

History, Memory, and Forgetting in Nietzsche and Derrida

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ABSTRACT: In this article I begin to explore Friedrich Nietzsche's and Jacques Derrida's philosophies of history in terms of the persistence of forgetting within (non-subjective) memory. In section I, I shall outline the totalizing production of history understood as an unsuccessful attempt to erase the indifference of animality and the difference of madness. The following two sections are concerned with the particular kinds of non-subjective memories—memorials—that arise in the aftermath of this erasure and include writing and the archive (section II), as well as the ghostly and genealogical confusions (section III). Throughout these sections I shall argue that each of the externalizations of memory in non-subjective memorials is contaminated by forgetting, both shaping and shaking up the foundations of history. Finally, section IV revisits the memorials and states of forgetting discussed in the previous sections in light of the (im)possibility of justice.

I. PRODUCING HISTORY AS A TOTALITY

The introductory gesture of Nietzsche's most rigorous engagement with the philosophy of history in "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life" is to establish what a lack of "historical sense" implies. For Nietzsche, this lack is synonymous with the condition of animality, in which the cattle unaware of temporal experience simply perform their physiological functions of leaping about, eating, resting, and digesting.¹ As a consequence of their ahistorical existence, the cattle are "fettered to the moment and its pleasure or displeasure" and live "a life neither bored nor painful."² If the animal performs forgetting without memory, it absorbs its experiences completely, in the same way it digests its hay. Every moment is a singular and intense flash³ isolated from every other moment

in animal consciousness that neither remembers the previous experience, nor is able to compare it with the present one, nor feels the boredom of repetitiveness if the two moments are similar.

Nietzsche's meditation on the mode of forgetting characteristic of the ahistorical animal is, in fact, epistemologically telling, given that he launches his philosophy of history from the limits of knowledge. For, who can be so intrepid, as to claim any degree of accuracy in the representation of animal consciousness? And who will be so bold, as to substantiate this intrepidity with the "remembrance" of a state of being *essentially* devoid of memory? But this epistemological problem need not nullify new insights into Nietzsche's views on a certain fullness (even over-fullness) of history. To put it abstractly, the emergence of history takes place in the territory "beyond the pleasure principle" and depends on the formation of memory, which Nietzsche-the-physician unequivocally diagnoses as indigestion prompted by pain. Historical indigestion, with which the cattle are unfamiliar, does not allow any experience to pass, as even the most insignificant aspects of the past are hoarded with the sense of antiquarian veneration.⁴ Thus, the practitioners of antiquarian history are ostensibly far removed from the animal state, though they are still situated on the same continuum of expulsion-retention, as the cattle.

It may seem odd that the unhistorical animal and the absolutely historical "antiquarian" being have something in common. Nonetheless, both share the same feature that determines the totality of their existence. This feature is indifference. The animal (and, to a greater extent, the plant) is incapable of either affirmation, or negation. Merely reacting to external stimuli, it passively accepts the given, in the etymological sense of the term (*accipere*, as a captive). Learning the "yes-saying" and the "no-saying"⁵ is a function of differentiation that develops in the course of a non-antiquarian—critical or monumental—history. Conversely, the antiquarian historian forgets forgetting and preserves as equally worthy "everything old and past that enters [his] field of vision at all."⁶ In other words, he simply accepts the past and the status quo, and as their captive, wishes neither to differentiate between past greatness and triviality (the monumental), nor to negate and destroy the past altogether (the critical). The ultimate vocation of the antiquarian historian is to strike a pose of yet another link in the "natural history" of plants and animals, from whom he inherits "the belief that there are *identical things*."⁷ In the antiquarian parlance, the indifferent treatment of the past is encouraged under the virtuous guise of objectivity that veils the secret desire to imitate nature "in all her extravagant and indifferent magnificence."⁸

In his discussion of animality, Nietzsche suggests that indifference is a primal force that both pre-exists and permeates history. Derrida, on the other hand, puts forward a diametrically opposed hypothesis, affirming the primacy of absolute difference. Absolute difference is expressed, for example, in madness before it is colonized by the mutually reinforcing regimes of rationality, history, and language.

In “Cogito and the History of Madness” Derrida insists that the first and the most dramatic/traumatic decision in the history of logos opened the possibility of history in general by way of the “internal division,” the incisive split, that detached meaningful language from the continuous monotony of random noise and silence.⁹ As a result of this division, language and reason combined in the rational language (and, for Derrida, there is no language other than the rational one) not only launched history, but also undertook, as the reverse side of this launch, to inter their other—madness—in the “act of force.”¹⁰ Despite the internment of madness, however, the needs of history, language, and reason dictated that the oppressed other be exhumed again and again in a ritual of self-frightening and self-reassurance.¹¹ It is as if these totalities muttered to themselves: “Here is the dreadful corpse of the other, and, yes, it is really dead.” Consequently, the opening of history reenacted in the endless double ritual of internment and exhumation unlocks (the coffin lids of) the same and the other only to promote the same through the dissimulation of the other.

The dynamics of self-frightening and self-reassurance are indicative of the general constitution of the same through the repression of the internal other, who is the other *of* the same. What first frightens the same is the absolute difference of the unruly other, which in the case of the other of history is linked to *différance*—the deferral and difference of time without space.¹² In Derrida’s words, *différance* is “older” than history, but it also propels the movement of history without self-identity, or respite.¹³ Here, the terrifying manifestation of *différance* provides a glimpse into pre-history, in the sense of time before the concept of history. History itself is historicized; it turns out that not everything is always already historical, that history has a beginning, and that history is neither autoimmune, nor eternal (which is one and the same thing). Absolute difference, as the other of history, is an abyss, yawning in the vertiginous and “unchallenged night . . . [of] . . . the radical absence of any historical witness.”¹⁴

But the phase of self-frightening is promptly followed by self-reassurance. The chaos of *différance* is ordered, if only temporarily, into the linear succession of “a present-past, a present-present, and a present-future.”¹⁵ For a split of a second, history, language, and reason establish a precarious self-identity, in which nothing is deferred and nothing is different from the self-same totality. The “historical liberation” of logos draws a neat line of demarcation between “a *determined* reason and a *determined* madness”¹⁶ and by determining madness, domesticates it, renders it less frightening, less uncanny (*unheimlich*), and not all that different/deferred from determined reason. The mad other is split from the sane self, tacked into the farthest drawer of consciousness, repressed, and forgotten until the next dose of self-frightening is required to upset the balance of history’s self-identity and, by the means of differing/deferring the presence of the same, to fuel the movement of history.

