

A VISUAL STUDIES APPROACH TO CRITICAL HISTORIOGRAPHY

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This dissertation asserts that critical historiography, a term first used by Stefan Berger and later by Mark Jarzombek, is worthy of extensive development as a discourse. Furthermore, it calls for both intra- and interdisciplinary research regarding the meaning, relevance, and application of critical historiography and its methods. Though post-structural approaches to historiography have afforded attention to the literary construction of written historical narratives, they have all but ignored Derrida's caution against the suppression of writing to rhetoric, which reduces writing to speech's graphic representation. My study restores the place of writing qua writing to historiography, a position, I insist, that is underscored—actually necessitated—by its etymology. While interest in historical narrative during the 1970s, 80s and 90s began an important chapter in postmodern historiography, my dissertation indicates that this was only an initial foray; these approaches neglected its written or inscribed *telos*. Rather than the study of tropes, which remains largely indifferent to writing's supplemental status, I look to written operations within historiography, drawing on Greimassian semiotics. I conduct an investigation of the effects of two operations on historical writing, one which centers on the inscription of charismatic authority, the other on the operation of ekphrasis within historical description.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

John J. Corso was born in Staten Island, New York. In 1997, he obtained a BA with honors in art from Williams College. He subsequently earned an MFA from Tufts University in affiliation with the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and an MA in art history from Tufts, both in 2003. His doctoral work in art history, theory and criticism was completed at Cornell University. John J. Corso is a trustee of the Telluride Association, and an assistant professor of contemporary art and critical theory at Oakland University, Rochester, Michigan.

Dedicated to Sally Esquivel.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS CRITICAL HISTORIOGRAPHY?

In 1996, comparative European historian Stefan Berger introduced into print the term, '*critical*' *historiography*; likely, it was the first instance of that term in English-language academic publications.¹ Four years later, MIT architectural historian, Mark Jarzombek, devoted the prolegomenon to his book, *The Psychologizing of Modernity: Art, Architecture, and History*, to an investigation of *critical historiography* (which, this time, appeared without Berger's quotation marks).² Given the popularity in the academy of both critical theory and new approaches to historiography, the appearance of the term was propitious. In both cases, these prominent contemporary historians of Modernity independently began a rich discursive dialogue on the meaning, value, and practice of that compound expression.

But in each case, the term itself was introduced without background, explanation, or procedural description: indeed, critical historiography remains undefined in scholarly literature. Yet, the seeming specificity suggests that the term might offer a more precise, potentially powerful type of analysis to the contemporary historian. A cursory glance at the term indicates an endocentric compound. Thus, the semantic head of the term lies within the latter word, and its

¹ Stefan Berger, "The Rise and Fall of 'Critical' Historiography?" *European Review of History* 3.2 (1996).

² Mark Jarzombek, *The Psychologizing of Modernity: Art, Architecture, and History* (Cambridge, U.K.; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

critical descriptor indicates a type or kind within that larger category, “historiography.” Before this can prove useful, however, we must pay some effort in sketching out a discursive territory for historiography, itself. Even a fast perusal of contemporary historical criticism amply shows that there has yet to emerge a consensus on historiography’s provenance.

This dissertation, accordingly, offers preliminary research into the meaning, method, and repercussions of a critical historiography. I proceed under the assumption that critical historiography would potentially enrich current discussions within historiography, critical theory, and especially the interdisciplinary research across those fields.

Pursuit of the term involves not only a history of the idea, but more formidable epistemological questions, as well. My research argues that though a number of interdisciplinary approaches may provide similarly useful angles, critical historiography is in fundamental visually anchored to writing. As a visual matter, it is appropriate that a historian of art—still the discipline most suited to visual questions—approach the interrogation of the term. To begin, I turn first to the aforementioned accounts by Berger and Jarzombek. Their respective essays engage with modern approaches to historical writing. For Berger, ‘critical’ historiography finds its roots in post-Marxist politics of resistance, while for Jarzombek, critical historiography originates in the European avant-garde movement. Neither Berger nor Jarzombek, however, looks immanently into the term, garnering some sense of scope from etymological clues.

I, therefore, turn to etymology, which in the case of critical historiography, sufficiently focuses requirements on any endeavor under that term. Early usage of the word, “critical,” was medical in nature, invoked to describe discernment or judgment as with a disease. A kind of visual prognostication, the word grew more generalized, later encompassing judgments of either fault or value in an object. (We might even regard criticism itself as a kind of reading, a searching for flaw or virtue in a given text.)

Historiography, however, in every respect indicates a narrative that has been *written*, or the study of historical writing, in both senses. Thus, the pen distinguishes historiography from the nonspecific study of historical criticism, the latter of which makes no modal determination. A consequent tenet of this dissertation holds that writing, in every instance herein, be given the broadest scope, following the pioneering work of the late philosopher, Jacques Derrida.

In his pivotal work, *Of Grammatology*, Derrida cautions against the suppression of writing to rhetoric in which writing denotes merely a graphic representation of speech. My dissertation responds to Derrida’s call by restoring the place of writing qua writing to historiography, a position, I insist, that is underscored—actually necessitated—by its etymology. Though attention to historical narrative from the 1970s onward began an important chapter in postmodern historiography, my dissertation indicates that this was only an initial foray; these approaches neglected the written or inscribed *telos* of historiography. Since I throughout the dissertation

refer to this telos as its “written-ness” or its “inscription,” I will pause here to give those two descriptors a fuller treatment.

By “written-ness,” I refer to the state or condition of being written; consistent with a Derridean framework, this state or quality results more from a process of division or delineation than literal alphabetic transcription or encoding. As a state or condition, written-ness is modal, and might best be described as resulting from the operation, “writing.” That operation itself, which I will explore later in chapter two, can be described as “inscription,” if it includes an object or substrate upon or within which that writing occurs. Thus, while writing refers to an operation, inscription simultaneously enjoins the object to that writing act.

Moreover, I continue in chapter two to insist that historiography, as a problem of writing, inherently relies on visual processes. This may confound scholars accustomed to thinking of vision as a strictly ocular process. Vision, rather, is a cognitive process which cannot be tied wholly to the eyes, but rather to varying degrees, informs any cognitive operation that relies on visuo-spatial effects, real or ideal. As I cite in Derrida, mark making, whether by pen and paper, trails through a landscape, or ultimately, the rectilinear plotting of a logic operation (as in Greimas’s rectangle), all constitute writing, and gain at least part of their meaning effects through visualization.

Vision, however, is subject to a variety of conditions that may warp or obfuscate an image; so, too, is historiography vulnerable to visual distortion. My research critically examines the especially visual effects of charismatic authority on written history from a sociological

perspective. Charismatic authority, I argue, causes direct misperceptions of the historical field, thereby providing opportunity for historiographic critique. I begin with Max Weber's definition of charisma as a transaction between a leader and the followers that bestow upon the leader an authority and investment in his or her message. Historians, I argue, in the construction of their own writing, may knowingly or unwittingly participate in a charismatic transaction diachronically with the subject of their history—the charismatic authority. Cautioning against such a history, which often follows a seamless “Grand Narrative” form to mask its own complicity, I insist that the responsible contemporary historian can forgo charismatic participation by drawing critical attention to the contradictions inherent in historical inscription. In doing so, attention to writing within historicism ensures that the historiographer no longer conspires in Grand Narrative, but instead highlights history’s immanence within writing.

An approach that endeavors to avoid such seamless historical narrative might follow the Foucauldian model of archaeology, which takes special interest in historical “ruptures,” rather than continuous causality. In this manner, I investigate the practice of ekphrasis, a writing style in which an author purports to represent faithfully in language a visual image, usually a work of art. Showing that such a representation cannibalizes the visual, I contend that ekphrasis exemplifies a rupture between text and image. Rather than the study of tropes, which is largely indifferent to writing’s supplemental status,

I look to written operations, with an emphasis which foreshadows my interest in Greimassian semiotics.

I conclude this study with a close look at the relationship of image to text within a Greimassian semiotic perspective, in which figurative language affords a process for encoding the visual within discourse. This process is, however, always operational and cannot promise any fidelity in the transposition of image into text. Instead, the inscription of figuration constitutes writing in a Derridean sense, and therefore for the historian, any issue of inscription must be a historiographical question.

Historiography is Fundamentally Visual

The compound “critical historiography” rarely appears in scholarly documents, and when it does, it often lacks historical context and an explanation of theoretical affiliation. The idiom likely derives from the conjunction of “critical theory” with the much older word, “historiography.” Critical theory, in the contemporary sense, originated with the Frankfurt School around 1937. That term is often interpreted as a tactical protocol with which its proponents may launch political and ideological opposition to oppressive regimes.³ While the term has expanded in its scope, the only scholarly accounts

³ See, for example, *Contested Knowledge*, which espouses just such an interpretation. This is only a partial understanding, though, since its creators—especially Theodore Adorno—were concerned that a radical left could just as easily spout a totalitarian ideology as the right. Instead, their project is more correctly interpreted as a dialectical reading, to offer question of any directive ideology; it was less concerned with the replacement of one regime with a more just, or democratic one, but only with providing the tools with which to critique any political force.

of “critical historiography” originate with writers evidently influenced by the Frankfurt School; thus, I maintain the narrower sense of “critical” given that limitation. With its longer etymological history, historiography, has referred to many different facets of historical practice: the writing of history, written history itself, the study of either, or even, as is most often the case with art history, an implied critical evaluation of the work of historians (written or otherwise).

This dissertation opens by taking up two of the rare contemporary instances of “critical historiography,” one in the work of architectural historian Mark Jarzombek and a second in the work of European historian, Stefan Berger. These two scholars stand out in contemporary historiography as the only active scholars today to employ the compound term “critical historiography” in their scholarship. Jarzombek uses the term as a corrective to what he sees as Modernism’s influence on contemporary historical methods, while Berger claims the term refers to an under-critical, defensive posture assumed by historians in the 1980s as a response to neoconservative scholarship.

Given the paucity of explicit references to “critical historiography,” I turn to several contemporary writers who investigate historiography from a “critical” perspective. This group of authors works either from within the paradigm set by the Frankfurt School, or else from literary critical perspectives, especially those influenced by the post-structural “linguistic turn.” In this group, I look at the works of Carl Becker, Allan Megill, Stephen Bann, Hayden White, Elizabeth Clark, and Madeline Caviness.

In all but the last of these contemporary writers, I locate a problematic treatment of the term “historiography.” What their formulations lack is an acknowledgment of the written aspect of historiography, an aspect distinct from its rhetorical construction. This is especially surprising in the case of those working from a post-structural linguistic approach, since they would likely be fluent in Derridean deconstruction, which enjoys semiotic play in etymological constructions of words.

When Vision Deceives: Viewing the Field Under Charismatic Authority

I establish in chapter two a working definition of critical historiography as a dialectical study of written history, I proceed in chapter three to critique the effects charismatic authority draws out in written history; to do this, I turn first to Max Weber. Weber’s best known work on charismatic authority accompanies extended meditations on Second Temple prophets in his essay, “The Sociology of Charismatic Authority.”⁴ In that essay, Weber suggests that one social process in which followers vested leaders with authority involved charisma. In such a situation, a given leader, one with a message counter to dominant religious leadership, believes himself to receive divine authority; if he offers sufficient “proof” to a followership, they will cede to him authority on account of his divine gift, i.e., his charisma. While Weber holds that the charismatic looks only inward for divine or magical confirmation of that authority, Weber

⁴ Max Weber and S. N. Eisenstadt, *Max Weber on Charisma and Institution Building; Selected Papers* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968) 313.

nevertheless notices that the followership of the charismatic will only bestow their allegiance so long as they recognize the divinity of that message. More precisely, Weber notes that this transfer of authority occurs through a “regard,” that is, a charismatic leader is constituted as such because he “is actually regarded” by his followers, and their regard is the mechanism of that conferral.

When French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu revisits Weber’s account of charismatic authority, Bourdieu outlines several problems in the earlier sociologist’s formulation, mostly owing to a model of the subject that proves incompatible with contemporary sociology. Bourdieu's reformulation of Weber aims to move beyond Weber’s interest in typologies and taxonomic categorization to theorize the charismatic transactions in terms of “direct interactions” between agents.

In Bourdieu's stylized approach to describing those interactions, characterized by post-Marxist economic analysis, agents vie in various struggles on a “field,” which might be seen as a spatial metaphor for the stage on which a sociological speech-act may be deployed. That field hosts extended interactions between agents, and power is ultimately exercised and captured there. In addition, agents act in accordance with what Bourdieu terms the *habitus*. In Bourdieu’s update of the Aristotelian term, the *habitus* is a “self-structuring structure” that dissolves the subject-object distinction; in doing so, the *habitus* theory holds that agents at once learn and constitute (i.e. self-structuring *while* structuring) the *doxa* that define their sociological positioning on the field. In this way, the charismatic, his followers,

and ultimately the religious powers against which the former two rebel can all be plotted on a sociological field, each constituting through their actions and self-defining each respective *habitus*.

For Bourdieu, then, a charismatic leader is not chosen on the basis of the novelty of his divine message or mission. Instead, the unarticulated conditions pre-exist any leader within a group of potential followers. A transactional process on the field allows a charismatic leader and his followers to negotiate the message. If a charismatic's message proves amenable to a people, then he will be adopted by that group as their leader. To balance the equation, the charismatic must continue to provide the leadership desired by that following to maintain authority.

If we reconsider the field that Bourdieu offers, together with the charismatic "regard" that Weber insists constitutes that authority, we can ascribe to the field a more spatial and visual modeling of those objective relations than is currently available in Bourdieu. In fact, construed to eliminate the aforementioned Weberian interest in the divine, Bourdieu's field suffers ironically symbolic consequences. Given that Weber specifies that the conferral of authority of upon the charismatic occurs through the *regard*, and given that Bourdieu's own description of the field posits an inherently visual—even sculptural—model of sociological interaction, I assert that charisma relies heavily on its *visualization*; Bourdieu seems to corroborate this assertion in his discussion on the role of ambiguity and legitimation. In fact, Bourdieu uses precisely visual terms to describe a mechanism similar to the divine message of Weber. Bourdieu writes of magic that a

magician's spectators produce and maintain a *collective misrecognition*, a projection and subsequent recognition of their own desires, which "is the source of power the magician appropriates."⁵

In attempting to expand on this collective misrecognition, I invoke the classic text by Walter Benjamin on "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Representation," in which the critic names the historical embeddedness of an object its *aura*.⁶ While the aura is not itself a visual object, its existence is confirmed—much like Weber's charisma—by regard. This aura, I argue, is itself the proof provided by the charismatic, concomitantly constituted by his followers' regard. More importantly, the aura attests to that magic or divine inspiration Weber accounts for; this divinity does not depend on the occult, but rather obtains its power through a symbolic struggle for *language*, that is, *for the symbolic itself*.

In this way, the struggle charismatics and their followers wage against dominant authorities is one of control over the symbolic. A critical prerequisite for control over the symbolic lies in access to and knowledge of tears in the symbolic, that is, singularities through which evidence of the Real flashes. While Bourdieu shuns psychologism in his own sociological study, my discussion of charisma and its linguistic battles on the field demonstrates that even Bourdieu's formulation cannot be uncoupled from psychoanalytic accounts of

⁵ Pierre Bourdieu and Randal Johnson, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993) 81. (Emphasis original.)

⁶ Walter Benjamin and Hannah Arendt, *Illuminations*, 1st Schocken pbk. ed. (New York: Schocken, 1969) 278, Section IV.

language. The battles for language, moreover, extend both synchronically and diachronically. The implication here is essential for critical historiography: in examining written history, we may discern within a historical text the diachronic continuation of a symbolic struggle. Put another way, a sympathetic historian may actually constitute himself within his historical text *as* a follower of that history. The historian must therefore be evaluated critically as belonging to the very field upon which her subject waged historical battle.

To examine a case in which this diachronic participation emerges, I turn to the writings of historian François Dosse on the history of structuralism. In 1991, Dosse published *History of Structuralism Volume 1: The Rising Sign*, the first volume of a monumental intellectual history which promised a reconstruction of the contours of structuralism.⁷ He writes: “In order to understand the principle positions of the period, we have to reconstruct its many methods and personalities, while at the same time, and without being reductionist about it, seeking some coherent centers.”⁸ Dosse presciently anticipates the anti-relativist backlash by offering some “centers” around which coherent historically narrative might be organized. As I will illustrate, though, his orthodox account relies entirely on the reductionism he eschews as a means to further the charismatic politics behind his writing.

⁷ François Dosse, *History of Structuralism* (Minneapolis, Minn: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) xxiii.

⁸ Dosse, xxiii.

In *The Rising Sign*, and *Volume 2: The Swan Song*, published in French a year later, Dosse skips over the defining work his history ought first to have considered: that is, *whether* there, in fact, are “principle positions” to understand, and *how* he defines that “period.” Actually, Dosse makes several a priori assumptions whose unsubstantiated nature weakens his historical credibility. First, through the entire 1,000-page history, is Dosse's undefended assertion of structuralism as a phenomenon of the 1950s and 1960s. Though French structuralism assuredly occurred during those decades, much earlier scholars publicly identifying with structuralism, notably structural psychologist Edward Titchener, announced the arrival of “structuralism” some twenty-five years earlier. Dosse was either completely unaware of earlier structuralisms (especially in the sciences and social sciences), or has deliberately suppressed the historical mention thereof. In either case, we must consider this omission a critical factor in Dosse’s equation of structuralism with 1960s Paris.

Far more devastating to the intellectual history of structuralism, however, is Dosse’s altogether uncritical positioning of structuralism’s etiology in the lineage of Claude Lévi-Strauss. The predominance of Lévi-Strauss to several strands of French and subsequently American structuralism is indisputable, but Dosse writes Lévi-Strauss as the founding father of a (nonexistent) global structuralist movement. More surprising, Dosse's fatuous language must be seen as evidence of Lévi-Strauss’s charismatic hold over him. By tracing Dosse’s historical narrative regarding Lévi-Strauss, I critique his historical text on the grounds that it participates in the charismatic exaltation of the very

actors it attempts to historicize. Most unfortunately, though, it conceals in its Hollywood-styled narrative the fact that Dosse, himself, is an agent on the structural field acting with impunity on behalf of establishing the unquestionably French reign over western intellectual life in the years surrounding and including the 1960s.

Though merely a case study to demonstrate the operation of charismatic authority within historical writing, the case of Dosse's structuralism, and structuralism more generally, presents a bridge between the early twentieth-century critical approaches to historiography and the grammatological direction I advocate. Structuralism provided historiographers the opportunity to interrogate history's reliance on language. More importantly, the transition from structuralism to post-structuralism—itself transient and far from clear-cut—brought to bear on the historical disciplines a sharp, lasting critique on any written narrative's claim for semiotic stability, a critique most often associated with the late Jacques Derrida. Though Derridean deconstruction has enjoyed enormous success in American academies, his approaches to grammatology and inscription remain even today undermined in historiography. Deconstruction became a critical tool to challenge establishment, but within historiography, so-called deconstructionists continue to neglect the process of writing to which Derrida so inscrutably attended. Dosse, thus, provides the practical link by which I aim to return to post-structural historiography a Derridean interest in history's grammatology.

Ekphrasis: History's Mirage

The Greek roots meaning, “out,” and “to speak” directly imbue the term *ekphrasis* with an emanating voice, but that term’s deeper significance lies in poetry. Within the history of western poetry, from Homer through the Renaissance, and into today, ekphrasis has come to describe the genre of writing which seeks to describe an otherwise visual work of art like painting or sculpture. The term is misleading; written language, too, takes a visual form, and so any attempt to distinguish between imagery and rhetoric will collapse.⁹ Since writing itself is “multimodal,” we must consider the practice of ekphrasis, or any linguistic description of visual phenomena, to be essentially hybrid.

The difficulty of reaching an agreeable definition of ekphrasis indicates a fragile theme from which a historian might launch an archaeology or epistemic history. Nevertheless, following the case of Dosse’s narrow Grand Narrative, I argue that just such a tenuous basis serves as a corrective for the outmoded intellectual biography, since critical approaches to historiography must proceed dialectically to challenge unchecked authority. Instead, a Foucauldian epistemology of ekphrasis will unveil gaps, lexical instability, and valuable ruptures around which a different kind of history or histories might begin.

⁹ WJT Mitchell meditates on the link between pictures and writing that has continued throughout human history in W. J. Thomas Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994) 445.

In moving from the critique of charisma to an examination of ekphrasis, after briefly introducing the operation of the latter, I then proceed to rectify what appear to be incongruent terms. That is, having launched a largely sociological critique of the force of charisma using a Bourdienne matrix, I argue that the value of ekphrastic critique is more clearly realized in terms of a Foucauldian approach to history. Thus, to bridge the two methodologies, I attempt first to propose a combined terminology merging Foucauldian epistemic history with Bourdienne sociology, thereby achieving compatibility between the two practices.

Perhaps the most immediate infelicity lies in the radical divergences between the two in their respective treatments of the subject-object divide. Of particular importance to an intellectual history are the repercussions such divergent positions hold over the placement of knowledges or discourses. I review Bourdieu's concept of the *habitus*, an ingenious invention he instituted to bypass any unnecessary subject-object division. Though Bourdieu easily analyzes the complex sociological predispositions and hegemonies regarding the maintenance of knowledge, he does not often delve into classical questions on the nature of that knowledge. Foucault, in contrast, offers a subtle distinction in kinds of knowledge, which complements his already complex schema of knowledge as it relates to power. I proceed to explain Foucault's distinction between *savoir* and *connaissance*, a distinction that seems to pose a problem for the historian by limiting the access one has to one's own episteme. Arguing that, in fact, these two kinds of knowledge are synchronic and

diachronic conceptions of the same kind, I then argue forcefully that both kinds of knowledge fit within the struggle of the Bourdienne field, so long as that field is granted irregularities and singularities, synchronies and diachronies.

If this amelioration between the two is granted, then issuing from a sociological critique of charisma, one can begin an epistemic history in its place as, for example, an archaeology around ekphrasis. Such an archaeology is not an exhaustive history as Dosse seeks in his two-volume set. Instead, an archaeology of ekphrasis, as observed in structuralist literature, is more of a multi-directional inquiry into the conditions that make the writing of ekphrastic language possible.

To do so, I begin with an examination of the essay, “The End of the Image Theory,” by Otto Pächt, in which the famed Viennese art historian denounces the practice of poetic writing about imagery, a practice that he even refuses to name. Pächt cites the derivative practice as a degradation of an original work, which corrodes that work into a vulgar imitation intended for mass consumption. Though Pächt is identified with the Vienna School of Art History rather than critical theory’s Frankfurt School, such a rebuke seems consistent with the school’s critiques, particularly in the assertion that the digestion of more difficult thought or creative process into kitsch representation disempowers the masses, ensnaring them in a cheap, ersatz shell of ideology.¹⁰

¹⁰ Pächt worked concurrent to the Frankfurt School, though he launched his criticisms most often against iconologists rather than totalitarians. Certainly there is overlap between the two approaches in their rebuke of aspects of scientism, but it would be hasty to equate the two, since ideologically, they approached criticism from

For Pächt, the main difficulty lies in the dangers for the reader. He faults the writer for creating a trap that in its crafty rhetorical construction permits the helpless reader to misread information. As I will show, this formulation relies on an implicit, passive construction of the reader. Unlike Algirdas Julius Greimas, whose approach I also examine, Pächt seems to locate a dishonesty in the middle man, who acts as a plunderer of the original force of the artwork. He apparently sees no power in the reader to read it as a separate text, but rather sees it as a replacement for the original, a replacement that will prove detrimental in the disappearance of the proper force of the original.

The problem in the mechanics of this process centers on a transposition of plastic units into a poorer, less replete version in language. This transposition Pächt sees as always a reduction in kind. The only corrective he posits is a systematic approach which, through a method decided ahead of time, can in a mechanistic way transpose those visual elements into a scientific language. We will see that Greimas attempts this very project, but, I argue, does not accomplish it.

Following the discussion of Pächt is an examination of ekphrasis as developed especially by Leonard Barkan, professor of art history at Princeton. Barkan posits the play of ekphrasis in a theatrical light, focusing on the age-old mimetic competition. Barkan shows convincingly that ekphrasis has long been linked to theater—a performance of language and image together. Both in form as writing

divergent stances, Pächt by valuing artistic intention, Horkheimer and Adorno by battling the “dialectic of the Enlightenment.”

and in performance on the stage, ekphrasis has been engaged in irony and comic performance, rather than a desire to deceive.

With Barkan as a guide, I theorize that ekphrasis never actually engages an original, but always takes a referent of its own construction, which it antepositions as its original. This original, though, never truly existed. To support this claim, with its roots in Barkan, I move then to my final examination of Greimas. Greimas, perhaps similarly to Pächt, seeks a thoroughly scientific project of linguistics. Following his article, “Figurative Semiotics and the Semiotics of the Plastic Arts,” I trace a very complex network of semiotic designations. In this work, Greimas deals with the image directly, but its relevance to the discussion on ekphrasis, I surmise, rests in Greimas’s words themselves, which function as linguistic description of imagery. Greimas begins his early investigation with the question, “Can we recognize a semiotics within plastic representation?” Believing that we can, Greimas goes on to examine painstakingly the paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes of such a semiotic system. Especially germane, Greimas posits the importance of a “reading grid,” that is, a culturally relative matrix of predispositions that allows a reader to recognize given features and bundles of features as representative of something in the natural world. Two asides need be mentioned in this introduction, however. As I explain, the reading grid does evolve within Greimassian semiotics into a much more performative model, in some ways similar to components of speech-act theory. Secondly, in this article, what most interests Greimas is the recognition of representation, though, he repeatedly contends (as in

the work of Kandinsky, for example) that abstraction and iconicity are merely degrees within a way of reading figures.

Believing that there is convincing evidence of a semiotics of plastic representation, Greimas executes a detailed investigation into various means by which signification emerges. He examines topographical analyses into figures of imagery, and though he does not execute his famous “semiotic square” in the confines of the article, he nevertheless presents all initial steps required for its plotting. Since this article provides the terms from which a semiotic square can be drawn—a visual representation of what Greimas has argued represents the most basic binary relationships within semantic paradigms of a given item—I continue in this fashion by completing a square based on the visual descriptors Greimas mentions.

Though Greimas often talks of a transposition from visual features into another discourse, natural language, etc., he does so in a very different, more systematic way than that in which Pächt speaks of transposition. For Greimas, transposition includes the construction of a meta-discourse, in essence, a functor, which can navigate the translations of items from one discourse to another.¹¹ I argue that the plotting of the semiotic square is itself just such a meta-discourse, as it posits the invisible structural relationships between a term and its calculated relations.

What does not interest me here is whether Greimas’s formulation of the relationship between paradigms is either stable or

¹¹ As in mathematics, a functor refers to a functional operation that interpolates items between comparable or related sets.

defensible; instead, what proves to be of utmost concern is what he is *doing*. That is, in the act of plotting a grid or in the act of using a metadiscourse to describe a given set of objects, I argue that the operation thereof is one of *inscription*. Such an inscription (which necessarily exceeds its own borders) is itself confluent with the writings of Derrida on an expanded concept of writing, a kind of writing that is not subservient or supplementary to the spoken rhetoric, but is itself constitutive and discursive. This inscription, which I ultimately argue is a historical operation, is thus the primary object of the historiographer. Under historiography, then, we must always include the evaluation of the means by which a historical writing inscribes its object, an operation, I insist, that is always deeply rooted in its own writing.

CHAPTER 2
HISTORIOGRAPHY IS FUNDAMENTALLY VISUAL

Introduction: The Seeds of a Discourse

The term “critical historiography” appears only twice in recent scholarly literature; and yet, the potential benefit of a historiographic practice cognizant of critical theory demands a more thorough exploration. This chapter introduces two published accounts of the term, one by architectural historian Mark Jarzombek from his 2000 book, *The Psychologizing of Modernity*, the other by European historian, Stefan Berger, from a 1996 article in the *European Review of History*.

This chapter will establish a provisional definition of the term “critical historiography.” I first discuss several twentieth-century texts on historiography to lay a foundation upon which to build my own definition. Though the term “historiography” is used in multiple historical contexts, close inspection reveals divergent definitions and imprecise connotations; such varied treatment is unnecessary, though, since in its etymology, historiography provides specific direction regarding its scope. After laying out some initial positions on critical historiography as presented within twentieth-century literature, I proceed to critique those texts, which neglect a fundamental aspect of historiography, that is, its inscription within writing. From this critique, I develop my working definition as a critical project that interrogates the writing or “written-ness” of

history, a grammatological aspect that I contend has been absent from recent historical criticism.

With too few examples to infer an established usage of the phrase, I begin by defining each half of the term. For this project, I am satisfied with a historically specific definition of “critical” that originates with Horkheimer and the Frankfurt School. In this context, a project is “critical” when it seeks to destabilize the advance of dominant, and often dominating, modes of thought. Criticality in this sense is not merely the substitution of one end of the political spectrum for the other, but an equally deliberative method that provides a check to any hegemonic system of thought.¹²

A “critical historiography,” then, can be seen as a historiography that seeks to destabilize the dominant ideology of the object of its critical gaze. But what does it mean to do historiography? Finding a similarly precise, historically situated definition of “historiography” is more challenging, in part because different historical disciplines maintain idiosyncratic formulations of historiography’s scope. In history of art departments, for example, historiography, though customarily taught only as a component within a more general methods class, is universally understood to delineate the study of the manner in which art history is *written*.¹³ This usage seems consistent

¹² Adorno’s well-known negative dialectic answered his own call to dispel totalitarian currents in criticism. By writing around rather than through any single issue, Adorno offered poignant critiques without ever providing a graspable weapon against them.

¹³ The term is also used to designate the study of art historians themselves, in addition to their works, a role often served by intellectual history within other historical disciplines.

with the Greek origins of the word, but is by no means standard across historical disciplines. While, likely, a given university's infrastructure correlates to the way it partitions historical practices, substantial dialog *between* historical disciplines remains underdeveloped. The pragmatics of academic funding and disciplinary competition certainly contributes to cross-departmental reticence. My interest in critical historiography and associated analyses does not entail so much an "interdisciplinary" approach, but rather an "intra-disciplinary" one—an approach that recognizes several powerful, parallel historical approaches and tries to facilitate more fully this discussion for the collective audience of historical disciplines.

If taken as an intra-disciplinary problematic rather than an interdisciplinary one, the historical disciplines have two immediate needs: first, a terminological remapping of discursive borders, and second, a concerted effort to build a common critical language. I have addressed the first question for the purposes of my study by designating an umbrella term under which the different configuration of practices (separated, somewhat arbitrarily by the given host institution, but not necessarily by correlation) be reunited by epistemic interest. I use the term "historical disciplines" to accomplish just that.

On the second matter of generating a common idiom within which the historical disciplines can support critical practice, my dissertation more broadly serves to foster such dialog. As outlined previously, various historiographers have enforced a more ambassadorial—less isolationist and jargon-riddled—critical program. This directive shapes the remainder of the chapter—indeed, the

structure of the overall dissertation. I henceforth aim to establish working historiographic definitions relevant to a variety of practitioners of the historical fields, no matter the disciplinary perspective or academic department.

