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Department of History

The Journey from Language to Experience:
Frank Ankersmit's Lost "Historical" Cause.

Peter P Icke

Doctor of Philosophy
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Abstract

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This thesis has been completed as a requirement for a higher degree of the University of Southampton.

My purpose in the researching and the writing of this thesis has been to investigate, and to try to explain, Frank Ankersmit's curious shift from his well expressed and firmly held narrativist position of *Narrative Logic*, to an arguably contradictory, yet passionately held counter belief in the plausibility of a form of direct (sublime) historical experience – an ***authentic*** unmediated relationship with the past. I am, accordingly, presenting here what I believe to be the most adequate explanatory account of/for Ankersmit's intellectual journey. A journey which, in essence, constituted a substitution of his earlier representational, language centred philosophy of history for what might be taken as a new and mystical non-representational theory. This alternative theory of Ankersmit's (let it be called this for now), lacking cognitive foundations, works on the basis of sensations, moods, feelings and therefore a consciousness deemed to be received directly from the past itself, and therein – for this thesis – lies its fatal weakness as a ***historical*** theory. Belief in the mystical may be all right at some level, if this is what is wanted, but a mystical experience itself cannot produce a historical re-presentation which (tautologically) is the only way that the past can be presented historically. Thus, I argue that Ankersmit's journey from language to (***historical***) experience – the latter phenomenon being more appropriately situated within the field of sociology/social theory and memory studies – is, in the end, a lost ***historical*** cause.

Contents

DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, Peter P. Icke, declare that the thesis entitled 'The Journey from Language to Experience: Frank Ankersmit's Lost "Historical" Cause' and the work presented in it are my own. I confirm that:

- this work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University.
- where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
- where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
- where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
- I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
- where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
- none of this work has been published before submission

Signed 

Date: 5th February 2010.

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I also want to extend my thanks to Sue Morgan who, in her role as research co-ordinator, facilitated my progression to an early PhD completion.

Hayden White, Beverley Southgate and Alexander Macfie read parts and/or the whole of my thesis in its various "stages of production", and I thank them for their critical but always constructive comments on and their support for the project; Mark Mason acted throughout as a brilliant sounding board for ideas, not only relating to this thesis but with regard to historical theory more generally; in similar vein, thanks as well to Kalle Pihlainen.

And finally my thanks to my wife Christina for her tireless proof reading of so many endlessly reworded arguments, her advice on writing style and her insistence on sentence length reduction.

Introduction

F. R. (Frank) Ankersmit was not a total stranger to me when I first came to his works on historical theory, for his reputation preceded him. As a pre-eminent philosopher/theorist[1] of history – the European Hayden White one might say – he had already, for me, assumed a significant status amongst the leaders in his field of scholarship, and it was that image which influenced my perception of the Ankersmit who I initially began to *read*, *analyse* and *situate*. But, through that reading, analysing and situating, it was precisely *that* Ankersmit who slowly began to melt away and mutate as another, quite different Ankersmit emerged out of what became my radical re-thinking of him – an Ankersmit whose work(s) do not fully live up either to his pre-eminent reputation or to expectations subsequent to it. This re-thinking (refiguring/relocating) of Ankersmit, which constitutes the substance of my thesis, is broadly reflected in its title, 'The Journey from Language to Experience: Frank Ankersmit's Lost "Historical" Cause', and it is from this governing perspective that I have constructed and produced the overall form and content of my argument. And so that the reader might know, right from the start, the direction and purpose of this argument, I will first briefly summarise it as a whole and then discuss its organisation into chapters.

I open my argument with the proposition that there is in Ankersmit's work(s), *vis-à-vis* the philosophy of history, a very good (even excellent) Frank Ankersmit of an enduring kind. This good/excellent/enduring Ankersmit is the Ankersmit of

[1] Because Ankersmit in various places is both referred to as, and sometimes refers to himself as, both a philosopher of history and a historical theorist (such usage effecting the collapse of any distinction that might exist between the terms *philosopher* and *theorist* in this particular context), it should be noted here that throughout my own text I have also followed this same common usage, using the two terms either interchangeably or preferring one over the other depending on what is perceived as, again, 'the context'. Furthermore, I should point out at this juncture that, with regard to notations, I will be using *single* inverted commas throughout for footnoted quotations, for phrases drawn for discussion from previous "block" extracts within my own text, and for my own rhetorical questions. My use of *double* inverted commas will be restricted to either the problematizing or highlighting of word/phrase meanings.

Narrative Logic[2] published in 1983. Yet, although the central thesis of that text – concerning the representational/propositional notion of the ***narrative substance*** – can, in my view, withstand all the criticisms that have been, and might be, levelled against it, the overall "logic" of *Narrative Logic* (and Ankersmit is regarded by many others, as well as by himself, as an extremely logical thinker) arguably leaves much to be desired. Hence it is my contention that whilst Ankersmit's notion of ***narrative substances*** does indeed stand impregnable, the thinking that underpins and underwrites his overall argument as expressed in *Narrative Logic* (his "means" which take him to his desired "ends") is often, in its elements, contradictory, incoherent and even unnecessary – faults which Ankersmit scarce seems to notice buried, as they frequently are, in an almost intimidatingly difficult and detailed erudition. Nevertheless, as stated, the conclusions reached by this early Ankersmit remain, I think, utterly convincing, conclusions which (articulated through the concept of ***narrative substances*** and informed by his central idea of histories as being individual proposals about or representations of an absent past) highlight the always problematical way in which the evidential traces of the past are transformed into history through, and *only* through, modes of representation. And that the absent past, being absent, can only be "known" through its representations, for there is nothing else: 'no representation, no past'[3] – Ankersmit's own phrase – says it all.

I further argue that Ankersmit's early mode of thinking (as epitomised in *Narrative Logic*) was overwhelmingly informed by, and owed its success to, his immersion in and reading of twentieth-century linguistics, narratology, textuality and representationalism widely construed. That is to say that his position is locatable in a ***language*** based philosophical context, a location from which he has been distancing himself over the last fifteen (or so) years until, in 2005, he was able to fully express his new (and for this thesis his current) position[4] as articulated in his

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[2] Ankersmit, F. R., (1983). *Narrative Logic: A Semantic Analysis of the Historian's Language*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.

[3] Ankersmit, F. R., (2006). '"Presence" And Myth' in *History and Theory* 45 no. 3: p328

[4] There is perhaps an irony here – maybe even a problem – in the fact that in 2007 Ankersmit launched a new journal, *The Journal of the Philosophy of History* (co-edited with Mark Bevir, Paul Roth, Aviezer Tucker and Alison Wylie), which seems (with regard to the contents of its first three volumes at least) to give much more room to textualism and intentionality in representation than it does to experience. That is to say that the Journal addresses old concerns (the concerns of the *early* Ankersmit), albeit in an overall

summative *Sublime Historical Experience*[5] without, as he put it, 'recanting' his previous position.[6] Ankersmit argued in *Sublime Historical Experience*[7] that the idea of history as a literary artifact, as textuality (he began to refer to it as that in his own shorthand), had been taken-up at too high a price. Matters had gone too far, such that the notion of historical/historian's experience had been squeezed out of the prevailing language-centred philosophical/theoretical history debates, these debates being most recently cast in forms of post-modern types of post-structuralism, deconstruction and, therefore, that ubiquitous textualism which now had to be "reined-in". As Ankersmit put it epigrammatically: 'language is where experience is not and experience is where language is not'.[8] Accordingly, as Ankersmit explained at length in *Sublime Historical Experience*, he now saw it as his task to rehabilitate experience and to establish a *juste milieu* precisely between language and experience.[9]

Now, in order to begin to understand the nature of the motivational drive which propelled Ankersmit in the direction of historical experience, and the style of logic with which he sought to validate this "move", a number of points can be made at this early juncture. In the first place Ankersmit has always needed history, a deep-seated need that, as we shall see, had its origins (not least) in the happy/unhappy vacillations which characterised his childhood and to which he himself draws attention. However, and this I think is ironic in the circumstances, Ankersmit's own critique of mainstream academic history (as laid out in *Narrative Logic*) was

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critical and disavowing way, yet the curious thing is that experience itself (Ankersmit's current and central interest) makes only fleeting, haunting appearances in it. Bearing in mind that this is, after all, the Journal of Ankersmit's new 'Centre for Metahistory', it appears odd (to me anyway) that it mostly concerns itself with arguments that have been going on in historical theory for the last twenty odd years and does not tackle sublime historical experience and its derivatives "head-on" as it were. This footnote might seem a little premature appearing as it does at this early point in my thesis – and perhaps it is – but it might, nevertheless, afford something of a foretaste of ambiguities to come as I work through the multiple aspects of Ankersmit's developing theoretical position.

[5] Ankersmit, F. R., (2005). *Sublime Historical Experience*. California: Stanford University Press.

[6] The extent/nature of Ankersmit's recantation is touched upon at various points in this thesis, but I pull together my final thoughts on what I consider to be its unresolved ambivalences in the form of a post script (or *coda*) at the very end of my Conclusion.

[7] And also in occasional related/formative papers which, as I have mentioned, run back ten to fifteen years (Ankersmit himself pointing out in the preface to *Sublime Historical Experience* that that text itself was some ten years in the making).

[8] Ankersmit. *Sublime Historical Experience*. p79

[9] Although, as I hope will become apparent, it could be argued that this move to moderate the pre-eminence of language took Ankersmit almost to the point of excluding it altogether.

arguably so devastating that no empirical, epistemologically-striving history could ever again, following this critique of it, be seen to provide access to the kind of historical truth that Ankersmit himself had always sought. He had in a manner of speaking "burnt his own boats" and there was literally no going back by this route. Consequently, in order to get at the past, Ankersmit was forced to look for another route to it which, he evidently came to believe, could be found through his rehabilitated notion of experience. Ankersmit, accordingly, argued for a form of direct experience of the past *unmediated* by any kind of historical discourse – he wanted, in effect, to by-pass representational history – and so in this way (this is the crucial point) he could successfully circumvent his own crushing critique of it. Hence, it was Ankersmit's desire to satisfy this newly framed need for a form of pure, direct contact with the actuality of the past itself – the past "plain" – that led him through various contentious (in my view) "means" towards his earnestly sought but unworkable (in my view) "ends". It is, therefore, in Ankersmit's arguably questionable development of his own theoretical position, driven by a particular need, that one can trace (and perhaps explain) his radical move away from the comfort and safety of the logic of narrative towards the hazards and perils of a somewhat bizarre notion of experience.

However, leaving that matter there for the moment and continuing with my summary, it is my further contention that (whatever else it does) sublime historical experience draws Ankersmit into a theoretical *cul-de-sac* if it is "historical" understanding that he really wants – and that is what he says he wants. For though Ankersmit establishes his current theoretical position on the basis of (sublime) historical experience (most fully expressed in his text of that name), what Ankersmit is actually talking about is arguably neither sublime nor historical nor experiential, rather it can be seen as a sometimes hyperbolically expressed discourse on the subject of *existential sensation*.

Furthermore, and finally, I argue (referring now to the 're-locating' or 're-situating' of Ankersmit's new style of theorisation as mentioned in my first paragraph) that if Ankersmit's work on experience is to be located/situated anywhere at all, then it

should be located *outside* of history altogether, in some corner (a somewhat mystical, mythical corner) of social theory or, to be more precise, within a corner of memory studies. For it appears to me that Ankersmit's new and current "home" is to be found within the embrace of theories of presence and authenticity, of trauma, of testimony, of witnessing, of nostalgia, etc., a habitat which has been growing rapidly over the last two or three decades. The crucial point here being that, whatever else it might be that Ankersmit is now talking about, it is *not* (strictly speaking) history/ historical theory; it is not about the past *as* history which, I argue, can only be produced through modes of textual representationalism. Accordingly, it appears to me that Ankersmit's 'Journey' towards a *pure* form of historical experience has taken him outside the sphere of history altogether into the complex sociological sphere of memory studies. And it is this ironic turn of events – precisely his 'Lost "Historical" Cause' of my thesis title – that can be construed/troped as (or simply *is*) the *tragedy* of Frank Ankersmit's move from language to (sublime) experience.

Now, within the individual chapters which follow this general thesis as outlined above is always present; it informs and guides, *inter alia*, the analysis as a whole. However, in addition to this general analysis, I also engage Ankersmit – especially in Chapters Two and Three – through a closely textured series of expositions and arguments in the particular which address, critically, details of various aspects of his evolving position.[10] Accordingly, in order to keep my general arguments foremost in the reader's mind, such excursions into the analytical/particular will at intervals be "brought back" such that they might be located within the general perspective of my overall thesis. And it is to be hoped that this strategy – this constant movement between the general and the particular – adds both depth and clarity to my overall argument which I unpack and organise within a structure comprising four chapters and a conclusion as follows.

- In Chapter One ('The Good Ankersmit') I establish my very best Ankersmit; for this purpose the arguments used focus principally, but not

[10] Although my comments during such arguments are sometime critical and sharp, I hope that they will not be taken as disrespectful.

exclusively, on Ankersmit's innovative derivation and development of the concept of *narrative substances.*

- In Chapter Two ('A Moment of Hesitation') I argue, on the basis of detailed analyses rather than on the more expository (though still analytical) nature of Chapter One, that this *good* Ankersmit is not so very good after all. For not only is his thesis in general (re: *narrative substances*) supported by a series of problematical philosophical and algebraic arguments or proofs deemed here to be (in the end) strictly unnecessary, but it also appears that Ankersmit is only able to establish the originality of his position on the back of several radical misreadings of other people. Accordingly, the point that emerges out of this analysis is that whilst Ankersmit's conclusions (as concisely stated by him) seem to me to be impeccable and eminently sustainable, the manner in which he establishes them is, arguably, flawed. Consequently, Ankersmit – who both presents himself as, and appears to be accepted as, the personification of philosophical rectitude and logical rigour (with regard to historical theory at least) – turns out to be something of a disappointment. However, a disappointment or not, Ankersmit himself very clearly thought that what he was doing was pretty good, in fact so good that he could see, or intuit, that his own ruinous critique of mainstream history was, in effect, denying him the only available (albeit problematical) route to the "knowledge" of the past that he had (and has) always needed and always sought. Ankersmit was therefore compelled to find and then transfer to an alternative style of theory that would, without falling foul of his own critique of representational history, allow some form of access to the past. And it is this transition – this crab-like move from language to experience in search of some other route via a "real" history towards a "real" past – that constitutes the subject matter of Chapter Three.
- Chapter Three ('Ankersmit in Transition') can therefore be read as a kind of "bridge" between two radically different modes of thought. Hence, in this chapter I investigate the arguments which Ankersmit began to develop especially (but not only) in the papers collected together in the volume

History and Tropology[11] (and not least arguments wherein he crucially distances himself from Hayden White) and which led him towards and began to shape his notion of (sublime) historical experience. It is this extraordinary idea of the actual possibility of historical experience as Ankersmit construed it (subsequently to be developed into sublime historical experience) that leads me into my Fourth Chapter which deals directly with it.

- Accordingly, in Chapter Four ('Sublime Historical Experience'), whilst attempting to adopt a more general and discursive style (without, nevertheless, losing an analytical "edge"),[12] I critique Ankersmit's notion of sublime historical experience and its dependent derivatives; in particular, *presence* and *parallel processing*. All of these phenomena (along with Ankersmit's fellow articulators of them who represent what I call the "Groningen School")[13] I shall then remove from the field of history studies to the field of memory studies where, as already mentioned, I think they really belong.
- Finally, in my Conclusion, I shall attempt to draw together (without too much repetition) the various elements of my thesis into what I hope is a coherent whole and locate it in a wider philosophical perspective.

There are now but two remaining matters which I want to mention in these introductory remarks; the first is to do with *positioning and reading*, the second with the *uniqueness* of this thesis.

Referring to the question of positioning in general, and taking due notice of one of Ankersmit's *own* arguments, I have to (and I do) take into account that the framing and prefiguring of any body of work will always be cast in a certain kind of "mould" governed by the point-of-view of its author. I am very aware that other people adopting different points-of-view could, would, and do read Ankersmit quite

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[11] Ankersmit, F. R., (1994). *History and Tropology: The Rise and Fall of Metaphor*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

[12] Such an approach, I shall argue, befits a reading of the sometime analytical but more often impressionistic mood of *Sublime Historical Experience*.

[13] The "Groningen School" and its advocates (for example, Eelco Runia, Hans Gumbrecht *et al*) will be discussed in Chapter Four.

differently from me. Nevertheless, it remains my contention that what I am putting forward in this thesis, as my thesis, constitutes the very best way of reading Ankersmit's *oeuvre*. And my argument, arising out of this best reading, is broadly speaking articulated about what I have already characterised as Ankersmit's tragic trajectory of historical/philosophical thought – a trajectory which carried him via various texts from his theoretical position as expressed and embodied in the *narrative substance* of *Narrative Logic* to the mystical, mythical, not even historical Ankersmit of *Sublime Historical Experience*. However, as I have already explained, I am quite aware that relative to different points-of-view other readings of Ankersmit are not only possible but inevitable. I am, for instance, quite sure that Ankersmit himself would not see his own evolution over the last (let us say) twenty-five years as constituting some kind of perverse movement from a good to an intellectually impoverished or a tragic version of himself – in fact, quite the reverse. Ankersmit would, and indeed does, see himself as being the very best possible Ankersmit right now and thus, believing that he has arrived at something of huge value and significance to historians and historical theorists, he would see the earlier Ankersmit as being, no doubt, still pretty good, but also somewhat *passé* in the context of his now current position.[14] However, my argument is that the nature of Ankersmit's developing position can only be adequately grasped when seen completely the other way around. That is to say that since his development of the notion of *narrative substances* he has not been getting better but, rather, he has been getting worse, to the extent that he now draws at least some of his theoretical arguments from the arguably eccentric and highly subjective world of mysticism as he "migrates", apparently without fully noticing it, from *history* into *memory*.

My second and final point concerns the question of the uniqueness (original contribution to knowledge, etc.) of my thesis. During my research into Ankersmit

[14] In order to justify this conclusion I refer to Ankersmit's Introduction to *Sublime Historical Experience* wherein he suggests that whilst not actually recanting his previous narrativist theoretical position he is, nevertheless, moving on to a much better understanding of what history is and, indeed, he is even looking into how historical consciousness *per se* came into being. Thus, even though he appears to be retaining his previous theoretical position with regard to the historical text, he undeniably offers his new *experience* based thesis as an advance on this previous position. For he presents it as not only a more comprehensive thesis but (and this is the main point) also as an unproblematic and *authentic* direct engagement with the actual past – something beyond the capacity of the historical narrative. These matters will be fully addressed as the thesis proceeds

and his current *milieu* I did not, and nor have I since, come across any lengthy comprehensive account or prolonged and systemic analysis of his work(s). Such a thing does not appear to exist in any language and certainly not in English. Accordingly, there seems to be precious little available in terms of substantial literature of the kind exemplified by this thesis. Of course over the years (and increasingly so latterly), Ankersmit has undertaken several interviews during which he has clarified his views on a range of matters including his own work and its "trajectory" as he sees it. There also exists a small number of sometimes incisive papers on some or other aspect of his work(s). For example a paper by J. Zammito on representation, overviews of Ankersmit's work(s) by E. Domańska and K. Jenkins, and a few occasionally more abrasive reviews on some of his individual publications (for instance, that of C. B. McCullagh and also, although less provocatively argued, those of M. S. Roth, T. G. Chorell, *et al*).[15] But, so far as I am aware, this thesis is the *first* and therefore the *only* attempt to evaluate Ankersmit at length in some analytical and thus critical detail and, therefore, the first to discern and expound a different trajectory from those occasionally suggested by others as well as that which Ankersmit's would see as his own. Accordingly, it is my hope that my arguments here concerning Ankersmit's work(s) will constitute a *different*, worthwhile addition to the extant literature. And moreover that, both in its originality and perhaps its persuasiveness, it might be of future use to others working in what is, not withstanding my particular critique of Ankersmit's increasingly experiential adventure, a vibrant and fascinating sphere of interest.

[15] These commentators and their reviews (along with others) will be evaluated in various places throughout my thesis.

Chapter One

The Good Ankersmit

The Ankersmit of the title of this chapter is the Ankersmit who emerges from and is thus defined by his first book *Narrative Logic*[1] published in 1983. In order to illustrate exactly what I mean by this I propose to lay out and evaluate the principal elements of Ankersmit's essential argument as articulated therein, prefaced very briefly by two pertinent considerations. My first is that to appreciate the full significance of his somewhat controversially received text (and the disruption that it caused within the discipline), one needs to understand Ankersmit's *own* reading of the general state of historical theory at that time. And my second, that one cannot ignore – as Ankersmit certainly did not ignore – the earlier huge contribution to this field of study by Hayden White, and here I refer particularly to White's publication of *Metahistory*[2] in 1973.

With regard to the first point, Ankersmit held (correctly I think) that before the publication of the two above mentioned books historical theory had concerned itself almost exclusively with historical research, while the writing up of the product of that research – a process that was generally taken to be relatively transparent and therefore unproblematic – had, as a consequence, remained largely uninvestigated. In short, there was no comprehensive philosophical analysis of the *writing* of history *per se*, and Ankersmit's precise purpose in the writing of *Narrative Logic* was to set that matter right. This is not to say that some questions concerning the intrinsic character of the (ubiquitous) narrative form had not, albeit in somewhat piecemeal form, been previously addressed. As Ankersmit pointed out in his Introduction to *Narrative Logic*, such explanatory literature could indeed be found but, disregarding for the moment the work of Hayden White, this was more often than not in the form

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[1] Ankersmit, F. R., (1983). *Narrative Logic: A Semantic Analysis of the Historian's Language*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.
[2] White, H., (1973). *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

of disparate articles (for example, those of Louis Mink, Roland Barthes *et al*) which, collectively he held, could not be seen to constitute 'a comprehensive survey of....the nature and task of narrative philosophy'.[3]

But – my second point – with White this was obviously very different, for amongst the then literature (even if one includes, say, Walter B. Gallie, Arthur Danto, Morton White and Maurice Mandelbaum)[4] White was exceptional and, as noted, Ankersmit could not and did not ignore him. Indeed, due to Ankersmit's constant harking-back to White in what one might see, over time, as a love/hate relationship in his sometime association with and sometime rejection of White's position, there is a sense in which White might even be seen to have been a constant *spectre*, haunting (and disturbing) Ankersmit's theoretical advances. Certainly, to put it neutrally at this early juncture, Ankersmit's work can in some ways (as we shall see) be taken as a development of White's own work. Yet, having said that, I still think that it would be a mistake to imagine that Ankersmit might have found in White a model for his own theorising. For whilst Ankersmit's early arguments, broadly speaking, carried him towards some of the same general conclusions as those expressed by White (in, for instance, *Metahistory*), he has nevertheless always been and undeniably remains 'original and complex in his own right'.[5]

Ankersmit's original project as he saw it himself, then, was to demonstrate that contemporary historical theory was inadequate to its undertaking; that it failed to satisfactorily account for the nature of the narrative form which was generally taken to arise unproblematically out of the product – the facts and singular statements – of historical research. Accordingly, through his intervention in the discipline, Ankersmit sought to challenge that established position by proposing that the hitherto presumed transparent process of historical writing was nothing less than opaque. And, furthermore, that almost everything that really mattered in the process

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[3] Ankersmit. *Narrative Logic*. p1

[4] Gallie, W. B., (1964). *Philosophy and Historical Understanding*. New York: Liveright Publishing; Danto, A., (1965). *Analytical Philosophy of History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University press; White, M., (1965). *Foundations of Historical Knowledge*. New York: Harper & Row; Mandelbaum, M., (1967). *The Problem Of Historical Knowledge: An Answer To Relativism*. New York: Harper and Row, and also Mandelbaum, M., (1971). *History, Man and Reason*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

[5] Jenkins, K., (1999). *Why History? Ethics and Postmodernity*. London: Routledge. p136

of history production took place between the completion of historical research and its writing up into narrative form – a process which Ankersmit referred to as the trajectory from evidence to text. It was the express purpose of *Narrative Logic* to scrutinize these matters through philosophical enquiry – essentially an enquiry into the nature of the narrative form, the nature of narrative knowledge that emerged from it and the role of linguistic instruments in the structure of that knowledge. Thus the possibility, or otherwise, of correspondence between the past and its narrative representation might be determined.

Against this lightly sketched background I now turn directly to the text of *Narrative Logic* in order to examine and analyse the principal elements of Ankersmit's argument, an argument which is articulated around three propositions or theses, his three 'essential pillars' (as he called them) which briefly put go as follows[6]:

1) That the past has no narrative structure within it – such structures occurring only in narratives themselves.
2) That ***narrative substances*** are the primary narrative entities in narrative accounts of the past.
3) That there is a relationship between ***narrative substance*** and ***metaphor*** and that the narrative use of language is indeed fundamentally metaphorical.

Pillar 1

In Chapter Four of *Narrative Logic*, Ankersmit draws attention to the distinction between the spheres of thought associated with the positions adopted by both the 'narrative realist' and the 'narrative idealist', and it will be necessary to follow this argument through in order to grasp the substance of Ankersmit's first essential pillar.

Ankersmit's so called narrative realist accepts the historical narrative as the verbalisation of a kind of "picture" of the actual past and since this picture, which is presumed to truly correspond with the past, arises out of the various statements that

[6] These three pillars, as expressed here, are contractions of Ankersmit's descriptions laid out on p87, p100 and p216 of *Narrative Logic*.

constitute the narrative itself, then it is taken that the author of that narrative must have had at his/her disposal a set of translation rules in order to effect the projection of past events and situations directly into narrative form. The source of these translation rules, Ankersmit suggested, could perhaps be found in the models and theories of the social sciences, or alternatively – and here he draws on the works of various German twentieth century philosophers – they might be found in the notion of *value* (seen here as the driving force of historical enquiry) and thus provide the historian with the transcendental structure required to perform this direct translation of the evidence of the past into a corresponding narrative form. Ankersmit brings together the foregoing as follows:

> ....the historian is offered a set of translation rules, either in the form of a value system or of socio-scientific theories, which, it is claimed, indicate how to translate the historical past into the language of historiography... .philosophies of history are based upon the (implicit) conviction that historiography is essentially a projection in historical language of past reality in conformity with these translation rules.[7]

Now, this verbalised picture theory of narrative realism is dismissed by Ankersmit for a number of reasons. In the first place he detects a debilitating terminologically generated confusion invading and eliding the quite separate domains of ontology, epistemology and the social sciences. For he recognises that these three categories, which are central to the philosophy of narrative realism, are at risk of losing their boundaries. Put more precisely, Ankersmit's concern is that the narrative realist might in error attribute an epistemological status to a particular set of socio-scientific rules thus asserting that only these amongst all possible rules can relate the past to its narrativised account. Such a strategy would have the effect of erasing the distinction between the domains of the epistemological and the socio-scientific, a gift to those who would transform history into a social science. Then, with regard to hermeneutic theory, which comes complete with its own intrinsic *life experience* translation rules and rests on the notion of ontological equality between the historian and the historical agent, a rather similar problem occurs but in this case the confusion arises between the categories of epistemology and ontology. And to complete this bewildering assortment of elisions, there also exists a confusion of the

[7] Ankersmit. *Narrative Logic*. p82

ontological with the socio-scientific which would appear to sustain the belief that it is indeed the essence of the past that is being translated into its narrative representation. At this stage in the argument it is already quite clear that a lack of clarity has its uses, and it provokes Ankersmit into writing that 'the picture theory depends for its very existence on a confusion of the ontological, the epistemological and the socio-scientific'.[8]

However, this problematic triple confusion of categories is, for Ankersmit, eclipsed by much more fundamental objections to the narrative realist's position. For, as he explained, it is difficult to see how the historical narrative can be taken as a definitive picture or projection of the actuality of the past when taking into account the following two points. First there is the question of category confusion; one cannot place a picture and a narrative into the same category simply to establish some linking mechanism between them. And, second, it would appear that any set of translation rules selected to perform this task of translation must themselves be selected and imposed arbitrarily. Indeed, there can never be any consensus on this matter, for by what measure can the definitive global translation rules of selection be selected to the satisfaction of all interested parties? Ankersmit continued with the observation that:

> ....the past [is not] like a landscape that has to be projected onto the linguistic level with the help of projection or translation rules. For the "historical landscape" is not given to the historian; he has to *construct* it. The narratio[9] is not the projection of a historical landscape.....the past is only constituted in the narratio. The structure of the narratio is a structure *lent* to or *pressed* on the past and not the reflection of a kindred structure objectively present in the past itself. We should reject 'the idea that there is a determinate historical actuality, the complex referent of all our narratives of "what actually happened", the untold story to which narrative histories approximate'.[10]

All of which leads Ankersmit to the conclusion that the past does not possess a narrative structure; narrative structures – a linguistic matter – occur only in

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[8] Ankersmit. *Narrative Logic*. p86

[9] Ankersmit favours the use of the word *narratio* as a contraction of *historiographical narrative representation of the past*. My preference is to stay with its shorter equivalent *historical narrative*.

[10] Ankersmit. *Narrative Logic*. p86. However, in the final sentence Ankersmit cites Mink L. O. (1978). 'Narrative Form as a Cognitive Instrument', in Canary R.H. and Kozickj H. (eds.) *The Writing of History: Literary Form and Historical Understanding*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press. pp129-149

narratives themselves. Furthermore, the past and its representation in narrative form are clearly separated by fundamental structural differences which deny the possibility of the existence of effective translation rules, since such rules would necessarily be required to perform the impossible task of linking entities that reside in categorically different domains. Hence, the narrative realist viewpoint loses credibility, and Ankersmit turns his attention to a matter which will not only be used to characterise the 'narrative idealist' but will also form the basis of his theory of *narrative substances*. This is how he introduces his proposal:

> ....the objects in the past so often mentioned by historians, objects such as intellectual, social or political movements and even nations or social groups, have no status in the past itself independent of the narratio: they spring from and are justified by the narratio.[11]

The point that Ankersmit is making here can be illustrated thus. A historian accounting for 'The Renaissance' might *appear* to be describing or investigating some thing that actually existed in the past; however, nobody living in Florence in 1500 would have been aware of any Renaissance as an object of possible study and measurement by future historians. This is simply because the word Renaissance (as used in this sense) refers to a 19th century colligatory term first adopted by historians of that period for the purpose of collecting together data which, when taken in sum, individuated the notion of a classically inspired rebirth of intellectual pursuits, particularly (but not always) artistic pursuits, associated with a loosely defined historical period. No two historians are necessarily going to exactly agree on the scope of data to be included within the term Renaissance; such decisions will be governed by the points-of-view of the historians in question. The Renaissance, then, is a concept figured within its narrative representation only, and that is all.[12] The

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[11] Ankersmit. *Narrative Logic*. p87

[12] It is interesting to note that the term 'Renaissance' was first used, as understood here, by the French historian Jules Michelet in his *History of France* (1855) and he saw it more as a general development in the sciences rather than in the arts, occupying the period from Columbus through Copernicus to Galileo (the mid 15th to mid 17th centuries) – that is, from the discovery of the earth to the discovery of the heavens (see Mansfield, B., (1992). *Man on His Own: Interpretations of Erasmus*. Toronto: Toronto University Press. pp140-143). The term was next used by the Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt who defined the Renaissance as the period from Giotto to Michelangelo (the mid 14th to mid 16th centuries) and thus, for him, it was an Italian affair centred on the arts (see the Penguin Books translation of Burckhardt's original 1860 text in Burckhardt, J., (1990). *The Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy*. St. Ives: Clays Ltd.) However, more recently the historian and genealogist Randolph Starn has taken the view that the Renaissance was a movement of practices and ideas without definitive beginnings, middles

central point to be stressed here is that the past is given shape or, better still, narratively "illustrated" by means of

> ....entities that do not form part of the past itself and that do not even refer to actual historical phenomena or aspects of such phenomena'. This is what I would like to call narrative idealism.[13]

All this both reaffirms the fundamental structural divide between the past and its narrative representation and suggests a certain autonomy of function with regard to the historical narrative which appears to be primarily governed by a narrative logic informed by linguistic rules and devices rather than the actuality of the past itself. The past can thus be seen to *underdetermine* its historicisation. The historical narrative can, therefore, no longer be taken as some sort of "window" through which the actuality of some past event might be viewed *exactly as it was*, rather it has to be seen as a *proposal* about that event. Or, as Ankersmit puts it, a mode of 'seeing as' cut adrift from the actuality of the past because it is unavoidably mediated through a complex of autonomous narrative devices which, *stricto-sensu,* lack any points of reference located in the past itself.

Now, none of this is intended to deny the veracity of facts or singular statements which *refer* to things, events or states of affairs which once "inhabited" the past. Nobody is likely to deny that Elizabeth 1st was Queen of England and Ireland from 17th November 1558 until her death on 24th March 1603. Such matters, which are ultimately validated by consensus, are entirely the concern of the field of historical research and, whilst Ankersmit has always recognised the value of this field of studies, it did not much figure in his thesis. Rather, Ankersmit is talking about conjunctions of facts and singular statements and the narrative knowledge that they carry by virtue of the manner in which they are structured into a coherent whole; the

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and endings (see Starn, R., (2002). 'The European Renaissance', in Ruggiero, G. (ed.). *A Companion to the Worlds of the Renaissance*. London: Blackwell Publishing. pp39-54). The point that I wish to make at this stage in my argument is that amongst these three eminent historians (one being responsible for "coining" the term Renaissance in the first place) we have three radically different ideas about what the Renaissance actually was and which period it actually occupied. But (and this is Ankersmit's point) each of these accounts is, no doubt, coherently articulated about its own uniquely individuated yet quite different *narrative substance*, and it is precisely such coherence which validates each account internally with reference to itself and not to the past. This matter will be discussed at greater length below.

[13] Ankersmit. *Narrative Logic*. p87

structure of the historical text being the key, for as the historian/historical theorist Alun Munslow has pointed out, the text

> ....is a structure and, as such, it has a logic of its own. Its logic is not that of reflection of the empirical essence hidden in things in the past but, rather, as a form of explanation its power resides in its own structure – structure which is always more than the sum of its parts.[14]

This *structure* – the logic of the narrative form – was precisely Ankersmit's subject of inquiry. He wanted to investigate the nature of it and understand how narrative knowledge (the meanings of narrative accounts of the past generated within the text) issued from the whole historical text. To fail to grasp this, as some do,[15] is to miss the point of his book.

In summation then, the past has no narrative structure within it – narrative structures occur (tautologically) only in narratives. Objects such as intellectual, social or political movements, nations, social groups and so on, have no "historical" status in the past itself. They spring from and are justified only by the structure of the historical narrative. The past is thus "illustrated" by means of entities which do not form part of the past itself, nor do these entities literally refer to the past. Hence, a gap exists between the past and its narrative representation which, in effect, not only affirms the structural autonomy of the historical narrative as a whole, but it also draws attention to the significance of the linguistic devices which govern it. In order to investigate the existence of any possible relationship between the actuality of the past (a past which does not say how it is to be represented) and the historical narrative that is presumed to be its representation, it would be necessary, Ankersmit argued, to analyse the logical structure of narrative accounts of the past and the precise nature of the narrative knowledge of the past arising from these accounts.

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[14] Munslow, A., (2003). *The New History*. London: Pearson Longman. p150

[15] For instance, Jonathan Gorman, referring both to the historical narrative as a whole and its singular statements says that '....the whole cannot be more than the sum of its parts.....a heroic argument is required to establish that indeed the whole is more than the sum of its parts'. This notion is central to Gorman's argument as laid out in Gorman J. L., (1997). 'Philosophical Fascination with Whole Historical Text' in *History and Theory* 36 no. 3: pp406-415. I have been unable to find explicit expressions of this view elsewhere but, nevertheless, I believe it to be part of the discourse in some quarters, in the sense that it reveals itself as a presupposition in argument.

To adopt a position consistent with these above observations would be to adopt Ankersmit's own position which is that of the narrative idealist. And this position rests on the assumption that there exists a narrative logic, uninformed by the past, which structures (apparent) knowledge of the past *internally* within its own narrative form. By contrast, and rejected by Ankersmit in his argument, narrative realism rests on the assumption that narrative knowledge of the past is directly informed by the past itself.

In the light of the foregoing the question of the *veracity* of historical facts or statements – *vis-à-vis* their *referential* links to the past – loses its assumed centrality and urgency. Indeed, it is undeniably the case that scholarly debate between historians almost exclusively focuses on the relative merits of different narrative interpretations of past events and how they might relate to other *key* texts that have somehow come to occupy authoritative positions on the subjects in question. For example, although I have read many reviews of history books by eminent historians, I have only rarely encountered any significant challenges to the facts of these various texts and, where a challenge is made, it is often in the form of a mild rebuke (for instance, sloppy work....get it right!). But, even when facts are to some degree questioned, the reviewers primary interest always concerns the validity of the text viewed as a whole when measured-up against the background context of other related texts. All in all history can be seen as an essentially inter-textual enterprise.

That much taken as understood, Ankersmit then moved on to investigate the nature and function of this *narrative logic* which apparently embodies the capacity to generate an endless collection of different historical accounts (sometimes radically different but always different) of the same past event. To meet this challenge Ankersmit proposed a new linguistic device, the *narrative substances*, which now brings me to his second essential pillar.

Pillar 2

So, what precisely does Ankersmit mean by *narrative substances* and where does this idea come from? Well, I think that the best way to get into Ankersmit's essential position is to understand how the concept of the *narrative substance* emerged out of an old idea which Ankersmit had appropriated and then ingeniously reshaped for his own purposes. By which I mean that what Ankersmit so successfully did was to take the historical theorist W. H. Walsh's exhausted notion of the 'colligatory concept', sever it from its objective referential entanglements, re-describe it as a 'linguistic instrument' and then relocate it in language where it had really always belonged. To explain exactly what I mean by all this it will first be necessary to have a closer look at Walsh's proposition.

Walsh introduced the concept of colligation (along with its anticipated explanatory potential) into the philosophy of history in his paper, 'The Intelligibility of History',[16] published in 1942. Walsh had borrowed the idea from the nineteenth century English philosopher and historian of science William Whewell, and Walsh continued to develop it throughout the course of various editions and reprints of *An Introduction to Philosophy of History*[17] before finalizing his argument in an essay entitled 'Colligatory Concepts in History'[18] (Walsh explained in this essay that he preferred to use the term 'colligatory concepts' rather than its earlier equivalent, 'appropriate conceptions').[19]

Colligation, as construed by Walsh, is essentially a form of contextualisation; that is, events are placed in a context through the establishment of a web of interconnections with other events in a manner that reveals the larger historical *wholes* of which the individual events are constituent parts. Walsh expected that colligation would offer the historian a tool of common usage in the sense that it might operate in its own right and independently with regard to the existing

[16] Walsh, W. H., (1942).'The Intelligibility of History' in *Philosophy* 17 no. 66: pp128-143
[17] Walsh, W. H., (1967). *An Introduction to Philosophy of History*. London: Hutchison & Co. p59
[18] Walsh, W. H., (1967). 'Colligatory Concepts in History' in Burston and Thompson (eds.) *Studies in the Nature of Teaching History*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. pp65-84
[19] Ibid. p72

positivist and idealist theories of historical understanding which had been essentially articulated through C. G. Hempel's 'Covering Law Model' and R. G. Collingwood's 'Re-enactment Theory' respectively. Walsh's introductory illustrative account of the process of colligation was set out as follows:

> If a historian is asked to explain a particular historical event I think he is often inclined to begin his explanation by saying that the event in question is to be seen as part of a general movement which was going on at the time. Thus Hitler's reoccupation of the Rhineland in 1936 might be elucidated by reference to the general policy of German self-assertion and expansion which Hitler pursued from the time of his accession to power. Mention of this policy, and specification of earlier and later steps in carrying it out, such as the repudiation of unilateral disarmament, the German withdrawal from the League of Nations, the absorption of Austria and the incorporation of the Sudetenland, do in fact serve to render the isolated action from which we started more intelligible. And they do it by enabling us to locate that action in its context, to see it as a step in the realisation of a more or less consistent policy. To grasp a policy of that sort and appreciate the way in which individual events contributed to its realisation is, at least in many cases, part of what is normally involved in giving a historical explanation.[20]

Walsh is thus suggesting here that the historian seeks an intelligible narrative *whole*, realised (in this particular example) through a 'unity of plot' arising out of the contextualising process of colligation[21], and that having achieved this unity any particular event within that whole might be thought to have been explained. It should also be noted here that Walsh's theory does not incorporate the idea that history could be seen as a 'rational process.....[or that his theory should be seen as] the only explanatory procedure adopted by historians'.[22] For

> ....in saying that the historian attempts to find intelligibility in history by colligating events according to appropriate ideas I am suggesting no theory of the ultimate moving forces in history. I say nothing about the *origin* of the ideas on which the historian seizes; it is enough for me that those ideas were influential at the time of which he writes. Thus the only rationality in the historical process which my theory assumes is a kind of surface rationality: the

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[20] Walsh. *An Introduction to Philosophy of History*. p59

[21] One should note here (taking this particular example cited by Walsh) that the contextualising process would necessarily show a preference for the selection of narrative statements capable of collectively individuating the idea that Hitler did in fact have in his mind the unity of plot proposed by the historian in question. It is, thus, the central idea that there must have been a particular *unity of plot* that governs the selection of statements which together individuate that very unity of plot notion. Accordingly, it could be argued that the 'colligatory concept' functions internally in a circular fashion and, furthermore, that it *is* exactly this autonomous mode of operation which is carried into its successor, the *narrative substance* (as discussed later in this Chapter).

[22] Ibid. p62

> fact that this, that and the other event can be grouped together as parts of a single policy or general movement. Of the wider question whether the policy or movement was itself the product of reason in a further sense I have nothing here to say.[23]

Of course, the colligatory concept relies on hindsight to create the contextualised field into which the various individual statements fit in sequence. Or, in other words, it is only by knowing how things turned out that historians (who, I think, generally distance themselves from hindsight and its traditional accomplice in crime – anachronism) can properly conceive of the *whole* in the first place, and it is therefore the directional "goal seeking" sequence of the *parts* with respect to the *whole* (as in the particular example cited, namely the case of Hitler's expansionist policies) that generates a mode of historical thinking which 'proceeds in teleological terms'.[24] It is also of interest to note that the events collected together in this particular case are related by *period* and not *type* and, furthermore, that there does not appear anywhere at all in Walsh's work, so far as I can see, an explanation of the event selection methodology to be employed by the historian. I presume that this matter was to be left to individual judgement and that selection would be a rather personal, and therefore obscure, value based affair.

Other more familiar examples of colligatory concepts mentioned by Walsh were 'The Renaissance', 'The Enlightenment', 'The Industrial Revolution', 'The Age of Reform' and so on. These terms are of a more general nature than that of Hitler's expansionist policies and might be characterised as complexes of inwardly related events and situations that appear to be unplanned (unlike Hitler's relatively deliberate sequence of acts). However, all of these colligatory concepts seem to be, in their wholes, of greater significance than the sum of their constituent parts.

Walsh does not offer any further meaningful analysis of his teleological mode of historical thinking, but he does move on in his unfolding explanation to account for deviations from his initial expansionist model. Here I quote W. H. Dray on Walsh who notes that

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[23] Ibid. p62
[24] Ibid. p60

> ....historians will be able to discern governing purposes and goals in cases where the agents concerned did not *deliberately* seek to realise them, let alone *plan* to bring them about by stages.... As an example, Walsh cites the way a 'sense of imperial mission' throws light on much that happened in the political history of Great Britain in the late nineteenth century, although few of the agents concerned ever articulated such an idea to themselves....Colligations depending upon the idea of unconscious motivation in this way Walsh calls 'semi-teleological'[25]....he also lays considerable emphasis on deviations from a straightforwardly teleological paradigm by reason of the intervention of chance occurrences or other unintended consequences in most historical endeavours. Even when agents are pursuing plans and policies, he observes, the latter may often have to be adjusted because of changing circumstances, especially those resulting from the uncontrollable actions of others.[26]

Consequently, Walsh found himself forced to devise a complex system of sub-categories beneath his colligatory concepts in order that the overall device might be seen to remain adequate to its task. Indeed, C. B. McCullagh, who later tried to develop Walsh's argument, found it necessary to account for even more different sets and sub-sets of colligation. In particular, he introduced the sub-categories of the 'formal' (relating to the formal structure of historical processes and the changes brought to them by the actions of historical agents) and the 'dispositional' (effectively values or ideas which could be shown to be motivating historical agents with regard to specific events or sets of events).[27] And, whilst revising the notion of colligatory concepts for his (previously mentioned) 1967 publication, Walsh himself recognized that in his earlier writings he had omitted to incorporate the social dimension in historical understanding. He accordingly noted that the idea of social process 'should have been taken as primary'[28] in his earlier works – an unfortunate admission after the devotion of some twenty-five years to an intransigent theory that had, time and again, effectively evaded the grasp of its advocates.

However, the point that I am trying to illustrate here is that a number of people (more than I have mentioned – a longer list would include such theorists as L. B.

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[25] For further explanation see Walsh. *An Introduction to Philosophy of History*. p61
[26] Dray, W. H., (1989). *On History & Philosophers of History*. Leiden & New York: E. J. Brill. pp37-53
[27] McCullagh, C. B., (1978). 'Colligation and Classification in History' in *History and Theory* 17 no. 3: pp267-284
[28] Burston and Thompson (eds.) *Studies in the Nature of Teaching History*. p73

Cebik, D. Thompson and M. White)[29] had, over several years, buried themselves in the "nuts and bolts" of Walsh's theory in what turned out to be an endless and unproductive search for some kind of workable understanding of it. The combined efforts of Walsh, Dray, McCullagh and the others had thus failed to arrive at any satisfactory understanding of the nature and significance of the valuable "tool" which lay before them. An indication of the mode of thought brought to bear on the problem is epitomised by Dray's insistence that colligatory concepts must be part of the past and not 'imposed on the past....[lest they] constitute a projection of the present upon the past rather than an attempt to take it for what it is and to study it for its own sake'.[30]

And here what I find curious is that hardly anyone investigating this matter seemed to notice that the notion in question, the colligatory concept, is of course just that, a *concept*, and that as a concept it must surely reside in the mind of the conceiver of that concept and not in the past itself. Yet this concept was sought-out and investigated *as if* it were in possession of some form of objective status, *as if* it had once existed in the past as an object to which one might refer. McCullagh, referring to The Renaissance in just such a manner, declared it to be of a general rather than a specific nature because 'historians found reason to speak of renaissances occurring in other periods, and even in other civilisations'.[31] Renaissances were thus presumed to occur *in* the past – just like outbreaks of the plague.

However, Ankersmit then stepped into the frame with a brilliant idea which finally (for me at least) closed down this extended debate. For (as I have said), he appropriated Walsh's colligatory concept, cut it loose from its problematic *direct* referential linkage with the past and re-described it under a new name, the *narrative substance*, as a linguistic device. A device which was and is fundamental to the logical structure of narrative accounts of the past and hence, all at once, old

[29] Cebik, L. B., (1969). 'Colligation and the Writing of History' in *The Monist* 53: pp40-57, Thompson, D., 'Colligation and History Teaching' in *Studies of the Nature and Teaching of History*. pp85-106, and White, M., (1965). *Foundations of Historical Knowledge*. New York: Harper & Row. pp252-254

[30] Dray. *On History & Philosophers of History*. p37. It is somewhat surprising to note that this comment was published in1989 – sixteen years after the publication of *Metahistory* and six years after the publication of *Narrative Logic*.

[31] Ibid. p47

theoretical questions evaporated to be replaced by interesting new ones as Ankersmit's *narrative substance(s)* entered the broader discourses of modern and postmodern historical theory.

To understand the manner in which the *narrative substance* functions, it is necessary to consider Ankersmit's observation that, taken in isolation, a constituent statement of a narrative account of the past has a double and not a single function. As a statement it refers directly to some aspect of the past or thing in the past; however, as a component of the narrative viewed as a whole it serves as a property of a "picture" of the past. This picture of the past (visualised from a specific point-of-view) which is individuated by a particular set of statements chosen and organised by the historian in order to produce that desired "picture", might be associated with a particular name, The Renaissance, The Cold War, The Enlightenment and so on, but often this will not be the case. Nevertheless, this does not mean that pictures of the past are not in use when such generally accepted terms fail to appear. Rather, the essential point here is that it is the *narrative substance* (governed by the historian's uniquely individuated point-of-view) which embodies overall narrative meaning and that this function should not be confused or conflated with (or indeed reduced to) the capacity of the narrative's individual statements to describe and, therefore, refer to the past.

Now, where a statement, or sometimes a single word, performs this double function within the narrative, it might not be clear which of the two functions is operative at any one time. Take, for instance, a historical narrative containing the word Napoleon; this word could be used as a direct reference to the man himself (empirically acquired biographical details perhaps) or it could embody an individuated "picture" of Napoleon from the unique viewpoint of the author of the narrative who favours a particular interpretation of Napoleon as this or that type of man – the author's Napoleon. One could say, then, that there are two subjects intrinsic to the word Napoleon. First there is the *narrative subject* (the actual man about whom verifiable statements can be made which refer directly to this person in the past). And, second, there is the *narrative substance* or the narrative "picture" of

Napoleon generated within the logic of the text which cannot be subject to truth claims precisely because this picture is figured by the historian within the substance of the narrative itself and does not refer to anything outside it to which correspondence criteria can be categorically applied. The conflation of these two functions can lead to confusion and unjustified claims with regard to the status of the narrative viewed as a whole, claims such as; 'the facts are right so the story must be right'.

It now becomes clear that the essential difference between the position of the narrative realist (who recognises ***narrative subjects*** only) and the position of the narrative idealist (who recognises both ***narrative subjects*** and ***substances***) is a matter of disagreement over the existence of ***narrative substances*** within narratives. Narrative idealism thus stakes claim to a third logical entity in addition to the subject and predicate of propositional logic and this new entity, the ***narrative substance***, carries the narrative meaning of historical accounts of the past and, as such, constitutes the primary logical entity within those narrative accounts. Moreover, Ankersmit claimed correctly that no one previously in the fields of both the philosophy of history and the philosophy of language 'ever seriously defended.... ..[this] idea'.[32]

So, when a ***narrative substance*** acquires a name (for example, The Renaissance) and this name subsequently enters into common usage, an erroneous assumption can become attached to it. That is, it can acquire the putative status of a known and definable entity which is assumed to inhabit the past itself; it could be taken (as Ankersmit would say) as part of the inventory of the past such that, as a consequence, the clearly demonstrable case that there are as many different Renaissances as there are historians who write on the subject is lost from view. To further illustrate this point take as an example the ***narrative substance***, 'The Age of Steam', as envisaged by railway historians. One historian might consider that the spread of the railway system, from its (steam driven) birth to the ultimate demise of the steam locomotive, was a very good thing all round and proceed to demonstrate

[32] Ankersmit. *Narrative Logic*. p102

this by indicating its contributions to a period of economic and social change which, in this case, would be construed or troped as progress. Another historian might take a less enthusiastic view and, with some justification, point to negative aspects of the social impact of the railways – for instance, the breakdown of village communities. Yet another historian might take the view that 'The Age of Steam' with its attendant pollution, dissipation of finite natural resources, etc., was or is part of a broader discourse concerning the degradation of the planet – and so on and so forth. In fact one could argue that there must be as many different points-of-view on this subject as there are historians writing about it, because each historian will colligate under his or her uniquely perceived notion of the meaning of 'The Age of Steam' the set of statements which individuate that very notion. The consequence of which is that each historian's narrative account of 'The Age of Steam' will be, to some degree, different, irrespective of the veracity of each of the narrative's constituent statements. Debates on the relative merits of such accounts, as mentioned earlier, would thus turn on the question of the apparent validity or plausibility of the various points-of-view adopted and would not be too concerned with any questions relating to the correspondence between individual narrative statements and the actual past to which the statements referred – these matters lie within the sphere of the philosophy of historical research and can ultimately be resolved in that sphere.

