THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICHESTER

An accredited institution of the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

Department of History

Impossible Histories: Derrida, the (Re)turn of Religion in Cultural Criticism, and Messianic Historical Theory

by

Mark Roger Mason

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

November 2013

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICHESTER
An accredited institution of the
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

ABSTRACT

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
Doctor of Philosophy

IMPOSSIBLE HISTORIES: DERRIDA, THE (RE)TURN OF RELIGION IN CULTURAL CRITICISM, AND MESSIANIC HISTORICAL THEORY

Mark Roger Mason

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

This thesis thinks through the *messianic* motif in the work of Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) in terms of what it yields for *historical theorisation*. It is a development and defence of a 'messianic historical theory' that attempts to de-stabilize/disturb *all* historicization(s). I argue that all historical (re)presentation is messianic in structure in the Derridean sense. While faithful to the 'postmodern' critique of history (and contesting any claim that such critiques are *passé*) this theorisation goes beyond the secularist vocabulary that it has hitherto deployed and re-equips it with an expressive 'religious' force (e.g., emphasizing categories of *faith* and *fideism*) that – tracking, and not wishing to be isolated from, debates regarding the '(re)turn to/of religion' in contemporary *cultural criticism* – is indexical to these (i.e. my) time(s).

Accordingly, in addition to detailed readings of Derrida's work my theorisation draws upon the conceptual resources of the '(re)turn to/of religion' in cultural criticism – particularly *vis-à-vis* the Derridean messianic and, pre-eminently, the work of John D. Caputo – to illuminate the *im-possible* messianic condition (historicity) of all historical (re)presentation which accounts for *both* its ceaseless proliferation/circulation *and* its unavoidable epistemological failure. The messianic structure which Derrida equates to the concept of a *quasi-transcendental* justice 'to-come' calls forth/generates historical (re)presentations and *simultaneously* undercuts their putative claims/aspirations as a 'true' discourse. I situate this messianic historical theory within the broader context of Derrida's *oeuvre* and his thinking of/call for 'some other concept of history'. I address various criticisms of Derrida's (and Caputo's) work and in the course of so doing propose a *reloaded* messianic historical theory strengthened by its arguable withstanding of such attacks. I propose deploying this messianic theorisation of historical (re)presentation as a tool of *critical resistance* (resistance to all attempts to close down the openness of the future). This resistance can be expressed as an *infinite close reading* of historical texts, which is – paradoxically – predicated upon/generated by that which resists thinking.

The 'originality' and contribution to knowledge of this thesis lies in it being the first sustained engagement with the Derridean messianic in relation to historical (re)presentation. I am not aware of any work that develops and defends what I have termed a 'messianic historical theory' nor of any thesis length attempt to link and think historical (re)presentation and the (re)turn of religion together *via* Derrida's messianic and those debates about it that have taken place in the field of cultural criticism broadly construed.

CONTENTS

Introduction: 'I dream of being a historian': the (re)turn of religion and developing and defending a Derridean messianic historical theory 1-56
Situating this Thesis: Attempt One 2-27
Situating this Thesis: Attempt Two (On – Three – Beginnings) 28-49
Thesis Structure 49-56

Chapter One: In the name of 'some other concept of history': Derrida, historicity and historical (re)presentation 57-112
Preliminaries 57-63
Section One: Some remarks on the 'impure' thematization of 'Derrida and History' ... 63-72
Section Two: Derrida's call/challenge for 'some other concept of history' and responses to it 72-78
Section Three: The unfairness of (the judgement of) 'the rejection of history' 78-84
Section Four: Some other concept of history I: systematizing a deconstructive 'critique' against the history of meaning 84-100
Section Five: Some other concept of history II: further implications and responses 100-108
Section Six: Conclusion: a radical historicity that permits the opening up of the affirmative thinking of the messianic 108-112

