingly in each other’s present’ (ibid: 91)<sup>160</sup>. But we need an account of how people can share pasts and be together in the present, where ‘coevalness’ is not a strategy for assimilation but rather, enables temporal differences to exist whilst time is

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<sup>159</sup> It is difficult to generate a ‘theory’ of coevalness, because, as Fabian puts it, ‘the problem is not just “there”; it is continuously generated at the intersection of contradictions in anthropological praxis’ (1983:37). As a communicative and epistemological condition, he insists, coevalness can only be ‘inferred from results’, i.e., from the different ways in which recognition or denial of coevalness inform theory and writing’ (ibid: 34).

<sup>160</sup> At the very end of *Time and the Other*, Fabian in fact tentatively postulates that the concept of ‘totality’ might be the solution to the problem of denying ‘coevalness’ (1983). Yet, for reasons explained above, this is not my own approach; thus I find Fabian’s use of ‘coevalness’ helpful, but seek to move on from him at this juncture.

shared. To develop such an account, I suggest, we require a conception of the ‘moment’ *itself* as plural and ‘not-one’, as a key element of thinking in terms of ‘*complex* coevalness’.

A conception of the ‘moment’ as plural and ‘not-one’, as discussed in chapter 6, can be found in the work of Christine Battersby, who argues that the ‘now’ emerges in a ‘nook’ of intersecting paths which may have led from the past into the present and open up an uncertain future. Taking inspiration from Kierkegaard, Battersby’s model of lived time makes it ‘impossible to think of the ‘moment’ in terms of a single, linear series of ‘nows’ that are linked together through one uniting history’ (Battersby 1998:150-1). A similarly fragmentary and pluralistic conception of the ‘moment’ can be found in the work of Gloria Anzaldúa. This conception is taken up and elaborated by Michelle Bastian, who argues that Anzaldúa’s work offers a nuanced understanding of temporal belonging and coevalness that resists the ‘lure of unity’ or ‘mathematical ideas of equivalence’ (Bastian 2010:153). Ordinarily, Bastian argues, ‘shared time’ is thought in terms of a ‘homogeneous present or presence. That is, the time that we share is thought to be a ‘now’ that brings differing experiences, histories and anticipations into a certain alignment by virtue of a shared moment in the present’ (ibid). In contrast, she contends, Anzaldúa’s work can be viewed as an effort to ‘think difference within the supposedly singular moment of time, which enables multiple histories, loyalties and modes of acting to exist simultaneously’ (ibid: 164).

Anzaldúa considers the problematic of the differential moment primarily through a philosophy of the self, as she considers how it is possible to give a philosophical account of her sense of herself as ‘whole’, when in any one ‘moment’ she is ‘always already divided by contradictions and called to respond to multiplying demands’ (ibid: 156). Anzaldúa’s solution is not to suggest a ‘generalised dispersal’ *in contrast* to the ‘moment’; instead, she seeks a way of being that can respond to heterogeneous demands *at the same time*. This is not, Bastian stresses, the ‘at the same time’ that pertains to clock time, whereby ‘the qualitative differences of each person’s moment are erased by the assumption of an underlying commensurability and uniformity’. Rather, she argues, ‘Anzaldúa’s refusal to split her contradictory heritages, and the political demands each makes upon her, suggests an

understanding of simultaneity, where to be ‘at the same time’ is to resist the desire to purge difference (and social contest) from the present’ (ibid). In this sense, not only does Anzaldúa’s work offer a way of thinking about one’s ‘own’ time and sense of self as ‘divided’ or ‘contradictory’; it also offers a way of thinking about sharing time with others, without recourse to a homogenous timeframe or a projected totality.

One passage Bastian cites to help give a sense of what ‘coevalness’ or being together ‘at the same time’ means in Anzaldúa’s work appears twice in the first section of *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1999): once at the beginning as part of a larger poem, and again at the end, as the final words:

‘This land was Mexican once  
 was Indian always  
 and is.  
 And will be again’ (Anzaldúa 1999:113).

The ‘land’ Anzaldúa is referring to here is Aztlán - the mythical homeland of the Aztec people which has played a key role in the Chicano Movement’s attempt to claim national rights to the South-West United States. Yet, Anzaldúa’s evocation of Aztlán performs a radical subversion of the traditional ‘origin myth’ prototype that links a unified people to a ‘rightful home’. Instead of constructing a ‘loss’ narrative staked on an ‘interrupted trajectory’, or offering a linear, sequentialist history of the South-West United States, (as that which was successively Native American, then Mexican, then part of the US), Anzaldúa highlights instead the shifting allegiances and competing claims that have resulted from invasions and re-invasions, as the land has variously been ‘home’ to Native Mexican and American civilisations, to Spanish conquistadors and Anglo-Americans. Bastian’s interest in the passage focuses on Anzaldúa’s use of a ‘confusing amalgam of incongruent presents, pasts and futures’, as she traces the multiple lines of this turbulent and violent history and considers the differing, and yet simultaneous political demands which emerge from it in the present. Her

claim ‘was Indian always’, for example, suggests that ‘the history upon which indigenous claims are based abides within the present as a past that can never be cancelled out’ (Bastian 2011:158).