To recapitulate the argument so far, Nietzsche and Derrida enunciate three steps in the production of history. First, Nietzsche commences his inquiry into the functions (uses and disadvantages) of history from the standpoint of the un-historical animal existence understood as the absolute indifference. Meanwhile, Derrida chooses to focus on the persistence of absolute difference in madness that precedes the rational concept of history. The un-historical animal has no sense of time, while the position of madness before language primordially temporalizes existence by differing/deferring presence. Despite these dissimilarities, however, neither the one, nor the other contains the synchronous Time of the self-same, from which history is born. The absolute indifference and the absolute difference are indistinguishable from one another, if not in their manifestations, then in relation to historical existence or, better yet, to its lack.

Next, both philosophers highlight a rupture understood as a condition of possibility for the emergence of historical sense. Nietzsche argues that this rupture crystallizes in the first memory of a moment that belongs to the past and in everything that issues from it, including the comparison of the past and the present as the foundation of cognitive comparison, the unhappy consciousness of the irreversibility of the past that bothers the no-longer-indifferent memory with experiential indigestion, and antiquarian history as the documentary signification of this indigestion. In Derrida's theoretical account, the rupture coincides with the suppression and assimilation of absolute difference underneath and within the homogenizing time-space of history that domesticates the alterity it encounters on its path.

Finally, totalized/totalizing history becomes inconceivable without the complex interlacing of difference and indifference. Nietzsche interweaves indifference and difference in history insofar as indifference is carried over to (1) the presumed objectivity of the historian and (2) the antiquarian's secret desire to imitate the "indifferent magnificence of nature," as well as insofar as difference arises from the deferral of happiness (read: forgetting) (1) in memory¹⁷ and (2) in the historical comparison of the non-identical past and present, including the past and present states of oneself. Derrida conceives indifference negatively, in terms of the suppression of difference in the totality of historical time-space that strives toward self-identity, while difference lingers in history as the apodictic element of the historical movement generated in the deferral of self-presence.

Disparate theoretical points of departure notwithstanding, Nietzsche and Derrida envision existence "before" history as the complete absorption in the moment, be it outside of time, or inside the unique temporality of *différance*. Not unlike the experience that is digested completely in forgetting before memory, the beholder of the un-historical sense melts into the sensations of the moment, in which "all is so palpable, close, highly colored, resounding, as though he apprehended it with all his senses at once."¹⁸ Where the animal eats and contentedly

assimilates its world with its narrow horizons, the surrounding world completely devours this unhistorical animal. As far as Derrida is concerned, the absorption in *différance* before history and speech betokens a lack of distance, or else the lack of the “wound” in the fabric of existence, which gives rise to the place of the speaker and the historian.¹⁹ The absolute indifference of the unhistorical animal and the absolute difference of the “madman” necessarily imply an absence of certain freedoms—the freedom not to be “fettered” to the moment, as well as the “freedom of speech” that underlies the bare fact of the exercise of speech. In light of this absence, the triumphant traditional verdict will be formulated, stating that reason, speech, and history liberate both the animal and the mad. Yet, the question that nags Nietzsche and Derrida with the disquietude and regularity of an obsession is: At what price? What is demanded from the historical animal and the sane “sovereign individual” in exchange for their so-called freedom?

The question itself is merely a tip of the iceberg of the intricate and never-ending accounting procedures and protocols that define historical existence. The debits are enormous: past generations lived and breathed for the sake of the present, the present—for the sake of the future, and all of the above—for the sake of the chief, if not the only creditor, namely the *telos* of history. Moreover, the accounts are never balanced; “liberated humanity’s” debits exceed its credits and we always find ourselves in the red. When the unhistorical animal learned to forget forgetting, it was to a certain extent unfettered from the moment, but at the price of unhappiness and, Nietzsche argues, at the expense of life itself.²⁰ When in the hypothetical transition from madness to the tyranny of reason the former is excluded “by decree,”²¹ one no longer sees the other as absolutely other, but only as another part of the same. The forgetting of forgetting and the exclusion by decree are the indications of the juridical institution of history, whereby the exception (speech and memory) legitimizes itself as if it were the rule, effectively outlawing the more basic and pre-originary phenomena of madness, silence, and forgetting.

And yet, the old exceptions and outlaws linger within the confines of the new rule. As Derrida put it, one may choose to maintain “a distance from distance”;²² in other words, one may decide to put the newly found “freedom” to a different use by consciously embracing the unhistorical existence. For example, the Nietzschean supra-historical actor is capable of “yes-saying” and “no-saying” to history, and may “retrospectively breathe this unhistorical atmosphere” if the latter option is adopted.²³ Derridian deconstruction may (and does) capitalize on the infinite possibilities of language to overturn the metaphysical concept of history and to ponder a history without linearity and without its subsidiary logocentric, metaphysical, and idealist features.²⁴ Without a doubt, a case can be made against the unhistorical condition beyond history that might parody “pre-historical” existence, or worse, attempt to recover a concocted lost origin. But

the supra-historical perspective on history (history threatened by the erasure of “no-saying” and by internal deconstruction)²⁵ is not accepted by the subject in the same fashion, as the absolute silence and absolute indifference automatically and categorically imposed on the animal and the madman. If history possesses any value whatsoever, it is to teach historical beings the responsibility of decision, of negation, and of affirmation. And although history may reveal itself as a mere detour that at the end of the day finds itself at its point of departure, its educational value is immeasurable and irreplaceable.

