Theory Time: On the History of Poststructuralism

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Introduction

I would like to begin by thanking the Academy’s Council for the honour of presenting this lecture, and the Secretariat for their organisation of the symposium.¹ It is a particular pleasure though to thank my colleague and friend of many years Mark Finnane, for his good work and good offices in the convening of such a timely and significant intellectual event.

My topic — the intellectual history of post-1960s humanities theory, poststructuralism in particular — is one that comes with great promise and significant risk. The promise is to achieve some insight into a series of intellectual practices and contexts that had significant impact on the culture of the Western humanities academy during the second half of the twentieth century and up to the present. The risk is that there is little agreement about how to develop a historiography for poststructuralist theory, or even about whether one can be developed. This is to say nothing of the fact that in pursuing this task one must run the gauntlet between those whose love of poststructuralist theory makes its historicisation sacrilegious and those whose dislike of it makes it unworthy of historicisation. An invitation to speak on the history of humanities theory thus has something in common with an invitation to a post-concert party with the Rolling Stones: there is the enticement to discover something new and possibly forbidden; the challenge to stay the distance in a demanding milieu; and the risk that one will leave the event in worse shape than on arrival.

There are several books and essay-collections dealing with the history of structuralism and poststructuralism, from which of course there is much to be learned.² Some works nominating themselves as histories of poststructuralism, however, turn out to be exercises in poststructuralism whose commitment to the
thematics of fluidity and indeterminacy means that they pose no historical question. Other works do offer an historical narration — for example, of the transposition of German transcendental phenomenology into French theory, or the transposition of French theory into American deconstruction — but in a manner that fails to break free of the self-understanding of their subject. These are works that track the travels of such themes as the indeterminacy of meaning, or the subversion of identity, without inquiring into how meaning is rendered indeterminate or identity subverted; in what cultural and pedagogical contexts such apparently subversive activities might be instituted and valorised; and what cultural purposes or programs might be pursued through such specialised intellectual activities. Finally, there are some studies that have indeed helpfully approached the history of theory in terms of intellectual activities undertaken in particular contexts. These studies though have been hamstrung by their reliance on a philosophical-historical conception of context, understood as the hermeneutic space in which a-temporal ideas are realised or obscured in material circumstances. It seems to me that this conception has short-circuited investigation into the specific character of the intellectual activities that constitute poststructuralist theorising, and thence into the kinds of historical context in which these activities have been undertaken.

Let me begin then by proposing some theses about the history of poststructuralist theory, presented both as hypotheses requiring the support of historical evidence, and as recommendations for the redescription of particular kinds of intellectual activity. Seen from the standpoint of contextual intellectual history, poststructuralist theory can be understood as a development of European university metaphysics, specifically of its most recent form: the metaphysics of transcendental phenomenology elaborated by Edmund Husserl in 1920s Germany and then quickly improvised on by his unfaithful apprentice, Martin Heidegger. If this post-Kantian metaphysics is understood as a particular culture of intellectual self-questioning and self-transformation, then we can propose that poststructuralist theory emerged during the 1950s and 60s when this culture of metaphysics was taken up into an array of adjacent intellectual disciplines, and underwent a series of geo-intellectual translations, in a process of academic assimilation and transmutation that still continues.

It is a mark of the underdeveloped and contentious character of the historiography of poststructuralism that before exploring this hypothesis it is
necessary to surround it with a series of prophylactic clarifications. It should first be understood that in our discussion the term metaphysics is not being used in a normative sense, as if to engage in metaphysical thought might be a bad or a good thing. It is being used rather in a historical-descriptive sense to characterise a particular form of thought, just as one can characterise such figures as Aristotle, Hobbes, Locke or Rawls as belonging to the history political thought without thereby praising or blaming them. Second, we should also be clear that here the term metaphysics is not being used as it is by philosophers, to characterise true or false beliefs about the ultimate ontological constituents of reality. Intellectual historians use the term in a different way, to characterise a particular body of doctrines and discourses, without regard to its truth or falsity, transmitted in a linked array of institutions from the early middle ages to the present. At the centre of the European metaphysical corpus sits the doctrine of God understood as a divine intelligence continuously intelligising the forms or natures of things, and man as an intellectual nature capable of participating in this intellection in a diminished but perfectible manner. Third, in characterising the metaphysics from which poststructuralist theory emerged as ‘European university metaphysics’, we can begin to restore metaphysics to its geo-intellectual region and institutional context. European metaphysics was of course decisively informed by Greek and Arabic sources, but by the sixteenth century these had been assimilated into Latin Christian monastic metaphysics and thence its inheritor, early modern university metaphysics. The history of metaphysics in general and of poststructuralist theory in particular is the history of an array of intellectual activities cultivated and transmitted within the European university and its colonial transplants. European metaphysical thought is local to the European university analogous to the way in which English common law thought is local to the culture and rituals of English common law courts.

In proposing that it can be historically understood as an improvisation on the most recent, post-Kantian form of European university metaphysics, I am suggesting that poststructuralist theory requires a historiography that keeps its distance from two rival parties: from the enemies who treat it as ‘fashionable nonsense’, and the friends who regard it as remembering a Being that was forgotten by reason. Such a historiography is confronted by a double task. First, it must provide an account of post-Kantian metaphysics as a particular kind of intellectual activity and academic culture, initially a highly recondite perhaps even esoteric one, confined to a certain
kind of regional philosophy faculty. Then it must outline how this form of metaphysical thought was transmuted into an academic culture capable of being taken up in a variety of non-philosophical or para-philosophical disciplines — literary studies, Marxism, psychoanalysis, even historiography and jurisprudence — from whence emerged the array of exoteric hermeneutic disciplines known as poststructuralist theory. Needless to say I will not be attempting a discursive narration of these developments in the present address. Instead I propose to offer an array of historical snapshots of particular artefacts and scenes. These might be regarded as crime-scene-investigation photos, from which we can piece together the narrative chain of past events.

1. Two Examples

We can begin by setting before ourselves two documentary examples of the poststructuralist discourse that we are seeking to redescribe as a particular kind of intellectual activity undertaken in within a specifiable contest. These texts — a chapter from Michel de Certeau’s *Heterologies* and Jacques Derrida’s ‘Force of Law’ essay — both date from the late 1980s. As American translations or transpositions of ‘French theory’ they document a late stage in a complex chain of intellectual innovations, receptions and transpositions. The proximate starting point of this chain is to be found in 1920s German university metaphysics, although we will see that it reaches back well beyond this. The de Certeau text is indicative of a style of literary hermeneutics with substantial dissemination in Australian university literature and cultural studies departments, and Derrida’s ‘Force of Law’ essay provided a template text for critical legal studies in Australia no less than in the United States and the United Kingdom.