In practice the ***narrative substance*** and the historian's narrative point-of-view which governs it (regardless of discursive familiarity) will, then, lack any clear consensual identity because there will always be some measure of disagreement over the appropriate make up of its individuating statements. Furthermore, ***narrative substances*** or points-of-view, in order to possess identity at all, will require the presence of other competing points-of-view. That is to say that identity itself is a relational and thus a relative matter which arises out of differences; the notion of the existence of just one single point-of-view is, in a sense, oxymoronic because such singularity would constitute a postulated "truth" and not a proposal about it. Consequently, because any particular narrative point-of-view will strive to exclude all other competing points-of-view, it must follow that any ***narrative substance*** gains its identity negatively by virtue of what it rejects – by what it is not. Thus, given that

competing collections of narrative accounts of past events depend for their existence on the various *narrative substance*s within them, then it follows that there could be no historical debate without them. Debate in such circumstances could only operate at the empirical level of reference, and factual reference *alone* cannot constitute a history at all: *no narrative substance... no history*!

To briefly summarise the above at this point. Ankersmit is claiming that access to the logical structure of narrative accounts of the past is only possible through a newly postulated primary logical entity, the *narrative substance*, which embodies the narrative meaning of narrative accounts of the past. Of central importance to this notion, its "key", is the understanding that individual statements within the narrative have two functions; they refer to and thus describe things in or aspects of the past, however, taken collectively, they become properties of this *narrative substance* and thereby help to uniquely individuate a point-of-view or "picture" of the past which has no reference outside its narrative form (it can only refer to its own *narrative substance*). *Narrative substances* sometimes acquire names, and with these names comes a semblance of "visibility", but more often than not they remain unspecified. In both cases, however, *narrative substances* are somewhat nebulous in character and consensus regarding the exact nature of any such entity proposed by a historian will be hard to attain.

Bearing in mind all the foregoing, it appears to me that Ankersmit's suggestion that the arguments explored in *Narrative Logic* 'might be looked upon as an attempt to elaborate Walsh's notion of the colligatory concept'[33] is, without doubt, a very modest claim. Ankersmit's *narrative substance* was the product of a brilliant paradigm shift in thought which, it would seem, was beyond the compass of those working in the old field of colligatory studies. There were clues and intimations, of course, as exemplified by this comment from Walsh himself:

> Impartial history, so far from being an ideal, is a downright impossibility. In support of this we could point out that every historian looks at the past from a certain point of view, which he can no more avoid than he can jump out of his own skin. We could also maintain that the disagreements of historians, when

[33] Ankersmit. *Narrative Logic*. p100

> carefully analysed, seem to turn on points which are not matter for argument, but depend rather on the interests and desires of the contending parties, whether in a personal or in a group capacity. Historical disputes, according to this way of thinking, are at bottom concerned not with what is true or false, but with what is and what is not desirable, and fundamental historical judgments are in consequence not strictly cognitive but 'emotive.' This would go far to abolish the distinction between history and propaganda, and therefore to undermine the claim that history is (or can become) a truly scientific study.[34]

A paragraph like this would not look out of place in one of Ankersmit's philosophical texts, even the style of writing (if not the register) is somewhat similar. However, what is of interest here is that such unexpectedly perceptive observations, first published in 1952, were not developed by Walsh in any form whatsoever during those thirty-one years prior to the publication of *Narrative Logic*. Dray also seems to have missed something, for having written the following he then ignored it – as if the ideas articulated by the mentioned Louis Mink were curiosities and of no consequence:

> Of all the writers who have recently urged more attention to the part/whole relation in historical thinking, only Mink has explicitly held that tracing out a configuration is itself (i.e., even in the absence of an interpretive concept or description) a mode of understanding. The most important conclusions historians reach, Mink has maintained, are 'undetachable' from the works that formulate them; for the conclusions *are* the details in their complicated interrelationships.[35]

So, the connections were not made, and it was left to Ankersmit to conjure up the innovative mode of thought required to successfully lift a thoroughly stagnant concept out of the rigid mindset in which it was embedded, radically re-describe it, and then successfully relocate it at the cognitive core of the narrative form. This, to my mind, is more than plain elaboration.

Once the idea of the *narrative substance* is grasped, of course, it all seems so obvious – how could it have been generally overlooked for so long? And Ankersmit even suggested a wider application of his theory (an application which can be linked back to history) as demonstrated by his investigation of the notion of *self ident*ity (or

[34] Walsh. *An Introduction to Philosophy of History*. p22
[35] Dray. *On History & Philosophers of History*. p49

the "internalist" view of oneself), as opposed to *personal identity* (which he associated with the "externalist" view of oneself). Ankersmit characterised self identity as follows:

> This is the sense in which one knows oneself as one ultimate indivisible being in the course of having any experience whatsoever, I know myself now as one being who just could not be any other. The question of my being some other person just could not arise, I am myself whatever my experience is like. But there is also a sense in which I am continuously subject to change. Every instant I change....in terms of what I undergo or experience or do I am never the same person.[36]

The problem, then, is to express self identity in terms of a unique and constant entity which has the capacity, without compromise to itself, to internally tolerate change. Ankersmit's offered an ingenious solution to this problem as follows:

For Ankersmit, the expression 'self identity' signifies a uniqueness or *unity* of experience that can be seen as a 'logical entity' which encompasses all personal experiences (and consciousness itself) and attributes them exclusively to the *self* – a unity which, nevertheless, embodies the inscription of change occasioned by those experiences. Hence, Ankersmit argues that the logical entity self identity refers to a *narrative substance* (per)formed on the self, whilst the statements of which it is comprised express all the experiences and perceptions of that self to date and will, in the fullness of time, include those to come. Self identity, thus conceived, is not an unchangeable property of the self, but a narrative concept which refers to a *narrative substance* individuated by a constantly expanding collection of statements expressing experiences and perceptions of the self. It is, then, self identity as a *linguistic entity* that rationalises the concept of the "sameness" of the individual throughout the changing experiences of life. Accordingly, self identity cannot be reduced to any particular experience or perception, rather it is the case that singular experiences and perceptions collectively individuate self identity.

As such, self identity does not convey knowledge, but rather allows the *arrangement* of knowledge from an evolving point-of-view which, in a circular manner, is itself

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[36] Ankersmit. *Narrative Logic*. p183

its own referent. Ankersmit argues that self identity is 'the most important *narrative substance* we know and, moreover, prerequisite for our very ability to recognize other *narrative substances* and thus for the narrative writing of history'.[37] The logic of the latter statement rests on the recognition that the notion of self identity effects a division between the spheres of what does and what does not belong to the *self*, and that this demarcation implicitly presumes the existence of other *narrative substances* besides self identity – the necessary condition for the writing of history.

Another of Ankersmit's interesting "asides" concerns the 'narrativised self', which might be seen to be located somewhere between two extremes. At one end of the scale is the solipsist's position from which all reality is seen to be written-in to self identity, and at the other end lies the condition of rejection or loss of self identity. In the first case the *self* is all and external reality becomes an empty place, whilst, in the second case, the *self* is lost from view as it dissolves into the immensity of external reality. This diversion from his main argument is used by Ankersmit to illustrate the nature of psychological disorders which might arise from irregularities in, or loss of, self identity leading to distortion of, or loss of, viewpoint on reality. A psychoanalyst would subsequently be required for the treatment of these disorders, such treatment being effected through the identification and neutralization of the problematic individuating experiential statements which happen to be disturbing or demolishing self identity.

On the issue of self identity, then, Ankersmit, with remarkable insight, is arguing the point that the writing of history is impossible without it. He argues that the notion of self identity logically entails the division of reality into two spheres – that of the self and that which is not the self – and that this division is the necessary precondition for the recognition of other *narrative substances* which exist outside self identity. Only after this recognition of the existence of *narrative substances* outside self identity, or the *history of the self*, is it possible to write history at all. It is worth mentioning that this point, which I consider to be one of Ankersmit's most striking

[37] Ankersmit. *Narrative Logic*. p187

and which has implications for the history that I am arguing for, seems to have been completely overlooked by his many commentators.

Pillar 3

With reference to his third proposition or essential pillar (to recall, the relationship between *narrative substance* and metaphor), Ankersmit argued that one cannot overlook the conspicuous similarity between the modes of operation of the metaphor and that of the *narrative substance*. This observation suggests that the *narrative substance* – the cognitive core of the narrative form – is of a fundamentally metaphorical kind and thus, it follows, that the narrative use of language must also be fundamentally metaphorical. He builds his argument to that effect in the following way.

As previously established, narrative statements have a double function. That is, to briefly restate, they describe the past (such description being subject to empirical falsification) and they collectively constitute an image of the past (an image, seen from a particular point-of-view, which logically cannot submit to any form of falsification). There is a clear distinction between these two quite different uses of language, the empirical referential language of description and the aesthetic language (the figuring/shaping) of individuation; nevertheless, they are elided into a single structure, the narrative itself. Ankersmit pointed out that this double function, which typifies narrative statements, is also typical of metaphorical statements. Take, for example, Shakespeare's metaphor 'All the world's a stage' from *As You Like It*, (act 2 scene 7). The meanings of the words 'world' and 'stage' in isolation – their signification – would in Ankersmit's argument comprise the literal content of the phrase. However, taken in the whole the phrase also constitutes an invitation to the reader/audience to visualize the world from a particular point-of-view which, in this case, effects the transfer of the attributes of the theatrical stage onto the world. This metaphorical use of language (which is crucial for all meaning making) can be seen to furnish Shakespeare's phrase with a *surplus* of meaning which exceeds its

aforementioned literal meanings. Ankersmit referred to this surplus as the 'scope' of the metaphor, which allowed him to make the important observation that the metaphor is not part of reality itself but should rather be seen as a linguistic figure that imposes or proposes a particular view on/of reality.

To further illustrate the point, I recall as a schoolboy being told that electricity – the mysterious stuff which makes sparks – should be seen as a flow of water, a river, where driving force corresponds to electrical voltage and flow corresponds to electrical current. This metaphorical point-of-view, with its implied relationship between the force thrusting the river along and the mass of water carried by it, has the effect of *appearing* to explain something about, or of demystifying, the phenomenon of electricity. Accordingly, the metaphor's 'scope' not only familiarizes the notion of electricity but it also provides a model of logic upon which problem solving (in this case at that entry level of physics) might be accomplished. This example effectively highlights three characteristics of the metaphor: (1) It *familiarizes* but does not *explain* the unfamiliar. (2) The metaphorical "model" (if it's a good one) facilitates problem solving. (3) The metaphor is not part of reality – water and electricity don't mix. And I would add, by way of an aside, that this familiarization process, which appears to be the primary function of the metaphor, gives rise to a kind of illusion. The illusion being, that the nature of the familiarized new phenomenon might appear to have been adequately explained and understood when, in fact, it has *only* been described in terms of other, older phenomena, which are equally assumed to have been understood, but which have themselves been placed under description in terms of various preceding and presumed understood phenomena, and so on and so forth. It thus becomes clear that the language with which we choose to put our world under description (and then use to deduce our "knowledge" about it) comprises a complex of receding metaphors – all the way down.

This impenetrable void that separates ***knowledge*** from mere ***description*** has often been vividly articulated, but perhaps never better than by Albert Camus who writes:

> Of whom and of what indeed can I say: 'I know that!' This heart within me I can feel, and I judge that it exists. This world I can touch, and I likewise judge that it exists. There ends all my knowledge, and the rest is construction..... you tell me of an invisible planetary system in which electrons gravitate around a nucleus. You explain this world to me with an image. I realize then that you have been reduced to poetry: I shall never know. Have I the time to become indignant? You have already changed theories. So that science, that was to teach me everything ends up in a hypothesis, that lucidity founders in metaphor, that uncertainty is resolved in a work of art. What need had I of so many efforts? .....you give me the choice between a description that is sure but that teaches me nothing and hypotheses that claim to teach me but that are not sure.[38]

Metaphor, then, articulates both a literal descriptive function and a *seeing as* or point-of-view function. And it is the *excess* of metaphorical over literal meaning which Ankersmit sees as the 'surplus meaning that constitutes the essential logical difference between metaphorical and literal statements'.[39] Both the historical narrative and the metaphor can, therefore, be seen either *descriptively* or in the form of *representations* (or proposals) governed by linguistic devices which are suggestive of perspectives from which reality might be viewed. Accordingly, as Ankersmit pointed out, when we can claim that 'description and individuation are the two logical operations that embody the essence of the narrative use of language, we are justified in ascribing to the narratio a profoundly metaphorical character'.[40]

Underlining this argument in some measure is Hayden White's view of the metaphor as a deviation from the literal, a swerve in locution 'sanctioned neither by custom nor logic'.[41] White observes that 'tropics is the process by which all discourse *constitutes* the objects which it pretends only to describe realistically and to analyse objectively'.[42] That is to say that it is through tropological (metaphorical) description that objects are first constituted before becoming "known" or understood within that same imaginative framework of metaphor in which they were first constituted (a kind of linguistic tautology). It thus follows by implication that the

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[38] Camus, A., (1955). *The Myth of Sisyphus*. London: Hamish Hamilton Ltd. pp22-23
[39] Ankersmit. *Narrative Logic*. p212
[40] Ankersmit. *Narrative Logic*, p216
[41] White, H., (1978). *Tropics of Discourse*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press. p2
[42] Ibid. p2

linguistic device, the trope, possesses a certain autonomy of operation with regard to narrative meaning. There exists, then, a parallelism of thought between White and Ankersmit, for Ankersmit also proposed an autonomy of operation with regard to the narrative, in this case the historical narrative, the meaning of which appears to be governed by images generated by linguistic devices rather than the actuality of the past itself.

This, then, is Ankersmit's central argument which ties metaphor to *narrative substance* and thence to narrative form and, in so doing, draws attention to the most conspicuous logical property shared by the metaphor and the narrative; namely, that their meanings can be said to be carried by their *propositional* and not by their *descriptive* modes of articulation.

Ankersmit concluded his argument with a closer look at the metaphorical structure of narrative statements in order to establish some criteria of preference which might be used to select the *best* narrative accounts of the past. He opened his argument with the following observation:

> Anyone who has ever tried his hand at writing history will have experienced the extreme flexibility of descriptive statements on the past: they meekly fit the most disparate accounts of the past.[43]

This flexibility of descriptive statements allows for their requisition as required. Thus, any statement might contribute to the individuation of a multiplicity of different *narrative substances* because descriptive statements have no 'narrative compass of their own'.[44] It is *only* the historian's unique point-of-view which endows purposefully selected narrative statements with their capacity to collectively illustrate that very point-of-view from which those statements were selected. Seen this way, there exists an internal circularity which characterises the nature of all historical narrative statements and which, accordingly, affirms the autonomous nature of the narrative meaning carried by the *whole* historical text. This is how Ankersmit put his circularity argument:

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[43] Ankersmit. *Narrative Logic*. p218
[44] Ibid. p218

> The dependence of separate descriptive statements upon the points-of-view individuated by them when taken together, their "compasslessness" when taken in isolation, underlines once more the circularity so characteristic of historical knowledge. Isolated individual statements of a narratio may indicate all conceivable directions – only a narrative "point of view" can give them "narrative direction", yet this "point of view" only comes into being thanks to those helpless descriptive statements.[45]

Now, one might not be entirely happy with the idea that this point-of-view only comes into being thanks to descriptive statements or, in other words, as if the narrative viewed as a whole were not prefigured – aesthetically and ideologically positioned (this, of course, being White's point which arguably draws attention to a weakness in Ankersmit's third 'pillar',[46] albeit a weakness which does not necessarily damage his overall thesis). However, one cannot object to Ankersmit's argument if he means by it that individual 'compassless' statements have meanings imposed on them from a prefigured point-of-view (the necessary initial condition for the writing of history) in order that they might, in a circular fashion, individuate that precise point-of-view. Accordingly, the meanings of narrative statements can be seen to be determined by the narrative interpretations in which they reside and the meanings which become attached to facts can similarly be seen to be narrative dependant. Ankersmit thus concluded that it is indeed the case that 'there are no [meaningful] facts devoid of narrative interpretation'.[47]

The foregoing argument would, I think, permanently preclude the possibility of any definitive selection criteria which might be put to use in order to identify the best of any collection of variously construed historical narratives, each purporting to properly (truly) represent some past event or situation. However, skirting this relativistic conclusion,[48] Ankersmit proposed a selection strategy that rested on his notion of 'scope' which, accordingly, he extended beyond the metaphor to encompass the narrative form *as a whole* and which somewhat deflected attention away from his relativistic difficulties.[49]

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[45] Ibid. p218
[46] This point will be fully explored in Chapter Two.
[47] Ankersmit. *Narrative Logic*. p219
[48] Ankersmit has never liked relativism despite its "logic".
[49] I shall be returning to this argument in my Conclusion.

As previously explained, the formulation of a metaphorical statement necessarily involves the individuation of a point-of-view from which reality (or rather a part of reality) could be seen. This point-of-view endows the metaphorical statement with the capacity to articulate information in *excess* of that contained within its meaning when taken literally. Hence, the scope of a metaphorical statement is wider than its literal descriptive content which, lacking point-of-view, fails to project any familiarising metaphorical *figure* onto that part of reality in question. It should again be noted that this figure or way of seeing reality, whilst giving preference to certain statements on reality, does not itself constitute any part of reality for Ankersmit who thus concluded that:

> ....it seems only reasonable to say that the most successful metaphorical statements are those in which the dissimilarity between scope and descriptive content has been maximalized. Scope-maximalization is the goal of the metaphorical dimension in language.[50]

Similarly, the historical narrative's constituent statements will collectively individuate a point-of-view – thus suggesting a particular structure or shape to that part of the past in question – and, therefore, together these statements will carry narrative meaning in excess of the sum of the descriptive meanings carried by each statement when considered in isolation. Accordingly, Ankersmit argued that, as was the case with the metaphorical statement, the scope of the historical narrative viewed as a whole will also be greater than the sum of its parts taken in isolation. It also manifestly follows (as I have previously argued) that the narrative meaning, or what Ankersmit often refers to as the 'historical knowledge' carried by the narrative as a whole, will be governed by the unique point-of-view adopted by the historian. This is inevitable because to adopt a particular narrative point-of-view is to express a preference for the sort of narrative statement that would lend support to the point-of-view adopted.

Now, whenever historical narratives are compared it is precisely their scopes and not their points-of-view which form the basis of that comparison because there is no common ground against which the comparisons of intangible points-of-view could

[50] Ibid. p221

take place. Ankersmit, then, contends that the best amongst competing narratives must be the one that has most effectively and courageously maximalised its scope.[51] Thus concluding that '*Fertility* and not *truth* is our criterion for deciding upon the relative merits of narratios'.[52]

For the moment, then, this completes my reading of what I take to be the essential elements of *Narrative Logic* – the same elements that define the *good* Ankersmit of my chapter title. In the next chapter I will, amongst other things, be following Ankersmit's scope argument as it is developed by him, but I now propose to bring this chapter to a close with an appraisal of the generally unfavourable reviews that *Narrative Logic* has received.

The Reviews

It came as something of a surprise – bearing in mind the significance of Ankersmit's pioneering thesis and its attendant clarifications of "old problems" – to discover that very few reviews of *Narrative Logic* have actually been published. I have only been able to find four (in English) of which the most positive is that of Hayden White who recognised that the book represented a 'substantial contribution, not only to the literature on philosophy of history, but also that which deals with narrativist philosophy'.[53] White accepted Ankersmit's argument that a historical narrative, being a representation of or proposal about the past, can constitute nothing more than an invitation to view a past event or situation from a particular perspective and, furthermore, that its 'referent' is the *narrative substance* governing that perspective. A historical narrative is (says White) to be seen 'not [as] an "image" of the past nor an "explanation" of it..... ....[but] always at best an "interpretation" of the kind of

[51] Ankersmit found himself obliged to adds caveats here. For instance, he insisted on the overriding stipulation that individuating narrative statements which can be shown to be false are to be rejected and, furthermore, that the *preferred* narrative account is the one that comes closest to propaganda without actually becoming propaganda. However (and this matter will be further discussed in Chapter Two, pages 73 & 74), he made no mention of any adjudicator charged with the responsibility for the identification and suppression of either false statements or examples of propaganda.

[52] Ankersmit. *Narrative Logic*. p223

[53] White, H., (1984). 'Reviews of Books' in *American Historical Review* 89 no.4: p1037

complex entities that can be comprehended only in the extent to which they can be "narrativistically" represented'[54].

David W. Foster wrote a short review for the literary journal *Rocky Mountain Review* in which he called for further exploration of 'the continuities between literary and so-called non-literary works, to expand the scope of literary studies to include a wide variety of written texts other than the strictly literary',[55] and it is against this literary background that Foster finds interest in Ankersmit's explanation of historical writing as a *specimen* to be studied rather than to be accepted or rejected. Donald R. Kelley, by contrast, wrote a distinctly negative review, the content of which suggests that he had failed to properly grasp Ankersmit's argument. Kelley is of the opinion that Ankersmit creates difficulties for himself when he grapples with historical terms like 'The General Crisis' and especially 'The Renaissance'. He also accuses him of a '....cursory dismissal of "historical research", by which he means not only the whole area of discovery but also that of the definition and interpretation of evidence...'[56]. Now, Ankersmit has never dismissed historical research, on the contrary he frequently comments on its importance, as (for example) during an interview with Ewa Domańska, when he pointed out that

> ....it may very well be that all true progress in history is progress in historical research. If one compares what we now know of civilizations that have been forgotten for millennia, or of languages that have not been spoken for many centuries, it would be ridiculous to deny that progress is made in the area of historical research. So no one should try to look down on historical research; that really is the cognitive backbone of history. However, it is not all the historian does....[57]

Consequently, the central point here (and this is not only evident from the book's main text but it is also made quite clear by Ankersmit in its Introduction), is that *Narrative Logic* is not about historical research, it's about historical writing. Moreover, referring back to Kelly's 'dismissal' comment above, the notion of

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[54] Ibid. p1037

[55] Foster, W. D., (1986). 'Book Reviews' section in *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature* 40 no. 4: p238

[56] Kelley, R.D., (1984). 'Reviews Section' in *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 15 no. 2: pp317-318

[57] Domańska, E., (1998). *Encounters: Philosophy of History after Postmodernism*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia. pp73-74.

'interpretation of evidence' does not fall into the empirical sphere of historical research. To miss this point is to miss a fundamental premise of Ankersmit's thesis, and therefore it seems to me that any difficulties referred to by Kelly are of his own and not of Ankersmit's making.

Undoubtedly, however, the review that most influenced general opinion about the book and, according to Ankersmit, inflicted the most damage to the book's sales, was that written by C. B. McCullagh[58] and published in *History and Theory*. Some years after the appearance of this review Ankersmit expressed his continuing resentment against McCullagh in an interview with Ewa Domańska:

> ....*Narrative Logic* never had the slightest impact even in the small world of historical theorists. Of course, this has much to do with several evident short comings of the book itself: I went to the wrong publishing company, the book was poorly produced, written in an awkward and stiff English, and contained a lot of misprints. On top of that I had the misfortune that McCullagh's review of the book in *History and Theory* was the most hostile and most narrow-minded review that was ever published in that journal. The sad irony, by the way, is that I had myself suggested to the editors of *History and Theory* to ask McCullagh to write a review – a perfect example, I'd say, of how one can cut one's own throat.....what I learned from McCullagh's review was that a meaningful debate with positivistically minded people like him would be impossible. It was not merely a matter of disagreement; rather you could say that all the kind of things that I considered to be the most interesting and challenging problems of how the historian uses narrative language to account for the past were non-problems for positivists like McCullagh.[59]

With regard to the content of the McCullagh's review I can only agree with Ankersmit, for I find it rather shallow and lacking in cohesion. Furthermore, and this is really my main point, McCullagh roundly dismissed Ankersmit's central thesis as 'neither enlightening nor convincing'[60] without properly understanding it or suggesting anything better. I am not for a moment advocating that everyone should accept Ankersmit's argument, but its rejection must, at the very least, be articulated on the basis of a considered assessment of his proposals taken in the whole. I found what I consider to be some thirty points of contention within McCullagh's text and,

[58] McCullagh, C. B., (1984). 'Review Essays' in *History and Theory* 23 no.3: pp394-403
[59] Domańska. Op. cit. pp71-72
[60] McCullagh. Op. cit. p403

since it would be tiresome to mention them all, I have broken down my list under three headings and addressed a selection of the more significant points within the categories of 'misrepresentation', 'misunderstandings' and 'inadvertent accord'.

Misrepresentation

This, McCullagh's inexcusable yet frequent blunder, is typified by his rhetorical question; '....why should the point-of-view of a historian be considered both additional to the statements of his or her narratio, and an integral part of that narratio as well?'[61]. Now, in the first place, Ankersmit does *not* say that the historian's point-of-view constitutes some sort addition to the statements in his/her historical narrative, rather it is the historian's point-of-view which expresses a preference for and therefore governs the type of narrative statement that the historian will be predisposed to select out of all possible statements that are available for selection. Moreover, Ankersmit repeatedly stresses his wholly logical assertion that a point-of-view or *narrative substance* is not part of (past) reality but a way of looking at it and therefore it can be neither a part of reality nor a part of a representation of it.

McCullagh is also of the view that Ankersmit is in *denial* over 'the reality of states and religions because our concepts of these things are mental constructions .....it can be dangerous to believe that the state does not exist just because the authority of its offices is not visible'.[62] I cannot find nor can I recall such a denial anywhere at all in Ankersmit's writings. He does, however, make the point that *states* and *religions* are *narrative substances* and, as such, the notion of what that state or that religion might be is an individual or personal matter which depends on that person's point-of-view. There may be some significant degree of overlap between individual notions of what these concepts are, but it nevertheless remains the case that each individual will have his or her own unique point-of-view on whatever concept it is that is under consideration – that is all. And this is not so surprising since, unlike the signifier *table* or *chair*, a *state* or *religion* has no external referent. Or, to put it

[61] Ibid. p397
[62] Ibid. pp398-399

differently, one can walk around a *chair*, point at it, prod it and even sit on it, but how can one repeat that performance with a *state* or a *religion*? McCullagh, however, 'cannot see any fundamental difference between the "normal things" [dogs and snowflakes] which Ankersmit has referred to and things referred to by general colligatory terms'.[63]

My next example of McCullagh's misrepresentation concerns 'scope' as defined by Ankersmit. Here is one of the many things that McCullagh has to say about it:

> Why does Ankersmit think that the bigger the scope of a narratio the better? It is not at all clear. He mentions Sir Karl Popper's belief that daring, highly falsifiable hypotheses are to be preferred (245). And he writes approvingly of some interpretations being more fertile than others in that they enable one to synthesize more facts than the narratio expressing them actually describes (223-225).[64]

But it is abundantly clear why Ankersmit thinks 'the bigger the scope the better', he explained it very well as I hope I have shown. But what concerns me here is McCullagh's claim in the last two lines of the extract above, for I have looked very carefully through pages 223-225 of *Narrative Logic* and I cannot find anywhere a statement to the effect that a greater degree of fertility enables one to 'synthesise more facts than the narratio expressing them actually describes', nor can I work out exactly what this is supposed to mean.

Misunderstandings

These mostly seem to arise out of McCullagh's failure to grasp the significance of what I take to be Ankersmit's irrefutable distinction between the two categorically different spheres of narrative *representation* and narrative *description*, for he asks 'What more is there to a picture of the past than those statements which form the narratio?'[65] wherein the 'picture' (*representation*) has been elided with 'those statements' (*descriptions*) which form the narratio. This mistake is then

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[63] Ibid. p398
[64] Ibid. p401
[65] Ibid. p395

compounded by McCullagh's assertion that 'A central theme of Ankersmit's book is his denial of "narrative realism", that is of a theory that historical narratios represent or describe the past'.[66] Again, by his conflation of the two terms *represent* and *describe* he ignores the fundamental distinction between them.

In response to Ankersmit's claim that the structure of the historical narrative is 'pressed on the past', McCullagh states that '....this conclusion is far to sweeping. The descriptions of the past presented in narratios are not "pressed on the past" regardless of evidence. If they do not fit the facts, if they do not describe them correctly, then they are rejected'.[67] But this argument makes no sense to me, for *description* in narrative accounts of the past operates at the level of the fact and the individual statement. It would appear that McCullagh is saying that if descriptions which are constituted by facts do not fit the facts with which they are so constituted, then they are rejected. McCullagh compounds his curious position when he states that the historian 'has a variety of concepts by which to conceive of the past, and his or her job is to find those which correspond most exactly to what is known about it'.[68] He seems to be saying here, although it is difficult to be sure, that having acquired empirical knowledge of the past the historian's task is then to match that empirical knowledge to a preconceived aesthetic concept from a list of such concepts available for this purpose – off the shelf. This muddled philosophy does not work for me and arguably has little or no bearing/traction in relation to Ankersmit's own clear position on the matter.

Inadvertent accord

There are numerous instances in his text where McCullagh's oppositional arguments seem to be inadvertently paralleling or supporting Ankersmit's arguments; here is one of them:

> Ankersmit might have argued that the statements in a narratio can have several different kinds of meaning. As descriptions of the past they can have a plain

[66] Ibid. p397
[67] Ibid. p400
[68] Ibid. p399

> locutionary meaning, in accordance with dictionaries and grammar books. They can sometimes also be seen to instantiate the historian's general conceptions of past events and their causes. And, finally, they can also be said to express certain unstated values and interests of the author. If an historian's conceptual framework and values and interests constitute his or her point of view, then in these ways the statements of a narratio may be said to manifest it. Whether Ankersmit would agree with all of this, it is impossible to say. His analysis of "point of view" never really gets off the ground.[69]

However, my point is that if 'the historian's general conceptions' and his 'unstated values and interests' were to be, quite reasonably, taken as *narrative substances* (because these elements constitute a point-of-view) and the word *instantiate* were to be understood in the sense of *individuate* (as, I think, it can), then this statement is unintentionally in accord with Ankersmit's thinking on the matter. McCullagh's antepenultimate sentence seems to corroborate the position such that, on this reading, Ankersmit might well say 'yes; I agree with all of this'.

So, all in all this is arguably a very unsatisfactory review, and I find it difficult to understand why McCullagh would have wanted to write something which, in my view, could have reflected so badly on his own reputation as a historical theorist. However (and perhaps the explanation lies here) one has to consider what might have been the effect of the actual publication of *Narrative Logic* on McCullagh himself, bearing in mind that Ankersmit had based his *narrative substance* on a concept that had, over so many years, completely escaped McCullagh's grasp. For Ankersmit snatched this thing from beneath McCullagh's nose, turned it on its head and relocated it at the cognitive core of the narrative form where it had really always belonged, presumably to the embarrassment and annoyance of McCullagh. But then, having written his book about it, Ankersmit did something himself which was simply incomprehensible, for he abandoned all caution and recommended McCullagh as its reviewer. Why Ankersmit should have acted in this (potentially) masochistic way eludes me – did he in an irrational moment catch sight of the "high road" to general acceptance through McCullagh's possible endorsement of his book? If so, his risky strategy rested on a careless miscalculation since it was very unlikely

[69] Ibid. p397

that McCullagh could, in the circumstances, have been won-over to Ankersmit's point-of-view. The strength of McCullagh's opposition to Ankersmit's thesis discounted agreement at any level, even had he grasped the point. But, there again, does not McCullagh's incoherent response to Ankersmit's thesis have the appearance of a hastily fabricated barrier set-up against the thrust of a superior argument? Perhaps McCullagh grasped the point after all because there is no doubt that, if taken seriously, Ankersmit's critique of so many epistemological shibboleths would have fatally undercut McCullagh's own rigid, epistemological position. Seen from this perspective one could argue that McCullagh might have hoped to "shore-up" (relatively speaking) his own foundering argument through the demolition, by petty trivialisation, of a much better argument from Ankersmit. Seen this way, the *good* Ankersmit looks really *very good* indeed.

But be that as it may and moving on, in the conclusion to his review essay McCullagh put forward the following complaint: 'General accounts of historical knowledge and understanding are only illuminating if based upon fine analysis of actual examples. The absence of such analysis in this book explains its inadequacies'.[70] So, in Ankersmit's absence I now propose to do just that – to take up McCullagh's challenge and map out by means of Ankersmit's *narrative logic* the process necessarily involved in the production of a history of, let's say, 'last month in the UK'.[71]

Now, although an unimaginably huge number of things happened in the UK last month, only a very small percentage of the totality of those events will have been recorded and thus become available as *traces* of last month. Nevertheless, this small percentage will still constitute a very large body of data which, in order to be usable, will inevitably require reduction on the basis of some chosen set of selection criteria. On this small (and therefore hopelessly unreliable) remnant or part of the past a

[70] Ibid. p403

[71] My subject for historicisation, 'last month in the UK', the month prior to the writing of the first draft of this chapter, is that of May 2008 and I have deliberately chosen a very recent past for my example in order to illustrate, alongside my main argument, this additional point: If a recent well documented past foils all concerted efforts to fix its intrinsic meaning, then how are we to capture with words the essence of a more remote and less well documented past?

whole is eventually to be presented in narrative form on the general and usually unquestioned assumption that a whole can be unproblematically inferred from an infinitesimally small part of that whole.

Compounding this problem is the matter of data selection itself, how is it to be done? Or to rephrase, what are the statements or facts about last month that might capture its essence – *in and for itself* (as, I believe, McCullagh thinks is possible)? Could last month in some definitive sense, in and for itself, be found in (for example) the collapse of Bradford and Bingley's share price, obesity in school children, the soaring cost of energy, the collapse of sterling, road rage, escalating health care inequalities, the credit crisis, the failure of English cricketers or perhaps the weather? What I am trying to indicate here, what is crucial, is the need to take a point-of-view on last month in the UK before it is possible to say anything about it that carries any meaning at all – a uniform selection of un-colligated statements, a kind of month average strung out in a line, would be incomprehensible.

So if, for instance, I take the view right now (Spring 2008) that Gordon Brown and his labour government are painfully acting out some "end game" which is evident in the unpleasant odour of sleaze, misused privilege and reactive politics that have collectively permeated his administration – an administration which is out of touch, out of control and destined for ignominious collapse; and, if I further take the view that this "end game" viewpoint (however unlikely it might seem to others) captures the essence of last month more effectively than any other possible view on last month, then I have a basis for data selection. My preference being, of course, for that data which would adequately individuate my own point-of-view when worked-up into story form under the governing logic of the *narrative substance* "end game".

To now restate the foregoing more in the language of Ankersmit, "end game" is here an arbitrarily chosen *narrative substance* or colligatory device for the express purpose of selecting and organising knowledge of the past (in this case the verifiable facts or singular statements which refer to or describe aspects of last month). This data will be sought out and selected in order to collectively individuate the *narrative*

substance "end game" which is not part of the past but, rather, a viewpoint imposed on the past, a *violence* or a *knocking into shape* of an actual past that has no preference on how it is to be represented. However, despite these intractable difficulties, the adoption of a point-of-view will always be a necessary condition for any historical writing at all for, and I repeat: *no narrative substance – no history*.

To continue with my example (and taking now Ankersmit and White *in alliance*), having adopted a point-of-view and having collected together the statements required to individuate it, the next task is to write-up the data into narrative form. For this purpose I will need a story line or mode of emplotment, a mode of argument and some refinement in position concerning the manner in which the story is to be troped such that it carries its intended meaning. These strategies, both conceptual and explanatory, will, of course, be coloured by the ideological position that I bring to the task – *history is always history for someone*. Now none of these complex considerations, which necessarily come into play in order to establish the *form* of the kind of story to be told, can be seen to have much to do with the past itself: certainly none of these *conditions of possibility* for any historicisation of the past are *in* the past itself. It is true, of course, that the narrative's constituent statements will refer to some aspect of the past but, taken individually, they cannot be representative of a narrative proposal about the past. The origin of any proposal about how the past might have been lies imbedded in the conceptual apparatus of the historian and cannot therefore be taken as part of the past itself. Rather, the historian's adoption of a *concept* of how the past might have been – a necessary condition of possibility (as explained above) for the writing of history – is, as Ankersmit puts it, 'pressed onto the past'. It shapes a *putative* past which correspond with its own internal concept of how that past might have been.

This brief example, I hope, illustrates what I take to be Ankersmit's essential understanding of the process of history production and (thus defended) it was as good, or better, than any alternative theorisations up until that time. Turning again to McCullagh, I cannot find in his critique any better way of thinking through the production of history. In fact, on those occasions where he approached a coherent

theory on the matter it seems to me that he was inadvertently falling in line with Ankersmit's thinking.

In short, then, the position as I see it (and as Ankersmit describes it) is this: the evidential traces of the contingent actions and situations which once constituted the actuality of some past event are drawn/figured together into some or other "historical" order by historians through the imposition of some or other story form upon them. This story form is a linguistic construct informed *solely* by its own *narrative substance*. It is a product of the enculturation of its own time and it cannot be found *in* the past itself. The past is thus violated by the very act of historicisation; that is to say that the past is ordered, beaten into shape and suitably appropriated in order to fit, what is in the end, an arbitrary story form which is *retrospectively* imposed on it whence to serve some human purpose to which the past itself is indifferent. Now if McCullagh still believes, as I think he does, that past events have their own intrinsic stories to reveal concerning their meanings, purposes, trajectories, etc., and that these stories are lying around somewhere awaiting their discovery by a historian adequate to that task, then he should ask himself two important questions: who is the author of these stories and what is that author's authorial intent?

Chapter Two

A Moment of Hesitation

In Chapter One I focused on what I consider to be the very best elements of Ankersmit's narrative theory as originally articulated in *Narrative Logic* (and later restated in *History and Tropology* in the form of abbreviated tabular sets of conclusions, collected together under the title 'Six Theses on Narrativist Philosophy of History')[1] and which, in sum, constitute the finished "weight" of Ankersmit's argument. These conclusions, taken in isolation (that is, divorced from the arguments that produced them) are, I think, coherent and complete in themselves. They embody the very substance of what I have termed 'The Good Ankersmit' and, unquestionably, I have no wish to subvert them. However I do have reservations about the structure, the philosophical style, and the intent of some of the arguments that even this *good* Ankersmit used to support or prove his conclusions. And these reservations will, *vis-à-vis* my thesis, allow me to argue that 'The Good Ankersmit' is not, on analysis, as good as his conclusions might suggest.

In this Chapter I first address several preliminary observations in connection with my own thesis which, of course, is not in itself exempt from the many considerations explored here (and in the previous chapter) in relation to Ankersmit's own arguments. These matters are laid out below in 'Section One: Introductory Comments'. I then collect together my various reservations about Ankersmit, as indicated in the paragraph above, under the subsequent subtitles: 'Section Two: The Illusion of Proof', 'Section Three: A Further Question of Misrepresentation', 'Section Four: Historiography and the Art of Gardening' and 'Section Five: Fact and Value' (these reservations collectively constituting my 'moment of hesitation'), before drawing matters to a close in 'Section Six: Concluding Observations'.

[1] Ankersmit, F. R., (1994). *History and Tropology. The Rise and Fall of Metaphor*. Berkeley: University of California Press. pp33-43

Section One: Introductory Comments

Ankersmit's argument, as laid out in Chapter One, is centred on the notion of the *narrative substance* as a linguistic instrument which performatively expresses the preference for narrative statements of a particular kind (exactly those which, in a circular fashion, contribute to the individuation of that very same *narrative substance*). Now my title for Chapter One, 'The Good Ankersmit' is, of course, itself a *narrative substance* which, accordingly, expresses a preference for the selection of those statements capable of collectively individuating my particular notion of what it is about the *good* Ankersmit that is good. To look at it another way, my choice of that particular title (worked-up from my own point-of-view) in effect *prefigured* the overall meaning and direction of the subsequent text, hence setting-up the condition(s) to be satisfied with regard to statement selection. I therefore took with me to my source – the book *Narrative Logic* – a prefigured notion of the meaning that I wanted my narrative critique to carry, and this prefigured notion (a *narrative substance* governed by my own point-of-view) directed me in the end to exactly those statements which could be utilised in support of that viewpoint. Had I prefigured my narrative from a different point-of-view (that is with a different kind of story in mind, thus generating a different *narrative substance* and a different title) then I would, or could, have settled on a different selection of individuating statements.

Now, with this second chapter of my thesis I have introduced another and a somewhat indistinctly delineated *narrative substance* in the form of an enigmatic title, 'A Moment of Hesitation', which suggests that all is not well with Ankersmit's argument but it does not afford the reader the anticipation of any specific narrative shape or direction to the subsequent text. Nevertheless, my point-of-view and thus my authorial intent is uniquely clear to me prior to the narrativisation of my data regardless of the title chosen, or indeed in the absence of any title at all. For, of course (as previously noted), the point-of-view assumed by a narrative's author is not necessarily "visible" to the narrative's reader. Indeed, on occasions it might be very hard for the reader to pin it down at all.

Moreover, one has to consider that there are many possible different points-of-view from which the detail of any text, in this case that of *Narrative Logic*, might be approached, and each one of the possible resultant explanatory accounts of that text would, no doubt, appear to be validated on the basis of its own particular verifiable collection of individuating constituent statements. Thus the plausibility of any explanatory account of an original text (each one being, in essence, a proposal for a particular explanation of that text) can only be judged within the "frame" of its own internally functioning *narrative substance*. One therefore has to conclude that the preference for *this* rather than *that* explanatory proposal , bereft of any common empirical basis upon which competing proposals might ultimately be judged, will come down to a matter of usefulness and aesthetic appeal arising precisely out of what Ankersmit calls its narrative scope. Thus, in order to "sell" a particular thesis the author of that thesis must, by 'maximalising its scope' (that is its ability to generate new insights, as Ankersmit argued), make it more useful and attractive than all competing theses.

Now, I am directing attention towards the foregoing *Ankersmitean* position and some of its consequences in order to rationalise what might appear to be an inconsistency arising out of the juxtaposition of my own two oppositional points-of-view, as expressed in each of the first two chapters (chapter headings) of this thesis. So, to make this clear(er), the point that I am making and addressing here is that the *good* Ankersmit of my first chapter (the Ankersmit of his *conclusions* taken in isolation) is, and continues to be for me, utterly defensible. However, I cannot extend that point-of-view to embrace all of the various arguments which Ankersmit employed in support of his so-called proofs. Thus, in relation to these latter considerations I have taken a completely different point-of-view which (I am arguing) can, without contradiction, co-exist with the former. They simply constitute two different perspectives on *Narrative Logic* which are each coherent in themselves and (this being the point) their logical co-existence, having already been accounted for within Ankersmit's theory of *narrative substance,* is unproblematic.

My final observation at this stage is that Ankersmit's convoluted philosophical style of proof (evident in *Narrative Logic* and equally so, as I hope to show, throughout many of his works) which he endeavours to bring to bear on his subject matter, is not only problematic but also strictly unnecessary. For his thesis arguably constitutes a proposal for a new rhetorical explanatory model, the purpose of which is to account for the nature of the historical narrative, and as such it stands in its own category with its own *new* descriptive (metaphorical) use of language. It is thus, in a sense, disconnected from any attempt at establishing its logical or scientific proof in the general terms of an *older* or a *current* language – a matter which will be explored below. Furthermore, my argument is that Ankersmit's general thesis can only be assessed on its utility; if it is found to be more useful than all competing theses, and I believe that it is, then it stands on that merit only.

With these points made I can now set about my aforementioned *critical assessment* of the negative elements of Ankersmit's often misleading but always idiosyncratic style and structure of argument; a "dissection" of *Narrative Logic* which, in its sustained critical form, is something to which Ankersmit, as far as I know, has not previously been subjected.[2]

Section Two: The Illusion of Proof

With the help of Richard Rorty, Donald Davidson, Mary Hesse and others, I propose to argue here against what I take to be Ankersmit's firm (and ironic) belief that his thesis can be privileged with some logically assembled proof of an absolute and irrefutable kind. Central to my argument is the rejection of the notion that language can be seen as a medium that stands between the *self* and a *reality* which it presumes

[2] For instance, although John Zammito offers a critique of Ankersmit (Zammito, J., (2005). 'Ankersmit and Historical Representation' in *History and Theory* 44 no. 2: pp155-181), his argument is limited to a rethinking of the notion of colligatory concepts only. Also Ewa Domańska (Domańska, E., (2009). 'Frank Ankersmit: From Narrative to Experience' in *Rethinking History* 13 no. 2: pp175-195) is critical of Ankersmit's *Narrative Logic* but, again, from a limited perspective. Neither of these two papers, nor others that I have examined during my research, aspire to the all encompassing style of close reading and analytical dissection that I am, at least, attempting here.

to accurately describe. Such a notion presupposes a world in possession of an intrinsic nature which can be captured in a linguistic expression or representation thus revealing a truth which lies 'out there'. Now, I am not suggesting that there is not a world out there which is common to the sensory perceptions of all of us, however, there is no *truth* located out there. Here is Rorty on the matter:

> To say that the world is out there, that it is not our creation, is to say.... that most things in space and time are the effects of causes which do not include human mental states. To say that truth is not out there is simply to say that where there are no sentences there is no truth, that sentences are elements of human languages, and that human languages are human creations. Truth cannot be out there – cannot exist independently of the human mind – because sentences cannot so exist, or be out there. The world is out there, but descriptions of the world are not. Only descriptions of the world can be true or false. The world on its own – unaided by the describing activities of human beings – cannot.[3]

Rorty is claiming that the notion of *truth* is language dependant. Or, to rephrase, human beings make languages within which sentences reside and it is only these sentences – shaped and articulated within the descriptive capacities of their own languages – that can be true in relation to the language in which each is framed (thus to change one's language is to change one's network of common sense truths). On this understanding it follows that not only is truth made by human beings but that it is also of a tautological kind. The philosopher Donald Davidson also takes an anti-foundationalist position with regard to language which he sees as a 'token' of what is out there; something that cannot reach 'what knowledge seeks':

> We should banish the idea that language is epistemically something like sense data, something that embodies what we can take in, but is itself only a token, or representative, of what is out there. Language does not mirror or represent reality, any more than our senses present us with no more than appearances. Presentations and representations as mere proxies or pictures will always leave us one step short of what knowledge seeks....[4]

And the theorist of rhetoric, Thomas Kent, in the preamble to his report of 'A Conversation with Donald Davidson' for the journal *JAC*, clarifies Davidson's position and links it to Rorty's thus:

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[3] Rorty, R., (1989). *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p5
[4] Davidson, D., (2005). *Truth, Language and History*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. p130

> Davidson's philosophy of language constitutes the first systematic treatment of language which breaks *completely* with the notion of language as something which can be adequate or inadequate to the world or to the self. For Davidson breaks with the notion that language is a *medium*, "a medium either of representation or of expression". If language does not mediate between us and the world, as Davidson claims, and if we cease to imagine that a split exists between an inner world of thought and feeling and an outer world of objects and events, as Davidson advocates, then nothing exists "out there" or "in here" that will serve as an epistemological foundation for either a theory of meaning or a theory of truth; all we have to authorize our utterances are other utterances. As Rorty puts it, "only sentences can be true... and... human beings make truths by making languages in which to phrase sentences".[5]

To collectively summarise these positions, the world is *known* only to the extent that it is placed under some form of description (an inscription set within the metaphorical potential of the particular language of description in use), which causes beliefs about *how it is*. Thus, the notion that there can be "true knowledge" of the world is an illusion – nothing more than an internally generated language effect.

With regard to this collective view concerning language of use, and taking Rorty's position in particular, the difference between literal and metaphorical use of language can be expressed in terms of the difference between its familiar and unfamiliar use. Or, the literal (old metaphors having acquired a certain familiarity of use) is that which can be handled within the current language network. But the metaphorical – or *new* – as yet unfamiliar use of language, having no fixed place within that current language network, stimulates the imaginative search for its own meaning which, on successful acceptance and habitual use, will eventually subside into the familiar and unthinking language of the literal (a nebulous conglomeration of dead and dying metaphors).

To develop his position on the performative nature of the metaphor, Rorty draws for the most part on the work of Davidson. However, he is also attracted by the work of the English philosopher of science Mary Hesse and for my particular purpose here I am going to use Rorty's summary of Hesse's approach to the notion of scientific progress; this is the way he puts it:

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[5] Kent T., (1993). 'Language Philosophy, Writing and Reading: A Conversation with Donald Davidson'. *JAC* 13 no. 1

> The replacement of one set of rhetorical concepts [metaphors] by another, concepts which cannot themselves be defined in terms of an overarching observation language, is essential to the attainment of greater predictive success, but there is no way to see such replacement as "getting closer to the way things really are" unless this means simply "getting more predictive power". If that is all that it means, then one cannot explain the success of science in terms of the notion of corresponding better to reality.[6]

Hesse, then, takes the view that scientific theories should be taken as metaphors and she underlines this view when she concludes that 'rationality consists just in the continuous adaptation of our language to our continually expanding world, and metaphor is one of the chief means by which this is accomplished'.[7]

Hence, the way that I read Hesse could, I believe, be illustrated thus. In the later half of the 17th Century and the early 18th Century, Isaac Newton re-described the world/ universe. The descriptive language that he used was radically different from and possessed a much greater predictive power than the then generally current language of Aristotle (as articulated in his theories on the nature of physics) which, consequently, fell out of use as the superior utility of Newton's new language (or use of metaphor) became apparent. During the following two hundred or so years, repeated experiments and measurements confirmed the efficacy of Newton's predictive model and the once exciting new metaphors of the "Newtonian" language died into literal modes of expression – its *common sense* truths. Then in walked Albert Einstein with a new set of descriptive metaphors in the shape of his special and general theories of relativity, the predictive capacities of which pragmatically turned out to be vastly superior to those used by Newton which were thus dispatched to the periphery of Einstein's model and reduced in status to "local effects" (approximations within a much larger whole). Accordingly, the *scientific* world adopted the new and exciting language of Einstein.

On this view – which is Hesse's view – the ongoing scientific process cannot be seen in terms of incremental movements towards some form of *absolute* knowledge

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[6] Rorty, R., (1991). *Essays on Heidegger and Others*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p103
[7] Hesse, M., (1980). *Revolutions and Reconstructions in the Philosophy of Science*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. p123

or truth, but rather in terms of the general adoptions of successions of improving metaphors or predictive models with which the world is put under description. Not only are there no necessary linkages between these various metaphorical models of the world, but also there can be no ontological linkage (entailment) between any model and the world *in itself*. The idea that there can be a collective convergence of such metaphorical models on some ultimate knowledge of the unmediated /unprocessed world in itself is an illusion because improvements in the utility of predictive models can lead to nothing more than better predictions. It would also appear that scientific "progress", thus conceived, cannot and does not move forward and upward in a linear regular developmental fashion, but rather it moves in a series of irregular (metaphorical) "steps" where the "uprights" coincide with the adoption of each radical new description of the world and where the "treads" might be seen as plateaus of ratification and consolidation of current descriptions – their literalisation.

In summation then:

- Language is not a medium that stands between the *self* and the *world* (it is not a window on reality) and it is, therefore, imperative to break free from what appears to be the common sense wisdom, or conviction, that language can somehow put one *in touch* with reality.
- Language is the medium in which the *human* world is constituted by placing it under description, and however sophisticated that metaphorical description might be or become, it cannot lead to a knowledge of the world *in itself*.
- Knowledge of the of the world in itself is arguably unattainable. However, it is possible to pragmatically advance ever better predictive metaphorical models of the world to the extent that we have the potential to get around in it more effectively/successfully, sustained by the comforting sense of an ever-increasing familiarity with it.
- If successful (and thus adopted), new metaphors will acquire familiarity and eventually subside into literalness; they will "die" into a new language

which, in due course, becomes the literal common sense (the real) of its own time. Language, then, is essentially metaphorical all the way down.[8]

Now, since on this view our so-called *knowledge* of the world has no ultimate reach beyond the metaphors that we use to describe it, it must follow that this presumed knowledge is of a rhetorical, and not empirical, kind – *all* of it. Rhetoric is thus the bottom line and must apply across all disciplines (literature, philosophy, the sciences, history and so on) and the acceptance of such a "linguistic" notion carries with it inescapable implications, not least for the discourse of history itself and the various theoretical arguments which are confidently wheeled out in support of it: history *is* logocentric.