Following the discussion of critical historiography, then, I seek to articulate the more widespread formulations of historiography. I do so by means of a nontraditional review of literature, nontraditional in that my review makes no claims to comprehensiveness. I organize this data in pairs by staging hypothetical conversations between scholars. Beginning with the early twentieth-century, I recount the work of American historian, Carl Becker, focusing on his 1931 article, “What is Historiography?” In this article, Becker describes the then orthodox practice of historiography as the exhaustive listing—and to a limited extent evaluating—of published historical texts on a given topic. To illuminate the changes in historiographic practice over the past 60-70 years, I compare Becker's work to a more current criticism of historiography by contemporary historian Allan Megill. Megill's article, like Becker's, criticizes the dominant methods of historiography, methods that he sees as a victim of the professionalization of history. Since Becker promoted an early historical relativism—a relativism that paved the way for later historians to critique the Grand Narrative tradition—comparison with Megill seems apt in presenting both past and contemporary critiques of dominant modes of historical practice.

Two staged dialogs complete this section, both discussants practicing within the Anglo-American tradition. The first involves a conscious dialogue in which British art historian, Stephen Bann, takes

up critical aspects of the seminal work by American historian of consciousness, Hayden White. White's work on literary tropes in history provides a pivotal study on historical criticism, but as this dialog will demonstrate, he falls short of discussing the written aspect of historical narratives.

Finally, I compare the calls from two medievalists, Duke Professor, Elizabeth Clark, and Tufts Professor Emerita, Madeline Caviness. While each scholar makes the case for a historiography more attuned to the linguistic turn (and, consequently, the means by which medieval studies may further such a historical sensitivity), they do so from fundamentally different discursive positions. Clark, as a scholar of early Christian religious texts, primarily finds interest in narrative, while Caviness, as an art historian, centers on visuality. This foundational difference between the two, I show, exemplifies the widespread disparity in treating the written interests of historiography, interests that historians of visual culture hold at the fore of their methodologies.

In the case of her book, *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn*, Clark shows remarkable sensitivity to both linguistic and critical approaches within European and American traditions of history. Though astutely aware of deconstruction and Derridean criticism, what I describe as the grammatological study of history, nevertheless, eludes her chronicle: Clark's account of the linguistic turn reiterates writing's supplemental status within Western thought. On the other hand, Caviness describes a means of incorporating theoretical and critical perspectives in terms that are wholly

congruous with a study of history *as writing*. I, therefore, conclude this chapter with Caviness's invocation of triangulation as a means of consciously inscribing the historical object within adjacent discourses. In a later chapter, I will return to Caviness's method, noting the propitious juxtaposition of her triangulation to Greimas's rectangle.

Though scholars like Clark make laudable appeals for an "epistemic" historiography, only a few historians (Dominick La Capra and Hayden White, for example) have developed the distinction between historical criticism and what we might think of as a self-aware historiography. I argue that this distinction is vital to an etymologically faithful understanding of historiography, since more sweeping epistemological inquiries need only deal with the restricted scope implicit within "historio-" and "-graphy," or history *writing*. From this, a question ensues: why has historiography so frequently been synonymized with epistemology in the philosophy of history? Surely, historiography as the study of written history is not the most appropriate mode in which to conduct philosophical epistemology, except insofar as the writing itself engenders a limited kind of epistemological questioning. The term, "critical historiography," as I develop it here, thus restores to written history the urgency that Derrida carries throughout his *grammatology*. Any epistemological question for the historiographer, I charge, is one of writing *per se*, not one of language, so to speak, and therefore, only suitably referred to as a *grammatological* question.

The first area I will draw up surrounds the topic of the *avant-garde*, a popular term describing modern art, but initially derived from

the militaristic “front line.” Thus, the avant-garde seems an appropriate commonality between two scholars, Mark Jarzombek and Stefan Berger; both Jarzombek and Berger posit Modernity as a chief concern of recent historiography. Jarzombek deems Modernity an obstacle which has cast all contemporary historical writing into suspicion, since it promotes an aesthetics of anti-intellectualism and opposition. Berger, on the other hand, sees the “Rise and Fall of Critical Historiography” related to the “old ‘critical’ paradigm from the late 1970s onwards [which] had much to do with political disillusion and methodological weaknesses.”¹⁴ He locates “‘critical’ historiography” as a late twentieth-century defensive response by the academic left to conservative trends in historiography. This section will outline their arguments.

In an ambitious “Prolegomenon to Critical Historiography,” Jarzombek attempts an explanation of the compound term, critical historiography.¹⁵ The “Prolegomenon” occupies a slim entry in a book otherwise concerned with the degradation of scholarly reception of art and architecture in interwar Germany. More pointedly, *The Psychologizing of Modernity* problematizes “the intermixed disciplinary and quasi-disciplinary substructures” that influenced the course of scholarly inquiry into modern art and architecture.¹⁶ The miscegenation between the scholar and the philosopher produced the

¹⁴ Stefan Berger, “The rise and fall of ‘critical’ historiography?” *European Review of History* 3.2 (1996): 213.

¹⁵ Mark Jarzombek, *The Psychologizing of Modernity: Art, Architecture, and History* (Cambridge, U.K.; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 327.

¹⁶ Jarzombek, 1.

twentieth century art/architectural historian, who, in Jarzombek's words, could not dispense with "an increasingly problematical philosophical foundation for the avant-gardist, anti-intellectualist aesthetics of intellectualism."¹⁷ The real challenge for Jarzombek proves to be historicizing an era with the very historical methods so visibly touched by modernity.

Jarzombek's point proves salient if one subscribes to his convincing charge that the artificial split between art history and art production—a split he links to the birth of the College Art Association and the professionalization of the discipline, ostensibly but not explicitly, in the United States—is a false, unnecessary, even detrimental bifurcation that the assiduous historian of modernity ultimately need overcome. To do so, he advocates adopting a critical outlook to historical writing. Jarzombek substantiates my assessment regarding the colloquial use of the term, "historiography," as popularly circulated by both art and architectural historians:

'Historiography' is thus more than just what historians have to say about each other's work; it is the dialectical equivalent in history of the modernist notion of self-consciousness. It is the site where history constructs itself to its own advantage.¹⁸

In the remainder of this passage, Jarzombek launches a headstrong attack on scholars who lack "a critique of their disciplinary

¹⁷ Jarzombek, 5.

¹⁸ Jarzombek, 8.

aesthetic of objectivity.”¹⁹ Tacitly, though, he confirms the definition widely held by art and architectural historians that historiography *at least* constitutes “what historians have to say about each other’s work.” The corrective that Jarzombek posits is a “project that is neither the handmaiden of a discipline,” nor a seemingly modern drive towards objectivity.²⁰ Instead, he suggests beginning with “a critique of a historian’s practice,” followed by “larger disciplinary ideological critiques.”²¹ He continues:

Beyond that, it could develop into a more far-reaching, galloping interdisciplinary diegesis dealing with the fundamentals of epistemological construction [...] In all cases, (and, I should add, it is possible to envision an art or architectural practice as historiography!) functions on the principle that history and the production of art and architecture are only as strong as the historiography that simultaneously critiques them.²²

But throughout the work, Jarzombek fails to distinguish this critical project from a project many other scholars have more convincingly called “historical criticism,”²³ from the provocative term he uses instead, “critical historiography.” Indeed, Jarzombek neglects to make any worthwhile clarification about what makes his criticism

¹⁹ Jarzombek, 9.

²⁰ Jarzombek, 11. Jarzombek’s language here is rather unclear, but I interpret his charge that Modernism seeks a loss of “Self” to refer to the Modern quest for a universalized objectivity.

²¹ Jarzombek, 11.

²² Jarzombek, 11.

²³ For instance, Dominick LaCapra, Hayden White, Paul Ricoeur, Roland Barthes, Elizabeth Clark, and others.

relevant to historiography *as such*, rather than a kind of historical connoisseurship.

Juxtaposed with the article by Stefan Berger entitled, *The Rise and Fall of 'Critical' Historiography?*, Jarzombek's undefined use of the term shows not a personal oversight, for though Berger, too, deploys the term, he also does so in a nonspecific manner. Rather, alongside Berger's article, it becomes evident that the vagueness of the term is more appropriately attributed to an uneven treatment by the historical disciplines as a whole. In his article, Berger declares "critical" to mean "oppositional and emancipatory," and he further identifies this historiography in Britain, France, and Germany to the period since 1945.²⁴ Given that Berger limits the scope of critical historiography to that time following World War II, a time especially pivotal to the intellectual production and critical inventions of the Frankfurt School, it seems reasonable to assume Berger refers to that German and transplanted American tradition rooted in social theory. His article, however, presents several implicated origins of the 'critical' with virtually no reference to Frankfurt social theory. Instead, Berger suggests three areas around which varieties of critical historiography revolved: British Marxist analysis, the French Annalists, and a post-war German revival of "modernization theory," largely uninterested in Marxist concerns.²⁵

It is unclear why Berger would neglect the Frankfurt group's relevance to criticism, especially given that Berger opens his article

²⁴ Berger, 213.

²⁵ Berger, 218.

with a quote from Walter Benjamin, a close friend of Theodor Adorno. We might attribute this suspicious lacuna to an incompatibility between the reductivist model that Berger renders for “the critical” and the more complex approaches offered by the Frankfurt school. Though, indeed, the Frankfurt thinkers appropriated from Marxism a certain interest in emancipation, they nevertheless rejected Marx’s faith in the revolutionary direction of materialist thought. More importantly, their methods were most often formed as *dialectical*, not oppositional, critiques.

Berger maintains the oppositional definition of “the critical” throughout his article, most observable in a curiously persistent idiosyncrasy. At each mention of ‘critical’ historiography, Berger uses (as I have just done here) single quotation marks, imbuing the term with an ironic status. In essence, this mark itself underscores his thesis, which asserts that the earlier, oppositional critical historiography following World War II has been undermined during the neo-conservatism of the 1980s and 1990s. Berger writes, “‘Critical’ historiography cannot be about legitimating what is already powerful; on the contrary, it has to be oppositional history.”²⁶ Presumably, the relegation of the critical to apostrophes denotes any of the following: that the term is used outside of common usage, that it ironically does not signify a *true* criticality but is falsely misleading, or even that ‘critical’ references speech or dialog. While all these may be true, the more appropriate emphasis in Berger’s article ought to be placed on

²⁶ Berger, 213.

critical ‘historiography.’ That is, while in a very narrow sense, Berger does discuss a kind of critical history, even while mentioning the ‘linguistic turn’ and other contemporary thinkers, Berger himself never examines the ‘writing of history.’ While he ultimately calls for a reinstatement of critical historiography updated with postmodern terminology to return to the emancipation movement with a greater technological acumen, he does not himself seem willing to apply that criticality on his own gloss of names of European historians. Never, in his refashioning of a 1960s political activist tone, does Berger rethink either the role of criticism—decidedly dialectical and not a replacement of liberal values for conservative ones—or the absolutely constitutive role of writing to history.

Jarzombek comes closer to a genuinely critical attitude. He posits the development of critical historiography in successive steps; moreover, he holds the presumably elementary task of the critical historiographer to be a “critique of the historian’s practice.” We will have to assume that Jarzombek advocates a categorical appraisal, rather than critiques of individual practitioners, given the impersonal singular of his statement. I take issue with this charge, though, since it bears little distinction from the work of a historical critic. In fact, since Jarzombek nowhere makes explicit the connection between writing and historical practice, this occupation is more appropriately given to the critic—not the critical historiographer. Any such usage renders the “historiographer” a deceptively excessive term.

Jarzombek insists that to evaluate such practices, the critical historiographer may indeed resort to ideological critique; Jarzombek,

however, fails to defend ideology's constitutive basis of historiography. Critical analysis of ideology offers potentially rich recourse to the historiographer; my own chapter three uses a similar analysis of charisma, not from a strictly Marxist or Althusserian tradition, but rather from the sociological critique of agents controlling access to information. Ideology and the mechanics thereof can explicate a number of influences on the writing of history, but cannot be allowed totalitarian control over critical historiography. Though some critical practices do entail rigorous attention to ideology, Jarzombek's neglect in developing his terms forces us to admit to historiography too wide a range of critical approaches, many of which do not directly engage with ideological critique. Recall an earlier excerpt from Jarzombek's "Prolegomenon," in which he imagined a critical historiography that might become a "galloping interdisciplinary diegesis."²⁷

In addition to never fleshing out the terminology of that interdisciplinary diegesis, I charge that Jarzombek glosses over a more troubling aspect of historiography—its "written-ness." This is especially suspect given Jarzombek's expected predisposition to art and architectural criticism—a criticism that among other modalities, thoroughly regards the visual. The *diegesis* Jarzombek speaks of in the aforementioned quotation, with its voice echoed in the retelling—not the writing—of history, utterly obfuscates the grammatology of written history by suppressing its writing to the voice of the narrator. Surely, *diegesis* finds closer affinity in the *logos*, and therefore, any

²⁷ Jarzombek, 11.

diegetic analysis must be released from the graphically-minded historiographer.

Jarzombek's most illuminating charge from that passage, though, is sublimated within parentheses—a sublimation that indubitably demonstrates the unconscious role of writing in critical historiography, and even supports the very statement he relegates to a tangential status. He writes: “(and, I should add, it is possible to envision an art or architectural practice *as* historiography!)”²⁸ It is fitting that Jarzombek erects parenthetical walls around this statement. Architecture is a process of division and restriction,²⁹ and thus delineates if not *as* writing itself, then at least *as* an early form of writing (as Derrida terms, *arche*-writing). Jarzombek recognizes this when he contains his statement, somehow to soften or restrict a potentially instigative poke at the division between art historians and artist-architects themselves. But, the process by which those disciplines split is the very process that allows history to be written at all; a critical historiography capable of managing this *contradiction* must itself “envision” the problem as one of *inscription*.

For Jarzombek to gloss over this essentially visual aspect is especially troubling since, as an art and architectural historian, he is particularly equipped to consider poetic and formal meaning in written history. (Troubling, too, since his parenthesis temporarily breaches the *diegetic* discourse, but sadly sequesters that grammatical

²⁸ Jarzombek, 11.

²⁹ Though countless architectural theorists treat this process of division with far greater depth than I do here, one that deals with the idea memorably is Rem Koolhaas, especially on pondering the Berlin Wall.

question within the very object he ought to regard!) In fact, Jarzombek's own writing plays in the mimetic costume of the modernist (the "Prolegomenon" itself a promise quite inflated—like a Botero—implying simultaneously a thesis of phenomenal size but vulnerable to deflation by anyone willing to prick the surface.) Indeed, his subsection headed, "Critical Historiography," pronounces with so vehement a tone that one wonders (given the glut of Modern manifestos) whether Jarzombek ironically assumes the voice of a modern decree to call critical attention to the performance thereof. Whether a conscious deployment of style or a magnificent emergence of a split unconscious, the performance itself is the prolegomenon's most laudable virtue.

Indeed, Jarzombek's theatricality is what enables its own criticality. By calling the artifice of its written style into suspicion, he encourages the reader to search for the conditions that make its very formulation possible. This theatricality, therefore, provides Jarzombek's most effective—though unintentional—thesis: that critical historiography, to establish its own self-criticism, must invoke its own written vulnerabilities, whether stylistically or otherwise.

Though Jarzombek and Berger both aim to launch a critical project, they nevertheless do not interrogate the fundamental meaning of such a critical historiography. We are left, then, to look to more rigorous examinations of historical criticism, and ultimately to impute upon the more successful currents of historiography a

grammatological direction.³⁰ An early pioneer of historiographic questioning in the United States, Carl Becker, a professor of European history at Cornell University, asked the question, “What is Historiography?” in a 1938 review of the book, *A History of Historical Writing*, by Harry Elmer Barnes, a historian often credited (alongside Becker) with pioneering the modern academic field of history in the United States. Becker's question has a twofold purpose: as a review, his question seeks to evaluate Barnes's claim for a comprehensive history of historical writing, but more pressingly, Becker lays down one of the first published accounts in the United States to grapple with a reevaluation of the meaning of historiography itself. To this latter end, Becker begins with three kinds of historical fascinations which, incidentally, correspond to his own early-, mid-, and late-career interests. Becker postulates first his historical interest in the

³⁰ The history of art has interrogated these policies of disciplinary isolationism since the 1980's—here, Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson are notable critics of the de facto policy. In history departments, Paul Ricoeur, Dominick LaCapra, Hayden White, E.H. Carr, Elizabeth Clark and Quentin Skinner have been vocal proponents for attention to literary criticism as valuable tools for historical narratives. A commonality to most academic traditions of the historical disciplines remains a schooling in historical “methods.” History departments often school aspiring historians in a variety of empirical methods or protocols. In most history of art departments, methods courses often begin with so-called formalist approaches. Formal analysis involves extensive discussions on the visible forms of a given artwork, usually accompanied either by an interpretation of the meanings of those forms or a historical attempt to reconstruct the artist's intention by interpreting his or her styles of execution. Formalist instruction increasingly neglects issues of connoisseurship and authentication, though traditionally these endeavors were pursued simultaneously. In more recent years, the history of art has welcomed a variety of approaches born of other disciplines, from social and Marx-inspired analyses in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to contemporary approaches such as semiotics, feminist analyses, cultural studies, and post-colonial studies, among many others. The once-observed tendency toward empirical or scientific study has all but disappeared, now that connoisseurship and conservation has been assumed by the abundantly better qualified graduates with degrees in the science of conservation.

“mechanics of research,” followed by the ostensibly more abstract pursuit of “history itself,” which he describes as the “suggestive meanings” the historian might ascribe to given periods. But by the age of sixty-five, Becker writes, his earlier historical interests give way to what he calls the “most intriguing aspect of history,” that is, “the study of the history of historical study.”³¹ Becker identifies this last pursuit as that of “historiography.”

Carl Becker: An Early Champion of Modern Historiography

In this article, Becker indicates the possibility of a historiography that draws from the dynamic, even literary interpretative function of history. Becker, for instance, admits *The Iliad* into the category of historical literature, a work that offers “history, story, and scripture all in one.”³² Becker elaborates that the invention of written records marks the shift in history when humans could distinguish that the historical memory of an event differs from its written account.³³ Only at this moment, Becker writes, “could they properly distinguish between story and history [...] then only could histories be thought of as a “branch of literature.”³⁴ This remarkable assertion proves to be the most valuable kernel in Becker’s essay, but the conclusions he draws from it remain deeply unsatisfying. For Becker, histories as a “branch of literature,” offer us narratives that

³¹ Carl Becker, “What is Historiography?” *The American Historical Review* 44.1 (1938): 20.

³² Becker, 27.

³³ Becker, 27.

³⁴ Becker, 28.

convey the evolving conception of time and space. Ancient histories retain the gods, whose interventions in the world of men explain historical causality. As these narratives evolve, the gods as historical agents find replacement with new catalysts, whether called “the Law of Nature, the Transcendent Idea, the dynamic principle of Dialectic, or whatever it may be.”³⁵ In each of these models for historical causality, the historiographer can glean something about that era’s understanding of its own relation to time and space.

Becker’s vision of historiography as a sort of historical criticism must be contrasted with the more orthodox historiographic practice in place within most American academic centers of the time. Though Becker’s critical perspective predated the Frankfurt School, it certainly was informed by the New Criticism movement underway in the United States. The practice of such analysis within a historical context, though, was quite novel, and Becker notes as much in his review of Barnes’s more traditional historiography. Barnes’s work, Becker shows, conforms to the drolly conventional collection of secondary sources grouped thematically. Becker credits Barnes with producing “more than an annotated catalogue of historical works,”³⁶ but faults him for not thinking through the intellectual potential of historiography. For Becker, the consideration of the elements of time and space on historicism ought to form the backbone of a conscientious historiography. He writes, “The development of intelligence, in the individual and the race, is in some sense a matter

³⁵ Becker, 28.

³⁶ Becker, 21.

of pushing back the limits of the time and space world and filling it with things that really exist and events that actually happened.”³⁷ This is to be contrasted with the grand but nevertheless predictable mission Barnes sets forth in his book:

[To] characterize the intellectual background of each major period of human advance in western civilization, show how the historical literature of each period has been related to its parent culture, point out the dominant traits of the historical writing in each era, indicate the advance, if any, in historical science, and then make clear the individual contributions of the major historical writers of the age.³⁸

But for Becker, that relationship between historical literature and its “parent culture” reflects the history of that culture’s consciousness, a history which he equates with the consciousness of frames of reference for space and time.³⁹ The history of consciousness as an intellectual history of time-space consciousness, “far more than sheer brain power,” shapes the content of historical literature, and more urgently, informs any culture’s intellectual history. To relocate historiography to Becker’s field of intellectual history, he contends, would thus allow historiography to “have as its main theme the gradual expansion of this time and space world...”⁴⁰ Becker provocatively declares that such a historiography would chart history

³⁷ Becker, 25.

³⁸ Becker, 21.

³⁹ Becker, 26.

⁴⁰ Becker, 26.

as history “subjectively understood’ instead of Barnes’s more limited purview of the development of historical truth from an objective viewpoint.⁴¹

Becker’s reception by more doctrinal historians was markedly strained, and he was very often criticized for introducing a relativism into history that, for many of his contemporaries, threatened the scientific expectation within the field.⁴² This may seem deceptive, since at first glance, Becker’s historical relativism reveals an interest in the terminology of the theory of relativity, at least as a metaphor through which historiography could chart a history of space-time consciousness. But this interest in scientific language resisted the kind of scientificity that contemporaneous historians had proposed, namely in its interdisciplinarity rather than in its dedication to a native historical science. We may even theorize the widespread criticisms toward Becker as an unarticulated repudiation of his interdisciplinary assaults on the dominant professional borders in American history departments. Historian Allan Megill offers useful critical attention to the professionalization of (especially United States and Canadian) history and historiography, criticisms very much germane to Becker’s review. Megill traces four distinct phases of professionalization, with particular emphasis on the previously

⁴¹ Becker, 26.

⁴² Becker’s interests here raise several questions about terminology, not the least of which remains the discrepancy between his deployment of intellectual history as the history of consciousness versus our contemporary usage of the term, which refers to the development of intellectuals and the content of their academic contribution. For an account of his early critics, see John C. Cairns, “Carl Becker: An American Liberal,” *The Journal of Politics* 16.4 (1954): 623-44.

prevailing Grand Narrative tradition, a tradition still very much in force during Becker's tenure.

Far more sufficiently, and sixty years earlier, Becker offered a compelling call for revision to the provenance of historiography—a provenance that seems presciently suited to critical application. The dense paragraph below outlines several of Becker's editorials that will find subsequent elaboration: the designation of historiography as a phase of intellectual history, the subsequent subjectivism of the conceptualizing of time-space expansion, the separation from the motive of objective, historical truth, and finally the regarding of history as a literary modality. Becker, as we also observed in Megill, describes temporally the provenance of historiography:

Regarded strictly as a phase of intellectual history and not as a balance sheet of verifiable historical knowledge, historiography would have as its main theme the gradual expansion of this time and space world (particularly the time world perhaps, although the two are inseparably connected), the items, whether true or false, which acquired knowledge and accepted beliefs enabled men (and not historians only) to find within it, and the influence of this pattern of true or imagined events upon the development of human thought and conduct. So regarded, historiography would become a history of history rather than a history of historians, a history of history subjectively understood (the 'fable agreed upon', the 'pack of tricks played on the dead') rather than a history of the gradual emergence of historical truth objectively considered. The historiographer would of course be interested in histories—they would be a main source of information; but he would not confine his researches to them—would not, indeed, be interested in histories as such but only as one of the literary forms in which current ideas about the past find expression.⁴³

⁴³ Becker, 26.

Let us consider Becker's designation that historiography should be "a phase of intellectual history." While indeed, the desire to list and evaluate historical work holds relevance to the intellectual historian, Becker advocates its use only in the service of the larger intellectual project of a culture's understanding of and historical placement within time-space. Such an investigation may draw from intellectual biography, it may focus more on that thinker's ideas, or an admixture of the two. But Becker, exhibiting a touch of the relativism for which he was famous, importantly calls for "a capacity for imaginative understanding" from the historiographer. That is, Becker sees such intellectual biography or intellectual histories only at the service of the larger question of a given culture's conditions for understanding history—i.e., its image of time-space.

In Becker's text, use of the word, "phase," remains idiosyncratic; nevertheless, we may examine some possible interpretations here. "Phase" in its nominal form occupies two primary entries.⁴⁴ The first is a historical term for the Jewish holiday, Passover, which holds some interest in its reiteration of Megill's "first phase" of (pre-professional) historiography, in which story and truth were conjoined in the authoritative hermeneutic history as inscribed in the Bible.

In its second entry, "phase" presents four subordinate entries. The word's primary meaning in this entry refers to the "aspect presented," either lunar or planetary, to an observer's eye. The key here, much like the interest in my earlier discussion, is the

⁴⁴ All references here are to *The Oxford English Dictionary*.

embeddedness of appearance, even considerable as causing to appear (these four possible meanings are referred to as “senses”). In this sense, phase resolutely affirms Becker’s quest for reconstructing a given society’s perspective (especially that perspective of time and space). It also simultaneously does not disprove Megill’s sense of fragmentation, though admittedly, fragmentation holds more relevance to a synchronic process whereas phase suggests more diachronic processes.

While the astronomical sense of the word phase appears in the English language by the late seventeenth century, its appearance in the middle French with identical spelling evidences an earlier meaning. This sense, referring to a clear state within a varying life or timeline, seems to suggest a pre-Enlightenment (or, perhaps, pre-Hegelian) model of history. Such a comparison to a life cycle, for example, is doubtless clear to art historians. Winckelmann, the “father” of the modern discipline of art history, saw all societies as describable in historical phases, especially as in Greek art and society, to which he attributed a primitive phase, the simple-phase of Phidias, a “graceful and charming” phase, and finally a late phase of decline and impostor works.

Now, to regard historiography as just such a mortal phase of history seems fraught, depending entirely on which of the several senses of the word we are to equate with Becker’s original sentiment. The third and fourth most recent senses of the word offer a more generous place for historiography—the third referring to a repeatable cycle, which may or may not be in synchronicity with another, the

fourth referring to the chemical descriptor, which indicates a particular state or form of matter (like ice, water, or vapor). The second sense, however, very often used casually as something to outgrow, leaves a most uncertain prognosis for the discipline. As either a physical or chemical phase, historiography in relation to history seems congruent with Becker's relative historical perspective and Megill's sense of parallel, fragmented disciplinary practices. But, can we imagine the invocation of that more temporary sense? Indeed, if we can impute a critical tone onto each, then we can imagine an apocryphal end to historiography.

Becker seems content with the subsumption of history into literary studies, furthering his progressive suggestion that historiography acknowledge its position as a "branch of literature." In that written history offers the historiographer a corpus for contemplation as rich as that for the literary scholar, taken discursively, historical literature forms a conjoined twin to fiction, one equally deserving of critical attention. Viewed in this way, historiography constitutes not merely a "phase" of historical disciplines, but one of the historical disciplines itself in which historical criticism—any number of critical methods focused immanently on the *writing* of history—usurps the mundane task of literature review.

Contemporary Historians and Historical Criticism

Megill presents a now-familiar repudiation of the—until very recently—dominant historical style of the "Grand Narrative," which he

defines (*pace* Lyotard) as “the story that the world would tell if the world could tell its story.”⁴⁵ Megill’s pithy essay identifies the vestiges of a Grand Narrative style still functioning in contemporary trends to “synthesize” otherwise fragmentary episodes into some historical account that aims at presenting “the full story.” Megill targets professional historians, deliberately using a term freighted with connotations of membership and exclusivity, the consciousness with which he uses it emphasizing the unconscious, often-unnoticed repercussions of the professional club.⁴⁶

Megill sketches a development of western historical writing, which leads to this professionalized, but nevertheless counterproductive historian’s bias. European historical narrative in its first phase (a phase before professional historiography) was exclusively the provenance of a single hermeneutic narrative, that is, the Judeo-Christian Scripture.⁴⁷ Since the narrative therein held unquestioned authority, Megill contends that the need for a professional historian to find the narrative was wholly absent. With the gradual weakening in “faith” of this one text to satisfy all historical needs, Megill writes, “professional historians began to walk the earth.”⁴⁸ Megill sarcastically remarks that in the early phase, historiographers assented to the existence of a Grand Narrative, but deferred the telling of it until the future, “after further research has

⁴⁵ Allan Megill, "Fragmentation and the Future of Historiography," *The American Historical Review* 96.3 (1991): 696.

⁴⁶ Megill, 695.

⁴⁷ Megill, 696.

⁴⁸ Megill, 696.

been done.”⁴⁹ To the canon of such minded historians, Megill admits Ranke, Lord Acton and J.B. Berry.⁵⁰ Included also in this early phase is “that vast majority of historians who never reflected on universal history, but nonetheless wrote out of a fundamental faith in the validity of Western culture as they understood it.”⁵¹

Megill posits the third phase to have followed World War I. This “later phase of professional historiography” witnesses a waning devotion to the Grand Narrative, but also a simultaneous emergence of “a purely ideal narrative, a narrative that could never actually be told.”⁵² Megill notes that ideas like “autonomy” and “synthesis” retained their favorable appeal amongst professional historians, but any particular formulation could only garner contingent, factional support.⁵³

In the fourth phase, which he flirtatiously deems a “post-professional” phase, Megill sees a complete dismissal of the Grand Narrative, but a dismissal offered (as one might suspect, from the inclusion of the “post”) with irony. On the habits of such fourth-phase historians, Megill spends some time imagining the disaffected ignoring of terms as “synthesis” and “autonomy,” the lack of confidence in ever telling “the full story,” and even a shape-shifting ability (even propensity) to move between disciplinary occupations—from historian

⁴⁹ Megill, 696.

⁵⁰ Megill, 696.

⁵¹ Megill, 696-697.

⁵² Megill, 697.

⁵³ Megill, 697.

to economist, to philosopher, to literary critic, even to historiographer and back again.⁵⁴

To recapitulate, Megill's article seeks to problematize the professional tradition of synthetic, whole-story history and historiography. Importantly, Megill never really defines this latter term, so we can only assume it refers to writing about historical writing. Megill largely prognosticates on the condition of unnecessary synthesis, arguing that this is a symptom of a kind of institutional professionalism, which remains reluctant to forfeit its claim to a single professional "competence." Though Megill himself offers no particular evidence of such collegiate nepotism of ideas, it nevertheless seems highly plausible that such an atmosphere would persist in Anglo-American universities, and likely, too, within continental traditions.

Citing *That Noble Dream*, Megill recounts Peter Novick's evidence that this professional cronyism was largely responsible for the institutional "repudiation" of Carl Becker (along with and in the company of Charles Beard).⁵⁵ Primarily at issue with Becker and Beard's methodology was relativism's inherent threat to what Novick calls "an autonomous profession."⁵⁶ Novick argues that the development of history into that autonomous profession relied part and parcel on the exclusion of relativism, so that history—with relativism sufficiently expunged—appeared to be a self-sufficient discipline. Both Becker and Megill offer instantiation of academic

⁵⁴ Megill, 697.

⁵⁵ Megill, 696.

⁵⁶ Megill, 696.

reluctance to question historiography's provenance and constitution. Though conservative members within the ranks of history departments disassociated from any hint of interdisciplinarity, proof abounds that historiographic questions have been and continue to be progressively refashioned both from within and without.