Chapter Two: Are we all religious now? Developing a messianic historical theory: Derrida, Caputo and affirmationism 113-202
Introduction 113-116
Section One: Reading the messianic in *Specters of Marx* and 'Marx & Sons' 117-164
Section Two: Reading religion and the messianic elsewhere: John D. Caputo and affirmationism 164-202

Conclusion: Considering criticisms and objections: messianic historical theory reloaded as impossible histories of faithful resistance (the infinite task, or – perhaps – the end of history?) 203-275
Section One: Solutions (Caputo and Laclau), fideism 'all the way up', empty formalism, and the dangers of 'letting the other come' 212-228
Section Two: On the quasi-transcendental, fideism (again) 'after finitude' and 'radical atheism': Quentin Meillassoux, Martin Hägglund and the 'anti-religious (re)turn' 229-256
Section Three: Mystical spellbinding? Sande Cohen's critique of Derrida 256-272
Section Four: Closing comments and testifying to stupidity before the other 272-275

Bibliography: 277-295

DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, Mark Roger Mason, declare that the thesis entitled '**Impossible Histories: Derrida, the (Re)turn of Religion in Cultural Criticism, and Messianic Historical Theory**' 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 acknowledge 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:

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to the many people who have, in various ways, assisted me with the completion of this thesis – a project which has indeed seemed to be structured by a messianic experience of endless imminence and deferral (always 'to-come')!

My debts to Keith Jenkins are immeasurable. The brilliant and life changing intellectual and personal formation he has provided, including his (endless!) patience, humour and wise counsel, render the term 'supervision' profoundly inadequate. I will never forget the generosity – in all things – that he has shown me.

Sue Morgan continues to embody all that is best in academic life. Her outstanding intellectual work and passion as well as constant kindness and encouragement continue to be inspirational; she sets *the* example.

Sarah Gilroy, at considerable cost, facilitated the opportunity for me to finally complete this thesis, and monitored progress with a careful and supportive eye; for that I will always be grateful.

Nicola Nathan's superb support, calm efficiency and understanding in all things work and thesis related have been indispensable. Not least of all I am deeply appreciative of her IT skills!

For their help, encouragement and intellectual stimulation at different points I would like to thank *all* my colleagues at the University of Chichester and the members of the Philosophy of History seminar group at the Institute of Historical Research (London, UK) as well as my friends Peter Icke, Michael O'Rourke, Beverley Southgate, Sande Cohen, Berber Bevernage, Matthew Crisp, Nick Reeve, Murray Jacobs, Jo Preston, Ian Wedd and Jo West.

The loving support that has been heaped upon me by my parents Carole and Ian is awe-inspiring; I grow ever more appreciative of it as the years pass. Since my father's death, my mother has continued to demonstrate with humbling consistency and modesty what it means to put others first in life. I am also grateful for the love and example of Elizabeth and John Searle, my mother and father in-law.

My children Joseph, Elizabeth, James and Daniel continue to be a source of deep joy, encouragement and a reminder of what is really important; thank you my friends!

It is, *above all*, to Rebecca – my wonderful and incomparable wife and friend – that I owe the most. Her belief, understanding, encouragement, grace, beauty and sacrifice – in short, her love – makes all the difference this and every other day. I am conscious of the inadequacy of this expression of all she continues to give me; words will always fail to represent such a gift.

INTRODUCTION: 'I DREAM OF BEING A HISTORIAN': THE (RE)TURN OF RELIGION AND DEVELOPING AND DEFENDING A DERRIDEAN MESSIANIC HISTORICAL THEORY[1]

I begin this Introduction by articulating what I have called 'Two Attempts to Situate this Thesis' before going on to describe the further 'Two Chapter and Conclusion' structure of it. These attempts at situating, of 'contextualising', enable me to problematicise – whilst simultaneously affirming – key elements of the thesis from the outset so that the chapters/conclusion which follow never bear the character of being definitive. The 'contents' of those chapters and that conclusion are then outlined in sufficient detail at the *end* of this Introduction where it is hoped that the 'situating' arguments which have preceded them give them a certain 'logic' of argumentative sequencing – if nothing else! I have decided to approach the Introduction in this way (long, detailed and supported by extensive footnotes[2], so that were it not for its deliberately introductory 'nature' – hence my retention of the