Moreover, it must now be clear that *meaning* as we humans construe it is not a property of the world but just an effect caused by the language – the metaphors – we impose on the world in order to give it a semblance of familiarity. The world *in itself* has no language preference for its own description; it does not choose between the languages of Aristotle, Newton or Einstein, nor, for that matter, does it choose between the languages of the sloth, sperm whale or the garden slug; each species gets along as best it can within the frame of its own self referenced world. Now, to impose an arbitrary metaphorical language and thus an arbitrary rhetorical meaning on the world is, as Derrida pointed out, an arbitrary act; an act of violence. Of course such acts of violence are commonplace – they pass largely unnoticed – and, with the onset of familiarity of usage, language generated meanings (the product of these acts of violence) acquire the generally unquestioned shape of common sense – a communal *meaningful* view on reality. Keith Jenkins puts this point thus:

> To make (to realize) a meaning, to bring a meaning into the world is ultimately an act of violence—a violence of "writing" that can be called *first-level violence.* Since there is no one-to-one natural correspondence between word and world, no literal entailment of signifier to signifier and thence to the signified and thence to the putative referent, to get the actuality of the world into a language it never asked to be put in is always to establish both a power and a metaphorical relationship (a tree *as if it* was a tree, the past *as if it* was history ...). Yet, accurate as this is, Derrida thinks the notion of a metaphorical

[8] The significance of this for (or the counter-part of this in) history being that '....dead historical metaphors become the reality of the past'. (Munslow, A., (2003). *The New History.* London: Pearson Longman. p170).

> relationship still runs the risk of carrying realist overtones, in that it may suggest that there is a meaningful reality to which the text refers, albeit figuratively.[9]

Moreover, since meanings *in* the world can only arise through the imposition of language *onto* the world – meanings being language or *use of metaphor* dependant – it follows that such an imposition or act of violence is a necessary condition for the possibility of meaning. In an interview with the philosopher Richard Kearney, Derrida extended this argument with the observation that metaphor implies a relation to an *original* property of meaning whereas, by contrast, the 'act of violence' implies a violent production of meaning (or an abuse) – a *break* bereft of anterior sanction which Derrida characterises as 'catachresis'. I am reproducing here both Derrida's answer and the question which prompted his response since, in addition to explaining this distinction between metaphor and catachresis, both underline the rhetorical nature of philosophy and, in particular, they both expose the debilitating flaw that lies right at the conceptual core of metaphysics:

> **KEARNEY:** Is there not a sense in which philosophy for you is a form of literature? You have, for example, described metaphysics as a "white mythology", that is, a sort of palimpsest of metaphors *(eidos, telos, ousia)* and myths (of return, homecoming, transcendence towards the light, etc.), which are covered over and forgotten as soon as philosophical "concepts" are construed as pure and univocal abstractions, as totalizing universals devoid of myth and metaphor.
>
> **Derrida:** I have always tried to expose the way in which philosophy is literary, not so much because it is *metaphor* but because it is *catachresis.* The term *metaphor* generally implies a relation to an original "property" of meaning, a "proper" sense to which it indirectly or equivocally refers, whereas *catachresis* is a violent production of meaning, an abuse which refers to no anterior or proper norm. The founding concepts of metaphysics – *logos, eidos, theoria,* etc. – are instances of *catachresis* .....[10]

Now all the foregoing is constitutive of my position on these various considerations at this moment. Or, to put this another way, the foregoing arguments are in my view the best possible arguments on this matter in that they have the widest degree of utility, or apparent "fit", and are arguably the most defensible. That is *not* to say that

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[9] Jenkins, K., (2000). 'A Postmodern Reply to Perez Zagorin' in *History and Theory* 39 no. 2: p192

[10] Derrida, J., (1995). 'Deconstruction and the Other' in Kearney, R. (Ed.) *States of Mind: Dialogues with Contemporary Thinkers.* New York: New York University Press. p153

my point-of-view is fixed, rather, drawing on Rorty, I might say that this is my 'end language' which must always be seen as provisional pending *better metaphors to come*. Accordingly, it is against this background (this axiom)[11] that I now turn back to Ankersmit and to some aspects of his philosophical position which are not overtly expressed in his writings and which, therefore, have to be inferred from the content of his sometimes obscure and contradictory arguments. Before proceeding, however, it would be worth pointing out that what I take to be the confused philosophical style of argument which Ankersmit brought to his writing of *Narrative Logic* effected an underlying *weakness* in its structure. This weakness, which by Ankersmit's own admission (whilst being interviewed by Ewa Domańska) arose out of his incongruous use of an 'Anglo-Saxon philosophy of language....to demonstrate Continental conclusions',[12] generated a curious language mix that neither the Anglo-Saxon philosophers of language nor the Continental structuralists/poststructuralists liked very much (and nor did they much like Ankersmit as user of it). In the same interview Ankersmit also explained that, in the hope of gaining increased readership with respect to future publications, he had found it expedient to 'adopt the rhetoric of deconstructivism and of the relevant French theorists'.[13] But I see no evidence that this ploy of Ankersmit's met with any degree of success, and this is not so surprising since these two different styles of philosophy reside in categorically different structures of thought which are fundamentally opposed to each other. That is to say that Anglo-Saxon philosophy is essentially conceptual and foundationalist whilst Continental philosophy is, from top to bottom and in every respect, rhetorical and anti-foundationalist.[14] Thus, and this strikes me as being somewhat absurd,

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[11] This is not to say that various attacks (neorealist for example) have not been made on what I might call "Rorty's position" (for example, the objections raised by a dozen philosophers including J. Habermas, H. Putnam and M. Williams in Brandom, R.B.(ed.).(2000). *Rorty and His Critics*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing in which central features of Rorty's views are critiqued: i.e. his conviction that *communal practices* can best be characterised as *justification* driven and are not in need of any 'transcendental' governing concept, no truth goal, and that the world *in itself* cannot be known independently from how we talk about it etc.). But, my judgement is that none of these critiques is convincing, not least relative to Rorty's own accompanying replies to Williams, in particular, but also to Habermas, Putnam *et al.*

[12] Domańska. *Encounters*. p71

[13] Ibid. p71

[14] Broadly speaking I take the view that Anglo-Saxon philosophy is characterised by its predisposition towards clarity of argument on the basis of a modern formal logic, its respect for the sciences and its belief in the possibility of some form of actual knowledge about *what is out there*. By contrast, and again very broadly speaking, I take continental philosophy as being of a rhetorical kind which centres on the human condition. It also stands opposed to scientism and the possibility of *absolute* knowledge.

Ankersmit appears to have adopted a radical shift in position both to meet a marketing contingency and also to appease (or be accepted by) the French theorists. Such a project was not only entirely unrealistic but was also bound to generate contradictions. For (leaving aside the doubtful notion that one might, as a matter of expediency and with untroubled ease, be able to accomplish such a fundamental change of theoretical position) there exists a lingering residue of "certaintism" in Ankersmit's writings which could never be taken seriously by any anti-foundationalist.

My first indicator of Ankersmit's philosophical position is taken from the introduction to *Narrative Logic* and reads as follows:

> Most of the reliable scientific knowledge we possess and its astonishing growth in the past two hundred years, are the result of the scientists' attempts to discover something general in those very diverse phenomena of reality. So why shouldn't we follow the same course in philosophy?[15]

The unmistakable assumptions embodied in this statement are (1) that *reliable* (meaning in this sense, I think, unchangeable) scientific knowledge exists as an incontrovertible fact, (2) that it is growing rapidly and (3) that it arises through the attempted discovery of 'general' features located in the 'phenomena of reality'. This does not fit Hesse's much more useful "model" in which she attributes scientific progress to random (as opposed to linear) successive replacements of rhetorical concepts 'which cannot themselves be defined in terms of an overarching observation language'.[16] Hesse, then, has no general unifying concepts, she simply has sets of metaphors which cannot either refer to reality or refer to other sets of metaphors and, hence, their adoption or rejection turns on the *sole* basis of their predictive usefulness. Furthermore, the concept of knowledge in an absolute sense is rejected by Hesse in favour of the more passive notion of predictive knowledge; that is, "knowing" something *only* in relation to a metaphorical model from which its behaviour can be predicted. For example, scientists have models to predict how gravity behaves with a high degree of certainty and precision (models which, for example, can be successfully used in the fields of astronomy and space exploration),

[15] Ankersmit. *Narrative Logic*. p5

[16] Hesse. *Revolutions and Reconstructions in the Philosophy of Science*. p123

but that does not mean that scientists know what gravity actually *is* in itself. Now, Ankersmit may have used the word 'knowledge' rather loosely here but, nevertheless, his statement taken in the whole has the ring of certaintism about it and he proposed to carry this position with him into his thesis on the philosophy of history. So my answer to his question, 'why shouldn't we follow the same course in philosophy?' is that – 'we shouldn't because Ankersmit's interpretation of the *course* of science rests on a metaphorical view of the world which is incoherent and thus invalid'.

This notion that the nature of objects of scientific enquiry can somehow be referred to directly, that some stable link exists between *word* and *world*, is positively loaded with presuppositions that cannot be sustained. In current discourse there seems to be some generally accepted *common sense* idea that descriptions of the world should be seen or shown to be adequate to the world which they describe. But how can this adequacy be demonstrated without stepping outside language? In order to find descriptions adequate to the objects which they describe, one has to postulate something both fixed and prior to language against which the world (on one hand) and its linguistic description (on the other) might be compared in order to determine the latter's adequacy with regard to the former – a sort of transcendental adjudicator (and what language does the adjudicator speak?). In short, then, there appears to be no escape from the world of language with its internally referenced webs of circulating statements which carry the appearance of actually *knowing* what they can only metaphorically describe. Accordingly, I argue that the very idea of the possibility of *proof* across all disciplines is an illusion (a deception arising out of a tautology) and I cannot, therefore – and this is my point – see the point of Ankersmit's protracted attempts to prove his theory of *narrative substances*. Yet, on page 105 of *Narrative Logic* Ankersmit announces this endeavour thus:

> In the remaining part of this book I will attempt to prove that Nss [narrative substances] do indeed play an all important role in narrative historiography, so I have no intention of basing my case on mere postulation of some "virtus narrativa" in order to explain narrative historiography.[17]

[17] Ankersmit. *Narrative Logic*. p105

Ankersmit's declared strategy, then, is to devote the rest of his book (pages 105 to 252) to the construction of a scientific style of proof in order to validate what he sees as a mere rhetorical proposition which, by his implication, lacks proper status until it has been so proven. He initially sets about this task by describing in detail four objections to his proposal on *narrative substances* which he then "knocks down" one by one, leaving his proposition as the winner of the contest. Ankersmit may claim that all this is a clarification process,[18] but he presents his *selection by elimination* argument is if it were part of his proof, and I think that this should be set aside right away, for how can it be possible to defend and, by implication, validate one's own position solely through the negation of a small number of competing positions? With this matter dismissed, I can now move on and look at what I take to be the essential character of Ankersmit's so-called proof of the existence and nature of *narrative substances*.

For each of the three 'pillars' or 'theses' about which *Narrative Logic* is articulated, Ankersmit found support in the theoretical writings of the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga, who looked upon historical knowledge as essentially aesthetic, subjective and intuitive. Indeed, Ankersmit has frequently expressed his admiration for Huizinga's work which, he says, contains 'the best analysis of the nature of historical knowledge available as yet'.[19] And it is this 'analysis' of Huizinga's, combined with a certain *logic* of the mathematician and philosopher Gottfried Leibniz, that Ankersmit put to use in furtherance of his search for the proof of the theory of *narrative substances*.

Leibniz himself believed that the process of reasoning could be reduced to a form of mathematics – a universally valid structure of calculations which could collectively function as the "last court of appeal" for the resolution of differences of opinion in argument. Enrico Pasini explains the matter thus:

> The same concepts are repeated ever and again in Leibniz's countless manifestoes……:

[18] Ibid. p2

[19] Ibid. p251. (footnote 3). In this lengthy footnote commencing on page 250 Ankersmit also explains, in some detail, the relationship between Huizinga's work and his own.

> "Since when I had the pleasure to considerably improve the art of discovery, or analysis, of the mathematicians, I began to have certain new views, that is, to reduce all human reasoning to a sort of calculus, which would be of use in discovering a truth in so far as it is possible *ex datis*, i.e. from what is given or known" (Leibniz GP, VII, 25).[20]

A universal writing would also result of it, that "would be like a sort of general algebra, and would give the means to perform reasoning by calculation": such a calculus would not only be an instrument for learning and research, but it would be an infallible judge of controversies as well, offering a way to solve disputes by simple reckoning.[21]

Now, it is this universal writing (a kind of algebra of thought likened to, and including the notational system of, conventional algebra), along with an unshakable belief in it, that Ankersmit seems to have imported, as one of his instruments of proof, into his Huizinga inspired mode of historical theorisation (for there are a lot of algebraic-like symbols and formulae in use throughout *Narrative Logic*). Occasionally, however, Ankersmit drifts away from this algebraic form of notation in preference for something reminiscent of the configurational formulae of the chemist in which individual symbols represent ideas directly in diagrammatic or graphic form – as is also the case with Egyptian or Chinese characters – and it is pertinent to note in this connection that the significance of symbols in language was also the subject of Leibniz's attention. Of course, Ankersmit interest in Leibniz is not just confined to his 'language of algebra' for he finds, amongst other things, that 'Leibniz's use of the concept of substance or monad is most easily adaptable to the narrative philosophy advocated [in *Narrative Logic*]....'[22] and this, Ankersmit later explains, is primarily why he proposed the term *narrative substance*.

Within the notion of the monad Ankersmit thus found (what he said was) a 'resemblance between Leibniz's logic and the historist philosophy of history

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[20] This, Pasini's reference, refers to Leibniz G. W., (1875-1890) in Gerhardt, C.I. (Ed.). *Die Philosophischen Schriften von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz.* Berlin: Weidman. VIIp25 (7 vols Cited by volume and page).

[21] Pasini, E., (1923). 'Arcanum Artis Inveniendi: Leibniz and Analysis' in *Psychology and Philosophy* no1. pp268-272

[22] Ankersmit. *Narrative Logic.* p105. It should also be noted that, *vis-à-vis* Ankersmit's quite considerable use of *logic* in *Narrative Logic*, that he was able to state very clearly the whole thesis of that text in his 'Six Theses on Narrativist Philosophy of History' (the substance of Chapter One in *History and Tropology*) without a single use of logical symbols at all; hence my view that such logic was unnecessary in *Narrative Logic* itself.

defended in ...[his] book'.[23] To understand what he meant by this one must first appreciate that, for Ankersmit, the historist – and Ankersmit was favourably disposed towards historists and historism – took the view that historical phenomena should be situated in, and understood from, the context of a unique process of historical change. Ankersmit, as he himself explained, recognised that 'historism erroneously situated narrative logic in the past itself'.[24] But, as he further explained, this matter could be put right by translating 'traditional historism from a theory on historical objects into a theory of historical writing'[25] and, in this way, the historist's 'uniqueness of historical change' could be displaced from *aspects of the subject matter* to *aspects of narrative substances*. The subject of change thus becomes the linguistic entity *narrative substance*, which in its fully individuated form is not itself changing as a concept, but rather has "historical" change (now seen as the product of the historicisation of the past) locked up inside it. It *is* this idea, as far as I can tell from my reading of Ankersmit, that he found mirrored in Leibniz's monads. However, valid or not, I do not propose to go into this particular theory since, in itself, it is not relevant to my argument. All I want to say is that Leibniz's *universal language of algebraic reasoning* along with his *monadic substance* and Huizinga's *analysis of the nature of historical knowledge* (none of which have attracted much general support) are in essence metaphorical models which, in common with *all* theories, can (as I have argued) either be adopted or rejected on the basis of their attractiveness and utility. I cannot therefore see how Ankersmit's direction/style of argument, worked-up out of old rhetorical positions, can add to or constitute the kind of certain proof he sought.

So, in order to bring this particular argument to a close, I put forward the following observations. In the first place I think that in *Narrative Logic* Ankersmit attempted to use an outmoded *language of proof* which could only be at odds with his new rhetorical position as expressed in his theory of *narrative substances*. That is to say that he brought with him into his proof a worn out, died into literalness (or

[23] Ibid. p141
[24] Ibid. p123
[25] Ibid. p124

sometimes dead), old language of outmoded styles of (generally) positivist philosophies, the character of which provoked a form of narrative contradiction which undermined the book's coherence – a matter which went pretty much unnoticed by its critics. Nevertheless, within *Narrative Logic* there are inspirational elements which, when collected together, constitute a particular point-of-view on Ankersmit; my 'Good Ankersmit' of Chapter One. However, the rest of *Narrative Logic* (more than half of it) is arguably not so good, and any point-of-view governed by these questionable elements of it (the elements critically assessed in this chapter) could not, by me, be shown to be good at all. Furthermore, Ankersmit is mistaken in his belief that he can demonstrate proof of his theorisations. The notion of proof (verification) implies something absolute or universal, something "fixed" to which his theory might be anchored, but this is to suggest that there is something of a permanent/stable kind outside his theorisations and hence outside his language. The contradiction here is that the *language* Ankersmit used to construct his proof is also the *language* in which his theory is constituted, and thus his so-called proof is just an internally circulating language effect, not a proof at all. Indeed, can any theory really be proved in an absolute sense? Is not the overriding criterion of preference for one theory rather than another simply that of utility? – use it for now (if it works better than others) whilst awaiting the arrival of even better metaphors to come.

Or (and finally) to make this point from another angle, we have seen that Ankersmit's thesis rests on his three 'essential pillars', the third pillar of which concerns the fundamentally metaphorical nature of *all* language. Thus it follows, by Ankersmit's own logic, that his ubiquitous proofs (not just his propositional sentences) can only be constituted metaphorically. So, the question that has to be asked, a question which is nowhere addressed in *Narrative Logic*, is this: 'What exactly is the ontological status of a proof which is, of necessity, structured within a framework of internally referenced metaphorical figures of speech?'. The word 'proof' might be suggestive of a validating *fixed* authority situated outside (independent of) its own language of description, but (as I have argued here) it can

very easily be shown to be just another form of rhetoric – and Ankersmit should have known this.

Section Three: A Further Question of Misrepresentation

In Chapter One I considered the essential differences between the two spheres of thought associated with the theoretical positions taken-up by first the 'narrative realist' and then the 'narrative idealist'. The former position resting on the supposition that narrative knowledge of the past is informed directly by the past itself, whilst the latter presumes a narrative logic, uninformed by the past, which structures narrative knowledge of the past .To adopt this latter position, as Ankersmit does, is to affirm the fundamentally autonomous nature of the historical narrative and, moreover, to categorically reject the idea of the existence of *translation rules* which would necessarily be required by the 'narrative realist' in order to effect the projection of the actuality of the past directly onto the structure of the narrative itself. With all this in mind I will now turn back to Chapter Four of *Narrative Logic* and Ankersmit's misrepresentations of Hayden White's position with regard to translation rules.

Now it is my contention, as already noted, that Ankersmit (whether he realised it or not) repeatedly misrepresented White and, moreover, that these misrepresentations had the effect of elevating the status of his own theoretical arguments relative to White's arguments (a matter to be further considered towards the end of this chapter and in the next such that it becomes a sort of "sub-thesis" of my thesis). However, in order to substantiate my claim of misrepresentation it will be necessary to take apart the content of page 83 of *Narrative Logic*, to break it down and scrutinise its parts in search of evidence, for this is a "crime scene" and it needs close attention. Here is the first part of Ankersmit's argument:

> White.....explicitly rejects all claims as to the nature of historical reality and thus comes closer to narrative idealism. Nevertheless, he cannot bring himself to abandon the translation rules of narrative realism..... The past, as such,

> White argues, cannot be understood by us: in itself the past is a meaningless myriad of facts, states and events, an amorphous chaos of data that successfully resists "conscious apprehension" by the historian[6]. Therefore the historian has to translate the "prose" of the historical past into the narrative "poetry" of historiography. The four rhetorical tropes: metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony are capable of achieving this translation. These four tropes, each in its own way, make a selection or abstraction from the initial chaos of historical reality and thus succeed in making history intelligible to us.... Unfortunately, White fails to explain why the four tropes possess the remarkable capacities he credits them with. This is probably due to his partial abandonment of narrative realism. On the basis of an assumption on the nature of historical reality and the relation between its constituent parts, he could have made out a good case for his tropes. As it is now, his opting for the four tropes to action as the translation rules that enable the historian to translate the past into the narratio remains entirely arbitrary.[26]

Thus, Ankersmit emphatically maintains (this is the central matter at issue) that White has opted to use his tropes to *translate* the past into narrative form. Now there is no doubt whatsoever in my mind that White has never suggested that the tropes might function in such a way. He has always maintained that narrative accounts of the past (the *worked-up* products of historians) are not (in that working-up) informed by the past itself but rather by linguistic devices in the form of tropes etc. That is, as White puts it, 'one utilizes the tropes of language.....in order to figure it [figure forth the discourse]'[27] and that tropes might thus be seen as 'the "theory" guiding the articulation of the discourse'[28] and, moreover, that these tropes constitute 'the only conceptual protocol we have'.[29] To propose the existence of translation rules is to suggest a kind of "linear flow" *from* the evidence of the past *into* its narrative form (no 'conceptual protocol' required here), but White, in conspicuous contrast to this notion, is talking about the "projection" of the tropes and other linguistic instruments onto the evidence of the past in order to figure forth that evidence into a narrative form. This is an imaginative conceptual act by the historian and the *flow* is the other way round. In short, White does not entertain the notion of translation rules here or anywhere else.

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[26] Ankersmit. *Narrative Logic*. pp82-83
[27] White, H., (1978). *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press. p115
[28] Ibid. p115
[29] Ibid. p115

Furthermore, the statement that the past is 'an amorphous chaos of data that successfully resists conscious apprehension by the historian [6]' is attributed to White, but I cannot find any such reference to this on page 34 of *Metahistory* (the page to which Ankersmit's footnote [6] refers). However, this statement is consistent with White's position, so I will move on to the following sentence which also appears to be attributed to White and which reads, 'therefore the historian has to translate the "prose" of the historical past into the narrative "poetry" of historiography'. White then, according to Ankersmit, argued that the past 'successfully resists conscious apprehension' yet, through the agency of the four rhetorical tropes acting as translation rules, this 'successful resistance' is broken down such that the 'prose of the historical past' can be translated into the 'poetry of historiography' and that all of this can be found on page 34 of *Metahistory* – which, as it happens, it can't. I am not sure how a past that 'successfully resists' can then 'yield' to translation rules – is this not unsuccessful resistance? However, ignoring this contradiction, my focus here must be on the notion that (and remember that this is Ankersmit purporting to interpret White's position) the historian is necessarily obliged to 'translate the prose of the historical past'. For it seems to me that if the historical past is to be found in the form of prose then someone must have already translated it. However, be that as it may, what I would really like to pin down here is the significance of the word 'historical' in the construction 'historical past'? Does Ankersmit mean 'the historicised past'? If so it ties in with his use of the word *prose*, but it contradicts the translation requirement and does not fit with the rest of the sentence. If the word is redundant and Ankersmit is referring to the actual past, then he certainly will not find any *prose* out there (or back there). This statement remains something of a mystery to me and it is at odds with my reading of White.

Ankersmit then goes on to suggests that had White dropped the translation rule idea, then he could have made a good case for his tropes, since

> ...there is still another way out for White. He could have offered a "transcendental deduction" (to use a Kantian term) for his four tropes: i.e. he could have tried to prove that knowledge of the past is only made possible by these four tropes..... We shall discover that, unlike the translation rules of narrative realism, the transcendental narrativist rules do not pretend to guide the historian in solving the problem of how to "translate" the past into a

> narratio, but that they only determine the logical structure of narrative accounts of the past. Of course, *such* rules can no longer be said to be translation rules.[30]

Now, if one were to replace the ambiguous construction 'knowledge of the past' with 'narrative knowledge' (understood as a narrative proposal about the past) then I think that this statement does approximate to White's argument which deals exclusively with the linguistic structure of the narrative discourse and does not anywhere refer to, or allude to, translation rules. Under a smokescreen of misinformation Ankersmit is simply restating White's position as if it were his own and, for me at least, he fails to "pull it of".

I now propose to extend my "crime scene" in order to include this extract from Chapter Two of *History and Tropology*, in which Ankersmit reaffirms his claim against White as follows:

> The linguistic turn announces itself unambiguously in White's philosophy when he compares the historical past itself with a text.[62] Just like a text, the past possesses a meaning that we are trying to discover, it needs interpretation, and consists of lexical, grammatical, syntactical, and semantic elements. Therefore, what the historian essentially does is translate the text of the past into the narrative text of the historian.[63] This translation procedure is always guided by either one or more of the four tropes: metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, or irony.[31]

This citation refers to page 30 of Metahistory (Ankersmit's footnote[62]) and the first point that I want to make make is that the word 'text' does not appear anywhere on that page. No doubt the word text has its place in Ankersmit's argument, but, cited thus, it already constitutes a deviation from White's actual use (on page 30) of the associated word *language*. This is what White actually says; '....the historian confronts the historical field in much the same way that the grammarian might confront a new language'.[32] Or, in other words, White is talking about the *manner* in which the historian confronts the historical field (as if it were a new language) and not the intrinsic character of the historical field (as if, in Ankersmit's words, it were a text). This twist in meaning is further compounded when Ankersmit shifts from his

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[30] Ankersmit. *Narrative Logic*. pp83-84
[31] Ankersmit. *History and Tropology*. p64
[32] White, H., (1973). *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press. p30

initial erroneous statement that White 'compares the historical[33] past itself with a text' to his even more astonishing inference that White actually views the past as a text, as follows; 'what the historian essentially does is translate the text of the past into the narrative text of the historian'. And this is not the end of it, for the second sentence of this citation (which Ankersmit also appears to attribute to White) simply beggars belief; here it is again; 'Just like a text, the past possesses a meaning that we are trying to discover, it needs interpretation, and consists of lexical, grammatical, syntactical, and semantic elements'. But White is not searching for a *meaning* possessed by the past, for he knows (and frequently expresses the belief as Ankersmit himself has already noted) that the past *in itself* is 'a meaningless myriad of facts, states and events, an amorphous chaos of data that successfully resists conscious apprehension' – so, what is Ankersmit's point? He appears to base his extraordinary argument on the following two sentences from page 30 of *Metahistory*:

> In short, the historian's problem is to construct a linguistic protocol, complete with lexical, grammatical, syntactical, and semantic dimensions, by which to characterize the field and its elements *in his own terms* (rather than in the terms in which they come labelled in the documents themselves), and thus to prepare them for the explanation and representation he will subsequently offer of them in his narrative. This preconceptual linguistic protocol will in turn be – by virtue of its essentially *prefigurative* nature –characterizable in terms of the dominant tropological mode in which it is cast.[34]

But, it is evident that White is referring very clearly here to the linguistic protocol which the historian projects onto the historical field *in his own terms* in order to *prefigure* (as a preparatory stage) what will eventually become the basis for his representation of that field in narrative form. Translation of an imagined 'text of the past' does not come into it at all, and why should it? There is no "shape" in the past – no formal structure or language to which one might apply translation rules, even if such rules could ever be found. Or, to rephrase somewhat, translation rules can only be applied to an existing language or structure in order to find its equivalent in a different language or structure. So, what is this entity situated in the past to which

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[33] In this particular context the adjective *historical* is redundant – a frequent recurrence in Ankersmit's texts.
[34] White. *Metahistory*. p30

these putative translation rules might be applied? Well, the answer to this question is that there is no such entity ready and waiting to be translated, and that the use of the word translation is therefore inappropriate in this context.

Let me explain my objection to Ankersmit's use of the word translation (in this context) with a brief illustration. Suppose that I have a pile of bricks outside my house and that, after a little thought, I decide to build myself an office extension – I've always wanted one. Having completed the project and with nothing better to do, I might reflect on the nature of the principal components (the bricks) that together make up my new office. There is nothing intrinsic to a brick that has the capacity to endow it with a predisposition towards constituting, along with other bricks, a building of a particular kind (I might have preferred to build a garage or a pigsty). So this emergent form, that of an office extension, is solely the product of my imagination (and labour) – it is imposed on the bricks by me and the bricks themselves do not, in the normal sense, inform this process[35]. Now, with regard to that original pile of bricks one might say with justification that a transformation has taken place, and indeed it has, but it would be inappropriate to refer to this transformation as a *translation* because there was nothing to be translated – there was no original coherent form within my pile of bricks that might submit to translation rules. Now this metaphor "translates" with ease into the sphere of historical theory – all that is required is the substitution of *evidential traces* for *bricks* – and it becomes equally apparent that the word translate is as inappropriate for evidential traces as it is for bricks because, just like bricks, evidential traces are lying around without any structure or form prior to their purposeful appropriation and use.

I propose to round off this argument with an amusing afterthought concerning the conveyance of a hidden message by the unlikely method of footnote exchange. My

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[35] This metaphor even works to the extent that it mirrors the limitations imposed on historical discourse by its own data. That is to say that one cannot write *anything* about the past – narrative accounts of the past will always be "circumscribed" by the historian's data. However, situated within such defining limitations the possibilities for the presentations of different yet plausible historical accounts of the past appear to be endless. Likewise, it is possible to find endless uses for bricks but the construction of a hot air balloon is not one of them.

story opens with this remark which appeared in the first essay (originally published in 1988) of White's *Figural Realism*:

> A history is, as Ankersmit puts it, less like a picture intended to resemble the objects of which it speaks or a model "tied to the past by certain translation rules" than "a complex linguistic structure specifically built for the purpose of *showing* a part of the past." (8) / my footnote 36

White's footnote (8) refers rather loosely to a range of pages which coincide with the whole of the second chapter of Ankersmit's *History and Tropology*. However, there is little doubt that the statement referred to regarding translation rules is this one:

> The historian's task is to offer us not a reflection or model of the past tied to that past by certain translation rules,(69) but the development of a more or less autonomous instrument that can be used for understanding the past.[37]

Now, this statement embodies precisely the 'narrative idealist' position which Ankersmit sets up in opposition to White's *supposed* position. It also contains its own footnote (69) which refers, in turn, to White's essay 'The Historical Text as Literary Artifact' published in *Tropics of Discourse* (having originally appeared in the June 1974 edition of *Clio*).[38] The pertinent extract reads:

> But it is wrong to think of a history as a model similar to a scale model of an airplane or ship, a map, or a photograph. For we can check the adequacy of this latter kind of model by going and looking at the original and, by applying the necessary rules of translation, seeing in what respect the model has actually succeeded in reproducing aspects of the original. But historical structures and processes are not like these originals; we cannot go and look at them in order to see if the historian has adequately reproduced them in his narrative.[39]

Thus, in this ingenious circular fashion, White referred back to himself and in so doing he indirectly pointed at Ankersmit's extraordinary error – does Ankersmit not read and understand the documents to which he refers? White dismissed the possibility of the existence of translation rules nine years before the publication of *Narrative Logic* and that should have been an end to the matter for such a careful (logical) reader as Ankersmit.

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[36] White, H.,(1999). *Figural Realism: Studies in the Mimesis Effect*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. p6. This extract is from the Book's first chapter, 'Literary Theory and historical Writing' which first appeared in print in Cohen, R. (ed.), (1988). *The Future of Literary Theory*. London: Methuen.
[37] Ankersmit. *History and Tropology*. p 66
[38] White, H., (1974). 'The Historical Text as Literary Artifact' in *Clio* 3 no.3: pp277-303
[39] White. *Tropics of Discourse*. p88

Section Four: Historiography and the Art of Gardening

This argument, which rests on Ankersmit's notion of scope as outlined in Chapter One, first appeared in *Narrative Logic* as a tentative proposition. In *Historical Representation* its status was upgraded to "firm" and then more recently, in an interview with Ranjan Ghosh[40] in the journal *Rethinking History*, the argument surfaced again with a certain ease of articulation – the sort that presumes membership of the established discourse.

To recap. In *Narrative Logic* Ankersmit proposed that the wider the narrative's scope (the more the whole exceeds the descriptive meaning of its individual narrative's statements) the more successful that narrative will be from a narrativist perspective. Moreover, it is the historian's goal to *maximalize* narrative scope because scope offers the only criteria available on which to assess the relative merits of competing narrative accounts of (some aspect of) the past. The narrative with the widest scope, Ankersmit explains, is likely to be the least conventional and most original of a competing set of narrative accounts, and thus 'the essential duty of the historian is to be original and refrain as much as possible from repeating what his predecessors in the investigation of a particular topic have said'.[41] Furthermore the scope of any *narrative substance* is defined by its comparison with other *narrative substances* – a *single* point-of-view on the past would constitute "finality" or "closure" and hence preclude historical debate. Debate is generated through the opposition of two or more *positions* and it is only against this background texture of positions taken (or the scopes of *narrative substances* proposed) that the relative merits of competing narratives might be ascertained with reference to Ankersmit's criteria of selection which are as follows:

[40] Ghosh, R., (2007). 'Interdisciplinarity and the Doing of History: A Dialogue Between F. R. Ankersmit and Ranjan Ghosh' in *Rethinking History* 11 no. 2: p244

[41] Ankersmit. *Narrative Logic*. p239. This is an interesting statement because it suggests that the historian's 'duty' is to go on producing more, but always different, historical accounts of the past. Or to put it another way, the historian's duty is one of *proliferation of historical texts*. However, in Chapter Six of *History and Tropology* Ankersmit takes a despondent view of the escalating overproduction of literature within the discipline of history which, he says, constitutes a 'present-day intellectual alcoholism.....in which historiography itself impedes our view of the past' (p163). Now, this damaging *overproduction* viewpoint may be well founded, but Ankersmit never "squares" it with his earlier imperative of 'duty' incumbent on the historian.

1) The best narrative of a set of competing narratives is the one whose statements 'individuate the "narrative substance" in which the scope of the narrative beyond the descriptive meaning [of its statements taken individually] is relatively largest'.[42]
2) That all the individuating statements in a narrative 'correspond to actual historical reality'.[43]

Ankersmit goes on to make the point that the narrative account of the past which best meets these requirements will be the most daring and courageous of the set under consideration. On this view it thus follows – ignoring for the moment item (2), the product of diligent research which *should* apply equally to all historical narratives – that the selection of the best narrative account out of a set of competing narrative accounts of the past will turn on the matter of scope – on *aesthetic* considerations alone. Now that is all very well but, unfortunately, Ankersmit adds some caveats as follows:

1) He points out that it will be argued that the 'obligation to maximalize the scope of the narratio requires the historian to suggest as much as possible, but explicitly to say as little as possible.....[and that this might] seem to reduce historiography to "propaganda"'.[44] This prompts Ankersmit to apply a new condition for the application of the above rules, namely that the narrative to be preferred is the one that 'comes closest to propaganda (however, without ever becoming propaganda)'.[45]
2) That the individuating statements included in the narrative 'should be true'.[46]
3) That historical debate must be 'open-minded and uncensored'.[47]

It is at this point (and this is by way of an aside) that I can already see problems ahead, for how does one deal with borderline cases which are bound to arise out of the application of such rules. Who exactly is going to be the disinterested adjudicator summoned (presumably) by Ankersmit to resolve such issues? Is this person Ankersmit himself or rather some transcendental "umpire" endowed with the unerring capacity to precisely define the boundary between *innocent discourse* and

[42] Ankersmit. *Narrative Logic*. p245
[43] Ankersmit. *Narrative Logic*. p245. I do not like the construction 'historical reality' (as noted before), however, the meaning is clear enough in this context.
[44] Ibid. p243
[45] Ibid. p243
[46] Ibid. p245
[47] Ibid. p243

propaganda and between *truth* and *falsity* with regard to narrative statements and facts? This matter is not addressed anywhere in Ankersmit's arguments.

But, to continue with my main point, Ankersmit observed that successful narrative accounts of the past (those with the widest scopes) are often inspired by ethical or political values and that it would be

> .....both unnecessary and unreasonable to demand of the historian that he should shed all his ethical and political commitments when he starts to write history: adherence to an ethical position may occasionally yield narratios with an unusually wide scope.....[historical points-of-view] may often be inextricably tied up with political or ethical values. Many narratios lose their internal consistency when robbed of the political values which structure them.....the narratio is the *trait d'union* between description and normativeness: on the one hand we have a set of descriptive statements, on the other a course of action is recommended. We might even toy with the idea that historiography may enable us to test ethical and political values.[48]

This is the extent of the argument as expressed in *Narrative Logic*. However, the notion embedded in the last sentence of the above extract was significantly expanded in *Historical Representation* such that it formed the central concern of the book's second chapter. Rather than attempt some sort of reductive representation of the argument, I have decided to reproduce the bulk of it from Ankersmit direct:

> .... this brings me to the main thesis that I wish to defend in this chapter, namely, the uncommon thesis that narrative or historical discourse is what we had best rely upon when we wish to decide what moral and political standards we had best adopt. To put it differently, the procedure for finding out what should be our most recommendable moral and political values is as follows. We must begin by collecting a large number of historical texts that have clearly been written from different moral or political points of view and let us take care, furthermore, that more or less the same historical phenomena .... are discussed in all these texts. We should observe, next, what has been the verdict in the history of historical writing on all these texts. Or to express it more solemnly, what will the application of the essentially aesthetic criteria used for assessing the merits of historical representations tell us about the qualities of these texts? Which of these texts satisfy these aesthetic criteria best? If we have ascertained as much, we should ask what moral and political values are dominant in the preferred set of historical texts. These, then, will be the moral and political values we should adopt and use as our compass for our present and future individual and collective action.... Aesthetics (the criteria that obtain in historical discussion) thus decides about ethics – and it can do so

[48] Ibid. p242

since aesthetics has a logical priority to ethics in the logic and the practice of historical writing. Hence, it is in historical writing, not in rationalist, a priori argument of whatever variant, that we will find our most reliable gauge for choosing political and moral values. Historical writing is, so to speak, the *experimental garden* [my emphasis] where we may try out different political and moral values and where the overarching aesthetic criteria of representational success will allow us to assess their respective merits and shortcomings. And we should be most grateful that the writing of history provides us with this experimental garden, since it will enable us to avoid the disasters that we may expect when we would have to try out in actual social and political reality the merits and shortcomings of different ethical and political standards. Before starting a revolution in the name of some political ideal, one had best begin with assessing as accurately and as dispassionately as possible the merits and shortcomings of the kind of historical writing inspired by this political ideal.... [hence we should not] demand that historians lay aside all their moral and political commitments when they write history.....such a commitment to moral and political values will often result in the kind of historical writing that is of greatest use to us for our orientation in the present and towards the future....It may equally well be that all truly important historical writing will require the adoption of certain moral and political standards....[49]

Furthermore, Ankersmit affirmed that insight into the past, and orientation in the present and towards the future, would be impaired by historical writing that seeks to avoid the moral/political dimension and, therefore, subjectivity should be welcomed as an 'indispensable contribution both to our knowledge of the past *and* to contemporary and future politics'.[50] Ankersmit brought his argument to a close with the following two conclusions:

1) That we have discovered (through the theory of the nature of historical representation) 'the logical priority of the aesthetic criteria of representational adequacy to criteria of what is right from an ethical and political point of view',[51] and that the reassuring insight to be derived from this is that 'we may trust the discipline in how it will, in the long run, succeed in dealing with ethical and political values....'.[52]

2) That 'we may safely assign to history the most important and responsible task of distinguishing recommendable from objectionable moral and political values....'.[53]

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[49] Ankersmit, F. R., (2001). *Historical Representation*. California: Stanford University Press. pp98-100
[50] Ibid. p100
[51] Ibid. p102
[52] Ibid. p102
[53] Ibid. p102

Since, as I have already mentioned, this argument was restated by Ankersmit in the Ghosh interview of 2007, I will (not unreasonably) assume that it remains Ankersmit's position on the matter.

Now what does this add up to? It seems to me that Ankersmit is claiming that, in spite of his earlier devastating critique of mainstream history, all is not lost. For he argues that given a sufficient number of narratives of some past situation or event, then the best of that selection can indeed be identified – but on *aesthetic* grounds only, thus working around his own critique of historians' epistemological assumptions. And, furthermore, that this "best" narrative once identified is good enough to properly inform (in relation to similar situations and events) ethical and political decisions of today.

Ankersmit's extraordinary proposition appears to be founded (once more) on the theorisations of Leibniz – in particularly those concerning the concept of the 'monad' and the 'narrativist universe'. Briefly, Leibniz's theoretical narrativist universe contains all known *narrative substances* (seen here as monads of an aesthetic kind) and when "full", or in its perfect form, it is presumed to meet the 'requirement for complete historical knowledge'.[54] The structure of this perfect, or full, (imaginary) narrativist universe is likened by Ankersmit to a kind of overlapping/adjoining universal network of *substances* without gaps, where each *substance* is a reflection of and in communication with all other *substances*. Being complete, the historical knowledge which it contains (also being complete) is taken to be fixed and theoretically knowable. Now, for me, not only is this an unattractive rhetorical model but also (and this is more to the point if indeed I have understood the point) there appears to be a flaw in Ankersmit's use of it. Ankersmit wishes to apply his aesthetic criteria of selection to a very large (even complete) number of competing narrative accounts of some past event (read here as monads/*narrative substances*) in order to yield the "knowledge" he seeks about it. But the problem here is that *very large* can never be large enough, for I cannot see how a *finite*

[54] Ankersmit. *Narrative Logic*. p240

selection of histories of the event in question can approach the 'fullness' required to meet the defined condition for 'complete historical knowledge' of it. The exact problem here is that even if it were possible to somehow collect together all relevant *narrative substances* known to date, what of *narrative substances* to come (new histories of that event)? Ankersmit has already drawn attention to the explosive nature of the expansion of historical literature (footnote 41), and he knows that each new piece of literature introduces further unique *narrative substances*. Now, if any one of these new *narrative substances* turns out to be exceptionally good – articulates the most contentious and daring of all possible scopes – then a whole chunk of historiography might well "lean over" and proliferate into as yet unimagined landscapes of thought. How can this exponentially expanding, unknown *historiography to come* be recuperated back into the 'narrativist universe' in order to perfect it and, thus, validate its historical knowledge *now*? There is a sense in which, to do what he wants to do, Ankersmit must think in terms of historical closure where none is possible: *différance* après Derrida is, it seems, the ironic final word on this fantasy of closure

I now leave this particular theory behind for a moment and turn back to Ankersmit's reflections on his initial investigation of the *narrative substance* (as he first described it in *Narrative Logic*). For surely it is undeniably the case that Ankersmit (along with Hayden White, Louis Mink, Roland Barthes *et al.*) has been instrumental in the disclosure of the hitherto scarcely observed function of the narrative form in historiography. And (as a consequence of this theoretical work) history, which had once appeared to embody the capacity to discover (or at least move towards) the "truth" about the past, was exposed as an empty signifier or empty vessel available for requisition and for the imposition of arbitrary meanings on it or into it, by anyone, for multiplicities of different purposes. But this understanding of history (as an endlessly re-describable medium, an adaptable politico/ethical tool available to anyone) does not sit easily with Ankersmit's 'experimental garden' notion of it in which history *itself* becomes the final arbiter – the final authority – with the capacity to justly and properly inform ethics and politics. It is difficult to see how (and Ankersmit does not explain how) he can

reconcile these conflicting positions. Perhaps he was taking a step back from the persuasive (anti-history) logic of his *narrative substance* and thus, in a perverse sense, he might have been trying to "claw" back some of the ground lost to what was arguably his best and most innovative work. Or, perhaps, he hadn't noticed the problem at all.

Section Five: Fact and Value

In Chapter Two of *Historical Representation* Ankersmit gave an account of the relationship between *fact* and *value* in narrative accounts of the past; it is this account that I now want to address and relate back to *Narrative Logic*.

On the basis that narrative representations constitute proposals for textual replacements of (or substitutions for) parts of the past, and that such substitutes can only be adequately evaluated against the kinds of circumstances to which the proposals were related, Ankersmit concluded that all proposals must inevitably be inextricably mixed-up with the social and political circumstances onto which those proposals are projected as historicised replacements for parts of the past. Along these general lines he worked-up an argument to the effect that there exists within the historical narrative a certain continuity between fact and value and his argument finally led him to this conclusion:

> .... historical representation truly presents us with the much sought-after *trait d'union* between the "is" and the "ought." We begin with merely a set of true statements and move then, automatically and naturally, toward an answer to the question of how to act in the future. The transition is completely natural, and at no stage can we identify a point where pure knowledge becomes pure action.... "fact" and "value," the "is" and the "ought", are merely the extremes on a continuous scale.[55]

Ankersmit illustrated this 'continuous scale' by comparing the likely style of debate that might spring from (a) matters concerning the contributions made by the Dutch state to the economic and political success of the Dutch republic in the seventeenth century, and (b) discussions centred on the nature of the totalitarian state during the

[55] Ankersmit. *Historical Representation*. p94

time of the 'Cold War'. In the former case the historian's moral and political standards would not have much bearing on the debate, however, in the later case such standards would define the character of that debate. These two examples, then, would lie towards the extreme ends of a logical scale (Ankersmit's 'continuous scale') embracing all possible fact/value combinations.

Now, the particular position which Ankersmit adopted here in relation to *facts* and *values* appears to rest on the assumption that there exists a link (an entailment), of a fixed and permanent kind, between fact and value. Or, to rephrase, in order that true statements might (as Ankersmit argued) move automatically and naturally toward an answer to the question of 'how to act in the future', those true statements must each have fixed values embedded within them – a multiplicity of possible values could only indicate a multiplicity of possible actions and thus fail to answer the question of 'how to act in the future'. But the idea that facts have values fixed within them is at total variance with Ankersmit's *own* central concept concerning *narrative substances* which relies on the particular understanding that facts and individual statements are, as he puts it in *Narrative Logic*,

> ...."compassless" when taken in isolation.... 'only a narrative "point of view" can give them a "narrative direction"....the variety of narrative meanings one and the same statement may have in different narratios suggests that what the historical facts are....always depends on what narrative use is made of the narrative statements in question. Thus there are no facts devoid of narrative interpretation in Narratios.[56]

This statement is very clear. Ankersmit is saying that the meanings (and therefore the values) attached to historical facts are to be found *only* in relation to their uses when organised into narrative form and, thus, on this matter Ankersmit has positioned himself as a *relativist*. However, by contrast (and presumably without noticing his adoption of conflicting positions) he became a *foundationalist* when presenting his 'continuous scale' fact/value case which operates on the basis of an assumed *fixity* of value to fact. However (and this appears to me to be the central issue negating Ankersmit's fact/value argument and, for that matter, further

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[56] Ankersmit. *Narrative Logic*. pp218-219

disrupting his 'experimental garden of historiography' argument), *empirical* facts and *aesthetic* values are of different ontological kinds and therefore the idea that some sort of 'continuous scale' (or any sort of linkage) could be constructed between them is logically flawed.

However, I shall leave the final word on the fact/value debate to Keith Jenkins:

> In the history of philosophy there has been no successful attempt – though many people have tried and some have indeed claimed success – to derive value(s) from fact(s) *logically*. This is not to say that we do not *seem* effortlessly to draw values from facts all the time in our everyday lives, but this is not what the philosophical argument is about. For although we routinely interconnect facts and values all the time we can never show a logical entailment from the one to the other; the fact-value argument is the argument that we can never logically draw from one fact, or one set of facts, one and only one value. For example, we might say that going to war hurts people and is therefore wrong; on the other hand we might say that even though it hurts people war can often be morally justified. Accordingly, if it is possible either to justify or not the act of war then it follows that there is no *necessary* entailment of values from the fact that war hurts people. Thus we are free to decide to draw (on undecidable grounds) whatever values, significance or meaning we like about facts (including the facts of the past, the present and the future). Until someone can show that there is a logical entailment — I doubt there is much chance of that happening — then we remain inescapably ethical, moral and historical *relativists*.[57]

Section Six: Concluding Observations

I now propose to gather together the main points of this chapter, along with some related final thoughts, such that they constitute, I hope, a cohesive account of the principal negative elements within Ankersmit's early theorisations. It is my view that these elements damage Ankersmit's thesis and therefore should never have been part of it.

First of all there is the matter of language which is shown by Ankersmit to be metaphorical 'all the way down' and this observation, applicable to all texts, must

[57] Jenkins, K., (2003). *Refiguring History: New Thoughts on an Old Discipline*. London: Routledge. p43

equally apply to his *own* texts. However, he loses sight of this when he presents proofs of his theories which, of necessity, can only be expressed in the metaphors of language and thus he is confronted with (but does not notice) the untenable concept of *proof resting on metaphor*.

But, what if one were to cleanse Ankersmit's *Narrative Logic* of its proofs? Over half of the text would (of course) vanish, so what would be the new status of this leaner version of his book?[58] Would it, for instance, reflect (albeit in Ankersmit's unique style) the substance of, in particular, White's *Metahistory*, or would it be a kind of *Metahistory* plus/minus something? To put it another way, is there anything at all in Ankersmit's general conclusions as expressed in *Narrative Logic* (and summarised in his 'Six Theses') which either does not directly reflect elements of White's *Metahistory* or is not an extension of some implicit notion within White's theorisations?

Take, for example, Ankersmit's fundamental and central concept of the *narrative substance* which, I am now going to suggest, could be seen as an incomplete abstraction from the works of White. I shall illustrate what I mean by drawing on White's essay, 'The Historical Text as Literary Artifact',[59] wherein he argues that historians both constitute and pre-figure their subjects as possible objects of narrative representation within the language used to describe them. Accordingly, the different kinds of historical representations that we can have of the *same* set of past events can be seen to be engendered out of the projections of the different linguistic protocols used to pre-figure those events. On this view, descriptions of events *already* signify preparatory interpretations of their own dispositions prior to the figuration of these events into the narrative proposals which presume to explain

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[58] I would question again (see footnote 22 on page 62) at this juncture the function that *logic* plays in Ankersmit's theory. For in order to articulate and prove his arguments Ankersmit often uses formal logic, yet, in his own reading or summary of *Narrative Logic* (in his 'Six Theses') his position is, indeed, accurately presented without any *logic* appearing anywhere in it. Did he then need *logic* at all? Well, I think that the answer is "no" because his *logic* is superfluous to his texts and, therefore, I believe that his book *Narrative Logic* would have been better served with the title *Narrative Substance*.

[59] This argument of White's, briefly sketched above, can be found in its complete form in White, H., (1974). '*The Historical Text as Literary Artifact*'. Clio *no.* 3: pp277-303 (or White, H., (1978). *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press. pp81-100) Also see White, H., (1973). *Metahistory*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press. p30

them. There are, then, two *figurative* levels at work here in the production of histories; first, the level of *pre-figuration* itself which establishes the description and hence constitution of, and the relationship between, the objects which inhabit the field of enquiry and, second, the specific *figuration* of those objects through modes of emplotment, argument, etc., into coherent, meaningful story forms in order to transform and explain the *apparent historical problems to be solved* which arise out of relationships *pre-figured* at the first level of figuration.