Becker and Megill maintain interest in the phasic division of historiography, and both of these points share a connection to the professional bias to which Megill importantly pays critical attention. For two historians as prolific as Becker and Megill both to use the term historiography without qualification (and Megill doing so with the gift of hindsight and "post-professional" irony), we can and must assume the broadest implications of the term. In both cases, we may discover that extending polysemic value to the term actually corroborates both of their projects.

Becker, certainly, eagerly desired a more reputable position in the early twentieth-century academy for intellectual history. Still, within his article, there is evidence that suggests even this model ought to be supplanted. Becker writes: "It would be worthwhile [...] to forget entirely about the contributions of historians to present knowledge and to concentrate wholly upon their role in the cultural pattern of their own time."⁵⁷ Modern historiography—and history, for that matter—by this account will inevitably lead towards an anthropological model.

⁵⁷ Becker, 25.

I cannot help but compare Becker's resourcefulness to the anthropological sentiment in bricolage. Lévi-Strauss developed this idea to describe what has anachronistically been deemed the pathway to postmodern thought: a resourceful approach to using whatever means are needed, without any concern for methodological consistency.⁵⁸ Certainly, Megill echoes this sentiment. He writes on a "disciplinary blindness" which impedes the modern academy:

This is the blindness of historians who argue only with historians, philosophers only with philosophers, economists only with other economists, and so on. When one's universe of argument is restricted in this way—and the disciplinary structure of the modernist university certainly encourages such restriction—it is easy to imagine that one knows what competence is.⁵⁹

While wholly sympathetic to Becker and Megill, I also have some reservations about the means by which they launch their disciplinary critiques. Both rely on launching a counter-vision of a "bricolage" history, and can only posit such an alternative by first collapsing the state of history. Both rely on a popular appeal to common knowledge in which a contemporary, cynical audience is invoked to assume disciplinary-wide incompetence regarding the epidemic use of Grand Narrative. While many historians have knowledge of or have even practiced less noble, more didactic forms of history, this by no means

⁵⁸ Lévi-Strauss used this term particularly in *The Savage Mind* to describe the means by which mental states assembled and created myth.

⁵⁹ Megill, 695.

sufficiently characterizes the historical disciplines as a whole. More likely is that, while the more nepotistic faculty-hiring practices tend to propagate a narrow discipline, most academics could agree with Becker's admission that the orthodox historian does not really exist.⁶⁰ We, the readers, are then thrust into a precarious position: in each article, we are asked to cast doubt on any coherent discipline, but no sooner is this request made than we are told that either a bricolage approach or a fragmented approach are the dialectical options to choose.

One case in point is the work by art historian Stephen Bann. As early as 1981, Bann wrote an enviable article not for art historians per se, but for philosophers of history.⁶¹ Appearing in the Cambridge University Press journal, *Philosophy*, Bann expands the purview of historiography from its restriction to lists and critiques of historical writing, a taxonomic style, Bann explains, that predominates in his native Britain. In contrast, Bann uses the platform of the philosophical journal to instigate a cross-disciplinary dialog in which to discuss—from both a historical and philosophical vantage—fundamental concerns on the writing of history.

Bann offers a concerted effort to converse between disciplines, in particular, joining in conversation historians and philosophers of history. He chastises esteemed conservative historian G.R. Elton's call for disciplinary isolationism. Bann instead suggests the pressing

⁶⁰ Becker, 22.

⁶¹ Stephen Bann, "Towards a Critical Historiography: Recent Work in Philosophy of History," *Philosophy* 56.217 (1981): 365-85.

relevance of historical thinkers like Hayden White to elucidate tropes employed in historical writing. In fact, citing White,⁶² Bann explains that the then contemporary historiography showed limitation because it “lost sight of its origins in the literary imagination.”⁶³ Bann, with an eye out for just such lost sights, trumps White's remark, for Bann notices White's indifference to discursive provenance. Bann keenly faults White:

[...] White holds that there is no essential difference, for the purposes of his analysis, between a narrative history and a philosophy of history, any more than there is reason to discriminate in the accepted way between ‘History’ and ‘Historicism.’⁶⁴

Bann then includes a passage from White's groundbreaking 1978 book on historical criticism, *Tropics of Discourse*, a passage I, too, will reproduce here in expanded form:

Even in the simplest prose discourse, and even in one in which the object of representation is intended to be nothing but fact, the use of language itself projects a level of secondary meaning below or behind the phenomena being “described.” This secondary meaning exists quite apart from both the “facts” themselves and any explicit argument that might be offered in the extra-descriptive, more purely analytical or interpretative, level of the text. This figurative level is produced by a constructive process, poetic in nature, which prepares the reader of the text more or less subconsciously to receive both the description of the facts and their explanation as plausible

⁶² For an excellent appraisal of White's famous work, as well as a discussion of his more recent directions, see Wulf Kansteiner, "Hayden White's Critique of the Writing of History," *History and Theory* 32.3 (1993): 273-95.

⁶³ Bann, 368.

⁶⁴ Bann, 369.

on the one side, and as adequate to one another, on the other.

As thus envisaged, the historical discourse can be broken down into two levels of meaning. The facts and their formal explanation or interpretation appears (sic) as the manifest or literal “surface” of the discourse, while the figurative language used to characterize the facts points to a deep-structural meaning. This latent meaning of an historical discourse consists of the generic story-type of which the facts themselves arranged in a specific order and endowed with different weights, are the manifest form. We understand the specific story being told about the facts when we identify the generic story-type of which the particular story is an instantiation.⁶⁵

The preceding disciplinary examination of historiographic provenance only generated geographic and temporal metaphors; if we are to regard disciplinary provenance as a set of admitted activities or practices rather than academic territory, then we will require a different kind of description altogether. One such description has been underway for some time in the literature: that set of discussions dealing with the philosophical sense of historiography’s epistemology. As just mentioned, Hayden White’s work pioneered this discourse, and continues to influence scholars. Bann, for instance, interprets the significance of White’s thesis to be nothing less than an “inversion” which “is literally without precedent.”⁶⁶ The essential windfall in White’s work for the field of historiography, Bann contends, is the liberation of the widespread “disavowal of the discursive structure of historical writing.”⁶⁷ But to heed Bann’s suggestion for critical care

⁶⁵ Hayden V. White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978) 110.

⁶⁶ Bann, 370.

⁶⁷ Bann, 370.

even when attending to White's text, largely owing to his distaste for textual analysis, White chooses to end his collection of essays in a outburst against writing conceived as such. Early in that collection, White establishes the etymology of the word *tropic* in the following passage:

It comes into modern Indo-European languages by way of *tropus*, which in Classical Latin meant "metaphor" or "figure of speech" and in Late Latin, especially as applied to music theory, "mood" or "measure." All of these meanings, sedimented in the early English word *trope*, capture the force of the concept that modern English intends by the word *style*, a concept that is especially apt for the consideration of that form of verbal composition which, in order to distinguish it from logical demonstration on the one side and from pure fiction on the other, we call by the name *discourse*.⁶⁸

Open and polysemic, White retains an unbothered posture to the "swerves in locution" he achieves with his use of the word "discourse," and while each sense he conjures involves metaphoric directionality, White never lays a clear or unobstructed course for that word. To demonstrate his thesis that discourse is entirely explainable as tropes, this strategy proves accommodating. In suppressing all other critical examination to tropology, however, White unnecessarily

⁶⁸ White, 2.

dulls the complex means by which writing can be distinguished from style. He replicates this blunt stance later in a discussion of “text.”

In the most circular—certainly most obdurate—essay in *Tropics*, White attempts to dismiss on several grounds what he calls the “absurdist moment in contemporary literary theory.”⁶⁹ The then “present state of literary criticism,” White insists, “does not constitute a coherent field of theory and practice.”⁷⁰ As soon as this is pronounced, though, White immediately contradicts himself by asserting its unity: “As a form of intellectual practice, no field is more imperialistic.”⁷¹ White unsuccessfully attempts to persuade us that “Absurdist” critics have wrongfully displaced the more moderate “Normal” critics, leading to an “apotheosis of ‘silence’.”⁷² For the Absurdist, White exaggerates, “Literature is reduced to writing, writing to language, and language, in a final paroxysm of frustration, to chatter about silence.”⁷³ White exuberantly explains his frustration:

Instead of regarding the literary text as a product of cultural processes more basic than writing, writing is taken as the crucial analogue of all those acts of signification by which meaning is conferred upon an otherwise meaningless existence, whence the pervasive melancholy of the structuralists activity; all if its “tropiques” are “tristes,” because it perceives all cultural

⁶⁹ White, 261.

⁷⁰ White, 261.

⁷¹ White, 261.

⁷² White, 262.

⁷³ White, 262.

systems as products of the imposition of a purely fictive meaning on an otherwise meaningless reality. All meaning derives from language's power to bewitch intelligence with the promise of a meaning that can always be shown on analysis to be arbitrary and, ultimately spurious.⁷⁴

At each level, White's huff prevents him from any meaningful engagement of the similarities between his own tropic project and the varied structural and post-structural projects. Here, White's own eponymous pun is at odds with that which he seeks to criticize, or more correctly, is in consort. In the book by Lévi-Strauss to which White refers, the role of irony is ever-present and often self-critical. Moreover, in Derrida's subsequent criticism of that anthropological work, the post-structuralist never makes the reckless claim that, ultimately, all meaning is "spurious." Nor does it establish writing as an analog "by which meaning is conferred upon an otherwise meaningless existence." (Would not such an analog be *tropic*?) Instead, the infinitesimally complex essay by Derrida, among other things, allows that the very possibility of erasure (as in White's own repeated erasure of post-structuralism into "meaningless existence") itself indicates the process of writing, a process not of the *conferral* of meaning, but of the *constitution* thereof.

It remains beyond the scope of this project to debate White's wholesale dismissal of writing as the designatory process in

⁷⁴ White, 278.

historiography—a dismissal due, evidently, to a deep-seeded mistrust of poststructuralists. What is of interest, however, is the unquestionable role of *writing* in historiography, a role that White’s hyperbolic repudiation, ironically, seems to confirm. On this point, White is casual, but incontrovertible: though he often exchanges the word “writing” for literary rhetoric, he does not do so with Derridean discourse in mind. White wrongly rejects—or more exactly, overlooks—Derrida’s profound assertion that writing and rhetoric share coincident processes, a misjudgment that strips from White’s topological theory a potentially mighty ally in both literary and historical criticism. I compare White’s theatrical performance in that essay to a description by Derrida:

This inflation of the sign “language” is the inflation of the sign itself, absolute inflation, inflation itself. Yet, by one of its aspects or shadows, it is itself still a sign: this crisis is also a symptom. It indicates, as if in spite of itself, that a historico-metaphysical epoch must finally determine as language the totality of its problematic horizon. It must do so not only because all that desire had wished to wrest from the play of language finds itself recaptured within that play but also because, for the same reason, language itself is menaced in its very life [...]⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Correct ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997) 6.

This inflation of language describes White's own imperative to purge criticism of grammatology, but that very inflation serves only to flaunt the play between writing and rhetoric. Derrida continues:

By a slow movement whose necessity is hardly perceptible, everything that for at least some twenty centuries tended toward and finally succeeded in being gathered under the name of language is beginning to let itself be transferred to, or at least summarized under, the name of writing.⁷⁶

But, for all of the deconstructive power in White's work, he falls short of transferring attribution of this shift to writing. Preferring time and time again the name, "narrative," White thus subtly resists the quiet re-inscription into writing, its story-telling, in short, its *voice*.

Though vastly useful for the historian, Bann, too, criticizes White's stubborn insistence on narrative's exclusivity. Perhaps as a corrective, Bann himself offers an insightful juxtaposition between Mandelbaum and Olafson in an attempt to illustrate the results of different approaches to the intersection between history and the philosophy of history. Maurice Mandelbaum was the Andrew W. Mellon Professor of Philosophy at John Hopkins from 1967-1974, though he taught there until 1978.⁷⁷ Also the president of the American Philosophical Association, Mandelbaum brought attention particularly to the philosophy of history and its enantiomorph, the

⁷⁶ Derrida, 6.

⁷⁷ Lewis White Beck, Norman E. Bowie, and Timothy Duggan, "Maurice H. Mandelbaum 1908 - 1987," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 60.5 (1987): 858.

history of philosophy. Frederick A. Olafson, similarly, is the Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at the University of California, San Diego. In juxtaposing those two philosophers of history, Bann aims to show a more fluid intersection, most specifically so that practicing historian-philosophers have recourse to incorporate theory into their works while at the same time, philosophers of history pay heed to the pragmatics of history writing. In the comparison between Mandelbaum and Olafson, Bann offers particular attention to what he describes as a shift from a speculative philosophy of history to an analytic one:

In the case of Mandelbaum, there is indeed a crucial distinction drawn between what he terms ‘general’ and ‘special’ histories; the latter being economic history, history of art, etc., and the former ‘the study of human activities in their societal context and with their societal implications.’ Only the ‘general’ history, in his view, can lay claim to a genuine objectivity, and this, presumably, gives it a distinctive importance. Mandelbaum does not, at this point, examine the very considerable amount of debate on this topic [... but] he does raise a genuinely contemporary issue which is perhaps decently veiled by the increased professionalization of both ‘general’ and ‘special’ historiography.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Bann, 377.

I will return to this distinction between “general” and “special” histories shortly, but it should be noted that Bann himself offers little discussion on his own status as, perhaps, a doubly special historian, of art and ideas. It is ironic, though, that Bann never in this work makes his own role as art historian explicit, but rather assumes the clothes of a general historian. His interest in interdisciplinarity is carried instead by implication in the invocation of Olafson’s work. Bann praises Olafson’s project to broaden the scope and interrelation of humanistic study. For Olafson, Bann does this to further show the philosopher’s role in broadening the discussion of historiography to philosophers and historians. Bann writes:

In other words, where our literary scholars are becoming skeptical about ‘unexamined teleologies,’ Olafson is advocating that the historian should attempt to reveal, as his highest purpose, the new and adequate teleology. [//] It is here that Olafson justifies his claim to be providing a ‘philosophical interpretation’ of the Humanities in general, as well as the place of History within them.⁷⁹

While impressed with the radical nature of such a claim, Bann does express some reservation. Worried that Olafson concedes too much in the joining of philosophy and practice without enough interest in the discursive particularity of historical writing, Bann moves to discuss a historian he considers to be thoroughly informed of the linguistic turn while equally entrenched in historical practice.

⁷⁹ Bann, 376.

Bann concludes his essay with an examination of “the philosophic position which can be deduced” from the historiography of Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie.⁸⁰

Le Roy Ladurie, whose work, *Carnival in Romans* among others is already classic, includes in his historiography a language so replete with contemporary (and, therefore, anachronistic) idioms as to garner frequent criticisms from others in the field. For Bann, however, this anachronistic style is central to the complexity of Le Roy Ladurie. Bann argues that, in fact, the very inclusion of incongruous concepts and terms is the mechanism by which Le Roy Ladurie positions not only the historian, but also the contemporary reader, alongside the now lost historical object. Bann, again:

[Le Roy Ladurie] had shown that the past keeps coming back, given a good chance. But he had also shown that this effect takes place not in spite of, but because of, its remoteness; not in spite of, but because of, the stylistic marks which identify the historical text as being produced by a writer of the present day; not because of its connections to the present, but as a result precisely of the effect of isolating it in itself, and circumscribing it as the minimal historical unit that could be an object of scrutiny.⁸¹

Bann sees this style, evidence of a keen philosophy, as a corrective for the oppressive role irony is afforded in White’s purview.

⁸⁰ Bann, 380.

⁸¹ Bann, 380.

Whereas White charges that ironic style is historiography's only possible track,⁸² Bann sees Le Roy Ladurie's as a liberating approach: "But where the ironic approach, in White's terms, is characteristically detected as a *negative* effect—where the historian simply eschews the organization of his discourse by tropes like metaphor and synecdoche—it achieves in Le Roy Ladurie a more integral organizing role, indeed a *positive* effect."⁸³

Bann, though, misses a crucial opportunity in his inspection of Le Roy Ladurie to distinguish between the tropological study of historical narrative and the writing of history. Though the above quotation shows clearly that writing remained central to Bann's interest in Le Roy Ladurie, Bann makes no distinction between the "marks which identify the historical text" as tropes rather than as signs of writing in the Derridean sense. In effect, though Bann criticizes White's pejorative sense of irony, Bann nevertheless preserves White's initial equation of the deployment of tropes with writing. What is essentially missed in Bann's article is praise for Le Roy Ladurie's attention to inscription, that is, his sticky cocooning of the historical object within that anachronistic, contemporary language. It is this act of inscription—i.e. language within language, and not the crafting of ironic tropes—which makes Le Roy Ladurie so valuable to historiography.

Elizabeth Clark, in her laudable study on continental, British, and American theoretical approaches to history over the last century

⁸² Bann, 381.

⁸³ Bann, 381.

or so, bears some resemblance to Stephen Bann's program. Clark, a historian of early Christian studies, aims to bring theoretical advances to practicing historians, while simultaneously informing theoreticians of the value of historical studies, in her case, specifically of early Christian textuality. Also like Bann, Clark works from what Mandelbaum would term a "special" history, since she works on the history of women, among others, from a non-hermeneutical perspective.

In her book, *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn*, Clark effectively follows the development of French and German historical traditions, from historical positivism, which aimed to supplant an "older belletristic history,"⁸⁴ to its most current formations in a linguistic, deconstructivist field. Beginning with German history, Clark notes that "'Method' was now the order of the day, and Ranke's influence—the Ranke of facts, archives, and documents—was to dominate."⁸⁵ From this early point, Clark develops a thorough narrative of the development of historiography, hitting major (and many minor) figures, including the Annalists, literary and historical critics, and early and later structuralists.

Writing somewhat interchangeably of intellectual history and historiography, Clark regardless makes the compelling case for updating more hermetic historical practices. Steadfast throughout the book, Clark builds a strong progression which indicates that any

⁸⁴ Elizabeth A. Clark, *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004) 64.

⁸⁵ Clark, 64.

historical project that endeavors to make a truth claim must do so in full awareness of the epistemological demands any such claim entails. In this, Clark insists on what has been called, the “reconfiguration of intellectual history” rooted in contemporary critiques of discourse and language.⁸⁶

Clark ends with an important chapter on the practical application of criticism (especially criticism informed by deconstruction) onto her own specialty of early Christianity. While not directly stating her work as indexical, Clark delivers an important case whereby the relevance of early Christian texts proves to be equally relevant to theoretical study. In that early historical figures are in a great sense lost to history—and this is especially true of women in ancient Christianity—Clark shows that while such elusive figures may not be directly observable, their effects are indexically available in the documents of others. More importantly, such an index points not only to the invisible figure, but also to socio-psychological relationships, since the historian of the artifact necessarily encodes in that work his own desire of the unseen other.⁸⁷ By showing an earlier dedication to the more “literary” forms of history and, subsequently, the militaristic overthrow of “rhetorical” history by the “new scientific history,” Clark foreshadows her own plea for a linguistic return.

Medieval Professor Emerita Madeline Caviness approaches the question from a different perspective, which she describes as *ad*

⁸⁶ Virginia Burrus (2005). “ELIZABETH CLARK’S HISTORY, THEORY, TEXT: A (SOMEWHAT) CONFESSIONAL READING.” *Church History*, 74(4), 812-816.

⁸⁷ Here, Clark questions the engendered desires male historians project unto their objects.

triangulum. In her book, *Reframing Medieval Art: Difference, Margins, Boundaries*, Caviness, too, discusses the difficulties in writing history about those most often relegated to the margins. Citing Flax's "triune relationship" which posits the methodological value of a psychoanalytic-philosophical-feminist approach that unapologetically embraces any disunities thereby generated, Caviness follows: "The question I pose in this book is how are we to evaluate the tensions and discrepancies between pictorial constructions, viewed as cultural practice, and historical 'reality?'"⁸⁸ The contingent solution Caviness affords her study relies on a similar trinity in which the object is envisioned from both a theoretical perspective and historical trace data. Caviness explains her method as a kind of triangulation:

Triangulation has come to hold special meaning for my work. Throughout this book I bring various feminist strategies to focus on selected works of art, and at the same time establishing a medieval context for them; in other words, I have two quite different angles from which I approach the object of study, giving a kind of stereoscopic vision. I have come to think of this model as an asymmetric triangle, where the medieval representations form an apex, projected between two widely separated viewing positions—one of the postmodern feminist critic, the other of the "historian" whom I hold by definition to be modern. The historical viewpoint privileges commentaries

⁸⁸ Madeline H. Caviness, *Reframing Medieval Art: Difference, Margins, Boundaries* (Medford, Mass: Tufts University Electronic Book, 2001).

by the makers and audience of the object in its original temporal and spatial frames, and may encompass interpretations over time; this is the conventional art historical route, the shorter of the two, yet it can no longer be viewed as the only one, connecting the ancient object directly with its modern viewer, the way it was held to be before the New Historicism. I still think of it as the short lever with which to pry open the object, but contextual study has a tendency to confirm the unity of culture at a given moment, rather than to reveal its fissures...⁸⁹

Discussion

Having outlined a sample of twentieth-century writings on historiography, I will continue in this section with a critique of those works; the final section of this chapter will suggest an alternative formulation of critical historiography to meet the deficiencies outlined herein. My critiques center around two themes. The first theme problematizes the assumed provenance of historiographic inquiry. The second theme faults historiographers for neglecting what, I argue, remains historiography's most essential aspect—its written-ness. I address this later criticism primarily through a comparative reading of an excerpt from Becker's text.

What is the provenance of critical historiography? This is by no means simple to address, since the compound term has not been

⁸⁹ Caviness, Introduction.

clearly defined in print, and the latter term alone—historiography—sees a surprising variance in contemporary literature. Moreover, provenance as applied to an academic field does not have a direct correlation to geographic borders, but rather references an abstract field of inquiry. That field abuts many other fields, even hosting subfields; thus, accurate identification of a particular provenance for historiography might prove an impossible task. Nevertheless, Becker, Megill, and Jarzombek all attempt to stake out a territory for historiography; all three summarily do so via a critique of disciplinary borders.

Is historiography, then, the best tool with which to have intra-disciplinary dialog? That is, is historiography the best way to get historians to talk? Strictly speaking, I argue that moving between various discursive historical practices requires more than talking, but requires instead multiple examinations of processes of inscription. It is a critical project, to be sure, and Becker, similarly, sees historiography's charge one akin to the critical study of literature. Becker seems to concur both that historiography is the tool for this job and that this respectable, under-appreciated activity deserves far more credit as a rigorous academic pursuit.

This chapter began with a more general discussion of what constitutes (and what ought not) the practices of the historiographer. I conclude here by explaining that by looking pragmatically, the historical disciplines have always hosted interdisciplinary historical endeavors, and likewise have other disciplines offered rich grounds for historical projects. A historian of art, therefore, holds as much a claim

to the requisite competencies as does any other historical academic. Having plotted a methodological heading, in the remainder of this chapter, I will focus on the specifics of my historiographic study.⁹⁰

And this is the primary contention of my own chapter herein: that the somewhat careless (“hardly perceptible”) transference of historical concerns (story, narrative, etc.) to writing qua historiography has rarely emerged beyond a nearly identical vehicle in which *history* pulls the narrative while its graphic mark (its *writing*) remains in the sidecar. Though White offers us magnificent technology with which to scrutinize writing, it nevertheless insists on that writing’s subservience to narrative. Bann, for all his care in ferrying White’s methods to a wider scholastic audience, also leaves this transition indeterminate. Recall White’s contention, quoted earlier, that “historical discourse can be broken down” into the facts, which he terms the “manifest or literal ‘surface’ of the discourse,” and an inner figurative level, which “points to a deep-structural meaning.”⁹¹ Derrida, however, problematizes any such discursive stratification, suggesting its reliance on dualism:

The system of “hearing (understanding)-oneself-speak”
through the phonic substance—which presents itself as

⁹⁰ Historical works addressing the development of Structuralism began to be written in the mid-1970’s, with substantial contributions ten years later. More classic historiographies appear in the 1990’s, which Edith Kurtzweil’s *The Age of Structuralism* appearing in 1996, and François Dosse’s mammoth work, *History of Structuralism* published in 1997—first published in 1991 as *Historie du structuralisme*. Works on structuralism continue into the third millennium, though admittedly, since as early as the mid-1980’s, post-structuralism and its ensuing discussions have eclipsed any sustained historical work on structuralism. Thematically, these works may be arranged loosely (if problematically) by organizing principle. One popular way to address the development of structuralism has been to create geographical clusters.

⁹¹ White, 10.

the nonexterior, nonmundane, therefore nonempirical or noncontingent signifier—has necessarily dominated the history of the world during an entire epoch, and has even produced the idea of the world, the idea of world-origin, that arises from the difference between worldly and non-worldly, the outside and the inside, [...] etc.⁹²

In maintaining two levels of signification *already present* in historical narrative, White performs what Derrida terms, “Technics in the service of language.”⁹³ Thus, any advance in poetics that maintains writing on the periphery of that project reifies a prior position of language (discourse) in which its writing is a mere supplement. Derrida expands:

I believe [...] that a certain sort of question about the meaning and origin of writing precedes, or at least merges with, a certain type of question about the meaning and origin of technics. That is why the notion of technique can never simply clarify the notion of writing.⁹⁴

As mentioned earlier, Bann proceeds as if White already makes this explicit, that writing figures discourse: “[...] White’s work in the English-speaking world at any rate, offers a path for historiography that is no longer based on the disavowal of the discursive structure of writing.”⁹⁵ But that “path” is itself writing, and the means by which historians structure and arrange their narratives *must* be considered a

⁹² Derrida, 8.

⁹³ Derrida, 8.

⁹⁴ Derrida, 8.

⁹⁵ Bann, 370.

function of *writing*. To consider poetic technique alone or in advance of writing flagrantly posits “the notion of technique” simply to “clarify the notion of writing.” In the previous chapter, I argued that all historiography has no choice but to consider paramount the inscription itself of recorded history. Similarly, the widespread contemporary calls for epistemological treatments in historiographic writing are excessively sweeping: only those epistemological questions concerned with grammatology are appropriate for historiography. Any questions on the nature of historical knowledge—that is, philosophically epistemological questions—are best redirected elsewhere.

One means by which history’s writing might be entertain is through the budding discourse called “critical historiography.” A term used intermittently during the twentieth century, critical historiography has languished in nonspecificity; while the term first referred to a politically progressive approach to history, more recent invocations of critical historiography have avoided carefully ascertaining its scope. I suggest that critical historiography wrests from the multivalent word, “historiography,” the study of written history, or the study of the writing of history. In addition, the “critical” modifier denotes a contemporary approach based on the history of critical theory. Like its origins in the Frankfurt school, critical historiography, then, adds to the study of written history the critique of dominant discourses.

CHAPTER 3
WHEN VISION DECEIVES: VIEWING THE FIELD UNDER
CHARISMATIC AUTHORITY

***Introduction to the Conflict between Charismatic Authority
and Critical Historiography***

Recognizing that a critical historiography must ask whether historians underwrite intellectual hegemony, I now turn to a formidable cohort of Grand Narrative historiography: charismatic authority. Naturally, all historians to some extent identify with their subjects, often ideologically. This identification inherently shapes narratives and sublimates inconsistencies. The critical historiographer, however, scrutinizes historical writing to uncover disruptions sutured together by a written account that aims to produce a seamless historical narrative; this scrutiny is especially urgent in instances when such continuity never existed. Of the many critical idioms that might render such a critique, I focus here on the particular effects charismatic authority forces upon narrative structure, effects I trace through a case study on Structuralism. That factor—charismatic authority—derives originally from Weber and subsequently through French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s revision of that theory.

My own study on charisma begins with a review of concepts by the paradigmatic sociologist, Max Weber. I proceed by attempting to extricate use of the term from a religious studies application to ascertain whether a secular deployment will prove fruitful for other

studies. I subsequently outline and develop sociological strategies Bourdieu uses to analyze charismatic relationships. I compare Bourdieu's work on charisma to Foucault's discursive formations.

In discussing Foucault alongside of Bourdieu, I bring a hybrid sociological analysis to the historiographic case of François Dosse's *History of Structuralism, Volume I*. Bourdieu's formulation of charisma bears specific relevance on the study of the social networks in Dosse's book. Consequently, I extend a historiographical critique to Dosse's work by adopting some Bourdienne terms which elucidate the dangers charismatic participation hold for written history. Once enumerating this procedure, I apply this template to identify specific charismatic operations at play in the first volume of Dosse's historical work, *History of Structuralism*. As set forth in his introduction, structuralism, with the initiation of the "linguistic turn," opened a channel in the history of ideas against and through which Derrida would later develop the discourse of grammatology. That discourse pays notable attention to writing, erasure, inscription, and delineation as themselves constitutive linguistic operations of equal significance to rhetoric. As such, the specific case study of Dosse's extensive history will act as a bridge through which I will ultimately support the grammatological imperative for historiographers.

My critique of Dosse contends that the historian uncritically enters the field not as an impartial recorder of facts, but as an agent of his charismatic historical subjects—the French structuralists. While Dosse narratologically displaces himself from the distant history of structuralism, I demonstrate that he nevertheless actively follows in

the wake of their charismatic leadership. My analysis does not dismiss the impassioned intellectual biography that Dosse presents. In fact, his extensive “family tree” offers a rich quilt of key centers in early postmodern French intellectual life. I do, however, seek to deconstruct the Grand Narrative edifice inherent in Dosse’s method—indeed any method—which eliminates the historical narrator, substituting a scientific, invisible voice. While the historical narrative in Dosse’s *History of Structuralism* provides a valuably dense network of post-war French intellectuals, it does so at the cost of criticality. Since the disaffected voice of the historian qua social-scientist forced a prescribed top-down narrative focalization, the authority of Dosse’s historical voice leaves the reader bereft of any active learning or personal evaluative capacity.

Dosse's *History of Structuralism Volume 1* serves as the definitive historical account of structuralism.⁹⁶ Dosse originally published "The Rising Sign" as "Le champ du signe, 1945-1966," the first volume of *Histoire du structuralisme*, in 1991. Volume two, "Le chant du cygne, 1967 à nos jours," followed in 1992.⁹⁷ Volume one has been translated into no fewer than eight languages to date. Dosse has gone on to publish extensively and successfully, becoming one of the most celebrated contemporary intellectual historians. In spite of its broad success, I know of no previous attempt to develop a critique of Dosse's *History* outside the space confines of a book review.

⁹⁶ Before *History of Structuralism*, Dosse had published one major work, *L'histoire en miettes, des Annales à la Nouvelle Histoire*, a book-length adaptation of his 1983 dissertation, *L'École des Annales dans les médias depuis 1968*.

⁹⁷ All English references are to Deborah Glassman's 1997 translation.

Both volumes one and two of Dosse's *History* found extensive praise in English and French language presses. The reviews most often range from devotion to reserved excitement. In this chapter, I aim to show, first, charismatic authority plays a central role in the formation, approval, and ultimately admission to the canonical intellectual history on structuralism. Second, the history of structuralism is fitted into a program on the history of twentieth-century France, with French politics as the primary telos to which every historical fact returns. These two premises, I conclude, are the result of a writing process deeply affected by charismatic leadership, which obscures the reader's ability to discern alliances between historian and subject.