In addition to a certain subversive choice nurtured by history (the choice that paradoxically prompts historical actors to dissent against history), Nietzsche and Derrida outline the internal dynamics of the unhistorical remainder nestled within history. While Part II is devoted to the nuances and specificities of this remainder articulated in terms of forgetting that persists in the midst of memory, some examples of this phenomenon are already apparent in Nietzsche’s and Derrida’s “diagnostics” of history. Analyzing the “malady of history,” Nietzsche bemoans “the excess of history [that] has attacked life’s plastic powers”²⁶ and weakened the faculty of forgetting. In its turn, the “excess of history” depends on a forgetting of a different kind—the forgetting of life, or what amounts to the same thing, the forgetting of forgetting. The difference between memory and forgetting lies in *what* is to be forgotten (time or life), not *whether or not something* is to be forgotten. Describing history as a historicized anachronism, as the ordered disorder, and as “the linking of modalized presents,”²⁷ Derrida implies that the production of history compulsively suppresses and represses²⁸ the materials it works with/on. The historical ideal inscribed in the *arkhê* and in the *telos* strives toward the absolute repression of the other, forcing various temporalities into a strict chronology, eliminating disorder, and fully re-presenting the past. Nonetheless, the inescapable *remainder* remains as a *reminder* of the radical incompleteness of these projects. Anachrony, disorder, and the unrepresentable subvert (“solicit”) history from within, signaling one and the same dangerous message: the return of the repressed.²⁹ From now on, who will play the role of a charlatan so daring as to insure history, that is, to insure history against itself?

II. BEYOND THE PRO-GRAMME OF HISTORY: THE WRITING AND THE ARCHIVE

At the beginning of Section (I) I referred to “non-subjective” memories, tentatively termed “memorials,” that promulgate forgetting within remembrance. Derrida considers writing to be one of the most significant memorials. Early on in *Of Grammatology* he argues that “historicity itself is tied to the possibility of writing. . . . Before being the object of history—of an historical science—writing opens the field of history—of historical becoming.”³⁰ As the opening of historicity, writing is implicitly contrasted with tradition, especially the oral tradition that

preceded the material records of past events. When a culture develops written chronicles of past events, the possibility of either forgetting the details of what has happened, or of transforming them in the process of the narrative's oral circulation is drastically minimized. The writing of history ceases to rely on the subjective recollections of those who disseminate the tradition and, instead, preserves the unadulterated account for the sake of the future readers, who wish to revisit the record.

It is certainly not far-fetched to argue that the "historical science" depends on the possibility of writing, spawning history as a text that defies forgetting and *as a result* embodies historical memory. But what does Derrida mean by the writing that opens "historical becoming"? A partial answer to this question is found, once again, in *Of Grammatology*, where the *telos*—the *pro-gram* of history—is linked with the history of the *gramme*, in the double sense of a line and a writing.³¹ The study/logic of linear writing, or grammatology, acts as a structuring principle of history and as a precondition of retention and protention, in which chronological time extends from the past to the future. Shaping linear history, linear writing (*gramme*) sets the tone and the program for the "historical becoming." To read this historiography, one needs only to follow the traces of the continuous line, and in so doing, to rediscover and corroborate the first written inscription that bestows its particular logic onto history.

Like any other memorial, the "historical science" and the "historical becoming" tied to writing harbor the elements of forgetting. In general, Derrida maintains that "writing structurally carries within itself the process of its own erasure and annulation."³² To make this typically Derridian abstract fulcrum more specific, I wish to juxtapose it with the "historical science" that consists of the records of past events, on one hand, and the "historical becoming" that flows out of these records, on the other. Regulating historical science, historiography supplants the "good memory" of the subjects of oral tradition,³³ and therefore, fosters forgetting, at the same time that it poses as the mouthpiece of memory. If one may now consult the historical archive, there is no longer a need to store the accounts of past events in collective memory mediated by tradition. The "historical becoming" that follows a linear program also ineluctably undermines itself, when it represses the discreteness and the spacing of the "pluri-dimensional symbolic thought" and temporalities.³⁴ The discreteness and the spacing evoked by Derrida are crucial for the opening of the distance in the fabric of existence—the distance that allows the historian and the speaker to record history and to speak. The uninterrupted continuity of the lines of writing and of history caricatures the unhistorical condition of zero-distance peculiar to the animal and the madman, and by the same token, plunges historical memory into the abyss of pre-historical forgetting.

The clearest pronouncement of the relationship between history and writing in Nietzsche's philosophy appears in *On the Genealogy of Morality*, where

“history of a ‘thing’” is compared with a “sign-chain of ever new interpretations and arrangements.”³⁵ Yet, while Nietzsche and Derrida share the conviction that, for all intents and purposes, history is a written and read (interpreted) text, the meaning they attach to textuality differs. Nietzsche differentiates between “good” and “bad” texts. The former causes “one to forget that it is a literary work”³⁶ and makes thought walk, or even dance.³⁷ The latter immortalizes the “exhausted things,” writes down “what is just about to fade and begins to lose its odor,” and relates “belated yellow sentiments”³⁸ (Nietzsche 1997b, 147). Whereas a good text permits the readers to forget textuality and to immerse themselves in the extra-textual, the bad and ineffective text reverses this order of things, making the readers to forget the palpable and magnifying the influence of the textual upon them.

In a challenge to Nietzsche’s attempt to reconcile writing and dance in his version of “good” textuality, Derrida retorts that “[w]e would have to choose then, between writing and dance . . . [for] . . . writing cannot be thoroughly Dionysian.”³⁹ The writing of the West is especially bogged down in the tempo and logic of the line, barring the freedom of a dance. This grammatological heritage weighs down on the writer and complicates the Nietzschean endeavor to “dance” with a pen. Nor will written history “be thoroughly Dionysian.” To write is to bow before *gramme*, opening the possibility of history as a science and as a becoming; to dance is to hold onto the absolute *différance* of madness before history. And although writing tends to slide into dance, the conjunction of the two is impossible and aporetic, heralding the end of derivative writing, and hence the end of the metaphysical concept of history.