De Certeau’s text takes the form of a series of hermeneutic operations performed on the travel writings of Jules Verne. At the centre of these operations we find a local version of the doctrine that in attempting to know the world man only succeeds in projecting his own formal preoccupations onto it, leaving the world itself unknown or obscured by the formal instruments of knowledge. De Certeau thus characterises Verne’s explorers and cartographers as engaged in a vast concealment of the world through processes of mapping and naming:

Essentially, Verne’s explorers are name-givers; they contribute to the world’s genesis through nomination. … The explorations semanticise the
voids of the universe. Their durations, accidents, episodes, and trials
metamorphose into words which fill the indefinite expanses of the sea …
The voyages write the Pacific’s great white page: graphs of journeys and
words (fragments) from histories traced on maps.  

De Certeau thus presents the colonisation of Pacific islands described by Verne as symbolical of the semantic colonisation of Being that takes place through the projection of words and maps: ‘The navigational colonisation inaugurates an operativity by providing it with a place of its own: the map, which replaces beings “calls” them to the linguistic network which situates them in advance in a field of human history’. If knowledge of the world takes the form of a semantic projection then, de Certeau stipulates, there can be no significant difference between Verne’s ostensibly factual travel narratives and his evident travel fictions, as the former no less than the latter will be separated from the world by the veil of narrative and cartographic projection through which it is apprehended.

This occlusion of the world is itself only a prelude though to the possibility of its hermeneutic disclosure, the distinctive feature of which is that it is not something that is achieved intentionally, by Verne or by his readers. Rather, de Certeau characterises it as something that takes place outside conscious intent, as if by chance, here in the form of unexpected breaches or delays in Verne’s narrative through which the world is glimpsed not in accordance with our projections of it, but as something ‘other’. De Certeau thus undertakes a reading in which breaks in Verne’s narrative are interpreted as symbolic expressions of the rupturing of the semantic colonisation of Being, such that the literary reading executes a metaphysical task: ‘The narrative creates stop-off points. … There is even, in the heart of the Pacific, a point of delay of tarrying, a paradisiac transgression of work, a pleasure place, an “enchanting picture”, as Verne writes.’ De Certeau presents this state of illuminated lassitude as a ‘feminine’ space outside the domain of semantic colonisation of the world, and through which the ‘other’ can enter consciousness, here in the form of the indigenous or native: ‘From there and nowhere else come the native, the other introduced into the fellowship of the explorers. Through the native, the reality of the elsewhere causes the voyage to drift, it diverts it, anchoring it in a dreamland. The circle is not perfect. Fiction cuts across it’.

In its jurisprudential content Derrida’s ‘Force of Law’ essay is far removed from de Certeau’s literary interpretation. In the hermeneutic operations that it performs on
its object, however, it remains close to the latter, giving a sense of the trans-disciplinary spread of poststructuralist theorising. On this occasion Derrida develops the basic phenomenological theme — of the occlusion of Being through the formalised projection of knowledge — via the topos of the difference between justice and law. Justice inherits the fluid and incalculable attributes of occluded Being, while law goes proxy for the ossifying effects of a projected formalism. In Derrida’s essay though the duality is organised via the traditional philosophical exercise of the antinomy or aporia: the holding of jointly valid but mutually contradictory theses:

In fact there is only one aporia, only one potential aporetic that infinitely distributes itself. I shall only propose a few examples that will suppose, make explicit or perhaps produce a difficult and unstable distinction between justice and droit, between justice (infinite, incalculable, rebellious to rule and foreign to symmetry, heterogeneous and heterotopic) and the exercise of justice as law or right, legitimacy or legality, stabilisable and statutory, calculable, a system of regulated and coded prescriptions.¹⁴

For Derrida it is the aporetic character of law that opens it to deconstruction: ‘it is the deconstructible structure of law (droit), or if you prefer justice as droit, that also insures the possibility of deconstruction’.¹⁵ At the same time, though, Derrida also invokes the Husserlian ancestry of this particular aporetic by referring to it as the ēpochē, that is, the exercise that requires the suspension of quotidian forms of judgment in order to allow occluded Being to manifest itself free of all projected concepts and designs.

The central aporia or ēpochē that Derrida performs is one that he scripts for the relation between ‘freedom’ and ‘rule’. According to this script, in order to be just, judges in courts of law must exercise a freedom in applying the rule or law that amounts in fact to reinventing it; but they must also simultaneously judge in accordance with the rule or law in order to avoid irresponsibility. This allows Derrida to suspend law in a web of mutually contradictory affirmations, of the kind that is correctly seen as a distinguishing discursive feature of the deconstructive variant of poststructuralist theory: ‘In short, for a decision to be just and responsible, it must, in its proper moment if there is one, be both regulated and without regulation: it must conserve the law and also destroy it or suspend it enough to reinvent it in each case, rejustify it, at least reinvent it in the reaffirmation and the new and free confirmation
of its principle’. The resultant fact that justice may only be glimpsed in the act of suspended judgment allows this deconstruction of law to stake a claim to a certain kind of (antinomian) political radicalism. It means that no actual or ‘present’ legal judgment can be just: ‘It follows from this paradox that there is never a moment that we can say in the present that a decision is just … or that someone is a just man — even less, “I am just”’. Such judgments can only be symptoms of the fact that all present legal orders must have ‘posed and violently resolved’ the indeterminate openness of the aporia of law and justice.

At the same time, this also means that the only just order is one that is not present, residing instead in an indeterminate and incalculable future. As the ‘other’ of law that can never be constituted as an object of formal knowledge or calculable policy, justice can only be glimpsed by chance through the corners of our eyes. Here it appears in the form of an unexpected eschatological ‘event’ that renovates empirical history by suddenly manifesting Being within it, while continuously receding beyond it and thereby reinitiating that history:

Justice remains, is yet, to come, à venir, it has an, it is à-venir, the very dimension of events irreducibly to come … Perhaps it is for this reason that justice, insofar as it is not only a juridical or political concept, opens up for l’avenir the transformation, the recasting or refounding of law and politics … There is an avenir for justice and there is no justice except to the degree that some event is possible which, as event, exceeds calculation, rules, programs, anticipations and so forth. Justice as the experience of absolute alterity is unpresentable, but it is the chance of the event and the condition of history.