The unconventionality of Anzaldúa’s temporalisations thus enables her to write ‘a history of the borderlands that affirms and recognises its contradictory historical trajectories simultaneously’ (ibid: 158-9). The crucial point for Bastian is that Anzaldúa is not ‘attempting to manage these diverse histories by rendering them commensurable (in reference to an all-encompassing spatial or temporal background)’, or by ordering them hierarchically within a linear history that splits and divides differences by ‘isolating them within different stages or moments, thus obscuring both the diversity of the present and the continuing claims of the past’ (ibid: 159). As such, Anzaldúa’s complex evocations and negotiations of her heritage implicitly offer an account of time that ‘enables contradictory histories and contradictory ways of acting to share the same time, to be coeval with each other’ (ibid: 162; see also Fernandes 2010)<sup>161</sup>. Indeed, from this perspective, ‘to be coeval (i.e. to live in the same time with another)’, is precisely about recognising ‘the multiple lines of time and of history that operate within the present’ (ibid: 157-8).

Another theorist who offers a promising way of articulating ‘complex coevalness’ is Chakrabarty, who advocates a subaltern historiography that thinks in ‘time-knots’ (Chakrabarty 2000). Thinking in terms of ‘time-knots’ means, firstly, placing a strain on the categories of past, present and future and recognising their interdependence and mutual imbrication: a theme that has been prominent throughout this thesis, and is undertaken so effectively by Anzaldúa in the passage quoted above. To live time is to live in ‘time-knots’, which are comprised of the traces and fragments of the multiple pasts that we inhabit, and also ‘the futurity that laces every moment of human existence’ (Chakrabarty 2000:250). Past worlds are never completely lost or finished; indeed, the reason that we have ‘points of entry’

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<sup>161</sup> Leela Fernandes makes a similar argument, contending that the ‘new Mestiza consciousness’ which Anzaldúa constructs in *Borderlands* radically transforms how we think about historical periodisations and temporality (Fernandes 2011).

into the past times that we study as ‘history’ is the fact that ‘they are never completely alien; we inhabit them to begin with’ (ibid: 113). Pasts ‘*are*’ there, in taste, in cultural training, in practices of embodiment, just as futures already ‘*are*’ there, in the sense that we cannot help but be oriented towards the future. This is not the conscious thought of ‘a future’, Chakrabarty explains, not the future that ‘will be’; but rather, the futurity we cannot avoid being aligned with (ibid: 251). In this sense, within lived time, there is no neat division between past, present and future, and no rudimentary sequential temporality. Rather, ‘it is because we live in time-knots that we can undertake the exercise of straightening out, as it were, some part of the knot (which is how might think of chronology)’ (ibid: 112).

The second key to thinking in ‘time-knots’ is to recognise the multiple lines of history and the ‘mutual contamination of ‘nows’ that participate in a variety of temporal trajectories’ (Hutchings 2008:166-7). The writing of history, Chakrabarty argues, must ‘implicitly assume a plurality of times existing together, a disjuncture of the present with itself’, just as Anzaldúa and Battersby envisage multiple lines of history coexisting in a complex and differential ‘present’ (Chakrabarty 2000:109). From this perspective, the thought of ‘totality’ is a hindrance to thinking the present or the moment as plural and ‘not one’. This is because, as explained above, ‘totality’ makes us regard plurality as ‘incomplete’ or ‘lacking’, when in fact, ‘*not-being-a-totality*’ is a *constitutional characteristic* of the “now” (ibid:250, emphasis added). The ‘now’ is always fragmentary and ‘not-one’, but crucially, these trajectories and fragments of pasts, presents and futures should not be understood as parts of a greater totality or whole, as ‘additive’. Rather than imagining or projecting a totality, then, the task is thus to create a ‘bottom-up’ or ‘criss-cross’ movement: generating ‘conjoined and disjunctive’ genealogies, as we ‘contemplate the necessarily fragmentary histories of human belonging that never constitute a one or a whole’ (Chakrabarty ibid: 125).

The work of Anzaldúa and Chakrabarty helpfully demonstrates that becoming ‘coeval’ need not entail a reduction in temporal complexity. Through engaging with a variety of histories and temporalities, we reach an understanding of the historical ‘moment’ as plural and ‘not-one’, and the ‘present’ as ‘noncontemporaneous with itself’. As such, we can think

togetherness within and across diversity, precisely through theorising historical moments themselves as heterogeneous, porous and fluid. This controverts the usual understanding of a shared ‘moment’ of time as an automatic ‘leveller’, as something we are simply ‘in’. Rather, according to the paradigm of ‘complex coevalness’ that I am proposing, shared moments and shared time must be *created*, through the cross-fertilisation of different temporalities and historical trajectories. This means that any historical present or ‘now’ is a conjunction of times, saturated with plural pasts, presents and futures, and forged through multiple, entangled lines of history.

## 2.2

### *Translating Temporalities*

The section above has outlined ‘complex coevalness’ as a mode of shared, created time which does not depend upon a projected totality nor does it presume ‘one’ historical time that we are all automatically ‘in’, either on the level of ‘history as a whole’ or on the level of the singular historical ‘moment’. This final discussion will consider more closely how we can put ‘complex coevalness’ into practice, using the problematics and practices of linguistic translation as an analogy for sharing histories through different temporalities and time frames.