Despite this objection, however, a reflection on Nietzsche’s good textuality will function as a signpost marking the survival of forgetting within memory. For Nietzsche, the excess of historical sense seems to entail a proliferation of bad textuality. The experiential indigestion characteristic of historical beings resonates with the forgetting of the palpable and the magnification of the textual. When indigestion prevails, there are no “human beings but only flesh-and-blood compendia and as it were abstractions made concrete.”⁴⁰ A totally historical being is also a totally textualized one—her life is written like a bad text, like a mediocre script played out in “flesh-and-blood.” What is “exhausted,” jaded, begins to fade, and “to lose its odor” is the very life of the historical being induced to memorize the script, but also to forget the last echoes of spontaneity and the sense of awe in the encounter with the strange and the unforeseeable (the other).

As an alternative to the union of history and bad textuality, Nietzsche imagines a situation, in which “history would move in flesh and blood, not as a yellowed document and as paper memory.”⁴¹ Interestingly enough, history moving “in flesh and blood” will still be produced as a text, but the relation between remembrance and forgetting will be reversed, such that the textual mediation will be relegated

to the background and the palpable experience will be accentuated. It is plausible to assume that “living” history—a term implied by this alternative—will become commensurate with Nietzsche’s notion of good textuality.

However tempting the thought of history written as a good text may be, the immediate context of the excerpt cited above suggests otherwise. The projection of flesh-and-blood history into the future hinges upon the return of “darkness”—the unhistorical sense—“beyond the present day” and the renewed primacy of tradition.⁴² As Derrida will swiftly rejoin, a history that employs good textuality is an illusion, because it purports to *recover* a pre-historical condition of dance without and before writing, in reaction to the excessively historical writing without the dance. At best, good textuality reverts into the “eternal presence” of natural writing indistinguishable from the divinity of natural law.⁴³ At worst, it obliterates writing from within and valorizes the advantages of oral tradition. In either case, good writing proves to be untenable.

But Nietzsche’s reflections on the philosophy of history show that the compatibility of good writing and history will not be illusory, if it is buttressed by the plastic powers of art and philosophy. Having prescribed forgetting as a medication that will counteract the excess of historical sense, Nietzsche foreshadows the epoch that will succeed the “delivery from the malady of history” and will bring with it the degree of health sufficient for the renewal of the study of history.⁴⁴ The kind of historiographic memory informed and transformed by the forgetting inherent in art and philosophy will unfold as a synthesis of the unhistorical and the historical in the *supra-historical* aestheticized and philosophized life, which chooses to return to history. This return is marked by the supra-historical actor’s decision to affirm history without letting historical sense to dominate over each and every aspect of her life. History itself is then written in an artistic mode as “inspired variations on . . . a familiar, perhaps commonplace theme” that is enhanced and elevated “to a comprehensive symbol.”⁴⁵ The supra-historical historian makes history dance, renews the original without inducing the boredom of repetition in the reader, and illuminates the past not as an exhausted relic, but as the fullness and flexibility of life, carrying its power and profundity into the future. This type of historiography, utilizing good textuality, is reminiscent of Benjamin’s criterion for a good translation, which manages to elevate “the original . . . into a higher and purer linguistic air.”⁴⁶ Both the good translation and the supra-historical standpoint derive novelty from the re-circulation of a past text (literary or historical) taken beyond its linguistic and temporal confines and made to serve a “higher” purpose, be it the advent of “pure language,” or the avowal of life.

A number of passages in *Specters of Marx* demonstrate that Derrida echoes the call for a definition of history as an inspired variation on a familiar theme. By the historic “we mean,” Derrida writes, “inscribed in an absolutely novel moment of a process that is nonetheless subject to a law of iterability.”⁴⁷ But concurring

with Nietzsche, without naming him, is Derrida now confirming the possibility of history “beyond the line,” or does he merely postulate an additional stage in the adaptability of linear writing to history? Is it plausible that the Derridian historian may now dance with the pen? Will this result in a differentiation between and the passing of judgment on “good” and “bad” modalities of textuality? If so, could certain texts guide the reader through the forgetting of the textual to the memory of palpable experiences?

These and many other questions will be posed before Derrida’s *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, which combines history and writing in the figure of the archive. Although Derrida does not explicitly refer to good textuality, archive has much in common with it. On one hand, mirroring the relation between writing and its erasure, archivization involves, among other things, the destruction of the archive, taking place in “the structural breakdown” of memory.⁴⁸ The archive effaces the traces of the past it systematizes in what Derrida calls “the archivio-lithic drive.” Such a drive, derived from the Freudian “death drive,” speeds up the forgetting of the textual, which is integral to the process of textualization, and puts history under erasure (in history). On the other hand, instead of reminding the reader of a palpable, live experience, which is the target of the Nietzschean good text, the archive aims at “a certain hypomnesic and prosthetic experience of the technical substrate.”⁴⁹ Precisely at the moment when a dance with the pen might have started, Derrida undercuts its movement by converting the “belated yellow sentiments” into inexhaustible, yet forever-yellowed, *virtual* experiences. In the terms of Nietzsche’s problematic, the emergence of prosthetic experience in the structural breakdown of memory widens the chasm between history/writing and life. To write down and, even more so, to archive an event is already to cross the thin border between the non-line (*a-gramme*) of the actual-unhistorical and the line (*pro-gramme*) of the virtual-historical media.