Charisma as Set Forth by Weber

In analyzing the period of the Second Temple, Weber set forth four types to describe social power structures within various social formations. The fourth of these, the charismatic leader, is what concerns this study. Weber sees the source of charismatic power, in the case of Hebrew prophets, in the "recognition" of super or even divine powers.⁹⁸ In the essay, "The Sociology of Charismatic Authority," Weber introduces "the general character of charisma" as one that effectively exceeds the demands of the "everyday routine," i.e., those normally provided for by either bureaucratic or patriarchal structures.⁹⁹ In times requiring different leadership, the charismatic

⁹⁸ Curtis Hutt, "Pierre Bourdieu on the Verstehende Soziologie of Max Weber," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 19.3 (2007): 232-54.

⁹⁹ Weber and Eisenstadt, 18.

leader “seizes the task that is adequate for him and demands obedience and a following by virtue of his mission.”¹⁰⁰ Weber adds that charisma “knows only inner determination and inner restraint,” though he immediately thereafter offers specific qualification.¹⁰¹ The charismatic, he writes repeatedly, looks only inward for divine inspiration. Weber contradicts this stance with the following quotation, in which he confirms that the charismatic must also anticipate the needs of his followers when executing his “mission.” Regarding this exchange, Weber writes:

His charismatic claim breaks down if his mission is not recognized by those to whom he feels he has been sent. If they recognize him, he is their master—so long as he knows how to maintain recognition through ‘proving’ himself. But he does not derive his ‘right’ from their will, in the manner of an election. Rather, the reverse holds: it is the *duty* of those to whom he addresses his mission to recognize him as their charismatically qualified leader.¹⁰²

It will benefit this discussion to plot points of recognition implicit in this formulation. Firstly, the charismatic must recognize his divine mission. Followers of the charismatic recognize him as their “master,” but this is a contingent recognition, given only upon sufficient proof.

¹⁰⁰ Weber and Eisenstadt, 20. I have chosen to maintain the masculine here because I believe that gender is implicated in the charismatic transaction. Since neither Weber nor Bourdieu analyze the gender politics of charisma, I assume that these texts refer to male charismatics, and while potentially applicable to female charismatics, I will not presume so here.

¹⁰¹ Weber and Eisenstadt, 20.

¹⁰² Weber and Eisenstadt, 20. (Emphasis original.)

The charismatic recognizes that proof is compulsory to maintain a following; if he can provide proof to the people, they will recognize him. Simultaneously, he recognizes the “duty” of his followers to honor his divine qualifications. Each point of recognition indicates a sequence of payment *in the form of* recognition.

Though Weber posits charisma as falling outside an orthodox economic system, as activity between agents, his text does admit a “transactional” element. The recognition itself is a “duty” collected by the charismatic in exchange for a desirable mission. While a charismatic may believe himself impervious to external motivation, his mission is nevertheless selected on the field and effectively brought by his followers.

Within this essay, Weber does not sequester charisma’s force to a heavenly realm. On the contrary, his description here plainly situates charisma in social action; charisma’s force—its claim—relies on its repeated performance (“proving’ himself”) and the repeated recognition of that symbolic. While Weber develops a sufficient explanation for the transaction—i.e. the proving and recognition exchange—he does not directly wrestle with the networks of social relations that set the stage for the charismatic to beguile his audience. Instead, Weber employs mystical language to describe what are otherwise sociological relationships. Weber writes:

The term ‘charisma’ will be applied to a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically

exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are *regarded* as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them, the individual concerned is treated as a leader. In primitive circumstances, this peculiar kind of deference is paid to prophets, to people with a reputation for therapeutic or legal wisdom, to leaders in the hunt, and heroes in war. It is very often thought of as resting on magical powers. How the quality in question would be ultimately judged from any ethical, aesthetic, or other such point of view is naturally entirely indifferent for purposes of definition. What is alone important is how the individual *is actually regarded* by those subject to charismatic authority, by his ‘followers’ or ‘disciples’.”¹⁰³

It behooves us here to take stock of Weber’s definition, largely because, as we shall see in the next section, Weber is too often read indelicately, denying subtlety in his decisive ambiguity. “Charisma” refers to that quality which designates the charismatic leader. By the “virtue” of charisma, the leader is “treated as” supernatural, superhuman, “or at least specifically exceptional” in power. This statement does not confirm whether the charismatic *possesses* such powers, but only that he is *treated as* being in possession of them. Again, an ethical, aesthetic, or other judgment regarding that quality is irrelevant to defining charisma as such; what matters is “how the

¹⁰³ Weber and Eisenstadt, 48. (Emphasis added.)

individual *is actually regarded,*” and, I will argue, this *regard* is, in fact, the source of the charismatic’s gift.

While Weber elsewhere contends that the charismatic himself must not question the divinity of his own calling, the above quotation forgoes the more pseudo-psychological characterization to which Weber elsewhere resorts. Instead, Weber frames the relationship of the charismatic to his gift in terms of access. We know simply that ordinary men do not have access to these gifts, but do have the ability to regard them. As for the charismatic, we know only that he is treated as described, but we have little information from Weber as to where the charismatic’s own relationship to his gift resides. And, certainly, the only dynamic of this relationship that would be of interest to the sociologist is the network by which the charismatic acquires that gift.

Weber’s work on charisma is most often met with approval, and its criticism tends toward problematizing the distance between the exceptionality of charismatic authority and more mundane exercises of authority.¹⁰⁴ Hebrew University sociologist emeritus, S.N. Eisenstadt, argues that a closer reading of Weber, particularly alongside anthropological and modern communication studies, bridges this gap, thus heightening the pertinence of charismatic analysis in everyday social structures.¹⁰⁵ Citing work by Rudolph (sic) Arnhem, Eliot Freidson, Joseph T. Klapper, Ernst Kris and Nathan Leites, and others in defense, Eisenstadt insists that charismatic authority holds direct

¹⁰⁴ Weber and Eisenstadt, ix.

¹⁰⁵ Weber and Eisenstadt, xxvii.

influence over mundane social structures.¹⁰⁶ Further, Eisenstadt notes the “semi-conspiratorial” approach to charisma posits the pragmatic need of despots to maintain “legitimation or for keeping people quiet and obedient.”¹⁰⁷ My own project aligns with Eisenstadt on this point, since charismatic authority, I argue, equally shapes both mundane and extraordinary contours of the academic landscape. Reconsidering Weber’s theory of charisma’s sociological transaction plotted through Pierre Bourdieu’s field, I will continue in this chapter by suggesting that the seemingly mundane practice of the historian can reveal the systematic exercise of charismatic authority over historiography.

Bourdieu Refashions Weber

Bourdieu provides the most significant reappraisal in recent scholarship of Weber’s work on charisma. Though Bourdieu criticizes Weber for never bringing his analysis of charisma into a fully sociological discourse, Bourdieu nevertheless sees exceptional value in reworking Weber’s original formulations. Bourdieu ultimately appends Weberian work by highlighting charisma’s reliance on large groups of people within fields of actorship rather than individuals. Bourdieu draws attention to the “transaction” within the field as the event that bestows charismatic authority; he further posits the causes of social predispositions of charismatic authority and followership as a social—and not divine—consequence. What is most crucial about Bourdieu’s

¹⁰⁶ Weber and Eisenstadt, xxvii.

¹⁰⁷ Weber and Eisenstadt, xxix.

intervention, then, is his insistence that charisma is not the provenance of one individual, but is a social set of situations between multiple agents. Social predisposition, rather than individual psychology, forms the basis for Bourdieu's resuscitation of charismatic analysis.¹⁰⁸

In preparation for this discussion, I will first outline a few sociological terms that Bourdieu originated which are vital to any discussion of the French sociologist. In *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, Bourdieu set forth the crucial question of learning why classes of people tend to remain socially immobile even when their economic abilities improve. In short, the judgment of taste proved to be an essential clue as to the long-term habituation of class markers.

Bourdieu developed valuable explanations of that immobility which inform all of his subsequent work on sociological exchange. Firstly, Bourdieu reasoned, there are different kinds of capital other than economic capital, specifically, cultural capital and symbolic capital. Bourdieu explains:

[A]longside the pursuit of 'economic' profit, which treats the cultural goods business as a business like any other [...], there is also room for the *accumulation of symbolic capital*. 'Symbolic capital' is to be understood as economic or political capital that is disavowed, misrecognized, and thereby recognized, hence a

¹⁰⁸ Hutt, 244.

legitimate 'credit' which, under certain conditions, and always in the long run, guarantees 'economic profits.'¹⁰⁹

When classes of economically challenged individuals increase their economic capital, their non-economic capital (i.e. symbolic and cultural capital) often remains unchanged. Since it is often possible to convert between capital modalities, their class often remains far below wealthier classes, the latter of which are often far richer than commonly perceived, owing to invisible stores of cultural and symbolic capital.

Secondly, people often habituate ways to express their symbolic and cultural capitals (or lack thereof) through socialized behaviors known as *doxa*. Over the course of one's life, the assimilation of these *doxa* create an individual that is at once subject and object, constituent and constitutor of that system. Bourdieu calls this socializing, self-constituting role the *habitus*, and often refers to it as "a structured and structuring structure."

Bourdieu's most explicit work on the structuring effect of charismatic authority emerges in a brief essay published in English as "Legitimation and Structured Interests." This essay provides one of the most useful sets of sociological tools with which to approach charisma and power, since it attempts a translation of Weber into an updated sociological stance. To do so, it posits interrelationships of social agents, rather than divinely inspired individuals, as the basis for social analysis. My motive in re-reading this essay, then, is twofold. Firstly,

¹⁰⁹ Bourdieu and Johnson, 75.

I aim to determine which methods of analysis are appropriate to a secular discussion of charismatic authority. Secondly, and more difficultly, I am to select from Bourdieu's work those figures of speech that most directly serve as a kind of ekphrasis, a type of spatio-visual metaphor that I will more fully examine in the following chapter.

Bourdieu's criticisms of Weber can generally be grouped around problems from Weber's typological treatment of the subject and, subsequently, an ensuing symbolic interactionism that Bourdieu attributes to that treatment. Bourdieu succinctly faults Weber:

Weber consistently fails to establish a distinction between (1) direct interactions and (2) the objective structure of the relations that become established between religious agencies."¹¹⁰

The failure to draw the above distinction leads Weber to explain direct interactions by typology rather than sociology. Bourdieu finds this formulation deeply unsatisfying, complaining that Weber "never proposes anything other than a psycho-sociological theory of *charisma*."¹¹¹ In this criticism, Bourdieu indicates that Weber's theory of charisma itself remains mired by typological curiosity; such an unnecessary concern merely reduces interpersonal interaction to psychologically inflected types, rather than to their underlying social structures. Instead, he plans to resuscitate Weber's study of charisma, imbuing it with an independent analytical force. He does this by removing the individual from charisma's power and refocusing

¹¹⁰ Bourdieu and Johnson, 126.

¹¹¹ Hutt, 244.

on the greater social conditions that make charismatic leadership possible. Bourdieu cautions:

Let us then dispose once and for all of the notion of charisma as a property attaching to the nature of a single individual and examine instead, in each particular case, sociologically pertinent characteristics of an individual biography.¹¹²

Regarding charismatic agents themselves, however, Bourdieu tolerates Weber's formulation; Bourdieu writes:

These agents are relatively autonomous in respect of external constraints (economic constraints in particular) and invested with the institutional — or other — power to respond to a particular category of needs proper to determinate social groups by a determinate type of practice or discourse.¹¹³

The agents, or "protagonists" per Weber, ultimately prove problematic in their reliance on typologies, and Bourdieu seeks to remedy these "difficulties" with an examination of Weber's ideal types. Bourdieu overcomes the imprecision of Weber's typology by insisting that the "basic intention of Weber's programme of research" remains "the necessity of apprehending the different agencies in their interaction."¹¹⁴ For our purposes, this terminology fits nicely, as "interaction" between agents describes their play or intercourse within

¹¹² Bourdieu and Johnson, 131.

¹¹³ Bourdieu and Johnson, 119.

¹¹⁴ Bourdieu and Johnson, 120.

a field. Transaction would then describe an interaction in which an exchange passes between agents.

In place of a taxonomy of actor types, Bourdieu substitutes his own complex sociological formulation of the field. In this purview, Bourdieu seeks to relieve the sociologist from the earlier obsession with psycho-social typology which inevitably plagues any study that insists on the independence of an actor. Unless sociological study of charisma focuses on the interrelationships of agents and their actions on the field, Bourdieu emphasizes, that study will necessarily suppress the "question of legitimacy" to a question of the *"representation of legitimacy."*¹¹⁵

In a discussion of religious legitimacy, Bourdieu becomes his most independent in the article. Bourdieu follows Weber in asserting that the recruitment of a "retinue" or "community" to follow and carry out the message of the charismatic forms a mandatory step in establishing legitimacy.¹¹⁶ This community itself must meet certain "charismatic criteria."¹¹⁷ *"Religious legitimacy,"* then, "is nothing other than the state of the specifically religious power, relations at that moment [...]"¹¹⁸ Various expressions of that power will depend on an agent's configuration within the field, but also on its access to various capitals (symbolic, material) that can be deployed as weapons.¹¹⁹ Bourdieu writes:

¹¹⁵ Bourdieu and Johnson, 126. (Italics original.)

¹¹⁶ Bourdieu and Johnson, 127.

¹¹⁷ Bourdieu and Johnson, 127.

¹¹⁸ Bourdieu and Johnson, 127.

¹¹⁹ Bourdieu and Johnson, 128.

Competition for religious power owes its specificity (particularly in relation to the competition that takes place in the political field, for example) to the fact that what is at stake is the *monopoly of the legitimate exercise of the power to modify, in a deep and lasting fashion, the practice and world-view of a lay people*, by imposing on and inculcating in them a particular *religious habitus*.¹²⁰

At this point, Bourdieu reviews his renowned definition of the *habitus*, which refers to a "lasting, generalized and transposable disposition" to behave according to that particular world-view.¹²¹ Weber is virtually indistinguishable from Bourdieu's restylization here, but the division between the two quickly resurfaces:

Whilst the authority of the prophet — an *{auctor}* whose *{auctoritas}* has continually to be won and re-won — depends on the relationship that exists at any moment between the supply of religion and the public's demand for it, the priest enjoys an *authority deriving from his very function*, which relieves him of the burden of continually having to win and consolidate his authority [...]"¹²²

Thus, Bourdieu blames Weber for neglecting the social inculcation of the laity by the religious authority, in particular, the repercussions for the ensuing types of transactions it requires between laity and priests, charismatics and breakaway followers. It is the

¹²⁰ Bourdieu and Johnson, 126. (Italics original.)

¹²¹ Bourdieu and Johnson, 126.

¹²² Bourdieu and Johnson, 129.

struggle over the power to inculcate a habitus of followership that separates religious legitimation from the ever frangible link between a charismatic and his proselytes. Religious scholar Curtis Hutt provides one of the few accounts detailing Bourdieu's restyling of Weber. He posits Bourdieu's refashioning as an elucidation of power positions on the field:

Bourdieu goes on to wield Weber against Weber [...], centering the mischaracterization of the charismas put forward by religious leaders which are reputedly the product of "pure conceptualization" or spontaneous inspiration. Not only is this portrayal inaccurate, but also duplicitous. Legitimizing and consecrating speech takes the laity's and other consumers' eyes off services provided and interests served. *By rendering these forces invisible*, the reproduction of material and ideological dominance is more efficiently effected.¹²³

But by this, Bourdieu specifies that such an account explains "why a particular individual finds himself *socially* predisposed "to act in a way consistent" with latent lay persons.¹²⁴ Followers adopt a prophecy solely owing to its compatibility with a *habitus* already operating among followers.¹²⁵

¹²³ Hutt, 242. (Emphasis added.)

¹²⁴ Bourdieu and Johnson, 131. We will later see in the case study of Dosse that the desire for a particular prophet's message—for Dosse, the centrality of French intellectual dissidents to the evolution of structuralism—preexists the emergence of any single prophet or charismatic.

¹²⁵ Bourdieu and Johnson, 131.

Weber's take on charismatic authority relies on the faulty premise of individual subjectivities, a premise which, for Bourdieu, too heavily emphasizes power derived from symbolic force rather than the social transactions that imbue that force. To remedy this, Bourdieu interpolates his own theory of agency, which entails the social field as site of transactions between agents acting in accordance with the self-structuring *habitus*. The remainder of this section more closely envisions Bourdieu's introduction of the field as a corrective for Weber's symbolic interactionism.

Hutt notes that Bourdieu takes umbrage with Weber's "naïve symbolic interactionism."¹²⁶ Hutt continues: "This was on account of difficulties intrinsic to any investigation of ideal interests not grounded in an evaluation of observable social-historical practices. What people think and say are worldly doings—not the product of any divine or private revelation [...]"¹²⁷ In Weber's defense, both Bourdieu and Hutt prove to be overly dismissive and reductionist. In several other texts on charisma, Weber fully situates the divine symbolic within a social matrix. By paying attention to the charismatic as symbol, Weber does not necessarily exclude the wider network of social exchanges that transfers symbolic capital to the charismatic. Thus, while Bourdieu is certainly right to term the charismatic's relationship with the laity a "transaction," it would be unfair to edit a more sociologically embedded possibility from Weber's text.

¹²⁶ Hutt, 240. Symbolic Interactionism in this sense refers to the American sociological school of that name, which advocated the study of the significance agents impose or project onto a given symbol.

¹²⁷ Hutt, 240.

A consequence of Bourdieu's dismissal of symbolic interactionism is that move's accompanying expulsion of critical textual analysis from sociological inquiry. On this matter, my primary contention with Bourdieu is his indifference to the visual significance of his objects of study—an indifference he often gently acknowledges but defers to visual culture's "limited autonomy." In fact, I argue, Weber's original formulation lends something to Bourdieu, not only the observable, but *unobservable* doings—doings Weber admitted to the divine. Those doings are *also* worldly, and as such, deserve the sociologist's utmost attention. Nevertheless, Bourdieu steadfast maintains the anachronistic claim that Weber's understanding of relationships between agents is "*interactionist* (in the sense in which we speak today of *symbolic interactionism*)."¹²⁸ Bourdieu defends his critique:

The fact that it would not be difficult to extract the explicitly stated principles of a theory of symbolic interaction from Weber's theoretical writings makes the reformulation of Weberian analysis in the language of symbolic interactionism all the easier—and, it would seem, all the more legitimate.¹²⁹

Bourdieu insists that Weber's "interactionist view" neglects the configurations of the field entirely, reductively focusing on interpersonal relationships, which he characterizes as "practices and

¹²⁸ Bourdieu and Johnson, 121. (Italics original.)

¹²⁹ Bourdieu and Johnson, 121.

representations in the logic of symbolic interactions."¹³⁰ Such an approach never allows the sociologist release from "the characteristically Aristotelian logic of *typological* thought;"¹³¹ rather, that thinking remains inadequate by privileging "elements over relations of the religious field—and therefore of the objective domain."¹³² The ordering of "elements," Bourdieu explains, initiates an indefinite "list of exceptions" produced by the linearity of that logic, a recursion averted by the method of scanning the field. Bourdieu outlines the procedure for this sociological scan:

Any analysis of the *logic* of the interactions that may develop between agents in direct confrontation with one another must be subordinated to the construction of the structure of the objective relations between the *positions* these agents occupy in the *religious field*, a structure that determines the form their interactions may assume and the representation they may have of these interactions.¹³³

Furthermore, he writes: "It is only by constructing the religious field as the set of all the objective relations between positions so that we can arrive at the principle which explains the direct interactions between social agents and the strategies they may employ against each other."¹³⁴ Agents fight or play "within" the field and never *on* it.

¹³⁰ Bourdieu and Johnson, 121.

¹³¹ Bourdieu and Johnson, 121.

¹³² Bourdieu and Johnson, 121-122.

¹³³ Bourdieu and Johnson, 121.

¹³⁴ Bourdieu and Johnson, 121.

We notice an implicit insistence, in the subordination of *logic* to *positions*, on the worldliness of interactionism. But the spatialization of structural tropes only adds distance between language and social formation. While we can conceptualize the *field* as an abstract geometry (though in real practice it constitutes a topography or an architecture rather than geometry). I use Bourdieu's word in this instance not as a timeless geometry, but as an area of potentiation for action or operation. In this sense, agents do not maintain "positions" as calibrated coordinates, but rather they "keep" or "maintain the field." By maintaining the field, their operation therein constitutes the area of potentiation. This usage enhances the latent sense of the "fold" within the field, since the agent, enveloped within the fold, at once displaces and shapes it by his/her own operation. The mechanism of this folding becomes clearer when looking at the unnecessary "construction of the structure."¹³⁵

Since the field preexists, there is no need for its construction to begin with. Very much like the self-structuring structure of the *habitus*, the field self-structures at the moment that an agent makes a "pitch," as the common idiom "pitch the field" suggests. Thus, the "pitch" simultaneously sets the field and defines the agent. The "objective relations" thereby need no further structure or support, since the field itself forms those traceable relations. To be sure, we can analyze those forms, and also discuss inhibited potential of any agent to describe power-plays on the field. The field itself, as a form,

¹³⁵ On my own operational interpretation of the reticulated sociological field, I thank María Fernández for pointing out my model's debt to Gilles Deleuze.

necessarily restricts the parameters' forms within and thus also "determines both the form that agent interactions may assume and the representation they may have of these interactions."¹³⁶ It is tempting to think through these "representations" solely in visual mode, but as I have come to describe, the field is in constant flux, shaped by tissues of multiple modalities. Like enfolded membranes, access to—and therefore representation of—any swatch can only be a grope of the elephant: any one part is incapable of total representation, and the struggle over knowing the depth of its enfolding is the very struggle for legitimation.

Reinterpreting the struggles on the field as I have just done shows strong affinity to Foucault's examination of power and knowledge; the control of knowledge, he contends, is itself an exercise of power. To describe the struggle for legitimation as one of knowledge/power, it necessary for me to rectify the vocabulary of Bourdieu to Foucault. Changing between methodological matrices does introduce some difficulties, the most salient of which is the incompatible formulations of subject and object within respective Bourdienne and Foucauldian approaches. Bourdieu sought to eliminate the subject-object dichotomy that has plagued western philosophy by incorporating his concept of the *habitus*. Foucault, however, maintained the subject-object distinction to credit (and simultaneously to chastise) the historian.

¹³⁶ Bourdieu and Johnson, 121.

Certainly, Foucault's distinction between two kinds of knowledge, *savoir* and *connaissance*, needs mention here. *Connaissance* refers to those rules and agreements between human agents that allow them to reach accord. Both *connaissance* and the "conditions of knowledge" to which Foucault often makes mention retain sociological compatibility with Bourdieu's plotting various interests within the field. In contrast, *savoir*, following Kantian fashion, asks after the conditions that allowed *connaissance* to arise. How are we to retain sociological consistency with the introduction of *savoir*? If we understand Foucault when he says, "By *connaissance* I mean the relation of the subject to the object and the formal rules that govern it,"¹³⁷ we may achieve a particular compatibility with Bourdienne methodology by substituting Foucault's subject-object divide with a reinvigorated status of the *habitus* as described earlier.¹³⁸ This substitution, however, does not solve the seemingly asocial significance of *savoir*. In order to continue, we must first finally explore whether Foucault's pairing of terms proves to be incompatible within a Bourdienne system. The sociologist Devereaux Kennedy, an early American champion of Foucault, writes:

But Foucault does not place himself within a tradition of sociology of knowledge position by reducing these conditions of possibility (*savoir*) to social and economic conditions. He grants the possibility that position in the

¹³⁷ Devereaux Kennedy, "Michel Foucault: The Archaeology and Sociology of Knowledge," *Theory and Society* 8.2 (1979): 271.

¹³⁸ See page 80.

social structure or economic interest may explain why a given individual or group takes one side of a controversy rather than another. But, he argues, the conditions which allow the given controversy to exist do not reside within the given individual or group.¹³⁹

If we are to reconcile Foucault's dual levels of knowledge within a Bourdienne sociology, we will need to make terminological adjustments. First, though Foucault writes of subject-positions, we will need to consider agents; admittedly, this may cause some consternation for classical Foucauldians, who regard the conditional, conditioned nature of subject-hood to be vital in explaining power dynamics. We might understand the access to *connaissance* in a Bourdienne sense as an agent's own estimation of that configuration of the field in which he or she is enfolded. Sense of that field is always conditioned by it; a given agent's perspective of that field (read: subject-position) depends on the agent's conditioned means of understanding that field. We might ascribe the means of that understanding to the *habitus*, combined with formal knowability as determined by the configuration of the field.

Savoir, however, holds affinity to Bourdieu's understanding of the symbolic. *Savoir* remains unknowable to agents in their own time because, firstly, it is not an a priori structure to be discerned, and secondly, because this knowledge is not universal (i.e., a total history), but contingent to the historian's framing. While *connaissance* and

¹³⁹ Kennedy, 271.

savoir have direct relation to each other, they are temporally displaced; we might posit them as existing on separate fields, but this would be a mistake. Only if we adopt a restrictive Euclidean geometry need we conceive of two separate planes.¹⁴⁰

In a reticular topography, with singularities capable of temporal displacement, such separation is hardly necessary. The historian, by looking into the past, nevertheless wraps him or herself within an already-passed field of struggle; this pulls the symbolic of that field, changing access to it. We might, then, posit existence of the field synchronically (and knowable through *connaissance*), and diachronically (knowable as *savoir*). The field is constantly reticulating, and its knowability, thus, is ever-changing and can be described from several approaches. (For Foucault, this would imply that one cannot know one's own field diachronically, but only synchronically.)

“Surfaces of emergence,” an important concept in Foucault, can be effortlessly superimposed on Bourdieu's concept of the field. Foucault himself defines them as “fields of initial differentiation” that attempt to delimit, and therefore render describable, a discourse. Further, Foucault attributes to those fields evidence of struggles over knowledge, “within which a discourse finds a way of limiting its domain, of defining what it is talking about, of giving it the status of

¹⁴⁰ Foucault, of course, made the now famous declaration that “perhaps one day, this century will be known as Deleuzian.” (See his “*Theatrum Philosophicum*.”) It seems ironic, then, that I reinterpret Foucault through an already normalized Deleuzian matrix, normalized in that its rejection of philosophical Euclidianism so affected contemporary discourse as to have exceeded its original bounds. Such an approach, I contend, is no longer wedded to any single Deleuzian work, but rather spills into a much larger entropic discourse.

an object and therefore of making it manifest, nameable, describable.”¹⁴¹ Foucault’s vision of such surfaces remains remarkably consistent with my interpretation of a reticular field, in which folds, tears, and constantly changing perspectives present at any one time a deformed view of the discourse, one entirely flavored by one’s own available perspective, of the roughness of the terrain, singularities and their distortive effects, etc.

Kennedy describes further: “Authorities of delimitation are constituted by those who ceded the authority, power, and knowledge to delineate, name, and establish objects.”¹⁴² In that Foucault’s authorities gain their power by a transaction with their followers, this understanding of authority fits snugly within Bourdieu’s or even Weber’s framework. Bourdieu, however, allows a far greater complexity than Foucault. Since authority is merely one description of a relationship established between agents on the field, it remains not a transcendental force, but one of performed specificity. Foucault’s formulation remains somewhat serially defined, whereas in my take on Bourdieu, the field (or surfaces) are not only defined by emergence, but by a continual process of reformulation. Access to the knowledge of that surface (which authorities may have greater, but never total access to), constitutes the kind of authority and power invested in that authority by followers.

But the “rules” (referred to somewhat problematically as grids) by which agents negotiate discursive borders (or cease-fire zones),

¹⁴¹ Quoted in Kennedy, 276.

¹⁴² Kennedy, 276.

while hinting at Wittgensteinian interests, in fact serve more to allow epistemic differentiation. That is, Foucault identifies in historical subjects “lateral continuities,” or epistemic connections between popularly conceived splits, and “longitudinal discontinuities,”¹⁴³ or the ruptures in rule specificities that indicate the shift from one episteme to another, incompatible epistemes. To apply these terminological adjustments to structural history, then, would trace overlaps in those shared discursive specificities: this is all that is required of the strict archaeology of ideas. If one desired to add a sociological domain, though, one would include historical actions between agents which clarified, defined, obfuscated, and assumed interpretative authority over a given field.

As a fold or reticulum, the form of the field is an inseparable figure-ground continuum. To divide this simultaneous process into the sequential "construction" seems to reify the subject-object that Bourdieu sought to overcome. As a pitch is made, the field conforms to it, and similarly enfolds its agent. Any analysis of conditions (orientations) of agents within the field or their actions (pitches) is an analysis of conformity — both *to* that reticulum and *by* it!

Bourdieu asserts that Weber “locates the central principle of the systems of religious interest in the forms in which the privileged classes and the 'negatively privileged' classes represent their *positions* in the *social structure* to themselves.”¹⁴⁴ In referring to "positions" in a "social structure," Bourdieu elliptically allows the reader to substitute

¹⁴³ Kennedy, 277.

¹⁴⁴ Bourdieu and Johnson, 125. (Italics added.)

for Weber's simplistic "classes" his own broader categories of agents in the religious field. But in doing so, Bourdieu forsakes the formalism in Weber that Bourdieu himself would profit from. Formal interests are modal, and like charisma, express related and relational forms. The centrality of this form conceived as enwrapping through action on the field will persist throughout this study, since the formation of the cartouche, whether on the field or within the page, is the imperative concern of historiography.

Symbolic Consequences

In laying out the field as a means to overcome symbolic interactionism, Bourdieu enmeshes his own program in a visualized vocabulary to describe essentially rhetorical relationships between agents. By outlining sociologically how a charismatic is afforded power by followers, Bourdieu attempts to remove the divine power that Weber ascribed to the charismatic's message. The methodological substitution of divine or magic power for a sophisticated set of relationships or plays on the field, however, is itself not without consequences. Having outlined Bourdieu's field and further extended its visualization, I will in this section indicate that by using the field to describe the charismatic's symbolic acquisition of power, Bourdieu loses an area of significance that Weber admitted: the symbolic rupture created by the magical consecration of charisma. Hutt writes:

Bourdieu [...] maintained that the activities, values, and beliefs endorsed by a charismatic leader are socially generated—'already present in a latent state amongst all

the members of the class or group of his addressees.' [...] This is what underlies charismatic popularity—not a well-reasoned, remarkably unusual, or supernatural message.¹⁴⁵

In this way, as explained earlier, Bourdieu sidesteps any symbolic interactionism ascribed to the charismatic's object, that is, to the charismatic's divine message. Instead, the field of objective relations strips the message of any magic or divinity, returning it promptly to the worldly network of human relationships. But even Bourdieu concedes a more phenomenal element to this system at the point in which the prophet or charismatic's message is formed.

One manner in which a prophet's message feels out its agreeability with laity has to do with its *ambiguity*. Bourdieu writes: "The allusions and ellipses found in such forms of discourse are designed to promote a grasp of the message in the form of a misunderstanding or as a deciphering of a concealed message; or, to put it another way, to promote those reinterpreted perceptions that invest the message with the expectations of the hearers."¹⁴⁶ Thus, followers are primed to interpret an ambiguous message within the schema of their already formulated desires. Bourdieu neglects to specify whether this is an unconscious procedure, but ostensibly, to

¹⁴⁵ Hutt, 242.

