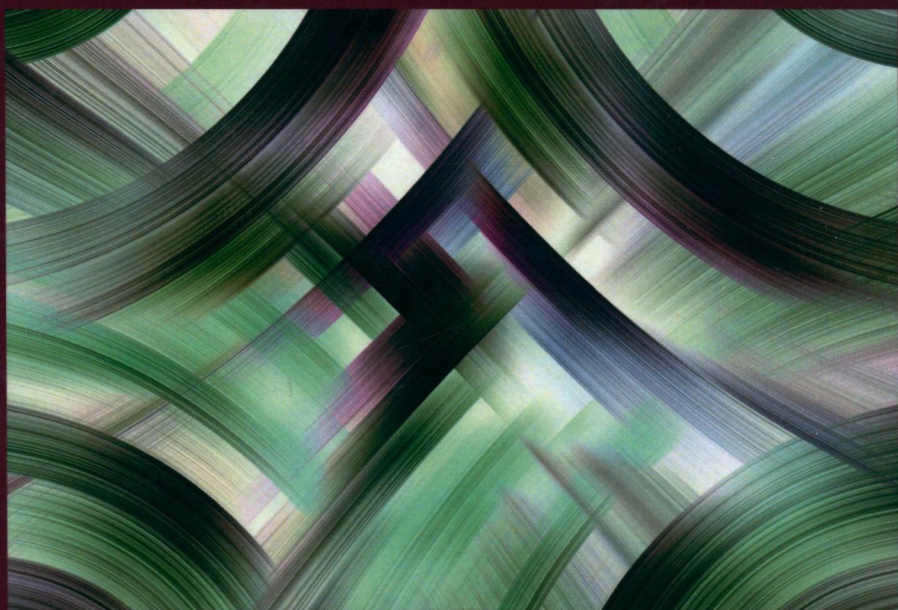


Theories of History

History Read across the Humanities

Edited by Michael J. Kelly and Arthur Rose



B L O O M S B U R Y

"This intellectually elegant collection of essays explores the complexities of historical theory as it applies to the humanities, broadly conceived. With erudition, insight, and scholarly imagination, it neatly challenges disciplinary boundaries and will reward attentive readers in every humanistic field."

WILLIAM G. ROSENBERG, Professor of History Emeritus, University of Michigan, USA

"In a series of case studies and theoretical reflections from across the humanities – from archaeology to law to rhetoric – this book gives a vivid snapshot of the most progressive thinking on history today."

ALAN O'LEARY, Professor of Film and Cultural Studies, University of Leeds, UK

"A major achievement. *Theories of History* instigates thinking about history from a refreshingly new perspective."

ALENKA ZUPANCIC, Professor of Philosophy and Psychoanalysis, Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Slovenia

The central question of this book is "what is history?". By describing "history" through its supplementary function to the field of History, rather than the ground of a study, this collection considers new insights into historical thinking and historiography across the Humanities. It fosters engagement from around the disciplines in historical thinking and, from that, invites historians and philosophers of history to see clearly the impact of their work outside of their own specific fields, and encourages deep reflection on the role of historical production in society.

As such, *Theories of History* opens up for the first time a truly cross-disciplinary dialogue on History and is a unique intervention in the study of historical representation. Essays in this volume discuss music history, linguistics, theater studies, art, film, archaeology and more. This book is essential reading for those interested in the theory and practice of history, philosophy, and the humanities more broadly.

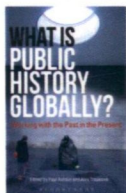
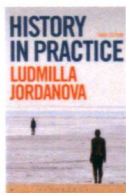
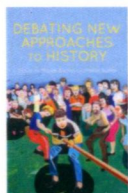
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Bloomsbury Academic

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ISBN 978-1-4742-7130-1



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LONDON • NEW YORK • OXFORD • NEW DELHI • SYDNEY

BLOOMSBURY ACADEMIC
Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
50 Bedford Square, London, WC1B 3DP, UK

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First published in Great Britain 2018

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A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

ISBN: HB: 978-1-4742-7130-1
ePDF: 978-1-4742-7131-8
eBook: 978-1-4742-7132-5

Typeset by Newgen KnowledgeWorks Pvt. Ltd., Chennai, India
Printed and bound in Great Britain