Chakrabarty outlines two relevant models of translation (2000:83). The first can be understood as the ‘scientific’ or ‘analytic’ model, which relies upon a ‘higher ideal of translatability’, and is central to the practices of modern historicism. On this model, a translation is enabled by the generality or universality of a third term of exchange, which functions as a ‘supervening, general construction mediating between all particulars on the ground’ (ibid: 76). As such, the particulars in question can in principle be rendered commensurate and mutually intelligible, thanks to the universal, mediating language or category. This higher ideal of translatability, Chakrabarty argues, depends ultimately upon a Newtonian ideal of objectivity, in which ‘translation between different languages is mediated by the language of science itself’. For example, ‘*pani*’ in Hindi and ‘water’ in English can



both be mediated by the universal third term ‘H20’ (ibid: 75). This ‘third term’ of translation is not a category that belongs only to the natural sciences, however, as the scientific model of translation has predominated in the modern social and historical sciences as well.<sup>162</sup> Indeed, Chakrabarty’s key argument here is that the homogenous ‘time of historicism’ fulfills a ‘third term’ function within modern historiography and social science that is analogous to that of ‘H20’ in the natural sciences:

‘The idea of a godless, continuous, empty, and homogenous time, which history shares with the other social sciences and modern political philosophy as a basic building block, belongs to this model of a higher overarching language. It represents a structure of generality, an aspiration towards the scientific, that is built into conversations that take the modern historical consciousness for granted’ (ibid: 75-6).

The ‘higher ideal of translatability’ in this case rests upon the assumption that diverse historical temporalities are always translatable through the medium of a neutral historical time, which they are all ‘in’. As stated, the implication is that however different individuals, groups or societies may temporalise and conceive of their historicity, however they might organise their memories and share time, ‘the historian has the capacity to put them into a time that we are all supposed to have shared, consciously or not’ (ibid: 74). This understanding of historical time, as I argued in the previous section, is given sustenance by the methodological imperative to project a ‘totality’ as a regulative idea or horizon, because it encourages us to think that whatever our particular situation and interpretation, we are all ‘in’ one historical time. When Jameson calls for us to ‘always historicize’, he is therefore taking for granted the

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<sup>162</sup> Chakrabarty’s main example here is Marxist histories, where categories such as ‘abstract labour’, ‘labour power’, or ‘productive labour’ function as mediating ‘third terms’ that have the same status as ‘H20’. The third term—e.g. ‘abstract labour’—expresses the ‘measure of equivalence’, such that events and places become ‘exchangeable with one another’ and general histories of ‘capital’ or ‘work’ can be written. In other words, it is taken for granted that a category such as ‘labour’ has universal applicability, and therefore that through it, different ‘life-worlds’ can be translated. Whilst recognising that there will be differences, what is presumed is that ‘work’ means essentially the same thing in all these different contexts (Chakrabarty 2000:76).

‘common language’ of a historical time that makes plural and diverse histories translatable or ‘transcodable’ (ibid: 111). The effect of such overarching categories and ideas, Chakrabarty contends, is that those temporalities which do not fit easily with the ‘universal’ homogenous concept of historical time are either overlooked, or *made* to fit in. This means not only that historical differences are neutralised and relegated to the margins, but further, that the challenges such differences pose to those hegemonic categories being used to make sense of them are ignored. Relying upon the ‘homogenous’ concept of historical time as a ‘third term’ can thus make us constitutionally unprepared for the possibility that there are unforeseen ways of thinking and imagining historicity and historical time.<sup>163</sup>

As an alternative to the ‘analytic’ model based upon a generalised exchange through a third or middle term, Chakrabarty proposes a ‘barter-like model’ of translation or exchange.<sup>164</sup> This is not an act of translation modeled on the procedures or objectivist imaginary of Newtonian science, nor does it appeal to any of the implicit universals that inhere in the sociological and historical imagination (ibid: 85). There is no presupposed, overarching category that is supposed to remain ‘unaffected by differences between the entities it seeks to name and thereby contain’ (ibid: 86). On this model, codes are switched without going through a universal logic or set of rules, but instead, through a set of ‘barter-like’, term-for-term exchanges, attentive to specific ‘poetic requirements’ of rhetoric and rhythm. For example, according to this model of translation, it is perfectly possible to

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<sup>163</sup> Chakrabarty focuses particularly upon the problem that ‘enchanted’ temporalities pose to the empty, secular time of historicism. As an example, he discusses Ranajit Guha’s essay ‘The Prose of Counter-Insurgency’ on the 1855 Santal rebellion (Guha 1988), which has to deal with the Santal leaders’ account of the rebellion in supernatural terms, ‘as an act carried out at the behest of the Santal God Thakur’. The historian, Chakrabarty claims, can speak of ‘religious consciousness’, but ‘cannot offer Thakur the same place of agency in the story of the rebellion that the Sandals’ statements had given him’ (2000:104). He refers here to Rudolf Bultmann’s argument that the presupposition of the ‘historical process’ as a ‘whole’ means that ‘the continuum of historical happenings cannot be rent by the interference of supernatural, transcendent powers and therefore that there is no “miracle” in this sense of the word’ (Bultmann quoted in Chakrabarty 2000:105). The supernatural temporality of divine intervention is therefore neutralised and suppressed, as the Santal rebellion is assimilated and ‘translated’ into the language and time of modern historicism. I discuss the question of enchanted temporalities and sacred time further in the thesis’ Conclusion.

<sup>164</sup> Among his inspirations, Chakrabarty cites Gayatri Spivak’s writing on the politics of translation, and her question of how the translator can ‘attend to the specificity of the language she translates’ (Spivak 2009:201).

translate the Hindi '*pani*' into the English 'water' without having to go through 'the superior positivity of H<sub>2</sub>O' (ibid: 83). This occurs through engaging in dialogue, conjuring images and describing sensations, rendering each person's idea and experience comparable and intelligible without being assimilated through a general term.