[1] Throughout this thesis I have opted to use the term 'historical theory' rather than 'philosophy of history'. This choice is intended to indicate something about the intellectual possibilities and aspirations/sensibilities that inform this thesis, as well as those that don't. My arguments are presented as resolutely *theoretical* rather than *philosophical* in accordance (and identification) with the distinction made by Fredric Jameson: '[T]he latter [philosophy] is always haunted by the dream of some foolproof, self-sufficient, autonomous system, a set of interlocking concepts which are their own cause. This mirage is of course the afterimage of philosophy as an institution in the world, as a profession complicit with everything else in the status quo, in the fallen ontic realm of ''what is''. Theory, on the other hand, has no vested interests inasmuch as it never lays claim to an absolute system, a non-ideological formulation of itself and its ''truths''; indeed, always itself complicit in the being of current language, it has only the never-ending, never-finished task and vocation of undermining philosophy as such, of unravelling affirmative statements and propositions of all kinds.' (Jameson 2009, 59) The ('quasi-transcendental') basis on which 'messianic historical theory', which *is* an affirmative conceptualisation, can nevertheless help unravel other 'affirmative statements and propositions of all kinds' is an issue that I discuss later in this thesis (see my Conclusion).

[2] Here, at the outset of my thesis, I want to make a structural point. It will soon become obvious to the reader of this thesis – possibly painfully so – that I have used the apparatus of *long footnotes* not only in this Introduction but also pretty much throughout. I have *decided* to do this because I wish to keep my reading of Derrida (*et al.*) focussed on the messianic (and associated terms) and the implications of this for 'a history/historicity of another kind.' Accordingly, I have relegated to the footnotes some material that might have made up – had I decided to use the more conventional approach – an initial, discrete chapter composed as a *literary/historiographical review*, a relegation that has helped me to develop an 'ongoing' reading of the Derridean messianic and history along with, *inter alia*, various wider debates or certain forms of explanation that are integral to the thesis since the attention required to be given to these is an attention that runs throughout the work, informing it at every point. A stand-alone 'early' chapter which, once read, may not have been regularly returned to – the fate of so many 'literary reviews' – has thus been deemed inadequate. Consequently, the notes at the foot of the page are indeed a kind of 'literary/historiographical review' but one which now runs beneath/adjacent to the text throughout rather than constituting a separate 'introduction to the field'. Yet, though beneath the text, adjacent to the text, and to be read *en passant*, they have also – in a way – taken on a life of their own, a 'life' to be (re)turned to as both *underlining* the text and as leading to 'debates and discussions' that take us towards *and* away from Derrida *via* explicitly *intertextual* acts: 'intertextuality live'.

designation ‘Introduction’ – it could be re-classified as a chapter) because it allows me to say, as a sort of prologue, certain things of a perhaps basic kind (definitions, exchanges, etc.) so that, these matters dealt with initially, they help inform – or even govern – what follows.

Situating this Thesis: Attempt One

The field which is constituted[3] by this thesis is a critical thinking through or analysis of (whilst recognizing that deconstruction cannot be reduced to either an ‘analysis’ or, without considerable qualification, critique[4]) the messianic motif that I argue patterns the work of Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) in terms of what it yields for a contribution to the ongoing theorisation of historicizing tendencies as they are variously described within academic culture (i.e. ‘historical interpretation’, ‘historical narration’, ‘historical [re]presentation’, etc.).[5] Specifically, I have chosen

[3] I deploy the language of the constitution of fields by way of signalling agreement with the injunction of Michel Foucault: ‘We should admit rather that power produces knowledge...that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations.’ (Foucault 1991, 27) Therefore, from the outset, I willingly concede that it is ‘power-knowledge, the processes and struggles that traverse it and of which it is made up, that determines the forms and possible domains of knowledge’ (Foucault 1991, 28) and that this thesis – as a contribution to knowledge – is, of course, not exempt from such processes/struggles.