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Theories of History

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Acknowledgments

This book is the result of a series of meetings, seminars, and extended discussions that began in 2011 with the formation of the *Philosophies of History* group. Countless people facilitated these events and ultimately the production of this volume. We would especially like to thank Emily Abbey and the Schools of History and English and the Leeds Humanities Research Institute at the University of Leeds for their extensive support of those meetings and seminars, from funding, to space, to encouragement. Thank you as well to St. Mary's University Twickenham, the University of Oulu, and to all of those who have presented and participated in *Philosophies of History*. Thank you too to Beatriz López, Emma Goode, and all the support staff at Bloomsbury for their unwavering support of this project.

Editorial Note

This volume is the product of the international project, *Philosophies of History (PoH)*—in affiliation with *Networks and Neighbours*—and its regular seminars, regional public history workshops, and multi-institutional relationships. Based now in New York, previously in Leeds (United Kingdom), *PoH* was founded and is still directed by “practicing” historians, many of whom are early medievalists. The latter point alone makes the group unique—as almost all theorists of history study the modern world—but our composition as a body of practicing historians also makes *PoH* anomalous, since most theorists of history are, by training and interest, philosophers. *PoH* held its inaugural seminar in the Spring of 2012 on the campus of the University of Leeds. From that, it has developed alternative avenues of enquiry, research and collaboration. Some of the contributors to this volume have been speakers in the *PoH* series, and we would like to thank them for their participation in the seminars. We are very excited to have been moving historical theory in novel directions for more than five years and we look forward to expanding our history-centered approach to theory into the next decade.

Contents

List of Figures	vi
List of Contributors	vii
Acknowledgments	ix
Editorial Note	x
1 Introduction: Evental History and the Humanities <i>Michael J. Kelly</i>	1
2 From the Extended Mind to the Anthropocene: Rethinking Scale in Literary History <i>Arthur Rose</i>	17
3 How We Got Out of Music History, and How We Can Get Back into It <i>J. P. E. Harper-Scott</i>	37
4 Humanist Matters <i>Adi Efal-Lautenschläger</i>	61
5 The Rhetoric of Time and the Time of Rhetoric <i>Rik Peters</i>	81
6 Past, Present, and Future <i>F. R. Ankersmit</i>	103
7 The Nigerian “History Machine” <i>Samaila Suleiman</i>	119
8 History as a Scam: Confrontation and Resentment between Archaeology and History <i>Andre Szczawlinska Muceniecks</i>	141
9 Alternative Forms of Historical Writing: Concepts and Facts in Goya’s <i>Disasters of War</i> <i>Javier López-Alós</i>	159
10 “Methods of Reasoning and Imagination”: History’s Failures and Capacities in Anglophone Design Research <i>Sarah Teasley</i>	183
Notes	207
Index	249

Figures

7.1	Chart showing the frequency of articles appearing in JHSN	130
9.1	Albrecht Dürer, <i>Book of the Apocalypse</i> , “The four horsemen”	165
9.2	Francisco de Goya, <i>Disasters of War</i> , 1: “Sad presentiments of what must come to pass”	166
9.3	Francisco de Goya, “Christ on the Mount of Olives”	167
9.4	Francisco de Goya, <i>Disasters of War</i> , 29, “He deserved it”	170
9.5	Jacques Callot, <i>Miseries of War</i> , “The hanging”	171
9.6	Francisco de Goya, <i>Disasters of War</i> , 36, “Not [in this case] either”	171
9.7	Francisco de Goya, <i>Caprices</i> , 43, “The sleep of reason produces monsters”	175
9.8	Francisco de Goya, <i>Disasters of War</i> , 79, “Truth has died”	176
9.9	Francisco de Goya, <i>Disasters of War</i> , 80, “Will she live again?”	176
9.10	Francisco de Goya, <i>Disasters of War</i> , 81, “Proud monster”	177
9.11	Francisco de Goya, <i>Disasters of War</i> , 82, “This is the truth”	178