Practising exchange and translation according to this model, above all, means staying with heterogeneities, 'without seeking to reduce them to any overarching principle that speaks for an already given whole' (ibid: 107). The barter model is therefore not only sensitive to specificity; it is also rooted in an awareness of the *limitations* of translation. Instead of try to hide falterings and stutterings, translations are conducted so as to make visible the problems of translation, marking them with an ambiguity and 'uncanniness' (ibid: 88). This awareness of limitations, fragmentations and imperfections, it must be emphasised, is not a claim that different histories and temporalities are 'incommensurable' or unintelligible to one another. 'To allow for plurality', Chakrabarty writes, 'is to think in terms of singularities. To think in terms of singularities however... is not to make a claim against the demonstrable and documentable permeability of cultures and languages', thereby implying a cultural relativism (ibid: 83). Rather than searching for a mediating third term, or on the other hand, simply declaring relativity or incommensurability, the barter model of temporal translation searches for *porousness*, 'beckon[ing] us towards more affective narratives of human belonging where life forms, although porous to one another, do not seem exchangeable through a third term of equivalence' (ibid: 71).

The barter model of translation therefore constitutes a productive framework for historiographical understanding and practice which is grounded in a recognition of the 'contingent and ongoing cross-contamination of different temporal orderings' (Hutchings 2008:152-3). The methodological imperative here is to develop a capacity to explore both the possibilities and the limitations of one's own temporal horizons and logics, to register 'blind spots', as well as searching for 'porousness' and creating connections. Accordingly, I suggest, the barter model of translation can inform a feminist historiography that is sensitive to polytemporal determinations of feminist history, by opening up a way of understanding how

historical temporalities can be related, translated and shared, without falling back on an overarching feminist framework, such as ‘waves’ or ‘phases’, that assimilates all. Indeed, as Shih contends, the presumption that universalising concepts and categories are necessary ‘mediators’ is one of the key factors propping up the philosophical and cultural hegemony of western feminism and its strategies of incorporation and containment (Shih 2002:114).<sup>165</sup> As the mainstream’s ‘need to translate’ is so often based on a desire to reduce and simplify unfamiliar ideas and arguments and histories into shorthands and summaries, she argues, the result is often (quoting Spivak) ‘uncaring translations that transcode in the interest of dominant feminist knowledge’ (Spivak 2009:96). Or conversely, given that a ‘caring’ and sensitive translation takes time and effort, an unfamiliar idea, practice or history can simply be deemed ‘untranslatable’ or ‘incommensurable’: the consequence ‘not of difference made essential or absolute, but of ignorance’ (Shih 2002:97). The challenge before us, Shih claims, is therefore to imagine and practice an ‘ethics of encounter’ that is neither simply assimilationist nor conflictual (ibid: 92).

Such an ethics of encounter, I propose, can be cultivated through adopting the conceptual model of ‘complex coevalness’ and the ‘barter’ model of temporal translation, which requires us to search and probe for ‘porousness’ without the guide of a higher unity or ‘totality’ as a regulative ideal. There may be ‘violent jolts’ the imagination ‘has to suffer from the experience of traveling across temporalities’, as the different ways of thinking and living time bump up against each other (Chakrabarty 2000:94). Yet, if feminist history and historiography is to become a ‘site where pluralities will contend’, it has to be taken to its limits, ‘to make its workings visible’ (ibid: 96). Multiple, disparate feminist time frames and temporalities do intersect and weave together, yet they need not be translated into ‘one’ historical time of feminism in order for us to conceive and construct collective histories.

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<sup>165</sup> This ‘asymmetrical ignorance’ results in highly reductive and arbitrary assignations of ‘difference’ and ‘similarity’ which means that, as Chinese scholar Li Xiaojiang contends, Chinese women have increasingly become ‘untranslatable’ to the West because of the West’s ‘willful mistranslation of them’ and their reaction against such mistranslations. Indeed, Li has criticised not only ‘western feminists’ but also diasporic and postcolonial intellectuals, who ‘transform the dyadic interaction into a tripartite construct – mediating between the Western audience and the nonwestern ‘Other’’ (Shih 2002: 102).

Rather than relying upon allegedly ‘universal’ homogenising temporal templates and frameworks, we need to create shared histories which affirm the diverse ways of experiencing, imagining, measuring, configuring and reckoning historical time. This is an ongoing, intersubjective project that both ‘unfolds within and also makes possible a shared experience of time’ (Weiss 2011:184).

## **CONCLUSION:**

### **POLYTEMPORAL HISTORIOGRAPHY AND COALITIONAL POLITICS**

This chapter has considered the vital question of how diverse historical temporalities can relate to one another, and become part of a shared historical field. I have argued against ‘totality’ as a rationale or a regulative, methodological device for linking and relating multiple histories, because the idea of historical totality, even as a ‘regulative idea’ or a ‘methodological imperative’ (rather than a speculative theory), goes hand in hand with the idea of historical time as a homogenous time in which we are all automatically ‘in’. This gives rise to presumptions of a ‘higher’ unity and cancels out the polytemporal configurations of historical time. I have argued instead for a polytemporal paradigm, and for an understanding of ‘complex coevalness’ as a relational mode which is produced through thinking in ‘time knots’ and conducting ‘barter-like’ temporal translations. The practical implications of the polytemporal model of historical time for feminist historiography will be drawn out in more detail in the thesis’ Conclusion, but I want to conclude this chapter now by briefly drawing a parallel between a ‘polytemporal’ approach to historiography and the ‘coalitional’ approach to feminist politics.