We might say then that de Certeau’s literary poststructuralism operates as a hermeneutic exercise in which the semantic occlusion of being and its unforeseeable self-manifestation takes place through the reading of a literary text: a text that is ascribed the formal order and the unexpected indeterminacy required for this exercise. For its part, Derrida’s deconstruction of law takes place through an exercise in which the aporetic balancing of the incalculability of justice and the certainty of law permits a suspension of not just of philosophical judgment but of all ‘present’ legal orders. This opens a space in which a permanently futural justice might unexpectedly disclose itself in the form of an event capable of transforming those who behold it.
Before discussing some of the key historical episodes that led to the emergence of this kind of poststructuralist theorising we need to offer a *prima facie* characterisation of the kind of intellectual activity it involves — a characterisation of what is being ‘done’ in discourses of this kind — at least as a means of filing these snapshots for the purposes of contextual historiography. Here it is important to avoid two opposed but complementary attempts to provide a historiographic characterisation of poststructuralist theory. Some historians have attempted to characterise poststructuralism as an intellectual symptom of a real historical transformation. Its indeterminacy has thus been tied to the loss of metaphysical faith in reason and progress supposedly attending the catastrophic history of the twentieth century.\(^{20}\) Alternatively, its anti-humanism has been tied to the real eclipse of humanism and destruction of humanity brought about by the totalitarian politics of Nazism or Marxism.\(^{21}\) In seeking to subordinate poststructuralist hermeneutics to a rival kind of philosophical-historical hermeneutics, however, this strategy opens the door to irresolvable contention over which hermeneutics permits access to the real, or access to its inaccessibility. Neither does it take us any closer to describing the intellectual activities involved in postmodern theorising, as it treats these as intellectual symptoms of events taking place elsewhere — in historical reality — as if these activities were not themselves real historical events.

Other historians have taken a different and potentially more sympathetic approach, treating poststructuralism not as a metaphysical symptom of historical catastrophe but as an historical symptom of the eclipse of Western metaphysics. On this view the postmodern cultivation of indeterminacy represents an understandable response to the loss of metaphysical certitude but one that fails to grasp how truth might yet be restored in a ‘post-metaphysical’ form; for example, through a properly dialogical reconciliation of different horizons of hermeneutic expectation.\(^{22}\) In treating poststructuralism as symptomatic of the collapse of Western metaphysics, however, this response again slides into a counter-hermeneutics and again fails to offer a positive redescription of the kinds of intellectual activity that actually comprise poststructuralist theorising — all the more ironic if this activity turns out to be rooted in the culture of modern university metaphysics.

How might it be possible then to provide an historical characterisation of poststructuralist theorising that locates it in a historical context without engaging in the hermeneutic reduction that treats it as the intellectual symptom of a hidden
historical reality? It is possible to do so, I suggest, by drawing on a form of intellectual history that approaches philosophies in terms of the acts of self-transformation and self-cultivation that they require. This is the approach that informs Pierre Hadot’s studies of classical philosophies as ‘ways of life’; that is exploited in Peter Brown’s elegant investigations of late-ancient and early-Christian philosophical asceticism; and that Michel Foucault has nominated as the investigation of practices of ‘spirituality’ within philosophy. Foucault locates the ‘ascetic’ presupposition of this philosophical spirituality in the doctrine that the quotidian subject is not qualified for access to higher truth; and he has characterised it as ‘the search, practice, and experience through which the subject carries out necessary transformations on himself in order to have access to the truth’. The dimension of spirituality underlying certain forms of philosophy may thus be understood in terms of: ‘the set of these researches, practices, and experiences, which may be purifications, ascetic exercises, renunciations, conversions of looking, modifications of existence, etc., which are, not for knowledge but for the subject, for the subject’s very being, the price to be paid for access to truth’. By redescribing philosophising as a particular kind of activity — as a work of the self carried out on the self for the purpose of transforming its mode of acceding to truth — this approach allows us to treat poststructuralist theorising itself as a concrete historical reality rather than as an intellectual symptom of one. This enables us to view its context in terms of the circumstances in which the activity is carried out and the cultural forces or institutions programming these circumstances, rather than in terms of the hermeneutic relation between an intellectual movement and real history.

Viewed in this light, then, our snapshots of de Certeau and Derrida may be regarded as pictures of particular acts of intellectual self-transformation and self-cultivation. Let us suggest that here we are dealing with a certain kind of ‘spiritual exercise’ in which the exercitant is firstly required to withdraw from quotidian knowledge and value — literary veridicality, the ‘present’ legal order — thence to enter the state of suspended judgment or illuminated lassitude in which it might be possible for a spiritually uncontaminated phenomenon to appear unexpectedly, as the ‘other’, the ‘event’, the eschaton. It should be clear that in offering this characterisation of poststructuralist theorising we are not attempting to falsify it. As a concrete historical activity such theorising is no more capable of being false than is chess, yoga, or the Eucharist, and, by the same token, no more capable of being true.
What we are doing, rather, is seeking to transform the register in which poststructuralism is understood: from that of a theory that might be true or false to that of an irrefrangible activity, whose character is open to historical description and whose contextual circumstances are open to historical investigation that might indeed be true or false. Of course this shift results in a dramatic change of outlook, as it means that an intellectual discipline dedicated to disclosing the pristine indeterminacy beneath empirical reality is itself treated as an empirical reality of a particular kind, hence as an object for an empirically-oriented intellectual history. I have indicated that the acts of self-transformation and self-cultivation present in poststructuralist theorising are developments from post-Kantian metaphysics, so we can now turn to some snapshots of these developments.

2. Davos 1929

In order to get some sense of what was at stake in the contest between Kantian philosophy and the post-Kantian transcendental phenomenology of Husserl and Heidegger, we can turn to the debate between Ernst Cassirer and Heidegger that took place in the Swiss alpine spa of Davos on 26 March 1929. Reminiscent of early modern academic metaphysical disputations, this event was attended by 200 mainly German and French academics and students, and formed part of a ‘International University Course’ sponsored by the Swiss, French and German governments with a view to improving relations between Francophone and Germanophone academics. Among the academics were Rudolph Carnap, Joachim Ritter and Jean de Cavaillés, while the students included a young Emmanuel Levinas and possibly a youngish Herbert Marcuse, both of whom were undertaking spiritual apprenticeships in Heideggerian philosophy. Were this debate to have taken place wholly in the register of philosophy — as a clash between rival interpretations of Kant and thence rival epistemological theories — then it would be difficult to understand either how it could have galvanised and polarised the 200 spectating minds, or how it could continue to echo in rival discipleships that resound around us. If though we approach the contesting philosophies not as rival theories of truth but as rival ‘spiritualities’ or exemplary modes of acceding to truth — that is, as rival displays of the acts of self-transformation required to form the self in which truth might be disclosed — then the magnetism of the spectacle becomes explicable. For now the debate appears in the form of a contest between rival spiritual-philosophical exemplars, personified by
Cassirer and Heidegger, each offering a model of the kind of subject into whom one should transform oneself in order to accede to the highest kind of truth: the truth that transforms those who behold it.