White further explains that the historical narrative *per se* might be taken as a system of signs, in the sense that it

> .... points in two directions simultaneously: *toward* the events described in the narrative and *toward* the story type or *mythos* which the historian has chosen to serve as the icon of the structure of the events. The narrative itself is not the icon; what it does is describe events in the historical record in such a way as to inform the reader what to take as an icon of the events so as to render them familiar to him. The historical narrative thus mediates between the events reported in it on the one side and pregeneric plot structures conventionally used in our culture to endow unfamiliar events and situations with meanings, on the other.... [and that, therefore] as a symbolic structure, the historical narrative does not reproduce the events it describes; it tells us in what direction to think about the events and charges our thought about the events with different emotional valences. The historical narrative does not image the things it indicates; it calls to mind images of the things it indicates in the same way that a metaphor does.[60]

In consideration of this more detailed account of historical writing, it might appear that Ankersmit used just *part* of White's wider theoretical argument. That is, Ankersmit only observed White's second level of *figuration*, for there is nothing in Ankersmit's description of the *narrative substance* to account for the *pre-figured* natures and relationships of the kinds of objects which come to occupy the historian's field of enquiry in the first place. One could then say that the *narrative substance*, as conceived by Ankersmit, is always governed by a point-of-view concerning objects which have already been linguistically constituted and pre-figured before he gets at them. And, furthermore, that in his own theory Ankersmit moved from the narrative's individuating statements directly to a "picture" of the

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[60] White. *Tropics of Discourse*. pp88-91

past without accounting for that process in itself. White, however, in his brief yet more comprehensive argument (which accounts for both the referential and the aesthetic components of historical writing), explained that the historical narrative does not directly "image" the things that it indicates, but rather that (as a culturally dependant semiotic system) the historical narrative indicates the direction in which a culturally recognisable, familiarising image might be found; an important consideration for historians engaged in, for instance, transcultural studies.

Now, Ankersmit, as a close reader of Hayden White, should have at least registered White's argument. Had he done so his attention would have been directed not only to the *cultural dimension* of the narrative form but also to the arguably deeper level of *pre-figuration* which runs beneath, and has a bearing on, the mode of operation of his own *narrative substance*.[61] In fact, the nature of Ankersmit's so-called point-of-view (which governs the *narrative substance*), is only investigated by him to the extent that he points out that people have them, that they are all different, and that they are often hidden from view. But, as I have explained (and this is ironic), a point-of-view *in itself* must be tropologically figured within explanatory strategies (modes of emplotment, argument and ideology) and, therefore, it could be argued that White's conceptual and explanatory linguistic mechanisms reside unnoticed beneath (as pre-figuration) and scarcely noticed within Ankersmit's *narrative substance* which is, after all, a figurative device.

Now, if all the propositions advanced in *Narrative Logic*, or at least the general conclusions arising from them, could be similarly traced back and matched, or linked-up in some form or another, to White's conclusions as outlined in his preface to *Metahistory*[62] (and broadly speaking I believe that they can) then *Narrative Logic*

[61] Why this omission one might ask? Well, my speculative suggestion is that Ankersmit harbours an instinctive suspicion of the notion of pre-figuration, for he argues that it is the 'Whitean counterpart of Kant's transcendental aesthetics and transcendental analytics' (see Ankersmit, F. R., (2009). 'White's 'Neo-Kantianism': Aesthetics, Ethics and Politics' in Ankersmit, F. R., Domańska, E. and Kellner, H. (eds.) *Re-Figuring Hayden White*. California: Stanford University Press. p27) and everything associated with Kantianism is, for Ankersmit, to be avoided at all costs. This anti-Kantian/anti-prefiguration position adopted be Ankersmit will be further examined in Chapters Three and Four.

[62] White. *Metahistory*. pp xi-xii, wherein White states that 'The general conclusions I have drawn from my study of nineteenth-century historical consciousness can be summarized as follows: (1) there can be no "proper history" which is not at the same time "philosophy of history"; (2) the possible

might appear to be little more than an abridged re-description of, or perhaps supplement to, an existing text and could best be read as such.

Turning now – with the above in mind – to Ankersmit's perplexing *manufacture* and subsequent *demolition* of misrepresentations of White's texts, which (if uncritically accepted) would have had the effect of elevating Ankersmit's own status relative to that of White's, the following extract from a thought provoking interview might be of interest. The interviewer, Gary Olson, asked the interviewee, Jacques Derrida, to comment on misrepresentations and misunderstandings of his own work and this was his answer:

> First, there are no simple misunderstandings. Each time you read a text – and this is my situation and the situation of every reader – there is some misunderstanding, but I know of no way to avoid this. Misunderstanding is always significant; it's not simply a mistake, or just an absurdity. It's something that is motivated by some interest and some understanding. Sometimes the most ferocious Critics who react vehemently and passionately and sometimes with hatred understand more than supporters do, and it's because they understand more that they react this way. Sometimes they understand unconsciously, or they know what is at stake. Sometimes I think that this enemy, because he's so ferocious, so nervous, is more aware of what is at stake than a friendly ally is. So, sometimes misunderstanding is understanding, and the other way around.[63]

There is no doubt that Ankersmit's concept of the *narrative substance* as he described it (despite my identification of it with part of White's wider thesis) was and is of significant value. But with regard to his general theoretical conclusions (taken in the round) I am not convinced that Ankersmit can be seen to have detached

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modes of historiography are the same as the possible modes of speculative philosophy of history; (3) these modes are in reality *formalizations* of poetic insights that analytically precede them and that sanction the particular theories used to give historical accounts the aspect of an "explanation"; (4) there are no apodictically certain theoretical grounds on which one can legitimately claim an authority for any one of the modes over the others as being more "realistic"; (5) as a consequence of this, we are indentured to a *choice* among contending interpretative strategies in any effort to reflect on history-in-general; (6) as a corollary of this, the best grounds for choosing one perspective on history rather than another are ultimately aesthetic or moral rather than epistemological; and, finally, (7) the demand for the scientization of history represents only the statement of a preference for a specific modality of historical conceptualization, the grounds of which are either moral or aesthetic, but the epistemological justification of which still remains to be established'.

[63] Derrida, J., (1990). 'Jacques Derrida on Rhetoric and Composition: Interview by G. A. Olson' in *JAC*, 10 no. 1

himself much from White's position, although the impulse to do so is evident; a persistent "undercurrent" running beneath the structure of his arguments. For instance, Ankersmit frequently promotes his own style of theory as the "real thing" because it addresses the problem of 'how the historian accounts for or represents past reality',[64] whereas he distances himself from White's literary theory which he characterises as 'wholly useless as a theory of history'[65] in that it fails to 'account for the historian's representation of past reality'.[66] It seems to me, however, that White's *formalistic* literary theory is performing this task which Ankersmit denies it – that is, it satisfactorily accounts for the imaginative, aesthetic construct of history.

Furthermore, it would appear that, in spite of his ruinous critique of narrative historiography, Ankersmit was unable to "let go" and submit to his own *narrative logic*. The idea that history, having had its old positivistic, epistemological stuffing effectively critiqued to death by him, could still retain its putative capacity to properly inform ethical and political decisions in the present is a strange and puzzling manifestation of Ankersmit's inability to observe the consequences of his own arguments. Of course, with this notion in particular Ankersmit does indeed succeed in establishing a degree of detachment from White whose theorisations could not, I believe, ever support such an idea.

Finally, then, to complete this Chapter with a question. Could all the above mentioned anomalies be symptomatic of a kind of paranoia which might be expressed as Ankersmit's flight from the formula, "Ankersmit = White"? Well, I think that it could, and this theme of detachment (Ankersmit's desire to separate himself from White, from the *spectre* of White) will run, as a continuous thread, into and right through the content of my next "bridging" chapter.

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[64] Ankersmit. *Historical Representation*. p68
[65] Ibid. p74
[66] Ibid. p68

Chapter Three

Ankersmit in Transition

Ankersmit's *shift* from the theoretical position that he brought to his writing of *Narrative Logic* to the very different theoretical position that he brought to his writing of *Sublime Historical Experience* is the subject of this Chapter. However, before launching my investigation into the exact character and purpose of this transition, I begin by way of a general reflection on 'where I am now' and an indication of where, in Chapter Four, 'I intend to go'.

In Chapter One I collected together various arguments drawn from Ankersmit's *Narrative Logic* which individuated the governing *narrative substance* of that chapter's title, 'The Good Ankersmit'. In Chapter Two, however, I argued that I had found in those very same arguments various deviations from and contradictions to what I would call "good theory", evidenced through positions which (I tried to show) were not only sometimes at odds with each other but which also failed to act as those supports and proofs of Ankersmit's main arguments in ways he clearly imagined that they would. It is, of course, somewhat speculative to say that these deviations and contradictions, which variously undercut the relativist conclusions logically issuing out of his idealist theory of *narrative substances*, were unconscious or subconscious retreats from a generally radical position, possibly an untenable position – a "step too far" – for a man who saw and sees himself as a conservative liberal. For Ankersmit has never been fully at ease with the postmodern/textual "turn" (as exemplified in *Narrative Logic*) which he became so famous for championing in his exchanges with Perez Zagorin in the pages of *History and Theory* in 1989-90. Indeed, this championing has by now – in 2009 – almost sunk without trace as Ankersmit moves, again in a somewhat contradictory way, between historical experience on the one hand – which *vis-à-vis* the mainstream looks like another radical move (albeit to save "history" from a now rampant

textualism) – and the sometimes toyed with comfort-zone of a *learning from the past* sort of historism.[1]

But, be all that as it may, the point that I want to make here is that in the ten years following the publication of *Narrative Logic*, Ankersmit's increasing uneasiness with what was for him an overplayed (perhaps stretched to *extremis*) linguistic textualism became evident in his various essays and papers, the most important of which – along with a specially written synoptic Introduction – appeared together in his *History and Tropology: The Rise and Fall of Metaphor* (1994). To be sure, from the later vantage point of (post) *Sublime Historical Experience*, the essays in (and around) *History and Tropology* only intimate, quite understandably, Ankersmit's "experience" text which was to be published eleven years later in 2005, a text that (he explained in its Preface) took a decade in its making. Consequently, *History and Tropology* contained only an embryo of what was later to emerge, fully grown, in *Sublime Historical Experience*. Nevertheless, it will be argued here that *History and Tropology* articulates and thus marks a new stage in Ankersmit's trajectory from language to experience – a launching pad for a new "goal". This goal was not of a kind that one might associate with the everyday work of the historian, for it was in

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[1] Ankersmit's credentials as a postmodern history theorist were most definitively "nailed to the mast" in his exchanges with Perez Zagorin in the pages of *History and Theory* (see Ankersmit, F. R., (1989). 'Historiography and Postmodernism' in *History and Theory* 28 no. 2: pp137-153, Zagorin, P., (1990). 'Historiography and Postmodernism: Reconsiderations' in *History and Theory* 29 no. 3: pp263-274, and Ankersmit, F. R., (1990). 'Reply to Professor Zagorin' in *History and Theory* 29 no. 3: pp275-296). I owe my depiction of Ankersmit as a conservative liberal to a conversation with Keith Jenkins who informed me that in his own conversation with Ankersmit this is how he had styled himself. Post 2005 this conservatism has manifested itself historically (politically Ankersmit is active in right wing liberalism in Holland) in various ways both in and in addition to his central desire to ground a real past in 'direct experience' safe from relativistic peradventure. For instance, in the foundationalist agenda of the Introduction to the first publication of the Journal for the 'Centre for Metahistory', Groningen, which he co-edits (see Ankersmit, F. R., Bevir, M., Roth, P., Tucker, A. and Wylie, A., (2007). 'The Philosophy of History: An Agenda' in Ankersmit, F. R., Bevir, M., Roth, P., Tucker, A. and Wylie, A., (eds.). *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 1 no. 1:pp1-9) where postmodernism was dismissed as the '....soon to become dated debate on extreme relativism and scepticism, sometimes called after a recent architectural style, postmodernism' (p1). And also in the widely recognised conservative manifesto which Ankersmit wrote for *Manifestos for History* wherein (on page 222 in the Afterword to that volume) Hayden White noted his surprise that Ankersmit now '...councils a return to the good old ways of Ranke and traditional historians, in order to restore history to its traditional task of teaching (political) philosophy by example (see Ankersmit, F.R., (2007). 'Manifesto for an Analytical Political History' and White, H., 'Afterword' both in Jenkins, K., Morgan, S., Munslow, A., (eds.) *Manifestos for History*. London: Routledge. pp179-196 & pp220-231).

fact quite literally categorically different. Thus, as Ankersmit himself pointed out in *Sublime Historical Experience*, his new theory would have:

> .... no bearing whatsoever on what historians actually do and on the question of why they do what the do....[and that the issues he now deals with are]....as useless as they are meaningless from the perspective of the practice of historical writing....[and furthermore that]....some readers (as I hope) may conclude that this book has helped to deepen their intuitions, whereas others – for reasons that are easy enough to predict – will consider the book useless, "hyperbolic", or simply nonsensical.[2]

Now, it might appear that I am getting somewhat ahead of my own argument here, and perhaps I am, but not without good reason. For it is clear from the above assortment of statements, drawn from the Preface of *Sublime Historical Experience*, that Ankersmit's new theorisations were indeed to constitute a radical departure from his previous language governed, representationalist style of historical theory (as articulated in *Narrative Logic*) which he has marginalised thus:

> the lingualism of the philosophy of language, of hermeneutics, of deconstructivism, of tropology, of semiotics, and so on has become by now an obstacle to, rather than a promoter of, useful and fruitful insights. The mantras of this now so oppressive and suffocating lingualism have become a serious threat to the intellectual health of our discipline.[3]

As will become apparent in my next chapter on *Sublime Historical Experience*, this departure eventually transports Ankersmit into a new sphere or style of enquiry (a far cry from the *best* Ankersmit of *Narrative Logic*) operating on the basis of nostalgic longings, sensations, feelings, impressions, atmospheres, intuitions and so on; a move from 'the rationalism of "theory" to a new romanticism',[4] as he himself puts it. We, his readers, are thus invited to 'enter the dark and sometimes even sinister Romantic world of the profoundest and quasi-existentialist layers in our relation to the past....'[5]. In short, Ankersmit had(s) an agenda, perhaps longstanding (as already noted, in *Sublime Historical Experience* he explained that his book was at least ten years in the making) and which I am deliberately highlighting at this stage in my argument in order to help clarify my particular reading of *History and*

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[2] Ankersmit, F. R., (2005). *Sublime Historical Experience*. California: Stanford University Press. pp(xv-xvi)
[3] Ankersmit, F. R., (2006). 'Presence and Myth' in *History and Theory* 45 no. 3: p336
[4] Ankersmit. *Sublime Historical Experience*. p7
[5] Ibid. p10

Tropology. For, to repeat, it is in (and around) the essays of *History and Tropology* that Ankersmit arguably moves – largely *via* (as we shall see) a critique of Hayden White[6] – from his "historical" theorisations of *Narrative Logic* to his "historical experiential" theorisations of *Sublime Historical Experience*, and it is this movement, I argue, which precipitates his fall from the *good* to the *lost* Ankersmit of this thesis.

Ankersmit's repositioning of himself within historical theory thus involved a certain *trajectory of argument*, and it is my contention (my thesis) that whilst its point of departure resides in one category (the discourse of history), its point of arrival resides in quite another (the discourse of memory studies, memory not being of a historical kind). Now, I cannot see how a trajectory of argument can unproblematically move between two different categories in this way, nevertheless, it would appear that Ankersmit (if he was aware of the problem at all) found its solution in their conflation into a single category. It is also of interest to note here in passing that the American history theorist, David Carr, is also currently working towards a similar conflation of categories and, together, these "moves" would appear to be symptomatic of a wider shift from history to memory[7]. Carr, to be more specific, wishes to combine *historical representation* and *memory* into a single study of *experience*. He recently pointed this out in his paper, 'On the Different Meanings of Experience', delivered at an International Conference in Ankersmit's home university of Groningen, at the 'Centre for Metahistory' (a sort of "Groningen School" of experience related studies to which Carr has attached himself). Carr also

[6] On reflection, having re-read my whole thesis, I have again considered why Ankersmit was (and still is – as will be argued below, especially in Section Three) so anti-White whilst, at the same time, being in some sort of a need of him to both *measure* and to *validate* his (Ankersmit's) own works (what I have referred to as Ankersmit's love/hate relationship with White). This is, I think, because everything that Ankersmit wished to distance himself from in the writing of *Sublime Historical Experience* was already deeply engrained in White's own theorisations. For instance, when Ankersmit argued against postmodernism, poststructuralism, rhetoric, language, textualism and the linguistic turn etc., he was arguing against everything that White had happily embraced. And therefore my particular emphasis on White here, and elsewhere in this thesis, is not only because of Ankersmit's specific use of White to advance his own position but also because, all matters considered, Ankersmit's *journey from language to experience* might equally be seen as his *journey from White to experience*. Or perhaps better still, as I have already intimated, Ankersmit's *journey from the 'spectre' of White to experience*.

[7] This matter will be more fully explored in Chapter Four and the Conclusion.

made the very same point in a brief résumé of his paper, which appeared in the conference program notes, as follows:

> For several decades, philosophy of history has been dominated by two themes: representation and memory. Reflection on these two themes has revealed some important things about history, but it has also raised certain problems that it is incapable of solving. As a way of overcoming the weaknesses and solving the problems of this dual focus on representation and memory, I propose to put experience in their place. In proposing this approach to the philosophy of history I am joining hands with a development that is already vigorously under way. In the work of F.R. Ankersmit and Eelco Runia, similar themes are being stressed. I read these new works with a certain shock of recognition, because they seemed to be undertaking something I had myself been attempting in recent work under the title of a phenomenology of history.[8]

Ankersmit and Eelco Runia were both present at this conference (they were also key figures in connection with its conception and organisation) and neither of them raised any objection to Carr's statement – nor, for that matter, did anyone else – so I presume that this is the position of them *all* and, therefore, that *history* and *memory* are taken to be "of a kind" in Groningen.[9] This position, however, which (it should be stressed) appears to be the collective position of Ankersmit and *all* his colleagues (whatever their location) engaged in memory, presence and experience studies, is fundamentally untenable for reasons that I will fully explore in the following chapter. I am introducing the matter at this juncture because it is of vital importance to my argument; perhaps I should go further and suggest that it is at its very centre.

But I return now to the detail of *History and Tropology*, the text of which is made up of five previously published essays along with a new introduction, a new conclusion and a tabular arrangement of the main argument of *Narrative Logic* entitled 'Six Theses on Narrativist Philosophy of History' (to which I referred in the opening page of Chapter Two and that chapter's footnotes 22 & 57). The bulk of the text is thus composed of essays which were not originally written with an "integrated whole" in mind and, therefore, Ankersmit relied substantially upon his Introduction to the

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[8] From page 13 of an explanatory pamphlet titled *Moved by the Past* and published by the 'Centre for Metahistory', Groningen for its International Conference of Sept 27th & 28th 2007.

[9] This conclusion of mine is not derived only on the basis of the documents cited here – it is, in fact, axiomatic to all literature concerning 'historical experience' as construed by Ankersmit and the Groningen School (and I include *presence*, *parallel processing* etc.). This matter will be covered in the following chapter.

volume to make apparent the underlying theme connecting the various essays together. Consequently, it is in Ankersmit's Introduction to *History and Tropology* that one might be able to more readily discern both the substance and the new direction of his evolving project. A project which I will argue is *founded* on a critique of, and a distancing from, Hayden White's methodological arguments /positions as expressed in *Metahistory* (and other texts) and which, accordingly, I will look at here in some analytical detail. Consequently, this critical analysis which is, as I say, a somewhat finely tuned close reading of *History and Tropology*, is the primary subject of this chapter. For once this argument is established, then Ankersmit's transition or journey from language to experience will be understood. This understanding will then be summarised and contextualised in the last two sections of the chapter where the "trees" of the previous ones will, I hope, be seen to fall almost naturally into the shape of a "wood".

My account of Ankersmit's transition from language to experience is laid out in Six Sections: 'Section One: Ankersmit on *Metahistory*', 'Section Two: Language Revisited', 'Section Three: Ambivalence: An Unlikely Story', 'Section Four: The Case of the Vanishing Tropes', 'Section Five: Consolidation' and 'Section Six: An Explanation', and it might help the reader if at this point I offer a brief explanatory clarification of these various subtitles. Hence, in Section One I look at Ankersmit's idiosyncratic and sometimes quite extraordinary reading of Hayden White's *Metahistory*. Then, in Section Two, I place *History and Tropology* within the book's own 1980's "frame". Sections Three and Four focus on single arguments which, taken together, constitute (in my view) the basis upon which Ankersmit articulates his constituting position within *History and Tropology*. These two arguments which initially appear to be quite separate can, I argue, be linked together to provide the platform from which Ankersmit propels himself into his radically new style of historical theory which, eventually, finds its full expression in *Sublime Historical Experience*. In Section Five I summarise all the preceding arguments (including those of Chapters One and Two) and prepare the ground for Section Six which contains (and again summarises) my own particular explanation for Ankersmit's

deviation from radical historical theory as currently conceived[10] and to which the *good* Ankersmit seems to indeed belong.

Section One: Ankersmit on *Metahistory*

An understanding of Ankersmit's idiosyncratic interpretive reading of Hayden White's *Metahistory* is of crucial explanatory assistance in connection with the arguments which are to follow in the subsequent sections. *Metahistory,* Ankersmit explains:

> .... can be read and interpreted in two ways that are fundamentally opposed. Indeed, we can read it as the unmasking of the historian's effort to get hold of historical reality and historical truth ..... but the book can also be interpreted as follows. Precisely by focusing on and by problematizing the historian's language, White demonstrates *not* that it is impossible to get hold of past reality, but the naiveté of the kind of positivist intuition customarily cherished in the discipline for how to achieve this goal. More specifically, what these positivist intuitions proudly present as historical reality itself is a mere spectral illusion that is created by the historical discipline itself. Surely, there is a historical reality that is, in principle, accessible to the historian. But historians have forgotten about this historical reality and mistaken the product of their tropological encodation of the past for the past itself. Within this reading, not the practicing historian criticizing White but White himself is the realist who reminds us of the difference between reality and mere intellectual construction.[11]

This is a dense extract and it needs to be broken down in order to grasp the nature of Ankersmit's two fundamentally opposed interpretations of *Metahistory*. The first interpretive position solely accommodates the notion that White is 'unmasking' the historian's (hopeless) efforts to get hold of 'historical reality' and 'historical truth'. I am rather uncomfortable with regard to both of these last constructions – 'historical reality' might be better expressed as 'the actuality of the past' and 'historical truth', as I have previously pointed out, is an oxymoron. However, the distinction that Ankersmit is making here is clear enough and my own reading of *Metahistory* was undoubtedly also from this 'unmasking' point-of-view. Ankersmit's second

[10] By this I mean a current style of historical theory of the kind informed through the works of people like Hayden White, Richard Rorty, Keith Jenkins, Sande Cohen, Alun Munslow, Jacques Derrida, Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth *et al.*

[11] Ankersmit, F. R., (2001). *Historical Representation* , California: Stanford University Press. p254

interpretive position rests on the notion that White is 'problematizing the historian's language' expressly in order to demonstrate that a confidently presumed grasp of 'past reality' can only be a 'spectral illusion' – a 'tropological encodation of the past' rather than the past itself. So far so good, but Ankersmit's interpretation of White's position does not finish at this point, since he then attaches to this 'spectral illusion' concept the governing notion that there is, after all, a historical reality *accessible* to historians, but that they have lost sight of it. This is because they are mesmerized by their own 'intellectual constructions' which contrive to obscure it. Nevertheless, it is "right there" if only they could see it (this "it" already being the idea of the past "plain" at the centre of *Sublime Historical Experience*). In this interpretation of *Metahistory* Ankersmit finds in White the realist who has taken upon himself a certain task, namely that of educating historians to the extent that they might perceive the difference between a reality (which is in principle accessible to historians) and their own 'intellectual constructions' (which are constituted within the discourse itself and form a barrier to the perception of an otherwise accessible reality).

This second interpretation of *Metahistory*, which accommodates the notion of an *accessible* past, is at variance with my reading of White's text(s) and, to the best of my knowledge, it is unique to Ankersmit. Nevertheless, this is the reading which he favours and he supports it with the following two arguments:

1) To the great late eighteenth and nineteenth century historians/philosophers investigated by White (Gibbon, Tocqueville, Macauley, Michelet *et al.*) the past was:

> ....a sublime and quasi-divine spectacle that required the whole of their powerful personalities in order to become expressible in their writings. To them the past was not yet that tamed and domesticated reality that is the product and counterpart of the methods and canons of contemporary disciplinary historical writing. To them the past was a past that can only be rendered if it resonates in the depth of the historians own soul and evokes there the essentially poetic response testifying to their actual encounter with past reality.[12]

[12] Ibid. p254

Additionally, Ankersmit maintains that White was fascinated by the manner in which these historians and philosophers of history related to (what Ankersmit calls) 'historical reality itself', and it would thus be, he says, a perverse interpretation of *Metahistory* to read it primarily as an account of how the poetics of historical writing blinded these great historians and philosophers to the *reality* of the past

> .... for their poetic grasp of the past did not remove them from the past, did not create an insurmountable distance between the past and themselves – on the contrary, it was only thanks to their poetic genius that they caught a glimpse of it and could inform their readers about their experience of the past.[13]

Ankersmit thus manages to find within White's *Metahistory* the presumption of a past actuality which was exclusively accessible to those great historians/ philosophers of poetic genius who somehow avoided the nineteenth century disciplinisation of history. The nature of this access to the past and its mode of operation is the subject of Ankersmit's next argument.

2) This argument centres on White's observation that the greatness of the aforementioned historians originated, as Ankersmit puts it,

> .... in the easy freedom with which they moved through the tropological grid, while defying those "elective affinities" to which mediocre historians ordinarily submit their encodation of the past.... White [proposed his] stylistic or linguistic protocols only to demonstrate how historical reality can be made visible not by a docile submission, but by a subtle and poetic evasion of these protocols. White's tropes will indeed often function as a screen between us and historical reality, as will be the case when the mediocre historian obediently submits to the dictates of one trope only.[14]

Accordingly (Ankersmit continues), White's tropology shows us how these great eighteenth and nineteenth-century historians

> ....succeeded in finding and exploiting the cracks and fissures in the tropological screen, and how precisely through these cracks and fissures they managed to get a glimpse of past reality that remained inaccessible to their less gifted colleagues. This also explains why irony is so prominent in White's tropology. Irony is the trope that confronts us with

[13] Ibid. p255
[14] Ibid. p255

> the limitations and shortcomings of the other tropes; it is, so to speak, the trope that is the natural ally of historical reality itself and that enables it to reassert its rights against the pressure of the other tropes. Irony naturally situates itself in these cracks and fissures between the other tropes, and is therefore the trope of historical reality itself.[15]

It should be noted here that none of the statements or ideas attributed to White by Ankersmit in the preceding extracts from *Historical Representation* are referenced to White's texts. To be sure Ankersmit prefaces his argument with a statement (a kind of "let-out" clause) to the effect that he is focusing on 'general trends'[16] which connect White's various texts; however, there is no way of knowing in any particular instance to which of these Ankersmit is referring. This is a very unsatisfactory state of affairs, particularly in view of the radical nature of some of the claims made.

Now, in contrast to these arguments put forward by Ankersmit, my own reading of *Metahistory* turns on the understanding (unquestionable in my view) that the book was intentionally written as, and only as, a *formalist* critique (drawing on literary theory and linguistics) of the nature of the historical narrative. On this reading I have not been left with the impression that White was reminding me of the difference between, on one side, an 'accessible' past and, on the other, 'a mere intellectual construction'. For me, White was highlighting the hopelessness of the historians self-appointed task – to find meaning, direction, understanding and so on, in the chaos and contingency of a past that has gone forever. Moreover, this is a past which does not at all indicate how it is to be "told"; it only leaves behind traces which are not to be confused with the past itself (as happenings, occurrences, events etc.) and which can be variously appropriated.

Furthermore, nowhere in White's writings can I find any textual evidence that he actually believed that any of the historians that he studied caught glimpses of past reality through either their defiance of, or their exploitation of, the elective affinities within his (White's) tropological grid. Indeed, in *Narrative Logic* Ankersmit states

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[15] Ibid. p255
[16] Ibid. p254

White's general position very differently as follows: 'the past is an amorphous chaos of data that successfully resists conscious apprehension by the historian'.[17] What is more, I cannot grasp the logic that leads Ankersmit to the conclusion that *irony* must be the trope of ***historical reality*** (meaning, in this instance, the actuality of the past itself).[18] Nevertheless, all of this definitely appears to be part of Ankersmit's interpretation of Whites position and, as such, it provides an essential insight into his developing arguments which, resting very much on this and other curious misreadings/interpretations of White's texts, will (as we shall see) lead Ankersmit himself to think that he "also" could access the *real* (the past "plain").

Section Two: Language Revisited

Twentieth-century philosophy, Ankersmit observes in *History and Tropology*, was fascinated by the phenomenon of language. Philosophers such as Russell, Carnap, Wittgenstein, Strawson *et al.*, had described the nature of language in different ways yet, despite the diversity of their arguments and their inevitable conflicts of opinion, these philosophers of language appeared to share a common underlying position; namely that they all reasoned from the singular assumption that

> ....language is the principal condition for the possibility of all knowledge and meaningful thinking, and that therefore an analysis of language is of as much importance to the contemporary philosopher as an analysis of the categories of understanding was for Kant of the first *Critique*.[19]

Furthermore, Ankersmit continued, it is precisely this comparison with Kant's *Critique* which gave rise to the notion that contemporary philosophy of language

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[17] Ankersmit. *Narrative Logic*. pp82-83

[18] I find the repeated construction 'historical reality' confusing for reasons already explained. However, I do not think that there is any doubt that Ankersmit (in this instance and in most cases elsewhere) is referring to the actuality of the past. Now, to attach a trope to the actuality of the past simply does not make sense, for a trope is a linguistic instrument. One can talk of the trope *irony* in connection with a narrative construct like history, or as a master trope governing historiography (construed here as a body of propositions about the past, presented in the form of *stories*) but it is meaningless to attach this linguistic instrument to the chaos/contingency of past events and situations which have no trope or story form within them. The troped story form is a product of the enculturation of its own time and it is *retrospectively* imposed on the past – hence, it is a mistake to turn this process on its head and presume to discover that trope (and/or that story) in the past itself.

[19] Ankersmit. *History and Tropology*. pp1-2

might best be seen as 'a new and more fruitful phase in the transcendentalist program that was inaugurated two centuries [earlier] by Kant'.[20]

Ankersmit then drew attention to two interconnected underlying assumptions upon which this new language centred phase of philosophy, in part, rested. In the first place, a kind of reductionist methodology was uncritically adopted or, to rephrase, it was thought that nothing essential to the comprehension of complex issues would be lost when reducing such issues to their constituent or component parts. This theoretical position can be associated with Bertrand Russell and 'logical atomism',[21] a philosophical belief which originated in the early twentieth century but which had lost favour by the later decades of it. However, although this belief was eventually thoroughly discredited, for Ankersmit the philosophy of language remained 'atomist as far as method [was] concerned'.[22] Thus, it was taken to be self-evident within the contemporary philosophy of language that *only* the investigation of propositions (these being, of course, the professional concern of historians) and their constituent components would lead to the discovery of the overarching conditions governing truth and meaning.

Given the foregoing, I think that the second of the two assumptions will logically follow. For the adoption of the essentially atomist methodology just noted informed the philosophy of language in such a manner that it could only remain blind to the possibility of narrative meaning carried at the level of the text viewed as a complex whole. Or, to put this another way, the complex whole was regarded as a "non-problem" from the point-of-view of a philosophy of language which failed to register any philosophical "stumbling block" at this level. Accordingly, *all* problems

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[20] Ibid. p2

[21] Principal exponents of 'logical atomism' were (in addition to Russell) Rudolf Carnap and a pupil (later a colleague) of Russell, Ludwig Wittgenstein. Central to 'logical atomism' was the notion that the "world" can be unproblematically explained with reference to fundamental logical facts, or atoms, which cannot be broken down any further. 'Logical atomism' thus stood in opposition to 'logical holism' – a belief articulated about the notion that the world operates in such a way that no part can be known without the whole being known first. (Both Russell and Wittgenstein were eventually to reject the atomist theory).

[22] Ankersmit. *History and Tropology.* pp2-3

were taken to be reducible to those encountered in the analysis of singular propositions and their constituent parts.

These two interrelated assumptions – the validity of the reductionist method coupled with its logical counterpart, the non-problematic nature of the text viewed as a complex whole – were then, Ankersmit explained, transported out of the *philosophy of language* and superimposed onto the *philosophy of history* to the extent that

> ....in the fifties and sixties, philosophy of history preferred to focus on the elements of the historical text, like singular statements about historical states of affairs, statements expressing causal connections, ... The historical text as a whole was rarely, if ever, the topic of philosophical investigation. This is all the more to be regretted since the *fortunes* of philosophy of history self-evidently lie with the historical text and not its parts. Only a philosophy of history concentrating on the historical text as a whole could contribute importantly to contemporary philosophy of history and go beyond a mere application of what had already been discovered elsewhere.[23]

This unsatisfactory state of affairs, Ankersmit believed, might well have been explained by the general reluctance amongst philosophers of history to attach any significance to the distinction between *historical research* and *historical writing* – a distinction which, as I have already shown, was "pivotal" to Ankersmit's earlier theorisations. Historical research is an essentially empirical/epistemological pursuit, the results of which are typically expressed in the form of verifiable individual statements about the past. However, historical writing is arguably of an *aesthetic* kind; an imaginative activity which cannot be subject to truth claims at the level of the text. Its product, the historical narrative, embodies the facts and individual statements arising out of historical research but is underdetermined by them (as was explained in Chapter One). Thus, in this sense, within historical writing there exists a certain autonomy of activity with regard to the use of the product of historical research, and it was precisely this crucial point that was missed by twentieth century philosophers of history who focused on the philosophy of historical research to the exclusion of the philosophy of historical writing. I offer this following quotation as a

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[23] Ibid. p3

perplexing (to me at least) endnote regarding Ankersmit's absolutely clear and fundamentally sound distinction between these two quite different categories;

> In *Narrative Logic* I started with the traditional, but now almost universally condemned, distinction between historical research and historical writing.[24]

It is Ankersmit's own description of the reception of his distinction between historical research and historical writing which invites comment. He says that it was almost universally condemned, but surely Ankersmit's distinction, once articulated, becomes conspicuously self-evident and beyond condemnation.

However, leaving that matter aside, my primary purpose here is to make it clear that the foregoing "in sum" constitutes the well conceived backdrop against which Ankersmit offered his very individual and, from my point-of-view, poorly conceived ongoing assessment of Whites theoretical position.

Section Three: Ambivalence: An Unlikely Story.

In the closing paragraph of Chapter Two – and fleshed out a little in footnote 6 of this chapter (page 89) – I suggested that the evolving shape and style of Ankersmit's theorisations might be seen to be driven by a kind of paranoia evidenced through his all pervasive compulsion to detach and distance his own work from that of the *spectral* Hayden White. It was, of course, Ankersmit's misfortune (one of timing) that he arrived on the field of historical theory only to find that it had already been comprehensively "staked-out" by White, whose earlier well established intervention in the field had been monumental to the extent that there remained little space for any further original "narrativist" influence on the fundamentals of historical theory (as opposed to more technical matters).[25] And indeed (as I have already argued), in terms of *substantial* theory Ankersmit had little new to offer at that time: the work

[24] Domańska. *Encounters.* p73

[25] I recognise here that White's essentially pragmatic "staking-out" of the historical field did, of course, leave *space* for a more detailed investigation of the linguistic and poetic elements constitutive of historical narratives (see Munslow, A., (2007). *Narrative and History*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan., and in particular the section on 'Tense/time: Mimesis, order, duration and frequency'. pp51-59).

he was doing might best be seen as a re-working of, or supplement to, the existing narrativist position in historical theory. Ankersmit's *narrative substance* was an innovative and useful device, of course, but my point here is that it was worked-up from Walsh within a wider sphere of understanding developed, in particular, by Hayden White and Roland Barthes. It is therefore, for me at least, not surprising that Ankersmit's aspiration or quest for originality motivated him to move away from the "Whitean" position, but I am surprised by the poverty of the arguments which he employed to establish that separation. The first of these arguments concerns the notion of a *presumed* ambivalence in White's use of literary theory, two separate instances of which were cited by Ankersmit in *History and Tropology*.

In the first place Ankersmit believed that *Metahistory* would, for most readers, present only a singular point-of-view on its subject matter. Or, to rephrase, White might be seen to offer *only* a theory of historical writing in the proper sense of the word. However, for Ankersmit *Metahistory* is

> ....not primarily a book about how historical truth can be attained and tested, et cetera .... but about how we should read history books. It was part of White's enterprise to read the great texts of the nineteenth-century historians as if they were novels – something no theorist had ever done before....
> ..[furthermore] since historiography answers historical instead of philosophical questions, it might seem that *Metahistory* had no bearing on the kind of topics discussed by philosophers of history. Nevertheless, *Metahistory* did also imply a theory of history in the traditional sense....the book is a theory on historical representation as much as one on how to proceed in historiography. It is true that the major theses of this theory (one may think here of White's thoroughgoing relativism, his advocacy of a linguistic turn for historical theory, and the way he argued his views) pointed toward a new phase in the history of historical theory; but as such these theses undeniably fell within the scope of what traditionally was perceived as the task of philosophy of history. Hence, *Metahistory* was ambivalent in that it tended to render historiography more philosophical and philosophy of history more historiographical; the borderlines between the two disciplines were effectively blurred.[26]

This, the first of Ankersmit's demonstrations of ambivalence in White's work, is arguably confusing and unsatisfactory. The confusion might be partly attributed to the many peculiar statements within it. In the first place, I do not think that

[26] Ankersmit. *History and Tropology*. pp7-8

Metahistory is 'primarily a book about how historical truth can be attained and tested'. I would suggest, in fact, that it is exactly the opposite. Nor is it presented as a normative discourse on 'how we should read history books'. Furthermore, I do not think that it was White's 'enterprise' to read the great historical texts of the nineteenth century 'as if they were novels'. To be sure, White exposed the *fictive* nature of the historical narrative; that is, he explained the manner in which meaning is imposed onto the data of the past through the imposition of a culturally specific imaginary story form on it (the fictive process), but this is quite another matter.

Moreover, Ankersmit's notion that *Metahistory* is constituted as 'a theory on historical representation as much as one on how to proceed in historiography' ignores a distinction which White frequently makes. This following quote from an interview with Ewa Domańska can stand in for all of those occasions:

> ....when people say to me, "I love *Metahistory*. I am applying its principles to my own work", I say, "It's not meant to be applied. It's analytical. It does not tell you how to do something!" Psychologists write to me and say that they use the theory of tropes which I developed to treat their patients. So they will talk about the metaphoric mind or consciousness, or metonymic; and I say, "That's being very literal-minded, I only used the concept of the tropes metaphorically. It's not supposed to be taken literally".[27]

Hence, *Metahistory* does *not* (and was never intended to) indicate 'how to proceed in historiography'. And the rest of Ankersmit's above extract, his first (so-called) example of White's ambivalence, can also be readily dismissed because it is immediately apparent that Ankersmit has missed something fundamental to White's thesis. White explains the matter thus:

> ...every history presupposes a philosophy of history. So in the same way that I seem to collapse the distinction between fact and fiction, so too the distinction between history and the philosophy of history.[28]

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[27] Domańska, E., (1993). 'The Human Face of a Scientific Mind. An Interview with Hayden White' in *Storia della Storiografia* 24 no. 2: pp5-21

[28] White, H., (1997). 'Facts, Fictions, and Metahistory: A Discussion with Hayden White by Richard J. Murphy ' in *Revue d'etudes Anglophones* no. 2: pp13-30

Nevertheless, Ankersmit set-up an imaginary opposition between (what he construed as) the *separate* disciplines of, on the one hand history and, on the other, the philosophy of history, and in so doing found his ambivalence in what is a single entity. To sum up this particular issue, Ankersmit's interpretation of White's position stands in contradiction to White's clearly stated view, which is that history *presupposes* a philosophy of history without which the writing of that history could not take place. A philosophy of history is, then, an integral part of history itself and there are no boundaries to blur. There is *no* ambivalence here.

Ankersmit then turned (for his second example of ambivalence) to the role of the tropes in the writing of history; here he identified within White's conceptual theory or tropics what he called a more interesting and important ambivalence. According to *Metahistory* (Ankersmit observed) historical writing is always informed by one of the four tropes – metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, or irony and the acceptance of this tropological position of White's implied 'a *rapprochement*[29] between history and literature [because] the use of figurative language is what both have in common'.[30] White's *Metahistory*, then, challenged historians to think of historiography not as a science but as a form of literature and; thus conceived, history would become the subject of forms of *literary* rather than *scientific* analysis. It was from this exchange between science and literature that Ankersmit's second idiosyncratic example of ambivalence was to emerge as encapsulated in the following complicated extract:

> *Metahistory* transformed historical writing into literature.....[however] .....on the other hand, we should recall that Max Black already recognized the significance of metaphor for the sciences; and Mary Hesse even went so far as to assert that concept-formation in the sciences is essentially metaphorical. In other words, when focusing on tropology White happened to single out precisely that aspect of historical writing which one, for good reasons, could say is shared by literature *and* the sciences. This, then, is the *ambivalence* in White's theory .... Surely *Metahistory* inaugurated the swing of historical theory toward literature, yet it managed to do so in such a way as not to preclude a scientistic interpretation of historical writing. One might object, at this stage, that the ambivalence is merely apparent. That is

[29] Ankersmit, of course, uses the word 'rapprochement' here to suggest a return to the style of history which pre-dated its nineteenth century professionalisation.
[30] Ankersmit. *History and Tropology*, p8

> to say, arguments like those of Black and Hesse should not be interpreted as an indication of the scientism of metaphor (and, hence, of White's tropology) but rather as an indication that philosophers of science are now prepared to recognize "literary" elements even in the sciences. What we see in the arguments of Black, Hesse, and White is, it might be said, an unequivocal agreement to move *away* from science and *toward* literature. Certainly this objection makes sense. However, in reply to this objection, I now want to point out that in White's own view tropology does not necessarily mean a radical break with science and scientistic cognitive ideals and, moreover, that an independent argument can be conceived to show that tropology even lies at the heart of these scientistic cognitive ideals.[31]

At the risk of sounding pedantic I must first comment on the opening statement of this extract. Surely, it must be the case that it is not literally historical writing that is being transformed; historical writing is, after all, written down in the form of marks which remain constant. Rather, it is in the "grasp" of the intrinsic nature of historical writing that the transformation takes place: no doubt Ankersmit's sometime puzzling style of expression leads to much confusion and misunderstanding.

Turning now to the theoretical positions of Max Black and Mary Hesse which (I believe) can be taken together for the purposes of this argument, I need here to simply refer back to my relevant explanation and conclusion under 'The Illusion of Proof' (laid out Section Two, Chapter Two). To briefly restate, I take the view that *all* disciplines are of a rhetorical kind. That is to say, that all so-called "knowledge" of the world (the human world) is contained within the metaphors that we humans use to describe it – knowledge is constituted in language. And *meaning*, as we humans construe it, is not a property of the world but rather an effect caused by the language – the metaphors – which we impose on the world in order to endow the world (not least for our own psychological needs) with a semblance of familiarity. It follows then that Ankersmit's statement, 'when focusing on tropology White happened to single out precisely that aspect of historical writing which one, for good reasons, could say is shared by literature and the sciences', reveals nothing new, for both literature and the sciences are of a rhetorical kind. Therefore, it

[31] Ibid. p9

seems to me that right at the outset Ankersmit's second example of ambivalence, which presupposes a rhetoric/science distinction, is erased with the collapse of that very distinction.

Now, I want to make it clear that for me this argument is closed at this point, and I would prefer to let the matter rest here. However, for Ankersmit (who maintains that 'this, then, is the ambivalence in White's theory .... surely Metahistory inaugurated the swing of historical theory toward literature, yet it managed to do so in such a way as not to preclude a scientistic interpretation of historical writing') the argument clearly continues, and this argument of Ankersmit's should be examined because buried within it are certain conclusions/ideas which are central to his developing theoretical position (and thus my thesis on it).

So, to continue with my critique of the argument as laid out in the above extract, Ankersmit momentarily concedes that 'one might object, at this stage, that the ambivalence is merely apparent' (thus suggesting a slight shift towards my point-of-view) and that 'Black and Hesse should *not* be interpreted as an indication of the scientism of metaphor (and, hence, of White's tropology) but rather as an indication ....that philosophers of science are now prepared to recognize 'literary' elements even in the sciences'. However, Ankersmit immediately negates this interpretation because he believes that he can demonstrate that 'in White's own view tropology does not necessarily mean a radical break with science and scientistic cognitive ideals and, moreover, that an independent argument can be conceived to show that tropology even lies at the heart of these scientistic cognitive ideals'.

To again offer a brief summary. It seems to me that Ankersmit is arguing that White's thesis (in opposition to the Black/Hesse theses) implies 'the scientism of metaphor and, hence, of tropology', and that linked to this is the (not exactly parallel) attendant notion that White's theory of tropology reveals the wholly literary nature of the historical narrative without implying a break with 'science

and scientistic cognitive ideals'. Furthermore, Ankersmit believes that this interpretation of White's position can be shown to be implicitly embodied within White's texts. In order to demonstrate this Ankersmit now puts together yet another complex and convoluted argument.

Metahistory, Ankersmit first explains, carries the implicit notion that 'historical insight and meaning are only possible thanks to the tropes'.[32] (If Ankersmit has in mind here ***narrative insight and meaning*** as tropologically constituted within narrative construct called history, and I believe that he does, then I would say 'yes, exactly so'). However, he continues, it follows that

> ....precisely tropology can show us how the discipline of history truly is part of the Western, Faustian effort to conquer cognitively the physical and the historical world we live in. In one word, tropology is for history what logic and scientific method are for the sciences.[33]

Now, there is nothing at all in this extract that makes much sense to me, and in order to explain what I mean I want to comment on the various notions/ propositions contained in it.

- In the first place history has no status with regard to definitive knowledge about the actual past and, therefore, cannot add anything to *worldly* knowledge about it. This is not to say that individual statements within a historical narrative cannot, by consensus within the discipline etc., be taken to be *true*. But, of course, individual statements "in the raw" (prior to their organisation into narrative form) do not constitute a history. Ankersmit knows all this – it is, after all, central to his thesis as laid out in *Narrative Logic*.
- Taking the next point, tropology is the process by which 'all discourse *constitutes* the objects which it pretends only to describe realistically and to analyse objectively'[34]. Tropes generate *figures* in speech or thought and they do so by their deviations, or "swerves", from the normal or the

[32] Ibid. p9
[33] Ibid. p10
[34] White. *Tropics of Discourse*. p2

predictable. Consequently there is no prior logic or convention determining the manner in which tropes might function and I therefore have difficulty with the notion that tropology, seen as a *process in itself* or as a *figure of swerve*, might directly or literally indicate how one entity can be 'truly' part of another.

- Furthermore, the world itself cannot be historical. Historical means pertaining to history and a history can never aspire to being anything more than just one of a group of ultimately unverifiable competing propositions (of an *aesthetic* kind) about how some aspect of the past might have been. Histories are retrospectively worked-up accounts, generally in written form; the *past* isn't. Hence, the use of the adjective 'historical' to describe the world as it presents itself to us constitutes a category blunder (since *history* – as fictive narratives etc. – and *the world* are ontologically different) and, thus, makes no logical sense at all.
- Finally (in the last sentence of the extract), Ankersmit appears to be working-up some unjustifiable comparison between two quite different relationships. The first of these two relationships (between tropology and history) operates *internally*. That is to say that tropology is a conceptual strategy which resides and functions from within the historical narrative and, depending on its governing mode of operation, endows that narrative with a particular meaning. Thus, tropology as an enabling device has the capacity to generate an apparently endless variety of different narrative meanings out of a single set of data. But, the relation of *logic* and *method* to *the sciences* appears to be of a quite different kind. Science is a structure which is constituted in, and thus determined in relation to, its language of description. There is, then, a certain "fixity" to science, albeit of a temporary (relative) nature. Logic and scientific method necessarily inhabit that same language of description and, together, they may be applied to the structure of science, or some aspect of it, to produce (unlike history) repeatable results. Such results would add to the collective knowledge of the world, bearing in mind that knowledge of the world is

always in relation to its overarching language of description. To briefly restate, the former *internal* relationship is multifarious with regard to its data which can be variously construed. Whilst, by contrast, the latter relationship, which refers to an *external* submission to a fixed structure, moves towards a "knowledge" relative to a specific framework of language. Thus, Ankersmit's conviction that these two relationships may have a common ground for comparison seems to collapse.

Now, my immediate purpose in the working through of certain Ankersmitean confusions in some detail is to illustrate a general observation with regard to Ankersmit's own arguments. That is, many of them (all the above being examples) are problematic because they are handicapped by a lack of internal coherence which arises out of contradictions, category errors, misrepresentations, misunderstandings, and so on. In the particular instances critiqued above, Ankersmit was attempting to establish a foundation for his own position based on flawed assumptions/propositions on which his subsequent argument was to be built. And the general observation to be noted here is that the bulk of Ankersmit's supporting arguments, certainly to this point in my thesis, can equally be shown to be informed and argued on the basis of unworkable positions. However, it should be quickly pointed out that Ankersmit's philosophical perspective, however argued, cannot be assumed to preclude the validity of his own theoretical conclusions. His conclusions as "ends", which stand apart from his philosophy as "means", must be assessed on a pragmatic basis – that of their usefulness rather than their mode of derivation. But the question that nevertheless remains is 'why did Ankersmit bother with proofs at all when, arguably, they cannot ever reach closure?'

Returning now to the argument at hand which, to recall, concerns Ankersmit's two putative instances of ambivalence[35] in White's use of literary theory (the

[35] Both of these 'instances' have already been rejected by me but, as I have pointed out, I will follow his second argument through because within it can be identified the development of other

second of which is under consideration here). Ankersmit, then, is suggesting that White initiates 'the swing of historical theory towards literature' but does so in such a way as '*not* to preclude a scientistic interpretation of historical writing', the latter of these two consideration being seen by Ankersmit as the 'scientism of metaphor' and thus the 'scientism of White's tropology'. Moreover, Ankersmit maintains that it can be demonstrated that White's theory of tropology, *in White's own view*, 'does not constitute a break with the scientistic and cognitive ideals of science' and that tropology in a *scientised* form 'lies at the heart of these scientistic cognitive ideals'.

Believing to have established these contentious points, Ankersmit then brought Jean Piaget into the picture in order to substantiate his claim that White himself can be shown to support a scientistic interpretation of *Metahistory* and of metaphor. Piaget is mentioned by White in his Introduction to *Tropics of Discourse* and the significance of his appearance needs some clarification. White's argument is, in fact, very clear on this matter; its central purpose being to establish sufficient reason for treating the theory of tropology (more precisely the fourfold pattern of the tropes) as a model of discourse and of consciousness in general. It was in the writings of three radically different thinkers working in different disciplines – Piaget, Freud and E. P. Thompson (along with others, but these three were the primary exemplars) – that White found theoretical structures analogous to the structure of the tropes as described within his own theory of tropology. These *cross-discipline* structural similarities were highlighted by White because they were suggestive of a certain (generally unnoticed) ubiquity with regard to the tropological model itself. Now, the point that must be made here is that White was not adopting or appropriating Piaget's theoretical work (which concerned the successive stages in the cognitive development of the child) in order to incorporate it, somehow, into his own work.

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problematic assumptions which I will show, in due course, are to be used by Ankersmit to effect both his *separation* from White and his *departure* from Kantian philosophy.

He was simply using Piaget's striking conclusions along with the equally striking conclusions of other theorists working in different fields of study to demonstrate the general recurrence or reinvention of the structural form of the tropological model, and thus (this is the "key" to White's argument) reveal the *archetypal* nature of the fourfold pattern of tropes.