As stated in the thesis’ Introduction, if there is something called ‘feminism’, it is difficult to think of it as a ‘paradigm’ or ‘framework’ as such. Indeed, ‘feminism’ itself is a contested term, as is the category ‘women’. They are terms which call for ‘barter-like’ translations, rather than presumptions that ‘feminism’ and ‘women’ are universal ‘third terms’ that can be taken for granted. When we say ‘we’, it is not a case of naming of an underlying

shared identity. It is an act of forging a shared response and responsiveness, of naming a shared, active desire to challenge the subordination and oppression of women within male-dominated societies and communities, and the marginalisation of women's knowledges, experiences and creations within androcentric discourses. This kind of understanding informs a coalitional approach to feminist politics, where 'feminism' is distinguishable by the kinds of questions, problems and challenges it poses and faces, which constitute common sites for debate and challenge and creativity. From a coalitional, pragmatic perspective, feminist thought and practice needs to be mobile in response to shifting conditions, and moreover, able to engage with the variety of perspectives which collide and join forces within specific sites for action and debate. Instead of a phasic model, teleological ideals, and the 'non-repeatable moment', the coalitional approach requires a flexible temporal framework that can bring together different modes of acting rather than dividing them across time, affirming them as 'relevant and appropriate choices in the present' (Bastian 2011:162). Similarly, from a polytemporal perspective, feminist historiography needs to be mobile, and to engage with a variety of temporal frameworks, and with temporalities more complex than the linear account of historical progress that has dominated feminist theory and politics.

Coalitional and polytemporal approaches, it must be stressed, are not limited to making only local claims (Flax 1987), or incapable of tackling totalising processes or identifying predominant patterns. The point, rather, is that effective feminist political and historical engagement does not depend upon projecting a totality as an 'absent cause' or 'higher ideal', or a grand redemptive vision of feminism. Coalitional theories, instead, envisage the process of tracing patterns and relating disparate practices and phenomena as a 'bottom-up', shifting and incomplete activity. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, for example, speaks of a 'temporality of struggle' as 'an insistent, simultaneous, non-synchronous process characterised by multiple locations, rather than a search for origins and endings' (1995: 81). This is reminiscent of Chakrabarty's description of thinking in 'time-knots', conducting temporal translations, and generating 'conjoined and disjunctive' genealogies, as we 'contemplate the necessarily fragmentary histories of human belonging that never constitute a

one or a whole' (Chakrabarty 2000:125). It is not a case of simply ignoring or evading totalising processes or grand historical narratives. The idea, rather, is that instead of tackling them through an equally grand counter-narrative or totalising theoretical framework, we 'release into the space' occupied by particular European histories and hegemonic political paradigms 'normative and theoretical thought enshrined in other existing life practices and their archives. For it is only in this way that we can create plural normative horizons specific to our existence and relevant to the examination of our lives and their possibilities' (ibid: 20).

## THESIS CONCLUSION

### **Towards a Polytemporal Historiography**

In the Introduction to this thesis, I set out the core question driving a pragmatic approach: what difference would this particular idea or way of thinking make? (James 2000:26-7). This is the question which orients my concluding remarks here, as I draw together the polytemporal model of historical time that I have built up over the past few chapters, and consider what difference it could make to feminist theory and historiography if we conceive of historical time in this way. How would a feminist historiography guided by the logics of polytemporality and repetition be different from a historiography guided by the logics of totality and teleology? How might it alter the ways we construct and approach histories of feminist theory and practice? What kinds of future possibilities are opened up by a polytemporal approach?

The driving ambition of the thesis has been to challenge the dominant model of historical time within contemporary historiography, which remains bound to notions of linear succession, teleological progress, and totality. This model of historical time informs and supports the hegemonic model of feminist history, presented as a progressive series of 'waves' or 'phases', which culminate in an author's position in the present, from where she has a purview of 'feminist history' as a whole. As demonstrated in chapter 1, the hegemonic model's reliance upon the temporal logics of 'teleological totalisation' and 'sequential negation' has detrimental effects upon how feminists in the present conceive and relate to feminist pasts. The organisation of different feminist approaches into sequential historical stages precludes a productive exploration of the interconnections between coexisting strands of feminism, and of the potential relevance that older forms of feminism might have within present contexts. Moreover, the totalising and teleological gesture of discerning an overall 'direction' to feminist theory not only results in a closed-minded attitude towards the past and



future, but can also bolster universalising assumptions whereby we presume that feminisms everywhere are working out the same trajectory, at different 'stages' of development.

My response to this problem has been to conduct a detailed 'root and branch' investigation into the concept of historical time, to ensure conceptual clarity as we seek to further interrogate this dominant model of historical time, and most importantly, to develop alternatives. In the course of this investigation, I have formulated a 'polytemporal' model of historical time, premised upon the core idea that historical time is constructed through various temporalities and fields of time, which intersect and interweave to produce shifting, internally complex configurations of historical time. The thesis has focused on four 'times' that consistently enter into constructions of historical time: the 'time of the trace', 'narrative time', 'calendar time', and 'generational time'. Taking each 'time' in turn, I have demonstrated that each temporal field is itself internally complex, and can be 'temporalised' in various ways.