¹⁴⁶ Bourdieu and Johnson, 131. This observation bears specific application for the historian. As I will show in the following section, in the case of reading the structuralists, we in the academic community favor figures/authors who confirm our own habitus.

be perceived as a providential windfall, surprise or sudden relief must likely accompany the follower's reception of the prophet.

I have avoided to this point any discussion of the particularity of religion because by reducing the study to the field of objective relations, Bourdieu effectively secularizes the authority afforded to the charismatic. Though that authority certainly derives from a religious community and is enacted on a religious field, the content of that message is largely irrelevant, since its value derives from successfully meeting the "expectations of the hearers." We can easily adapt this model of authority onto a secular field all the while maintaining Bourdieu's sociological template, since—unlike Weber—sacred content never actually defines Bourdieu's process. In fact, charismatic authority per Bourdieu bears remarkable resemblance to his decidedly secular discussion of the authority afforded to the work of art. On the latter, Bourdieu writes: "In short, what 'makes reputations [...] is the field of production, understood as the system of objective relations between these agents or institutions and as the site of the struggles for the monopoly of the power to consecrate, in which the value of the works of art and belief in that value are continuously generated."¹⁴⁷

The "reputation," which is akin to the proselytism afforded to the prophet, is likewise steeped in symbolic economies: it is, after all, a credit or account extended to someone on their behalf. Reputation, figured as the above field, relates directly to charisma's field of operation, but I would draw an essential difference. While reputation

¹⁴⁷ Bourdieu and Johnson, 78.

includes the struggle for “the power to consecrate,” this lateral struggle between agents is unnecessary in the charismatic transaction. I argue that this indicates a qualitative difference in fields. More specifically, reputation is never a “gift,” but always reflects credit extended. Moreover, this loan is an estimate, computation, or figure. But for symbolic capital to hold currency, it must be subject to both a disavowal and a misrecognition. The latter misrecognition simultaneously constitutes a kind of legitimating recognition, in that the field accepts the original disavowal, thus recognizing a mistake.

Since in the course of discussing charisma we have several times seen arise comparisons to the misrecognition afforded to the magician, we must first more fully consider the resemblance. On this matter, Bourdieu is especially insightful:

[T]he problem with magic is not so much to know what are the specific properties of the magician, or even of the magical operations and representations, but rather to discover the bases of the collective belief or, more precisely, the *collective misrecognition*, collectively produced and maintained, which is the source of the power the magician appropriates ... [this] source of ‘creative’ power, the ineffable *mana* or charisma celebrated by the tradition, need not be sought anywhere other than in the field, i.e. in the system of objective relations which constitute it, in the struggles of which it is the site and in

the specific form of energy or capital which is generated there.¹⁴⁸

In the above quote, Bourdieu accounts for how the greater field of social interactions produces a kind of “collective belief.” Here, though, Bourdieu stops far short of Weber’s initial question of the divine or supernatural. Can we reconcile the two to produce a theory of the field that does not dismiss the “magic” therein? I believe it is possible through a term monumentally developed by Benjamin: the *aura*.

Benjamin deployed the term, *aura*, to denote an artwork’s “being imbedded in the fabric of tradition.”¹⁴⁹ While in his initial formulation, one can detect a nostalgia for mysticism, the term can nevertheless prove relevant even under secular sociological scrutiny. Benjamin continues with a discussion quite germane to the one of magic:

Originally, the contextual integration of art in tradition found its expression in the cult. We know that the earliest art works originated in the service of a ritual—first the magical, then the religious kind. It is significant that the existence of the work of art with reference to its *aura* is never entirely separated from its ritual function.¹⁵⁰

While Benjamin’s prose does not instantly offer itself to the sociologist, it can still be adapted to social study without much effort. In that the “cult” consists of agents acting within some ritualized field,

¹⁴⁸ Bourdieu and Johnson, 81. (Emphasis original.)

¹⁴⁹ Benjamin and Arendt, 278 part IV.

¹⁵⁰ Benjamin and Arendt, 278 part IV.

we can garner compatibility here with Bourdieu. The *aura* then refers to a highly specialized kind of “collective misrecognition,” that is, the bestowing of magical, supernatural, or divine powers on some object. This *does* differ from Bourdieu’s plainer description of art’s power in his more clinical estimation of art’s economic value because the aura requires a change in the *visualization* of a particular field. I will explain.

Recall my earlier distinction between reputation and charisma, in which I held that an essential transactional difference is charisma’s “gift,” which differs from reputation’s “loan” or “credit.” That gift constitutes far more than mere “consecration;” it is the production of the aura itself. But the *misregard* has an unexpected effect, unexpected because it so precisely and restrictively renders the *visual field*. It does this through what Benjamin calls ritual, but what we might consider—in Bourdienne terms—the production and maintenance of “the ineffable *mana* or charisma.”

Thus, the aura is a highly social gift onto a charismatic, owing to a carefully executed misregard by one’s followers in the visual field surrounding the leader. That aura’s magic or divine powers derive from a distortion of vision.¹⁵¹ We, therefore, have a definition of the aura and a description of its origin, but still lack clarity on *how* it functions, that is, the mechanism of that social interaction. To understand the social mechanism, we must more closely consider the collective misregard.

¹⁵¹ This reading of the aura may potentially be extended retrogressively to Benjamin’s essay, but I will not lay out the steps to do so here.

The aura itself is pneumatic rather than purely optic; it differs from the halo in this respect. It is, however, conferred through a visual field by the concentrated regard of charisma's followers. It is a contradictory struggle, then, as followers vouch for the presence of the aura (the spiritual emanation) while they deny themselves visual possession of it. "Proof," in the form of visual clues, is only offered periodically and as necessary to rehearse their mutual agreement, keeping it current. That visual proof (the whisper of the divine aura) escapes into the visual through momentary apertures. The charismatic tries to exert control over these apertures, but at times, his or her individual will is unable to stop the apertures from opening. These apertures must always be confirmed visually and can only be seen by followers (though the charismatic knows of their existence).

The aura itself is invisible (though perceptible), and its manifestation emanates through apertures. Without regard of the aura, a regard based upon misregard, charisma ceases to be such. This magical exchange is wholly constitutive, and any like conditions without it rapidly retreat to the field of ordinary reputation. The gift of grace is immediately withdrawn (rescinded or revoked), and any (gift) offering or token converts instantly to a line of credit. Such debt ultimately will require repayment—often with interest.

But Bourdieu himself leaves underdeveloped a thorough account of the role of the *symbolic*. The notorious Lacanian, Slavoj Žižek, provides a necessary corollary on this problem. Žižek's academic contributions span disparate topics, but in the sociological discussion of Bourdieu, Žižek's groundbreaking application of Lacanian

psychoanalysis—an analytic discourse intended for the study of individual subjectivities—onto compound subjects, i.e., social fields, opens to discussion the Bourdienne silence regarding the symbolic. Both the allusions and ellipses are better understood as linguistic manifestations of the symptom. In this respect, they are tied to the divinity or magic of the charismatic, magic that Bourdieu too hastily dismisses. In a declaration germane to the Bourdienne field, Žižek writes that the symptom, for either the "Freudian field" or the Marxist one, "In both cases the point is to avoid the properly fetishistic fascination of the 'content' supposedly hidden behind the form..."¹⁵² This finds similar expression in Bourdieu's purging of the content of the prophet's message. Žižek continues: "the 'secret' to be unveiled through analysis is not the content hidden by the form (the form of commodities, the form of dreams) but, on the contrary, *the 'secret' of this form itself.*"¹⁵³ Thus, the questions, "why have the latent dream-thoughts assumed such a form?"¹⁵⁴ And, "why have values assumed the form of various commodities?" Both inquiries find close parallel in Bourdieu's question (which I paraphrase), "why have the interests of the laity assumed the form of a charismatic message?"

To ask these *formal* questions, however, indentures us to complete a certain line of inquiry where Bourdieu does not. That is, what of those magical interests that gave birth to the charismatic? If we consider the laity as subject to an imbalance of power from within

¹⁵² Slavoj Žižek, *Mapping ideology* (London ; New York: Verso, 1994) 296.

¹⁵³ Žižek, 296. (Italics original.)

¹⁵⁴ Žižek, 296.

the established (legitimate) religious field, we see that the invocation of magic—and ultimately bestowing that gift onto a charismatic agent—cannot be reduced to a sociological scorecard of power. Rather, it indicates struggle for the *symbolic itself*.

During the battle for legitimation, religious authorities do more than wrest symbolic capital—they gain control of access to the habitual ways of understanding the *symbolic*. In doing so, they cultivate in lay followers an understanding of the field with but one asymptote—God. Access to this God, which in Žižekian/Lacanian psychoanalysis is access to the Real, is of course administered through religious authority (read: the Law of the Father) by the religious institution. From Bourdieu's anti-interactionist perspective, my equation of God with the Real is justified on the grounds of its transactional verifiability: both the religious Father and Lacan's Father hold equal and total control over the symbolic. Furthermore, lay dissatisfaction is not simply a dissatisfaction of power imbalances in the field. It is a symptom of the insistence that the field maintains any number of internal herniations, through which emerge evidence of the failure of that symbolic (the fallibility of the Father's law), evidences of the Real. Bourdieu's discussion of sacramental grace proves relevant:

Priestly practice and also the message the priesthood imposes and inculcates always owe most of their characteristics to the continual *transactions* between the church and laity. The church as *permanent* dispenser of grace (sacraments) enjoys the corresponding coercive power of being able to accord or refuse 'holy goods' to the

laity over whom it intends to exercise religious leadership.¹⁵⁵

But the charismatic, also, owes much to continual *transactions* with the laity. The difference between the two authorities, then, rests in their opposing treatments of the symbolic. In the regular, *permanent*, and *complete* sanctity of the church, a smooth conception of the symbolic is meted out to willing laity; any fear of the wrath of the Real is averted entirely or, at worst, rationalized within the hermeneutic of that explanatory religious system. The charismatic, however, fights not in equal terms, for how could he, without equal symbolic material or cultural capital to the religious authority. Instead, the charismatic—by magic or divine grace—tears into the fabric of the field, revealing the very *Real* symbolic dysfunction within. Though Bourdieu dismisses ambiguity and misrecognition as the mechanisms behind the prophet's "mana," he is wrong to suggest these revelations are not occult. This is the ineffable magic of the charismatic, and while priests may dispense "grace," it is a banal grace that lacks the *Real* divinity of the prophet.

To regard a charismatic's powers as divine owes to a "manner of looking."¹⁵⁶ That is, though Bourdieu ascribes charisma's power to misrecognition, in order to address the "magic" involved, we must account for the visual within. Since a charismatic's followers actually perform that misrecognition (that is, they actuate a decision, rather

¹⁵⁵ Bourdieu and Johnson, 133.

¹⁵⁶ Oxford University Press, *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2000). Accessed 16 November 2007.

than default to a cognitive mistake), we would do better to call it a “misregard.”

In sum, to Weber’s account of charismatic authority, Bourdieu introduces the variables of the objective relations of the field to explain the worldly transactions between agents that bestow charismatic authority and legitimacy onto a leader by his followers. Bourdieu’s language, itself ekphrastic, is easily adjusted to illustrate its reliance on visuality and spatiality to explain interrelationships. This secular account remains indifferent to the religious, symbolic content that Weber maintains, but in doing so, Bourdieu’s attempt to avoid symbolic interactionism brings him to the door of the linguistic and psychoanalytic symbolic. It is through this portal that I attempt to reintroduce Weber’s interest in divine symbolism. I do so not to affirm the hermeneutic power of that symbolism, but rather to suggest that charisma gains power precisely because it suggests—quite supernaturally—the porosity of the symbolic, through which the presence of the undifferentiated Real may be discerned.

That charisma is sociologically structured, by this point, is sufficiently clear. The remaining sections of this chapter will apply directly Bourdieu’s analytical method to show that the field of objective relations extends not only synchronically, but diachronically, also. Thus, a charismatic’s followers may still satisfy the transactional requirements even trans-temporally. This is satisfied on three accounts. Firstly, the followers must recognize the message of that leader; secondly, they must regard that message as enchanted—which we may interpret as a linguistic perforation of the symbolic revealing

the Real. Finally, they must vest the charismatic with both legitimacy and authority over the dominant structures of that field. In the particular case of the historian, I aim to show in the next section, that the case of François Dosse and the history of the structuralists meets all of those requirements. I will subsequently argue that this kind of history is one formed through charismatic authority. Finally, I will argue that such a charismatically inflected history merits historiographic criticism, since that kind of history seeks to obfuscate its own means of inscription to further the message of their charismatic leaders.

Enter the Rising Sign

The structuralists like the prophet, too, launched an ensorcelled assault on the symbolic. While institutionally the religious authority and the academic authority function with very different economies and, therefore, different bureaucracies, they share a regulatory role regarding the symbolic. François Dosse thus posits a story of structuralist history that closely follows the contours of the renegade prophet. Dosse himself must be seen as a follower of charismatics, one who himself might be a continuer of that line. The remainder of this chapter then, will scrutinize Dosse's text to detect such evidence of a history under the sway of charismatic authority. Once this charge is adequately established I then proceed in chapter four to envision a critical historiography that takes as its structuring principle not charismatic authority, but rather, the episteme of ekphrasis.

The two volumes form a pendant, with "The Rising Sign" indicating a historical crescendo (with the faint hint of proletariat struggle); "the Swan Song" documents the wane of the former. In the titles alone, thus, we have the promise of an exciting (even tragic) narrative. Of course, the French "champ" is even more loaded than the English. The division between waxing and waning sign—between 1966-67—also makes a bold historical promise. And, anyone even mildly acquainted with French modern history will want to infer connection here to the 1968-69 uprisings.

The outline of volume one is tripartite.¹⁵⁷ "Part I: The Fifties: The Epic Epoch" makes clear from the first two chapters (7. The Eclipse of a Star: Jean Paul Sartre," and "2. The birth of a Hero: Claude Lévi-Strauss") that this is a cinematic history. In any cinematic history, the casting is of utmost importance. What is suspicious of the chapter titles, though, is their compatibility with Hollywood language. This does not merely constitute glib criticism on my part; I mean to show, over the course of this chapter, the means by which Dosse's book unwillingly participates in an extended dance whose field generates and replicates authority based on charisma. Dosse's table of contents, both in its language and by its length, recalls the screen's titles or credits. With heavy use of the ubiquitously academic colon (:) this Table of Contents fittingly reads as a cast list. The role (e.g., "The Birth of a Hero") in the drama precedes the colon, followed by the actor

¹⁵⁷ I will not look here at volume two, for reasons which will become clear.

(e.g., "Claude Lévi-Strauss"). With twenty-one of thirty-nine chapter titles taking this form, it is hard to see the resemblance as accidental.

The titles of the Dosse's two books show a methodological affinity with his dissertation adviser, Jean Chesneaux, both in their multiple-volume format and in their penchant for dramatic narration. *History of Structuralism*, already ambitious in its title, cannot be taken lightly. In a book whose foundation lies in the history of linguistics, the deliberate omission of an article to modify "history" holds opportunity for analysis. The absence of an article (such as the more modest "a" or the more definitive "the") adds a monumental promise of cinematic proportions.

In my critique, I am expressly interested in a careful examination of the "field" as set by Dosse, and several of the actor/agents. As the last section's study of Bourdieu suggests, there already existed prior to Dosse's book a group of followers eager to canonize the French structuralists. Dosse invites criticism in the very first sentence of the introduction: "Structuralism's success in France during the 1950s and 1960s is without precedent in the history of the intellectual life in this country."¹⁵⁸ With this statement, the fundamental premise of the book—and, surely, the intellectual history of structuralism universally—is clear. Though not exhaustively French, Dosse here establishes the irrevocable bond between French history and structuralism. Dosse continues:

¹⁵⁸ Dosse, xix.

There was such widespread support for structuralism among most of the intelligentsia that the resistance and minor objections put forth during what we can call the structuralist movement were simply moot. We can better understand how so many intellectuals could be at home in the same program if we understand the context. These were two fundamental reasons for its spectacular success. First, structuralism promised a rigorous method and some hope for making decisive progress toward scientificity. But even more fundamentally, it was a particular moment in the history of thought, which we can characterize as a key movement of critical consciousness; for the structuralist program attracted a particularly broad range of enthusiasts" [...]¹⁵⁹

Dosse in that first introductory paragraph defines a specific field, the French intelligentsia of the 1950s and 1960s, and proceeds straight away to elide that field with the global totality of “the structuralist paradigm.”¹⁶⁰ More importantly, without qualification, Dosse unifies structuralism as a single “program,” “a rigorous method,” “a particular moment,” and — suspiciously — a “paradigm.”¹⁶¹ As such, Dosse closely follows Bourdieu’s prediction of charismatic authority’s “collective misrecognition.” Certainly, such an oversimplification relies on the mistaken recognition of pattern where,

¹⁵⁹ Dosse, xix.

¹⁶⁰ Dosse, xix.

¹⁶¹ Dosse, xix.

in fact, there was ambiguity and complexity. While Bourdieu gives us little instruction on handling the “context” of the message, we have to understand at least part of the context as a socio-historical—not simply a textual—question. As mentioned earlier, ambiguity in the charismatic message allows potential followers to interpret, of more accurately, interpolate a message whose interest pre-existed the specific form of that message. This interpellation by a potential follower must be understood as pitching the field. It is a perlocutionary act by a social agent who simultaneously declares a speech act, thereby entering and enfolding the structural field. Thus, to even approach such a scope within a historical project, Dosse is entangled in a complex field of academic interests. Dosse writes:

The structuralist program was a veritable unconscious strategy to move beyond the academicism in power, and it served the twofold purposes of contestation and counterculture. In the academic realm, the structural paradigm successfully cleared the ground for proscribed knowledge that had long been kept at bay, in the margins of the canonical institutions.¹⁶²

Dosse’s thesis of unconscious, underground struggle resembles the methodology of his adviser, and for that matter, shows his allegiance to the Marxist proclivity to identify proletariat struggle. Like more reductivist interpretations of Marx, though, this approach may ultimately oversimplify matters into a plain economic model—a

¹⁶² Dosse, xix-xx.

criticism Bourdieu launches and tries to resolve with multiple forms of capital.

But the de-pluralization of structuralism into a simple “strategy” dramatically curtails the kind of activity occurring on the field. It firstly posits a unified group of agents, acting in consort against the institutionalized academy. Secondly, it describes those procedural actions alternatively as a “strategy” and a “paradigm.” But use of that latter term, particularly for a historian of structuralism working as late as the early 1990s, beckons an inspection of Thomas Kuhn’s use of the word. In his already classic work, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Kuhn offers two requisite characteristics that must be present before he is willing to apply the term, “paradigm.” He writes:

Aristotle’s *Physics*, Ptolemy’s *Almagest*, Newton’s *Principles*, and *Opticks*, Franklin’s *Electricity*, Lavoisier’s *Chemistry* and Lyell’s *Geology*—these and many other works served for a time to define the legitimate problems and methods of a research field for succeeding generations of practitioners. They were able to do so because they shared two essential characteristics. Their achievement was sufficiently unprecedented to attract an enduring group of adherents away from competing modes of scientific activity. Simultaneously, it was sufficiently open-ended to leave all sorts of problems for the redefined group of practitioners to resolve.¹⁶³

¹⁶³ Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 3rd ed. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996) 10.

Kuhn goes on to qualify, and I add emphasis to the part most relevant:

By choosing it [i.e. the term ‘paradigm’], I mean to suggest that some accepted examples of the actual scientific practice—instrumentation together—produce models from which sprung particular coherent traditions of scientific research.¹⁶⁴

Though Kuhn does not work closely with charismatic authority, he does make clear that a given paradigm shift does not issue directly from the merit of a particular discovery. More correctly, Kuhn speaks of the ability “to attract an enduring group of adherents” from dominant, competing paradigms. The resemblance to Weber and Bourdieu’s descriptions of charismatic authority is remarkable. Dosse follows Kuhn’s paradigm-shift pattern in the over-dramatization of the authoritative shift from Sartre to Lévi-Strauss. He writes, “The law of tragedy requires a death before a new hero can come on stage.”¹⁶⁵ The sacrifice to structuralism that Dosse offers up to the annals is none other than Jean-Paul Sartre. The chapter, dedicated to this figure and his forced change of guard, assumes third-person limited voice. The historian provides an empathetic “reconstruction” of Sartre’s inner pain, a pain that Dosse shares with us. Dosse narrates a series of “breaks” (read: shifts of paradigmatic status) for Sartre, beginning with faltering involvement with the French Communist Party at the height of the Cold War. Personal “breaks” with Claude Lefort, Camus, and

¹⁶⁴ Kuhn, 10-11.

¹⁶⁵ Dosse, 3.

Etiemble, and then Merleau-Ponty, Dosse insists, contributed to Sartre's disharmony.¹⁶⁶

Dosse's conception of this existential field from the first incorporates evidence of Sartre's enchantment:

Other adventures were to unfold with Sartre, but the younger generation continued to be *fascinated* with him. [Regis Debray] writes that "for many of us in my high school in the fifties, *Being and Nothingness* quickened our pulse."¹⁶⁷

Dosse begins to set a cosmos of charisma which directly accounts for paradigmatic changes: "This unshakable image would cling to him and he would be its first victim. [/] The Sartrean star was eclipsed because of political issues, but it was also affected by what was beginning to take shape in the intellectual world."¹⁶⁸

Dosse, of this latter crisis, faults the rise of the social sciences, which precipitated a "middle ground between the traditional humanities" and "the hard sciences."¹⁶⁹ Sartre, refusing to leave his own philosophical ground, "was left behind."¹⁷⁰ Here, too, though, we must afford Dosse the estimable role of a prospector trying to lay out different academic fields. While Sartre's field certainly was reformulated, Sartre was not simply "left behind" as in a continental

¹⁶⁶ Dosse, 4.

¹⁶⁷ Dosse, 4. (Emphasis added.)

¹⁶⁸ Dosse, 4.

¹⁶⁹ Dosse, 4.

¹⁷⁰ Dosse, 4.

drift. Rather, his waxing status, Dosse outlines, was the result of competing messages from younger charismatic intellectuals.

Dosse goes on to explain existentialism's collapse in light of new structural challenges to the earlier, Sartrean subject. The "subject and conscience gave way to rules, codes, and structure."¹⁷¹ What does this describe? While it could indicate in part a changing academic *habitus* as intellectuals become used to using different concepts, it more readily evinces a change in a *doxa*, or the way these agents were led by the field to identify themselves. At first, Dosse's series of biographical vignettes can be used to fashion an account of the French structural field. Such a sociological history cannot be considered his goal, though, and even as such, it never furthers any socio-historical *analysis* of French structuralism.

Lévi-Strauss was a thinker of such colossal charisma that, indeed, an analysis of his authority would occupy its own book. Fortunately, it is not my prerogative to do so here. What I would like to call attention to is Dosse as a (temporally displaced) follower of that leader. Dosse confirms this displacement by recounting the life of "Sartre's intimate friend," Jean Pouillon, an philosopher-turned-ethnologist who, Dosse insists, "became the sole link" between the fading Sartre and the rising Lévi-Strauss. Dosse writes:

What had at first seemed to be a gratuitous detour or exotic adventure in foreign climes became, for Pouillon and for an entire generation, a lifelong engagement in an

¹⁷¹ Dosse, 5.

existence turned toward new and more anthropological questions, and an abandonment of classical philosophy.¹⁷²

Not only Pouillon, but by Dosse's script, we, too, follow the charisma of Lévi-Strauss, the man who—from the primitive forces of nature—emerged with a *new* knowledge of anthropology.

The abrupt force with which Dosse throws us at the foot of this "Hero" is remarkable because the gravity of Lévi-Strauss captures us so fully and without warning (a mere seven pages) that we never have the opportunity to question this "Birth of a Star" as the big bang of structuralism. By himself romanticizing the star-status Lévi-Strauss, Dosse pulls us into the structural field—a field that he constitutes, and one he defines as beginning with the anthropologist. Thus, the originary charisma of the anthropologist finds institutional *legitimation* as a charismatic leader in Dosse's book.

Dosse confirms the importance of "allegiance" in the formation of the structural field. He writes of Pouillon that Claude Lefort provided an opposition to Lévi-Strauss' "relegation of historicity to a secondary position."¹⁷³ On this point, Dosse reports Pouillon to have "remained faithful" to synchronicity over diachronicity.¹⁷⁴ "But," Dosse reassures us, Pouillon's "double allegiance to structuralism and to anthropology was absolute, and from this point on Jean Pouillon attended Claude Lévi-Strauss's seminars" at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷² Dosse, 6.

¹⁷³ Dosse, 6.

¹⁷⁴ Dosse, 6.

¹⁷⁵ Dosse, 6.

Dosse's own limited omniscient voice does the opposite of including the valorized observer. It instead is meant to suture us, the reader, into the drama, therefore, to accept this drama as complete, and thereby to assert its accuracy and verity. But looking to Dosse's own words reveals contradictions. How, for example, do we reconcile the implied conflict between anthropology and structuralism that Pouillon, ostensibly, straddled?

With the "Crises of the Militant Intellectual," Dosse further characterizes the decline of Sartre as a more widespread intolerance for the modern practice of intellectuals inserting their authority into any field.¹⁷⁶ We could liken this to a drastic reduction of symbolic capital afforded to intellectuals. For Dosse, though, the structuralists, in particular George Dumézil and Claude Lévi-Strauss, provided the corrective for the arrogance of the militaristic intellectual. As Dosse continues with a quote from Lévi-Strauss, we see the charismatic's denial of exterior motives, just as Weber specified. "To the same question regarding commitment, Lévi-Strauss answered, 'No, I consider that my intellectual authority, insofar as I am considered to have any, rest on my work, or my scruples of rigor and precision' ".¹⁷⁷

In a sense, with "The Birth of a Hero," that is, the title of chapter two, Dosse offers us a sort of confession. By positing the origin of Structuralism as concomitant with the birth of Lévi-Strauss' "hero" status, Dosse admits that his conception of the ontology of structuralism has little to do with the content of structuralism, but

¹⁷⁶ Dosse, 8.

¹⁷⁷ Dosse, 9.

instead with a biographical narrative in which Lévi-Strauss assumes the status of the prophet. In fact, Lévi-Strauss acquires in Dosse's estimation, the soul (we might say—God-given grace) of a poet:

Torn between a desire to restore the internal logic of material reality and a poetic sensibility that strongly tied him to the natural world, Lévi-Strauss forged important intellectual syntheses in much the same way as one writes musical scores.¹⁷⁸

A chronological biography, encyclopedic in tone and approach, begins this chapter. Starting in childhood, Dosse locates the initial spark of Lévi-Strauss's enchantment to his artistic patrilineage and his "intense pleasure of exotic nature."¹⁷⁹ Dosse even overtly admits the magic in Lévi-Strauss's nature: "Lévi-Strauss rejected the *spell* of his own sensibility and *without renouncing it*, sought to contain it by constructing broad logical systems," (emphasis added).¹⁸⁰ A true wizard, aware of his powers, through the power of rationality Lévi-Strauss could channel his magic for the broader good. Dosse's written account thus confers unto Lévi-Strauss the charismatic gift of divinity.

There remains an odd romantic flirtation in Dosse's work; odd because he never forfeits a decidedly heterosexual tone, while, nevertheless playing with a very close set of relationships. From "Sartre's intimate friend" in Pouillon,¹⁸¹ to Marx as one of Lévi-

¹⁷⁸ Dosse, 10.

¹⁷⁹ Dosse, 10.

¹⁸⁰ Dosse, 10.

¹⁸¹ Dosse, 5.

Strauss's " 'three mistresses' " ¹⁸² and later to Barthes as a mother figure, the book constructs an early "rising" structuralism as homosocial and self-sufficient. This does change the nature of the charisma and it complicates the arrangement of the field. But it would be a mistake to read this as playfulness: it is, in fact, only possible because of an impenetrable assumption of French masculinity that Dosse uses the technique. In fact, this flirtatiousness—devoid of any queered risk—serves to further establish loyalties. Dosse uses this flirtation just before underscoring Lévi-Strauss' loyalty to Marx. ¹⁸³ This thread continues:

Leaving Anglo-Saxon empiricism behind, Lévi-Strauss found his masters in anthropology among those descendants to the German historical school who had left history, proponents of cultural relativism: Lowie, Hroefner, and Boas, 'authors to whom I willingly proclaim my debt'. ¹⁸⁴

The odd homosocial transfer occurs most auspiciously in the English translation discussing Lévi-Strauss's infatuation with Boas:

Lévi-Strauss was even present at the death of the great master during a lunch given by Boas in honor of Rivet's visit to Columbia University. 'Boas was very gay. In the middle of the conversation, he violently pushed himself

¹⁸² Dosse, 14.

¹⁸³ Dosse, 14.

¹⁸⁴ Dosse, 15.

away from the table and fell backwards. I was sitting next to him and rushed over to lift him up. Boas was dead.¹⁸⁵ Even at death, Dosse confirms a spirit between them. No sooner in Dosse's narrative does Boas's death become succeeded by a passing of the importance of "the laws of language" to Lévi-Strauss: "Here was the linguistic thrust coming from anthropology as of 1922, and it was auspicious for the fruitful meeting between Lévi-Strauss and Jacobson."¹⁸⁶ The death of Boas, in Dosse's configuration, becomes a sacrifice, but one whose "thrust" bears enormous fruits for the historical narrative. Through Boas' transfer, Lévi-Strauss gains a thirst for language.

One frustration a reader may encounter in Dosse's text is his frequent neglect of attribution of various voices in the main text. In many cases, these orphaned quotations assume the form of consulting expert, but the lack of any attribution of substance shows an instance where Dosse himself invokes an invisible authority. The transaction is laid out before the reader. A good instance follows, expectedly the "hero," Lévi-Strauss. Dosse writes that the publication of Lévi-Strauss's thesis, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, "was one of the major events of postwar intellectual history and a touchstone for the founding of structuralism."¹⁸⁷ Offered evidence is an orphaned quote, contemporary expert testimony:

¹⁸⁵ Dosse, 16.

¹⁸⁶ Dosse, 16.

¹⁸⁷ Dosse, 18.

What seems most important and most fundamental to me is *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, by the will to scientificity it introduced in the analysis of social multiplicity, but its quest for the most encompassing model to account for phenomena that do not appear, initially, to be part of the same categories of analysis, and by the transition from the question of filiation to one of alliance.¹⁸⁸

To construct repeatedly expert—yet anonymous—testimony such as this is not only historically dubious; it has a direct effect on the power relations with which the author is involved on the historical field. These cameo appearances (i.e., the many figures who are largely unknown outside French academic circles) establish a transaction in which we, the readers, give Dosse, the historian, a certain grace. Until we read otherwise, we extend to Dosse a historical authority, but we do this because of the field he constructs, one of disembodied voices signifying expert scholars whose testimony needs no time/date stamp. Similarly, we have no recourse to verify, and therefore, must accept Dosse's account to proceed.

And, again, with a brief account of Emmanuel Terray, we see this incontrovertible testimony described suggestively as a seduction:

For me, [Terray] at the time, and I still hold this opinion, the progress this book [*The Elementary Structures of Kinship*] represented was comparable in its field, to Marx's

¹⁸⁸ Dosse, 18.