Without going into a level of detail incompatible with our present purposes it is necessary to sketch the briefest of accounts of what it was about Kant’s metaphysics that permitted it to undergo two such opposed receptions. In his militant reaction to both empirical science and existing Protestant university metaphysics, Kant executed an extraordinary dual reshaping of the ‘rational being’ that had long stood at the centre of German university metaphysics: that is, man as the harbinger of an intellectual nature, created by the intellection of a divine mind, and hence capable of participating in divine intellection in his diminished creaturely capacity. On the one hand, Kant ascribed man the possession of a pure apperceptive intelligence from whose synthetic activity the categorial forms of all knowledge emerged and from whose freely self-determining will issued the moral law. On the other hand, in a disturbingly difficult conceit, Kant viewed space and time as this rational being’s sensorium or intuitional apparatus. This means that the appearance of objects in space and time is regarded as the manner in which the pure intellects of man the creative intelligence (homo noumenon) are apprehended through the spatial and temporal sensorium of man the subject of passive intuition (homo phenomenon).

To the extent that it can be rendered intelligible, then the interaction between the active intellect and the passive sensorium is handled in Kant’s ferociously difficult conception of the transcendental imagination, to which he ascribes the capacity to render figural, via the ‘transcendental schematism’, the otherwise abstract relations of the transcendental intellect. It is not our purpose to attempt to clarify this conception here, only to note the two different ways in which Kant appears to understand it, and in which it has been understood since. On the one hand, the figurations effected by the transcendental imagination — the ‘transcendental schematisms’ — can be regarded as products of the synthetic activity of the intellect, as when the shape of a triangle is conceived as the product of formal rules of construction. On the other hand, the figuration of things can be thought of as the product of the spatial and temporal forms of passive intuition, such that the triangle is only grasped as a shape through the manner in which the ‘reproductive imagination’ synthesises or associates perceptions in time.
The only reason for dwelling on this unresolved bifurcation in Kant’s conception of transcendental imagination is that it helps to clarify the opposed Kant receptions of Cassirer and Heidegger that were on display at Davos in March 1929. As the leading inheritor of Marburg neo-Kantianism, Cassirer conceived the figuralisation of things in space and time as the product of purely formal intellectual relations, in a manner that marginalised independent spatio-temporal intuition. Cassirer’s teacher Hermann Cohen had thus treated the calculus as a kind of simulacrum for Kant’s a priori intellect, viewing experience as a transcendental projection of the relations generated by the calculus, which could thereby function as a model for the formal-philosophical foundations for scientific knowledge.\(^3\) For Cassirer though the calculus was only one instance of the more general domain of ‘symbolic forms’ that embraced aesthetic and other cultural forms. By construing these as the a priori forms through which man projects an array of objective sciences or cultural meanings, Cassirer sought to dissolve substantial Being into a plurality of relational symbolic forms or structures, thereby modeling the epistemological deportment that would characterise the moment of structuralism. It was on this basis that Cassirer distinguished his position from Heidegger’s at Davos, arguing that:

Being in ancient metaphysics was substance, what forms a ground. Being in the new metaphysics is, in my language, no longer the Being of a substance, but rather the Being which starts from a variety of functional determinations and meanings. And the essential point which distinguishes my position from Heidegger’s appears to me to lie here.\(^3\)

The (in)famous difficulty of Heidegger’s philosophical repudiation of this neo-Kantian structuralism arises from its ‘gnostic’ character, that is, from its tying of philosophical truth to the purifying elevation of a rare and privileged subject of truth; and it is this gnosticism, understood non-pejoratively, on which our brief characterisation of Heidegger at Davos must focus. In rejecting Cassirer’s transcendental-structuralist reception of Kant, Heidegger made use of an esoteric metaphysical doctrine that remained deeply but obscurely present in Kant: namely, the doctrine that time (and space) should be understood as the ‘pure self-affection’ of Being. The core idea in Kant is that our inner empirical intuition of ourselves as temporal beings (homo phenomenon) arises because we are ‘affected by ourselves’ as rational beings (homo noumenon), which means that our empirical self can never directly know the rational self whose ‘self-affection’ it is.\(^4\) In Heidegger this
becomes the doctrine that a pure non-temporal intelligence only becomes aware of itself in the temporal world that it intelligises but, in doing so, is thrown into time. Here it can only appear to itself as one temporal being among others — what Heidegger calls the ‘thrownness of Being’ — even if it must remain oriented to the transcendent infinite Being for whom time is only the sensorium in which it apprehends its own creation of the world. It is this conception of human being finding itself as a finite being thrown into the temporal world that Heidegger baptised as Dasein, or ‘being there’, and that he deployed as a weapon against Cassirer’s conception of man as the transcendental font of the forms of experience:

I believe that what I describe by Dasein does not allow translation into a concept of Cassirer’s. … What I call Dasein … depends on … the original unity and the immanent structure of the relatedness of a human being which to a certain extent has been fettered in a body and which, in the fetteredness in the body, stands in a particular condition of being bound up with beings. In the midst of this it finds itself, not in the sense of a spirit which looks down on it, but rather in the sense that Dasein, thrown into the midst of beings, as free, carries out an incursion into the being which is always spiritual and, in the ultimate sense, accidental.

In this passage we have a snapshot of Heidegger’s reconstruction of the mode of acceding to metaphysical truth and a program for the act of self-transformation required to become the special kind of self capable of acceding to this kind of truth. In repositioning man as a pure intelligence that only comes to awareness of its world-creating intellection through the senses of the body to which it is fettered, Heidegger sought to displace Cassirer’s image of man as the transcendental intellect. Against Cassirer, Heidegger stipulates that man cannot accede to the truth of being in the manner of ‘a spirit which looks down on it’. He must do so rather in the manner of a finite being thrown into time, but obliquely aware of the infinite Being from whence it has been thrown. Through this reconstruction of Kantian metaphysical culture, Heidegger sought to transform the mode of acceding to metaphysical truth, from that of the reflexive recovery of the transcendental conditions of knowledge, into that of the ‘accidental’ ‘incursion into being’. Here truth is acceded to only in the form of fitful glimpses of the recessive infinite Being that bestow on man (Dasein) the brief but highest moments of his existence:
[It is] so accidental that the highest form of the existence of Dasein is only allowed to lead back to very few and rare glimpses of Dasein’s duration between living and death. [It is] so accidental that man exists only in very few glimpses of the pinnacle of his own possibility, but otherwise moves in the midst of his beings.\textsuperscript{38}

I want to suggest that in this gnostic reconstruction of the mode of acceding to metaphysical truth we can find the intellectual core of poststructuralist theorising. In constituting truth as something occluded by the formal structures of knowledge, as something to which temporally-fettered man can only accede in the accidental disclosures of Being that break through such structures — or appear fitfully in their interstices or at their margins — Heidegger provided the template for an esoteric spiritual exercise that proved capable of exoteric reception in a variety of academic disciplines. We can thus recognise this exercise in de Certeau’s hermeneutic suspension of the travel-writer’s semantic colonisation of the world, in which the truth of the ‘other’ only appears in the unexpected delays and tarryings of the narrative. It is no less visible in Derrida’s use of the aporia or ἐποχή to suspend the formal certitude of the ‘present’ order of law in order to permit the deconstructionist a glimpse of a permanently recessive ‘justice to come’.