The main priority in the thesis has been to develop alternative models and methods, rather than to refine my critique of the hegemonic model of feminist history, and the dominant model of historical time which underpins it. Nevertheless, the polytemporal model I have outlined has much to offer critical historiographical approaches. In the first instance, the polytemporal model opens up a way of critically unpacking concepts of historical time, through identifying the different *temporal combinations* which give rise to particular concepts of historical time. By adopting a polytemporal approach, feminist historiographers can thus gain deeper and more detailed critical insight into the hegemonic model of feminist history, through examining the different temporal layers and combinations that construct and sustain it. The polytemporal approach enables us to investigate, for example, how the model of overlapping, progressive series of 'waves' or 'phases' is supported by simplistic conceptions of historical chronology, as well as by traditional linear modes of narrative configuration with a clear direction, beginning, middle, end. We can also examine the extent to which the 'waves' trope maps on to a unilinear idea of a generational succession, or the extent to which it is bolstered by an aggregative model of knowledge-building and revisionism, which in turn,

rests upon an understanding of the historical past itself as a completed and aggregate set of events.

As demonstrated throughout the thesis, analyses of these different times and temporalities requires a thorough critical scrutiny of not only our epistemological frameworks, but also our ontological presumptions about historical reality and time, which underlie our understanding of what it is to write history, to trace the past, to construct a chronology or create an order of inheritance. The polytemporal approach thereby facilitates a broader and more penetrating critical response to the problem of historical time than the structuralist approach, which is restricted to a textual analysis of tropes and techniques. A textual analysis of how the hegemonic narratives of feminism are secured is certainly important; but if we continue to believe that historical time is 'really' chronological and unidirectional, or that the past is 'really' a total and complete sum of raw facts, then the thoroughgoing reconceptualisation of historical time that feminist historiography requires cannot be achieved.

The main contribution of the thesis, as stated, has been to demonstrate that the polytemporal model opens up *alternative* possibilities for reconceptualising and reworking historical time, in ways which could make a significant difference within feminist theory and historiography. As set out in the beginning of the thesis, an alternative model of historical time needs to be able to account for the coexistence of 'multilinear', parallel trajectories which nevertheless inform and intersect with one another. It should also be 'multidirectional', in the sense of allowing for two-way determinations between past and present, as the past affects and shapes the present, and in turn, present perspectives affect and shape our relation to the past. This kind of model, I postulated, would facilitate more fruitful interactions and conversations between feminisms of the past and the present, rather than fixing certain types of feminist theory to certain times, and presuming that the past has nothing to say to the present. Finally, an alternative model of historical time should be able to account for multiple determinations of the 'time of feminism' itself, to generate a more a more sensitive and

receptive approach to the various ways in which feminists make feminist history and conceive of historical time.

Whilst various feminists have recognised the need for this kind of model of historical time, there has been little elaboration as to what exactly it might look like or how it might work. To remedy this, Chapters 2-5 of the thesis have each offered a thorough conceptual elaboration of the range of temporal possibilities within their designated 'field' of time, demonstrating various ways of reconceptualising historical time as multilinear and multidirectional. Taken together, these chapters present a robust exposition of a polytemporal model, giving content to the idea of a multidirectional, multilinear historical time, which so often remains under-developed and under-explored. Two significant forms of transformation in particular have emerged across all of the different chapters. The first is the importance of grasping the *fluid relation between past, present and future*, as a means of remaining open to the possibility of the past interrupting the present, and impacting on the future in unforeseen ways. I have theorized this temporal fluidity through various frameworks and concepts, for example, through the two-way temporality of the 'trace', the palimpsestic temporality of 'narrativity', the bidirectionality and anachronisms of 'calendar time', and the dynamic interplay between continuity and discontinuity within 'generational time'. The second key form of transformation is the importance of registering and working with *plural determinations of historical time*, which has also been theorised in various ways, for example, through 'pluritopic hermeneutics', the pluralistic conception of 'publicness', or through the paradigm of 'many' symbolic orders and cultural imaginaries rather than just 'one'. To try and consolidate the polytemporal model, and offer a more integrated conclusion, I will return here to the two concepts that I explored in the final two chapters of the thesis, concepts which aptly capture and express these two themes of *temporality fluidity* and *temporality plurality*: 'repetition' and 'polytemporality' itself. In this sense, they can be considered as the conceptual 'emblems' of a multidirectional, multilinear historical time, and a polytemporal historiography.

### *Repetition and Polytemporality*

*'Repetition'*, or *'repetition with variation'*, generates a conceptual account of historical change and process that operates according to echoes and feedback loops, and a relational dynamism between past, present and future. The idea that the past can be repeated in the present requires a decisive shift away from a conception of the past as fixed and finished, towards a more fluid and fragmentary model in which the past is ambiguous and indeterminate, and exists in a complex relation with the present in which it *'repeats'*. Moreover, on this model, the present is not a clearly bounded, all-knowing, or all-powerful moment of complete insight, but nor is it simply a passive conduit or link in the chain from past to future. Rather, it can be viewed as a kind of temporal matrix or *'hub'*, as different traces and trajectories spill over from the past, and can be taken up and *'repeated'* in various ways, producing multiple theoretical and strategic possibilities. In this regard, the model of *'repetition with variation'* subverts *'presentist'* approaches that would seal the present off from its unsettled relation to the past, and also reductive approaches that treat the present in terms of a point-like moment in a chronological series. It also offers an alternative to the teleological ideal of emancipation as a step-by-step process of *'graduated'* progression, whereby different stages lead up to the present and (anticipated) future in one all-encompassing movement forwards. Within the framework of repetitions, feedback loops, echoes, and untimely resurfacings, the present and future are shaped by the past, but not in a deterministic manner, as the past repeats itself in the present and future in unpredictable and unexpected ways. This makes it impossible to conceive of feminist history as a series of completed phases or stages that come one after the other, and proceed teleologically from past to present to future. Instead, it conjures impressions of feminist history as a shifting entanglement of indeterminate pasts, uncertain presents and undecided futures, which coexist in complex and dynamic interrelation, and are continually being reopened and called into question.