Introduction: Evental History and the Humanities

Michael J. Kelly

*Lex divina triplici sentienda est modo: primo ut historice, secundo ut tropologice, tertio ut mystice intellegatur. Historice namque iuxta litteram, tropologice iuxta moralem scientiam, mystice iuxta spiritalem intellegentiam.*¹

In the past few decades, scholars have celebrated the end of history and proclaimed its rebirth. Outside the walls of the academy, in the media, it is easy to find claims that readers and viewers are “witnessing” (or consuming) history, that certain events, from pie-eating contests to war catastrophes and natural phenomena, are “historical.” Governments too are part of this trend, with the US Senate, for example, establishing a formal definition of history in 2006.² This increasing interest in the historical has emerged, in large measure, from elementary and outdated notions of history, eliciting the questions that drive this volume: what role does History, the discipline and its professionals, play amidst an expanding public craving for history and revived discourses in historical theory? To what extent is History informing and leading the discussion on history and on the past? What is its impact on historical theory? These are fresh and urgent questions for the field and for the state of history publicly, and they deserve a collective and inclusive response. This volume aims to initiate that response by exploring the current relationship between History and its cognate humanistic disciplines. To develop a reflection on History itself, this volume looks at History from the perspective of the Humanities.³

The contributions to this volume, and their respective authors, represent a spectrum of humanistic inquiry: anthropology and archaeology, architecture, art, design, education and pedagogy, medieval studies, music, theater and performance, law, literature, rhetoric, and philosophy. By exploring the humanistic

fields with which History is in dialogue, as well as the institutions that correlate between them, the discussions presented can serve as a firm basis through which to elicit original discourses between History and the other Humanities. The chapters of this volume introduce complementing and common theses and have been arranged accordingly. Primary themes and topics include: facticity, facts and the event of (historical) “truth”; objectivity and subjectivity; and the disagreements, and at times apparent dissonance, between History and other humanistic fields, and the partial reconciliations between them since the linguistic turn and postmodernity.

The expanding interest in evental history, today, is largely the result of a diverse, interdisciplinary engagement with the work of Alain Badiou—corresponding to the general proposition that Philosophy presently steers historical theory (to the detriment of History). Badiou’s historical theory is more the product of scholars’ careful exposition of his writing than his own advanced historical-theoretical exposition.⁴ The first *Being and Event* (1988) develops a theory of being. The second, titled *Logics of Worlds* (2006), develops a theory of appearing. In *Logics of Worlds*, Badiou tackles the question of how a truth appears in a world, which can be read as “how history can happen”? Badiou refers to this mode of appearing as a subject-body, a new subject is born from fidelity to a trace-event, which one can call “historical becoming.” Thus, truth engenders history. For Badiou, philosophy cannot find or develop new truths. Neither can history be about finding or creating truths. Truths find history; that is to say, historical conditions develop by which a truth can (re-)emerge from the void (through, as I argue elsewhere, the antihistorian).⁵ In short, history is the history of truth; there is no history of the finite, only of the eternal; history is singularly associated with humanity (which is not to say the latter).

In *The Rebirth of History*, Badiou effectively lays out his philosophy of history, alternatively the history of truth, by analyzing recent riots around the world and schematizing the process of revolt. Here, he establishes three types of riots: *immediate, latent, and historical*. The immediate riot is the unexpected moment in a world, when the possibility to describe the current state of the world springs forth, announcing through its action that there is a truth that does not fit into this world: for example, the communist idea. The latent riot is the period when subjective decisions are being made, when it comes to be decided whether the immediate riot will be an event or not, and this is defined by subjective choice: faithful, reactive, or obscure (occult). The subject that is born from these riots—a subject for Badiou is almost always a group, or collection of people, or a party, or a movement—who is faithful to the event of the emergence of

the new truth inaugurates a third stage of riot: the historical riot. The historical riot occupies a space and has a unified commitment to alterity; a unified Idea, it is the rebirth of a truth.