[4] Derrida argued that ‘[i]t is because deconstruction interferes with solid structures, ‘‘material’’ institutions, and not only with discourses or signifying representations, that it is always distinct from an analysis or a ‘‘critique’’.’ (Derrida 1987, 19) See also Derrida 1995b, 83: ‘Deconstruction as such is reducible to neither a method nor an analysis (the reduction to simple elements).’ I discuss the issue of utilizing the language of ‘critique’ in relation to the work deconstruction in Chapter One. More broadly, however, it is important to point out that Derrida repeatedly stressed that he was ‘all for knowledge...for analysis’ (Derrida 1995b, 201).

[5] Hayden White has provided a succinct explanation of historical interpretation and narration: ‘Historians also often claim to explain the matters of which they treat by providing a proper understanding of them. The means by which this understanding is provided is *interpretation*. *Narration* is both the way in which a historical interpretation is achieved and the mode of discourse in which a successful understanding of matters historical is represented.’ (White 1987, 60) Sande Cohen makes explicit the political dimensions of historical narration: ‘Historical narration has a double status: it narrates each past, or segment thereof, putting our knowledge of consequences, often little more than present rationalizations, into a story the past did not know belonged to it; it uses that past to legitimize strong, contentious, present interests.’ (Cohen 2006b, 254) In my view, the best explanation of historical (re)presentation – that also indicates why I have chosen to enclose the ‘re’ in brackets throughout this thesis – can be arrived at through a summary of the different positions taken by the historical theorists Keith Jenkins and Frank Ankersmit *vis-à-vis* their preferred nomenclature on this issue. Ankersmit (2001, 11-12) has argued that ‘we may ‘‘re-present’’ something by presenting a substitute of this thing in its absence. The real thing is not, or is no longer available to us, and something else is given to us in order to replace it. In this sense it can be said that we have historical writing in order to compensate for the absence of the past itself. The same is true of the work of art: the statue of a God, of an emperor, the painting of a person, castle, or landscape, all function as substitutes for the absent God, emperor, and so on, and they are all made in such a way as to be most successful in functioning as such a substitute. Since the work of art belongs to the domain of aesthetics, the same is true for all representation – and thus also for historical representation...the crucial insight is that the represented and its representation have the same ontological status.’ From this he goes

to situate the thesis (recognizing that it can always be situated otherwise, by every writer; by every reader) as a *development* and *defence* of an avowedly Derridean 'messianic historical theory', albeit a theory that makes no claims to offering definitive philosophical/cognitive proofs (and eschewing the overtones of mastery and 'totalization' – see *n*41 – that often accompany such claims) thus being, rather, a 'testimony' of sorts (one that implies 'a kind of act of faith' – see *n*75); a proposal that is aware of its own contingency. Given these 'choices', what follows is