One of the central distinguishing features of Heidegger’s post-Kantian university metaphysics is the fact that it operates as a supremacist enclave culture. This is not an accidental historical feature but an aspect of its spiritual-philosophical core. It arises from the fact that the initiate can only accede to truth by suspending all formal quotidian sciences, thence to rise above their inauthentic subjects through the accidental glimpses of Being that lift man to the ‘pinnacle of his own possibility’. Such glimpses are by definition inaccessible to quotidian subjects remaining within the confines of positive knowledges, which means that they are incapable of confirmation through open evidentiary procedures, and must rely instead on the confirmatory insights of fellow initiates. We can readily imagine the allure of this spiritual life-style to Heidegger’s young acolytes at Davos, who joined him on the alpine slopes during the day before descending to evening lectures still wearing their ski-clothes, breaking through the decorum of the scientific ‘suits’.

In a lecture to theology students in Tübingen two years prior to the Davos debate, Heidegger had already sketched the reorganisation of academic disciplines that followed from his new comportment towards truth. He told them that the positive
sciences could only provide ‘ontic’ knowledge of particular regions of being, while his fundamental ontology required a shift from ‘beings to Being’. This meant that positive sciences and scientists would have to place themselves under the tutelage of a metaphysics that provides the only escape from their technological objectification of Being.39 Four years after Davos, in his inaugural address as Rektor-Führer of Freiburg University on 27 May 1933, Heidegger was ready to put his program for a metaphysics-led restructuring of the university into the form of a pedagogical exhortation to the student body. In exhorting his students to break through the artificial enclosures of the positive sciences and open themselves to the transformative force of concealed Being, Heidegger was attaching his metaphysical program of university reform to the political reform of the German university proclaimed in the Nazi neue Studentenrecht of May 1. The ‘New Students’ Law’ had been designed to effect the ideological unification and political activation of the student body in the service of national spiritual renewal.

In a direct transposition of his new regime of truth onto the academic structure of the university, Heidegger told the students that genuine theory and science had been progressively lost to the West since the time of the Greeks, the last people for whom science had been ‘the questioning holding of one’s ground in the midst of the ever self-concealing totality of what is’40. The questioning of Being or ēpochē is not that which finds an answer in the positive sciences but is the attunement to the self-disclosure of Being that dissolves all such sciences into a fundamental ontology. ‘Such questioning’, Heidegger told his activated audience, ‘shatters the division of the sciences into rigidly separated specialities, carries them back from their endless and aimless dispersal into isolated fields and corners, and exposes science once again to the fertility and the blessing bestowed by all the world-shaping powers of human-historical being (Dasein)’. If the academic body wills the ‘essence of science’ in this sense then it will ‘create for our people its world … that is, its truly spiritual world. For “spirit” is … primordially attuned, knowing resoluteness toward the essence of Being’.41

In transposing his new and heightened mode of acceding to truth onto the intellectual order of the university, Heidegger sought to supply it with a new foundation, in the form of the ontological questioning of all positive sciences. This was also envisaged as providing an exalted cultural-political mission for the politically-engaged students, whose cultivation of a ‘primordially attuned, knowing
resoluteness toward the essence of Being’ promised them the spiritual qualification required to lead a whole people to its spiritual destiny. Rather than being symptomatic of Nazi totalitarianism or anti-Semitism, then, the academic supremacism of Heidegger’s metaphysical regimen was in fact the genuine expression of the spiritual supremacism of this latest form of German university metaphysics. What Nazism seemed to promise Heidegger was a politicised university administration and a politically active student body through which the university might be reorganised around the ‘theoretical’ questioning of the technological sciences. The very different kind of student movements of the late 1960s could thus appear to make Herbert Marcuse essentially the same promise. While there was no intrinsic affinity between Heidegger’s metaphysics and Nazi ideology, neither was their relation that of accidental historical contamination; as the Nazi politicisation of the university provided Heidegger with an appropriate cultural and political context for implementation of the supremacist spiritual comportment arising from his metaphysical regimen.

Johns Hopkins 1966

In turning to our second episode in the emergence of poststructuralist theory — the symposium on ‘The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man’ held at the Johns Hopkins University from 18-21 October 1966 — we are struck by its differences from the Davos symposium no less than by its similarities to the earlier event. If Davos represented the government-sponsored gathering of a European intellectual elite, brought together to facilitate exchanges between German and French academic cultures, then the Hopkins symposium represented the utilisation of a culturally powerful elite American university as a reception context for French theory of the 1960s. The event was thus organised by the transatlantic team of René Girard, Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato and featured papers by Roland Barthes, Lucien Goldmann, Tzvetan Todorov, Jean Hyppolite, Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida, whose work was discussed by leading US academics. At the same time, though, if we view it from the perspective of the paper that would become its talismanic centre-piece — Derrida’s ‘Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences’ — then the Hopkins’ symposium displays an uncanny similarity to the Davos event. For not only did Derrida repeat Heidegger’s announcement of the eclipse of neo-Kantian structuralism of the kind represented by Cassirer, but he did so
in the form of a ‘debate’ with the absent doyen of French structuralism, Claude Lévi-Strauss, using a poststructuralist metaphysics that was almost wholly Heideggerian. If poststructuralist theory can be historically understood in terms of the assimilation of post-Kantian metaphysics into French theory, and hence its reception in the elite American humanities academy, then the presentation of Derrida’s ‘Structure, Sign and Play’ paper to the Hopkins’ symposium offers us an important snapshot of this transpositional context.

In order to approach this event from the viewpoint of an empirically-oriented intellectual history, we need to reframe it in accordance with our redescription of the culture of post-Kantian metaphysics, and thereby measure our distance from the most familiar understandings of it. One of the striking features of Derrida’s characterisation of the intellectual transformation that he was announcing was his treatment of it as an unexpected ‘event’. Derrida portrayed this event as signifying the eclipse of the ‘metaphysics of presence’ that is still embedded in structuralism, and as disclosing a truth only capable of being glimpsed fitfully in an unnameable birth:

Here there is a sort of question … of which we are only glimpsing today the conception, the formation, the gestation, the labor. I employ these words … with a glance toward those … who … turn their eyes away in the face of the as yet unnameable which is proclaiming itself … only under the species of the non-species, in the formless, mute, infant, and terrifying form of monstrosity.44