A historical riot represents the emergence of one political truth only; fidelity to the event that brought forth the truth and is now an event-trace in the historical riot: as Badiou states in *Theory of the Subject*, “there is only one political subject for any historicization.”⁶ Accordingly, the *subject is always an exception to the world*, the subject is *always constituted, rare, finite and dependent on an event*. The subject is an exception to the situation, in a relationship to something in its world as also to something outside of it, an alternative truth, and it is in this paradoxical relationship that history becomes interesting, because it is here that the subject can touch the infinite and elicit a riot (a revolt against the norms)—a disruption that has the potential to call forth the philosophical conditions for a new truth.

Political solutions, that is, new political truths, emerge from outside history, and yet, history is fundamental to their creation. History is meant as a form of organization, a methodology. Central to Badiou’s argument is that riots, including the historical riot, are precursors to the political; *history is prepolitical*. With the birth of a subject in its fidelity in the historical riot, people who are present in the world but absent from its power begin to become present, that is, there is a “historical” awakening, or, rebirth. The so-called Arab Spring, for Badiou, ushered in a new historical sequence, a new time, the coming to the end of the current period and the beginning of an event that could lead to a new historical sequence if the riots (bodies and languages) lead to an Idea (i.e., the political truth, the “communist hypothesis”). The goal of riots and the rebirthing of history is, for Badiou, the return to the world of the communist hypothesis, which simply means: “the proposition that the subordination of labour to the dominant class is not inevitable.”⁷ The “rebirth of history” represents this universal communist potential.

Badiou’s philosophy of history maintains history as a temporal descriptor; history is a sequence of time, as historical riots open the chance for new “long-term temporalities.”⁸ History maintains, as a possibility, the reemergence of the communist hypothesis. History is thus, for Badiou, a fragmented collection (or not) of sequences defined by the subordination of labor to the dominant classes. History, in this sense, is a temporal-atemporal, double-sided line of truths, a meta-history that weaves its way alongside human existence; in certain moments the communist hypothesis exposes itself, while, mostly, an absence of history is characterized by this suppression. Sometimes history exists and

sometimes it is inexistent, and this existence/inexistence is directly correlated to the existence/inexistence of history and politics. Historical becoming is the chance for the rebirth of politics; the rebirth of history represents the chance for a rebirth of politics, and so the communist hypothesis.

In “History and Event,” Quentin Meillassoux claims that for Badiou “there is only a history of the eternal, because only the eternal proceeds from the event.”⁹ Meillassoux is correct: what this means is that history can only be the history of the eternal since truths are eternal and history is only about seizing truths. Truths and history derive from the finite but are, in themselves, infinite. From this logic, Meillassoux argues, truths are both eternal and historical, which might be clarified as *truths are eternal because they are historical*. Truths elicit history, they are history, and they are what end an intervallic period (between history and nonhistory). They and so history are eternal and infinite and capable of being reborn perpetually. Because they are infinite, though, they cannot be repeated: we cannot repeat history. “Marxism, the workers’ movement, mass democracy, Leninism, the party of the proletariat, the socialist state—all the inventions of the 20th century—are not really useful to us any more.”¹⁰

Hence Badiou’s philosophy of history is a double-sided, uneven relationship between infinity and finitude, between nonappearance and appearing, that cannot accommodate a vision of perpetual progress (or regression). History is radical potential, the grounding of a radical politics, or rather, I would say, anti-history is the grounding, the historical riot is the antihistorical event (eliciting evental history). Badiou’s philosophy of history (re-)announces universal historical truths, in the sense that there are and must be the possibility for materially derived transcendental truths that do not fit into the logics of a world, but that can enter it through the conditions that bring forth the “riot” (antihistory), and which can start to be reborn through the historical riot. Performance reopens the past, thereby cutting a hole in the logic of the world.

Incorporating performance into historical analysis is central to History and the supplemental disciplines analyzed throughout this volume. Performance provides the basis for the unpredictable truth-event, and, in this way, is foundational to History. New musicology, as J. P. E. Harper-Scott elaborates below, instead of associating performance and text into an evental history establishes them as dichotomous, with a privileging of the latter, the historical object. Harper-Scott’s model for showing this is the history of Beethoven. In the history of rap one can find a similar situation in the historiography of lyrics versus beats, which narrows the possibilities for rap’s historical becoming and proliferates an “end of rap” narrative. The “end of history,” Berlin-wall-fall moment