---

on to argue that 'representation falls outside the scope of epistemology. Epistemology relates words to things, whereas representation relates things to things...The paradigmatic model of description is the true statement: the subject-term of the statement identifies and refers to a thing in reality whereas its predicate-term attributes a certain property to it. This distinction between subject- and predicate-term cannot be made in representations. If we look at a painting or a photograph we cannot distinguish between components that refer and those that attribute. And this is what we would expect, since representations and what they represent are ontologically equivalent. For since the distinction, obviously makes no sense for the represented thing, this must be true of the thing representing it as well. It follows that the whole technical apparatus developed by epistemologists over the centuries (and by contemporary philosophy of science) cannot be of any use to us when we are dealing with representation – and with the question of what may make one representation better than another. The main shortcoming of (most) contemporary philosophy of history is that it takes description – instead of representation – as its model in its attempts to deal with the problem of historical writing.' In another text, Ankersmit indicates a strong preference for speaking of 'historical representation' rather than 'historical narration' on the following grounds: 'Whereas we can tell narratives about what never actually took place, there is no representation without a represented. That is simply part of the etymological meaning of the word: you can only make something present again which is not present now (for whatever reason). So the term *historical representation* will never invite us to forget that the historian's text is a text about a past and that it should do justice to this past as well as it can.' (Ankersmit 2005, *xiv*) By contrast, Keith Jenkins (2003, 34, 40 and 41-42) sometimes prefers (historical) 'presentation' to 'representation'. He begins by citing (34), and agreeing with, Hayden White that there is 'no such thing as a *single* correct view of any object under study but that there are *many* correct views, each requiring its own style of representation. This would allow us to entertain seriously those creative distortions offered by minds capable of looking at the past with the same seriousness as ourselves but with different affective and intellectual orientations. Then we should no longer naively expect that statements about a given epoch or complex of events in the past ''correspond'' to some pre-existent body of ''raw facts''. For we should recognize that *what constitutes the facts themselves* is the problem that the historian, like the artist, has tried to solve in the choice of metaphor by which he orders his world, past, present and future.' (White 1978, 47) On this basis, according to Jenkins, 'the only thing we can ever offer as a history is a present-centred *proposal*, a tentative *presentation* about how ''the before now'' might be seen.' (40) In an interesting move, Jenkins then (41) draws on the work of the *History and Tropology* era of Ankersmit (see Ankersmit 1994, 188-192) but argues for histories as *presentations* and not as *re-presentations.* Jenkins thinks that 'this change from representation to proposed presentation is to be preferred for two reasons. First, for a strong working definition of representation, the presence of an independently given historical actuality which can act as an independent check on saying anything (at the level of meaning; at the level of the text) is required. But if it is the presentation itself – the historians' text – which creates the reality to which it ostensibly refers in the very act of presenting it, then it is this presentation which creates past ''reality'' in the first place. Thus the historian's narrative is not representing the once actuality at all in the sense of presenting it *again*, but is actually presenting it for the first time whilst simultaneously proposing this presentation as a way of thinking about things as one of many proposals – thus making it just another text amongst those which constitute the extant literature. Which means that, second, because *all* proposals can only be deemed relatively plausible *not* in relation to ''the past'' as such but with regard to other historians' proposals or texts – that is intertextuality – then when it comes to ''judging'' historian's presentations/proposals *the past literally does not enter into it*; only texts matter historically.' (Jenkins 2003, 41-42) I side with Jenkins in preferring 'presentation' over 'representation' but, given that 'representation' is the more widely established term (and, accordingly, in a desire to avoid confusion) I have opted to enclose the 're' in brackets throughout.

irreducibly – and, therefore, unavoidably – polemical, although I have, *après* Derrida, 'no special taste' for such warfare.[6] It can, in part, be understood as a sustained attempt to foreground, *via* a particular kind of messianic formulation, the de-stabilization (or disturbing) of all established approaches to, and processes of, *composition* – a word that, as Derrida points out, implies 'that you can distinguish between the meaning, the contents of the meaning, and the way you put these together' (Derrida 2003c, 65) – that 'historicize' as such and, more particularly, that refuse to aver that history floats free of the past (i.e. compositional rejections of the 'past/history' distinction).[7] Of course, this thesis is itself, both at the artificial and collapsible levels of the *form* (assembled and responsive to a set of traditional academic protocols) and the *content* (arguments affirming the deconstruction always already going on in every historicization that are re-figured in the 'religious' and messianic terms to be found in Derrida's work and developed and defended in response to various criticisms of such non-/pre-/post-secular language and conceptualization) is not exempt from that same de-stabilization (disturbance).[8]