*'Polytemporality'* is a concept that enables us to develop a new language of 'sharing time', which can register and work with this plurality of entangled times and temporalities. Taking a polytemporal approach means thinking in terms of 'complex coevalness' and 'time-knots', rather than in terms of a higher totality, homogenous moments, or unified stages and eras of time. It means conducting 'barter-like' temporal translations and creating 'conjoined genealogies', which can never add up to a completed whole or be subsumed within an all-encompassing temporal framework or master narrative. Translating temporalities and sharing histories from a polytemporal perspective is about searching for 'porousness' whilst being aware of the limitations of our own temporal perspectives, concepts and logics. A polytemporal approach, therefore, can shape a feminist historiography that is sensitive to various determinations of feminist history and configurations of feminist time, and does not fall back on hegemonic frameworks such as 'waves' or 'phases' of feminist history in the collective singular. It guards against presumptions that a particular timeline or date is necessarily significant for all, that a certain kind of narrative structure is mutually intelligible or universally appropriate, that all generational orders have the same temporal logics or patterns, or that we are all oriented and affected by the traces of feminists pasts in the same way. Instead, to think in terms of 'polytemporality' is to seek out ways of sharing time and constructing histories which do not reduce, but rather affirm, the pluralistic complexity of historical time.

### ***Practical Implications***

Given that this has been a theoretical historiographical study, as opposed to a substantive historical intervention, the focus has been on giving a conceptual account of the polytemporal model, rather than actual case studies. However, inspired by pragmatic philosophy, the different chapters have each considered the implications for the feminist historian and theorist, indicating how these alternative conceptions might translate into historical practice, and alter how we construct and approach histories of feminism. Rather than simply offering a

purely abstract philosophical speculation on the nature of historical time, then, the polytemporal model I have developed can be considered as a practical as well as a conceptual model.

For instance, I have argued that the concept of repetition can open up a transformative, strategic historical practice, premised upon the ‘recollecting forwards’ or the proactive ‘repetition’ of forgotten or discarded ideas and methods, which can be used to unlock present feminisms, and be brought to bear on feminism’s possible futures. The concept of repetition can also inspire a reflexive and critical form of historiographical practice, because it makes us aware of less desirable elements that continue to repeat themselves in our own presumptions and discourses, even as we may think we have moved on. ‘Repetition in practice’ thus affirms the transformative and subversive power of the historical past, yet also requires a critical reflexivity around more problematic repetitions of the past in the present. This links to the idea of ‘restless revisionism’ I proposed in chapter 2: a form of historical practice which fosters a provocative relation between the ‘active’ and the ‘reflexive’ modes of historical practice, and moreover, cultivates a ‘receptive’ attitude, through which we remain open to the surprises and reorientations that history can bring.

The chapters on ‘repetition’ and the ‘time of the trace’, further, have both offered concrete examples to illustrate how ‘restless revisionism’ and ‘recollecting forwards’ can work, such as Deborah Withers’ ‘Sistershow’ project, Waters’ and Conaway’s ‘untimely’ anthology of nineteenth century feminism, or Kathi Weeks’ redeployment of ‘Wages for Housework’. The chapters on ‘narrative time’, ‘calendar time’ and ‘generational time’ have also considered the practical implications for the feminist historian and theorist. Chapter 3, for instance, demonstrated how the theoretical paradigm of ‘narrativity’ can inform a mode of ‘contrapuntal reading’, which seeks to read *beyond* or *in-between* the authorial voice and the defined contours of a single narrative, teasing out the relational, political and temporal dynamics that underpin any singular narrative account. Additionally, it showed how ‘narrativity’ can inspire alternative ways of writing and constructing feminist histories, using ‘fractured forms’ to construct decentered or ‘interactional’ narratives—such as Diane Elam

and Robyn Wiegman's 'side-by-side' narrative technique—as a way of expressing interpretative ambiguities and multiple perspectives, and avoiding a sense of temporal 'closure'.

The discussion of 'calendar time' in chapter 4 offered practical suggestions as well, as I illustrated how a 'qualitative' approach to calendar time can facilitate a critical form of historical practice, which is reflexively attuned to the ways in which dates and periodisations operate as 'sticky signs' such as '1970s feminism', and as 'hot' and 'cold' chronologies within feminist histories. Moreover, I suggested that the qualitative approach can lead to more creative and subversive calendrical practices, for example, using dates to 'shock' and disturb hegemonic timelines and presumptions, or using the specificity of dates to guard against reductive generalisations, and to point to the coexistence of different kinds of feminism within the same date. Chapter 5 advocated a similarly nuanced approach to generational time, proposing that the thought of 'many' symbolic orders and cultural imaginaries, rather than 'one', can direct us to search for alternative paradigms and techniques that subvert the usual hegemonic orders of unilinear succession, as found for example in Gayl Jones' 'blues novel'.

These practical suggestions and concrete examples begin to demonstrate what difference it could make to feminist theory and historiography if we conceive of historical time as internally complex, multilinear and multidirectional. Through such suggestions, I hope to have shown that a multilinear and multidirectional historical time can be achieved not only through theoretical elaboration, but moreover, through being put into practice, as we open up multiple channels and tracks between feminist presents, pasts and futures.