Capital or to Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*! Once again, our young philosopher was seduced by giving some order to an area where apparently total incoherence and total empiricism reigned. His admiration confirmed his choice of career and a way of life in anthropology.¹⁸⁹

But where can we properly place the seduction? Is its source the realm of "total incoherence", or perhaps the realm of "total empiricism"? (Indeed, can these two realms really coexist?) Is that seduction in Marx, in incest, or in unseen structure? This is not merely a flirtations return; rather, I call attention here to a powerful action waged by Dosse. Bourdieu reminds us that the field is a struggle between unequal agents. Right within this text Dosse, by way of intellectual coquetry, takes full advantage of his own historical authority by concealing from his readers the very ability to discriminate on one's own the history of the structural field. In linking a field prior to Lévi-Strauss's arrival as dominated simultaneously by incoherence *and* empiricism, Dosse sets the scene for the birth of that hero. The status of *The Elementary Structures* serves as a historical confirmation—but it is an antepositioned history.

This move serves Dosse in ways that exceed presenting a biographical narrative on Lévi-Strauss. It offers an origin for an unstoppable history of dialectics—an often discredited method, to be sure. By doing so, our ability to perceive the historical conditions of the structural field become cripplingly distorted. Through Dosse's

¹⁸⁹ Dosse, 19.

academic authority we are funneled into a narrowed field which, devoid of any historical irregularities, retains a smoothed path leading from charismatic to charismatic. Dosse's history, though it ironically enlists Foucault as an unwilling structuralist, nevertheless takes little heed of Foucault's interest in rupture.

I will bring the tenor of this criticism to a close by summarizing more rapidly the narrative in Dosse's first volume. The impetus of my critique of charisma by now I trust is sufficiently argued, at least in Dosse's formulation of the origin of Structuralism, by which he means the arrival of Lévi-Strauss. While the aforementioned critique holds amply true as a general methodological fault for Dosse, continuing with such microanalysis will grow tedious quite rapidly. My objective here is not to posit a microhistory or an alternative to Dosse's narrative itself—but rather to think *how we might approach* an alternative history

Discussion

David Herman's review of *History of Structuralism* is the only one in the Anglophone world to ask questions about the lack of a critical engagement in the work. Herman notes, rightly, that "Here emerges a second assumption at the basis of Dosse's account: that the history of structuralist thought reduces, at one level of analysis, to a collocation of the biographies of its proponents, fellow-travellers and

detractors."¹⁹⁰ He promptly continues: "Yet a catalogue of the experiences of (more or less renowned) structuralist thinkers does not suffice to explain what structuralism was or why it exerted such a tenacious hold on the French imagination [...]"¹⁹¹ While Herman cogently asks how Dosse's differs from an antiquarian project, he seems to lose quickly the import indicated by these critiques.

Herman, paraphrasing Dosse, cedes any question of structuralism's contested meaning by resorting to the common topos, that "the provenance of the term *structuralism* is essentially linguistic."¹⁹² In the sense of creating, Herman concludes from Dosse's book that the word "apparently was Jakobson's coinage."¹⁹³ (This is, however, incorrect, as both Wilhelm Wundt and E.B. Titchener used the term on the continent before Jakobson.¹⁹⁴)

Herman also adeptly identifies the unresolved "systems/structures" dichotomy, but he fails to address its significance for a historical project. Herman goes on to identify a formalism in Lacan: "In *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1949), Lévi-Strauss had already whetted the French appetite for scientificity."¹⁹⁵ This would have been rich grounds for a social history of structuralism. Later: "Likewise, Lacan framed his 'return to Freud'

¹⁹⁰ D. Herman, "History of structuralism, vol 1, The rising sign, 1945-1966, vol 2, The sign sets, 1967-present," *Postmodern Culture* 8.1 (1997): U96-U107, paragraph 2.

¹⁹¹ Herman, U96-U107 paragraph 3.

¹⁹² Herman, U96-U107 paragraph 4.

¹⁹³ Herman, U96-U107 paragraph 4.

¹⁹⁴ See especially, E.B. Titchener, "The Postulates of a Structural Psychology." *Philosophical Review*, 7 (1989): 449-465.

¹⁹⁵ Herman, U96-U107 paragraph 6.

using linguistic and mathematical formalisms; both were part of an attempt to demedicalize the psychoanalytic project and rescientize it on other grounds."¹⁹⁶

Herman continues with identifying how "Althusser and his followers (including Pierre Macherey, Michel Pêcheu, and Etienne Balibar) tapped into the 'ambient climate of scientism' (I: 290).¹⁹⁷ But, can we be satisfied by simply equating any field that looks to science as structural? What are the conditions that allow us to accept such an equivocation? Is it distaste for empiricist alternatives?

Again, Herman notes important gaps in Dosse's text, most especially the "intellectual biography" of Lyotard.¹⁹⁸ But, he fails to account for *why* such an omission might be compatible with Dosse's project. Herman also notices the status of "Julia": women are on a first-name basis.¹⁹⁹ Since Herman does not delve into the causes of these lacunae, Dosse's homosocial, charismatic program goes unremarked.

Dosse's book would have been vastly more precise in scope and promise if reconfigured as a social history of the academic environment of *Paris* between 1945 to 1966 and 1967 to the present. Much of his painstaking work would be directly applicable, though the stylistic change— which would prove to be decidedly less cinematic— would accordingly be less modest. While an orthodox social history

¹⁹⁶ Herman, U96-U107 paragraph 6.

¹⁹⁷ Herman, U96-U107 paragraph 6.

¹⁹⁸ Herman, U96-U107 paragraph 8.

¹⁹⁹ "Julia" referring to the influential Lacanian, Julia Kristeva. Herman, U96-U107 paragraph 9.

would still not offer a deep look into the content of structuralism; it nevertheless would provide a rich understanding of the social conditions of intellectual Paris — a valuable undertaking that would not simultaneously subsume any complexity into the Grand Narrative.

This, perhaps, would not be a French history, but one of American tastes. Dosse's dissertation advisor, the Marxist historian Jean Chesneaux, has himself been criticized for forcing his historical narratives to conform to a predetermined pattern in which the oppressed subject rises up and conquers its oppressor — an error Dosse replicates here. With some imagination, the measured reader of Dosse can squint past the (very American!) Hollywood docudrama style, and still make out the foundational facts for a social history of structuralism.

To prepare for what will be described as a singular event in structural history, Dosse writes: "Lévi-Strauss therefore adopted [the 'phonological method's'] founding paradigms, virtually on a term for term basis. Phonology sought to go beyond the stage of conscious linguistics phenomena. Considering the specificity of terms was not enough, the goal was to understand them in their interrelationships, and phonology therefore introduces the notion of system in an effort to construct general laws. The entire structuralist method is embodied in this project."²⁰⁰

Dosse does little else to justify this stark conjoining of terms, but it is wholly insufficient to equate interrelationships transitively to

²⁰⁰ Dosse, 21-22.

structuralism. The interrelationships of linguistic terms certainly characterizes the new mission of that field, which moved in the modern era (with Jakobson and Saussure) beyond the earlier taxonomic model. But, surely, the inductive reason of general laws — while the data, i.e. interrelationships, was a novel formulation — is at least as old as the Greeks! Dosse makes no distinction here of whether, in fact, Jakobson's inductive practice is in any way "structural," or, in the fetishism of scientific jargon, structure becomes a substitute for "general laws."

One shortcoming of Dosse's narrative remains the inattention to site/geographic import outside of France. If, as he argues, the birth of a new method occurs from the intercourse between Jakobson and Lévi-Strauss, how does New York's exile community interact? How did this community set conditions and repercussions in Paris of the 1960s? If the "entire structuralist method is embodied in this project," then can we induce a discursive scheme from Dosse?

Certainly, the psychoanalysts have shown us the value of what we leave out as, often, more valuable than what we directly say. This single paragraph of Dosse's which until now offers the most significant evidence of alternative structural forefathers to this point in the book, is thus a rich text in its lacunae. Let us consider the narrative techniques one by one.

Dosse writes of Dumezil: "He would not, for example, have accepted being included in a history of structuralism, which was foreign to him. 'I am not, I do not have to be or not to be a structuralist.' His position was *unequivocal*, and he went so far as to

refuse any reference to the word 'structure' in order to avoid any form of co-optation."²⁰¹

But clearly, this safeguard proved insufficient. Dosse soon after writes of his dilemma: "Given this, can we go against his will and evoke some of the innovations of this adventurer in Indo-European mythology in the context of the development of the structuralist paradigm? Yes, and as he received him in the Academy, Levi Strauss was right in saying that the word 'structure,' or 'structural,' would have come immediately to mind had Dumezil not refused it in 1973.

This stubbornness is important evidence within my Bourdienne analysis because it indicates an overt discursive struggle between three specific agents: George Dumezil, Levi Strauss, and the latter's charismatic champion Dosse. While I cannot argue with Levi Strauss's desire to relate Dumezil's work to the anthropologist's territorially limited definition, I do take particular umbrage with Dosse's collaboration. Dosse's discussion never emerges from the most superficial gloss of the similarities between Levi Straus and Dumezil's respective curriculum vitae, naturally flourished with a fraternal interest in Mauss (and also Marcel Granet). This is critical in understanding Dosse's modus operandi: the historian suppresses any epistemological comparison wholly underneath the gravitas of charismatic personalities.

To avoid the pitfalls of nationalistic bias that Dosse encountered, I would instead defend directions based on formal or thematic

²⁰¹ Dosse, 32.

similarities, rather than geographic or chronological continuities. Firstly, following Foucault, an epistemic history of the ideas of structuralism would dispense immediately with the dialectic narrative that Dosse so eagerly produces regarding the uprising of French intellectuals against the academy. Dosse's approach represents what Foucault would term a "total history," a universal story that suppresses inconsistencies to the larger narrative. This is particularly curious given the extraordinary breadth of Dosse's project. Since he avoids any deep account but rather assembles an unprecedented collection of briefs on various French intellectuals, his chosen form ought to have elucidated fissures and discontinuities by statistical likelihood; it, however, produced a virtually seamless, but fictive narrative with no such discontinuities. As a case for critical historiography, furthermore, Dosse's airbrushed history brings attention to the power of charismatic authority to camouflage the processes of historical inscription. As in the fight for religious legitimation, Grand Narrative wrests from its reader any potential to discern actors and struggles on the field. The affect is to sublimate further the means by which historical subjects are inscribed in discourse, making the project of a critical historiography even more elusive.

CHAPTER 4
EKPHRASIS: HISTORY'S MIRAGE

Introduction

In contrast to Dosse's history organized around charismatic affinity, I argue in this chapter that a viable epistemic history could be constructed around the operation of ekphrasis. An epistemic history would neither present a narrative of pure continuity, nor one of radical discontinuity. Taking an ekphrastic episteme, a number of accounts would simply connect visually informed theorists to one another. It would explain their theoretical affinities, perhaps trace common homologues, and importantly offer attention to differences and epistemic infelicities. Such a configuration of actors and theories would not have a discreet beginning or ending, but rather would offer a swatch from a larger network of relationships. The possibility of a multitude of such histories becomes available, and their historiographic value must be evaluated not on comprehensiveness, but rigor in describing a specific set of relations within the field.

Let me begin the case for such an episteme with an examination of terms: ekphrasis, from the Greek for "out" and "to speak," has been defined in the English language as "a plain declaration or interpretation of a thing" since the early 18th century.²⁰² The term, though, is now widely used to describe that body of poetry which

²⁰² Oxford University Press, *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2000) <<http://resolver.library.cornell.edu/misc/3862894>>. Accessed 19 November 2006.

portrays an existing painting or sculpture. The practice finds its origins in Homer, but also shows notable development in several works by Vasari and his contemporaries. For the initial section of this chapter, then, we will consider rhetorical works describing historical artworks, a definition I will append as the chapter progresses. The term, "description," poses more obdurate challenge; both etymology and current usage indicate a more ambivalent mode of output—description may occur in words, sketches, or even paintings. For the time being, the only other appreciable difference between description and ekphrasis will be the source: description does not specify an original mode or object, but any object capable of description may serve. As mentioned earlier, ekphrasis will refer to those works based on an artwork.²⁰³

Finally, and perhaps most tenuous, the relationship between the visual and the rhetorical must be granted some sort of exemption, at least temporarily. Numerous scholars offer the tools with which a compelling opposition between the two terms would be dissolved effortlessly. I in no way, then, ought to be mistaken for promoting such an immutable difference; instead, I would plot the two terms as coexistent with overlapping spectra. As WJT Mitchell writes:

[Literature,] insofar as it is written or printed, has an unavoidable visual component which bears a specific relation to an auditory component, which is why it makes

²⁰³ I will ultimately reverse this simplification, since ekphrasis will always posit an object of description, even, as I will show, if that object is an antepositioned simulacra.

a difference whether a novel is read aloud or silently. We are also allowed to notice that literature, in techniques like ekphrasis and description, as well as in more subtle strategies of formal arrangement, involves virtual or imaginative experiences of space and vision that are no less real for being indirectly conveyed through language.²⁰⁴

Mitchell, along with Leonard Barkan, identifies this multi-modality as "hybridity," but this term holds little value, since it points not to a coexistent condition, but rather concurrent modalities, which are constitutive and defining rather than conditional and contingent. (In fairness, Barkan more patiently makes the case for hybridity based on the bastard conjunction of theater and picture.)²⁰⁵ So, as perceptual subjects, it is unlikely whether we could ever isolate or extract one perceptual mode from the others; this chapter, then, will employ frankly the "visual," to denote a real art object made of traditional materials, and the "rhetorical," to denote a form intended to be read as text. I insist that the difference is not casual, and does not deny the aforementioned "hybridity," but recognizes that deconstruction of vision and rhetoric would yield a discursive nihilism.

This problematic relationship between vision and rhetoric, art and literature, and even the nihilist threat therein, is precisely

²⁰⁴ W. J. T. Mitchell, "Showing seeing: a critique of visual culture," *Journal of Visual Culture* 1.2 (2002): 165-81,

<<http://vcu.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/1/2/165>>.

²⁰⁵ Leonard Barkan, "Making Pictures Speak: Renaissance Art, Elizabethan Literature, Modern Scholarship," *Renaissance Quarterly* 48.2 (1995): 342.

responsible for Otto Pächt's denouncement of the practice. By the early 1930's, the leading art historian of the Viennese School chided translating imagery into "poetic description," which, Pächt insisted, was a dangerous, misleading practice that strips the artwork of its value and function.²⁰⁶ Pächt's rebuke, while dismissive of the literary tradition of ekphrasis (indeed, his essay so thoroughly dismisses the practice as not to name it once in the entirety of his paper), nevertheless offers such well-argued caveats as to warrant a closer appraisal. This chapter, then, will look at theoretical approaches to ekphrasis, first, by reviewing some literature that indicates to this author that any ekphrastic work necessarily furthers an aesthetic theory. As I argue such, I will then ask whether ekphrastic writing can be produced for subjects outside of the fine arts, or whether writing about an artwork is essential to the genre. As I conclude affirmatively that any visual material may inform ekphrastic writing, I will devote the final part of the chapter to the question of whether an original image proves necessary for ekphrasis, or if a simulacral ekphrasis holds equal semiotic consequence.

Leonard Barkan notes that ekphrasis "stands as the emblem of a kind of utopian poetics."²⁰⁷ Barkan locates this utopia not in the poets themselves, but in scholars, who attempt to promote a "unifying insight that transcends medium, form, and the contingencies of

²⁰⁶ Christopher S. Wood, *The Vienna School Reader: Politics and Art Historical Method in the 1930s* (New York; Cambridge, Mass.: Zone Books; Distributed by the MIT Press, 2000) 182.

²⁰⁷ Barkan, 327.

historical moment."²⁰⁸ If we are skeptical of the possibility of that utopian promise being fulfilled through ekphrasis, we at least can hardly garner malicious intent from the tradition; before happily consenting, though, I will go through several of Pächt's most compelling criticisms, to see whether his revulsion provides a needed defense. An initial criticism Pächt sees in ekphrasis (again, I am substituting the word more consistently, where Pächt would resort to one of a variety of derogative terms) lies in its making popular, even vulgar, art history for the masses.²⁰⁹ Pächt consents that there is an "active need" for such a measure, i.e., for a summary means for facile understanding of the arts, but Pächt's objection rests more with the teller than the reader. His concern lies in the mistaken identity by the reader of the writer—a mistake that credits the writer with "scientific truth" or honest objectivity, a promise, Pächt is sure, that cannot be satisfied.

Though the history of ekphrasis suggests that the term presents a transposition of image into writing, by following Leonard Barkan, I insist that any such tactic is, in fact, a subtly violent break with its image. Showing that an original is wholly unnecessary for ekphrasis to operate, the written transposition can only be unfulfilled. Instead, any written account of an image antepositions a restricted image in place of the natural image. This arrangement poses an interesting antinomy: how can writing posit an image if that writing is incapable of such a transposition? The resolution of this contradiction will

²⁰⁸ Barkan, 328.

²⁰⁹ Wood, 181.

occupy this remainder of the chapter, returning, finally, to the relevance of this question to the historiographer. I aim to bridge this antinomy with a (perhaps unwelcomed) reading of Greimas inspired by my understanding of Derrida's *writing*.

Given that ekphrasis, at a superficial level, appears to transfer signification from the pictorial to the linguistic, investigation of Greimas's "Figurative Semiotics and the Semiotics of the Plastic Arts" is an understandable choice for comparison; as I hope to show, both hold unforeseen relevance to critical historiography. "Figurative Semiotics and the Semiotics of the Plastic Arts"²¹⁰ offers an opportune entry into early Greimassian investigations of the figurative; once I recount the primary steps of the article, I will demonstrate that within Greimas's understanding of the figurative—and especially figurativization—there rests the possibility of a delineation of the operation of writing, a theory for which, if Greimas had been more sensitive to Derrida's grammatology, Greimassian semiotics might provide a basis. It is this theory of the operation of writing, I argue, that must inform any historiographical project.

The Impossible Functor

The process of transposition, that is, converting visual content into words, angers Pächt deeply. He very credibly argues that the visual content of an artwork lies outside language, and any attempt to move that content into words sufficiently destroys that initial aesthetic

²¹⁰ To which I will henceforth refer as "Figurative Semiotics."

system. Pächt notes that this transposition is itself an "artistic" task,²¹¹ implying that the move, then, to represent the artwork is undone, and all we can hope to find is another artwork. The corrective, since Pächt is not against all forms of "pictorial expressions,"²¹² might be a rigorously scientific approach to description. Pächt even outlines what such an approach might look like:

A good description [...] must emerge from the center of an imminent aesthetic frame of reference and articulate the essential structural characteristics of the object. The description is formed not from an external point of view, not on a mere similarity, but on an inner grasp of the coherence of the whole. Only then will the description be not an arbitrarily attached label but a true conceptual symbol that serves as a base of operations for any further research.²¹³

Literary description not only stands outside of the inner structure of the artwork (i.e., from a "non-immanent" position), but more insidiously, the describer assumes the "standpoint of a naturalistic observer,"²¹⁴ thereby feigning truth. For Pächt, this observer's voice is nothing more than "pure convention," and can offer only a "mnemonic aid," that is, a verbal surrogate for a visual phenomenon.

²¹¹ Wood, 181.

²¹² Wood, 186.

²¹³ Wood, 188-189.

²¹⁴ Wood, 188.

Poets are not Pächt's only target, though, and the Viennese art historian challenges even the descriptive capabilities of colleagues, whose work, though perhaps an "expression of correct partial insights," nevertheless may prove similarly "symptomatic."²¹⁵ Pächt outlines a division in the way historians describe imagery: either historians obtain ideas from independent works, or they use deduction to acquire conceptual frames for several works.²¹⁶ The latter, Pächt notes, "guarantees its own scientific format from the start."²¹⁷

The issue of scientific truth, or more generally, scientific treatment of an art object, is a more complicated principle within the essay. A science in this sense must be understood more systematically or syllogistically. It reflects not a move towards mechanistic measurement, but rather immanently defined systematic study, through which both the proposed form of examination and the exam itself are presented under overt criteria. "Poeticizing description," on the other hand, conceals its mutating perspective in its own artifice, but fails to cede the scientific voice of authority. For Pächt, this authority sufficiently convinces the masses that they possess adequate understanding of the original, and that through the ekphrastic description, retrieve all significance that had been present in the original. Pächt writes:

A separate scientific language however—for this is what terminological questions require—can only be the aim of

²¹⁵ Wood, 182.

²¹⁶ Wood, 183.

²¹⁷ Wood, 183.

research that fundamentally refuses to achieve effects through language outside the domain of scholarship, therefore deliberately renouncing any illegitimately gained popularity.²¹⁸

Relegated safely to the domain of scholarship, such jargon-specific description will not disrupt the original work from its audience, but merely, within a sharply delineated net of academism, will only offer unarmful scientific description.

At this point, I would like to pause and add some shape to the barrage of protests in Pächt's article. First, there are several confluences that, in the heat of the argument, Pächt seems to admit out of carelessness. To bestow maximum credibility to Pächt, I must first address these contradictions to proceed to the more valuable parts of his remonstrance. Pächt often chides "systemless description," but surely a poetic ekphrasis may exhibit, indeed may have been created, within a fastidious system. Such a system would doubtless still trouble Pächt. System, then, cannot be taken to mean schematic procedure or construction, but instead, like syllogism, must offer an imminent means for verification. "System" under this more generous read poses no immediate threat to Pächt's logic.

Another related confluence is the arguably exchangeable use of "description" and "poesis." With this alternation, Pächt obscures whom he criticizes, whether it be anyone who describes the visual object or whether culpability rests with the poet alone. Since Pächt

²¹⁸ Wood, 187.

presciently notes that "words have exceptionally blurred and indeterminate content"²¹⁹ (another charge, consequently, he levels at ekphrasis), we can assume that any sharp delineation between the two would have been dubious, perhaps the only admissible difference being that one obfuscates more artfully than the other. Therefore, I assert that for Pächt, it matters not whether the description takes place in prose or verse, but that either form may seek to supplant the original object.

More serious conflations, however, include the almost reckless fusion of words used to designate that appositive image. Pächt calls the objects of ekphrastic writing artworks, perceptions, and phenomena. This leads the reader to wonder whether Pächt's complaint lies solely in ekphrasis of the artwork, or if it applies equally to all description of visual culture. We might be able to ameliorate this problem given that Pächt repeatedly locates the danger in the abuse of appealing to the populace, that is, any description that masquerades as synonymous with some other modality while at its core, seeking only to deceive. It is this deception, the intentional trickery of those who desire simpler description, upon which Pächt focuses his tirade.

Very similarly, Pächt almost interchangeably uses the words reception and perception, further complicating the aforementioned haziness by broadening the possible arena for misrepresentation from visual culture to encompass errors in perception itself. Thus, we no longer know if the obscurity lies in the visual object, in the perceptual

²¹⁹ Wood, 186.

operation that delivers the phenomenon to the subject (or a faulty percept), or within the subject him- or herself. This particular obscurity needs some sort of resolution, because with it we have not just a flippant terminological carelessness, but substantial implications for the nature of the artwork or literary product to the subject.

In fact, this is Pächt's very point: there is something fundamentally at risk in the instance of ekphrasis—it is not merely a question of taste. Pächt writes: "The danger of offering a completely misleading and irrelevant interpretation, under the suggestive power of [the] linguistic image" perseveres.²²⁰ This danger threatens because underneath the rebuke, Pächt clings to a formidable aesthetic theory, one that he fails here to articulate, but nonetheless a theory that relies upon the autonomy of the artwork. We see glimpses of the Viennese school's aesthetic theory in this passage:

Only as long as one was convinced that the phenomenon to be described stood firm and unchanging, as well as independent from each beholder, could one believe that the argument was actually about whether to use more concretely vivid or more abstract expressions... The subject of description...seemed nothing more than a question of terminology...²²¹

²²⁰ Wood, 186.

²²¹ Wood, 186.

In a succinct but no less powerful parenthetical retort, Pächt insists, however, that this is not a terminological problem.²²² Instead, Pächt continues:

The quality of the description is dependent on the quality of the phenomenon. If I have a thoroughly formed phenomenon (far removed from the chaotic or fragmented), it is very easy to describe. For then perception itself is no longer blurred (diffuse or complex), blind and dumb, but articulated, and thus intelligent and knowing, in the truest sense of the word "meaning-full" (*sinn-voll*). One has to evoke then only this meaning, the internal order of the aesthetic phenomenon, and the image itself begins to "speak."²²³

This remarkable passage testifies to an underlying supposition on the nature of the artwork. Pächt holds the artwork to possess immanent structure, and it is that immanent, "intelligent" structure from which the aesthetic phenomenon emerges. This can only happen in an artwork which maintains "internal order" autonomously; any dependence on external order, and the phenomenon cannot maintain full meaning, but must always defer to an external semantic system. We glean from Pächt that it is ekphrastic description, far worse than fragmentation, that mutes the original work. By giving literal voice, it ruptures the autonomy of the artwork, making it a slave to the written work for its meaning. The artwork, then, has no need to speak, nor

²²² Wood, 186.

²²³ Wood, 186.

could it, since the visual phenomenon always remains silent, drowned in the ekphrastic expression.

The unfolding of the autonomous artwork enjoys an almost mystical treatment in twentieth-century German aesthetic theory; Pächt's essay fits within this tradition, showing some affinities with Sedlmayr and even Adorno and Horkheimer. But even from the vantage point of another, seemingly removed school of thought—Italian semiotics—the castrating power of ekphrasis can be corroborated. In a slim essay from his now classic *Travels in Hyperreality*, Umberto Eco describes the power of the image. Realizing that in order to make a radio broadcast more "real," the announcer of Radio Alice referenced a movie scene.²²⁴ Somehow, Eco realized, that this tactic marked a "singular" event, for as police struggled to break down the door, the narration could only resort to cinematic tropes. Eco concludes that either "life is lived as a work of art," or, more interestingly for Eco, images constitute memory.²²⁵

In case readers pronounce this epidemic to be the inevitable symptom of being raised within a media generation, Eco quickly dismisses this from being a byproduct of the modern condition. He writes:

To tell the truth, it isn't even necessary to talk about new generations: If you are barely middle-aged, you will have learned personally the extent to which experience (love,

²²⁴ Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyperreality: Essays*, 1st ed. (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986) 213.

²²⁵ Eco, 213.

fear, or hope) is filtered through "already seen" images [...]
We must only bear in mind that mankind [sic] has never
done anything else, and before Nadar and the Lumières, it
used other images, drawn from pagan carvings or the
illuminated manuscripts of the Apocalypse.²²⁶

Eco's careful prose repeats Pächt's view that the image holds its
own voice; since experience is "filtered" through images, rather than
narrated, Eco preserves the image's ability to communicate
autonomously. And, importantly, Eco insists, images throughout the
"history of political and social relations" have held this constitutive
position.

To further illustrate, Eco turns to a photograph of a young
Milanese gunman posed with his arms aiming his weapon, a photo
that had recently circulated widely throughout the Italian press. The
image, writes Eco, immediately joins the ranks of powerful, historical
photographs taken throughout modern history, because like
monumental photographs, this image "has become a myth and has
condensed numerous speeches."²²⁷ Eco continues:

It [the photograph in mention] has surpassed the
individual circumstance that produced it; it no longer
speaks of that single character or of those characters, but
expresses concepts. It is unique, but at the same time it
refers to other images that preceded it or that, in

²²⁶ Eco, 214.

²²⁷ Eco, 216.

imitation, have followed it...Sometimes it isn't a photograph but a painting, or a poster.²²⁸

Barthes writes similarly of the mythic power of photographs, and like Eco, attributes the constantly circulating chain of signifiers to its mythic status.²²⁹ This photograph did not describe a "single event," but rather posed "an argument."²³⁰ Like Pächt, then, the image for Eco, too, derives aesthetic force through its autonomy: though it refers constantly behind and ahead of itself, it nonetheless does so from within its own internal structure. A caption, an ekphrastic gesture, could only cleave the image's ongoing chain of signification, seeking to anchor through unchanging text the multivalent image to journalistic specificity.

Pächt's admonition, then, fits appropriately for any aesthetic theory that confirms upon the image the possibility of autonomous signification. Within looser traditions, though, Pächt's worst visions come to fruition. In a well-written and researched, but nonetheless conventional book entitled, *How Poets See the World*, Willard Spiegelman, lacking a developed aesthetic approach to the visual object, deracinates autonomy from the ekphrastic artwork.

²²⁸ Eco, 216.

²²⁹ Related arguments keep the critical literature on photography plenteous. For an early, scathing account of predatory photography, see Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, 1st Picadore USA ed. (New York: Picador USA ; Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001) 208.. Less hostile, but less rigorous is John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London; New York: British Broadcasting Corporation; Penguin Books, 1977) 165.. Regarding photography as fascism, also in direct dialog with Eco, see Berger, 165. Finally, an extremely recent look at photographic exhibition and violence, can be found in Mieke Bal, *Double Exposures: The Subject of Cultural Analysis* (New York: Routledge, 1996) 338. and in Errol Morris, "Most Curious Thing," *The New York Times* May 25 2008, , sec. WK; Editorial Desk; Op-Extra: Selections from Opinion Online: 12.

²³⁰ Eco, 217.

Spiegelman begins his chapter by recounting a definition of the literary genre of ekphrasis. He begins by citing Weiss's postulate that ekphrasis "is generally taken as a 'verbal representation of visual representation',"²³¹ but amends this claim by recognizing the poet's additional ventriloquism by sometimes assigning voice to a character within the frame. Unfortunately, the rhetorical device in Weiss's original positions the artwork within a mimetic, and, consequently, dependent relationship. Before the chapter even approaches an artwork, it is already, in Pächt's terms, non-autonomous, pointing externally to an object it will always approximate, but never embody.

This de-corporealizing process persists in the first discussion of Weiss's ekphrasis of a fictional fresco. Spiegelman cites John Hollander's term, "notional," to describe a made-up picture within literature.²³² The term, though, reifies a rhetorical bias: a notional image exists in concept alone. Weiss's fresco was created through text, and therefore, for both Hollander and Spiegelman, is "notional" or conceptual, and therefore, does not exist as an image, but only as a linguistic construct. If we are to presume the innocuous relationship of ekphrastic text on the image, then we must allow the possibility that a textually described object refers to a real image, regardless of historical verifiability. Since a notional work does not grant even the possibility of a real image, we can deduce that ekphrasis, even in the

²³¹ Willard Spiegelman, *How Poets See the World: The Art of Description in Contemporary Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) 112.

²³² Spiegelman, 115.

presence of a real image, similarly reduces that relationship to a notional one.

This reductive corollary, which inevitably binds an image (real or not) to a notion, seems increasingly well-founded as Spiegelman's chapter develops. Spiegelman spends some time conjuring a purpose for the ekphrastic form, but each speculation reifies the subservient position of the image. Spiegelman, with revisionary boldness, writes:

Weiss and his speaker [in the poem] have added a fifth cause to Aristotle's four: a relational one. *Esse est percipi*, nothing exists but as (or until) it is perceived. Hence the importance of description in the long poem, as neither filler nor ornament: it links sensibilities on both sides of the frame. Ekphrasis itself occupies the rich middle ground between narrative on one side and meditation on the other. Not only does Weiss present the fresco's self-description, he also allows it to turn its voice toward its maker [...]²³³

This telling passage offers several confirmatory signs. Between the second and third quoted sentences, Spiegelman implicitly equates perception with description, leveling an artwork to "nothingness" until substantiated by text. The subsequent two sentences ensure the disappearance of the "aesthetic" from the "sensible." Ekphrasis, here serving as the descriptive chain between narrative on one side of the frame, ostensibly ought to link the subject to an image. In that

²³³ Spiegelman, 118.

image's place, though, Spiegelman situates not the image but meditation, the fresco's own narrative converses with its beholder.