However, Ankersmit took a very different view from this and concluded that White's theoretical position was actually *informed* by Piaget. Or, to rephrase, that White's adoption of Piaget's theoretical position can be cited as another proof of White's multiple ambivalences, and his scientism of metaphor and thus tropology. This is how Ankersmit explained his position on the matter:

> White is even quite specific about how the common ground between history and the sciences has to be defined. He thus hazards the suggestion that each of the four tropes corresponds to one of the four stages that Piaget discovered in the cognitive development of the child. And as this cognitive development is conditional for the possibility of doing scientific research, so the tropes are conditional for the possibility of historical meaning and insight. What is of special interest in this suggestion is the following. As is well known Piaget's description of the cognitive development of the child is in many ways similar to and to some extent even inspired by Kant's transcendental analysis of the human mind, as expounded in his first *Critique*. I am convinced that the link between tropology and Kantian transcendentalism that is thus hinted at should be taken quite seriously. Indeed, this seems to be in conformity with White's own explicit intentions: he incidentally compares his own tropology with the Kantian enterprise.(16)[Ankersmit's reference] .....we would be [thus] justified in attributing to White the wish to develop a quasi-Kantian critique of historical knowledge and to closely associate his own theory of history with that impressive culmination point of Western scientistic thought. Apart from the literalisation of historical writing Metahistory is no less an endeavour to provide us with a quasi-Kantian, epistemological investigation of the cognitive foundations that support historical representation and meaning. This then is the ambivalence in tropology that no reader of White's earlier work can afford to ignore.[36]

However, on my fundamentally different reading of White's Introduction to *Tropics of Discourse*, as already argued above, Piaget is incidental to White's theory in the sense that he could be replaced without compromise to it.

[36] Ankersmit. *History and Tropology.* pp10-11

Nevertheless, Ankersmit (on the basis of his own radically different interpretation of that same text) contrived a link between Piaget's description of the cognitive development of the child and scientific research which he then further linked to historical meaning and insight only to then link the whole matter to Kant's transcendental analysis of the human mind, finally concluding that there is an implicit link between Kantian transcendentalism and tropology. Ankersmit went even further when he stated that White actually 'compares his own tropology with the Kantian enterprise' – witness Ankersmit's own reference[16] in the above extract which refers to the following extract from White's *Tropics of Discourse*:

> The essays in this book all, in one way or another, examine the problem of the relationships among description, analysis, and ethics in the human sciences. It will be immediately apparent that this division of the human faculties is Kantian. I will not apologize for this Kantian element in my thought, [for] I do not think that modern psychology, anthropology, or philosophy has improved upon it. Moreover, when it is a matter of speaking about human consciousness, we have no absolute theory to guide us; everything is under contention. It therefore becomes a matter of choice as to which model we should use to mark out, and constitute entries into, the problem of consciousness in general. Such choices should be self-conscious rather than unconscious ones, and they should be made with a full understanding of the kind of human nature to the constitution of which they will contribute if they are taken as valid.[37]

This statement by White seems absolutely clear. He was simply noting that the particular 'division of the human faculties' adopted within his own theory is Kantian because, when 'everything is under contention', the Kantian model is best for his purposes. This is a pragmatic choice of model and *not*, as Ankersmit insisted, an indication of a purposeful and total alignment with Kant. Thus, Ankersmit's claim that White was resolutely 'developing a quasi-Kantian critique of historical knowledge' for the express purpose of 'closely associating his own theory with that impressive culmination point of Western scientistic thought' is unfounded if this is all that there is to go on – and, as far as I can see from my readings of both Ankersmit and White, there is nothing else. It must then follow that Ankersmit's interpretation of *Metahistory* as 'an endeavour to

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[37] White. *Tropics of Discourse*. pp22-23

provide us with a quasi-Kantian, epistemological investigation of the cognitive foundations that support historical representation and meaning' (on which Ankersmit's ambivalence charge partly rests) is equally unfounded. I have, of course, already rejected the ambivalence argument on two previous counts and it now seems to have fallen to a third – it is thrice discredited.

So what exactly was going on in all of this? Well, my suggestion is that Ankersmit, in the furtherance of his venture (his new "goal"), was working-up some foundation (flawed though it was) from which he could execute two tactical moves in the progress of his own thesis. First of all he wanted to rid himself of Kantianism (this move will be more fully investigated below) and in doing so he would effect his second move (also to be further investigated), namely, to achieve a clear separation between himself and White who (as Ankersmit saw it) would then remain trapped in 'that well-ordered house of Kantian transcendentalism'.[38]

Accordingly, Ankersmit's overall "design" (if I dare look at it in this way), seen in the round, rests on the progress of two arguments; first, that of White's multiple ambivalences which putatively linked him closely with Kant (explored and dismissed above) and, second, as we shall now see, that of the so-called 'disappearance of the tropes' from *The Content of the Form* (and all White's subsequent publications) and to which I turn now.

Section Four: <u>The Case of the Vanishing Tropes</u>

Ankersmit confronted his readers with a curious observation – or so it seems at first sight – when he drew attention to

> ..... the ***profound difference*** between White's earlier work and the essays that have been collected in *The Content of the Form* (1987) .....White does not explicate this difference himself, but his ***apparent change of mind*** is no less important for that. No reader of *The Content of the Form* can fail to be struck

[38] Ankersmit. *History and Tropology.* p17

by the fact that the tropes are all but absent from it. A clue to ***White's change of mind*** can be found in [etc.]……[39] (my emphasis).

I will deal with the vanishing tropes in a moment but, before doing so, I am going to make an observation of my own. For throughout his works Ankersmit repeatedly uses a particular kind of argumentative strategy the effect of which is to seduce his readers into an unquestioned acceptance of a wholly unjustified assumption. The above extract contains a very good example of his technique and it will be seen that for clarity I have emphasised the operative words.

This is the way it works. Ankersmit opens with a statement which, at least on the surface of things, might not seem unreasonable. The opening statement in this particular case refers to an 'apparent difference' to be found in White's ongoing use of the tropes (that is, unlike White's earlier work the tropes appear to be all but absent from *The Content of the Form* and White's subsequent publications). A few words later Ankersmit refers to White's 'apparent change of mind' with regard to the tropes – thus Ankersmit, building on his first statement and without presenting any supporting evidence whatsoever, is now suggesting that White has apparently turned away from his central interest in tropology. And then, a sentence later, Ankersmit drops the word 'apparent' and refers to 'White's change of mind', thus elevating the status of a presumed *apparent change* to what is now (for Ankersmit) the *unequivocal fact* that White has changed. Accordingly, it is the certainty of White's "turn" from tropology that is now insinuated into Ankersmit's own discourse as a concrete matter of fact; a contentious fact which escapes scrutiny to become a foundational presupposition to Ankersmit's continuing argument – which I shall now outline very briefly.

Convinced of White's turn from the tropes, and apparently in pursuit of his own design, Ankersmit proceeded to demonstrate the close relationship between 'Kantian transcendentalism on the one hand and White's tropology on the other'[40] and, rather than taking tropology in the *whole*, he decided that he would

[39] Ibid. p13
[40] Ibid. p11

'restrict [his] exposition to metaphor'[41] which he said can adequately stand in for the whole. Ankersmit next observed that metaphor can be shown to be

> ...in fundamental agreement with the main inspiration of Kantian transcendentalism – and this is why metaphor is a continuation of scientistic cognitive ideals, rather than being in opposition to them.[42]

This statement is supported by two observations. First, that Kantian transcendentalism and metaphor function in a similar way (in the sense that they both enable the organisation of knowledge) and second, that they both appropriate and then familiarise some previously strange or unfamiliar aspect of the world. By linking these two similarities of function together, Ankersmit (by his interpretation and not mine) demonstrated the 'scientism of metaphor' and by extension 'tropology' (for, as I have already pointed out, Ankersmit's argument is predicated on the assumption that *metaphor* can adequately stand in for *tropology*). Hence, for Ankersmit, *metaphor* and *Kantian transcendentalism* are necessarily inextricably linked and this enables him to read into White's presumed rejection of tropology a logically entailed (but in White's case unrealised) rejection of Kantian transcendentalism. This is evident in Ankersmit's assertion that

> ...White favourably contrasts the historical sublime with the beautiful (and with tropology)...[and that] this is self evidently a move against tropology....[but] within.... not against Kantian transcendentalism.....for the sublime still has its logical place within the schematism of the Kantian system.[43]

Thus, Ankersmit is claiming here that White made his move against tropology but that he then failed to consolidate/endorse it because he failed to reject Kantian transcendentalism along with it. As far as I can make out this is, in skeletal form, Ankersmit's essential (for my particular purpose here) line of argument which putatively provided him with his confirmation of White's turn *from* tropology (linked by Ankersmit with a move *to* the sublime, discussed below on pages115-118). But, and this is important to Ankersmit, this turn was seen to be accommodated within the "architecture" of Kantian transcendentalism

[41] Ibid. p11
[42] Ibid. p11
[43] Ibid. p16

and therefore does *not* constitute White's escape from it. On the basis of this position Ankersmit can now declare his own *new* direction of enquiry as follows;

> I want to pursue the path suggested by White's transition from the kind of views that were presented in *Metahistory* to those we may find in his *Content of the Form*. That is to say, following White, I want to explore the possibilities and the nature of a form of historical writing that breaks with the Kantian, Enlightened tradition that always strove for a domestication or appropriation of the past. However, *in contrast to White* [my emphasis], I shall try to do so by attempting to effectively break the spell of Kantian, transcendentalist patterns of argument. My motivation for looking for an anti- or a-Kantian argumentation will be obvious: in the foregoing, we have seen that the intellectual function of both transcendentalism and of metaphor has always been to effect an appropriation of the relevant parts of reality. Hence, the avoidance of appropriation in our approach to reality can only have a chance of success to the extent that we know how to resist the temptations of transcendentalism and of metaphor.[44]

Now this time I am not going to dismember the finer points of Ankersmit's argument as laid out above (even though statements like 'metaphor is a continuation of scientistic cognitive ideals' offer compelling reasons to do so). Instead I want to reveal the underlying persuasive drift within it. Ankersmit, in the first two sentences of this extract, indicates that up to this stage in his argument he had been 'following' White. But – and this is the point that needs underlining – *from this point on, by resisting the temptations of Kantian transcendentalism and of metaphor, Ankersmit believed that he could move ahead of White whose own progress was impeded by his continued entanglement with Kantian idealism*. An argument like this makes good reading, but on brief reflection it immediately fails. For, broadly speaking, I take the view that very little common ground has existed between the theoretical positions of Ankersmit and White since Ankersmit's earlier development of his notion of the *narrative substance*; therefore the idea that Ankersmit was actually following White remains unconvincing. Furthermore, Ankersmit's earlier contention that White favoured the sublime over and above tropology, thus instigating his 'move against tropology', lacks credibility. Add to this Ankersmit's conviction that White actually sought a non-Kantian form of historical writing and then, for me,

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[44] Ibid. pp17-18

Ankersmit's whole argument is reduced to an incoherent distraction. For this reason I think that it is the presupposition upon which Ankersmit's argument rests that now requires closer attention, and this observation brings me right back to the beginning of this section and the matter of the vanishing tropes. If this presupposition were to be "unseated" – if it can be shown that White never abandoned tropes – then Ankersmit's subsequent argument would collapse.

White's (alleged) change of mind with regard to the primacy of the tropes (his 'turn from the tropes' which, we are informed by Ankersmit, is demonstrated by their virtual disappearance from *The Content of the Form* and White's subsequent writings) is also taken by Ankersmit, and this cannot be ignored, to be concurrent with 'Whites turn to the sublime'[45] (as noted on page 113). Ankersmit is even more precise than this when he refers to '...the later Hayden White who shows us the past under the aegis of the sublime (as in *The Content of the Form*)'[46]. Thus, White's supposed 'turn from the tropes' and his equally supposed 'turn to the sublime' are for Ankersmit closely associated movements.

Now, the 'turn from' element of this so-called change of mind is easy to dismiss, particularly when understood in relation to a more recent publication of Ankersmit's in which he actually pointed out that

> ....in his later work, White more frequently relies on prefiguration (and cognate concepts) than on the tropes. The title of his last collection of essays was *Figural Realism*, suggesting that the notion of *figura* may help us understand how we conceive of historical reality and in what way figura is conditional of our understanding of it.[47]

For it is evident from this extract that Ankersmit makes a category distinction between 'prefiguration (the primary stage of figuration in White's tropological theory) and figura' on the one hand, and 'the tropes' on the other. But (and how could Ankersmit possibly forget this?), prefiguration *is* a tropological act – it is a conspicuous instance of *tropology in motion*. And to finally dispel any

[45] Domańska. *Encounters.* p83
[46] Ibid. p83
[47] Ankersmit, F. R., (2009). 'White's 'Neo-Kantianism': Aesthetics, Ethics and Politics' in Ankersmit, F., Domańska, E., Kellner, H., (eds.) *Re-Figuring Hayden White*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. p27

possible doubt about this, here is what White has to say in *The Content of the Form* (that same publication from which, ironically, Ankersmit found his contrary notion):

> If there is any logic presiding over the transition from the level of the fact or event in the discourse to that of the narrative, it is the logic of figuration itself, which is to say, tropology.[48]

The claimed non-tropological status of *Figura*, which arises out of another of Ankersmit's misunderstandings, can also be easily discarded. *Figura* is essentially a concept of *fulfilment* and it is erroneously described by Ankersmit as follows;

> ... *figura* is meant to tie together two historical phenomena (separated from each other by sometimes thousands of years) on the basis of a certain structural similarity..... [where] the second can be seen as a fulfilment of the first.....this way of dealing with historical events and our understanding of them is riddled with nasty problems. First, what is to *count* as a pair of structurally similar events..... Second, the figuralist approach reduces the scope of historians to only those events that happen to have a believable twin in the past.....Lastly, the approach focuses on two events in the past itself, bypassing the dimension of language and historical meaning.[49]

One can immediately see here that, for Ankersmit's, the notion of *figura* has something to do with the past itself. That is to say that Ankersmit is looking for his 'believable twins' *in* the past. However, White is quite clear that *figura* as a figure of fulfilment

> ....casts its light back – retrospectively and, in the narrative account retroactively – on the earlier figurations of the character of process being related....It can only mean that the historian has treated his enfiguration of a given set of events as an "end-as-fulfilment" which permits him to "recognise" in earlier events in the sequence dim and imperfect anticipations of "what will have been the case" later on. The meaning-effect of the narrative account of the sequence is produced by the technique of relating events in order of their occurrence but construing them as "clues" of the plot-structure which will be revealed only at the end of the narrative in the enfiguration of events as fulfilment.[50]

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[48] White. *The Content of the Form*. p47

[49] Ankersmit. 'White's Neo-Kantianism: Aesthetics, Ethics and Politics'. p39

[50] This extract is taken from White's, H., (1999). 'History as Fulfilment: Keynote Address' (unpublished copy paper delivered at Tulane University on 12/11/99 and provided by Keith Jenkins).

Thus, for White, *figura* is a retrospective configuration of a sequence of actions and the outcome of those actions, such that the outcome can be seen as a fulfilment of the inaugural action. *Figura*, then, is a projection (of figuration) onto the past and *not* something that can be found in the past itself. Moreover, as an act of figuration *figura* is fundamentally tropological. It is, therefore, difficult to understand how Ankersmit could fail to grasp (and thus misconstrue) White's clear explanation of the notion of *figura*, particularly since there are at least three consistent accounts of it (that I have come across) from three[51] separate sources, one of which is in *Figural Realism*, cited above by Ankersmit. Moreover, White has himself rejected (in correspondence with me) the idea that he has moved away from his commitment to the tropes.[52]

This completes my investigation and dismissal of Ankersmit's conviction that with the publication of *The Content of the Form* White actually turned from the tropes. With this dismissal Ankersmit's dependant argument, outlined at the beginning of this section, is thus "unseated".

Next, I propose to tackle the related notion that White executed an associated turn to the sublime or, rather, a turn to Ankersmit's distinctly individual understanding of the sublime. The following excursion into this matter will also mark the end of my close reading of Ankersmit's texts. For it is now my intention to extricate myself from what has become a detailed (but nevertheless, indispensable) approach to Ankersmit's convoluted, developing argument. With this fresh approach Ankersmit's overall position might, I hope, be viewed from a more comfortable and perhaps more advantageous distance as I move towards my central argument. Here then, with a double sense of closure, I offer my own resolution to what can only really be described as the jumble and confusion

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[51] My three sources are Hayden White's 'History as Fulfilment: Keynote Address' cited above, White. H., (2005) 'Cosmos, Chaos and Sequence in Historiological Representation'. *Distinguished WEB Du Bois Lectures*. 142: pp36-53 and White. H., (1999). *Figural Realism: Studies in the Mimesis Effect*. Baltimore. Johns Hopkins University Press. pp89-90

[52] See footnote 60 of this chapter.

surrounding Ankersmit's claim in relation to White's putative 'turn to the sublime'.

The concept of the sublime has been the subject of centuries of debate amongst philosophers, writers and artists. However, for my purpose, *vis-à-vis* Ankersmit's 'Journey' to sublime historical experience, I will concern myself only with Romantic and postmodern notions of it. Philip Shaw has usefully established a distinction between these two different notions of the sublime which he expressed thus:

> If the aim of Romanticism is somehow to incorporate the 'sense sublime', postmodernism, by way of contrast, seeks to retain a sense of the sublime as other, a 'something' that can never be 'interfused' through the use of metaphors, symbols or verbal connectives.[53]

The postmodern *something* or sublime thing to which Shaw refers is un-presentable to the mind and beyond apprehension in language (or ineffable). It thus resists all attempts at its appropriation and it is precisely this concept of the sublime which is evident in *all* of Hayden White's writings from the 1960's on.[54] It has always been his position that following the nineteenth century disciplinisation of history, the undesirable consequence of which was the suppression of *this* notion of the sublime, we now

> ....require a history that will educate us to discontinuity more than ever before; for discontinuity, disruption and chaos is our lot.[55]

Undoubtedly, White was contemplating a style of history which would explicitly recognise 'our lot' as a chaotic and disruptive discontinuity under the aegis of an incomprehensible sublime. Thus White ponders the possibility of

> ....a conception of history that would signal its resistance to the bourgeois ideology of realism by its refusal to attempt a narrativist mode for the representation of its truth ....[and the possibility that this refusal might

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[53] Shaw, P., (2005). *The Sublime*. London: Routledge. p9

[54] Here I turn for support to Herman Paul who categorically states that, 'White's understanding of the world as a sublime (that is, chaotic and meaningless) reality already underlay his criticism of political ideologies in the 1960's' (Korhonen, K., (ed.) (2006) *Tropes for the Past: Hayden White and the History/Literature Debate*. New York: Rodopi. p40).

[55] White, H., (1966). 'The Burden of History' in *History and Theory* 5 no. 2:p134 (Later to become Chapter One of White's *Tropics of Discourse*).

> signal] a recovery of the historical sublime that bourgeois historiography repressed in the process of its disciplinisation.[56]

Now, there are two points which should be made here. In the first place White was just contemplating, as an imaginative exercise, the plausibility of a history which *refused* the narrative mode (refused the domestication of discontinuity and chaos) for the representation of its "truths". This, I think, can be read as a rhetorical proposition. And, in the second place, the historical sublime to which White referred is the *postmodern* notion of it (that is the incomprehensible, non-ontologizable, chaotic totality of the actuality of the past which escapes all attempts at its apprehension or appropriation). This second point is of crucial importance because, as I will now show, it can be seen to be at variance with what I believe to be Ankersmit's Romantic, 'incorporated' (as construed by Shaw), concept of the sublime.

Turning now to Ankersmit who, not exactly grasping White's position, maintained that the nineteenth century disciplinisation of historical writing (on White's view as Ankersmit interpreted it) involved the stripping of the past from everything that would not fit the 'tropological explanatory patterns.....devised for making sense of sociohistorical reality'.[57] But, Ankersmit continues, there is no choice on that particular issue, for is it not the case that

> ....metaphor and figurative language are our *ultima ratio* in the task of transforming the unfamiliar into the familiar [?]. However, it is precisely this category of the sublime that reminds us that the tropological appropriation of the past is not the only option that is open to the historian: representation – and even historical representation – leaves the historian the possibility of presenting the terrifying strangeness and sublimity of the past to his readers....[however]....I will not enter into a discussion of the plausibility of White's view that the disciplinisation of historical writing mainly consisted in an exchange of the sublime for the beautiful in historical representation....[58]

This extract is puzzling because the individual statements within it fail to cohere into any sort of comprehensible argument. For instance, the 'tropological

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[56] White. *The Content of the Form*. p81
[57] Ankersmit. *History and Tropology*. p16
[58] Ibid. p16

appropriation of the past' and 'historical representation' are construed by Ankersmit, on this occasion, to be of different kinds – his argument is thus in conspicuous contradiction to the central tenets of his own, earlier theorisations. Moreover, I cannot find anything in White's works which might confirm Ankersmit's contention that in White's view the disciplinisation of historical writing mainly consisted in 'an exchange of the sublime for the beautiful in historical representation'. Ankersmit both declined to enter into discussion on the matter and he also failed to reference his statement. There is, however, a clue in his argument, for it is evident that Ankersmit sees the sublime as an entity already (in a sense) resident in historical writing prior to its disciplinisation – otherwise its exchange for the beautiful could not take place. Moreover, the notion of exchange presupposes or suggests a certain comparison of order between *the sublime* and *the beautiful*. Accordingly, these points taken together, I think that what Ankersmit's has in mind is a quasi-Romantic 'incorporated' notion of the sublime – a sublime which submits to appropriation – which isn't ineffable![59]

On this understanding some small sense can now be made of Ankersmit's mistaken conviction that White turned to and somehow grasped the sublime. Ankersmit's argument is grounded on what he sees as a distinction between the theoretical position adopted by White in both *Metahistory* and *Tropics of Discourse*, and that adopted in all of White's subsequent publications. Within these later publications, commencing with *The Content of the Form*, Ankersmit (who seemed to be unaware that White's sublime was and always had been an unfathomable sublime of Shaw's postmodern kind) imagined that he had found in White's writings a sublime of the accessible kind (his own Romantic kind) which embodied the facility to replace or exchange itself with tropology. Furthermore, Ankersmit interpreted White's supposed sublime "turn" (his disavowal of the tropes) as a remedy forced on him through the recognition of two insurmountable difficulties with tropology: (1) that the traces/archival evidence of any event in

[59] Further support for this argument might be found in consideration of the title of Ankersmit's recent publication *Sublime Historical Experience*. For, in order to be *experienced* Ankersmit's sublime must submit to a form of order such that it may be consciously apprehended as experience. By contrast, White's sublime is chaotic and meaningless and therefore defies any form of apprehension: is non-ontologizable

the past may be tropologically encoded into many different yet equally valid narrative versions of that event (Ankersmit construed this as a fault with tropology) and (2) that the theoretical *optionality* of the tropes appeared to be negated (or called into question) when representing extreme events, the holocaust for instance. In this convoluted and muddled fashion (a complex, arduous argument which, I hope, I have myself properly represented) Ankersmit found the cause for White's *presumed* "turn" in what he himself interpreted as an intractable problem with the tropes; a problem which, he then further presumed, forced White's rejection of them in favour of the sublime.

Pulling all these above arguments together, one can perhaps now make out a certain direction or design[60] in them. For Ankersmit appears to read into (or project onto) White's theoretical position a duplicate of his own evolving position (essentially a movement away from the dominance of *linguistics* realised through the rejection of *tropology* and the adoption of the *sublime* in its place). And on the basis of this (I have to say contrived) comparison of

[60] The preceding arguments comprising the current and the previous Section of this Chapter should be very briefly brought into focus here (at the risk of repetition), such that my use of the word 'design' might not appear too extravagant. In the first place, and this is a sort of "base line", Ankersmit draws a parallel between *metaphor* and *Kantian transcendentalism* in that they both, in a sense, "strip" from the sublime, or the "whole", that which cannot be conceptually incorporated/grasped by them. It is for this reason that Ankersmit, driven by his need for the *unmediated* "whole", rejects them both together as a pre-condition to his argument for sublime historical experience (and I think that, for him, one entails the other so they both have to go anyway). Next, Ankersmit projects onto his reading of Hayden White a particular understanding of White's intentions. That is, he argues that White turns *from* the tropes and *towards* a sublime which, in this case, 'still has its logical place within the schematism of the Kantian system' (*History and Tropology*. p11) and, thus, that this combined *move* does not constitute a turn against Kantian transcendentalism – which, for Ankersmit, is the mode of thought within which White remains trapped. Now, I have myself separately argued against each of these two implied and linked so-called Whitean "turns", and I believe that I have shown that each one of these arguments fails. To clarify this point, I see from my own exchange of emails with Hayden White that he specifically said to me (on 27th March 2009) 'As for the disappearance of tropology from my later work, I would say that I continued to use it, I just did not wave it in the readers' face because I have to admit that I have not been able to convince very many people about its validity. I am going to come back to it again in some work I am planning now' (no *turn from*, hence no *turn to*). Since, to my satisfaction at least, each of these arguments has now been separately "dispatched", then of course the whole argument falls with it. However, even taking Ankersmit's argument in the whole as he presented it, there seems to be a problem. That is, Ankersmit's turn to the sublime frees him from Kantian transcendentalism but, as he himself insists, White's supposed turn to the sublime doesn't offer that same freedom and I cannot find anything in Ankersmit's philosophy to explain this "picky" behaviour of the sublime. However, having made these various arguments Ankersmit has, in effect, suggested a structural similarity between his and White's work up to this presumed joint turn to the sublime – and this is the essential point that I wanted to make and which now returns me to the argument above.

respective theoretical positions, he effects a kind of validation (a parallelism with White) of his own developing position *up to this point*. However, having arguably legitimated his work thus, it is also at this very same point that he *disconnects* from White who remains (as Ankersmit put it) 'trapped' in a Kantian, transcendentalist mode of thought. Ankersmit, accordingly, appears to emerge from this agglomeration of what are really quite extraordinary arguments as the *primary exponent* of what he believes will be his definitive non-Kantian and non-metaphorical *replacement theory of history*.

That completes my detailed analyses of Ankersmit's significant developmental arguments (principally arguments which carried him from the safe logic of the linguistic turn and thence, through various stages, to the threshold of experience), and I now propose to gather together and condense all of these various elements into a brief and (perhaps) more accessible general discursive account of Ankersmit's progress up to this particular juncture. This account, which comprises the next section of the current chapter, will provide the essential cohesive context within and from which I shall then propose an explanation for the Ankersmitean 'Journey' of my thesis title.

Section Five: Consolidation

Ankersmit's writings prior to his publication of *Sublime Historical Experience* can be seen to fall into two broad categories (a) those which are informed by the linguistic turn and (b) those which seek to separate themselves from it. Now, the significance and meaning of the so-called *linguistic turn* is very well documented, yet as a name for a happening of a particular kind it was badly chosen and can lead to confusion. This is what Hayden White had to say on the matter:

> .... I don't think it is correctly called the linguistic turn, because a semiotic or a structuralist approach to the study of cultural and social phenomena is more interested in discourse than in linguistics. Linguistics studies language phenomena only at the level of the sentence, but discourse works at the level of

> a number of sentences.... language and discourse are not the same thing. Discourse is a highly sophisticated, self-conscious use of language at a level more general than the sentence, and I think it had a very important impact upon the study of the human and social sciences. Because to consider these not as sciences, not even as disciplines, but as discourses allows you to understand why alternative interpretations of the same phenomena are possible. And this is what allows for one seeing that in the human and social sciences, indeed even in the natural sciences in large part, what you study is a product of the way you describe reality in discourse.[61]

Put this way, White convincingly argued his preference for the evidently more satisfactory descriptive term 'discursive turn' – nevertheless, a first naming often sticks and thus, confusion notwithstanding, the appellation 'linguistic turn' seems to have found its place in common usage.

Returning now to the two categories mentioned above, it should be understood that the favourable position that I have adopted regarding Ankersmit's conclusions in connection with category (a) is somewhat blighted by the incoherent and contradictory style of argument which he used in support of these conclusions. Furthermore, with regard to category (b), I find that both Ankersmit's theoretical position and his mode of argument are flawed. In addition to these observations there is one final general matter to be taken into account which is this: Ankersmit brought a kind of discursive "double plot" to these various texts under discussion here. Or, to be more precise, in *History and Tropology* Ankersmit was principally engaged in the composition (the setting-up) of some validating structure of argument in support of his move towards a new experience-based style of historical theory. However, running concurrently with this enterprise, in the form of a subsidiary plot, he continuously (and with misplaced ingenuity) endeavoured – as we have seen – to separate himself from the philosophy of Hayden White. I will come to all these matters in due course, however, first of all I shall reconsider Ankersmit's earlier introduction of his linguistic instrument *narrative substance* into the discourse of historical theory.

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[61] White, H., (2000). 'The Ironic Poetics of Late Modernity' (an interview conducted in Athens by Angelica Koufou & Margarita Miliori, December 1999) in *Historein: A Review of the Past and Other Stories* 2: pp183-184

So, to briefly recap. In his first book, *Narrative Logic*, Ankersmit focused on the often observed yet then scarcely worked distinction between historical research and historical writing. Historical research typically produces verifiable facts and singular statements referring to the past, but the writing up of that research into a narrative form (a history) was shown by Ankersmit to refer internally to its own *narrative substance* (governed by the point-of-view of its author) and not to the past itself. Historical writing, seen as a coherent whole, is therefore an internally referenced imaginative product of an aesthetic kind and, as such, cannot possibly be subject to validation on the basis of truth claims at the level of the singular statement. So clear does this point appear to be that it is interesting, even curious, to note here – bearing in mind that (a) histories are necessarily constituted (and thus carry their meanings) in *culture* dependant story forms and (b) that such story forms cannot be found in the past itself – that Ankersmit's enormously helpful proposition, which identified the *narrative substance* as the referent of its own manifest story form, received the negative reaction that it did. After all his proposition presented immediate solutions to a number of problems within historical theory; not least it offered a very plausible explanation for the apparently inexhaustible growth in the production of different, sometimes radically different but always different, historical accounts of a *single* vanished past – a past evidenced only through a finite common base of traces remaining from that single past.

Now, the *narrative substance* (which Ankersmit defined as the primary logical entity within narrative accounts of the past) functions as a kind of "filter" which processes available facts or narrative statements according to their usefulness with respect to the particular narrative meaning intrinsic to the *narrative substance* in question. Or, to rephrase, it is from the point-of-view which governs the historians chosen *narrative substance* that a preference for a particular fact or statement is expressed. This preference will be for facts and statements which contribute to the individuation of that very same *narrative substance* or point-of-view[62] which is, in

[62] It should be understood, as Ankersmit frequently points out, that a historian's governing point-of-view will rarely if ever be "on view" in his/her texts as a comprehensible and unambiguous figure.

turn, itself an expression of the historians predisposition to a story form of a particular kind. Hence, in this circular fashion, Ankersmit showed that the writing of history is always an autonomous activity in the extent to which narrative meaning (meaning carried by the narrative viewed as a whole) is referenced internally to its own arbitrary point-of-view, rather than to the past itself. On this understanding it follows that the facts and singular statements arising out of historical research do not, and cannot, somehow *figure forth* the truth about the past. Rather, they constitute the reservoir of raw unprocessed (and therefore "historically" meaningless) materials from which the historian makes a preferred selection in order to individuate a prefigured notion about the causality/direction/ meaning and so on, of the past. Having imagined and individuated a history, coherently articulated about its own governing but arbitrary *narrative substance*, some might then see fit to defend that meaning as if it were part of the past itself and not a projection onto it of an imaginary narrative proposal about an ultimately unfathomable past which, of course, never possessed a narrative form in the first place.

On this understanding, Ankersmit found in his *narrative substance* the "key" to the logical structure of narrative accounts of the past and he presented his case, for the most part, as an original thesis. Now, I am not going to suggest here that Ankersmit's was simply restating the work of others. For there is no doubt that his individual explanatory style, his focused insistence on the distinction between historical research and historical writing, his intuitive derivation and naming of the *narrative substance* and his thoroughly argued account of the fundamentally metaphorical nature of it, represented a truly significant contribution to historical theory as informed by the linguistic turn. But one cannot ignore the earlier work of his contemporaries, particularly that of Hayden White, whose writings (as I have already argued) have always both presumed the metaphorical nature of language and also taken into account the historical research/writing distinction. Furthermore, as the following extract suggests (and this can be taken as a supplement to my argument as laid out in Chapter Two, pages 81-83), White's essay 'The Burden of History' (which pre-dates *Narrative Logic* by some

seventeen years) appears to similarly embody the essential elements that constitute Ankersmit's *narrative substance*.

> It now seems possible to hold that an explanation need not be assigned unilaterally to the category of the literally truthful on the one hand or the purely imaginary on the other, but can be judged solely in terms of the richness of the metaphors which govern its sequence of articulation. Thus envisaged, the governing metaphor of an historical account could be treated as a heuristic rule which self-consciously eliminates certain kinds of data from consideration as evidence. The historian operating under such a conception could thus be viewed as one who, like the modern artist and scientist, seeks to exploit a certain perspective on the world that does not pretend to exhaust description or analysis of all of the data in the entire phenomenal field but rather offers itself as one way among many of disclosing certain aspects of the field.[63]

I believe that one can identify Ankersmit's notion of scope [64] in White's phrase 'richness of the metaphors', and surely the 'governing metaphor of an historical account' which behaves like 'a heuristic rule' (essentially a data filter) can be likened to the *narrative substance* itself. Moreover, White's allusion to a comparison between the artist who 'seeks to exploit a certain perspective on the world' and the historian who would appear to be similarly occupied, finds its parallel in Ankersmit's theorisations. One could therefore reasonably conclude that Ankersmit's central concerns, as articulated in *Narrative Logic*, are developments of, rather than additions to, historical theory.

Returning to Ankersmit's own account of his *narrative substance* one might now, against this explanatory background, re-examine the status of narrative accounts of the past *vis-à-vis* the actuality of the past itself. Ankersmit conclusively argues that narrative accounts of the past are the imaginative constructs of their authors, and that they refer internally to their own unique narrative points-of-view or *narrative substances*. The linguistic entities *narrative substances*, so described, can be seen to embody synthetic views of the past which are neither (logically) informed by, nor do they refer to, the past itself, although, as has been noted, within each singular individuating fact or statement contained therein such reference to the past is made.

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[63] White. 'The Burden of History'. p130
[64] As laid out in Chapter One of this thesis.

However, with regard to meanings and values, it should be understood that the worked-up facts and statements which comprise a narrative proposal about the past, taken in isolation, are in a manner of speaking "vacant"; that is to say that as empty signifiers they are devoid of any narrative meaning and direction, or 'compassless' (to quote Ankersmit). It follows that it is only relative to their appropriation and organisation into narrative form under the governing rationale of a *narrative substance* that facts and statements have their narrative dependant (and hence relative) meanings and values impressed onto them in accordance with the synthetic narrative point-of-view which they have been purposefully selected to individuate. Or, in short, the meanings and therefore the values attached to historical facts and statements are to be found only in relation to their uses when organised into narrative form.

Understood thus, the writing of history and the shapes or structures of the meanings that it carries can be seen to arise out of an arbitrary, unsanctioned *organisation* of the past – an internally functioning organisation which draws both on its own *narrative substance(s)* and on language and linguistic devices in order to generate its manifest (and meaningful) story form. Accordingly, Ankersmit sees such organisation of the past as a violation of the past...

> [t]elling of the past.....is unavoidably a violation of that past in order to effect such a narrative organisation of the past – an organisation that is not intrinsic to the past itself....[65]

The essential point that I thus wish to stress at this stage is that, on Ankersmit's view (and mine), the autonomous linguistic construct that we call history cannot provide access to any meaning, direction or purpose found/emanating from and thus located in the past itself; indeed, the discourse of history has little at all to do with the past in that sense. What emerges from Ankersmit's own arguments is the wholly defensible proposition that historians, for purposes of their own, linguistically generate and then project imagined meanings onto a past that neither notices nor cares about them. History is "one way" traffic – *nothing* flows back from the past but the echo of the imaginative figure of history itself. There

[65] Domańska. *Encounters.* p78

is, in short, an immutable disconnect (a dissonance) between history and the past which history purports to represent. It therefore follows that the notion that history could constitutes some sort of "bridge" to the actuality of the past is fundamentally flawed and cannot be sustained.

On my reading of *Narrative Logic* the foregoing paragraphs constitutes the important substance of, and the logical conclusions to, Ankersmit's position with regard to the ***narrative substance***. Unfortunately however, notwithstanding that logic, Ankersmit was unable to completely "let go" of his lingering belief that the discipline of history, despite his devastating critique of it, might serve some useful purpose after all, a purpose which he was to express through his experimental garden of historiography.

Now, if one were to take a general and uncluttered view of the meaningful content of *Narrative Logic* (and this would involve the stripping away of Ankersmit's endless philosophical/algebraic proofs and also his controversial re-descriptions of the works of Hayden White), then two essential "movements" would become apparent: a positive step forward and a hesitant step back. Ankersmit's positive step forward is the development and evaluation of the relativistic/relativising ***narrative substance***; his hesitant step back the apparent negation of this original position brought about by both his 'experimental garden of historiography' and his 'fact/value' arguments. These, it seems to me, are the two oppositional movements which Ankersmit attempted to pull together into (what is for me) the somewhat problematic whole of *Narrative Logic*.

The first of these two negating movements, Ankersmit's experimental garden of historiography (evaluated in Chapter Two), centred on the notion that

> ....we can test moral and political values by establishing whether they inspire good or bad historical narratives.[66]

[66] Ghosh, R., (2007). 'Interdisciplinarity and the Doing of History: A Dialogue between F. R. Ankersmit and Ranjad Ghosh' in *Rethinking History* 11 no. 2: p244

Or, as Ankersmit insisted, if historical narratives inspired by one set of moral and political values can be systematically refuted by historical narratives inspired by a second different set of moral and political values, then the conclusion must be that the second set is that which is to be preferred and therefore, by extension,

> ....we need no longer first put into practice moral and political values....[rather], our compass here is historical writing; write histories inspired by these values, next see which of them are best – and then you will know what moral and political values you should adopt.[67]

For Ankersmit then, historiography taken in bulk form (metaphorically perceived as a garden in which the plant that best flourishes is the one to which the greatest merit is to be assigned) was to assume the function of *arbiter* on matters of moral and political values. Now, this argument is hopelessly inadequate for reasons already expressed, however that is not my immediate concern here. Rather, I want to turn to Ankersmit's fact/value argument (the second of his two negating arguments) on which his experimental garden of historiography is grounded. And my position here is that even if it were possible (and I do not believe that it is) to find *the* definitive history of some past event – a kind of transcendental history embodying the capacity to reject all competing accounts of that same event – there yet remains an insurmountable problem. That problem is that any happening or fact, either past or present, does not entail, intrinsically within itself, a *fixed* value which might lead to a *fixed* ethical imperative or response to that happening or fact. Values and meanings are not in happenings and facts, they are always projected onto them in relation to enculturation, ideology, context (and so on) which, taken together, constitute a point-of-view. Values and meanings are indisputably relative matters. It follows, therefore, that since values are neither in, nor entailed from, facts, that any perceived imperative or actual response to the facts of a situation or happening can be seen to be resting on a wholly-arbitrary rhetorical position. Thus, in any particular instance, one might ask 'whose values are they that are in play, how and why are such particular values privileged above all others and in whose interests do they operate?'

[67] Ibid. p. 244

Ankersmit, however, takes a very different view. For him '*fact* and *value*, the *is* and the *ought*, are merely the extremes on a continuous scale'[68] and this pivotal observation/belief of Ankersmit's endorses his unshakable conviction that from a set of true statements one can move 'automatically and naturally toward an answer to the question of how to act in the future'.[69] Now, the *modus operandi* of the experimental garden of historiography relies entirely on this (erroneous) assumed relationship (what Ankersmit calls the *trait d'union*) between fact and value and it can, accordingly, be seen as a kind of second-level [70] enabling device for his "gardening" metaphor.

Referring back to the *narrative substance* and the logic from which it is derived, one can therefore see that a substantial incongruity ruins the coherence of Ankersmit's overall argument as expressed in *Narrative Logic*. For whilst articulating his gardening metaphor on the basis that values are entailed (fixed) in facts, he is assuming the position of a *foundationalist*. However, in order to validate his *narrative substance* argument it was necessary for Ankersmit to demonstrate (as he did very satisfactorily) that the meanings and therefore the values attached to facts and statements depend on the manner in which they are organised (emplotted, troped, etc.) into narrative form. He thus concluded that 'there are no facts devoid of narrative interpretation in narratios [narratives]'.[71] This position is, of course, that of the *relativist* and it cannot coherently co-exist with a *foundationalist* point-of-view. These two oppositional/incommensurable positions, merged (apparently unnoticed by Ankersmit) into a single book, and the consequent textual incoherence/tension evident in it, no doubt contributed somewhat to its poor reception.

But, taking my argument a little further, I think that Ankersmit's adoption of the notion of the experimental garden of historiography constitutes his *first* tentative turn away from the implicit, inescapable logic of his own *narrative substance* . And it was this turn which was more confidently developed in *History and Tropology*

[68] Ankersmit. *Historical Representation*. p94. This citation is consistent with, although more succinctly stated than, Ankersmit's views as expressed in *Narrative Logic*. p242
[69] Ibid. p94
[70] The first-level enabling device being the belief in the possibility of a single definitive history.
[71] Ankersmit. *Narrative Logic*. p219

where, as I have tried to show, Ankersmit argued for a rejection of tropology and Kantian transcendentalism in exchange for (what I have argued was) his own idiosyncratic quasi-Romantic perception of the sublime. Ankersmit wanted to avoid Kantian transcendentalism and metaphor because together they effected an appropriation and thus a domestication (a mediation of only that which could be apprehended within the tropes) of reality. Instead of which Ankersmit wanted to grasp the "whole", in the raw, the past "plain", the pristine, the unprocessed and the unstructured, and he believed that his search for a non-Kantian, non-metaphorical form of historical knowledge was the way forward. For Ankersmit *only* this direction of enquiry would hold within it the potential to successfully avoid the hidden dangers of appropriation and thus truly (in his view) offer the possibility of a glimpse of the (Romantic) historical sublime. From this perspective Ankersmit, in a key sentence or two, re-defined the direction and purpose of his theoretical enquiries as the development of

> ....an alternative to a Kantian theory of history [which] should begin with the recognition that Kantian transcendentalism is primarily a theory of experience and of how experience is transformed into knowledge. So historical experience, the experience of the past, will be our natural point of departure.[72]

Now, at this juncture in Ankersmit's argument there is an extremely important point which needs to be made. It is this. Having already established that language is fundamentally metaphorical (this being, to again recall, the third essential pillar of Ankersmit's argument as proposed in *Narrative Logic*), it follows that Ankersmit's move towards experience (which is conditional on the rejection of metaphor) also entails the rejection of language. But, the bizarre idea that language can be (totally) disregarded or replaced by experience (sensation, etc.,) entails the dismissal of the meaningful world as we (humans) know it. The absurdity of holding this position rests on the understanding that we humans live in a rhetorical world of human making which is constituted in the language we use to describe it. Any *thing* that lies outside our capacity for its linguistic description could not be linguistically related to

[72] Ankersmit. *History and Tropology*. p18

other things and thus could not (as Richard Rorty argues) be talked of or thought of. Or, as Rorty's Nietzsche points out:

> That things possess a constitution in themselves quite apart from interpretation and subjectivity, is a quite idle hypothesis; it presupposes that interpretation and subjectivity are not essential, that a *thing* freed from all relationships would still be a *thing*.[73] [my emphasis]

Glossing Nietzsche, Rorty comments that when Nietzsche says that a thing conceived apart from all relationships would not be a thing (for us), he is in effect saying that since all language seems to be a matter of relating some things to other things, then what is not so related cannot be talked of or thought of. Lack of linguistic describability *means* lack of relations and hence the only access to the indescribable must, on this account, be a sort of direct awareness (perhaps of the sort that the mystic has with God). Much of the history of Western Philosophy, continues Rorty, from Plotinus and Meister Eckhart down to Husserl and Russell is the quest for such direct experience (the pursuit of reality "plain"). But this is an impossible quest for, as Plato recognised, the only way to escape from linguistic re-description is to access a kind of *absolute* knowledge unmediated by linguistic formulations. Thus to conceive of a reality "plain" (direct access to the real truth of things as they are/were) is to conceive of that which cannot be described and thus (this is the crucial point) cannot submit to re-description or, as Rorty puts it,

> ....is to escape from the linguistically expressible to the *ineffable*. Only the ineffable – what is not describable at all – cannot be described differently.[74]

This contradictory desire to access the ineffable logocentrically constitutes the motivational basis of metaphysics and also (it should be added) it effects the source of a certain style of mysticism – exactly that sort of mysticism that "leaks" into and informs Ankersmit's position as expressed in *Sublime Historical Experience* (the substance of my next chapter). However, that aside for now, and by way of a concluding observation on this matter, it is of crucial importance to note that it is precisely such a Nietzschian position that lies beneath White's own extremely Nietzschian/existentialist readings of the ineffable/inaccessible sublime (a constant

[73] Ibid. p111
[74] Ibid. p118

in White's thinking from his late teens/early twenties through to his eighties).[75] Accordingly, the point to be made and underlined here is that I do not think that this vital Nietzschean/Whitean insight ever entered into Ankersmit's own theorisations at all or, if it did, then it seems to have been forgotten *vis-à-vis* the very idea of sublime historical experience.

Returning now to my theme – my thesis on Ankersmit's developing position – one can see that his rejection of a metaphorical transcendentalist conception of history (in which 'the experience of the objects studied....counts for nothing'[76]) and his adoption of concepts of historical writing which take account of experience, can together be seen as the basis for, and indeed the substance of, his turn to experience. This turn will lead Ankersmit via the history of mentalities[77] in *History and Tropology* towards his own development in *Sublime Historical Experience* of

> ....a new theory of historical experience.....[which recognises] the authenticity of historical experience as a token of its willingness to abandon the pretensions of the transcendental self to familiarise the (historical) world....The notion of *historical sensation* as described by Goethe, Meinecke and Huizinga enables us to get a clearer view of what is involved in historical experience.....[and thus] the nostalgic experience of the past is proposed as the matrix for a satisfactory analysis of historical experience.[78]

This is the extract that both establishes a "bridge" to the next chapter and marks the completion of my account of Ankersmit's gradual shift in theoretical position from his early involvement with language up to the threshold of what eventually became an overwhelming engagement with (historical) experience.

Accordingly, let me now, finally, bring this section to a close with a brief résumé/account of Ankersmit's subplot which, as I have already pointed out, runs concurrently with (and interconnects with) his central arguments. This subplot is,

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[75] This is unquestionably the position that White has always taken concerning the *sublime*. See Jenkins, K., (1998). 'A Conversation with Hayden White' in *Literature and History* 7 no. 1:pp72-73

[76] Ankersmit. *History and Tropology*. p28

[77] For Ankersmit, the history of mentalities implements the movement against appropriation (and hence, by implication, the movement against Kantianism) and, furthermore (he says), it should be seen as a break with most historical writings of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But, his argument is not convincing since metaphorical appropriation is fundamental to the use of all language, and that includes the language of the history of mentalities.

[78] Ankersmit. *History and Tropology*. pp30-31

of course, largely evidenced through Ankersmit's various significant misrepresentations of White's work, misrepresentations which have perhaps been covered in enough detail already (in this and the previous chapter) such that it would be sufficient for me now to merely list below the most important of them, and then to suggest a plausible explanation for them.

The principal misrepresentations that I have in mind are those concerning the translation rule argument, the ambivalence charge upon which Ankersmit's controversial interpretation of *Metahistory* depends, White's alleged rejection of the tropes and Ankersmit's more recent misconstrual of White's actual account(s) of *figura*. In the closing paragraphs of Section Two of this chapter I offered a partial explanation for these matters, and I now offer for consideration an addition to that explanation which, in summary, comes down to this. Long before Ankersmit's intervention in the historical theory, White's new language-informed style of historical theory was largely completed and comprehensively "wrapped up" to the extent that there was little space left for any improvements on it. That is, there was no obvious room left for any fundamental additions or changes to what had already been said by White and, hence, Ankersmit found himself unable to make any significant and original contributions to narrativist historical theory during a *crucial* stage in its development. All he could do was add to, develop and promote what was already there and that, it would seem, was not enough for him.

With all of this in mind I can now put forward an overarching speculative explanatory proposal which actually comes in the form of a *spectre*, or more precisely in the already hinted at form of "a *spectre* of White". This proposal rests on the observation that Hayden White is (as I have, I think, already shown) omnipresent in Ankersmit's earlier theorisations to the extent that, at bottom, he might be shown to be articulating Ankersmit (Ankersmit speaks but we are listening to White). Perhaps, from this viewpoint, it is possible to see White (and his theoretical position) as the spectral embodiment of everything that Ankersmit found himself compelled (psychologically) to leave behind. Only a resolute dismissal of White (or rather, of that which he metonymically represented)

offered Ankersmit release from this spectre. Accordingly, perhaps subconsciously, this resolute dismissal of White affected/effected Ankersmit's description/redescription of White's position such that it might fall to his own arguments. On this reading White becomes Ankersmit's *bête noire* or haunting which he is driven to exorcise by whatever means he can find. However, whilst this is an interesting secondary thought, I now want to address my primary explanatory account of Ankersmit's turn from language to experience, again in a sometime résumé/summary fashion.

Section Six: An Explanation

At the outset it must be understood that the following argument/proposal is based on the assumption that Ankersmit has always harboured a deep seated need to retrieve the past in some real/authentic form. In order to adequately explain this need I must, with a momentary glance towards the substance of my next chapter, draw on the endnotes to page 281 of *Sublime Historical Experience*. Page 281 itself refers to Ankersmit's 'fascination since early adolescence.... [with]..... a world we have lost'.[79] The world referred to here is that which preceded and was traumatically terminated by the French revolution of 1789. Without wanting to "trespass" on the content of my next chapter, it should be sufficient for my purpose to simply draw attention to Ankersmit's following very personal recollections of his early years:

> The transition from childhood to early adolescence on the one hand and [my] nostalgia for the eighteenth century on the other are, for me, most intimately linked. I must have transferred my feelings about the loss of my happy childhood days to 1789 – , and I am well aware of what things made me do this at that time in my life. Undoubtedly this is why I can now still feel the awareness of what we lost in 1789 with the intensity with which one experiences the great losses in one's personal life and why, for me, 1789 is still the historical event par excellence. This also moulded my relationship to the past, and this book is, in fact, an attempt to come to terms with the pain I can still feel about 1789. Needless to say, I fully recognize that all this is peculiar to me and that I will not share my attitude toward the past with many others. On the other hand, was *History*, as we presently know it, not born from the rupture of the great revolution from the West's childhood days of the Ancien

[79] Ankersmit. *Sublime Historical Experience*. p281

> Régime? Is *History* – again, as we presently know it – not the offspring of the unhappy marriage of past and present that was celebrated in 1789?[80]

Ankersmit makes other similar references to his childhood, but I think that one can already see here the origin of his passion to seek out and "know" the past. But, as we have seen, with the publication of *Narrative Logic* (which turned out to be so good in terms of its general conclusions) no empirical epistemologically-striving history could ever again be taken as the narrative embodiment of any kind of truth, knowledge, essence, meaning, purpose and so on, of the past. Ankersmit (following, for sure, in the theoretical "wake" of Hayden White) had in the course of writing *Narrative Logic* systematically and brilliantly deconstructed history. He had indeed opened up and laid bare the essential nature of the narrative form, described its *cognitive core* and irrevocably severed all epistemological ties between the form of the historical narrative and the past which it was supposed to adequately represent. Thus history, which had once appeared to embrace the possibility of the discovery of truth and knowledge about the past, was at once revealed as an empty vessel available for requisition by anyone for any purpose – an autonomous internally referenced imaginative construct, underdetermined by and categorically different from the past itself. Ankersmit had, in effect, reduced academic modernist histories to ruins and, in so doing, he had demonstrated that there was no possible access to the past by this particular route.