If this formulation echoes Heidegger’s template remark — that ‘the highest form of the existence of Dasein is only allowed to lead back to very few and rare glimpses of Dasein’s duration between living and death’ — then that is no accident. It is not just that of the three poststructuralist thinkers named in the paper — Nietzsche, Freud and Heidegger — only the last is a shaping presence, animating what Derrida calls the ‘Heideggerian destruction of metaphysics, of onto-theology, of the determination of being as presence’.45 More importantly it is that Derrida’s framing of the paper and all of the hermeneutic operations performed within it are instantiations of Heidegger’s post-Kantian mode of acceding to metaphysical truth: that is, of the doctrine according to which man finds himself thrown into historical time through the ‘self affection’ of a pure Being that can thus never be ‘present’ in temporal experience, except for the fitful glimpses of the ‘unnameable’ disclosed to those at the pinnacle of man’s possibility.
If we redescribe this doctrine in the manner already outlined — that is, as the program for a self-transformative exercise through which the initiate seeks to realise the elevated self in whom truth can be disclosed — then we obtain the appropriate historical context in which to locate Derrida’s Hopkins’ paper. In this context the delivery of his paper will not appear as the ‘event’ through which the structuralist ‘metaphysics of presence’ was eclipsed through Derrida’s rare glimpse into an unnameable recessive Being. Rather, its delivery will be approached as an historical event in which a regional mode of acceding to truth, improvised within the spiritual culture of post-Kantian European university metaphysics, was modeled for an elite audience of American humanities intellectuals who were addressed as potential initiates and disseminators. It is via this contextualisation that we can arrive at an historical understanding of the intellectual operations performed within the paper itself.

The central feature of the paper in this regard is its extensive use of the aporia or antinomy as the means of executing the ἔποχη or skeptical suspension of positive knowledge that lies at the heart of this exercise. Taking place as the joint affirmation of mutually contradictory theses, the aporia has a long history in the practices of Western philosophy and spirituality. It reaches all the way back to the Pyrrhonists — who used it as a means of achieving ‘equipollence of contradictories’ (isothenia) and thence suspension of judgment (ἔποχη) in pursuit of inner peace (ataraxia) — and all the way forward to Kant. He organised the ‘antinomies of reason’ as a means of suspending judgment between rival ‘empiricist’ and ‘rationalist’ doctrines with a view to forming what he called the ‘critical attitude’ towards transcendental ideas.

In ‘Structure, Sign and Play’ Derrida engages in the aporia in order to achieve the suspension of positive knowledges and the destruction of the ‘metaphysics of presence’ — Heidegger’s ‘clearing of the ground’ — thence to achieve the condition of floating attunement to unnameable Being whose fleeting self-disclosure promises radical self-transformation. If the transgressive novelty that Derrida’s antinomies promised to insiders in fact depended on the unquestioning repetition of an old exercise, then this exercise was certainly not the ‘fashionable nonsense’ denounced by hostile outsiders, reaching back as it did through Kant to Pyrrho. To break a spell we must first pay it the honour of learning its incantations.

We can briefly observe then that the central antinomy that Derrida executes in ‘Structure, Sign and Play’ is performed on the notion of structure itself. Derrida
begins this exercise by declaring that the principle of ‘structurality’ is to determine the play of possibilities in a totality for which the structure constitutes a centre that is not part of this play. The next move is to observe that to maintain its structuring role, the centre may not itself be subject to the ‘principle of structurality’ that defines the totality; and this gives rise to Derrida’s central aporia or paradox, that the centre is both within the structure yet outside it: ‘The centre is at the centre of the totality, and yet, since the centre does not belong to the totality … the totality has its centre elsewhere. The centre is not the centre’. Once structuralism has been incorporated into this aporetic exercise then its claims to scientific knowledge can be suspended via the paradox to which they have been made to lead. This allows Derrida to interpose that it is not knowledge that lies at the base of structuralism but desire, specifically the desire to escape the anxiety arising from the fact that Being eludes all attempts at its structural determination. In this way, like Heidegger, Derrida can nominate ‘metaphysics’ as the attempt to allay the anxiety arising from the absence of Being by declaring it to be present, for example, as ‘essence, existence, substance, subject’. All of these have been used to anchor the centre of structure in a present origin or telos — a ‘transcendental signified’ — yet each only expresses the desire to quell the fear arising from its absence.

The intellectual ‘event’ or ‘rupture’ that Derrida announces to his audience is thus one that takes place through the antinomy that suspends structural determination in the paradox of ‘the centre is not the centre’. It is through this antinomy that Derrida can identify this event with the application of the principle of structurality to structure itself, and thence with the admittance of language or discourse into the structural sciences. Here discourse will be understood in terms of the ceaseless detour or differance of meaning in relation to a permanently recessive Being or ‘transcendental signified’ to which it nonetheless remains oriented:

From then on it was probably necessary to begin to think that there was no centre, that the centre could not be thought in the form of being-present, that the centre had no natural locus, that it was not a fixed locus but a function, a sort of non-locus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play. This moment was that in which, in the absence of a centre or origin, everything became discourse … that is to say, when everything became a system where the central signified, the original transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a
system of differences. The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the interplay of signification *ad infinitum*.

Seen from an historical perspective, then, Derrida’s Hopkins’ paper can be understood as a snapshot of a dual regional transposition of post-Kantian European university metaphysics. It represented the trans-Atlantic geo-intellectual transposition of a philosophical culture that had previously been regionally ‘continental’ (European): this owing to the fact that its origins in German academic metaphysics had hindered its reception in Anglo-American contexts in whose early modern religious settlements tended to be inimical to university metaphysics. At the same time it represented a discursive transposition from the kind of explicitly metaphysical arguments in which Cassirer and Heidegger engaged at Davos to a much broader hermeneutic register. Here literary and aesthetic studies could also act as vehicles for the exercise of metaphysical self-transformation, allowing ‘continental philosophy’ to enter the United States and Australian humanities academies initially through the beachheads provided by literature and language departments.

In fact this discursive transposition had already been anticipated by Heidegger at Davos in his comment that ‘art itself has a metaphysical sense’. The more Heidegger focused on metaphysics as an exercise through which initiates could learn to attune themselves to unplannable glimpses of incalculable Being, the less dependent this became on specifically philosophical terminology and argumentation. Heidegger’s own postwar transposition of his metaphysics into a literary hermeneutics — facilitated by the translation of his recondite philosophical vocabulary into accessible literary metaphors — was mirrored in the work of French literary phenomenologists, and made it possible for the esoteric metaphysics to appear in the exoteric form of literary hermeneutics. Derrida’s Hopkins’ paper sits on the cusp of this transition. In its metaphorical philosophico-literary vocabulary — in its discourse of decentralised structures and of meaning detoured from the ‘transcendental signified’ through the aporetic structure of discourse — it could look backwards to Derrida’s demanding philosophical discussion of Husserl’s phenomenology, yet forwards to a kind of literary criticism, deconstruction, that could be taught to undergraduates as a hermeneutic routine.