What complicates this schema of a premature, aborted dance is the incompleteness of the archive—the incompleteness inseparable from life and from archival technique’s relation to “the singularity of the event.”⁵⁰ The archive is never sealed simply because life itself is not over, in other words, because not everything has been textualized, documentalized, and stored for future reference. Setting aside the connotations of incompleteness as lack, one may view this attribute of the archive as a promise of the unhistorical, which is perhaps the messianic promise *proper*. The promise of an active openness to the future without the compulsion to react to the past. The promise of a supra-historical existence without denying a history capable of the movement/dance “in flesh and blood.” The promise of a decisive erasure of history in history. The promise of reaching the end of the line and of surviving the logic of *gramme*.

III. BEYOND HISTORICAL "REALITY": OF GHOSTS AND GENEALOGICAL CONFUSIONS

In the spirit of Derridian philosophy, the practices of reading/writing and archivization exemplify the ghostly return of the past and the—no less ghostly—possibility of futurity, haunting the present. Every reader/writer is equally obliged to respond to the ghosts of the present-absent past writers and to the demands of the future readers. As a reader, one attends to the voices of other writers (who are/were readers); as a writer one addresses future readers (who may also be writers). "Let us never forget it," Derrida implores, "the mid-day ghost appears for us in an experience of reading."⁵¹ The archive augments this "mid-day" haunting, precisely, because it contains the reminders of the past remains (traces) preserved for the sake of the future:

Undoubtedly, but in the first place . . . the structure of the archive is *spectral*. It is spectral *a priori*: neither present nor absent "in the flesh," neither visible nor invisible, a trace always referring to another whose eyes can never be met, no more than those of Hamlet's father, thanks to the possibility of a visor.⁵²

In its ghostly dimension, the archive is "neither present nor absent 'in the flesh'" and therefore stands in contradiction to Nietzsche's dream of a history that will move not as a "yellowed document," but "in flesh and blood." It represents a memorial proper to the antiquarian concept of history that faithfully and meticulously accumulates multiple fragments of the past, while it forgets the differential significance of these memories for the present and for the future.

On one hand and as a rule, Nietzsche does not deny the affinity of historical sense and the ghost. When one remembers something or someone, a moment from the past "returns as a ghost and disturbs the peace of a later moment."⁵³ But on the other hand, he takes on a dangerous task of categorizing, sorting out, and evaluating the different ghosts. "A dangerous task," for how are we to categorize indeterminate ghosts without rendering them determinate? On what grounds do we extend hospitality to some disturbers of the present and reject others? Nietzsche indicates that this seemingly impossible decision is based upon what is forgotten in the dynamics of archivization and antiquarian history, namely, the monumental significance of the ghosts "assumed by the eyes through which they see and through which they compel everyone to see—compel, that is, because the intensity of their consciousness is exceptionally great."⁵⁴ The exceptionality of those whose "intensity of consciousness" continues to command enormous influence even after they are no longer present defies the Derridian conception of the spectral other "whose eyes cannot be met." The masquerade is over when Nietzsche's ghosts remove their visors, and their intense consciousness is shared with others, enlivening the yellowed documents that bear the signatures of these

“greatest spirits” and performing the miracle of the embodied, corporeal history “moving in flesh and blood.”

It is in the rare instances of “the greatest spirits” that Nietzsche locates the *telos* (or rather the *telois*) of history:

That the great moments constitute a chain . . . , that this chain unites mankind across the millennia like a range of human mountain peaks, that the summit of such a long-ago moment shall be for me still living, bright, and great—that is . . . the demand for monumental history.⁵⁵

Ironically perhaps, *telos* in Nietzsche’s reinterpretation does not signify the cumulative end of history, or a single point in time toward which the historical stream rushes. Rather, there are several scattered ends and goals (“mountain peaks”) that appear quite accidentally, unevenly, and unexpectedly, interrupting the reign of the prevailing mediocrity. The role of monumental history, then, is to mediate between the disjointed peaks, to gather them into a mountain range, and to effectuate a ghostly collaboration of the greatest spirits, regardless of their respective chronological “positions.” Thus, a highly selective and vibrant archive is formed, in which Plato may well converse with Marx, while Nietzsche and Derrida are given another chance to catch up on a virtual discussion of historiography and justice over a glass of wine.

The operations of monumental history are akin to Derrida’s “commerce without commerce of ghosts,” whose highest value and greatest offering for the generations to come is expressed in the “heterodidactics” of learning to live *from* (but also to live *on*) those still living, though also dead—those vacillating on the border between life and death.⁵⁶ The Nietzschean ghosts of greatness congregate outside of the empirical chronological history and time overwhelmed by their intensity of consciousness. The same extra-historical site teems with the Derridian ghosts that terrify and/or inspire hope without fully entering or inhabiting any given historical temporality. Exceeding the opposition between the actual and the ideal, between empirical history and teleology,⁵⁷ the ghosts touch empirical history only to gesture toward what “is” beyond this history. Beyond the historical dispersion of anachrony into memory lies the realm of anachrony as forgetting—“anachrony promises and practices forgetting”⁵⁸—and, therefore, of life—“life as forgetting itself.”⁵⁹

But this extra-historical site is also where the commerce of ghosts and monumental history diverge. Instead of reviving anachrony, the latter mediates between the greatest spirits from different epochs and creates a condition, in which “they live *conjointly* and *concurrently*.”⁶⁰ Translated into Derrida’s terms, monumental history synchronizes (conjoins) the anachronous disjointure of time, putting it in the peculiar order of a simultaneous present liberated from temporal, or epochal constraints. This synchronicity materializes in the memory of past greatness: only on the condition that one remembers the highest peaks in human history, can one

expect to keep history and life itself alive in the age of deadening and excessive historical sense. Beyond (but also, necessarily, within) antiquarian history that thrives on the forgetting of greatness and opposes life, monumental history works as a tireless motor, propelling life and expelling/forgetting mediocrity.

The epistemic effects of the ghostly conception of history are not trifling, for it generates confusion that threatens the production of knowledge. Below I formulate three main kinds of confusion: (1) a conflation of ghostly subjects with the objects of (historical) knowledge, (2) the historian's disorientation in the spectral light of history, and (3) a confounding misidentification of ghosts. The epistemic disorder is intensified with every new kind of confusion, from erroneously positing something as an object of study, through shining light on that "object," to inevitably misidentifying it. I will argue that every one of these epistemic steps is marked by a confrontation of memory with blinding forgetting and a reinstatement of amnesia that destabilizes history.