As a direct consequence of the efficacy of his own demolition job, Ankersmit then found himself confronted with an *impasse* for, as I have shown, he desperately wanted and needed some form of authentic access to the past, but there was now no such path to the past through history – he had thoroughly and quite literally critiqued that idea to death. Ankersmit, therefore, needed to find his way to the past by some other route, a route which would *not* succumb to the same devastating critique with which he had so effectively demolished history. This is the "pivotal" point of my explanatory argument and all matters concerning Ankersmit's new theoretical position, his misrepresentations and his often impenetrable logic, etc., can arguably

[80] Ibid. p442 (*endnote 25*)

be taken to link directly back to this overriding single consideration. Accordingly, Ankersmit's continuing search for a solution to what had become his own dilemma was essentially governed by the firm belief that only a non-Kantian, non-metaphorical link with the past *of the direct experiential kind* (experiences of the past received directly from it in the form of sensations, feelings, etc.), could eventually lead to a meaningful engagement with the past unmediated (and this is the crucial point) by language.

Now, reflecting on the plausibility of this explanation, all I can say is that for me there really seems to be no other available. In its favour it takes into account Ankersmit's initial need to really know the past, his (somewhat ironic) demolition of the only (once seen as possible) path to it and the consequent search for another way, his endless theoretical posturing in support of (what I am arguing is) a 'lost' cause and his extraordinary interpretations of the works of others – interpretations which he put to work in the furtherance of his own idiosyncratic cause However, in order to balance the account, I have to say that there is no doubt at all in my own mind that Ankersmit's early contributions to historical theory (albeit developments of original ideas) were inspirational and significant. Furthermore, I can and I do appreciate exactly what it was that Ankersmit was trying to achieve in the writing of *History and Tropology* and in his subsequent publications. But, and this is a big but, there are arguably major problems with the fundamental presuppositions which Ankersmit brought to his argument for historical experience and, as I shall argue in the following chapter, his overall position on historical experience collapses under the combined weight of these and yet more unworkable arguments to come. This collapse, in a sense, reflects back onto my explanatory proposal as laid out here. That proposal being, in essence, that Ankersmit's insatiable need for the authentic past, both *against* his own logic of *Narrative Logic* (which he should have observed) and *because* of it (since it blocked his access to the past through mainstream history), drove him towards and up an experiential *cul-de-sac* for, as we shall see in the next chapter, experience could never have given him the "real" history that he sought. And it is this argument which in my view, of course, represent the key to Ankersmit's controversial departure from the mainstream of historical theory.

Before bringing this chapter to a close it is worth noting that there are arguably two essential (central) problems that Ankersmit carried with him from *History and Tropology* into his argument for sublime historical experience. In the first place he failed to recognise that the past as an object of study is constituted *only* in its language of description (as convincingly argued by Hayden White and others). Thus it could not be assumed to continue to exist outside language as would be necessary if it were to function in Ankersmit's new theory which rejected *language* in exchange for *experience*. And the second problem, which in a sense parallels the first, is that Ankersmit also neglected to question the idea that meaningful experiences themselves could actually exist outside language. Of course, sensations/feelings/moods in isolation can so exist, but without concepts of understanding (which are language dependant) they cannot constitute experiences[81]. Ankersmit's new theoretical argument, as he crossed the threshold of experience, was thus to be considerably weakened by the omission of these two important considerations – it was off to a very bad start. However, for the moment, further investigation of these two problems can rest pending their more detailed consideration in the following chapter.

So, having made all these points, and also taking into account my views as expressed in this and the preceding chapter, it will by now have become apparent that it is my position that the writing of *Sublime Historical Experience* could never have been anything but a "doomed" project. Nevertheless, an analysis of the book is essential to my thesis since it represents the completion of Ankersmit's venture – his 'Journey from Language to Experience' – and it is, therefore, to *Sublime Historical Experience* that I must now turn in order to complete my story, or perhaps I should say my proposal on how best to read Ankersmit. However, before doing so there is to be one final concluding paragraph.

This very final conclusion comes in the form of a kind of global contextualisation to date; a "birds-eye" view of the plot so far. In the first three chapters of my thesis I have tried to trace a line of development from an Ankersmit at his very best to an

[81] This, Kant's point, will be explored in the following chapter.

Ankersmit moving towards his very worst and, it is to be hoped, that following my analysis of his writings one can now see how and why my portrayal of Ankersmit has been formulated in this particular way. In sum, these three chapters can be seen to describe and critique the combination of unusual, generally controversial, arguments which carried Ankersmit towards the threshold of a new land wherein the solution to his dilemma (his *impasse*) might be found – the land of sublime historical experience. The next chapter examines exactly what he does when he gets there.

Chapter Four

Sublime Historical Experience

In September 1994 Frank Ankersmit presented a remarkable paper at an International Conference in Uppsala, Sweden. This Conference had been organised by the Commission of Historiography under the title 'The Past of History', and one of its primary functions was to analyse philosophically the intellectual basis for the study of history. 'Can We Experience the Past?' was Ankersmit's choice of title for his unique contribution to this analysis and it is the substance of his paper, or more precisely the suppositions on which this substance rests, that I want to initially consider before setting out the broad structure of the final chapter of my thesis.

First of all, however, I should point out that I have described Ankersmit's paper as remarkable because, as touched upon in the previous chapter, the new style of historical theory proposed in it was distinctly different from the also new (but nevertheless always language governed) exploratory proposals advanced in and especially towards the end of *History and Tropology*. I am thinking here in particular of Ankersmit's excursions into the history of mentalities and micro-stories[1] and in general his search for a non-Kantian, non-metaphorical form of historical writing; such endeavours can only be language bound. By contrast, Ankersmit's new theoretical style was predicated on the notion that it was only through the *rejection* of all forms of mediation – language, textualism, context, etc. – that the past might be accessed *plain* in the form of direct, and therefore unsullied, authentic historical experiences. Furthermore – and this is the main point that I wish to stress at this juncture – Ankersmit's Uppsala paper constituted his first comprehensive account of unmediated direct historical experience; in fact,

[1] Later Ankersmit expressed his reservations in relation to this particular line of enquiry, for in 2003 he said: 'I now feel that I may have been too generous in my interpretation of the micro-stories, that the intellectual import of the micro-stories is negligible and that the fashion was little more than a temporary eccentricity' (see Ankersmit, F. R. (2003). 'Invitation to Historians' in *Rethinking History* 7 no .3:p428).

Ankersmit's account was so comprehensive that his later publication, *Sublime Historical Experience*,[2] can be taken as a 480 page expansion and development of it.

In Section Two of his paper (subtitled 'The Nature of Historical Experience'), Ankersmit argued that whilst historical experience had rarely been the subject of discussion or debate amongst historical theorists, it was nevertheless possible to find an adequate account of it (in fact, he says, the most complete account of it) in the works of the Dutch cultural historian Johan Huizinga. Although Ankersmit found Huizinga's account of the phenomenology of historical experience to be 'regrettably sketchy',[3] he nevertheless believed it to be 'fundamentally correct....[and therefore]....the obvious point of departure ....for his thesis'.[4] But, and this diminishes Ankersmit's argument somewhat, Huizinga himself did not speak of *historical experience* at all but rather, drawing on the works of the novelist and literary theorist Lodewijk van Deijssel, he spoke of *historical sensation*. However, wishing to avoid terminological confusion, Ankersmit preferred to discuss his variant of Huizinga's historical sensation under what he considered to be 'the more neutral term "historical experience"'.[5] It thus seems, from the very outset, that Ankersmit was – through his change of terminology – performing a crucial but unexplored, and apparently unnoticed, conceptual leap from the notion of *sensation* to the quite different notion of *experience* whilst continuing to use Huizinga's sensation based theory as exemplar for his own theory of experience. Experience, as Kant long ago pointed out, is 'the unification of a sensible object with a concept of understanding',[6] and intuitions (or sensations) without concepts of understanding are "blind". Accordingly, it follows that sensations *alone* cannot constitute experiences, rather they can be seen as providing, as it were, the occasion for possible experiences. Seen this way, Ankersmit's apparently innocuous shift from the term sensation to his preferred term experience is anything but neutral. Nevertheless,

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[2] The distinction that Ankersmit's makes between 'historical experience' and what he calls its variant 'sublime historical experience' will be fully explained later in this chapter.
[3] Ankersmit, F. R., (1996). 'Can We Experience the Past' in *History-Making: The Intellectual and Social Formation of a Discipline (Proceedings of an International Conference, Uppsala, September 1994).* Torstendahl, R., Veit-Brause, I., (Eds.) Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International. p50
[4] Ibid. p50
[5] Ibid. p50
[6] Curtis, N., (2001). *Against Autonomy: Lyotard, Judgement and Action.* Aldershot: Ashgate Pub. p35

drawing on Huizinga's description of historical sensation, Ankersmit proposed his own theory of historical experience which he summarised in four points as laid out below:

1) It is effected through quite insignificant cultural objects.
2) It is of short duration (a matter of seconds or at most of a few minutes), and it resists contextualisation. In fact, Ankersmit went further and described it as a completely de-contextualised experience with a high and impenetrable fence around it, and this de-contextualisation on the side of the subject is returned by a de-contextualisation of the object.
3) It comes unannounced and unexpectedly and cannot be repeated at will. It is thus a gift of the moment which the historian undergoes rather than provokes.
4) It has to be distinguished from historical insight. For in the case of historical experience the historian's mind is *formed* by the past itself whereas historical insight is a *formation* of the past by the historian. However, Ankersmit explains, historical experience can be the source of historical insight and in so doing he provides a link, it seems to me, between historical experience and the practice of history.[7]

These points, listed on page 50 of his paper and derived from Huizinga's discourse on historical sensation, together constitute what Ankersmit claimed in his paper to be a *definition* of his concept of historical experience. There is nothing more in the paper to support this claim except for brief anecdotal remarks elicited from the writings of Herder, Meinecke, Goethe, Byron, Ruskin, Proust, Burckhardt and others, who are said to have described events which could be construed, and are construed by Ankersmit, in such a way as to fall within his own so-called definition

[7] This is a point that is well worth a comment, for Ankersmit insists in his preface to *Sublime Historical Experience* that his thesis '....has no bearing on what historians do and on the question of why they do what they do... [and the kinds of issues discussed in his book].... are as useless as they are meaningless from the perspective of the practice of historical writing' (pp xv-xvi). Yet, in his Uppsala paper he states, contrary-wise, that 'self-evidently....historical experience can be a source of historical insight' (p52) and he defines historical insight as '....intuitions of how knowledge of the past can be organized and presented in a historical study' (p51). Now, the organization and presentation of the past in the form of history is precisely what historians try to do – this is their primary sphere of activity – so it would appear that on this matter Ankersmit is (without apparently noticing it) setting up two contradictory arguments /positions.

of historical experience – a definition which turns out to be just a brief summarisation of effects and therefore not a substantive definition at all. It thus seems to me that everything[8] that has grown out of Ankersmit's embryonic, putative notion of the existence of historical experience, including his position with regard to sublime historical experience which he claimed is a variant of it,[9] refers back to this terminological muddle which, in its turn, rests on what is (by Ankersmit's own admission) a summarisation of a 'regrettably sketchy account' of Huizinga's own very personal and imaginative belief that he could receive authentic sensations (not experiences) directly from the past.

Anticipating objections to his claim that the vanished past can be experienced in the present, Ankersmit added to his descriptive account of it the explanatory observation that, since historical experience is ordinarily occasioned by some object from the past that is given to us here and now, then,

> ....it seems a perfectly reasonable assumption that in these objects an *aura* of the past has been preserved all through the centuries and that the subject of historical experience suddenly becomes aware of [this preserved *aura*]. Hence, the notion of historical experience does not necessarily require a sudden disappearance of the dimension of time or some mystical union with the past.[10]

Although Ankersmit failed to reference this statement to the works of Walter Benjamin in this particular paper, it is undoubtedly (and is so footnoted in his book *Sublime Historical Experience*) a reference to Benjamin's essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction'[11] and the notion of *aura* contained in it.

Now, to draw these various points together, Ankersmit claimed in his paper that a historical experience is a rare, short durational 'gift of the moment' to the historian. It comes unannounced and ordinarily relies for its reception on the historian's particular sensitivity to an *aura* which, Ankersmit affirms, can reasonably be

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[8] The word 'everything' can arguably be extended to include amongst other things *presence* and *parallel processing* (both to be discussed later in this chapter) and indeed the establishment of 'The Centre for Metahistory', Groningen, set up for the purpose of investigating all these putative phenomena.
[9] Ankersmit, F. R., (2005). *Sublime Historical Experience*. California: Stanford University Press. p127
[10] Ankersmit. 'Can We Experience the Past'. p55
[11] Benjamin, W., (1969). 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' in *Illuminations*. Arendt, H., (Ed.) Zohn, H., (Trans.). New York: Schocken Books. pp217-252

assumed to be attached to whatever cultural object from the past it is that effects such experiential transmissions. And finally, that historical experience is necessarily a *de-contextualised* experience; that is, an experience outside the contexts of both subject and object.

This argument of Ankersmit's underlies and informs his theoretical position as articulated in *Sublime Historical Experience* and thus constitutes the footing upon which he proposed his notion of sublime historical experience. However, as the basis for an argument in support of the existence of historical experience it already appears to be slender indeed. For there seems to be nothing in it, or its anecdotal corroborative evidence, that can possibly lend support to the idea that a small number of appropriately gifted historians can step outside their own contexts and then receive de-contextualised experiences directly from the past by way of *auras* (in the case of cultural objects from the past given to us in the present) or by way of *metonymy*[12] (in the case of monuments, texts or whatever). To me it has the appearance of a flawed argument which rests on the unlikely supposition that the subject of historical experience (that is the historian) can, by some means or other not explained, achieve his/her own de-contextualisation (de-subjectification) at the moment of experiential reception. For, to be de-contextualised is quite literally to be *outside context*, to be outside what we are or outside that which inscribes us and without which we are pre-nascent again. Much more plausible is the argument that every individual embodies and is articulated by a context-bound condition which is not of his/her choosing. As Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth explains:

> ....individuals do not produce ideas or cultural systems; ideas and systems are there already and individuals .... get born into them just as they are born into a language and into an entire set of assumptions about identity, conduct and How Things Work.[13]

Surely, there can be no experience of the sort that Ankersmit describes outside or prior to this defining/governing context, for it is only within such a context that the

[12] The transmission process involved in historical experience was eventually developed to include a form of non-*aura* dependant *metonymic* transfer of feelings, intuitions etc. from past to present. This matter will also be investigated later in this chapter.
[13] Ermarth, E. D., (2001). 'Beyond History' in *Rethinking History* 5 no.2:p196

conditions for the possibility of categories of understanding can be said to reside. This and other related considerations will be addressed in more detail in the last section of this chapter.

However, I want to leave this for the moment and turn to address another matter; namely, that were Ankersmit's phenomenon of historical experience to be accepted, then certain questions would seem to arise in relation to it. For instance, what contributions to history and historical insight can be attributed to historical experience? What is to be the role of historical experience in the future doing of history? And, above all, how exactly is a very personal and idiosyncratic experience, based on sensations and feelings, to find its validation in a discipline which trades in consensually agreed empirical data and representational proposals? These are reasonable and legitimate questions to raise, not least because it was Ankersmit himself who chose to prefix and thereby describe the experiences in question with the adjective 'historical' yet who then, somewhat perversely I think, closed down all debate on this matter by arguing that the investigation of historical experience could *not* be 'an appropriate task for a historical theorist'.[14]

On reflection, it therefore seems to me that Ankersmit's notion of historical experience (as he himself describes it here) might almost be seen as a form of religion established on the basis of the four primary points listed above which, understood thus, would then be seen to constitute its foundational beliefs or its absolute presuppositions. There is nothing in Ankersmit's position which might be seen to lie beneath these presuppositions: no validating theory, nothing that can be measured or fixed, albeit even temporarily, such that it might become part of the broader theoretical discourse about the past. Ankersmit is simply asking us to believe absolutely in his four descriptive points. Or, to rephrase from a slightly different perspective, one could only be a "true" follower of Ankersmit (on this matter) on the basis of the total acceptance of each of these arguably quasi-mystical propositions which, in order to support any favourable reading of *Sublime Historical*

[14] Ankersmit. 'Can We Experience The Past'. p55

Experience, must necessarily operate as the book's unquestioned, foundational presuppositions.

In this short preamble I have only referred to the underlying descriptive premises governing Ankersmit's theory of historical experience as expressed in his Uppsala paper. The rest of that paper contained other dependant components of Ankersmit's argument which, along with his founding premises, he eventually expanded/ developed into book form as *Sublime Historical Experience*. All of the principal elements of these various arguments will be critiqued in the following four sections of this chapter under the subtitles: 'Section One: Cultural Trauma and the Historian', 'Section Two: Obsession or Theory?', 'Section Three: Presence: A New Paradigm' and 'Section Four: A Misleading Title'. But, before proceeding, I must take a moment to first clarify a terminological matter and then, second, explain my approach to my own reading of Ankersmit's text in this specific instance in a little more detail.

With regard to terminology, then, it will be evident that Ankersmit's thesis can only be properly (and fairly) assessed on the basis of his own definitions of the terms that he uses, and it is for this reason that I must clarify, with reference to Ankersmit's developed thesis as laid out in *Sublime Historical Experience*, the distinction that he himself makes between the three key terms 'objective historical experience', 'subjective historical experience' and 'sublime historical experience'. Dealing with these three in order, Ankersmit said that he used the term 'objective historical experience' for 'referring to how people in the past itself....experienced their world themselves'[15] and, furthermore, that this form of historical experience, already well documented, would not be part of his exposition. However, 'subjective historical experience' (also shortened to 'historical experience' both by Ankersmit in his book and by me in this thesis) would be subject to examination and it should, Ankersmit argues

> ....primarily be situated in a context in which the past has already acquired its independence from the present: There is a past that is investigated by the

[15] Ankersmit. *Sublime Historical Experience*. p264

> historian and, then, suddenly, seemingly out of nowhere, may arise this sudden fusion of past and present .... it is an experience of the past by the historian.....[and] is a direct encounter not only with the past in its quasi-noumenal attire but also with the *aura* of a world we have lost.[16]

However, 'sublime historical experience' is the historian's own experience

> .... of a past breaking away from the present. The past is then born from the historian's traumatic experience of having entered a new world and from the awareness of irreparably having lost a previous world forever. In such cases the historian's mind is, so to say, the scene on which the drama of world history is enacted. The fate of a civilization will then have its resonance in the historian's mind.....instances of sublime historical experience have been decisive in the evolution of the West's historical consciousness (and hence in the writing of history itself). "The wisdom of the world" is then primarily expressed by historians....[consequently] the historian then is a civilization's Delphic oracle through whose mouth the gods announce their will and speak to all who try to recover their way in the present. These are the most tragic moments for historians, but also the moments of their greatest triumphs. Historians will then feel themselves part of what they are describing – *viz.* this divergence of present and past – and their desperation about the loss of a familiar world will then motivate their writing and inspire in them their profoundest thoughts. What they then write about their civilization's fate, about its having been thrown into a vortex of unfathomable powers, is then, in the last analysis, an expression of the historian's own experience of the past.[17]

Thus described it appears – and this is a key distinction to keep in mind – that, unlike 'historical experience' (which arises out of a sudden and momentary fusion of past and present – a transient closure of the "gap" between past and present), 'sublime historical experience' actually takes place and unfolds on the 'scene' of the historians own mind (a style of re-enactment) and therefore manifests itself as an expression of the historian's *own* experience of the past; in this sense there is *no* temporal "gap" to close. Now, this distinction between the two phenomena is surely one of kind rather than degree, and it is partly[18] for this reason that I would question Ankersmit's assumption that the latter phenomenon is a variant of the former. However, my purpose here is to clarify Ankersmit's own distinction between these two phenomena ahead of Section One in which the detailed nature of sublime

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[16] Ibid. pp264-265

[17] Ibid. p265

[18] There are other differences (to be discussed later in this Chapter) which can only enforce this argument for a category distinction between these two variants of historical experience. Nevertheless, Ankersmit argues throughout *Sublime Historical Experience* that the latter is a variant of the former.

historical experience will be explained (revealing yet another distinction between these two types of historical experience).

The second introductory point that I want to make is that when reading any text there is always a temptation to start at the beginning, end at the end and take one's compass, for the purpose of analysis and critique, from any identifiable introduction to that text. I used this approach in my Chapter Three analysis of *History and Tropology* precisely because it was in Ankersmit's Introduction to the book that he sought to coherently pull together his chosen, disparate collection of essays. But in *Sublime Historical Experience* Ankersmit's Introduction fails to serve this purpose, for in it he confronts the reader with too many false starts, too many different definitions of his project (all of which sit uneasily together), thus precluding any clear idea of precisely what it is that he is going to be doing and saying.[19] By way of illustrating this point here is just a short selection of statements drawn from the book's Introduction:

> ....the crucial question is whether it is (historical) experience that may enable us to break through the walls of "the prison house of language" – and this is the main question to be addressed in this book.....the main topic of this book is to contribute to the resuscitation of the notion of experience from its apparent death, to explore and to explain the parallelism of the relevant developments in historical writing and philosophy, and, more specifically, to show what lessons historical writing can teach the philosopher.....the claim that there is a variant of experience preceding and transcending questions of truth and falsity is precisely the main thesis of this book.....this book is mainly an attempt to do away with all the (quasi-)transcendentalist conceptions we may find not only in tropology but also in hermeneutics, deconstruction, (post-)structuralism, or semiotics.....more specifically this book is a rehabilitation of the romanticist's world of moods and feelings as constitutive of how we relate to the past.....[and finally]What is the experience of the past underlying the language used by the historian? That is the question asked in this book.[20]

In addition to this (what one might call) uncertainty in relation to narrative direction, it soon becomes apparent that a straightforward reading of the book from beginning

[19] This point was also raised in Chorell, T. G., (2006). 'F. R. Ankersmit and the Historical Sublime' in *History of Human Sciences* 19 no. 4: p92

[20] Ankersmit. *Sublime Historical Experience*. pp4-14.

to end presents even further difficulties since Ankersmit does not enter into a substantial discussion of its ostensible subject matter, sublime historical experience (as indicated by its title), until reaching his very last chapter (that is Chapter Eight) some 317 pages into the text. It would seem to me, therefore, that any analysis of the book might sensibly first address the content of its last chapter. Accordingly, in Section One of this chapter I initially examine the meaning of *collective* sublime historical experience as described by Ankersmit in his Chapter Eight. I then look at its implications and impact, as construed by Ankersmit, at the level of the *individual* historian (in this instance necessarily drawing on further references scattered throughout the book) and I also reflect on the confusion that arises out of Ankersmit's conflation of what are arguably different considerations.

I should point out here that Ankersmit's conflation of these two phenomena – the collective and the individual – has already been noted by Keith Jenkins who, finding himself initially dissatisfied with his own critique of *Sublime Historical Experience*, finally managed to put his finger on the problem as he saw it. This is how he described his thoughts on the matter:

> ....slowly, I began to get it. For whilst I had initially thought that I was dissatisfied because I hadn't managed to adequately *connect* two things that inform Ankersmit's text – sublime experience (as the historians existential experience of the sublime) and collective S.H.E. – as I reflected on this I began to realise, too late in the day, that these two elements did not actually (and certainly did not necessarily) connect up any way: that the historian's experience of the sublime and S.H.E. are totally different, separate things. In fact, what we have here are two books in one. For although on the surface and from the title – *Sublime Historical Experience* – it looks as if that's what the book is about – namely the collective feeling that a civilisation experiences when it undergoes a rupture so profound that in its semantic free-fall everything collapses irretrievably – in fact the ***bulk*** of the work is actually on the experiences historians (apparently) feel when 'the past' they thought they knew becomes strange as all that was solid indeed 'melts into air'. And it is *this* phenomenon that the book is primarily about; it is this which constitutes the vast bulk of the first seven chapters of this eight-chaptered text.....so, once I had realized Ankersmit's two-in-one, then my unease about being able to convey the joined-up nature of the book or capture its coherence vanished as I

> recognised that the book was never coherent in the first place; that it is about two very different phenomena which just cannot be elided.[21]

Taken together, both of the above mentioned unwarranted elisions of ideas (first the conflation of the notion of *experience* with that of *sensation* and second the conflation of the idea of a *collective* historical experience with that of an *individual,* existential historical experience) arguably effected a distortion in, and substantially diminished the force of, Ankersmit's thesis. I will return to these matters in more detail later. However, to conclude my account of the layout of this current chapter, having established in Section One the nature of and the, for me, irreducible distinction between collective and individual historical experience, I then consider its significance for the historian. In Section Two I evaluate Ankersmit's very personal and idiosyncratic obsession with a particularly negative and traumatic notion of sublime historical experience, whilst Section Three deals with the closely related phenomena *presence* and *parallel processing*. In Section Four I then attempt to dismantle the whole idea of sublime historical experience which, I argue, is not and cannot be historical at all. Rather, it would appear to be a phenomenon of an *existential* kind and is I think more suited to – if it suits anything at all – the field of memory studies.

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[21] Jenkins, K., (2009). 'Cohen *contra* Ankersmit' in *At the Limits of History: Essays on Theory and Practice.* London: Routledge. pp311-312. In the same essay Jenkins suggested (and I am noting this as a point of interest which might add something to the more general understanding of Ankersmit's motivational drive towards the sublime) that one might take as Ankersmit's governing thematic

> ....something like Nietzsche's dictum that we need lies in order to live, and that these 'lies' can be seen as the various ways in which social formations have constituted 'reality' - and especially the way they have expressed this through language. And I think Ankersmit shares Nietzsche's view that if we stripped away these carapaces of the real ('reality effects') to reveal 'bare life' then without our usual fictive, fabular shelters, we would be quite literally exposed to the nature of actuality plain before human beings got at it and (contingently) real-ised it.

But Ankersmit's sublime thus realised, Jenkins continued, was and is an angst-ridden and terrifying sublime which failed to register the positive, expectant dimension of Nietzsche's own thinking. Nevertheless, Ankersmit would have us follow his argument (this being his contribution of a form of *authenticity* to the discipline of history) in order that we might also experience and benefit from a sublime (albeit of his own idiosyncratic kind) which would otherwise be denied us by Nietzsche's '....soothing tissue of lies (linguistic/textual) which allow us to pass through life as if sleepwalking', as Jenkins put it. My point here being that from this perspective Ankersmit's self appointed task would have become clear to him, he would tear away from the past all those carapaces of textualisation in order to reveal it "plain" or, as Ankersmit himself expressed it, he would 'break through the thick crusts of effective history and meet history in its quasi-noumenal nakedness'(Ankersmit. *Sublime Historical Experience*. p277).

A very final point; a reminder. On page seven of my Introduction I said that in Chapter Four I would try to adopt a more discursive/impressionistic style of writing (whilst not entirely losing an analytical "edge") rather than the expository and analytical style of the preceding chapters, and I now need to remind the reader of the consequences of this change. In order to do so I refer to my structuring of Chapter One where I tried to outline the whole of Ankersmit's *narrative substance* argument (the logic of *Narrative Logic*) before later, especially in Chapter Two, concentrating in detail on its parts. However, by contrast, in this current chapter I deal with Ankersmit's *Sublime Historical Experience* not chapter by chapter outlining the whole, but by concentrating on those aspects or parts of it – and *only* on those aspects or parts of it – which serve the purpose of my thesis; that is, to show that Ankersmit's journey from language to experience is a lost *historical* cause (a cause that loses history along the way, displacing it into memory studies). My treatment of Ankersmit's text in this chapter is therefore deliberately impressionistic in the sense that these *parts* are pulled together to give weight to my thesis, not to give a general reading of *Sublime Historical Experience*.... though I think that such a general reading would not subvert my thesis.

Section One: Cultural Trauma and the Historian

In the introduction to this chapter which you have just read, I focused my attention on three of Ankersmit's unsatisfactory (in my view) theoretical assumptions. These are (1) that the notions of *sensation* and *experience* may be unproblematically conflated, (2) that a *description*, in this case of historical experience, can be taken as an *explanation* of it and (3) that *collective* sublime historical experience, as he himself describes it, can properly be seen as a variant of his concept of *individual* historical experience. The first two of these essentially unexamined presuppositions were brought by Ankersmit directly into his expanded thesis (as laid out in *Sublime Historical Experience*) and, as a consequence, they can be seen to have informed and to some extent governed his argument therein. The third matter mentioned above, which disturbs the coherence of Ankersmit's general position in relation to historical experience of both kinds, will be further scrutinized below. However, first

I am going to turn to yet another of Ankersmit's unexamined presupposition (touched upon towards the end of the previous chapter) which, arguably, can also be seen to lie beneath and govern the style of argument which he presents in support of his proposal on sublime historical experience. I am here referring to Ankersmit's evident belief that (human) reality (not *actuality* but *reality*) is prior to language (or does not presuppose it) and that, in consequence, the real and language can be treated as discrete entities. He plainly stated his position thus:

> It certainly needs the philosopher's propensity to dogma and to intellectualisation to sincerely believe that a pre- or non-linguistic experience of reality would be impossible. As Schusterman most perceptively comments:
>
> > We philosophers fail to see this because, disembodied talking-heads that we are, the only form of experience we recognize and legitimate is linguistic: thinking, talking, writing. But neither we nor the language which admittedly helps shape us could survive without the unarticulated background of pre-reflective, non-linguistic experience and understanding.
>
> I could not agree more.... [22]

Ankersmit then moved on to conclude that 'the ultimate truth we can have of the world is a truth in which the world "exposes" itself to us free from all context'.[23] And in so doing he is undoubtedly proposing that the world of *human* reality (the "real" of *our* species which is the only world that we humans can possibly know) can be revealed to us in the form of a context free, authentic experience.[24] That is to say, authenticity unmediated by language and thus free from, or prior to, language. But, of course, this language/reality position assumed by Ankersmit is not (I think) generally accepted and should, for clarification, be set against the positions adopted by other philosophers/theorist in the same general discursive field. For this purpose I have selected four such individuals (Hayden White, Jacques Derrida, Richard Rorty and Paul Ricoeur) not least because they all make frequent appearances in Ankersmit's various theoretical arguments and one can, therefore, reasonably

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[22] Ankersmit. *Sublime Historical Experience*. p254 (and Ankersmit's inset quote, Schusterman, R., (1992). *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers. p128

[23] Ibid. p257

[24] The reader will have noticed at this point in Ankersmit's argument that his notion of 'truth' appears to have been elided with his notion of 'authentic experience' which, as he elsewhere claims, is not *in itself* truth generating. This problem will be further discussed and referenced on page 205 (footnote 1).

presume that Ankersmit is *au fait* with their various positions on this particular matter; positions which I now briefly summarise.

As already noted, White – in his Introduction to *Tropics of Discourse* (and one should bear in mind here that this publication of 1985 was informed by White's *Metahistory* of 1973 which was, in its turn, an expansion of ideas expressed in 'The Burden of History' right back in 1966) – figuratively represented the tropological use of language as 'the shadow from which all realistic discourse tries to flee'.[25] This flight was seen by White as futile because realism in discourse arises out of tropological language use, and he went on to explain (also noted) that 'tropic is the process by which all discourse *constitutes* the objects which it pretends only to describe realistically and analyse objectively'.[26] On this view it would appear that reality, as the subject of discourse, is inextricably imbedded in tropological language use and, as such, can be taken as a performative product of that tropology.

Derrida's position as succinctly expressed by one of his former students, the French philosopher Jean-Luc Marion, is that we simply do not have and cannot have

> ....access to reality apart from our engagement in language. There are not first things presented to consciousness, that are then matched up with signs to represent them, but always and only signs that refer to other signs or resonate as symbols in a web of meaning. Reality is not what is present in or behind the signs, but effectively remains constructed by them as text. In other words, reality is always and already mediated: we inhabit a symbolic order.[27]

On this understanding it is not possible for human beings to stand outside the human system of meaning (which Derrida refers to as 'the text'), for we are always and already implicated in that system (we are 'always in a text already').

Rorty's position (also already noted in previous discussions in this thesis) is one which takes the view that, following Nietzsche, one must break absolutely with the notion that things have a constitution in themselves outside of all relationships, such relationships being expressed in systems of meaning (or language). Thus, for Rorty as well, the "real" is constituted in language and language 'goes all the way down'.

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[25] White, H., (1978). *Tropics of Discourse*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press. p2
[26] Ibid. p2
[27] Horner, H., (2005). *Jean-Luc Marion:A Theological Introduction*. Burlington VT: Ashgate Pub. p43

And finally Ricoeur, whose three volumes under the title *Time and Narrative*[28] (described by Ankersmit as a magisterial 'landmark in the philosophy of history'),[29] and his *Rule of Metaphor*[30] which preceded this triple volume work, recognise the 'power of the metaphorical utterance to redescribe a reality inaccessible to direct description'.[31]

Now, the crucial point here is that Ankersmit has taken a position on the nature of reality which can be seen to radically contradict these four alternative theoretical positions, such positions being drawn from philosophers/theorists who Ankersmit himself introduced into his own theoretical arguments for various purposes, whilst ignoring the supremely important point on which they all appear to agree. Namely, that what constitutes the *real* world for us humans is a real (a reality effect) made meaningful by language. Ankersmit's apparent disregard for this if not identical at least collective position is further compounded when one takes into account a wider perspective, for it is surely the case that *the complicity of language* in what we think we know as *the real* is accepted amongst a much broader group of prominent philosophers. It was, for instance, accepted by Jean-François Lyotard who, as Geoffrey Bennington pointed out, took the position that

> ....[r]eality is neither simply given and awaiting more-or-less adequate transcription, nor is it magically produced by a demiurgic act of creation on the part of a speaker, but is an unstable state attributed to referents on the basis of operations of nomination, ostension and description..... Reality is established as the result of playing a language-game with specifiable component parts.[32]

And by Roland Barthes too, who writes that there is no 'other side'[33] to language; there is no autonomous reality which is merely relayed by language. These same general assumptions were also made by the later Ludwig Wittgenstein (whose latter works influenced Lyotard's position), Elizabeth Ermarth, Judith Butler, Ernesto

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[28] Ricoeur, P., (1983 vol. 1, 1990 vol. 2/3). *Time and Narrative*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
[29] Ankersmit. *History and Tropology*. p68
[30] Ricoeur, P., (1986). *Rule of Metaphor*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
[31] Ricoeur, P., *Time and Narrative vol. 1*, p. xi.
[32] Bennington, G., (1988). *Lyotard: Writing the Event*. New York: Columbia University Press. p121
[33] Barthes, R., (1977). *Image, Music, Text*. New York: Hill and Wang. p30

Laclau, much of the work of Jean Baudrillard and many others. In fact, such anti-foundational/post-structuralist positions are now common in our intellectual culture.

In short, there is a substantial authoritative weight behind this specific proposition concerning the relationship between language and reality. Surely (as a sometime postmodern thinker) Ankersmit should have addressed this matter in detail in *Sublime Historical Experience* precisely because it is this argument/position that, if accepted, can be seen to fatally undermine his central thesis which manifestly operates on the understanding that an autonomous past reality – not actuality but reality – (the authentic reality of the past that Ankersmit thinks he can grasp direct) *does* precede its constitutive language of description. But nowhere in Ankersmit's theorizations is this matter substantially confronted – at best it is dismissed in his writing on Rorty; it is simply peremptorily excluded because

> ....it leaves no room for the possibility of an experience of the world that is not predicated on language.....[and moreover] the more language and reality are integrated....the more experience will be squeezed out of existence by it. [34]

Or, in other words, his thesis cannot both tolerate it and remain intact, so he rejects it. Thus, what is at stake here right at the outset is the viability of Ankersmit's overall thesis when seen against the background of these alternative presuppositions, presuppositions which can be seen to significantly undermine or negate his project. Accordingly, it is with these crucial prefacing points made and in mind that I can now turn directly to Chapter Eight of *Sublime Historical Experience*.

Chapter Eight opens with a short treatise on the nature of forgetting, a particular type of which takes precedence in Ankersmit's unfolding argument. The exact nature of this specific type of forgetting is explained by Ankersmit in relation to traumatic/disruptive past events of a particular kind and the irreversible identity loss associated with these specific events. The *dislocation* of this no longer accessible past identity, effected by its repudiation (understood here as an endeavour to forget) as a necessary condition for the acquisition of a new identity, is (in brief) what lies at the heart of the phenomenon of sublime historical experience and will be explained more fully in a moment. But first it should be stressed again, in view of its

[34] Ankersmit. *Sublime Historical Experience*. p74

central importance to my argument, that the identity to which Ankersmit refers in this instance is not that possessed by an individual being but, rather, that possessed by a civilisation, a culture or a past epoch. It is therefore of a *collective sublime kind* and, as such, it would be my argument that it is categorically different from historical experience which is of an *individual existential kind* (as already explained in the early remarks to this Chapter). Having again highlighted this distinction between historical experience and sublime historical experience, Ankersmit's later questionable conflation of these two categories will become all the more conspicuous.

But to continue. Ankersmit found his paradigmatic explanatory model for loss of collective identity in the events, and the consequent *rupture* with a former way of life, which together constituted (for him) the substance of the French Revolution of 1789. For, as Ankersmit said, it is undoubtedly the case that the dramatic transformations which issued from the French Revolution 'changed the lives of Western Europeans in every conceivable aspect..... [and that they were] the most decisive and profound changes that Western man had undergone in the course of history'.[35] Furthermore, that these changes brought to the level of collective consciousness the realisation that a former way of life had been lost forever. Or, to rephrase, Ankersmit is arguing here that, as a direct consequence of the French Revolution, Western Europeans quite suddenly became aware of an un-reflected previous world (their own previous world or former collective identity) which, at the precise moment of its recognition, they were forced to irrevocably surrender in favour of a new identity. This *lost* identity, which had to be surrendered or *forgotten* at the very moment of its realisation, and the trauma surrounding this loss constituted (for Ankersmit) both the necessary conditions for the occurrence of sublime historical experience and also the basis upon which a new Western European identity had to be established. Furthermore, Ankersmit argued that Western historical consciousness itself can be seen to come into being[36] out of this

[35] Ibid. p323

[36] Ankersmit also argues that 'modern Western historical consciousness came into being in sixteenth century Italy' (*Sublime Historical Experience*. p356) and, accordingly, he finds (in this instance) its origin in the period which he refers to as the Italian Renaissance. But, he also states that the 'formation of

same pivotal and profoundly traumatic transformation from a former pre-revolutionary identity to a new post-revolutionary identity. And he went even further when he suggested that 'the fact that the Anglo-Saxon world has had the fortune of never having to undergo such a traumatic experience may help us to explain why historical consciousness is so much an *invention* of the European continent'.[37]

For Ankersmit, then, this kind of transformation from a former to a new identity is

> .....always accompanied by feelings of a profound and irreparable loss, of cultural despair, and of hopeless disorientation. In this sense such historical experiences are undoubtedly traumatic too. But the stake of the traumatic experience is far more dramatic in such cases—for here one really loses oneself, here a former identity is irrevocably lost forever and superseded by a new historical or cultural identity. Hence, in cases like these any reconciliation of a former and a new identity is categorically out of the question—and this also means that no room is left for a mechanism that might give us the redemption from trauma. This, then, is the kind of trauma that we will always carry with us after History has forced us to confront it; it is a trauma for which no cure is to be found. The new identity is mainly constituted by the trauma of the loss of a former identity— precisely *this* is its main content, and that this is the ineluctable truth announces itself in the realization (agonizing, resigned, or otherwise) that this loss is permanent and can never be undone. And then trauma is just as permanent as the loss of the former identity is. In this way we can say that our collective identity largely is the sum of all the scars on our collective soul, scars that were occasioned by our forced abandonment of former identities, scars that will never wholly fade and that will cause in us a continuous and enduring pain.[38]

Consequently, sublime historical experience (which is understood by Ankersmit to arise out of the said traumatic[39] loss and consequent repudiation and forgetting of a former identity) is, particularly when taken in relation to the description immediately above, bound to be for him of a negative, pessimistic and melancholic kind. However, before pursuing this significant point, I should highlight a distinction that

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modern Western historical consciousness....came into being in the decade between 1790 and 1800' (*Sublime Historical Experience*. p443 fn.25). There are, throughout the book, many references to these two *formative* periods but it is not clear to which one he definitively and finally attributes 'the coming into being of modern Western historical consciousness'. There is thus a two to three hundred year gap to explain here.

[37] Ankersmit, F. R., (2002). 'Trauma and Suffering: a Forgotten Source of Western Historical Consciousness' in *Western Historical Thinking: An Intercultural Debate*, Rüsen J., (ed.). New York: Berghahm. p75

[38] Ankersmit. *Sublime Historical Experience*. p324

[39] For Ankersmit 'the trauma is the sublime and *vice versa*'(Ankersmit. 'Trauma and Suffering'. pp75-76)

Ankersmit makes between this type of forgetting, which is associated with the trauma of identity loss, and a superficially related yet different kind of forgetting which leaves identity intact.

This other variant of forgetting, where a memory is too painful to be admitted to collective consciousness, is explained by Ankersmit in relation to the trauma of the Holocaust. The memory of this terrible event was, he argued, for the two decades following World War II, forgotten or withheld from conscious memory. It was, at least during that period, literally unspeakable; it defied adequate narrativisation and could not therefore be *de-traumatised* and thereby be subsumed into the collective Jewish consciousness. However (Ankersmit continued), profoundly traumatic as it undoubtedly was, the Holocaust left the collective Jewish identity intact. That is to say that there was no rupture in the Jewish identity, it survived, and there was therefore no necessity for the Jewish race to repudiate it in order to build a new identity. One could say that forgetting in this instance (the closure of its associated trauma) assumed the psychological aspect of a *repression* and that there was no loss, and therefore no imperative to forget, at the level of identity. Understood in this way it is immediately obvious that the Holocaust could never function as one of Ankersmit's sublime sources of historical experience because his defining element, 'traumatic loss of a former identity', was never a component of it. This illustration serves to again highlight the centrality of Ankersmit's *traumatic identity loss* theme within his concept of sublime historical experience and it can be taken as its decisive causal element.

I return now to a previously mentioned point and the question that arises out of it; namely, 'why is it that sublime historical experience is exclusively for Ankersmit of a negative, pessimistic and melancholic kind?' Well, an attempt at a more comprehensive answer will be the subject of the next section of this chapter, but for now the short answer is that it is so because that is how he repeatedly describes/defines it. For example he says

> ....history as a reality of its own can only come into being as a result of traumatic collective experience....the past is primarily a painful past ; and histories rejoicing in the triumphs of monarchs, soldiers and heroes will never

> be able to give us that essence....shared traumatic pain provides the collectivity with a common basis in a far deeper layer of reality than happiness and joy could ever be capable of....historical experience is always an experience of *loss*..... ..[experience of a prehistorical past] can only come into being as a figure of loss.... and, finally, historical experience is fundamentally tragic.[40]

These observations are predictable, of course, since Ankersmit's notion of sublime historical experience is (as explained) worked-up from and predicated on his own founding condition for it (this condition being that of its grounding in trauma and loss). There is, I recognise, an inevitable and unsatisfactory circularity in this explanation, but the matter will have to rest here for the moment pending Section Two.

However, (and this is, I suppose, another matter – an aside) perhaps Ankersmit's notion of sublime historical experience should be re-examined with reference to his paradigmatic account of it in relation to the French Revolution. The point that needs to be made here is that in Ankersmit's explanatory example, the idea of 'traumatic loss of a former identity', can only function or have any meaning at all when applied to the French elite, the minority. For, seen from the point of view of the majority (say, the French peasants) the French Revolution engendered a positive and radical identity where before there had been scarcely any positive/progressive identity to lose. Or, to rephrase, the French Revolution arguably effected a transformation in the standing of its peasants which lifted them out of their collective quasi-medieval mode of existence towards the status of modern citizens. From the standpoint of the peasant this transformation can be reasoned as having the appearance of a progressive romantic gain[41] rather than a sudden traumatic loss. It might thus be

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[40] These citations are, in the order quoted, drawn from Ankersmit. 'Trauma and Suffering'. p76 (first three quotes) and Ankersmit. *Sublime Historical Experience* p128 & p234 (for the final two quotes).

[41] On this longer perspective the French Revolution, notwithstanding the violence and atrocities occasioned by it, can be read not as Ankersmit's sombre and pessimistic ending but, rather, as a progressive and optimistic beginning. This is also, of course, Kant's position. For him 1789 was a sign of progress as indexed by its favourable reception by the *sensus communis*. This is interesting because whilst Ankersmit draws heavily on Kant's notions of the sublime, he never mentions the fact that although for Kant 1789 occasioned sublime feelings it did not occasion negative ones. The sublime – as ascribed to an event – is therefore not determined by it. Moreover, Cohen, Bennington and Lyotard all make this same point (see Cohen, S., (2006). *History Out Of Joint*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press pp182-282 and Bennington, G., (1988). *Lyotard: Writing the Event*. Manchester: Manchester University Press., in

concluded that Ankersmit's new historical theory which appears to be figured out on the basis of the losses occasioned by privileged minorities, is for those disadvantaged minorities/elites only. And he appears to confirm this observation when he states that

> .....elites vanquished by the inexorable course of history will be most open to and most fascinated by historical fate as manifesting itself in the guise of long-term developments. Only these can make these former elites realize why all their wisdom and insight could be so sadly helpless and ineffective against the inexorable course of History. Even more so, one may well surmise that an unusually acute awareness of long-term developments is the indelible sign of the historical consciousness of superseded elites, for they are in the best social position to identify them...[42]

Bearing in mind that sublime historical experiences are, as Ankersmit has always insisted, only encountered by a small number of appropriately gifted historians (connoisseurs), then it could be argued that such experiences, if taken seriously, are also exclusively confined to current elites who receive messages from former elites. And since these messages are connected with the traumatic loss of the former identities of such elites then they can only be both non-representational (in a general sense) and deeply pessimistic.

Now, so far this discussion concerning the content of Chapter Eight of *Sublime Historical Experience* has only revealed a very general idea of what sublime historical experience is and where it comes from, and this isn't really satisfactory. In order to get a more precise idea of what Ankersmit thinks that it actually is and, more to the point, how he thinks that it actually connects up and manifests itself at a conscious level within the subject of that experience (or, in short, how the historian actually "gets it") it will now be necessary to turn back for a moment to the beginning of Chapter Five of *Sublime Historical Experience* where Ankersmit lays out what I want to call his 'fabulous explanatory story' in precisely the detail sought. For Ankersmit's extraordinary illustrative vindication of his thesis, which he claims is elicited from (or described with the help of) Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical*

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which Bennington expresses this view in his Chapter Five 'Le Différend'. pp106-178 and within that Chapter under the subtitle 'The Sign of History'. pp162-165, Bennington relates Lyotard's similar view).

[42] Ankersmit. *Sublime Historical Experience*. p142

Investigations,[43] is presented here in Chapter Five as, perhaps, an early introduction to Chapter Eight. Anyway, whatever the source or inspiration for this story (which I quote here at some length in order to allow Ankersmit to explain himself fully) he asks his readers to

> .....think now of a civilization, a culture, or a historical epoch as if it were some strange and hybrid creature.... Such a creature would be "strange and hybrid" in the sense of being, on the one hand, far more than what we are and, on the other, far less – "more" in the sense of comprising, in some way or other, all the individuals that are part of this civilization, and so on but "less" so in the sense that its level of self-awareness is far less developed and far les articulate than usually is the case with us as normal, waking human individuals. Moreover, think of this strange creature to consist of nothing but these vague and inarticulate sensations, moods, and feelings. It lacks a "self" tying them together; these creatures are only these fleeting sets of sensations, moods, and feelings. In this way these creatures are sets of experiences without there being a subject of experience. Suppose, furthermore, that, for all their so very weak or, rather, nonexistent capacity of self-awareness, these strange creatures may nevertheless sometimes become conscious of themselves, of their pains and sensations, although even then there is no "I" to which (the awareness of) these pains and sensations could meaningfully be attributed. What could this entity possibly be? The paradox of a self-awareness without self-awareness could then be solved by saying that the presence of these pains and sensations articulates itself only in the minds of some of the great poets, novelists, or historians living and writing in a certain civilization or culture. The job of self-awareness has been delegated, so to say, by these creatures to certain "subsystems" of theirs.....such as poets, novelists, and historians (and we may envy them for their capacity for doing this, for how more pleasant would human life be if we could do the same!). These poets, novelists, and historians are the creature's "nerves", so to say (although in order to make the metaphor work, we should attribute to these nerves also the capacity for translating the firings of these nerve cells to the level of consciousness). In that case the disjunction of experience from truth and language would hold also for what these "enthusiastic" (to use the most appropriate adjective here) poets, novelists, and historians say about their civilization, and so on. And the implication would be that we should not try to fit their writings into the discourse of truth (as exemplified by statements such as "This cat is black"); instead we should see them as the *groanings* [my emphasis] of this civilization. That does not imply, however, that they should be meaningless to us. Once again: Far from it! These groanings may overwhelm us with an unequalled force and intensity, and they may be perceived in the *basso continuo* accompanying all that a civilization thinks and does. It means, rather, that we should not interpret them as being about something else in the way that the true statement is about some state of affairs in the world. We should take them for what they are, that is, as the groanings of a civilization, as the texts in

[43] Wittgenstein, L., (1963). Anscombe, G. E. M. (trans.) *Philosophical Investigations*. Oxford: Blackwell.

> which the pains, the moods, and feelings of a civilization articulate themselves. In this way these groanings are essentially poetic; just like a poem they do not aim at truth but at making experience speak. And this is how we should read them.[44]

On my reading, what I believe Ankersmit is claiming here is that fleeting sets of sensations, moods and feelings, all of them bereft of a subject of experience, or a *self*, can nevertheless collectively constitute the painful experiences of past civilisations, cultures or epochs. These so called 'hybrid creatures', made up of those painful experiences, drift about in a timeless limbo awaiting realisation – that is to say, awaiting a self onto which each might register its as yet un-manifest self-awareness through the temporary possession of a 'subject of experience' – the subject of experience being an unsuspecting and suitably gifted surrogate historian, poet etc. Such fleeting sets of sensations, moods and feelings (the actual stuff of sublime historical experience) have, according to Ankersmit, the capacity first to enter the central nervous system of that subject of experience and then to manifest themselves at the level of the subject's consciousness as authentic historical experiences. These "epiphanies", Ankersmit maintains, are not presented in the form of true statements about the past but rather as the authentic recovery, through the re-living at the level of the historian's, poet's, etc., individual existential self, of the collective pains, moods and feelings which civilisations (cultures or epochs) have experienced . And, furthermore, Ankersmit expects that we should take them for what he says they each are – the *groanings* of a civilisation in the case of his example. This, as far as I can see, is the process by which Ankersmit's privileged historian is supposed to be able to effectively tap directly into the past (granted here as a gift of the moment which cannot be repeated at will) through the agency of sublime historical experience (the 'hybrid creature') and render the collective experience of that past into an individual, existential experience in the historian's present. In this way Ankersmit offers a putative link between collective 'sublime historical experience'[45] and individual (existential) 'historical experience'. Or to put

[44] Ankersmit. *Sublime Historical Experience*. pp196-197

[45] It is curious to note that, at this earlier stage in his argument, Ankersmit's fleeting sets of collective sensations, moods and feelings (which I take to be sublime historical experiences "in the raw" and available for processing through the central nervous system on receipt) are not anywhere in this particular explanation linked directly to the idea of *irretrievable loss of a former identity* which is fundamental to

it another way, this is how a historian, through the agency of sublime historical experience, is presumed by Ankersmit to be able to experience an authentic past that actually *predates* his or her own life. Now, before moving on to Section Two of this chapter, a very brief summary of the current section and then one final observation concerning Ankersmit's sequencing of Chapters in *Sublime Historical Experience*.