Spiegelman writes: "Unveiled to its audience, the fresco enters time, acquires its own historical and spiritual identity from the glares and glimpses of its viewers."²³⁴ But again, the unveiling for this notional work can only be accomplished through word. The claim to truth in this work remains the utter domination of the image by its linguistic unveiling.

The "occasion" (as Spiegelman calls it) of an actual, historical artwork proves no better ground for the likes of the image. Moving to an ekphrastic poem by Irving Feldman written on George Segal's plaster casts, Spiegelman writes:

Does art imitate nature, or the other way around? It hardly matters, for Feldman slyly reminds his readers of the implicit metaphor-making in representation and consequently in all knowledge: "About these figures we don't ask, 'Who are they?' / We ask, 'Who, who is it they remind us of?'" In other words, because they lack genuine identity or integrity they must be merely *like* something else. But if they are better than we are, then it is we, not the statues who are the pale imitations. We are returned firmly to the realm of the simulacrum.²³⁵

The identity crises introduced by the poet, and certainly absent in the silent original, brings about an odd twist for Spiegelman. The

²³⁴ Spiegelman, 118.

²³⁵ Spiegelman, 126. (Emphasis original.)

original sculpture, in its nondescript mimesis, though an original artwork, loses its status and falls into simulacral flux. But, Spiegelman contends, we are imitations, and so the critic thrusts both object and spectator into tautological peril. Though viewer loses origin and falls into the realm of the copy, the sculpture never regains its independence: it is always mimetic, always referring to the viewer referring back.

The final section of Spiegelman's chapter offers his most potentially original contribution on ekphrasis. Realizing the paucity of critical analyses ekphrasis based on non-representational art, Spiegelman speculates that for the ekphrasis of an artwork "in the absence of all mimesis," the poet "has really only two paths to follow."²³⁶ He or she might present a "scientifically accurate 'description'" of the forms, or else "the poet may use the painting as a springboard for reverie, reflection, or," Spiegelman continues, the poet may seek to translate "its effects on and intentions for us, into appropriate linguistic structures."²³⁷ Pächt, naturally, would likely take issue with each of these options, and particularly the needless dichotomizing. Scientifically accurate description, as mentioned earlier, could not simultaneously claim itself as art; rather, such a work would need to relinquish its dual status, seeking instead to understand the original work immanently. The latter path more overtly exposes the rapacious relationship of the ekphrasis, which quite literally, springboards off the plane of the picture into its own

²³⁶ Spiegelman, 129.

²³⁷ Spiegelman, 129.

reflection. His chapter ends with the consummation of Pächt's opening forecast, that ekphrasis might fool the reader into "the impression that they [the artworks] have been reproduced with poetic means, illustrated in words."²³⁸ Pächt promptly dismisses this possibility:

In contrast to the high prestige that poetic description enjoys, the theoretical foundation of the approach is rather slight, for it necessarily presupposes a concept of scientific truth—truth as faithful reflection, as imitation of reality—that has become untenable since the advent of modern epistemology.²³⁹

The path to popularity via literary or poetic description spells an unhealthy competition between the original and is diluted "extended caption."²⁴⁰ In a cogent essay on ekphrasis in Sidney and Shakespeare, Leonard Barkan confirms this anxiety. Barkan recounts that, since the time of the Greeks, poetry, theater, and visual arts have vied for highest prestige.²⁴¹ Barkan writes: "Mimesis is by its very nature a discourse of competition—or, at the very least, of comparison."²⁴² In the case of ekphrasis, this competition often becomes a set of "contests," not only to determine the closest representation, but also to vet media themselves.²⁴³ But mimetic dexterity only partially describes the games. Again, Barkan: "And, as I

²³⁸ Wood, 181.

²³⁹ Wood, 181.

²⁴⁰ Term from Spiegelman, 113.

²⁴¹ Barkan, 341.

²⁴² Barkan, 342.

²⁴³ Barkan, 342.

have already suggested, the bid for prestige is one of the primary modalities of theoretical thinking about any cultural enterprise from Plato onwards."²⁴⁴

Early on, however, Barkan establishes that modalities are not the only competitors; artistic creators vie for dominance, too. In a passage selected from *An Apology for Poetry*, Barkan demonstrates that Sidney most significantly contends that poets "exist in a unique relation to both nature and truth," and that, unlike historians and philosophers, poets have creative faculties that trump even nature.²⁴⁵ What strikes Barkan as most astonishing is that in this example of mimetic prowess, the visual artist makes no entrance. Barkan rightly insists that this stands in contrast to the traditional *topoi*, which credits painters to be the most "literally appropriate" creative competitors to nature.²⁴⁶

Given the impoverished backdrop of painting in Elizabethan culture, Barkan surmises that Sidney devoted his poetics to creating "something out of nothing."²⁴⁷ Barkan speculates that Sidney "appropriates and then suppresses the visual artist because he wants his poetry to make pictures but does not want the pictures to be real."²⁴⁸ Instead, Barkan argues, the only speaking image for Sidney was the theater.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁴ Barkan, 341-342.

²⁴⁵ Barkan, 336.

²⁴⁶ Barkan, 336.

²⁴⁷ Barkan, 337.

²⁴⁸ Barkan, 337.

²⁴⁹ Barkan, 337-338.

In this adroit move, Barkan suggests that for England, the theater served in parallel to Italy's rich image culture. The suggestion seems well founded, and Barkan supports his claim with additional evidence, such as the prevalence of theatrical metaphors in London culture where its Italian correlate would display visual ones. More pregnantly, Barkan writes:

A middle course between the theater as a mechanism of visual composition and the theater as a signifier of loftier geometries would involve a recognition that both the theater and the visual arts are in this period coming to understand their own discourses and practices; the two media become interrelated as they attempt to define and promote themselves.²⁵⁰

Drawing borders, then, becomes the central catalyst for the two discourses to become intertwined. While Barkan continues to mount proof for theater's interconnections to visual media, I, too, would like to bring attention to Barkan's own methodologies, which echo an interdisciplinary approach. Though I will postpone a discussion of method for the time being, I intend to return to performance studies to conclude the discussion on ekphrasis.

Returning to the article, Barkan devotes the second half of his essay to the works of Shakespeare, for if the theater provided Sidney the English corollary of Italy's visual arts culture, then, Barkan rightly suspects, the searchlight shined back upon the stage would likely

²⁵⁰ Barkan, 339.

reveal inversely valuable insights into the ekphrastic moment come alive. Barkan begins by asking how the theater "stages" the "conflicts" between image and word for the title of best mimetic mode.²⁵¹ He finds in Shakespeare a straightforward answer: "He celebrates the drama as speaking picture by selectively withholding speech from picture and picture from speech."²⁵²

As evidence, Barkan recalls *The Winter's Tale*, in which the likeness of Hermione, likely a statue of the dead mother, comes to life.²⁵³ Barkan suggests that so long as the statue cannot speak, she remains a statue, even on the stage.²⁵⁴ Shakespeare, in Barkan's delightful reading, notes that the sculpture took many a year to be "performed," that is, "perfected."²⁵⁵ When the sculpture gains the ability to speak, though, Shakespeare delivers the chiasmus: the sculpture becomes perfected though its performance:

It is at that moment that the central dream of all ekphrasis can finally be realized, that is, that the work of art is so real it could *almost* come to life. Theater removes the *almost*.²⁵⁶

Barkan admits *Cymbeline* to the essay in proof of another formulation of ekphrasis on the stage. In the drawn-out narrative, Iachimo, spying on sleeping (and faithful) Imogen, contents himself to write down the "'contents of the story'" illustrated in the room's

²⁵¹ Barkan, 342.

²⁵² Barkan, 342.

²⁵³ Barkan, 342-343.

²⁵⁴ Barkan, 343.

²⁵⁵ Barkan, 343.

²⁵⁶ Barkan, 343.

pictures and tapestries.²⁵⁷ The audience must take him at his word, for we never witness directly that ekphrasis.²⁵⁸ Barkan relays Iachimo's report, revealed two scenes later, followed by commentary:

"Never saw I figures / So likely to report themselves." But they do *not* report themselves. Shakespeare's theater teases us with their absence. His audience sits in London watching a bare stage and hears a verbal description of classical pictures in words while, as a perfect complement, Posthumous sits in Rome and is treated to an ekphrastic rendering of the art work decorating Imogen's bedroom back in Britain.²⁵⁹

Barkan asserts that Shakespeare thus stages "the drama of cultural absence and poetic recuperation" experienced in the geographic dislocations between Italy and England.²⁶⁰ With *Hamlet*, Barkan places the ekphrastic keystone in the written staging of the scene en scene of the King's death and betrayal. To this scene, Barkan attributes the height of "visual narrative ekphrastically rendered."²⁶¹ Barkan likens the "tableau" to the "painted panes of a saint's life,"²⁶² but unlike those tableau, which seek credence based on their mimetic claims, with the substitution of Lucianus's name for

²⁵⁷ Barkan, 343.

²⁵⁸ Barkan, 343.

²⁵⁹ Barkan, 344.

²⁶⁰ Barkan, 344.

²⁶¹ Barkan, 345.

²⁶² Barkan, 345.

Claudius's, Shakespeare proves "that the relation between images and words may be radically unstable."²⁶³

Strictly speaking, though, Barkan, while providing three splendid meditations on the stage, never actually answers his own question when he asks how the theater stages the conflicts between modalities,²⁶⁴ but rather, only addresses the conflicts between image and work, abandoning the conflict of performance. In his original question, Barkan remarks that theater "enters into the history of pictorial discourse because it enacts the millennial contests concerting the relative power of picture and word in capturing mimesis."²⁶⁵ While the first two references strike me as plausible within a more conservative reading of ekphrasis, Barkan's closing instance in *Hamlet* reveals a *différance* of another kind.

In the case of *Hamlet*, and, I would argue, in earlier cases of ekphrasis of simulacra, the written ekphrasis occurs in the book. As the play describes the silent images, it does so with the knowledge that those images are not yet existent. The means to reach ekphrasis in the play, though, becomes salient while in Weiss's poem, the ekphrastic mechanism remained hidden behind the "notional" fresco. Shakespeare's ekphrasis knows that it will be "perfected," in the sense of "performed." As such, it is quite sure that an "original" image will exist, but this original exists antepositionally. Barkan's example makes this clear.

²⁶³ Barkan, 346.

²⁶⁴ Barkan, 342.

²⁶⁵ Barkan, 342.

Ekphrasis always, then, anticipates an antepositional original, but like a demon, it holds a secret. With its immanent birth through performance, it must vampirically feed off death. In Hamlet, that death was Gonzago's, for the king's death enabled the antepositive original's performance. In occurrences where a true original image exists, ekphrasis nevertheless requires a victim. In this case, Ekphrasis does not require the stage, though, since its etymology promises its own ability to rise on its own, and speak as it will. That voice necessarily and at all times draws its own existence from the death of the real artwork, supplanted by its ensuing copy made real through ekphrasis.

Greimas and the Operation of Inscription

Algirdas Julien Greimas began his career in Lithuania with a short study of Don Quixote, though he himself recognizes the 1956 publication of his article, "L'actualité du saussurisme," as a milestone.²⁶⁶ In the latter article, Greimas investigated works by Saussure, Merleau-Ponty, and Lévi-Strauss.²⁶⁷ He attributes to this work an understanding of paradigmatic analysis which would come to form half of his influential discourse analysis. The second half would come from his discovery of the progenitor of Russian formalism, Vladimir Propp. Greimas recounts that Lévi-Strauss recommended

²⁶⁶ Algirdas Julien Greimas, Paul Perron, and Frank Collins, "On Meaning," *New Literary History* 20.3, Greimassian Semiotics (1989): 540.

²⁶⁷ Greimas, Perron, and Collins, 541.

Propp's work on Russian fairy tales to Greimas's friend, Roland Barthes:

[...] that there existed an American translation of a certain Vladimir Propp. Barthes gave me the reference and I sent to Indiana University Press for the book. Although this is anecdotal, I would like to say that Propp furnished the syntagmatic or syntactic component for my work. My theoretical genius, if I can so call it, was a form of "bricolage." I took a little Lévi-Strauss and added some Propp. This is what I call the first stage of semiotics.²⁶⁸

The second stage, according to Greimas, came shortly thereafter, whereupon close study of the work by Danish linguist Louis Hjelmslev imparted onto Greimassian linguistics led, by 1970, to an attempt "to formulate better the elements of narrativity."²⁶⁹ Greimas writes that beginning in the 1970's:

What became obvious is that if you want to construct a narrative grammar, then it has to be a modal grammar. This is where the revolutionary concept of the whole project took place since, if doing or causing are broken down, then, for example, to communicate can be analyzed as to cause to know. It is not a knowing-how but a causing to know, that is to say, the causing can be in either a realizing or a virtualizing position. Thus, doing or causing and being are modalities. From this point of view

²⁶⁸ Greimas, Perron, and Collins, 541.

²⁶⁹ Greimas, Perron, and Collins, 542.

the whole grammar is composed of modalities; the rest is simply content, semantics.²⁷⁰

Instigated by a 1985 conference at the University of Toronto, Greimas posited that he and his colleagues were already within a fourth stage of semiotics. In this stage, Greimas and his colleagues were considering the problem of a discursive grammar. It is just before this fourth stage, in 1984, that “Figurative Semiotics and the Semiotics of the Plastic Arts” was published, though it was written for an earlier project that went unpublished. Even by 1984, Greimas confessed that the text was “a bit out of date.”²⁷¹ For the purposes of my own study, however, it provides a much clearer entry into the work of Greimas, and offers an accessible case with which I will relate this problem of ekphrasis to the work of critical historiography. And while the paper, “Figurative Semiotics,” avoids the jargonic trappings that accompany the fourth stage of Greimassian semiotics, it nevertheless is of sufficient density to require first a cursory primer on Greimassian terms.

Greimas, in fact, published in 1979 an extensive dictionary of semiotics, released in 1982 under the English title, *Semiotics and Language: An Analytical Dictionary*. Its status as a dictionary is, actually, under debate,²⁷² and accordingly, I will instead draw from the

²⁷⁰ Greimas, Perron, and Collins, 542.

²⁷¹ First published as “Sémiotique figurative et sémiotique plastique,” in *Actes sémiotiques-Documents*, 60, and translated in Algirdas Julien Greimas, Frank Collins, and Paul Perron, “Figurative Semiotics and the Semiotics of the Plastic Arts,” *New Literary History* 20.3, Greimassian Semiotics (1989): 627-49.

²⁷² See Umberto Eco, Patrizia Magli, and Alice Otis, “Greimassian Semantics and the Encyclopedia,” *New Literary History* 20.3, Greimassian Semiotics (1989): 707-21.

excellent introduction Paul Perron wrote for *New Literary History's* 1989 volume dedicated to Greimas. In that introduction, Perron cites Hjelmslev's concept of the "semantic universe" as prominent within Greimassian semiotics.²⁷³ That universe, which is "coextensive with the concept of culture," essentially refers to "the totality of significations prior to its articulation."²⁷⁴ Perron notes a practical difficulty with the concept, though, and presents Greimas's solution:

[Since] the semantic universe (the set of the systems of values) cannot be conceived of in its totality, Greimas introduced the concepts of semantic microuniverses and universe of discourses. The semantic microuniverse, which is apprehensible as meaningful only if particularized and articulated, is paradigmatically and syntagmatically manifested by means of discourses.²⁷⁵

The microuniverse encompasses the paradigmatic axis but does not refer on its own; for a proper semiosis to occur, the syntagmatic must be introduced, thereby forming that particular discourse. These two axes, the paradigmatic and syntagmatic, are often described by Greimas (and, as Greimas notes, similarly described by the likes of Chomsky, Freud, and Hjelmslev) as surface structures—the latter—and deep structure—the former. Paradigms are deep in that they derive meaning from their unarticulated relationship to other (absent, but connoted) paradigms. The investigation and reduction of the

²⁷³ Paul Perron, "Introduction: A. J. Greimas," *New Literary History* 20.3, Greimassian Semiotics (1989): 525.

²⁷⁴ Perron, 525.

²⁷⁵ Perron, 525.

simplest set of such relationships ultimately defines the primary role of the semiotic square, a concept to which I will return.

“Figurative Semiotics” contains three parts, entitled, “Figurativity,” “The Plastic Signifier,” and finally, “Toward a Plastic Semiotics,” the latter of which only indicates a direction in which a semiotic investigation of plastic representation might occur, but it does not offer anything of a how-to guide.²⁷⁶ The article immediately poses a problem for a “visual semiotics,” given that such a semiotics cannot be readily identified as either of the two macrosemiotics resulting from the human condition, that is, as a “natural” language or world.²⁷⁷ Greimas questions, “Where do we place this phenomenon of the visual which is both ‘natural’—because it is manifested, ‘transcoded,’ within our verbal discourses—and ‘artificial’—because it constitutes, in the form of ‘images,’ an essential component of constructed poetic language?”²⁷⁸ He provisionally offers that visual semiotics must be defined by its “*planar structures*,” and that those structures work within “tridimensional space.”²⁷⁹ Greimas consents that such a formulation, already of “scarcely articulated specificity,” quickly vanishes when considered alongside of systems of writing or other modes of graphic representation.²⁸⁰ Without a more precise scope, Greimas proceeds to problematize the use of the word “semiotic” in that formulation; the word, semiotic, “implies that the markings

²⁷⁶ Perron, 523.

²⁷⁷ Greimas, Collins, and Perron, 628.

²⁷⁸ Greimas, Collins, and Perron, 629.

²⁷⁹ Greimas, Collins, and Perron, 629.

²⁸⁰ Greimas, Collins, and Perron, 629.

covering the surfaces chosen to receive those markings constitute signifying wholes, whose limits are yet to be defined, in turn constitute signifying systems.”²⁸¹ This implication “justifies” for Greimas the semiotic postulation regarding the materiality of the plastic arts.

But, in order to offer semiotic analysis, Greimas must ask a preliminary question. He writes, “Are visual configurations, which are constructed upon planar surfaces, representations?”²⁸² If so, Greimas continues, what kind of systems might they entail, and, can we recognize those systems as languages? “In other words,” Greimas writes, “can they speak of something other than themselves?”²⁸³ In the case of the letter “o,” Greimas argues that there is no iconic relationship between the visual depiction of the letter and its corresponding sound. Thus, the link between the two is “a correspondence between two systems—graphic and phonic—such that the figure-units produced by one of the systems can be globally homologated with the figure-units of another system,” never requiring any “natural” link between the two.²⁸⁴ This relationship never exceeds one of analogy.

On the other hand, in the creation of formal languages, while such languages may use equal visual signifiers—as an alphabet—“the internal organization of the visual figures is a matter of indifference to them.”²⁸⁵ That is, in the case of “writing as a system,” Greimas posits

²⁸¹ Greimas, Collins, and Perron, 629.

²⁸² Greimas, Collins, and Perron, 629.

²⁸³ Greimas, Collins, and Perron, 629.

²⁸⁴ Greimas, Collins, and Perron, 630.

²⁸⁵ Greimas, Collins, and Perron, 630.

“oppositions” between possible features (or the absence thereof) as constitutive, while formal languages use those signifiers in an independent and “discriminatory” way.²⁸⁶ Greimas articulates the importance of this distinction:

If we now set aside the rapprochement between graphic and phonic systems [...] we see that in the case of our two extreme examples, we can speak of two “representation systems” and mean two different things by that. Writing is an articulated visual mechanism which can represent anything (the semantic universe in its totality). Formal language on the contrary appears to be a “corpus of concepts” that can be represented in any way (using various symbol systems). What seemed especially interesting to us was to show that one and the same alphabet could be used to two different ends, that one and the same signifier could be articulated in two different ways and thus be used to constitute two different languages.²⁸⁷

This passage exhibits my primary criticism of Greimas and an internal inconsistency I will attempt to ameliorate with the introduction of a grammatological perspective.²⁸⁸ Greimas make clear in the alphabetic example the difference between the functioning of

²⁸⁶ Greimas, Collins, and Perron, 630.

²⁸⁷ Greimas, Collins, and Perron, 630.

²⁸⁸ While it would be sheer conjecture to surmise whether my forthcoming revision would be positively received by Greimas, he, nevertheless, was eager for constant revision to what he termed, the “semiotic project.”

writing as a representation of the semantic universe versus the disinterested use of writing in a formal language. The formal language, by definition, is unable to immanently comment upon its own formation; therefore, any system of writing can never function intertextually. For this, Greimas posits the need for a metalanguage or the transposition between discourse universes.

I charge, however, that the difference Greimas draws between the two kinds of writing are surface differences. The great power in Greimas's semiotics is its ability to think through operation; it is at its most advanced levels an operationalist endeavor. Writing at its current development within that project remains very much under-examined. In the above passage, writing in both cases represents simply a functional system which either refers to a semantic universe, capable when combined with a syntagmatic axis of dynamic, immanent discourse, *or* to the more arbitrary system of representation within a closed, artificial language. The explanation proves to be an incompatibility of approaches: the earliest stages of Greimas's semiotics belie a more unsatisfactory functionalist explanation; with the introduction of modalities in the "third stage" of semiotics, Greimas relocates the project to one of operationalism. In this process, however, he neglected to update his functional approach to writing; it is my prerogative here to do so. I will continue to trace this latent functionalism in "Figurative Semiotics," concluding the chapter with a suggestion for an operationalist account of writing.

Following the two types of representation, Greimas further complicates the scenario with the introduction of the age-old problem

of iconicity. Frustrated that “despite all the refinements that centuries of thought have brought to the concepts of ‘imitation’ and ‘nature,’”²⁸⁹ Greimas complains that nevertheless a sentiment persists that correlates the “likeness” of an image, as a “motivate” icon, to a referent in the real world. Such an imitation “presupposes a very thorough implicit analysis of ‘nature’ and a recognition of the fundamental articulations of the natural world” that the painter is said to copy.²⁹⁰ Greimas doubts that any such reduction can maintain fidelity to the “richness of the natural world.” Those marks on a canvas, he writes, “are perhaps identifiable as *figures*, but not as *objects* of the world.”²⁹¹ Greimas writes:

The concept of *imitation*, which in the communication structure refers to the enunciator’s sending instance, corresponds to the concept of *recognition*, which refers to the receiver’s instance. To “imitate” in the precarious conditions we have just described makes no sense unless the visual figures thus traced are offered to a spectator in order for him to recognize them as configurations of the natural world. But this is not “doing painting.”²⁹²

In this way, Greimas argues for an emphasis on “legibility of the natural world,” which generates the sense of imitation, rather than something manifest in the code of the image itself. For, what “is

²⁸⁹ Greimas, Collins, and Perron, 632.

²⁹⁰ Greimas, Collins, and Perron, 631.

²⁹¹ Greimas, Collins, and Perron, 630 Emphasis added.

²⁹² Greimas, Collins, and Perron, 631-632 Emphasis original.

‘naturally’ given?” Greimas asks.²⁹³ A figure (which, Greimas clarifies, is “constituted by features coming from different senses”), cannot be legible as an object without being transformed into an object.²⁹⁴ An object, “insofar as it is, for example, contrastable to ‘process,’ is interoceptive rather than exteroceptive, and is not ‘naturally’ inscribed in the primary image of the world,” Greimas adds parenthetically.²⁹⁵ Greimas later come to describe the dichotomy between exteroceptive and interoceptive as the “set of semic categories which articulate the semantic universe,” that, further, constitutes “a paradigmatic classification that enables us to distinguish figurative from non-figurative (or abstract) ones.”²⁹⁶ But, this remark traps the early Greimas in a tautology, one which essentially states that a figure is a figure until it is transformed into an object. The point of it, though, is to suggest that legibility requires an act on the part of an actor—the object is the conceptual result of such an engagement. Quickly, we notice in this relationship a problematic division between subject-object, an inconsistency that is immediately repeated:

It is this grid through which we read which causes the world to signify for us and it does so by allowing us to identify figures as objects, to classify them and link them together, to interpret movements as processes which are attributable or not attributable to subjects, and so on.

²⁹³ Greimas, Collins, and Perron, 632.

²⁹⁴ Greimas, Collins, and Perron, 632.

²⁹⁵ Greimas, Collins, and Perron, 632.

²⁹⁶ Algirdas Julien Greimas and Joseph Courtés, *Semiotics and Language: An Analytical Dictionary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982) 214.

This grid is of a semantic nature, not visual, auditive, or olfactory. It serves as a “code” for recognition which makes the world intelligible and manageable. Now we can see that it is the projection of this reading grid—a sort of “signified” of the world—onto a painted canvas that allows us to recognize the spectacle it is supposed to represent.²⁹⁷

As Perron explains the reading grid more plainly as the mechanism, “subject to cultural relativism, in which the figurative forms of visual figures are identified as ‘representing’ objects of the world transformed into object-signs through semiosis.”²⁹⁸ Objects, then, are “the result of reading constructions.”²⁹⁹ The idea of the reading grid eventually drops away from Greimassian semiotics, a result of an early formulation of the subject-object-act trio described in “Figurative Semiotics.” I posit that the reading grid dilemma is resolved when Greimas develops a more complex theory of “actantial grammar,” in which an actant performs an act—this is a more satisfactory expression that dissolves the functional subject-object into an operational relationship, one that refocuses action as modality and subject as perpetrator (actant) of that modal verb.

The fairly early model here involving reading grids (something that will eventually be subsumed under actantial analysis, I argue) causes a maltreatment of the role of writing, since writing is posited

²⁹⁷ Greimas, Collins, and Perron, 632.

²⁹⁸ Perron, 529.

²⁹⁹ Perron, 529.

always as an object—or, at least, as objectified—rather than as a process.³⁰⁰ I will continue to outline Greimas’s scheme for figurativization, a process crucial for interpreting a more satisfying semiotic theory of writing.

Given the interim role of the reading grid, which more essentially posits iconicity in the reader rather than the signifier, Greimas affirms the non-iconic character of plastic representation. Instead, iconicity is determined from a culturally-defined set of schemata, intuited at the moment of textual reading. It is not, however, the only means of perception. “Such an iconizing reading is, however, a semiosis—that is, an operation which, conjoining a signifier and a signified, produces signs.”³⁰¹ Greimas deems the reading grid to be “of a semantic nature,” which, we must assume, possesses a paradigmatic dimension. With the reading grid,³⁰² a reader can group salient features together into “figurative formants,” which transforms those visual traces into “object-signs.”³⁰³ The crucial act of grouping “is a simultaneous grasping that transforms the bundle of heterogeneous features into a format, that is, into a unit of the signifier.”³⁰⁴ The “grid of the signified” is what allows for recognition, and it is at this moment

³⁰⁰ Greimas successfully expunges this problem from his later work by developing his actantial grammar in the 1970s, but that grammar’s ability to explain syntactic operation is somewhat in doubt by the release of his work, Algirdas Julien Greimas, *De l'imperfection* (Périgueux: P. Fanlac, 1987) 99.

³⁰¹ Greimas, Collins, and Perron, 633.

³⁰² As in an earlier case in this dissertation, the grid would profit from Bourdieu’s concept of the habitus, which would relieve Greimas from the need to posit such a grid.

³⁰³ Greimas, Collins, and Perron, 633.

³⁰⁴ Greimas, Collins, and Perron, 633.

that the reader may correlate the representation as one of an object of the natural world.³⁰⁵

Regardless of the means of analyzing the reader (whether as subject to the reading-grid as within this article, or as an actant), the important attribution here that remains constant is sequence. In this system, grouping of features into figurative formants occurs at the level of the act of reading, and it does so on the basis of culturally inflected reading grids. Greimas makes clear that the moment of semiosis is responsible for which particular features are amalgamated into signification. Greimas writes:

We can see that the formation of formants, at the time of semiosis, is no more than an articulation of the planar signifier, its *segmentation* into legible discrete units. This segmentation is done with a view to a certain kind of reading of the visual object, but as we saw in connection with the twofold function of the alphabet, it does not exclude other possible segmentations of the signifier. These discrete units, constituted out of bundles of features, are already well known to us. They are the "forms" of Gestalt theory, "figures of the world" in the Bachelardian sense, "figures of the level of expression" according to Hjelmslev. This convergence of points of view originating in seemingly very disparate preoccupations

³⁰⁵ Greimas, Collins, and Perron, 633.

allows us to speak here of a *figurative reading* of visual objects.³⁰⁶

The recognition of such figures defines reading, an activity, but what can we ascertain of a figurative reading in the case of ekphrasis? The previous section established that an original image is, in fact, unnecessary for the production of ekphrastic language. In the presence of an original artwork, the reading grid which, a priori, ensures that various figures will be grouped together to yield a viable signifier, to which the process of semiosis will attach an appropriate signifier. In this account, Greimas's semiotic process remains consistent with the aforementioned disjunction of ekphrastic writing with its "referent." I, however, went further to suggest that any ekphrastic writing antepositions a more restricted image in place of that original; this is especially so when an original does not exist, and, therefore, any ekphrasis already positions that replacement image. What does this mean within a Greimassian framework? Moreover, can we consider ekphrastic reduction in images without a written product? These two questions can be subject to semiotic method. Greimas writes: "This mode of reading that produces semiosis—a criterion which allows us to speak on the semiotic nature of the object under study—brings us to a semiotics that we can call *figurative semiotics*."³⁰⁷ But, what is this "mode of reading" in the case of ekphrastic reduction?

³⁰⁶ Greimas, Collins, and Perron, 633-634. (Italics original.)

³⁰⁷ Greimas, Collins, and Perron, 634. (Italics original.)

Though by the time this paper was written, Greimas had well in place a modal grammar, the concept of modality reached its most developed form following the publication of “Figurative Semiotics.” Greimas later allows a “first stage” of understanding modality which divides modes of verbal forms into “utterances of doing and utterances of state.”³⁰⁸ “In other words,” Greimas writes,

...the following can be conceived: (a) doing modalizing being (*cf.* performance, art), (b) being modalizing doing (*cf.* competence), (c) being modalizing being (*cf.* veridictory modalities), and (d) doing modalizing doing (*cf.* factitive modalities). In this perspective, the modal predicate can be defined first of all by its sole tactic function, by its transitive aim, which can affect another utterance taken as object.³⁰⁹

In the case of “reading an artwork,” for example, the artwork’s status as object is irrefutable. The “mode of reading,” however, requires much closer scrutiny. Since reading an artwork is not factitive, we must assume the instance of “doing modalizing being.” The “being,” though, might easily mislead, since it is yet unclear whether this mode is itself virtual, actual, or realized. Greimas later clarifies: the “planar object” that produces a “meaning effects” therein affirms its membership within a semiotics system.³¹⁰ But, though we

³⁰⁸ Greimas and Courtés, 195.

³⁰⁹ Greimas and Courtés, 195.