### *Future Possibilities*

I want to conclude the thesis now by considering how the polytemporal model of historical time I have proposed here might be tested and pushed further. In the first instance, whilst the thesis has tried to draw out the practical implications of the 'polytemporal' model of historical time for feminist theory and historiography, the primary contribution of the thesis has indeed

been theoretical. As such, it will be illuminating and important to work more closely with substantive historical and archival feminist projects in the future, to consider further how the polytemporal model of historical time might be put into practice, and demonstrate what polytemporal feminist histories might look like, and how they might work. Moreover, whilst my study here has been situated and oriented by the specific problematics and paradigms of feminist historiography, the polytemporal approach to historical time could have a broader application and inform other historiographical fields, including the histories of other political movements, branches of cultural or art history, or archive studies. Finally, whilst I have identified four key ‘fields’ of time that consistently enter into constructions of historical time, I have stressed that they are not exhaustive of historical time, and that the model I have developed here is not fixed or all-encompassing. There are various temporal fields and temporalities that can play an important role in shaping concepts of historical time, which I have not considered here, and which warrant further exploration.

One important field of time that has an interesting relationship with historical time is religious, spiritual or ‘enchanted’ time. Indeed, the question of this relationship is one of the key concerns guiding Chakrabarty’s study of postcolonial thought and historical difference, as he argues that modern conceptions of historical time are inherently secular and thus categorically incapable of accommodating spiritual or ‘enchanted’ temporalities (Chakrabarty 2000:72-7). This argument gives rise to some vital questions for feminist historiography to address, especially in light of recent debates within feminist theory concerning the emergence of the ‘post-secular’ and its challenge to secularist feminist hegemonies (Reilly 2011; Ahmed 2002; Mani 2009). To what extent can we discern an implicit secularist bias within feminist historiography and feminist conceptions of historical time? For example, to what extent does the polytemporal model I have proposed in this thesis depend upon a secularist framework? Can it accommodate religious and spiritual temporalities, which may well include teleological determinations, or eschatological meta-narratives that imbue history with an overall meaning and purpose? Moreover, what kinds of insights and temporal models do religious and spiritual feminisms bring to the project of rethinking historical time? How might feminist studies on



religious rituals contribute to philosophical understandings of historical repetition? How could feminist hermeneutical writings on religious texts and issues of interpretation and translation inform historiographical approaches to historical texts? (Gross 2010; Jones 2009).

Another important temporal field to be considered is that of new technologies, which significantly affect the ways in which historical narratives and trajectories are composed, configured and encountered. The impact of new technologies, particularly the participatory formats of digital media, upon feminist activism and modes of organising is being thoroughly explored (Everett 2004; Garrison 2010). Yet, from a historiographical perspective, it is also crucial to explore how changing technologies are influencing how feminist *histories* are being constructed and temporally configured. On the one hand, contemporary digital culture is, in fact, often associated with the *waning* of 'historical consciousness'. Andreas Huyssen, for example, has powerfully articulated concerns that the 'outsourcing' of memory—as everything is automatically 'remembered' for us—can (perhaps paradoxically) lead to a kind of 'mass amnesia', just as the obsession with documenting and recording can lead us to live the present at a remove (Huyssen 1995). On the other hand, however, new technologies are having a profound impact upon the ways in which historical information is disseminated and organised, including, for example, mechanisms facilitating cross-referencing such as hyper-text, or the capacity of a database to assemble and produce fragments and narratives based on different search criteria. Indeed, whilst transforming narrative structures, technological changes may also be unsettling narrative's privileged position with regards to history, as new visual media challenge the dominance of older linguistic media (Bolter and Grusin 1999:57).

Such technologies and media profoundly affect the ways in which the traces of history are pursued, how time lines are generated and dates are coordinated, how different generations are able (or unable) to communicate with one another, and how genealogical relations are traced and given symbolic expression. These technologies transform the ways in which events are not only understood and organised retrospectively, but further, the ways in which events unfold and are understood at the time of their occurrence and the moment of recording. As Derrida has insightfully argued: 'The technical structure of the archiving

archive also determines the structure of the archivable content even in its very coming into existence and in its relationship to the future. The archivization produces as much as records the event' (Derrida 1996: 16-17). This adds another dimension to my 'indirect realist' account of the 'mediated' nature of historical reality and the interrelation between interpretation and happening.

Interesting historiographical possibilities can thereby emerge through engagement with the multiple modalities of digital culture, which is not simply about the technology itself, but rather, about the cultural and relational practices which attend it, and *how* people use media texts and technologies to record and remember. Vicki Callahan describes this kind of approach as 'media archaeology': a 'deep time methodology' which engages with a nonlinear, multidirectional flow of information, rather than a single evolutionary stream of data, through which the work of history becomes 'a discovery process with open-ended results and multiple points of entry' (Callahan 2010:4). Online archives, interactive media, and 'improvisatory live remixes of found footage', she claims, offer myriad opportunities to displace homogenous, linear histories (ibid: 5). 'The archive becomes in this context not the last edifice standing in a received history, but a dynamic agent of change and a space of becoming' (ibid: 6, see also Harris 2007). In this regard, the field of digital and media studies itself is generating temporal and historical approaches and paradigms which can shape how we understand and configure historical time. Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin, for example, propose the paradigm 'remediation', as a means of grasping the relationship between 'old' and 'new' forms of cultural mediation (1999). Instead of a historical progression whereby newer media simply subsume and replace their predecessors, these media theorists contend that 'ours is a genealogy of affiliations, not a linear history, and in this genealogy, older media can also remediate newer ones' (ibid: 55; see also Murray 1998). Through engaging with temporal technologies and paradigms such as these, a polytemporal historiography could further extend its relevance and levels of complexity, weaving in even more temporal layers, dynamics and rhythms.

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