In summary, then, I am arguing thus far that Ankersmit's own argument in support of sublime historical experience rests on four contentious presuppositions which, had they been properly investigated, would have effectively negated his thesis. And, furthermore, that having initially set up his argument on the basis of these suspect presuppositions, Ankersmit stretched credibility even further with his fabulous story about a 'hybrid creature' which his readers are presumably expected to swallow whole. I do not doubt that in his book Ankersmit described what sublime historical experience is to ***him***, but I think he failed to present to his readers a comprehensible account of it at a theoretical level. His proposal that the traumatic 'groanings of a past civilisation' could, in the guise of a hybrid creature deprived of its own self-awareness, alight on the central nervous system of a gifted historian in order to release its own self-awareness into that surrogate's mind in the form of an unmediated authentic experience of those same groanings, isn't really a philosophy at all – arguably it's a fantasy. Nevertheless, it seems that Ankersmit pressed on with this idiosyncratic description of a profoundly traumatic and melancholic kind of sublime historical experience only to then mistake that imaginative description for an explanatory account of it.

And my final observation for the moment, which takes me back to the introductory remarks to this chapter, concerns Ankersmit's choice of title for his book (*Sublime Historical Experience*) which, of course, suggests that 'sublime historical experience' is its central topic. Yet, as noted, this subject is not addressed in any substantial way until the book's very last chapter: how has this come about? Well,

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Ankersmit's concept of sublime historical experience as later described in Chapter Eight of *Sublime Historical Experience* (as explained at the beginning of this Section).

an explanatory clue could lie in the book's recurrent *Romeo and Juliet* theme which constitutes a coherent narrative thread that runs right through its first six chapters. For this is consistent with the idea suggested by the title of Ankersmit's book whilst in manuscript form, *Historical Experience: the Embrace of Romeo and Juliet*, which was changed (for no clarified reason) to the current title shortly before the book's publication.[46] Just a few examples of this Romeo and Juliet theme are the kiss,[47] the embrace[48] and the metaphor for de-contextualisation.[49] The point here is that the original title suggested a book about historical experience of the individual kind and not the collective, sublime kind (the wider significance of this argument will be expanded in a moment). On this basis Ankersmit's description of collective sublime historical experience, his variant of historical experience, would then be expected to follow and not precede the main argument. One can perhaps now see some rationale for Ankersmit's particular sequence of chapters and hence arguments – a rationale that was, however, effectively lost with the book's change of title.

Section Two: Obsession or Theory?

I now turn to address Chapter Seven of *Sublime Historical Experience* where a more adequate explanation might be sought for Ankersmit's particular preference for a profoundly melancholic and pessimistic style of historical experience. However, for reasons which will become immediately apparent, I first want to return to Ankersmit's Introduction to the book where he contemplates the origin of the sublimity of historical experience;

> .....[it] involves, in the first place, a Gestalt-switch from a timeless present into a world consisting of things past and present. This gives us the discovery of the past as a reality that has somehow "broken off" from a timeless present. This is "the moment of loss". But at the same time historical experience aims at a recovery of the past by transcending again the barriers between past and present. And this could be characterized as "the moment of desire or of love". All of historical writing is to be situated in the space enclosed by these

[46] See 'footnote 148' in Jay, M., (2004). *Songs of Experience*. California: University of California Press. p216
[47] Ankersmit. *Sublime Historical Experience*. p121
[48] Ibid. pp130 & 135
[49] Ibid. p125

> complementary movements of the discovery (loss) and the recovery of the past (love) that constitute together the realm of historical experience..... *The sublimity of historical experience originates from this paradoxical union of the feelings of loss and love, that is, of the combination of pain and pleasure in how we relate to the past.*[50]

It appears, then, that the sublimity of historical experience is, at this introductory stage in Ankersmit argument, situated in a space enclosed by 'loss and love' or 'pain and pleasure' which, together, constitute the realm of historical experience. However, the pleasure/love element of this equation is lost without trace by the time that Ankersmit gets round to "nailing down", in the last two chapters of his book, his final definitions of both historical experience and his variant of it, sublime historical experience. Exactly why and where pleasure and love disappear from historical experience is hard to see, but by the time Ankersmit gets to his seventh chapter it seems that they have already departed, thereby effecting a destabilisation of the harmony of the loss/love and pain/pleasure dichotomies established at the beginning of his book.

It is with this observation made that I might now myself plunge into the arguably oppressively melancholic curiosities of Ankersmit's Chapter Seven (appropriately titled 'Subjective Historical Experience: The Past as Elegy') which are collected together here and presented in the form of an explanation for subjective historical experience.[51] Broadly speaking Chapter Seven breaks down into two parts, the 'Pulcinella' and the 'Rococo' arguments, the first an illustrative example of subjective historical experience through the analysis of a painting and the second, the more convoluted of the two, being concerned with the establishment of a link between rococo ornament, or rather the mode of artistic expression embodied in it, and subjective historical experience. Both of these examples are, in their own individual ways, of a negative kind and it is important to try to see how they work for Ankersmit if his text is to be understood.

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[50] Ankersmit. *Sublime Historical Experience*. p9

[51] To recap, subjective historical experience is of the Huizinga kind (the second of Ankersmit's three kinds of historical experience as explained in this Chapter's preface).

The Pulcinella (taken by Ankersmit to have been of the unpleasant, malicious, vulgar and egoistic type)[52] was a traditional and very distinctive character from the *commedia dell'arte,*[53] and groups of these bizarre hunchback masked figures were often depicted in Eighteenth-Century Venetian paintings. Ankersmit selected a particular example of this genre of painting, the capriccio[54] 'Arcade with a Lantern' by Francesco Guardi, as *the* definitive source of historical experience in the sense that this painting, which pre-dated the French Revolution, could (he supposed) *in itself* afford access to 'the "mood" of the ancient régime'[55] through its oppressive symbolic Pulcinella theme of ennui, incarceration and hopelessness[56] (the painting appears on the cover of his book). But, and this is crucial, Ankersmit failed to observe that this *access* came courtesy of his own interpretation of the meaning of the painting and what he himself saw in the loathsome Pulcinelli depicted in it. In total Ankersmit wrote twelve pages of detailed perspectival, tonal and comparative analyses of Guardi's painting in which, he believed, he had adequately demonstrated the case that his own experience of the painting had indeed 'obliterate[d]....the barriers separating [him] from the end of the eighteenth century',[57] thus revealing the authentic moods and feelings of that time. I have carefully studied Ankersmit's interpretation of the Guardi painting but I will not enter into any discussion of it here simply because it constituted (as would be the case with any such interpretation) a personal projection onto the object of its investigation; in this case the projection of Ankersmit's own thoughts and feelings onto the Guardi painting. My argument here

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[52] Ankersmit. *Sublime Historical Experience*. pp266-267.

[53] This ('the comedy of art') is a form of improvised theatre that began in Italy in the 15th century. Unscripted performances, involving troupes of up to ten costumed and masked performers, were held in the open air using few props. They were funded by donations and anyone could view the performances free of charge. It is interesting to note that in his ballet "Pulcinella", Igor Stravinsky (on the basis of an eighteenth-century play) cast his Pulcinella as a 'traditional hero of Neapolitan *commedia dell'arte*' who, in this particular instance, negotiated a happy ending to the ballet and was thus of a markedly different type from that described by Ankersmit (see Kuenning, G., (1995). 'Stravinsky: "Pulcinella" Suite programme notes' at http://fmg-www.cs.ucla.edu/geoff/prognotes/stravinsky/pulcinella.html).

[54] In Italian capriccio means that which is capricious, whimsical or fantastic. In relation to paintings of this period the term was used to describe imaginary topographical scenes comprising extant architectural elements which were recombined in inventive relationships for decorative effect. Their capricious nature suggests a certain lightness of being – an engaging whimsy – and accordingly, for me, there is nothing in this particular painting (as I argue below), and certainly nothing in Guardi's paintings in general (not, perhaps, even in the *genre* itself), that suggests Ankersmit's doom and gloom analysis.

[55] Ankersmit. *Sublime Historical Experience*. p273

[56] Ibid. p272 (see here for a more complete description of the dark and oppressive "Pulcinella" effect).

[57] Ibid. p276

is that Ankersmit, assuming a morbid negative point-of-view (governed by a portentous, retrospectively imposed master-trope of tragedy/trauma; an apprehension of the Revolution to come), placed the various elements of Guardi's painting under a particular style of description. He then found meaningful relationships amongst these elements such that the painting itself appeared to transmit, of its own volition, precisely the moods and feelings required of it by the point-of-view originally taken. And, indeed, this process was helped considerably by Ankersmit's choice of painting, for whilst I have looked at many other examples of Guardi's work I have yet to come across another of his pictures which could have been so advantageously appropriated for this precise use. There is arguably something of the notion of *figura* (as described by Hayden White)[58] in all of this. That is to say that Ankersmit, without realising it, appears to have retrospectively (in the light of privileged hindsight) applied an imaginative *figure* onto Guardi's painting such that the imminent French Revolution, retrospectively figured by Ankersmit on the basis of traumatic, irrevocable loss, became its fulfilment.

Now to consider Ankersmit's Rococo argument, which he prefaced with an autobiographical confessional that occupied two pages of text and, in addition, a lengthy endnote (already mentioned in Section Five of the previous Chapter), all of which referred to his unhappy childhood. Ankersmit, in essence, explained that as a sickly child – confined to his bed and cut off from the outside world – he was inevitably overtaken by an overpowering sense of boredom. However, he discovered that boredom possessed a special intrinsic quality because

> in boredom the interactions between ourselves and the world are temporarily suspended; and this suspension invites reality to manifest its true nature, untainted and undistorted by our interests and preoccupations.[59]

It was this 'true' nature of the world which was thus revealed to Ankersmit during his sickness through his boredom induced fascination with the repetitive flower patterns on his parents bedroom curtains. These patterns *seen in the whole* and thus drained of their representational content at the level of the individual component

[58] Already explored in some detail in Section Three of the preceding Chapter.
[59] Ankersmit. *Sublime Historical Experience*. p286

flower, appeared to embody an autonomous freedom of interaction (an interaction which also encompassed various random stains and tears in the wallpaper) within which new shapes and new meanings emerged. Drawing (he claims) on Kant, Ankersmit argued that this free play of imagery could be understood as the product of *originary de-contextualised experience* and that this form of expression is therefore

> ....the closest we can come to pure experience, to complete openness to what the senses present to us, for now neither the real world nor our perceptions of it is forced any longer within pre-existing patterns.[60]

Ankersmit is therefore arguing that, liberated from all the influences which might require reality to be seen in one particular way rather than another, 'pure experience' is attained (since there is no mediating determinant to fix or regulate the free play of the imagination) and, through this pure experience, 'reality may manifest to us its quasi-noumenal qualities'.[61] This explanation, as Ankersmit admitted, presupposed the complete subjectivity of perception and thus the obscuration of the object of perception. Yet, he insisted that we can still

> ..... agree with Kant that the workings of such cognitive structures do not in the least exclude the possibility of knowledge of objective reality.[62]

Now, very briefly, two things. First, this last statement – which, incidentally, Ankersmit failed to reference to Kant's writings – arguably does not fit in with my own reading of Kant and, second, Ankersmit's argument taken in the whole seems to internally negate itself. However, discounting these two problems for a moment, there yet remains another more fundamental problem with Ankersmit's argument for (as mentioned in the preface to this Section), in Kant's theorisations experience is the unification of a sensible object with a concept of understanding. On this basis Ankersmit's idea of 'pure experience', and his argument for it, can be seen to be meaningless since experience already embodies categories of understanding and therefore cannot be 'pure' in the sense that he means. This unexamined conflation of

[60] Ibid. p287
[61] Ibid. p289
[62] Ibid. p289

experience with *sensations* as evidenced in the former of these two quotes is, as I have already stressed, a serious flaw in Ankersmit's theoretical position.

However (rejoining the Rococo argument), Ankersmit next turned his attention to the "secrets" of ornament and decoration, initially with reference to a late seventeenth-century engraving by Jean Bérain depicting an 'elegant arrangement of grotesques'. This arrangement, to Ankersmit, exemplified Kantian free play and, furthermore, the engraving's three-dimensional central *tempietto* (motif) set within a two-dimensional ornamental depiction of the surrounding framework, suggested to Ankersmit that the engraving was in essence a representation of *dimensional transition*. For whereas normally a picture is detached from three-dimensional reality (its real surroundings) by a separate purpose made two-dimensional picture frame, in this particular case the ornamental frame was subsumed into the picture itself. Thus dimensional change became the subject of the picture, and Bérain's engraving was accordingly deciphered by Ankersmit as *a depiction of the transition between picture and ornamental frame*. This unexpected line of argument was expanded as Ankersmit took-off on something of a journey through the world of rococo representational art, during which he particularly noted the merging of ornament with representational reality and the rococo artist's play with space and time which found its expression in the symmetry of the ornamental C-curve.[63] Seen altogether, the purpose of Ankersmit's argument, which I have only very briefly sketched here, was (on my reading of it) to show how rococo (or, rather, its expression of moods and feelings) moved *from* its early form as ornamental framework *into* the representation of reality itself – the picture – which its original purpose was to frame only (thus invading reality with ornament). The next stage of the development of ornament was to truly supersede itself by becoming (transforming itself into) part of reality itself. In this manner ornament, Ankersmit explained, 'paradoxically disappeared at the very moment [it] became everything

[63] The C-curve is primary in rococo. It is suggestive of depth, movement and mobility and it can be said to represent the four dimensional world (time being the fourth dimension). It is, Ankersmit argues, an affirmative expression of the artistic confidence of the rococo period which has its parallel in the Enlightenment's confidence in Newtonian science. The C-curve curls up the infinite in itself – it reduces infinity into a form which can be surveyed in a single glance. (see *Sublime Historical Experience*. pp 299-306)

....it died in its highest state'.[64] Now, this argument with all its ramifications constituted what Ankersmit called 'the secret of the ornamental picture frame'.[65]

For Ankersmit then, as he explains himself in his Chapter Seven, rococo represents and expresses a world of moods and feelings which resonate deeply within himself, and it is in these moods and feelings that he finds that the past object and the present subject merge in pure experience without a subject of experience to experience it. Moods and feelings are, on this view, both subjectless and objectless and they precede the differentiation between self and the world (or subject and object). They are, for Ankersmit, embedded in an indivisible totality of experience where moods and feelings are expressions of both the self and of the world. Extending and stretching this argument, Ankersmit then claimed – in what is surely a *non-sequitur* – that 'because of this moods and feelings have a natural affinity with historical experience.....and one might well say that sublime historical experience preferably makes itself felt in these moods and feelings.[66]

This is the substance of Ankersmit's Rococo argument on my reading of it and, as such, it can be seen as an attempt by Ankersmit to raise rococo ornament to a new status; that of a form of expression (articulated through ornament) which shared an equivalence or correspondence with sublime historical experience. To me the argument is convoluted, complex, confusing and fragile at best.

Nevertheless, the structure and content of the Pulcinella and the Rococo arguments – the two principal elements of Ankersmit's Chapter Seven, as noted above – may afford further insights into the nature of Ankersmit's position in relation to historical experience (of both kinds). But (referring back to this Chapter's opening paragraph), there is nothing at all in these arguments that might, as was hoped, help explain Ankersmit's particular preference for a negative and pessimistic style of historical

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[64] Ankersmit. *Sublime Historical Experience*. p306
[65] Ibid. p297
[66] Ibid. p308

experience. However, an explanation might be found through further examination of Ankersmit's reference, again previously mentioned, to

> the complementary movements of the discovery (loss) and the recovery of the past (love) that constitute together the realm of historical experience....[followed by his italicised statement that] *The sublimity of historical experience originates from this paradoxical union of the feelings of loss and love, that is, of the combination of pain and pleasure in how we relate to the past.*[67]

This quotation might at first sight leave the impression (as it did for me) that the historical experience itself inhabits a space between loss/pain at one extreme and love/pleasure at the other, and that within this space one could then reasonably expect to find historical experiences of the non-negative pleasurable kind. But, in the italicised part of the quotation Ankersmit is actually associating the loss/love and pain/pleasure combinations with 'how we relate to the past' and *not* with the experience of the past itself. So these combinations are, in a sense, to do with the state of mind that the historian brings to the experience (or needs to possess in order to have such an experience) rather than the mode in which that historical experience is registered. Thus it is 'these most personal feelings....[that] are absolutely indispensable for....being open to the experience of the past'.[68] Or, again, '...[historical experience] must be situated....on the surface, where subject and object meet, where they lightly touch each other in a most tactful gesture....of the subtlest and most delicate love'.[69] All of this is to do with the manner in which the historian makes contact and *not* about what comes through having made that contact.

But even this does not properly answer the question of Ankersmit's pessimism, for there must have been many past events which could have intrinsically satisfied Ankersmit's conditions for the occurrence of sublime historical experience (an irreparable break with the past, the necessary rebuilding of identity, etc.) that are not of a profoundly pessimistic kind. For instance (and in addition to the "happy peasants" of 1789), following the 13th Amendment of 1865 which abolished slavery in America, the community of recently freed slaves would have experienced a

[67] Ibid. p9
[68] Ibid. p191
[69] Ibid. p152

radical break with their collective past which required the building of a new collective identity out of that break. It could well have been traumatic for some of them at the time, but it seems unlikely that the majority of ex-slaves would have wanted to reverse events and regain their pre-emancipation slave lives and slave identities. Surely one can presume that their change in status would generally have been seen by them themselves as a positive, perhaps even a romantic move towards, at the least, a better post-emancipation human condition. A similar argument, no doubt, could be applied to the beneficiaries of post-World War II decolonisation and countless other instances of advantageous (to the benefit of one group or another) breaks with the past. Why Ankersmit should have excluded, without explanation, these happier sorts of collective transitions between old and radically new modes of existence remains unclear to me. So perhaps all that can be said is that sublime historical experience is, after all, Ankersmit's concept and that, as I have already pointed out, he defined it in a particular way and worked his thesis around that definition.[70] And in so doing I think that he also demonstrated (whether he noticed it or not) that sublime historical experience is of an *elitist* kind. For it can by definition 'only come into being as a figure of loss'[71] and that loss can only apply to the traumatic and irretrievable losses of the minority groups it favours – his vanquished elites[72]– or, as he elsewhere describes them, 'the most responsible among [those constituting a civilisation]....the Socrateses, so to speak'.[73]

Whatever the reasons for it, however, Ankersmit's pre-occupation with a deeply pessimistic notion of the sublime (a kind of dark obsession which excludes any other possible reading of it) certainly colours his ominous reading of the past and the mechanism which (he says) afford conscious awareness of it. Buried in his own terrifying historical sublime he has little at all to say about positive emancipatory possibilities for the future. For (arguably) we should never

[70] On reflection, Chapter Seven of *Sublime Historical Experience* could never, of course, have offered the explanation sought, for Ankersmit chose as his secondary title to it 'The Past as Elegy' and seen as a *narrative substance*, which is exactly what it is, this colligating device would filter out all statements of the non-elegiac kind, the happy and positive kind, and admit only those of the elegiac or mournfully reflective and melancholic kind.
[71] Ankersmit. *Sublime Historical Experience*. p128
[72] Ibid. p142
[73] Ibid. p367

....fail to give up (as Derrida urged us never to give up) on that great 'fable' of emancipation....and [we should] place the past where it categorically belongs - *behind us*....the past isn't something we should *nostalgically* dwell in or on, but something we should get out of, not least by stressing the positive aspects of 'sublime' experience....[74]

Moreover, although the arguments Ankersmit used in support of sublime historical experience can (as he himself accepted) be seen to reflect his own very personal "spin" on it, there seems little doubt that, nevertheless, he wished to carry his readers with him such that they could also, like him, believe in and benefit from those fleeting unmediated experiential moments through which the sublime would (Ankersmit supposed) reveal the past in all its authentic nakedness. I shall return to this 'authentic nakedness' later in Section Four, however, one final observation to conclude this Section. Ankersmit presented his argument for the existence of sublime historical experience in a writing style which was suggestive of its own collective acceptance. I am referring here to his ubiquitous use of the word 'we'; an umbrella term under which Ankersmit included himself and all his readers who, figured in the form of a like-minded community, were assumed by Ankersmit to be picked up and swept along by the affirmative logic of his argument. My point is that Ankersmit, in effect, left no space for dissent in his text because it presupposed and manufactured its own singular, collectively understood thrust towards its one and only conclusion.

Section Three: Presence: A New Paradigm.

This critique of (sublime) historical experience cannot be complete without a brief contextualising account of its offspring, *presence*, and the related phenomenon of *parallel processing*, not least because Ankersmit himself, along with the psychologist and historian Eelco Runia, established a department at the University of Groningen (the 'Centre for Metahistory') for the study of these phenomena. Accordingly, my short description of *presence* is articulated in relation to the output of what (as previously noted) I shall be referring to here as the "Groningen School".

[74] Jenkins, K. 'Cohen *contra* Ankersmit'. p311

It seems that the word *presence* was first coined in this connection at an International Conference at Groningen University, entitled 'Presence: A viable alternative to representation?'. Its central theme, which (it is interesting to note) sought to *diminish* the representationalism expounded by Hayden White in his book *Metahistory*, was that such a notion had lost its vigour, rigour, and explanatory power when faced with the more recent phenomena of memory, remembrance and trauma studies. Collectively, the development of these new studies (according to the Conference program notes) constituted the emergence of a new paradigm for which the Centre for Metahistory 'boldly gave the name "Presence"'.[75]

A second International Conference at Groningen in 2007, entitled 'Moved by the Past', again focused on (or, perhaps one could say, was again obsessed with) Hayden White, and chose as its point of departure an analysis of his expression 'what is fictive in all putatively realistic representations of the world, and what is realistic in all manifestly fictive ones'.[76] Taking the second part of this quotation, *what is realistic in the manifestly fictive*, and misunderstanding White's purpose in writing it, the declared objective of the conference became the search for

> ....how reality can be said to be 'present' in fictive representations of the world ... [and to] explore the way the past may engulf the here and now...[having been].... transported through time, as a kind of stowaway, in the .... novels, laws, histories, myths, traditions, monuments etc. we consider it our duty to make and transmit.[77]

Furthermore, it was proposed that the conference would investigate how the transported past could be said to exert an influence on the present. [78]

In this context I now turn to Eelco Runia who, in his essay 'Presence', refers to *presence* not as a manifestation of meaning[79] but as a condition of ""being in touch"

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[75] See the promotional literature for 'Presence: A Viable Alternative to Representation', An International Conference held at Groningen University, 1st & 2nd December 2005 or (http://www.rug.nl).
[76] From the preface to a conference pamphlet distributed at a colloquium entitled 'Moved by the Past' (Groningen University 27th & 28th September 2007) p6. Also available at (http://www.rug.nl).
[77] Ibid. p17
[78] Altogether these objectives constituted a radical conceptual departure from the substance of White's original argument which, in point of fact, analysed the functional distinction between the sign, symbol and icon in language use and neither mentioned nor implied any passage of agencies, stowaways or anything else directly from the past into the present. (See White, H. *Tropics of Discourse*. p88).
[79] For Runia '....all strategies of emplotment, including the strategy White calls metonymy, belong to the sphere of "metaphor". They are metaphorical because they are in the business of 'transfer of meaning",

– either literally or figuratively – with people, things, events, and feelings that ma[k]e you into the person you are'.[80] In this sense for him *presence* is 'the unrepresented way the past is present in the present',[81] and he further explains that this transfer from past to present is effected by the rhetorical figure of metonymy. Runia goes on to say that:

> [a] metonymy is a "presence in absence" not just in the sense that it presents something that isn't there, but also in the sense that in the absence (or radical inconspicuousness) that *is* there, the thing that isn't there is still present. The presence of the past thus does not reside primarily in the intended story or the manifest metaphorical content of the text, but in what story and text contain *in spite* of the intentions of the historian. One might say that historical reality travels with historiography not as a paying passenger but as a *stowaway*.....the wonder of the historical text is....that it, despite its textuality, somehow, sometimes, *does* bring us into contact with historical reality....[for] the past *is* present in the present.... [and moreover] historical reality is, so to speak, very able to get into contact *with us*.[82]

However, Ankersmit in his essay 'Presence and Myth', explains that 'Presence is a new word in theoretical reflections on the humanities' and that

> ....there are no dictionary meanings or authoritative discussions of "presence" that fix the significance of this word in a way that ought to be accepted by everybody using it. So we are in the welcome possession of great freedom to manoeuvre when using the term. In fact, the only feasible requirement for its use is that it should maximally contribute to our understanding of the humanities.... [and] I am convinced that this really is the kind of notion we now need more than anything else. For the lingualism of the philosophy of language....has become a serious threat to the intellectual health of our discipline. The notion of "presence" may help us to enter a new phase in theoretical reflection about the humanities and to address a set of wholly new and fascinating questions.[83]

Notwithstanding this apparent confusion (which is particularly evident in Ankersmit's claim that a word of no fixed meaning or significance can, nonetheless, signify a notion which can be of use to the humanities), all these various accounts of

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whereas metonymy, by presenting an absence, is a "transfer of presence"' (Runia, E., (2006). 'Presence' in *History and Theory* 45 no. 1: p29).

[80] Runia. 'Presence'. p5

[81] Ibid. p1

[82] Ibid. p1

[83] Ankersmit, F. R., (2006). 'Presence and Myth' in *History and Theory* 45 no. 3: p328

presence do, in fact,[84] share a common characteristic. That is, they are all to do with immediate, untarnished, abrupt, intuitive and *unmediated* modes of access to the past – the past "plain". The pure essence of *the back there* suddenly flooding directly into *the here and now* in all its authenticity. Or, in short, the "stuff" of historical experience on which the concept of *presence* is manifestly based and then further developed (as I shall now show) into an *agency*[85], that of *parallel processing*.

Runia's[86] concept of *parallel processing* essentially rests on Freud's observation that an experience which is not adequately remembered may be repeated by a patient under (psycho)analysis in the form of an unconscious re-enactment of that experience. Runia then further observed, drawing also on the works of the American psychoanalyst Harold Searles, that inadequately remembered experiences (those that are not adequately historicised) may not only shape re-enactments through patient/psychoanalyst interaction but may also shape the interactions between psychoanalysts and their supervisors (as Runia calls them). Runia then takes this Freud/Searles combination of ideas into the field of historical theory and calls it *parallel processing* in order to distinguish it from Collingwood's theory of re-enactment.[87] It should be noted here that Runia's *parallel process*, as he described it, can only operate on the basis of both of these propositions; first, the idea that an inadequately remembered past experience can interact with and shape the mind of the subject of that experience and, second, that this kind of *re-experiencing* process can, in effect, be displaced such that it can perform its interactions in another location. Armed with this theoretical tool Runia found in his description of a particular event, the Srebrenica Massacre which took place during the Bosnian War of 1992/5, his postulated *parallel process* which he then championed as *the* (his) definitive proof of the existence of *parallel processing*.

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[84] Even in 'Presence and Myth', for instance, Ankersmit goes on to illustrates his argument with an example of *parallel processing* which, as I will explain in a moment, relies on a form of unmediated contact with the past (see 'Presence and Myth'. pp333-335),

[85] Because it is assumed to be able to exert an influence on the present.

[86] Although Ankersmit argues enthusiastically for *parallel processing*, it was Runia who first imported the idea into historical theory from the sphere of psychoanalytic research (see Runia, E., (2004). 'Forget About It: Parallel Processing in the Srebrenica Report' in *History and Theory* 43 no. 3: p293-320

[87] The essential difference here being that Collingwood's theory refers to the consequences of intended (conscious) action in an *artificially reconstructed* environment whilst Runia's concept refers to an unconscious process in a putatively *real* environment – the *presence* of the past.

The event is explained (storied) by Runia as follows. In July 1995 a large number (latterly reported as 8373) of Bosnian Muslims, under the protection of a Dutch UN peace keeping force, were slaughtered by Bosnian Serb forces in and around Srebrenica. This event, the greatest European mass murder since World War II, reflected badly on the peace keeping operations of a nation which believed in its own decency and moral propriety. The Dutch government's slow and confused reaction to the event – a replication of its own military authority's reaction – was interpreted by Runia as a failure to adequately historicise (or remember) the catastrophe, this being the Freudian key to the theory of *parallel processing*. The matter was then turned over to the historians of the NIOD (Netherlands Institute for War Documentation) who were asked to do what the Dutch military and Dutch politicians had failed to do – to account for (or historicise) the catastrophe. But, and this was Runia's point, the NIOD merely replicated the previous actions of the Dutch authorities in that they wrote 7000 pages (2.45 million words) of literary obfuscation which – this being the point –failed to properly account for the tragedy.

Runia (and Ankersmit) seized on this description of the sequence of events as both the definitive example of, and the proof of, the existence of *parallel processing* which was presumed to have been demonstrated through the NIOD researchers' re-enactment of their principals' behaviour in a *parallel process*, as evidenced by their very lengthy, indecisive and obscure report on it. And, what according to Ankersmit that report unintentionally did, was to

> '....try to perpetuate the myth of the Dutch people as a sensible, decent and fundamentally well intentioned nation...[for] myth manifests itself when historicisation has reached its limits and...then begins to leak into representation, and the continuum between nature and history emerges in which representation turns into a copying of the past....[whence] the representation of action becomes the action of representation....[and] precisely this transformation make us aware of the blind spot of the NIOD report: its authors started to behave in the same way as their principals but without being aware of it, and of what makes them copy their principals. We had best characterise this blind spot as the report's myth: for we have to do with myth when the past determines our actions[88, 89].

[88] Another of Runia's examples of the past determining actions in the present relied on the idea that 'In the cells and corridors of Abu Ghraib, Saddam Hussein's torture practices were so overwhelmingly present, and the sheer possibility of using them – though horrifying – loomed so large, that sooner or later the Americans *had* to repeat them' (Runia, E., (2006).'Spots of Time' in *History and Theory* 45 no. 3: p-

Seen in relation to the description of *presence* at the beginning of this Section and this very complex[90] developed version of it (or *parallel process*), *presence* can now be seen to operate at two distinctly different levels. That is to say that the past is presumed to momentarily flood into the present where, at the first level, it is simply registered as an individual's existential experience of it but, at the second level, the presence of the past (personified as 'the stowaway') *itself* takes action and imposes its own autonomous designs on the present. Or, as Runia himself prefers to put it,

> ....we as subjects are overwhelmed by the presence of the past – as in *sehnsucht* and nostalgia, in Johan Huizinga's "historical sensation", in what Frank Ankersmit calls "sublime historical experience", and finally in the mind-boggling cases where our object controls and prefigures the histories we, historians, write.[91]

Now, for me, the essentially passive notion of *presence* and, by contrast, the active 'mind-boggling' notion of *parallel processing*, consign these phenomena to different categories. Nevertheless, Runia's statement (immediately above) appears to *tie* together, for him and the "Groningen School" at least, the notions of *presence* and *parallel processing*. And furthermore, it relates them to sublime historical experience and historical sensation; the latter of which, as I have already argued, is the underlying founding concept upon which this whole branch of experience studies is based. Just for the moment this completes my excursion into the alluring sphere of *presence*.

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308). These and many related phenomena involving the *intervention* of the past in the present were the central concern of the previously noted conference 'Moved by the Past' (which I attended). However, no one present thought to question its underlying presupposition that the present can be influenced in the above way; this central idea was simply taken as a conference defining given.

[89] Ankersmit. 'Presence and Myth'. pp334-335

[90] A simple explanation might be that the Dutch politicians and the NIOD historians, being profoundly disturbed when they became aware of the effective (through neglect) complicity of their own Dutch UN peace keeping battalion in the massacre of these Bosnian Muslims, tried to concealed or disguise matters as best they could through obfuscation in order to mitigate National embarrassment. That is what others nations might well have done in similar circumstances and such a response could be easily explained in terms of human nature or political expediency, so why should Ankersmit and Runia need to explain this affair through the mysticism and the arguable incredulity of a notion like *parallel processing*?

[91] Runia. 'Spots of Time'. p7

Section Four: A Misleading Title

In this final Section of Chapter Four I am first going to very briefly gather together all the essential points that I have tried to make in the previous three Sections such that my critique of historical experience might be more effectively presented. I then question more closely Ankersmit's notion of de-contextualisation and the significance of his assumption that all considerations relating to language can be unproblematically ejected from his theorisations. Having dismissed Ankersmit's thesis on these and other grounds, I then hope to show that historical experience as construed by Ankersmit is not historical (nor for that matter, experiential) at all and, therefore, it could never have given Ankersmit the style of history he seemed to be after. Rather, if it can give or do anything at all (and I argue here that this is questionable) it does so only at an individual existential level and, therefore, it would have been more appropriate for Ankersmit to have located his *phenomenon* in the rapidly expanding field of memory studies – to which its timely appearance could also almost certainly be taken as indexical.

So, first the general points in connection with the arguments raised in this Chapter. Ankersmit's undertaking in the writing of *Sublime Historical Experience* can now be seen as an attempt to develop an alternative theory of history capable of providing an unmediated and thus *direct* entry into a real, authentic experiential relationship to the past. In addition, his argument was to account for the nature and occasion of the emergence of a modern Western historical consciousness which he inextricably tied-in to his notion of sublime historical experience. And, furthermore, sublime historical experience itself was understood by Ankersmit to be a variant of historical experience which, as I have argued, rested not only on a problematic interpretation of Huizinga's thesis on historical sensation, but also on a series of pre-suppositions that were never properly investigated by Ankersmit. Now, with these general points made, a brief summary of the nature of sublime historical experience can follow.

For Ankersmit the French Revolution of 1789, which gave rise to 'the most decisive and profound changes that western man has undergone',[92] is the paradigm case for his theory of sublime historical experience. The irreversible rupture with a previous way of life occasioned by the French Revolution and the necessary abandonment of its traditions, familiarity and so on – the shedding of a previous identity in order to enter into a radically new way of life with a new identity – was a painful experience. And this pain (the pain of profound loss and cultural despair) which lingered on after the event as a constant presence (seen by Ankersmit as a component of his 'groanings of civilisations') is the essence of the "stuff" that historians are presumed to connect with when experiencing the historical sublime – an experience which, Ankersmit insists, can *only* come into being out of the trauma of loss. Now, concurrently with this proposition Ankersmit's ran the closely related argument that in order to get a historical consciousness in the first place, a civilisation or culture has to go through a traumatic cultural experience of this sort. For it is only when a civilisation's or a culture's past has been ripped away from its present, causing that civilisation or culture to lose all "bearings" as it faces the uncertainty of its collective future, that the process of historical change – the past breaking away from the present – becomes suddenly very apparent. Accordingly, for Ankersmit, it is precisely out of this sudden recognition of a previous identity which (because it has "broken away" and become irretrievably lost) has to be consciously shed in favour of a new identity, that the conditions for the acquisition of historical consciousness arises.

Now, at this stage in his argument Ankersmit (it appears) assumed that he had identified a *collective* sublime experience, his 'groanings of a civilisation' which, as he himself explained, had no subject of experience, no *self*. However, through the inventive introduction of the 'hybrid creature' metaphor, Ankersmit endeavoured to name, give shape to and articulate this *collective* notion such that it could be linked to the *individual* being of the subject of historical experience. Ankersmit, in effect, called on his readers to accept that this hybrid creature, adrift in the ether and bereft of self-awareness, possessed a facility which endowed it with the capacity to make

[92] Ankersmit. *Sublime Historical Experience*. p323

contact with (or intersect and enter in some way or other) a historian's central nervous system, thereby to register in that historian's mind (as a surrogate *self*) the authentic, unmediated feelings and sensations transmitted by the experience in question. Such an argument, if one were to suppose that it could be seriously entertained, would provide Ankersmit with his required link between *collective* sublime historical experience and *individual* (existential) historical experience. But, even so, there are yet further problems because historical experience itself rests, as I have argued, on a flawed set of pre-suppositions which are (1) that the notions of sensation and experience are identical (2) that description can constitute explanation (3) that sublime historical experience can be unproblematically taken as a variant of historical experience and (4) that human reality (not actuality but reality) is prior to language (or does not presuppose it) and that, in consequence, the *real* and *language* can be treated as discrete entities.

That completes my brief summary, but there is another assumption that should be revisited here, for it lies beneath and shapes Ankersmit's explanation of historical experience under the overarching rhetorical figure of his Romeo and Juliet metaphor.[93] I am referring to Ankersmit's conviction that the subject of historical

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[93] Ankersmit's Romeo and Juliet metaphor, as I have already explained, figures his argument in support of historical experience (as the original title to Ankersmit's book suggests - see page 164 above). This metaphor functioned for Ankersmit on the basis of what he called 'a double movement of de-contextualisation', in the sense that both Romeo and Juliet had to free themselves from the influences of their respective mutually belligerent families in order that they could eventually come together in the embrace, or kiss, which effected a transfer of *true* feelings and sensations. Projecting this idea onto his theory of historical experience, Ankersmit illustrated his conviction that both the historian and the past have to, in like manner, rupture their contextual ties in order to hurry together to the *locus* of contact where similar authentic exchanges would then take place. Now this metaphor of Ankersmit's has, I think, not been properly thought through, for Romeo's and Juliet's withdrawals from their respective families cannot be seen as acts of de-contextualisation at all. Rather, I would argue that they both added to, or modified, their contexts in the sense that their identities became more complex with the repudiation of their families. Accordingly, it is my argument that neither Romeo nor Juliet moved outside their respective contexts and that therefore Ankersmit's omnipresent metaphor fails to 'work its passage'. Furthermore, I should point out that Ankersmit's particular use of the Romeo and Juliet metaphor appears to conflict with his own *contextual* notion of self identity as he explained it in *Narrative Logic*. For (as I have already explained in Chapter One) he takes self identity to be a logical entity which refers to a *narrative substance* (per)formed on the self and which is comprised of statements which express all the experiences and perceptions of that self to date (which would, of course, in the fullness of time, include those to come). On this (Ankersmit's own) understanding of the structure of self identity – that is, as an always on-going performative product of contextualisation – his introduction of the idea that one can somehow "shed" context/identity is absurd/unworkable. Thus, Ankersmit's underlying articulatory use of his Romeo and Juliet metaphor in the first six chapters of *Sublime Historical Experience* arguably represents yet another contradictory tension within the rhetorical style of his thesis.

experience, the historian, can indeed become de-contextualised, as required by Ankersmit's theory, and thus meet the necessary condition for the receipt of (de-contextualised) historical experiences. I will now more thoroughly explore this assumption on which, by his *own* definition, Ankersmit's theory of historical experience actually depends and therefore without which it basically collapses. For the oppositional point that needs to be made is that arguably we are, all of us, born into ongoing social formations which constitute a context, or a life-giving, life-long process of socialisation and enculturation, which

> ....performatively produces/reproduces personal/interpersonal identities, etc., relative to hegemonic (and hence contingent/unstable) 'conditions'....we just are, as Derrida has expressed it many times, 'our inheritances' (know it or not, like it or not); we are 'always in a text already' without any originary moment, without any chance of any metaphysical/ontological....actual 'full presence'....[94]

On this understanding the Ankersmitean shedding of context/identity (literally the emptying out of the experiencing subject) reduces that subject to neutral blankness; an unformed pre-natal being without the wherewithal, the self identity, which is required by Ankersmit's theory in order to register the historical sublime or remember a previous identity or, for that matter, anything at all. It is interesting to note in this connection that the historical theorist Torbjörn G. Chorell, in his review article 'F. R. Ankersmit and the Historical Sublime'[95] (already referred to in 'footnote 19' above), produced an argument from a slightly different perspective which supports my sceptical position with regard to de-contextualisation.

Chorell argued that the notion of de-contextualisation as construed by Ankersmit was internally incoherent, in that Ankersmit claimed that historical experience referred to an experience

> ....in which the history of the experiencing subject (and the memory thereof) has no role to play—*it is an experience without a subject.* The subject has to divest itself from its *own* history which ordinarily contextualizes and historicizes his or

[94] Jenkins, K., 'Referee's Report' concerning the publication of Runia, E., 'Inventing the New from the Old: From White's 'Tropics' to Vico's 'Topics'' (Both to be published, along with Runia's reply to the Jenkins report, in a forthcoming edition of *Rethinking History* in 2010). Thanks to Keith Jenkins for early sight of these papers.

[95] Chorell. 'F. R. Ankersmit and the Historical Sublime'. pp91-102

> her experience – and in this way there is no preceding subject of experience. The subject of experience comes into being only with and thanks to the experience in question. It is only thanks to this emptying of the subject of any prior structure, content, memory, and so on that we can move on from dialectical *Erfahrung* (and thus from Gadamer and Adorno) to the sublimity of historical experience.[96]

Yet, this explicit understanding of the de-contextualisation process seems to defeat itself, for the subject of experience, stripped of any prior structure, content, memory, etc., lacks the cognitive framework within which anything at all could be recognised. So how, one might ask, could that subject, whilst suspended in a de-contextualised "nothingness" state of being, somehow recognise a previous self irretrievable broken away from the present? As Chorell pointed out, what the subject of experience must, actually, be recognising is

> ....the change that experience has brought about, not that they met a lost part of themselves in the moment of experience.... [and, furthermore, he asks] in what way does this differ from the dialectical experience that Ricoeur and Gadamer and others speak about, where the experience changes and influences the subject?[97]

Moreover – and crucially – since Ankersmit had claimed that it was through the phenomenon of historical experience that we can recognise a lost part of ourselves, surely the new identity formed out of that experience cannot be seen as a complete break with that previous identity. For we must be retaining some sort of memory of *what has been* in order to be aware of *what we have lost* and *what is new*; therefore we cannot have de-contextualised ourselves after all. Rather, this whole process must logically entail some form of continuity with the former self and, accordingly, Chorell has suggested that 'the loss [that] we think we have had has....been dialectically incorporated into the new memory'.[98] Chorell's critical evaluation of Ankersmit's position compliments my own critique of de-contextualisation and also accords with Ankersmit's earlier and much better characterisation of identity as a *narrative substance* written or inscribed on the self (as discussed in Chapter One, pages 29 and 30) and which he now seems to have forgotten.

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[96] Ankersmit, F. R., (2005). *Sublime Historical Experience*. California: Stanford University Press. p146
[97] Chorell. 'F. R. Ankersmit and the Historical Sublime'. P98
[98] Ibid. p99

I would now like to tie this observation into another important matter, namely the performative function of language which constitutes the human reality (built out of 'our inheritances') in which we are all immersed. I will be, in part, drawing for this purpose on an argument laid out by Martin Davis in the last Section of Variation Four ('History as Symbolic Re-enactment') of his recent publication *Historics*.

Davies argues here that within our (human) historicised world there is nothing which cannot become or has not already become a historical symbol – the past is all around us in our "historic" environment which is 'a collective memory containing stories written in stone, brick, wood, glass, steel; stories inscribed in field patterns, hedgerows, designed landscapes and so on ....'.[99] Accordingly, the past which no longer exists can only (putatively) make itself known through some kind of existing historical text within the historicised semiotic system. There is, therefore, no extra-textual referent for the historical text, no knowable objective reality, nothing beyond the semiotic-system which describes it.

Thus humans, as symbol using language animals, consciously operate reflexively through systems of representations – sign-systems (notations) of human making – without which human objective reality would be unthinkable and thus unknowable. This world of words creates the world of things or, to restate again one of my previous Hayden White quotes, '....tropics [meaning tropological language use] is the process by which all discourse *constitutes* the objects which it pretends only to describe realistically and analyse objectively'.

Returning to *Historics*, Davies, drawing support from George Steiner,[100] is in agreement with the latter's notion that;

> [t]he past is thinkable and knowable only through the current semiotic or symbolic system. 'Our sense of the past, not as immediately, innately acquired

[99] Davies, M. L., (2006). *Historics: Why History Dominates Contemporary Society*. Abingdon: Routledge. p233

[100] Steiner, G., (1975). *Extraterritorial: Papers on Literature and the Language Revolution*, Harmondsworth: Peregrine Books. (Davies quotes from p70).

> reflexes, but as a shaped selection of remembrance, is....radically linguistic. History, in the human sense, is a language-net cast backwards....'[101]

Davis's argument, then, is articulated around the understanding that we humans live in a rhetorical world of human making which is constituted in the language we use to describe it. Any *thing* that lies outside our capacity for its linguistic description could not be linguistically related to other *things* and thus could not (as we have seen Richard Rorty argue) be talked of or thought of. For, to step outside a language of description is to step into an ineffable void. A void which, in a converse sense, finds itself in serious want of a language of description (and any *familiarising* language would do, providing that it has sufficient utility value to allow us humans to get around in it). There is, then, no escape from language, and (incidentally) I therefore cannot agree with one aspect of Michael Roth's argument in his recent review of *Sublime Historical Experience* in which he maintained that, following the 'demise' of the linguistic turn,

> ...the massive tide of language....has receded... [and] we are now able to look across the sand to see what might be worth salvaging before the next wave of theory....begins to pound the shore. As language recedes ....etc/etc.[102]

For here the point is that arguably the medium of language does not, nor cannot, itself recede – it is not, in Roth's sense, 'tidal': language cannot succumb (to use his metaphor) to the moon's gravity and thereby leave us beached outside its reach in an ineffable void. As symbol using language animals we are always continuously and totally submerged in language – like it or not, that is how it is.

Now, I have argued these two connected points (the inextricably context bound condition of human existence and the language dependant nature of that context) in order to demonstrate the questionable nature of the idea that these arguments can be ignored or that they can, without explanation, be assumed to have been circumvented. There is nothing in Ankersmit's writings that indicates to me that he has grasped the implications that these considerations have for his thesis on historical experience, and certainly nothing that effectively negates these two

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[101] Davies. *Historics.* p235
[102] Roth, M. S., (2007). 'Ebb Tide'in *History and Theory* 46 no. 1: p66

arguments such that his move beyond them might be seen to be adequately justified. Nevertheless, Ankersmit does move on, apparently secure in the knowledge that de-contextualisation holds no problems for him, and it appears that the "Groningen School" itself reflects this position.[103] However, the last and essential point that I wish to stress here is that Ankersmit's assumption (in the furtherance of his thesis), that one can unproblematically "step out" of both context and language, is not supported anywhere in his writings by any form of argument whatsoever. But, as I have shown, there is a coherent and powerful counter-argument to Ankersmit's position which (in my view) fatally undermines his overall thesis and which he continues to ignore, even though it can be seen to be leaking into and destabilising his and the "Groningen School's" position on the matter.

So, to make it quite clear, my argument is that these two interconnected[104] propositions which, it can be convincingly argued, undermine the validity of Ankersmit's case for the existence of the phenomenon of sublime historical experience, were either unnoticed, ignored or dismissed by him whilst arguing his thesis. This oversight of Ankersmit's is compounded when taking into consideration a further two matters as follows:

[103] For instance, responding to Jenkins' 'Referee's Report' on his essay submitted for publication in *Rethinking History* (referred to above, footnote 94), Runia very positively confirmed that 'yes, I am saying that we are *not* 'always in a text already', yes, I do maintain that there are 'originary moments', yes, I do believe that things may start ex nihilo, yes, etc....' This constitutes a clear statement of position which, effectively, emanates from the "Groningen School", yet it is not entirely coherent for in Runia's essay he makes many references to his central subject *presence* as context bound. For instance 'our culture is made up of 'presences'.... institutions not only determine the way we live but also constitute the sphere in which we communicate about the way we live....presence succeeds in getting 'on board' unnoticed in as far as texts tap living culture....and (in Runia. 'Spots of Time'. p315) presence.. ....coincides with our culture. In a sense it *is* our culture.' On my reading of these two texts, and despite Runia's protestation to the contrary, it appears to me that he locates *presence* (and thus historical experience) precisely in that same cultural context discussed a few pages back, the context of *our inheritances*. This apparent contradiction of his own argument undermines Runia's theoretical position and by inference undermines the collective position of the "Groningen School".

[104] Ankersmit's presupposition that the human "real" precedes and is thus disconnected from its language of description, such that language and reality can each be taken as discrete entities (argued at the beginning of this section), can be taken as implicit to and thus included in the second of these interconnected arguments.

(1) Ankersmit's whole argument and its derivatives (*presence*, *parallel processing* and other products of the "Groningen School"),[105] rest on Huizinga's theory of historical sensation. Moreover, when Ankersmit took Huizinga's description of historical sensation and adopted it as the basis for his own phenomenon of historical experience, he apparently failed to notice the categorical distinction between these two terms. For a descriptive example of what I mean, let's say that walking down the high street I suddenly receive a sharp blow between the shoulder blades. At the instant of the occurrence my awareness is one of sensation and *only* that (shock, pain, fear for instance). However, a moment later, having turned and observed the piece of masonry fallen from above or my assailant still grasping a club (or whatever), I can then fit my received sensation of being struck into the human "real" – that is, into the context in which I function – and thereby transform my *sensation*, through categories of understanding (as Kant explained), into an *experience*. Now, categories of understanding are context bound and context, our human context, is (as I have already argued in various places) constituted in its linguistic (symbolic) description. On this view it follows that experience already and always embodies a language dimension within it which, ironically, is precisely what Ankersmit wanted to circumvent (and he believed that he had done so) through his use of the notion of experience. To sum-up on this point, it seems to me that Ankersmit's shift in descriptive terminology from *historical sensation* to what (for the avoidance of terminological confusion) he called the more neutral term, *historical experience*, effected a fundamental disjunction from, and therefore broke all ties with, Huizinga's phenomenon. Yet, Ankersmit continued to use Huizinga's now "disconnected" thesis as a kind of validating authority and exemplar (even explanation) for his own thesis. Moreover, Ankersmit failed to see that having made this questionable shift, he was, in effect, also moving back into the medium of language – the place he wanted to avoid.

[105] For instance, Rick Peters on 'Fascism as a Presence Based Culture', Michael Bently and his notion of 'chronism' - bringing presence (authenticity) back into historical studies and Hans U. Gumbrecht on the "transportation" of presence through language. These and other *presence* related essays can be found in (2006). *History and Theory* 45 no. 3 (a themed edition).

(2) My second point is in connection with Ankersmit's apparent assumption that, once described, a phenomenon is somehow explained and "up and running". For example, Ankersmit's 'hybrid creature' metaphor with which he linked the *collective* (sublime) and *individual* forms of historical experience, is a description presented as an explanation. Here Ankersmit presumes to be actually explaining how a historian can genuinely and authentically re-experience something predating his/her birth date – something he/she never witnessed – that is to say, something which resides outside the identity of its subject of experience. Now, Ankersmit's hybrid curiosity has already featured twice in my thesis and there is no need to run through its mode of operation again, but there are several observations that I would like to add to it. For instance, this metaphorical device of Ankersmit's is buried in his Chapter Five on Gadamer (page 196, right in the middle of the book), and is not in plain view in Chapter Eight where it belongs. For it is, after all, absolutely fundamental to the supposed functioning of the operating mechanism of Chapter Eight's subject matter, sublime historical experience. Indeed, Ankersmit's curious idea could easily be and indeed has been missed,[106] for nowhere else in his book does he again refer directly to this transference apparatus which purports to render a wandering, ethereal, experiential *collectivity* at an existential, *individual* level[107] – it is simply taken for granted that this can happen. So how might this "disappearance" have come about? Well, perhaps there is something else of significance going on in Ankersmit's text, for having completed his hybrid creature argument he effectively displaced both it and its explanatory mechanism by renaming it and thereby masking (in a way) its imaginative descriptive origin. That is, he told his readers to take the hybrid creature not metaphorically but for what it *really/actually* was, 'the groanings of a civilisation', and, accordingly, the creature vanished from Ankersmit's text at this point whilst the replacement 'groanings' (just another metaphor) got four mentions in ten lines to

[106] And it is missed to the extent that (to my knowledge) none of Ankersmit's commentators/reviewers have ever mentioned it.
[107] Hence, this is the only link between what appears to be two books rolled up into one.

reinforce its new status. No doubt the 'groanings of a civilisation', as a metaphor, better fits (or finds its natural home) in memory/experience discourse and, following the demise of the hybrid creature, it readily superseded[108] its predecessor and hence (this being the point of my observation) it effectively obscured its origins. However, the main point that I want to make is that behind what is intended to be a familiarising metaphor lies a bizarre old metaphor, and beneath that lies an astonishing description of a phenomenon. A description which Ankersmit must have taken as some sort of explanation[109] for that phenomenon because his subsequent argument is unquestionably based on the assumption that such experiential clusters of past moods and feelings really do exist and do exactly what he says that they do.[110]

To recap for a moment. Over the previous few pages I have laid out four arguments in opposition to Ankersmit's four positions regarding, respectively, (1) the notion of de-contextualisation (my point being that one cannot *step out* of context), (2) the language dependant nature of that context, (3) the conflation of experiences with sensations and (4) the very idea of the hybrid creature which provides the connective link between *collective* (sublime) and *individual* experience.