The initial difficulty arises with the very inception of the historian's object of study, which is but a spectral *subject*. Approaching their "object" of study, the historians naively believe that they are capable of sorting out and differentiating between the indeterminate ghosts of the past.⁶¹ As long as the "objective" criteria of historiography are in place, the procedure will be valid and legitimate, or so it seems. But the ghostly subject lurks behind the historian's back, transforming historical "reality" into phantasmagoria. In Nietzsche's view, world history written by the "objective," unsuspecting historian "has to do, not with what actually happened, but only with events supposed to have happened," while the end product of historical knowledge is "vapor—a continual generation and pregnancy of phantoms over the impenetrable mist of unfathomable reality."⁶² The memories (phantoms of history) are thus impregnated with the vapors of the historian's opinions and suppositions confounded with objectivity and enveloping historical reality in "the impenetrable mist" of forgetting.

In the Derridian vernacular this confusion is labeled as the first "thing of the thing." The first thing of the thing is mourning in the broadest sense of the term, denoting our ability to point out some *thing*, to "ontologize" and to lament its remains, in short, to "localize the dead."⁶³ From now on, history will be conceived as the work of mourning, whether it identifies and remembers the dead by erecting monuments on their graves, by preserving (mummifying) the remains in a blind antiquarian fervor, or by wiping out the past and re-murdering the (un)dead. Whatever route toward the interminable historical work of mourning they embark on, historians desire to put an end to "confusion or doubt: one *has to know* who is buried where—and *it is necessary* . . . that, in what remains of him, *he remains there*."⁶⁴ But the specter haunts, emptying memory of its content and converting the work of mourning, that is, history into an interminable repetition compulsion performed in the fear of ghostly return. Confusion—confused

memory as forgetting—is inevitable because the ghostly “thing” is never there, where the remains are buried; the graves are empty and so are the functions of the monument erected to commemorate a pure subject. As a result, the extremes of objectification are impotent in the “face” of the ghostly subject, whose subjectivity goes unrecognized.

The second confusion emanates from the spectral light that illuminates the historical field. As Nietzsche put it, a highly developed historical sense blinds historical beings with “*too bright, too sudden, too varying light*.”⁶⁵ Pretending to possess historical knowledge of the objectified, dead phenomena, historians lose all sense of strangeness and surprise that belongs to the unhistorical darkness.⁶⁶ Appropriating the past, making it their “own,” they strive toward the memory of everything, which in fact remembers nothing. This blinding forgetfulness may assume two forms. First, the historians, who subject themselves to “too bright, too sudden” of a light, reminiscent of Plato’s eidetic sun, will forget the shadows inhabited by the ghosts of greatness. (It is well known that there can be no vision in absolute light devoid of shadows.) But the reverse is also true, and the same historians may be blinded by the dazzling *source* of light shining from the “intensity of consciousness” of the great monumental historical characters—the consciousness that illuminates the predominantly insignificant moments of the antiquarian past around them and is itself painful to look at. Gradually, the confusion of the ghostly source of light with what it illuminates induces a certain type of insomnia, in which the lack of sleep, or of the unconscious bliss devoid of historical sense, interferes with and disorients the consciousness of historical beings.

Playing on the semantic meaning of “specter,” Derrida comments that “[t]he specter, as its name indicates, is the *frequency* of a certain visibility . . . of the invisible.”⁶⁷ The visible frequency of the invisible specter is a spectrum, a multiplicity of lights, coloring multiple temporalities and histories of ghosts. The multiplicity within the spectrum disorients those historians, who paint with white on white, superimposing the whiteness of the mourned dead on the self-same whiteness of light (before its split into the frequencies of the spectrum) and on the whiteness of continuous, linear history. Any hint of other colors is registered as a threat, since it indicates that life, anachrony, and forgetting are still haunting death, synchrony, and memory. But like Nietzsche’s historical being dazzled by the bright light without shadows, Derrida’s historian is blinded by the excessiveness of whiteness that creates “an imaginary screen where there is nothing to see.”⁶⁸ From the safe haven of the same in history, white is transfigured into a medium of the spectral other, whose silhouette is projected onto the “imaginary screen” beyond history. Hence, the ultimate confusion that portends the misidentification of ghosts and conflates the phenomenology of spirit with the non-phenomenon of the specter.

The buildup to the third and final confusion is now over. Ghosts are misrecognized. The relapse into the initial indeterminacy is completed. Nietzsche refers to this misrecognition as the “*genealogical* confusion” exemplified in the origin of religion: in the end “the progenitors of the *most powerful* clans . . . [are] . . . necessarily transfigured into a *god*.”⁶⁹ Out of fear, one is forced to obey the progenitors, whose ghosts demand painful sacrifices and the impossible debt repayment from the present generation.⁷⁰ These ghosts carry as their substratum everything that constitutes history, including the pain that (in)forms memory and the accumulation of debt, but also the subversion of history: the forgetting of the progenitors that institutes the memory of the divinity. The forgetting inherent in the rise of the religious does not cancel the historical debt; on the contrary, the indebtedness to the past generations is magnified to the extent that the new creditor is revered as a god. As a consequence of the genealogical confusion, the specters grow disproportionately large—like the shadows before sunset—and the ghosts of actual historical characters are misidentified as the spirits of the ideal unhistorical forces.