³¹⁰ Greimas, Collins, and Perron, 636-637.

may have access to the its mode of manifestation, the system's existence is unknowable.³¹¹ Greimas explains:

Knowledge of particular planar objects alone can lead to knowledge of the system which underlies them. This means that if the processes are grasped in their realized form, they presuppose the system as a *virtual* one, and thus as one that can be represented only through an ad hoc, constructed language.³¹²

Though we can only know an object through what Greimas elsewhere calls a *metalanguage*, he nevertheless holds that such a process of description does not preclude other “signifying articulations of planar objects,” and, in fact, refers only to figures which are assigned “with ‘natural’ interpretation.”³¹³

Because figurativity is generated through the process of reading, here given a priori structure through the reading grid, Greimas demonstrates that the “biased” and “partial” perspective implies that figurativization seems “to go beyond the limits of the planar vehicle or support, upon which its manifestation is based.”³¹⁴ This is a critical aspect in the larger discussion of ekphrasis for two reasons. Firstly, in this move, Greimas restricts any possibility of an autonomous artwork to phenomena of the natural world—in the process of legibility, an artwork cannot be comprehended unless filtered through the paradigmatic grid of reading. Thus, the “meaning effects” of a work

³¹¹ Greimas, Collins, and Perron, 637.

³¹² Greimas, Collins, and Perron, 637. (Emphasis added.)

³¹³ Greimas, Collins, and Perron, 634.

³¹⁴ Greimas, Collins, and Perron, 634.

are ineffably linked to their own construction as signifiers. Secondly, because the features of the object in the natural world (which are bundled to construct the signifier) “also appear at the same time as features of the *signified* of natural languages,” Greimas argues on this basis that “*verbal discourses carry within themselves their own figurative dimension.*”³¹⁵ There are two pervasive repercussions of such a correspondence.

In the first place, we see the suppression of the visual to supplemental status—or more precisely, of the possibility of a visual writing. This dangerous supplementation serves the purpose for Greimas of establishing the primacy of the narrative in his semiotics, but it does so at the price of semiosis happening at the level of the visual paradigm, rather than as a transposition to the rhetorical reading grid. In the second place, and more revolutionary than Greimas elaborates, Greimas states that the “problems posed by the analysis of ‘visual texts’ are comparable to those posed by verbal texts, be they literary or not.”³¹⁶ If this is true, it allows Greimas license to continue with his larger semiotic project, in which he perseveres in a “scientific” manner to reduce into its most fundamental parts both visual and figurative semes that, ultimately, will enforce Greimas’s larger narrative semiotics.

³¹⁵ Greimas, Collins, and Perron, 634-635. (Emphasis added.)

³¹⁶ Greimas, Collins, and Perron, 635.

Discussion

The remainder of “Figurative Semiotics” paves the way for Greimas to do just that: Greimas outlines the “initial steps” for the semiotician “to establish an area of investigation wherein to inquire into the how and why” of figure-objects.³¹⁷ In this discussion, I will establish the import of Greimas’s method for an understanding of why ekphrasis holds such interest to historiography. A recapitulation of the relevant Greimassian points will yield the following: semiosis occurs at the moment the paradigmatic is organized syntagmatically within the reader (or enunciator). Within “visual semiotics,” the reader of an image produces a semiosis by means of a culturally informed, a priori reading grid, which allows that reader to posit a given bundle of features as figurative. Figurativity, then, while appearing to refer to something of the natural world, is, in fact, a result of a predisposition in reading, rather than a natural link to the world. The very logic that allows us to posit a figural semiotics, however, must reciprocally be applied to natural language, at which point we must also acknowledge a figural component within language—not at the level of its figural expression, but at the level of a figural *content*.³¹⁸

“To say that a planar object is a process, a text that is realizing one of the system’s virtualities,”³¹⁹ is an admission of the semiotic method of analysis characterized by unscrupulous dissection in efforts to arrive at the smallest observable unit. Such a directive leads

³¹⁷ Greimas, Collins, and Perron, 636.

³¹⁸ Greimas, Collins, and Perron, 635.

³¹⁹ Greimas, Collins, and Perron, 637.

Greimas to the next step of attempting to isolate and identify a smaller segment within the plastic signifier, that is, “strictly plastic units which ultimately are carriers of significations unknown to us.”³²⁰ The drive in this endeavor is one towards operationalism:

Now, given a visual text which we consider to be a segmentable signifier, we need but enunciate our final postulate, that of *operativity*. This consists in saying that an object can be grasped only through its analysis. Put simplistically, it can be grasped only through being decomposed into smaller units and through the reintegration of those units into the totalities that they constitute.³²¹

The first option in such a segmentation, for Greimas, lies in the “topological mechanism” of the image. By this term, Greimas attempts a systematic means of reading the “reading” of an image. I will outline the scheme he introduces, but first must emphasize that it is not the particular mechanism in Greimas that interests me, but rather the “area of operation” that he identifies, and area I will describe in a grammatological sense as “writing.”

Of the “topological categories” in which visual figures might be cataloged, Greimas begins (quite conservatively) with the frame, with rectilinear, curvilinear, or compound forms. He then moves swiftly into an opposition between eidetic (the qualities of an image independent of color) and chromatic categories. I need not critique

³²⁰ Greimas, Collins, and Perron, 637.

³²¹ Greimas, Collins, and Perron, 637. (Italics original.)

these insufficient categories here. Very nearly one hundred years earlier than the publication of this article, art historian Heinrich Wölfflin developed a more complex series of oppositions, the creation of which has subsequently been thoroughly deconstructed by newer art histories.³²² Furthermore, by 1978, Jacques Derrida dismantled the surety of the frame as a painting's fundamental matrix of legibility in *La vérité en peinture*. (Formal categories being of especial interest to art historians, there is, in fact, a body of literature far too great to outline here, as German, Viennese, and American schools of formalism abound in such treatises.)

Greimas alternatively calls these forms "topological," as a general term, or "plastic categories," referring to the "minimal substructures" that can be discerned from topological segmentation.³²³ But, what holds relevance here is not the verification of Greimas's weak formal categories, but rather that implicit "area of operation" therein, an area that he himself neglected to investigate owing to the aforementioned bias against grammatology. Greimas writes: "These topological categories, projected upon a surface whose richness and polysemy would otherwise render it indecipherable, bring about its reduction to a reasonable number of pertinent elements necessary for its reading."³²⁴ Those elements, Greimas goes on to demonstrate, are

³²² Most helpful on this topic is Marshall Brown, "The Classic Is the Baroque: On the Principle of Wölfflin's Art History," *Critical Inquiry* 9.2 (1982): 379-404; but see also Mark Jarzombek, "De-Scribing the Language of Looking: Wölfflin and the History of Aesthetic Experientialism," *Assemblage*.23 (1994): 29-69.

³²³ Greimas, Collins, and Perron, 639.

³²⁴ Greimas, Collins, and Perron, 639.

subject to the same kinds of discursive analysis used upon linguistic structures.

Greimas grants a certain relativity to the reduction factor of those minimal units; instead, the semiotician “must be satisfied with the example offered by semantics.”³²⁵ This statement is instructive, since it implies Greimas’s most infamous contribution to semiotics, the exercise known as the semiotic square, and exercise utilized to consider the semantic, or paradigmatic, relationship of a given element. Greimas explains the similarity to semantics, and his passage is equally pertinent as a description of the utility of his square:

Semantics, faced with the impossibility of establishing a limited inventory of its semic categories that would still cover the whole of the cultural universe, has to be satisfied with taking into consideration only those categories that are relevant to the analysis of such and such a given microuniverse. Thus, for example, the differences we see from one analysis to another in their inventories of chromatic categories can be explained in exactly the same way.³²⁶

Though Greimas does not sketch out a semiotic square in this article, he does everything short of the exercise, including providing examples of oppositions appropriate for the square.³²⁷ (For example,

³²⁵ Greimas, Collins, and Perron, 640.

³²⁶ Greimas, Collins, and Perron, 640.

³²⁷ Greimas’s most complete early work on the square is found in A. J. Greimas, “Narrative Grammar: Units and Levels,” *MLN* 86.6, *Comparative Literature* (1971):

he notes the importance in Klee’s painting of pointed-rounded and earthly-heavenly oppositions, and in Boubat’s photography contoured-flat and naked-clothed oppositions.) With such a strong indication in “Figurative Semiotics” of the relevance of Greimas’s Rectangle in visual analysis, I will formulate just such a square here, with the express purpose of explaining not its correctness, but the scope of its “area of operation.”

Let us consider two terms Greimas lays out: those between chromatic and eidetic categories. To recapitulate, Greimas stipulates that these two plastic categories must be considered without overlap, i.e., the chromatic category must be considered to work solely from the provenance of color, and likewise, a black-and-white eidetic schema must be considered only as scale, and not as expressions of color. (Again, these categories contradict many contemporary understandings of light and human optic physiology, but let us set aside these foibles since the verification of this thought experiment is irrelevant to my argument.) The initial plotting of such an opposition will yield the following figure:

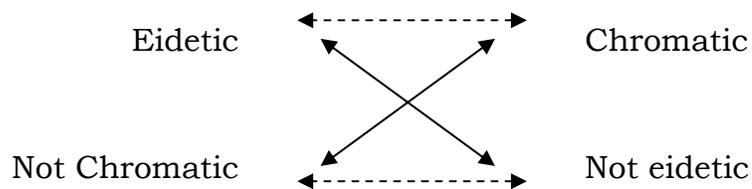


Figure 1

793-806. Again, due to the simplicity of his early interface with the “reading grid,” I have preferred “Figurative Semiotics” over the other works, since for my purposes, the relationship between actantial subject and object is less crucial than the act itself of inscription.

Thus, we have both the initial opposition, eidetic-chromatic, and its negative expansion, not chromatic-not eidetic. (The latter opposition, of course, includes a much greater sphere than does the former.) If we take the square further to calculate all interstitial semantic values, we will arrive at the following figure:

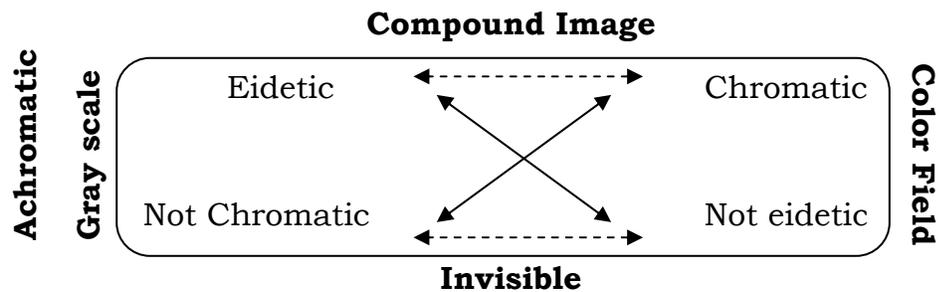


Figure 2

Usually, this figure is offered without an additional encirclement, but for clarity, I have made the cartouche, the effect of the secondary terms, explicit. While so many criticize the square on the basis of its functioning (e.g., why only four initial terms, why oppositions, etc.), it is not the insufficiency of binary opposition that concerns this study. In fact, Greimas himself suggests that the square is not important; he even entertains the possibility of a semantic circle! What is essential, and ironically neglected by critics, is the process of *inscription* that accompanies his efforts to think through the unthinkable—to *write* semantics.³²⁸

³²⁸ Of course, De Certeau's study on *The Writing of History*, too, posits writing history as an attempt to think the unthinkable. In that he makes little distinction on the operation of writing other than in its relationship to a phenomenology of presence,

Now, Greimas deserves substantial credit on the limits he sets on the square's usefulness. He cautions frequently that the square remains only one tool (one that does not exhaust the possibilities of semantic analysis) that, ultimately, is faced with an impossible task. But this is besides the task. What remains the most instructive moment in his analysis is *what he is doing*. Greimas believes, based on Boolean logic, that the binary serves as the most reduced number of variables into which one can make a logical proposition. Irrespective of the belief, in the moment of trying to delineate such binary relationships, he invariably exceeds those relationships. While he attempts to apply the thinking virtually, he does so only through a metalanguage. Greimas is fully aware that metalanguages are required to speak of the ineffable. What remains under-theorized, however, is that through the process of a metalanguage—through the expansion and circumscription of original terms—Greimas is *inscribing* those terms.

Inscription in this sense—far from the supplementary writing system which merely points to a natural or artificial language—constitutes its own semiosis as *writing*. The cartouche surrounding the original terms, terms that while referring to virtual signifiers nevertheless bears a figurativity, itself serves as inscription, as a visible mark.³²⁹ It is this inscribing mark, a mark that seeks to delineate the figurative, that we must call, *writing*.

his consideration of writing per se does not sufficiently distinguish itself from the rhetorical. It is on this ground that I have neglected it here.

³²⁹ We might even compare this to the author's signature, which, Derrida posits, is either inside the text, and therefore part of it, or outside the text, and therefore

In “The Violence of the Letter,” Derrida, in his characteristic flourished writing, critiques Lévi-Strauss for, among other things, arguing that the South American Nambikwara exhibit what must be the likeness of “the childhood of our race.”³³⁰ Derrida writes:

If writing is no longer understood in the narrow sense of linear and phonetic notation, it should be possible to say that all societies capable of producing, that is to say of obliterating, their proper names, and of bringing classificatory difference into play, practice writing in general.³³¹

So, too, must we understand any process capable of enveloping differential structures—regardless of the fixity or verifiability of those relationships—as being of a writing in general. Greimas’s metalanguage, in the semiotic square made manifest by the cartouche, would more accurately be read as a process of *writing*, rather than a rhetorical discourse. This needs further relation to the figurative.

Greimas writes:

When it is decided to take on the task of classifying all discourses into two large classes—figurative and non-figurative (or abstract) discourses—one soon notices that almost all texts called literary and historical belong to the class of figurative discourse. It remains understood,

irrelevant. Any inscription, therefore, must instantiate the former and not the latter. See Jacques Derrida, *Glas* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986) 262.

³³⁰ Derrida, 108. In this classic essay, Derrida argues that the moment the possibility of erasure enters a natural language, writing appears.

³³¹ Derrida, 109.

however, that such a distinction is somewhat “ideal,” that it seeks to classify forms (figurative and non-figurative) and not discourse-occurrences, which practically never present an “unalloyed” form.³³²

This quotation firstly suggests the arbitrary division of all discourses into figurative and non-figurative. Not two sentences later, however, Greimas disputes this division as being “somewhat ‘ideal’.” This incoherency brings question to Greimas’s frequent assertion that science, too, constitutes discourse without figurativity. Recall Greimas’s aspiration to reform linguistics as a true science, and as such, a discourse without figurativity. By his own admission, this must also be considered “somewhat ‘ideal’.” Additional incongruity arises in the comparison of this passage to an earlier citation, in which Greimas consented that “verbal discourses carry within themselves their own figurative dimension,”³³³ and, therefore, even a scientific discourse must carry “figures of content” and not just “figures of expression.”

Regardless of the desire for scientificity within the historical disciplines, we must consequently see all forms of historical writing as figurative, i.e., figurative in both content and expression. Though Greimassian taxonomy might maintain particular terminology for this consequence, the idea of figurativity in historical writing is not new. What we must investigate, though, is that the inscription of this figurativity—irrespective on the content of those figures—is

³³² Greimas, Collins, and Perron, 635.

³³³ Greimas, Collins, and Perron, 635.

appropriately a grammatological occurrence. The centrality of *occurrence* is not lost on Greimas.

In the passage, Greimas writes that the difference between the figurative and non-figurative that is a false difference, since we are not in the habit of dealing with forms as such, but rather, of discourse-occurrences. Chronologically, this passage from his book, *Semiotics and Language*, sufficiently succeeds the full development of Greimassian actantial theory. Nevertheless, this passage does not directly state actantial relationship; instead, the performativity of figuration as “discourse-occurrence” is only implied.

The passage continues:

In fact, what interests the semiotician is understanding what the **figurativization** of discourses and of texts—a sub-component of discursive semantics—consists in, and what the procedures (sic), which are put into place by the enunciator to figurativize the utterance, are. Thus, the construction of a model of discourse production—which we call the generative trajectory—proves to be useful if only because it permits the constitution of the general framework within which one can seek to inscribe, in an operational and tentative manner, subject to invalidations and reconstructions, the **figurativization procedures** of a discourse posed first as neutral and abstract.³³⁴

³³⁴ Greimas and Courtés, 118. (Emphasis original.)

Greimas writes that the “figurativization of discourses and texts” issues as “a sub-component of discursive semantics.” We must place this within the larger Greimassian program. Semantics, forming the paradigmatic axis of discourse analysis, always requires syntax to produce “meaning effects.” Paradigmatic analysis is still possible without syntagmatic consideration, since one may employ the semiotic square as a device with which to gauge a paradigm’s relation to other, unspecified paradigms. Thus, a figure in this schema must be understood to be subject to analysis by the square. Whether in the binary sets constructed by the square or with another means of analysis as in Caviness’s triangulation, any such analysis must be seen as inscription, and therefore, as writing.

The aforementioned “figurativization,” Greimas writes, consists *in* and *what* those procedures put into play as enunciation. The figure, then, is understood operationally. While that figure is a necessary precondition of writing as inscription, I do not equate figurativization alone as writing, but its inscription therein. This does not preclude figurativization’s consonance with Derridean “arche-writing,” the latter which, though not yet fully emerged as writing, forms its necessary precursor.

In fact, the generative trajectory, posited by Greimas as a framework, constitutes that in which the inscription is allowed to occur. We might extrapolate a kind of arche-writing in any established or constituted framework, within which inscription proper—qua writing—may eventuate. But within such a model, we find recursive frames, that is, in the initial constitution of any such model, which

serves as that framework, its very circumscription as model simultaneously constitutes it as a kind of arche-writing. It is not, therefore, the grouping of any set of objects, but rather the delineation of those objects as a group, the parentheses or braces which constitute that set, that must be seen as a primary inscription.

Whether implicit or explicit, the historian's job parallels this process at the moment he or she brackets any figures of a historical event. That bracketing, an operation, is a kind of enunciation that we must consider inscriptive. Thus, the historiographer follows in suit: it is the framework, rather than the individual parameters, that situates a historiographic inquiry. Further, such a framework must be received as part of an operative inscription. That inscription, and the inspection thereof, is always already guaranteed in the etymological provenance set up by its designation as *historiography*.

Of additional import for the historian of the visual, the practice of ekphrasis, in which an author selects and orders pertinent linguistic figures of figures, must also stand as an inscription. The existence of an original is, as I established earlier, extrinsic in ekphrastic generation. The selection of figures, and its requisite framing under the banner of ekphrasis, that is, as a purported linguistic record of a visual object, is precisely that framework which we have been discussing. Such an inscription must, therefore, be open to historical and especially historiographical analysis.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION: VISUALIZING THE HISTORICAL DISCIPLINES

This dissertation has taken as its initial problem the argument that critical historiography, a term first used by Berger and Jarzombek, is worthy of extensive development as a discourse. Furthermore, it has called for both intra- and inter-disciplinary research regarding the meaning, relevance, and application of critical historiography and its methods. My primary aim in this conclusion, then, is to set forth here questions for further development. Firstly, if we accept the etymological factors in critical historiography's scope, how ought the historian accept the roles of judging and discernment as mandated by a 'critical' historiography? Secondly, how does writing form the core of any historiographic project, and moreover, what is the visual basis of such a project? Thirdly, if vision and writing do form such a core, how does the historian handle failures of historical vision? Finally, if we cannot rely on writing to transcribe with fidelity a visual image, as Pächt as argued against ekphrasis, then how might we regard it visually as a grammatological issue, instead?

I offer only a preliminary avenue for exploration into these questions, and that avenue builds upon a visual studies perspective. Beginning with the term, critical historiography, I argued in chapters one and two that any such critical study necessitates deep reflection on the written aspects of history. After a careful look at historiography's etymology, I narrowed the ontological bounds of historiography to grammatological questions, that is, epistemological

questions whose grounds lie in writing rather than in the metaphysics of presence. Any other epistemological questions about history may hold great interest, but they are more appropriately taken up under other disciplinary banners. Once the critical historiographer recognizes the domain of writing as the proper field for investigation, he or she may pursue a number of discursive trajectories.

In chapter three, I took up one such avenue in historical writing: the problematic operation of charismatic authority. If a historical narrative theorizes interactions which, we might say, occur on a sociological field, then visual access to that field—and the writing that inscribes it—is first and foremost a historical issue. Bourdieu demonstrates, however, that access to the field, access to the means by which the field is controlled, and the means by which actors participate on that field are all the results of sociological transactions. In further examining the trope Bourdieu introduces, I argued that those transactions occur in a visuo-spatial zone, and as such, are always visually-mediated transactions. By tracing the transactional basis of charisma through Weber and Bourdieu, I reoriented Bourdieu's field to account for both synchronic and diachronic aspects of charismatic transactions. Such a multifaceted account (which Greimas would term "biplanar") disputes earlier models of history as a steady stream of progress, instead finding Foucauldian value in rupture. The recent history by John E. Joseph, Nigel Love and Talbot J. Taylor, *Landmarks in Linguistic Thought II*, begins with a valuable statement on this very approach. In it, they write:

The coauthors of this book do not view linguistic thought as a matter of progress towards the theories that have now attained the status of academic standards. Instead, in contrast to such a “progressivist” perspective, we offer a ‘continuist’ alternative, according to which 20th century thinking about language continued to debate and develop the same themes, questions, issues, concepts and arguments that have preoccupied Western thinking about language since its inception.³³⁵

Joseph et al expand upon this reasonable strategy by remarking that, contrary to a progressivist account, their historiography focuses on atypical but exceedingly important details such as “policing the borders of linguistics as a field of inquiry.”³³⁶ They underscore the critical role that discursive struggles played in inculcating the field with various ideological imprints. They cite Michel Foucault’s work from 1971, which insisted that disputes regarding disciplinary borders have always been inseparable from that discipline’s research itself.³³⁷

The thoughtfulness of this premise cannot be understated. Bourdieu, while viscerally concerned with social tangles that formed networks of struggles between intellectual agents, unapologetically views formal configurations of those discursive borders outside the scope of his inquiry. Therefore, though Bourdieu’s sociological

³³⁵ John Earl Joseph, Nigel Love, and Talbot J. Taylor, *Landmarks in Linguistic Thought II: The Western Tradition in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Routledge, 2001) vii.

³³⁶ Joseph, Love, and Taylor, vii.

³³⁷ Joseph, Love, and Taylor, viii.

mapping held direct relevance on gauging charisma's influence on historical writing, to consider epistemological history and the history of ideas, Bourdieu's work necessitated some additional adjustment to accommodate the requisite content aspects inherent the history of ideas.

I have defended various contours of my own project, contours that skirt several crucial—but for my purposes, extraneous—inquiries that will emerge from my visual studies approach to critical historiography. Firstly, I early on clarified that a historiographical project need not address the nature of historical knowledge, since that is not implicit within the “-graphic” declension. Actually, to begin an epistemic question of this nature requires an archaeology of knowledge, and as such, I deferred to the Foucauldian justification that historiography need not question historical knowledge so much as it must unearth the a priori conditions thereof. Since an archaeology must, I contended, simultaneously account for charismatic authority (a subtle sociological transaction that would be stripped of nuance if discussed solely within a Foucauldian discourse of power), again, I retained a Bourdienne vocabulary while reading Foucault's archaeological method through the former's lens. (As these two figures were working concomitantly, their own epistemic connection as gainsayers of structuralism might prove to be a fruitful study.) In investigating Foucault's archaeological “rules of formation” of a discourse, then, I attended to Foucault's term “surfaces of emergence,”

“authorities of delimitation,” and “systems of formation”³³⁸ by showing formal compatibilities with an enfolded, reticulated sociological field.

After outlining the functioning of Bourdieu’s field, I developed the concept in an inherently visual and visualizing direction. I showed that Bourdieu’s description of the field is so carefully bound to visual metaphor that further development of the sociology of charisma as a visualized phenomenon increases its effectiveness in plotting agents interacting on a manifolded field. I concluded that section arguing that Bourdieu, by introducing an envisioned field as a site of charismatic battle, inadvertently stumbles onto a different kind of Symbolic problem—one that insists the struggle for charismatic authority is itself a battle for legitimate control over knowledge of the Symbolic fabric’s convoluted topography.

Finally, I ended chapter three by demonstrating that in the case of François Dosse’s *History of Structuralism*, Dosse diachronically entered the very historical field he intended to historicize by bestowing charismatic grace upon the subjects of his study. In so doing, he himself intruded into the structural field, taking part in the ideological battles there. Though Dosse presents a seamless narrative, he does so by actively distorting views of the historical field—measures that must be considered interventions on the part of the charismatics whom he follows.

Following Foucault, an alternative model would posit historical ruptures—and not the more charismatic continuities—as viable,

³³⁸ Kennedy, 277.

preferable modes for the writing of history. I argued that an intellectual history needs to account for Foucault's "rules of formation" of a given discourse. To learn more of charisma's synchronic and diachronic authority on historical subjects, I attempted to reconcile a Foucauldian approach to those rules of formation while maintaining the complexity of the Bourdienne field. This allowed me to understand the shortcomings of Dosse's mythic biography. Though Dosse offered platitudes attesting to the importance of multiple "centers" of historical investigation,³³⁹ his seamless narrative erased any possibility of multiple centers. Instead, Dosse replaced the Foucauldian possibility of multiple "surfaces of emergence" with a single, concerted fountainhead from which all of structural history spewed forth. For Dosse, the ancestry of structuralism's exclusively French family began decisively with Lévi-Strauss.

In place of the appealing but charismatically complicit Grand Narrative style of Dosse's work, I urged historians to consider instead the archaeological possibilities of "lateral continuities" and "longitudinal discontinuities." For instance, where might Dosse have located epistemic alliances between Parisian structuralisms and other concurrent intellectual streams? Where, in the very familiar narrative presented by Dosse and others³⁴⁰ of a coherent French history of structuralism, might he instead have discovered ruptures that contest

³³⁹ See my footnote 8, page 12.

³⁴⁰ A similarly constructed, though more demure account occurs in Edith Kurzweil, *The Age of Structuralism: From Lévi-Strauss to Foucault* (New Brunswick, N.J., U.S.A: Transaction Publishers, 1996).

a meretricious continuity? The epistemic operation of ekphrasis, I suggested, might offer just such a rupture.

Following the operation of ekphrasis allowed me to reconsider Otto Pächt's injunction against it, which he insisted, served only to mislead the reading public. Looking more closely at the operation of ekphrasis certainly indicates that Pächt is right to fear any claim of a truthful transposition from visuality into language; the image posited by any ekphrastic writing always cannibalizes the real original (if there ever was one). Only by positing a restricted copy fashioned in language can ekphrasis ever attempt a transposition, but that transposition never emerges as a translation between modalities. Greimas ultimately provides the most compelling proof of this.

His "Plastic Semiotics," I proposed, presents a corollary account of ekphrasis, though he does not use the term. Arguing that visual phenomena resemble both natural and artificial discourses, Greimas assigns visual semiotics's existence in "tridimensional space" which, ultimately, resembles languages in their ability to refer outside of themselves. This confirms, for Greimas, that the image indeed possesses a semiotics. Since the plastic arts are capable of semiosis, like other semiotic systems, they must be open to paradigmatic analysis to determine the workings of their semantic universe. For Greimas, this invariably leads to the square, which plots oppositions between terms to expand those relations to unnoticed binary pairs.

Greimas's semiotic square has endured harsh, though appropriate, criticism given the seeming arbitrariness of its shape,

number of sides, etc.³⁴¹ I argued that its critics have consistently overlooked its greatest contribution as a model of inscription. The rectangle as a semantic abacus is problematic, since it relies on Greimas's dated belief that a Boolean constitutes language's most reductive semantic relationship. What matters far more to my own study, though, is the performed mapping of the square. As illustrated, the very act of plotting the square encircles its objects in a cartouche—an inscriptive mark indicating the Derridean operation of arche-writing. It is this envelopment within discourse, a particular encirclement, that distinguishes the rhetorical narration of history from its writing. As such, Greimas presents the unlikely opportunity from which the historical supplement may be received in its rich chirography, and that plotting (like the signature) insists not on the historical text's independence from its auto/graph, but rather insists on its complete ratification as such.

The study of the square thus allows us to reconsider the entirety of this project in terms of inscription, bringing my initial claim on the importance of writing to historiography back into play. While Bourdieu's discussion of potentiation and envelopment on the field resembled a description of performance, in fact, it was never such an act. As I have enumerated in my discussion on ekphrasis, those descriptions of the field are themselves cartouche-inscribed in

³⁴¹ See Timothy Lenoir, "Was that Last Turn the Right Turn? The Semiotic Turn and A.J. Greimas," in Mario Biagioli, *The Science Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1999) 590.

discourse. And though diaphanous rather than polygonal, such description of written activities is always a historiographic interest.

In this light, the utility of Madeline Caviness's process of triangulation finds fullest expression. In the previous chapter, I plotted variables on the semiotic square to expand those terms, showing their invisible counterparts. Greimas provided this exercise to explore unnoticed—but highly operational—paradigms within a given semiotic. While the particular paradigmatic results were of little interest to me, holding more relevance to the linguist, what was illuminating for my study was its resultant cartouche, which itself constitutes writing and evidence of inscription. That writing—which contains both visible and invisible paradigms—is of utmost importance to the historiographer, who must at all times trace and uncover written processes that define and constitute the historical object.

Triangulation, however, offers an elegant model, or at least a complementary one, in its insistence on operativity. Not a completed triangle, but always a process of drawing one, Caviness's semiotic exercise instead suggests that historical writing is already written within and without margins. Marginalia—especially studied in medieval manuscripts—like the Derridean cartouche, destabilizes each reading, competing for the means by which a text is rendered primary or marginal. The drawing of a margin line is itself the very process of inscription, and it calls attention not only to the act of its drawing (the writing), but to its ensnared body, as well.

Triangulation, too, has the added connotation of navigation, and providentially, of movement. Like the moving object within a radar

display (itself a kind of transitory cartouche), the historical object of triangulation is always under inscription (and, consequently, under erasure). The historian, as does the radar officer, always considers the historical object azimuthally: its obtains a bearing through inscription, but remains indefinitely positioned. The historian thus follows tracks—themselves evidence of inscription. It is this added quality of tracking with which I will conclude this dissertation.

Little distinction has been made thus far between historiographic tenses, but this is an area in great need of expansion in subsequent works on critical historiography. That is, the semiotic square and the cartouche are themselves geometric figures without temporal coordinates—they lack the contingency afforded by time. This proves acceptable for Greimas, though, since being essentially paradigmatic elements, they are unfettered by temporal limitations until they are arranged within a syntax. Only then do they acquire temporal positioning. Inscription, however, and by extension, the process of triangulation, in suturing the paradigmatic object within the syntax of its own configuration, necessarily renders its objects into time. This same induction into writing occurs on the field; as mentioned in chapter two, Bourdieu describes this process as a “self-structuring structure.”³⁴²

Triangulation, then, provides a historiographic analysis critically embedded within the refutation of its capture. It attests at every moment to inscription—to the seizure of historical and written

³⁴² See page 9.

tracks—but cannot offer that object in stasis. Such an approach—precise in its written coordinates, but at the moment of inscription, anchored to its own expiration—could lay a new course for contemporary historiography that continues to embrace its textual basis while at last crediting writing as its operative source of meaning.

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