Now, items (2) and (3), as I have already intimated (in the opening comments to this chapter and the beginning of its Section One), can be taken as unexamined presupposition imported by Ankersmit into his argument as articulated in *Sublime Historical Experience*, whereas items (1) and (4) are worked-up within that argument itself. And I think that one could further argue that *Sublime Historical Experience* – internally at the level of its own text and ignoring all philosophical presuppositions brought to it – could be reduced to items (1) and (4) as its two

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[108] Albeit with the word *groanings*, on some occasions, becoming *moods, feelings* or *experiences*.
[109] An explanation, both necessary and sufficient, cannot be generated within a description. However, there is a distinction between a description that only attempts to be a description and an attempt at an explanation of what is being described. I do not think that Ankersmit makes that explanatory attempt.
[110] I could equally have used for my example here Ankersmit's four point description of historical experience which, as evidenced in his following arguments, was taken by him to constitute a satisfactory explanation of it.

essential, central issues (i.e. his claims regarding first de-contextualisation and, second, the conflation of *collective* sublime historical experience and *individual* historical experience) for, in a manner of speaking, these are the sequenced enabling strategies which, were they to be accepted, would make his argument work. I have used the word sequenced in the sense that de-contextualisation, as expressed through Ankersmit's omnipresent Romeo and Juliet metaphor, is the necessary enabling device for historical experience itself and its variant as Ankersmit put it (although seen in my argument as of a different kind), sublime historical experience. Then, having argued this much, Ankersmit's subsequent conflation of these two different terms under the validating authority of the hybrid creature rendered collective (sublime) experience at an individual experiential level and got him, he thought, precisely the all embracing *direct experience* theory that he wanted. This appears to be the underlying thematic "story" of *Sublime Historical Experience*, a story which Ankersmit tried to hold together with his imported, unworkable philosophies.

However, to continue, it seems to me to be the case that any one of the points/ arguments mentioned above poses, at the very least, a serious threat to the validity of Ankersmit's argument for sublime historical experience. But, I am convinced that all four together demolish it and, accordingly, from my point-of-view the concept of sublime historical experience is now effectively dead. For this reason the completion of this Section (and Chapter) will have the appearance of a *post-mortem* on sublime historical experience which will initially focus on Ankersmit's choice of title for his book. Accordingly, I first of all want to consider Ankersmit's use (in his title) of the word 'Historical' which, and one must assume its purposeful use here, describes a phenomenon of a historical kind. So, what is it about sublime historical experience that is historical?

Well, I think that historical means pertaining to histories or stories about the past ('the-past-as-history'[111] being the only form in which the past can be thought of and

[111] In various places Alun Munslow has stressed the point that we can only "know" the past through various constructed historical accounts of it – or as 'the-past-as-history' which he suggests could usefully replace the word 'history' to remind us that '....the past exists now only as a form of created (written, physically built, filmed or whatever) phenomenon' (Munslow. *Narrative and History* p8).

debated in the here and now) and there is no history, as far as I can see, which does not have all of those characteristics which Hayden White attributed to it in his book *Metahistory*, my reading of which can be briefly summarised as follows. For White the past is sublime, it can never be known in itself and for itself, but it leaves traces and when seen in a certain light (from a particular point-of-view) a preferred selection of these traces can become both the sources for, and the evidence in relation to, the case to be supported from that point-of-view. This data, written-up in culturally meaningful story forms within the formalist literary structure identified by White [112] (its architecture being that of emplotment, argument and ideological positioning coherently integrated within tropological modes of meaning making) constitutes a history. In this sense history can be seen as the performative product of an on-going point-of-view which both launches the process of its own production and carries that process to its conclusion in the form of a narrative representation of, or proposition about, the past – and nothing more. Moreover, these components and processes are, in effect, White's *conditions of possibility* for any sort of history at all, be it of an empiricist, feminist, Marxist, reflexive postmodern (or whatever) style: (no White – no history...one might say). But, and this is my point, sublime historical experience does not have any of these characteristics in it, indeed it specifically rejects them all. And Ankersmit himself confirmed this point when he stated that *Sublime Historical Experience* is not about 'historical explanation, causality, narrative or representation'.[113] So, whatever it is about, one can very reasonably presume that it has nothing to do with history and it is therefore not *historical*.

[112] However, one should note that as a formal structure within which multiplicities of conceptual and explanatory choices exist, it clearly does not nor cannot determine the style or content of histories organised within its structure (it is not a form of linguistic determinism). It is a structure without a substance of its own but within which the substance of, for example, Nazism, Marxism, Imperialism (or whatever) can be imported and articulated – it is, in short, an empty yet necessary mechanism (a necessary condition) for the production of all stories including histories. White then, on my reading of him, is not saying that these component formalist elements determine what is to be said but he is saying that nothing can be said without them, that they are the narrative's *enabling devices*. Accordingly, White is describing/explaining a metaphysical concept/structure of a literary fictive kind within which all (hi)stories are necessarily told. Moreover, the fictive element in historical writing is irreducible, that is to say that one cannot get rid of it precisely because it *is* the structure within which traces of the past are worked-up into the coherent texts we call histories.

[113] Ankersmit. *Sublime historical Experience*. p14

Next the word 'Experience' which is equally inappropriately used in Ankersmit's title. For, as I have been arguing throughout this chapter, his book is not about experience. Rather, it is about sensations which do not in themselves constitute experiences *per se* but do, as I have previously argued, refer back to Huizinga's account of historical sensations upon which Ankersmit (without, as far as I can determine, noticing his conflation of categories) constructed his theoretical argument for historical experience.

And finally, as I have argued in Chapter Three, when Ankersmit talks of the sublime he has in mind a quasi-Romantic notion of it. For the aim of Romanticism was to somehow appropriate and subsume a 'sense sublime'[114] into itself and Ankersmit talks of *his* sublime in rather the same way. That is, as something imaginable with a theoretically discoverable shape and discoverable boundaries to the extent that its apparent indeterminacy might even be solved mathematically.[115] By

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[114] 'A presence that disturbs me with the joy / Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime', Wordsworth, W., (1798). 'Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey' in *Lyrical Ballads*, London: J. & A. Arch.

[115] This, another of Ankersmit's complex and convoluted arguments, involves the sublime, mathematics and Burckhardt's *synchronic* approach to the past (his attempt to liberate past events from their historiographical ties to the events – the context – which surrounds them). These synchronic cross sections (*Querschnitte*) of the past are each presumed to constitute an instantaneous de-contextualised image of the past. Burckhardt's past is thus denuded of its protective shell of narrative and revealed not as a set of dramas unfolding with time but as a set of isolated pictorial compositions – works of art – and the past, encountered thus, retains the character of a work of art. That is to say that the apprehension of any moment in the past (a snapshot), on this view, can be likened to an encounter with a work of art – an *experience* – where all that truly matters happens precisely on the trajectory between the work of art and the observing subject and nowhere else. Such isolated snapshots of the past deny the narrative organisation of any *before* or *after* and thus deny the discovery of any mediating temporal order in the past which would, were it to be established, devalue the notion of direct *experience* as referred to here. Ankersmit then argues that this 'doing away with narrative', which is central to Burckhardt's thesis, is in a sense initially *parasitic* because the act of 'doing away with narrative' presupposes the existence of narrative in the first place. Or, to rephrase, Burckhardt's argument operates on the basis of the prior existence of narrative which it then strives to dismiss – his argument thus *feeds* on narrativist historism. Ankersmit accordingly concludes that this act of de-historicising (de-contextualising) can only take place if everything is first historicised (contextualised). In this manner he finds a link between his so called 'de-contextualised historical experience' and the 'contextualised narrative'; that is to say that the former both presupposes and depends on the latter. Consequently, what is to be learned from Burckhardt, Ankersmit explains, is that professionalised (historist) historical writing should not be sacrificed in favour of historical experience because, although *narrative* and *experience* are incommensurable, 'historical experience makes sense only and exclusively against the background of professionalised historical writing....[for] before and without professionalised historical writing, historical experience is....meaningless'(*Sublime Historical Experience*, p.173). Accordingly, Ankersmit proposed that historians should recognise the creative interaction of the interdependence, yet incommensurability, of 'historical experience' and of 'professionalised historical writing'. However, says Ankersmit, there are no rules for fixing the *juste milieu* (his words) between the two of them. Moreover, if there were *fixing* rules then these two elements would no longer be incommensurable. And this is where the argument drifts into differential calculus for Ankersmit argues that....

contrast the post-modern sublime is an *ineffable* sublime which resists all attempts at its appropriation precisely because it is unfathomable, un-ontologizable and therefore beyond grasp. To somehow penetrate the ineffable (a logical contradiction) and apprehend its sublimity (place it under description) would be to negate its sublimity, yet this is effectively what Ankersmit seems to be doing when he engages with this post-modern sublime (of White, Derrida, Rorty *et al*) from the standpoint of a dated Romantic sublime. Moreover, Ankersmit's understanding of the notion of the sublime is, as Ewa Domańska has also pointed out (in a recent paper in which she focused on the concept of *Sublime Historical Experience*), inadequate to the needs of his argument, and she suggested that it would have been useful to her to have had from Ankersmit

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> ...it follows that if we accept the category of the sublime as a meaningful category, a creative interaction of narrative and experience must exist, although we will never be able to figure out a priori where to find it. It is the kind of thing that we just hit upon – and more cannot be said about it. We can only just *observe* or *establish* that some *optimum* or creative interaction has been achieved in the relationship between narrative and experience, without our being able to deduce this observation from the application of some set of rules for how to negotiate between the two (*Sublime Historical Experience*, p.175).

Ankersmit then likens this indeterminacy with that of the differential equation in mathematics (an equation which contains both an unknown function and its derivatives) wherein optimum values of the function, prior to Newton's/Leibniz's differential calculus, could only be established by trial and error commencing with an initial intuitive (logically inexplicable) guess or, in Ankersmit's words, 'something we just hit upon'. Thus, Ankersmit continues,

> ....differential calculus can be said to perform what, analogously, could not possibly be performed for the relationship between narrative and experience. So one might say that historical writing is in much the same situation as mathematics was before the discovery of differential calculus by Newton and Leibniz. Before this discovery there was something "sublime" about the question of where the equation $f(x) = \frac{1}{5}x^5 + \frac{1}{2}x^2 - 12x$ would attain its local optimum and minimum: One could only hit on it experimentally (that is, by simply trying out different values for x), but no adequate explanation could be given for this. It has been Newton's and Leibniz's feat of genius to reduce what was "sublime" to what could be figured out, or to reduce what was incommensurable to what could be made commensurable thanks to the magic of differential calculus, whereas this is not (yet) possible in the domain of historical writing. I would like to add here that Leibniz's theory of the substance (which is in many respects the ontological counterpart of his mathematics) may also show us what such a "differential calculus" for the humanities would probably have to look like and how we could thus eliminate sublimity from the humanities – although this will remain in all likelihood a merely theoretical rather than actual possibility (*Sublime Historical Experience*, p.175-6).

This claim of Ankersmit's – that the sublime can, in theory, be eliminated from the humanities – appears to me to be based on the belief that it is theoretically possible to transcend the sublime, appropriate it and then reduce it to the equivalence of a component of a mathematical equation. I have followed this argument through in detail because within it one can, in fact, discern the origins of three of Ankersmit's underlying ideas. First the notion of de-contextualisation in general and, in particular, the 'doing away with narrative'. Then the notion of linkage between 'de-contextualised historical experience' and the 'contextualised narrative'. And finally (supporting the current argument) an extension of Ankersmit's concept of the sublime which, for him, also includes the possibility of its theoretical reduction through a proposed '"differential calculus" for the humanities'.

some explanation of his '....theory of the sublime, the instruments for its analysis, and understanding of its aesthetics'.[116] Thus, also for Domańska, nowhere in his argument does Ankersmit clearly state his own position on the status of the sublime – a position which, were it to be revealed, would (I believe) locate him outside current philosophical discourse on the matter.

Accordingly, taking each of these three arguments in order, it would appear that one can immediately and reasonably strike the word 'Historical' from the book's title because the book has nothing to do with history. Along with it goes the word 'Experience', because the book is about sensations and not about experiences and, furthermore, the word 'Sublime' can also be struck out because, as Domańska argued (and I agree), Ankersmit's particular understanding and use of this word is inadequate to his argument. This apposite exercise, of course, leaves the book without a title. However, turning to the very last page of *Sublime Historical Experience*, one can see that the book is part of a series of books published under the collective title *Cultural Memory in the Present*. And this is very interesting, for (on my reading of it) this *is* precisely the subject of Ankersmit's book. What he is talking about in *Sublime Historical Experience*, but he scarcely seems to notice it, is the subject of enculturation. The transmission of cultural identity (or human context) from the past into the present in the form of a kind of *latent* memory; memory which is already and always in the present as embedded in our laws, our institutions, our religions, practices, norms, every-day 'isms' and so on, which are collectively referred to by Derrida as 'our inheritances' or, by Davies, as the 'collective memory of our already historicised world'. On this understanding, Ankersmit's excursions into the sublime can be re-situated where they really belong: in the field of sociology and memory studies from whence they appear to have escaped in the guise of the historical. Ankersmit's writings on sublime historical experience can, on this view, be explained in terms of the ancient sociological concept of *habitus*, more

[116] Domańska, E., (2009). 'Frank Ankersmit: From Narrative to Experience' in *Rethinking History* 13 no. 2: p187

recently re-elaborated by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu who argues that what is taken-for-granted in the world flows from

> ....practical sense....instilled by the childhood learning that treats the body as a living memory pad [a receptacle for enculturation], an automaton that 'leads the mind unconsciously along with it'....[in a] form of blind or symbolic thought ....[a] social necessity turned into nature, converted into motor schemes and body automatisms...[thus] agents never know completely what they are doing [but] what they do has more sense than they know....[and] every social order systematically takes advantage of the disposition of the body and language to function as depositories of deferred thoughts that can be triggered off at a distance in space and time by the simple effect of replacing the body in an overall posture which recalls the associated thoughts and feelings, in one of the inductive states of the body which, as actors know, give rise to states of mind.[117]

This line of argument can be applied equally successfully to the phenomenon of *presence* which, in the light of the foregoing explanation, can also plausibly be seen as the natural, explicable consequence of enculturation and hence need not be explained in terms of myth, stowaways, de-contextualisation, pre-lingual states of mind or anything else. Moreover, there is a rich, compelling and brilliantly argued contemporary source of literature to support this general view on the nature and effect of enculturation, yet it lies "untapped" by Ankersmit (and also by Runia/ Ankersmit in relation to *presence*) and which, were it to have been explicitly taken into account in their experience/presence discourse, could have enhanced the standing of the "Groningen school" and the literature produced by it. But Ankersmit does not appear to have attached any value to these explanatory politico-sociological sources (included in the works of, for instance, Badiou, Deleuze, Derrida, Lyotard *et al*) for, despite this vibrant and significant body of analysis, he preferred to find his definitive references in Huizinga, Burckhardt, Schiller, Goethe etc. Ewa Domańska has more to add to this critique, for in her essay for *Rethinking History* (mentioned a moment ago) she notes that

> ....in his discussion of historical experience Ankersmit not only ignores those trends in historiography which emerged in the 1990s, when he was formulating his theory of experience, but also fails to acknowledge those works which first drew historians' attention to the category of experience, such as 'history from below' with E. P. Thompson's classic *The making of the English working class*

[117] Bourdieu, P., (1990). *The Logic of Practice*. Chicago: Stanford University Press. pp68-69

> and the journal *History Workshop*, focusing on the experience of real life. Further, Ankersmit does not acknowledge the long tradition of women's history, which concentrates on the everyday experience of women, or the history of gender. In *Sublime Historical Experience* he never mentions Joan W. Scott's classic and influential 1991 article 'The evidence of experience'....[in which] she expresses an ambivalent attitude towards experience....[and] cautions against the notion of experience because it can essentialize both the experiencing subject and experience itself [whilst] Frank Ankersmit addresses experience within the aesthetic framework of the sublime [and thus] his view of experience is radically opposed to that of Scott. Adopting the concept of the sublime based on the classic theories of Burke and Kant, Ankersmit seems to invite the kind of criticism that is generally aimed at the project of modernity....a discussion of the historical sublime should take into account the critical views of it....[118]

And these critical views, to follow Domańska's developing argument, further undermine the integrity of Ankersmit's Burke/Kantian sublime because they oppose a sublime of this sort which is founded on a gender-specific tradition. Or, to restate, the sublime described by the classics is – as Domańska stresses – associated with a masculine perception of the world whereas the beautiful is associated with a feminine one, and this division of the world into the masculine sublime and the feminine beautiful (which is implicit in Ankersmit's Burke/Kantian sublime) has become, in the work of Scott *et al*, the focus of feminist criticism.[119] It is curious to

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[118] Domańska. 'Frank Ankersmit: From Narrative to Experience'. pp186-187

[119] Domańska is the fourth (of the very small number that my research has revealed) critic of Ankersmit's *Sublime Historical Experience* mentioned so far in this thesis, the former three being Jenkins ('Cohen *contra* Ankersmit') , Chorell ('F. R. Ankersmit and the Historical Sublime') and Roth ('Ebb Tide', a distinctly negative review, but a review which arguably failed to grasp the underlying substance/style of Ankersmit's argument). Another however (a fifth), is that of the historian John H. Zammito (Zammito, J. H., (2007). 'Frank Ankersmit: Sublime Historical Experience' in *The Journal of modern History* 79 no. 1: pp166-167) who also questioned Ankersmit's notion of the sublime, a critique which to some extent reflected Chorell's position. For not only does Zammito reject the notion of experience without a subject of experience, but also, picking up Ankersmit's claim that the '....changes in how people in the past experienced their world can be perceived only if they have a resonance in how historians experience their worlds' (*Sublime Historical Experience*. p105), he points out that this notion is '...as amenable to "dialectical" as to "sublime" experience; indeed, the former is more reasonable and likely' (op. cit. pp166-167). Moreover, Zammito questioned Ankersmit's ambiguity with regard to the role that historical experience may actually play in the writing of history, finally concluding that, in any event, the sublime cannot become the basis of normal historical practice. Now, these five commentators produced individual yet distinctly negative assessments of *Sublime Historical Experience*, and it therefore came to me as a genuine surprise to learn – late in the day for this thesis – that the book had been awarded the 2007 Socrates Prize for 'the best philosophy book in the Dutch language' (see 'Professor Ankersmit Wins Prize for Best Philosophy Book', University of Groningen, faculty of arts, http://www.rug.nl/let/nieuws/LetArchief/AnkersmitSocratesWisselprijs). Perhaps there are some favourable comments on, or reviews of, the book, but my research has not yet found one published in English.

I should mention here, to conclude what has become this brief footnoted survey of Ankersmit's critics, that in his recent publication (Jay, M., (2005). *Songs of Experience*. Berkeley: University of California

note here that Ankersmit hardly ever draws on female historians or theorists in any of his works.

Coming back now to my main argument, I think that all of the various anecdotal accounts which Ankersmit appropriated in support of his original argument for historical experience can now, from this broadly construed *sociological* perspective, be taken as manifestations of the on-going all-embracing process of enculturation (identity acquisition). To take just one more case as a general example, Ankersmit recounts how the German philosopher and literary critic Johann von Herder, whilst participating in the 1765 feast of Saint John in Riga, observed during its celebratory dances 'the living remains of ancient savage songs, of rhythmic movement and dance still present in a people living now'.[120] Ankersmit interpreted this anecdote[121] as a historical experience which afforded Herder 'an immediate contact with a world that seemed to be lost and forgotten forever'[122] and an 'experience/sensation of a union of past and present'.[123] However, my counter-argument would be that Herder observed a representation of some aspect of the past seen through the medium of dance which, articulated at a particular moment in the development of the *language of choreography* as expressed in Riga, produced a reality effect which referred internally to its own choreographic instruments of meaning production and not to the "real" of the past – this process, of course, being precisely Ankersmit's

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Press. pp255-260 and pp306-308), Jay devoted a number of pages to Ankersmit and his notion of the sublime. But, as Jay pointed out, the intention behind the writing of his own book was

> '....not to provide yet another account of what experience "really" is or what it might be, but rather to understand why so many thinkers in so many different traditions have felt compelled to do precisely that' (*Songs of Experience*. p1).

Accordingly, rather than being the subject of any comprehensive theoretical analysis, Ankersmit's theory of sublime historical experience was registered by Jay mostly as part of a chronological listing of descriptions of various past attempts to grasp the notion of experience. Nevertheless, within it Jay did question Ankersmit's lack of explanatory guidance in certain respects. For instance, he asked what exactly is it in the historian's own present experience that allows privileged moments of access to the past? (thus, for Jay, Ankersmit's *explanation* was clearly inadequate). And again, how is one to decide which historical experience, bearing in mind the rather private and hence unverifiable nature of them, is to win validation within the discipline of history? My answer to Jay's first question would be 'nothing', whilst to his second I would simply say (as I argue below) that the question is strictly speaking irrelevant, since Ankersmit effectively stopped talking about history when he started talking about experience.

[120] Ankersmit. *Sublime Historical Experience*. p146

[121] Which, along with many other stories of a similar kind (from Goethe, Byron, Baudelaire, Proust and many more), were collectively presented by Ankersmit as proof of the existence of historical experience.

[122] Ankersmit. *Sublime Historical Experience*. p146

[123] Ibid. p147

very own theory of *narrative substances* addressed to the narrative of dance. Such traditional dances with their symbolic figures and routines would indeed be inherited from, and continue to be part of, a natural on-going process of enculturation, but they should *not* be mistaken for a direct encounters with an unmediated past.

Finally, and appropriately I think, I now want to gather these various conclusions together and locate them within what Kerwin Lee Klein's has called the 'memory industry' as he described it in his seminal essay 'On the Emergence of Memory in historical Discourse';[124] a paper to which, to the best of my knowledge, Ankersmit has never referred. Of course, the memory industry is, as the concept of *industry* brings to mind, a massive phenomenon and no attempt is made here to do anything other than to point out a series of its associated characteristics that so "fit" the Ankersmit and Groningen style that such a close approximation of features suggests more than a mere coincidence.

Klein argued in his essay, then, that outside experimental psychology and clinical psychoanalysis, few academics paid much attention to *memory* until the 1970s when a surge of interest in autobiographical literature, family genealogy and museums focused attention on it to the extent that

> ...where we once spoke of folk history or popular history or oral history or public history or even myth we now employ memory as a metahistorical category that subsumes all these various terms. Indeed, one of the salient features of our new memory talk is the tendency to make fairly sweeping philosophical claims for memory, or even to imagine memory discourse as part of what is vaguely hailed as the rise of theory in departments of literature, history, and anthropology.[125]

Furthermore, he explained that this seemingly antithetical 'memory discourse' had combined with the vocabularies of the post-modern (essentially anti-historical) discourse to form a now rapidly expanding 'new cultural history' articulated on the basis of a kind of *common sense* which prioritised memory as its governing concept.

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[124] Klein, K. L., (2000). 'On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse' in *Representations* 69 (Special Issue: Grounds for Remembering). pp127-150

[125] Ibid. p128

Thus, the emergent key word *memory* is '....replacing old favourites – nature, culture, language – as the word most commonly paired with history';[126] it is, in effect, reworking the boundaries of history as its replacement rather than its supplement.

Examining the history of memory studies and drawing on the works of the American sociologist Michael Schudson, Klein investigated the notion of memory not as a property of individual minds but as a sundry, shifting collection of material artefacts and social practices. Memory, on this view, becomes 'a structural phenomenon rather than an individual phenomenon, and it makes a seemingly endless array of physical objects part of memory....[thus] a statue of Lenin is not just a mnemonic device to help individuals remember, but memory itself'.[127] At this point in his text, and to elaborate on the 'memory as structure' argument, Klein quotes briefly from the writings of the theorist and Jewish historian Amos Funkenstein. For my argument, however, I need to somewhat enlarge his quotation as follows;

> No memory, not even the most intimate and personal, can be isolated from the social context, from the language and the symbolic system moulded by the society over centuries. We should not, therefore, abandon the concept of collective memory, but must reformulate the relationship between collective memory and the individual act of personal remembering. The following analogy may help. Modern linguistics has developed the fundamental distinction, first introduced by the Swiss linguist de Saussure, between "language" *(langue)* and "speech" *(parole)*. Language is a system of symbols and the rules of their functioning: the inventory of phonemes, words, letters, rules of declension and syntactic rules available at all times to the speaker. Yet a language does not exist as an independent abstraction; it exists in that it is instantiated in every actual act of speech. And because every such act differs from the next even where its linguistic components are completely identical, every act of speech also changes the language in some way. This distinction should be useful in the attempt to define collective memory. The latter, like "language", can be characterized as a system of signs, symbols, and practices: memorial dates, names of places, monuments and victory arches, museums and texts, customs and manners, stereotype images ...., and even language itself (in de Saussure's terms). The individual's memory – that is. the act of remembering – is the instantiation of these symbols, analogous to "speech"; no act of remembering is like any other. The point of departure and frame of reference of memory is the system of signs and symbols that it uses.[128]

[126] Ibid. p128
[127] Ibid. p131
[128] Funkenstein, A., (1993). *Perceptions of Jewish history.* California: University of California Press. p6

Now, this extract, it seems to me, needs to be read with caution since the relationship that it establishes between collective and individual memory could perhaps be misunderstood. For whereas it places both collective and individual memory within a common structural framework of signs and symbols, it nevertheless identifies and separates the individual act of memory as a unique instantiation of that collective structural symbolic system. The point being that the structural system itself which constitutes 'collective memory' is categorically different from any particular act of 'individual memory' which, nonetheless, is inevitably mediated by that structure. That is to say, for example, that I cannot actually remember the Norman Invasion of 1066 because I wasn't there to observe it, but the social consequences of that invasion are part of my inheritances (a collective memory system of signs and symbols). Hence, any of my own acts of memory in relation to events that I have actually witnessed will, accordingly and unavoidably, occur within and thus be mediated by these and other sociological contexts which are in some part a consequence of multifarious collective inheritances, including those of the 1066 sort. On this reading of Funkenstein and in connection with this extract at least, it follows that collective memory and individual memory are of different kinds and that they cannot therefore be reducible one to the other.

Nevertheless, Klein did indeed identify, I think, a significant drift towards the conflation of collective and individual memories in Funkenstein's subsequent arguments, but the distinction between them as implied in the above extract seems to me to deny the possibility of that sort of category reduction. However, as Klein continues,

> ....the most common strategy for justifying the analogical leap from individual memories to Memory—social, cultural, collective, public, or whatever—is to identify memory as a collection of practices or material artefacts. This is the new structural memory, a memory that threatens to become Memory with a capital M and although Funkenstein's account is unusual in its sophistication, the general sense has grown so popular that Michael Schudson could describe it as the generic social science understanding of the term. The items adduced as memory are potentially endless, but certain tropes appear time and again. The most obvious are archives and public monuments from statues to museums....[such tropes

> emerging] as one of the common features of our new cultural history where in monograph after monograph, readers confront the abject object: photographs are torn, mementos faded, toys broken.[129]

Seen in these terms, memory takes on a material, empirical appearance which renders it suitable for historical study. Individual memory thus becomes 'Memory' (collective cultural memory), a subject in its own right, and this new materialisation of memory sanctions its '....elevation to the status of a historical agent, and [hence] we enter a new age where archives remember and statues forget'.[130] Klein gave examples of this mode of 'new age' historical theory, some of which he argued 'go to the edge', but (and this is a pity) he did not refer to Ankersmit although this following extract could be seen as a general admonition of Ankersmit's theoretical style, described by Klein as 'memory as re-enchantment' which

> ....represents itself as an engagement with postmodernism and appeals to the ineffable – the excess, the unsayable, the blank darkness, the sublime, or some other Absolute whose mysteries can be grasped only by those initiates armed with the secret code.[131]

Exactly!

This is all that I need from Klein for the moment then, except to say that he concluded his argument with the observation that the rapidly increasing use of memory as a supplement to or (as is more often the case) a replacement for history, reflected a growing discontent with the current academic historical discourse. In fact, he argued that it was the historiographic crisis itself which, by its own default, assisted the growth of memory studies as a therapeutic alternative to it.

However, my immediate purpose in quoting these particular extracts and arguments from Kleine's essay is to add weight to my contention that Ankersmit's excursions into the sublime and the experiential (which are not of a historical kind as I have already argued) are of a sociological kind. And within the discourse of sociology they can, more precisely, be seen to belong to the field of memory studies which has, as Klein has again convincingly demonstrated, recently re-invented itself in the style of a 'new age' history that *presupposes* the conflation of collective

[129] Klein. 'On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse'. pp135-136
[130] Ibid. p136
[131] Ibid. p137

memory, individual memory and history into a single category. Accordingly, I think that it is this same conflation of terms which (as I have already argued) underlies and "enables" Ankersmit's theory of sublime historical experience and, moreover, (referring back, for a moment, to the introductory remarks to Chapter Three of my thesis) David Carr is currently working towards a similar conflationary goal. His objective, as he himself announced it at the second Groningen conference on *presence*, is to combine historical representation and memory into a single study of experience which, it seems to me, amounts to much the same sort of project. Carr, as I have also pointed out, is one of the central figures at Groningen University's 'Centre for Metahistory' (along with Ankersmit and Runia) and he appears to be voicing a collective "Groningen School" position. Another matter which invites comparison between Ankersmit's position and the 'new age' field of memory studies is that of vocabulary, and Klein very usefully listed (or implied) key words from its preferred lexicon; *trauma, melancholia, transference, mourning, darkness, sublime, historical agent, secret, initiate* and, with something of a theological resonance, *witnessing, testimony, ritual,* and so on.[132] The evident "close fit" of these terms with the vocabulary of *Sublime Historical Experience* is remarkable and arguably cannot be ignored.

Now to my concluding remarks which bring this Section and the Chapter as a whole to a close. In my Introduction and Section One of this Chapter, I traced the development of Ankersmit's notion of sublime historical experience and raised some arguably serious theoretical problems with it. In Section Two I explored and tried to explain Ankersmit's very personal and idiosyncratic obsession with his theory and then, in Section Three, I extended my critique to cover the closely linked phenomena of *presence* and *parallel processing*. Drawing all these matters together in this Section, I have argued that Ankersmit's thesis, when placed under scrutiny and measured up against the better (in my view) arguments of contemporary social theorists and philosophers, fails to adequately cohere. It simply collapses under the totalised weight of its own inconsistencies and contradictions, not least because (as I have argued) it effectively disavows his own theory of *narrative substances* which,

[132] Ibid. pp137 & 141

Ankersmit continues to positively insist, he nevertheless does not recant.[133] Moreover, Ankersmit's overall project is misplaced. That is, he is arguing for a historical theory without noticing that he has firmly planted himself and his theorisations in the sociological field of memory studies.

Seen from this perspective then, and as just noted, Ankersmit's theory of sublime historical experience can arguably be seen to be indexical to (in the sense that it is part of the development of and can be gauged against) the inexorable rise and rise of memory studies of the popular and dominant 'new age' history kind as identified by Klein in his seminal paper. Furthermore, if one can accept (as I do) Klein's argument that this new style of memory studies is becoming a replacement for rather than a supplement to academic history, then Ankersmit's thesis could also be seen as indexical to an inverse collapse in the relevance of the academic discourse of history *per se*.

I shall now finally close this Chapter with the observation that, on the basis of all the preceding arguments, one could reasonably conclude that Ankersmit's book, *Sublime Historical Experience*, bears on its front cover the wrong or at least a very misleading title which, if corrected, would remove his book from its Dewey classification under 'history' and insert it into an entirely different sphere of studies under the general classification of 'sociology' and the sub-classification: 'contemporary memory studies'.

[133] It is interesting to note that (perhaps perversely in the circumstances) Ankersmit was even continuing to very effectively defend the central role of the *narrative substance* in historical writing in the same year that he published *Sublime Historical Experience*. I am referring here to his excellent 'Reply to Professor Saari' (see Ankersmit, F. R., (2005). 'Reply to Professor Saari' in *Rethinking History* 9 no. 1: pp23-33).

Conclusion

In essence, the central purpose and thrust of my argument as laid out in this thesis has been to challenge Ankersmit's own belief that he had found, or that it is even possible to find, a non-representational/textual form of history; of historical consciousness. Accordingly, Ankersmit's resolute journey from his early language centred/mediated post-modernist style of historical theory to the (unsupportable in my view) world of unmediated direct historical experience, has been presented here as a failed "historical" enterprise. In fact, Ankersmit's endeavour to move towards a definitive *authentic* history of a pure and unsullied kind – the past "plain" – through his theoretical notion of historical experience and its variants, has ironically, although he has shown little if any real sign of noticing it, steered him right back into the mediated world from which he had hoped to escape – namely, the complex world of enculturation with all its implications *vis-à-vis* the human social condition.

So, a broad summarisation of my thesis and some additional concluding thoughts. Since the 1980's Frank Ankersmit has been both a devastating critic of academic, epistemological histories (metanarratives having, of course, long gone) and, at the same time, a sometime promoter/promulgator of a certain kind of postmodern representationalism and its aestheticisation. Indeed, I think that one could say that, with the exception of Hayden White, nobody has "taken apart" academic history as thoroughly as Ankersmit. With his theories of the *narrative substance*, of anti-foundationalism, of linguistic performativity and so on, Ankersmit emptied all histories of their apparent meanings and in so doing revealed them as vacant vessels/structures or empty signifiers such that they could be refilled with multiplicities of different imagined meanings – the past as the plaything of historians. But, with the publication in 2005 of *Sublime Historical Experience* it became clear that Ankersmit had moved on to a new style of theory in which experience, worked-up out of both collective and individual memory and also propped-up with the notion of its *authenticity* (the "real" of recalled experiences),

had become his new foundation. On this basis, as we have seen, Ankersmit presumed to offer a way of accessing the past which was able to express its feelings, moods, impressions, etc., directly and authentically (not truthfully, for he says explicitly that sublime historical experience is *not* truth generating)[1]. It was precisely through such historical experiences, Ankersmit argued, that a relationship with the past could now be established without having to break through those distorting 'thick crusts' of textualism, representation, linguistics, facticity, and so on. Proposed as an alternative to, rather than a replacement for, his previous position, this new theory nevertheless provided Ankersmit with the facility to "sidestep" aspects of his older theoretical works (most notably, of course, the *narrative substance* of *Narrative Logic*) and, when understood in this way, it can be taken as a kind of explanatory key to his texts on experience and the sublime.

But my argument has been, and is, that none of this later theorising works for history conceived as 'the-past-as-history' (see Chapter Four, footnote 111). For, arguably, history to be a history has to be a representation, a figure or a device ('no representation no past', to recall),[2] and its manifold shortcomings, which vary from huge for the epistemologist to minimal for the aestheticist, are clear – *Ankersmit brilliantly made them so*. Ankersmit was (and is) therefore forced, not least by his own previous un-recanted theorisations, to leave that history behind – even in its more radical linguistic forms – as he embraced a non-representational memory based way of thinking about the past. Now, Ankersmit's attempt to circumvent his own critique of historical representation by accessing the past through sublime

[1] It is interesting to note here *vis-à-vis* 'truth', that Ankersmit states clearly in *Sublime Historical Experience* that 'Sublimity will, by its very nature, teach us no truths about the past, for from the perspective of cognitive truth this kind of encounter with the past simply does not and cannot exist. Sublime experience lives in a universe different from that of truth....as I would like to insist.' (Ankersmit. *Sublime Historical Experience*. p231). However, one might also note that for Huizinga – from who's theory of historical sensation, as we have seen, Ankersmit derived his notion of historical experience – sensation *did* produce historical truth. For, as Huizinga put it: '....a contact with the past that is accompanied by the absolute conviction of complete authenticity and truth [sic], can be provoked by [sensation]: a line from a chronicle, by an engraving, a few sounds from an old song' (Ankersmit. *Sublime Historical Experience*. p120). There is clearly a contradiction here, perhaps no matter, but it is a contradiction and Ankersmit must know this since Huizinga's conviction that historical sensation is *truth generating* is written down, right there, in the middle of Ankersmit's own translation from Huizinga's original text, yet it is not brought into his own theory of historical experience. Ankersmit appears to adopt a "pick and choose" policy with regard to Huizinga's writings as he moves unreflexively from Huizinga's theory of 'historical sensation' to his own theory of 'historical experience'.

[2] See *footnote 3* in my Introduction to this thesis (page 2).

experience is all very well if that is what he wanted (or wants) to do, but it should be understood (or so it seems to me) that the concepts and vocabulary that he used to effect this access to the past are drawn essentially from memory studies. They cannot therefore work for history old style, nor for history new (postmodern) style, nor for experimental histories, all of which are still representational with all of representationalisms associated limitations. And postmodernists (and experimenters), in particular, accept such limitations given that they are content with limited proposals and failed experimentations – the actual fate/destiny of all representations.[3] Moreover, it appears that, on the back of his critique of modernist /postmodernist histories, Ankersmit also rejected the positive and emancipatory positions adopted by postmodernist philosophers/theorists such as, say, Lyotard, Deleuze, Derrida, Baudrillard, Ermarth *et al*, in exchange for the sombre pessimisms of Huizinga, Schiller and Burckhardt through whom he found his escape from the "history trope". But, it has been argued, Ankersmit's escape is illusory given that it only came about (if it came about at all) through his substitution of memory for history.

These, then, are some of the reasons why I have argued that sublime historical experience is situated in the field of memory studies and, furthermore, that this siting can be taken as indexical to the huge and growing contemporary, popular interest in it. Such interest is everywhere today as evidenced through, for instance, museum and open air re-enactments of past events such that we can now ostensibly know and therefore "remember" who we were; through a multiplicity of radio and

[3] Jean Baudrillard makes an interesting distinction between critical and fatal theory, the consequences of the latter for history being that all historical representations inevitably fail. Critical theory is a subject-led dialectic, for it is the subject which dreams of a transparent link between the *signifier/signified* and the *referent*, leading to *knowledge* of the object (the thing in itself). But, the object always escapes such designs because it represents the "excess" situated outside the subject's restrictive, dialectical critical practices. Accordingly, the *past* as *object* will always be beyond (and so, in a sense, deconstruct) the critical discourse which strives but fails to construct and impose full meaning on it. For Baudrillard, the object (*the past*) is always victorious since '....the subject is no longer the master of representation....it is, henceforth, the object which refracts the subject and imposes upon it its presence and its random form, its discontinuity, its fragmentation, its stereophony and its artificial instantaneity. It is the power of the object which cuts a swathe through the very artifice we have imposed on it. There is something of revenge in this: the object becomes a strange attractor.' (Baudrillard, J., (1996). *The Perfect Crime*. London: Verso. p76). For Baudrillard, then, whose position is informed by fatal theory, the object (the thing in itself, the "excess" which *is* the object) forever slips away intact beyond the critical discourse which seeks to grasp it, to "know" it in itself; the fate (fatal theory) of all such discourse thus being that it is destined to fail. One could then say that the object defeats language – and therefore, as language users, it defeats us.

television programmes in search of personal identities (by means of trans-generational memory recall, heritage and docudrama productions), through media articles and presentations, through the figuring/re-figuring of testimony into stories of identity, and through '...such well known phenomena as oral history, autobiography and commemorative rituals.....pasted together into something called memory'.[4] The rise of these individuated, individualising personalised modes of activity wherein everyone can be his or her own historian or, better still, his or her own *authentic* self – this 'privatisation of the past'[5] as Ankersmit himself once put it – precisely demands the experiential and the authenticity of "feeling". And it is into this whole complex of phenomena that memory studies, heritage studies, living history and other routes to a presence of the literally absent past in the present,[6] are currently being installed at a theoretical level: a grand memory makeover[7] of history as past and present meld into tropes of nostalgia, of retro, and of "being there".

But, the arguable tragedy and irony of all this for Ankersmit is that, apparently unnoticed by him, his own journey towards a "pure" form of historical experience moved him not only away from history and into the complex sociological sphere of memory studies, but also had the effect of drawing the attention of others (not least his followers) away from history towards this insatiable, authenticating memory industry which both generates and validates personal identities. Accordingly, it could perhaps be argued that Ankersmit, as a largely unwitting contributor to the declining interest in the discipline of history, has actually effected an undesired counter-move against history, even towards an end[8] to history altogether. What once was history for Ankersmit (and for the public majority) is now becoming memory

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[4] Klein, K. L.,(2000).'On the Emergence of *Memory* in Historical Discourse'in *Representations* 69: p128.
[5] Such that, as Ankersmit argues, '....there no longer is one or more self-evident disciplinary centre from which knowledge of the past is organised. Our relationship to the past has become privatised in the sense that it primarily is an attribute of the individual historian and no longer of a collective disciplinary historical subject' (Ankersmit, F. R., (2001). *Historical Representation*. California: Stanford University press. p153).
[6] Which, I have argued, is a natural process of human enculturation – our inheritances.
[7] The *rise and rise* of memory studies which, as I have noted already, cannot be charted at length here (for it is vast), arguably includes, as symptomatic of it, the breakdown of grand narratives and the shrinkage of history to its articulation as *proper* histories (academic histories) which have become cut off (as academics talk only to themselves in ever decreasing circles) from the wider community's interest in public, memory based (so-called) histories of the sorts outlined above.
[8] See the last section, 'Endisms', in, Jenkins, K. and Munslow, A. (eds.) (2004). *The Nature of History Reader*. London: Routledge. pp243-332. Also Jenkins, K. (1999). *Why History?* London: Routledge.

per se, and if this general trend towards the exchange of history for memory were eventually to be successfully completed, then postmodern and other experimental alternatives to modernist histories (as once so effectively promoted by Ankersmit) would simply become irrelevant and drop out of use – as irrelevances do.

Of course, as noted, this was never Ankersmit's intention. He still wants a history. But it would appear that Ankersmit is now "stuck" with the notion of sublime historical experience which cannot give him one. For (and this seems to be at variance with his claim that his "sublime book" should *not* be interpreted as a recantation of his earlier work) his purpose, as he himself said, was to replace '....all that came to be known over the last twenty to thirty years by the name of "theory" ....[theory which] will be rejected here in the name of the notion of experience'[9] and that, of course, includes postmodern reflexive histories. The *good* (early postmodern) Ankersmit of my thesis, then, is being repudiated by Ankersmit himself because he is still searching for something else – something historical yet... something else. A lost cause? ....Yes. For I think that neither he nor anyone else can ever get anything better than reflexive/experimental post-modern kinds of histories if it is, as I say, histories (and that ever problematical historical consciousness) that are wanted.

And these, of course, are precisely the kinds of histories that Ankersmit actually *had* until he rejected them in favour of the sublime. Mystical experiences, mythological daydreaming and *presence* are all very well, but arguably they cannot produce a historical representation which (tautologically) is the *only* way that the past can be historicised (or presented historically). Having rejected postmodern kinds of historicisations for the experiential, Ankersmit's manoeuvrings have thus effectively seen him "trapped" between old modernist histories (which are not much use to him since *Narrative Logic* convincingly subverted them) and his current sublime theories and practices of *presence* which really have no "historical" traction at all. From this perspective one could say that Ankersmit's works reflect and refract the arguable disintegration of the hope, heralded by White and consolidated by the *good* early

[9] Ankersmit. *Sublime Historical Experience*. p10

Ankersmit, for highly reflexive, adventurous, ideologically sensitive, ethically democratising and emancipatory histories. As that hope fades, the possibility of radical, reflexive, generous histories ends too and experience, sublime or not, is scarcely a worthy alternative to that.

Coda

Now, it had been my intention to end my thesis at this point, but an afterthought of some relevance – a post script or *coda* – occurred to me precisely at this moment of closure and I would like to briefly lay out this reflection, if I may, which goes like this. Looking back over my research and its product (this text), I find to my surprise (and I am aware that I may look somewhat immodest here) that, arguably, I seem to have been able to undermine and dislodge Ankersmit's more recent arguments in order to show that his move from language to experience does not, contrary to his own intentions, constitute any sort of substantial contribution to history. And I think that I have also been able to show that Ankersmit's endeavours can be interpreted as being of a *tragic* kind; the work of an otherwise erudite thinker who has simply lost his way and wandered out of the sphere of historical theory without noticing it. So, and this now becomes the final thought/question that I wish to address, if my critique of Ankersmit can be taken as valid, then how is it that I have been able to execute that task comparatively easily (or if not easily, at least execute it)?

In order to try and answer this question, I need to briefly (very briefly) reflect somewhat widely on the *idea of history* and the changes to, or the re-shaping of that *idea*, over the last few centuries. I start (melo)dramatically and abruptly by saying that, once upon a time, here in the West and embodied deep in Western culture, there was a Christian God who provided the explanation and justification for everything – the omniscient repository of absolute truth – but that that God had, by the middle of the nineteenth century, (to put it into Nietzsche's words) died. A death

that gave rise to new secular manifestations in the style of metaphysical metanarratives which constituted, in essence, attempts to find a substitute for religion through the organisation of contingent events into some kind of unity of human trajectory (the 'grand narrative' of Marxism being an example). However, the democratising twentieth century and its increasingly democratic 'sovereign subject', fractured and splintered any such unity through individuated multiple claims on the past; self-validating claims from this or that perspective (ethnic, feminist, this class/that class, gay and so on). Consequently, this combination and concentration of expanding numbers of different individual historical points-of-view – this democratisation of history – appears to have dismissed and replaced previous notions of a 'unity of historical trajectory' and, moreover, is currently in the process of dismissing, along with it, the idea of a history as being for more than one person. For – and this brings me to the crucial point – history *qua* history must always be *for more than one*. So if, for example, I were to research and work-up a written history of my home town, Haslemere, then that history would be for everybody – anyone could have it – it would not be a history just for me. But since individuating democracy engenders *histories just for one*, and since history *qua* history is always *for more than one*, then these individuating histories are not histories at all; they are memories. Consequently, this individualising democratisation of history leads to a move from history (always *for more than one*) to a personal, solipsistic "projection" from the individual self for that *self* only. And, to again restate and further elaborate the point, as soon as history becomes a history for *one person only* then it ceases to be a history at all – it becomes privatised, a projection of one's memory onto things beyond memory: things made familiar through reading texts, hearing testimonies, being there at a particular re-enactment of a past event or standing at a place where some battle was once fought and (in consequence of that voluntary engagement) believing to have *felt* the past authentically; a direct "historical" [sic] consciousness, etc. The point is therefore this: that one's own memories, one's own *solipsia* (accumulated experiences of living in the world which, in part, individuate one's identity), do not and cannot constitute a history. A history is a representational substitute for, or retrospective proposition about, or a proposal for, the past

(primarily taking the form of a literary artefact) for *more than one*: memory is simply *not* "historical".

Now, my reading of Ankersmit leads me to suspect that, ironically, he must to some degree have intuited all of this but disavowed it. For (as we have seen) Ankersmit says in his Preface to *Sublime Historical Experience* that his new theory (the product of his move from 'the-past-as-history', or history for anyone, to an individual[10] experiential phenomenon) 'has no bearing whatsoever on what historians actually do ....[and is] meaningless from the perspective of historical writing'.[11] Here, Ankersmit appears to grasp that the subjects of his investigation (experience, consciousness and memory, both collective and individual), are not of a historical kind; that they have, as he put it, 'no bearing whatsoever on what historians do'. Which is, of course, to produce histories. Now, *if Ankersmit had stopped right there, everything would (or could) have been fine*. We would have been left with Ankersmit's quite separate and very substantial contributions to two different fields of study. That is, we would have had the *good*, early Ankersmit of the narrative critique of history (expanded somewhat over the years), and the *new* Ankersmit who is not, as he intuits here, really talking about history at all, but rather about how he personally wants to validate memory; not least his own. And, of course, since it follows that such a contribution to memory studies would have had nothing to say to Ankersmit's previous narrativist position/accounts, he would have had no need to deny or make any recantation of them.

This reading of – let's call it – Ankersmit's current "dilemma" does, of course, still support and confirm my contention that Ankersmit's mistake was to call (in some places) his memory work historical, to then propose (in other places) that it was a replacement/substitute for history, but then (elsewhere) that it was never less than a

[10] Ankersmit's 'historical experience' is for *one* person only and this must also apply to his 'sublime historical experience', which, as he says himself, actually (and necessarily) takes place and unfolds on the 'scene' of the historians *own* mind (a style of re-enactment) and it therefore manifests itself as an expression of the historian's *own*, singular experience of the past. (Ankersmit. *Sublime Historical Experience*. p265).
[11] Ibid. p(xvi).

substantial and governing supplement to it;[12] substantial in the sense that it presumed to explain the very origins of, and the modes of acquisition of, historical consciousness. From this (in my view mistaken) position, it would appear that Ankersmit himself was convinced that he could say something about "experience" which would have an impact on history itself; not an immediate impact in the sense that it might inform historical writing, but an impact in the sense that it could have had the effect of *shifting* the understanding of what history is actually about. That is to say that Ankersmit, somehow confusing history with memory (or not rigorously maintaining their ontological difference), wanted us, his readers, to understand that "real" history comes only by way of individual and cultural (collective) traumatic experiences. And, furthermore, that it is through – and only through – the interception of unmediated traces of these traumatic experiences that the (gifted) historian can engage authentically with the past.

Thus, my central point is that when Ankersmit started to confuse and break-down the ontological distinction between history and memory in the manner described above (such that he could write a book essentially about memory and existential sensation whilst believing himself to be writing a book about history and historical theory), he was accordingly bound to generate, within that book, a structurally incoherent argument shot through with ambiguities and internal contradictions. And it was this vulnerable/de-constructible account of sublime historical experience (which overtly issued forth the substance of its fatal critique), that was received by Ankersmit's critics as in a sense a "gift" and, moreover, a gift to me personally as one of them.

Nevertheless, even though in the end (and this is the end) Ankersmit might appear on my reading to be somewhat undeserving, he is, undoubtedly, an immensely important historical theorist. Nothing, absolutely nothing, I have said in this thesis is

[12] Ankersmit is ambiguous on this point throughout his texts and it is never satisfactorily resolved. For instance, he clearly states in the Introduction to *Sublime Historical Experience* (p14) that he does not recant his previous narrativist position, yet (see citation on page 208 above) he clearly states here that *all* previous historical theory is rejected in favour of experience. This has allowed me, as may have been noticed, a certain flexibility when presenting my own arguments in relation to what is an ambivalent position.

meant to question his integrity and sincerity; nor would I want to diminish in any way the infectious enthusiasm which he brings to, and is so evident in, his works (works from which I have myself much benefitted). Ankersmit writes, I think, with the very best of intentions for history and for historians. But (and my thesis is, I suppose, this *but*) all that said, Ankersmit's enthusiasm and zest for new ideas (never less than provocative and ambitious), and his remarkable erudition, do not in my view, despite his reputation for logic, make his position as it moves from language to experience appear either tenable or attractive to either that history or those historians. Somewhere in that dark wood – and over the years Ankersmit's (elegiac) wood seems to have grown increasingly dark – the argument of this thesis is that he has lost his way. Whether or not he should be found and saved 'for history' is a question that this thesis has, I think, at least raised.

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