Derrida relates the misidentification of ghosts to what he calls “a revolutionary *frequency*.”⁷¹ Listening to the revolutionary frequency, this *metaphysician* posturing as a physician monitors the pulse of history and keeps vigil next to its comatose body. Revolution is what fills history with intrigue and surprises, but it is also the most unsurprising thing of all because the *spirit* of the true revolution is indistinguishable from the *specters* of the failed ones. We have always known the “revolutionary” outcome even if we had hoped or feared that we did not know it—Derrida implies.⁷² We have known, as Marx had known when he wrote *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, that it heralds the genealogical confusion of revolutionary specters, whose memory is dissimulated in a forgetful automatic repetition. But, in the absence of the revolutionary *spirit*, the shadows past revolutions throw onto the present are not magnified. Rather, they diminish, as if at midday, when each subsequent revolution fabricates a parody more laughable, more lamentable, and more grotesque than its predecessors. Conflating the revolutionary specters, history feeds on itself and mourns its own mourning, but this self-cannibalization is not limitless. With every “new” repetition, the pulse of history grows fainter, as energy is drained from the past that stands in the way of the promise of radical futurity. Emaciated, spiritless, and godless, history forgets itself, proceeding and receding by inertia amidst its confused specters, and finally expiring under the “unbearable lightness” of its own being.

IV. FROM HISTORICAL JUDGMENT TO THE JUDGMENT OF HISTORY: THE UNHISTORICAL, WRITING, AND GHOSTS

When it comes to the question of justice, both Nietzsche and Derrida unequivocally vociferate: “There is no just praxis.” The moment of action is divorced from knowledge by the active (or activating) forgetting, making the act possible: “he who acts is . . . always without a conscience, so is he always without knowledge; he forgets most things so as to do one thing.”⁷³ Derrida, however, goes one step further with an attribution of the unavoidable injustice to the instant of decision preceding action: “the instant of decision is a madness—a decision of urgency and precipitation, acting in the night of non-knowledge and non-rule.”⁷⁴ In order to decide and to act, I am to sever my relation with the past, to cancel, as it were, history in forgetting and, in so doing, to open the door to the uncertain possibility of the future and, ultimately, of justice.

Because no practice may be (justifiably) called “just,” the practice of historiography is also, by implication, unjust. Yet, this verdict does not mean that history and historiography are not caught up in the processes that place them in a greater or a lesser proximity to justice. The unhistorical animal and the mad, writing and the archive, ghosts and confusions—these memorials and states of forgetting are fraught with the relations, possibilities, and impossibilities of justice. The “initial” production of history and speech in Derridian philosophy is fundamentally unjust, because it doubles up as the closure of madness and the negation of absolute silence. In contrast to Levinas, who considers speech and discursivity to be the preconditions of justice,⁷⁵ Derrida concludes that the speaker recreates the internal division in the history of logos, siding with determined reason, as opposed to the indeterminable madness. She confronts the “silence [that] plays the irreducible role of that which bears and haunts language, outside and *against* which alone language can emerge.”⁷⁶ It is conceivable that the second internal division in the history of determined reason would stem from the discourse *of* justice, or the discourse directed *to* the absolutely other. But even then the speaker would have to repress, if only temporarily, the absolute difference of pre-historical silence and madness, so as to remember the historical totality of speech and reason.

Reacting to Derrida’s claims, Nietzsche will remind him that the unhistorical condition is equally unjust. Indeed, the unhistorical animal with its narrow horizons of the absolute immanence “is the least capable of being just . . . [because it] . . . is a little vortex of life in the sea of darkness and oblivion.”⁷⁷ Although speech violates the blissful condition of indeterminable madness and of unhistorical animality, it would be wrong to romanticize these states of forgetting, in which justice is absolutely impossible. Yet, at the same time, these states of forgetting have a powerful bearing on justice. In Nietzsche’s words, they are “the womb not only of the unjust but of every just deed too.”⁷⁸ The movement toward justice is

instigated by the insertion of the unhistorical and the anti-historical into history: the overflow of language's "wounds" with the archaic pre-linguistic silence, the over-saturation of memory with forgetting, the historical rejection of history, etc. Otherwise, separated from the intra-historical content, trans-historical forms—absolute difference included—are vacuous, moralizing, and paralyzing.

Derrida further narrows down his version of historicity from the emergence of language in general to the emergence of written language. In this case, the oral tradition forgotten beneath the memorial of writing supplants madness as the victim of injustice. But, according to Derrida, writing in itself need not be unjust, for it may be conceived as either a generous absence of the author, who offers his work to the judgment of the reader, or as the hinge (*la brisure*), preserving difference in the articulation of various epochs to which the inscriptions belong.⁷⁹ What contains the possibility of injustice is the fall of writing into Occidental linearity with its desire to synchronize (not to articulate) difference expressed in linear historical narrative. This desire is embodied in the archive—the bridge between writing and reading—whose functions consist of the legitimization, classification, and ordering of writing.⁸⁰ The archive formalizes the unjust assimilation of difference in the practice of textualization, though it also conveniently corrects this formalization with the help of the archiviolithic drive that internally destroys it.

Nietzsche's notion of good textuality attests to the possibility of the internal destruction of writing that effaces itself. In general, however, writing participates in a "dangerous" feature of history, "in that it places all conventions *side by side so they can be compared* and thereby calls for a judgment."⁸¹ When the historian and the writer see everything that faces them on an equal footing (without which justice is unthinkable), they dare to turn their tools of the trade—history and writing, history *as* writing—into the gold standard of all judgment. The side-by-sidedness of the dead artifacts synchronizes without disjointure and arranges what is thus conjoined in a continuous line (gramme), with which the writer/historian is intimately familiar. Consequently, the very phenomenon Derrida considers as the apex of injustice is transformed into the measure of justice viewed from the "objective" historiographic standpoint.

Those who judge past history and past writing are the latecomers "born already grey-haired," exhausted, without childhood, and without forgetting.⁸² Latecomers are the kind of writers, who are primarily readers; they are critics immersed in the textual. The relative lateness of their appearance on the historical scene is mistaken for the attainment of the greatest knowledge hitherto, which gives them the right to pass judgment on past history and texts. Their perceived proximity to the end of history is associated with the expectation of its imminent transcendence, but ironically, "they are seized by the troubled presentiment that their life is an injustice, since there will be no future life to justify it."⁸³ Thus, the sand castle of the latecomers' justice crumbles thanks to their inability to combine historical

transcendence and historical immanence and to become absolutely “readerly” writers, as Barthes would say.