Regardless of the exoteric dissemination to come, however, poststructuralist theory would not lose its enclave character. To the extent that truth is imagined in the form of a recessive Being glimpsed through the suspension of positive knowledges,
then access to this truth — in the form of the event, the other, an indefinitely deferred literary meaning, a permanently deferred ‘justice to come’ — will be restricted to the initiates who engage in the exercise of suspension in order to attune a self that accedes to the truth in rare glimpses. This enclave culture would also remain illuminist and supremacist. In viewing positive knowledges as veils thrown over the lacunae revealed by their own aporia, poststructuralism treats the exponents of such knowledges as evading the ‘anxiety’ of the absence of Being, and hence of failing to reach the point where ‘man exists only in very few glimpses of the pinnacle of his own possibility’.

**Coda: Leipzig 1665**

We owe some kind of answer to those who might demand a justification for the kind of history we have sketched; that is, a justification deeper than the empirical adequacy and plausibility claimed by our redescriptions and contextualisation of poststructuralist theorising. Such a justification though cannot take the form of an attempt to recover a priori structures hidden beneath our historiographic discourse. Neither will it seek to identify breaks or delays in the historical narrative through which we might glimpse a much more profound historicity, in the form of an orientation to a permanently recessive future ‘to come’. It should be clear enough that such philosophical justifications are in fact internal to the philosophical modes of acceding to truth whose history we have been sketching. This suggests that we will need to look for a justification for our historiography neither in the concepts that lie beneath nor in the Being that recedes before it, but in the history that lies behind it: in short, not in the philosophy of history but in the history of historiography.

As a result of his insistence that we must approach man as a being thrown into time among other beings, Heidegger is sometimes credited with restoring history to philosophising in the face of the a priori metaphysics of Kant and the structuralists. The empirical history in which Heideggerian man (*Dasein*) finds himself thrown, however, is far from being the ultimate source of time or meaning. In fact Heidegger ascribes this source to the Being whose ‘self affection’ creates the historical time in which empirical man finds himself, and in which he is thus spiritually compelled to seek a glimpse of the recessive Being through which he will be transfigured. From this poststructuralist point of view, should empirical history itself be treated as the untranscendable horizon of events and their meaning — as we have been treating it
— then it would be in denial regarding the anxiety of absent Being. By vainly attempting to supply knowledge with a secure origin or telos, in the face of the indefinite detour of meaning through ‘discourse’, this history would be complicit with the ‘metaphysics of presence’. In the Hopkins’ paper we thus find Derrida declaring that:

The thematic of historicity, although it seems to be a somewhat late arrival in philosophy, has always been required by the determination of being as presence. … it could be shown that the concept of epistèmè has always called forth that of historia, if history is always the unity of a becoming, as tradition of truth or development of science or knowledge oriented toward the appropriation of truth in presence and self-presence, toward knowledge in consciousness-of-self.55

Far from restoring history to philosophy, then, poststructuralist theorising treats historiography as one of the positive sciences that must be suspended if the ‘metaphysics of presence’ is to undergo the rupturing or decentering through which an absent Being might be glimpsed and man might escape ‘self-presence’ and ‘consciousness-of-self’.

We need to be quite clear then that in this paper we have attempted to develop a historiography in which the poststructuralist suspension of empirical knowledge is itself treated as an object of empirical knowledge; that is, of an empirically-oriented intellectual history that treats this suspension or ēpochē as a concrete historical activity: in fact as one of the exercises in self-transformation carried out through such techniques as the aporia and aimed at forming an illuminated way of acceding to truth. The history in which this activity has been transmitted and takes place is not one into which man has been thrown on the other side of an infinite Being that he must continue to seek. Rather it is a history that is entered by treating events in time as forming a wholly immanent order, autonomous of any kind of transcendental dimension. Such a history is regarded as free of hermeneutic presuppositions or hidden meanings, and hence as the object of a narrative historiography attempting to track the relations between various kind of events, acts and contexts.

This is not to imply, however, that this kind of empirical historiography is grounded in some kind of objective historical ontology. To enter this historical world Western Europeans first had to learn how to treat temporal events and activities as untranscendable objects of a narrative historiography. In short, this historiography
arose not from the discovery of an objective past, but from an intellectual history that would allow the past to be treated as ‘objective’. Learning to treat temporal events and activities in his way, however, did not amount to assuming a hermeneutic presupposition, or falling into a hermeneutic circle that exiles real Being to the domain of rare glimpses. Rather it formed part of a complex set of cultural-historical transformations that began in seventeenth-century Europe. As a result of these transformations a conception of history that belonged to the culture of Greco-Christian theology and metaphysics — in which the meaning of the temporal world is seen in terms of the embodiment of transcendent concepts and purposes — was historically contested and partially displaced by a different kind of learned culture. This was one that sought to expunge transcendence from a temporal world, which was thence to be conceived in terms of immanent relations between empirical events. This transformation took place at the level of religious, theological, and political contestation, in which different forms of historiography were developed as instruments of diverging intellectual cultures and as weapons of cultural-political combat.

It was in the midst of such a contestatory milieu, in Leipzig in 1665, that the Lutheran academic philosopher Jacob Thomasius published a pioneering work — his *Schediasma historicum* — in what would become a new historiography of philosophy. Unlike preceding doxographic histories, Thomasius’s work was aimed at separating philosophy from theology by providing a history of them, and was in this sense self-consciously anti-accommodationist and anti-scholastic. The historiographic culture in which Thomasius worked drew on two quite different sources: firstly, a fideist pietism that rejected all metaphysical concepts as inaccessible to man’s corrupted faculties and as unnecessary for salvation, which comes from inner faith and grace; and second, the latest forms of textual and biblical criticism that had developed philological techniques for treating all texts, including holy ones, as documents of particular times and contexts, and amongst whose spectacular early successes had been Lorenzo Valla’s unmasking of the so-called ‘Donation of Constantine’. In the *Schediasma* Thomasius sought to show that a good deal of scholastic theology and modern philosophy was the product of the illicit merging of Greek metaphysics and Christian doctrine during the time of the church fathers, which had produced a philosophical theology or theosophy that had been highly damaging to
simple Christian faith. Thomasius identified God’s *ex nihilo* creation of the world as the Rubicon, as for Christian doctrine this means that nothing pre-exists God’s creative act and there is no other being co-eval with God. For Greek metaphysics, by contrast, the world is the product of two co-eternal principles, form and prime matter in the case of Aristotle’s hylomorphism, and intellect and chaos in the case of neo-Platonic metaphysics, making the eternity of the world into the defining feature of pagan philosophy: ‘the capital error regarding two opposed eternal principles of things, which is the foundation of all pagan impiety’. In a striking move, Thomasius used this difference to argue that Greek philosophy could not form part of Christian soteriological history that began with creation and ended with Judgment Day. It must instead belong to a wholly profane history that Thomasius identified with the pagan way of life and that allowed him to subject Greek philosophy to a situational or contextual description: as that which had been taught in the main philosophical schools. It was this way that Thomasius produced one of the earliest historical contextualisations of philosophy.

By treating it as the historical product of the merging of Christian doctrine with dualist Greek metaphysics in the scholastic university, Thomasius could also transpose the bulk of Christian theology into this new profane historical space, viewing it as arising from the historical reception of pagan metaphysical dualisms that drove an array of reconciliatory monistic and pantheistic ‘heresies’. Through its conception of the emergence of things from the unification of form and matter, Christian Aristotelianism, for example, formed a univocal conception of being — *ens qua ens* — in which God himself was treated as a kind of being, hence as inseparable from his creation. For its part, in identifying God with the *animus mundi* or world-soul, Christian Stoicism led to a pantheism in which the creation was worshipped rather than the creator. Finally, through its emanationism — according to which man was created as an intellectual being from the intellection of the divine intellect — Christian neo-Platonism established a false continuum between creator and creature. In another striking move, Thomasius argued that through this false continuum neo-Platonism had given rise to a heterodox practice of self-sanctification. This took shape in the form of practices of self-purification through which the adept strove to shed their material selves and rise to meet the pure intellect from which they had devolved, thereby dispensing with the mediation of Christ and the church. In treating this practice as the source of an ‘enthusiast’ comportment in which
philosophical initiates strove for union with God, Thomasius can be regarded as offering an early example of the historiographic redescription of philosophy in terms of self-transformative spiritual exercises.

We have already encountered what appear to be quasi-emanationist doctrines in the preceding discussion. Kant’s dualistic metaphysics — according to which empirical man (homo phenomenon) is the form in which a self-affecting pure intelligence (homo noumenon) appears to its passive self in the sensorium of space and time — would appear to be a development from early modern neo-Platonism. Similarly, in Heidegger’s post-Kantian metaphysics — in which man finds himself ‘thrown’ into a temporal world of beings that affords him only fitful (yet transformative) glimpses of the Being that throws him — we seem to find a further development. Will it prove a feasible avenue for historical inquiry to approach poststructuralist theorising as the most recent development of this metaphysical doctrine, whose central role is to program a self-transformative exercise in acceding to illuministic truth?

Already in the generation of historians of philosophy that followed Jacob Thomasius in the 1690s — Colberg, Arnold, and Christian Thomasius — the notion that the philosophical theologies were heresies had dropped from sight; or heresy had been transformed into a purely historical category reflective of how the heterodox had been viewed by the orthodox. This was even more so in the generation of historians that followed them, which included Beausobre and Mosheim, and would lead on to Gibbon and Hume. This change was not least due to the fact that the more deeply these historians of philosophy embedded philosophical theologies (and theological philosophies) in a purely immanent history of their function in churches, universities and sects, the less pertinent became the question of their truth or falsity. What did remain pertinent, though, was the redescription of them as intellectual practices giving rise to characteristic kinds of spiritual comportment, which were increasingly viewed in terms of their suitability for particular conceptions of post-confessional civil life. Will it prove to be the case that the kind of contextualist intellectual history from which this paper has drawn its snapshots of poststructuralist theorising is a late development of this profane anti-metaphysical historiography of philosophy?
Considering the horizons opened by these possibilities it is appropriate to close our discussion with these questions rather than their answers.
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See several of the essays in Mark Bevir, Jill Hargis, and Sara Rushing, eds., Histories of Postmodernism (New York: Routledge, 2007).


For fundamental studies of metaphysics as a component of the regionally located ‘school philosophies’ of rival confessional universities within the early modern German Empire, see Helmut Holzhey, and Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann, eds., Die Philosophie des 17. Jahrhunderts, Band 4: Das Heilige Römische Reich Deutscher Nation, Nord- und Ostmitteleuropa. 2 vols (Basel: Schwabe, 2001). In particular, see the indispensable chapters on specific regional-confessional styles of metaphysics in rival Catholic, Calvinist and Lutheran scholasticisms: Paul Richard Blum, ‘Grundzüge der katholischen Schulphilosophie’, pp. 302-330, esp. pp. 325-30; Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann, ‘Die Schulphilosophie in den reformierten


10 De Certeau, Heterologies, p. 144.
11 De Certeau, Heterologies, p. 148.
12 De Certeau, Heterologies, p. 148.
16 For a deconstructionist defence of this claim, see Paul Patton, ‘Derrida’s Engagement with Political Philosophy’, in Histories of Postmodernism, pp. 149-70.
21 In particular see David Roberts’ review of Breisach’s On the Future of History: David D. Roberts, ‘Postmodernism and History: Missing the Missed Connections’, History and Theory, 44 (2005), 240-52. More generally, see Jürgen Habermas, The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures. trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987); and Jürgen Habermas,


27 For a different but parallel discussion of this, see Friedman, A Parting of the Ways, pp. 25-37.


29 Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, B 37-B 53.

30 Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, B 150-B 156.

31 Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, B 176-B 187.

32 For more on this, see Gregory B. Moynahan, ‘Hermann Cohen’s Das Prinzip der Infinitesimalmethode, Ernst Cassirer, and the Politics of Science in Wilhelmine Germany’, Perspectives on Science, 11 (2003), 35-75. See also Friedman, A Parting of the Ways, pp. 25-9.

Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, B 156.


As is argued in Alan Milchman, and Alan Rosenberg, ‘Martin Heidegger and the University as a Site for the Transformation of Human Existence’, The Review of Politics, 59 (1997), 75-96.


For examples of this reading of the ‘event’ in its own deconstructionist terms, see the papers collected in the special issue of the electronic journal Theory & Event dedicated to the 40th anniversary of the occasion. We thus find the editors incautiously claiming that: ‘Looking back after more than forty years one can plausibly argue that


54. Consider in this regard the following passage from an undergraduate teaching text where Derrida’s program is presented exoterically and entirely within its own self-understanding: ‘Every text, like every Western philosophical system before Derrida’s “rupture”, creates its own world, with its own terms and premises; like a philosophical system, some idea or concept serves as a centre to hold the whole


58 For a detailed discussion, see the invaluable account in Lehmann-Brauns, *Weisheit in der Weltgeschichte*, pp. 21-111.

59 Jacob Thomasius, *Schediasma historicum* (Leipzig, 1665), § 19.

60 Thomasius, *Schediasma historicum*, § 37.


64 Thomasius, *Schediasma historicum*, § 52.

65 Thomasius, *Schediasma historicum*, § 53.


The decisive work in this historicisation and neutralisation of heresy was Gottfried Arnold’s monumental *Unparteyische Kirchen- und Ketzer-Historie, von Anfang des Neuen Testaments bis auff das Jahr Christi 1688* (Frankfurt aM., 1699).