Whereas Nietzsche situates latecomers on the continuum of synchronous history, Derrida reinterprets “lateness” as an attribute of anachronism. To turn toward justice, to face the other as other, one must arrive at a different time: “In order to wait for the other at this meeting place, one must . . . arrive there late, not early.”⁸⁴ If one arrives “there” late, one will meet the other without meeting her. Outside of the retention/protection of memory and beyond the opposition of empirical and ideal history, the other haunts the latecomer as a ghost. Spectrality inverts the direction of judgment, such that the anterior other judges the posterior latecomer. In Nietzsche’s terms, the intense consciousness of those inscribed in monumental history overflows its historical confines and, estimating the value of life, renders the impossible justice. Such justice will be rendered neither “by the living, for they are an interested party, even a bone of contention, and not judges; [nor] by the dead, for a different reason.”⁸⁵ Neither (both) living, nor (and) dead—the specters are uniquely situated outside of *and* within history and life: a position that allows them to compare, to evaluate, and to judge their respective values.

In conclusion, I will consider a rather provocative thesis that justice is contingent upon the (ghostly) position both within and outside of the totalities of history, language, and memory. From the brief overview offered above, it appears that a purely negative reaction to (the absolute forgetting of) these totalities reproduces the injustices inherent in them, since the rush toward the unhistorical condition ends with a “little vortex of life” oblivious to the demands of justice, and since the absolute silence rules out one’s address to the other. In lieu of this reaction, Nietzsche and Derrida think through the unjust totalities of textuality, writing, and the archive in a way that *internally* “de-totalizes,” or indeed deconstructs, them. Good textuality probes the limits of the textual; non-linear writing erases the line and attempts to articulate difference without suppression; and the archiviolithic drive declassifies and de-legitimizes documents. Therefore, good textuality stands for the textual *and* the extra-textual, non-linear writing—for writing *and* its erasure, and the archiviolithic drive—for historical order *and* disorder. The second element of each phenomenon does not simply negate the first, but moves through and beyond it toward a more just textuality, writing, and archive. Contaminating, without demolishing, the totalizing memorials of the past, forgetting instills life, difference, and justice in the lifeless, the indifferent, and the unjust.

NOTES

1. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 60.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., 64.
4. Ibid., 73.
5. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, trans. M. Clark and A. J. Swensen (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett, 1998), 19.
6. Ibid., 74.
7. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 21.
8. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 1997), 58.
9. Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, translated by A. Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 42.
10. Ibid., 61.
11. Ibid.
12. Jacques Derrida, "Difference," in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. A. Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 8.
13. Ibid., 22.
14. Jacques Derrida, *Aporias*, trans. T. Dutoit (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1993), 81.
15. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, trans. P. Kamuf (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), 39.
16. Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 37.
17. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings from the Period of Unfashionable Observations*, trans. R. T. Gray (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999), 256.
18. Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, 64.
19. Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 54.
20. Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, 67.
21. Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 47.
22. Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*, trans. B. Harlow (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 49.
23. Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, 65.
24. Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. A. Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1972), 49-50.
25. I elaborate on the notion of history (history under erasure) in the next section.
26. Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, 120.
27. Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, xx.
28. Having carefully eliminated any residual premises regarding the underlying subject of psychoanalysis, Derrida occasionally resorts to the Freudian psychoanalytical

- vocabulary. For instance, in *Specters of Marx*, Freud's term "the work of mourning" is applied both to the repetition of failure in the history of revolutions and to the (capitalist) economic activity.
29. Fredric Jameson, "Marx's Purloined Letter," in *Ghostly Demarcations*, ed. Michael Sprinker (London and New York: Verso, 1999), 40.
 30. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. G. C. Spivak (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 27.
 31. *Ibid.*, 84.
 32. Derrida, *Positions*, 68.
 33. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 37.
 34. *Ibid.*, 86.
 35. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 51.
 36. Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings from the Period of Unfashionable Observations*, 381.
 37. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. W. Kaufman (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 322.
 38. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 147.
 39. Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 29.
 40. Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, 86.
 41. Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings from the Period of Unfashionable Observations*, 265.
 42. *Ibid.*
 43. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 18.
 44. Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, 122.
 45. *Ibid.*, 93.
 46. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. E. Jephcott (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 75.
 47. Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 52.
 48. Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. E. Prenowitz (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 12.
 49. *Ibid.*, 25.
 50. *Ibid.*, 62.
 51. *Ibid.*, 86.
 52. *Ibid.*, 84.
 53. Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, 61.
 54. *Ibid.*, 65.
 55. *Ibid.*, 68.
 56. Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, xviii.
 57. *Ibid.*, 63.
 58. *Ibid.*, 111.
 59. *Ibid.*, 109.

60. Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings from the Period of Unfashionable Observations*, 214.
61. Presumably, Nietzsche himself escapes this kind of confusion by treating the (monumental) history that is worth studying as a procession of spectral, non-objectified subjects.
62. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 156.
63. Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 9.
64. Ibid.
65. Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, 98.
66. Ibid.
67. Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 100.
68. Ibid., 101.
69. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 61.
70. Ibid., 60.
71. Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 112.
72. Ibid., 113.
73. Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, 64.
74. Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law: 'The Mythical Foundations of Authority,'" in *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, ed. Drucilla Cornell, Michel Rosenfeld, and David Gray Carlson (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), 26.
75. Emanuel Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. A. Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 100.
76. Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 54.
77. Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, 64.
78. Ibid.
79. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 66.
80. Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, 40.
81. Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings from the Period of Unfashionable Observations*, 250.
82. Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, 101.
83. Ibid., 104.
84. Derrida, *Aporias*, 66.
85. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. W. Kaufman (New York and London: Penguin Books, 1976), 474.