---

[6] In this thesis I acknowledge and work with(in) the unavoidable condition of *polemos* as described by Derrida to Maurizio Ferraris: 'Of course, if there is *polemos*, and irreducible *polemos*, this cannot, in the final analysis, be accounted for by a taste for war, and still less for polemics. There is *polemos* when a field is determined as a field of battle because there is no metalanguage, no locus of truth outside the field, no absolute and ahistorical overhang; and this absence of overhang – in other words, the radical historicity of the field – makes the field necessarily subject to multiplicity and heterogeneity. As a result, those who are inscribed in this field are necessarily inscribed in a *polemos*, even if they have no special taste for war.' (Derrida and Ferraris 2001, 12) An inevitable condition of *polemos* is also advocated – although, in a very different kind of argument – by Gopal Balakrishnan where, having set out his understanding of criticism ('a reconstruction of the overall argument of a work, which explores the possibility that its logical, empirical and even stylistic failures arise from ideologies embedded in its framework'), he then goes on to point out that 'measuring the relative intellectual value of political stances need not be an exercise in neutrality, for not everything is thinkable from every point of view. Recognizing this elementary fact requires that criticism contain a coefficient of polemic.' (Balakrishnan 2009, *x-xi*)

[7] The past-history distinction – 'the idea that history is a discourse about, but categorically different from, the past' – is made by Keith Jenkins: '[H]istory is one of a series of discourses about the world. These discourses do not create the world (that physical stuff on which we apparently live) but they do appropriate it and give it all the meanings that it has. That bit of the world which is history's (ostensible) object of enquiry is the past. History as discourse is thus in a different category to that which it discourses about, that is, the past and history are different things. Additionally, the past and history are not stitched into each other such that only one historical reading of the past is absolutely necessary. The past and history float free of each other, they are ages and miles apart. For the same object of enquiry can be read differently by different discursive practices...whilst, internal to each, there are different interpretive readings over time and space; as far as history is concerned historiography shows this.' (Jenkins 1991, 5)

[8] As Derrida reminds us: '[*D*]*econstruction* means, among other things, the questioning of what synthesis is, what thesis is, what a position is, what composition is, not only in terms of rhetoric, but what *position* is, what *positing* means. Deconstruction questions the *thesis*, the theme, the positionality of everything, including, among other things, *composition*. Writing is not simply a ''composition''. So once you realize that writing is not simply a way of positing or posing things together, a number of consequences follow. Without remaining at this level, which is radical – but we have to mention this radicality – I would say

Indeed, part of my argument is that all discourse/(re)presentation is messianic in structure in the Derridean sense (although this messianic structure is not restricted to 'just' discourse/(re)presentation – see *n*4 – and could always go under other names – see *n*19) and that, because of this, no model of composition – including this one – has, or should make any claim to, finality.

Derrida pointed out (so as to de-stabilize/disturb) attempts by 'classic historiographers' to situate deconstruction, insisting that it was 'resistant to periodizations' (Derrida 2001a, 15-16; 20). Nevertheless, when discussing the increased visibility of aspects of his work, even he found it necessary to propose an *emphasis* that possessed 'without being rigorously either true or false, a certain appearance in its favour, and an appearance that we should take account of.' (Derrida 2001a, 22) In the same vein, this thesis has been written in the hope that it also possesses 'a certain appearance in its favour' in relation to ongoing debates concerning historical theorisation. It acknowledges from the outset that as with every historical (re)presentation and every discourse, it is subject to the same problematic of the reductiveness of thought. Given that, as Richard Terdiman asserts, 'the world won't fit into our heads or within our theories', the necessity for us is plain: 'We always choose, select, and quintessentially – we always *ignore*.' (Terdiman 2005, *x*) This reductiveness of thought is part of what deconstruction unravels and reveals, as Mark C. Taylor suggested in his *New York Times* obituary for Derrida (published on 14th October 2004):

> The guiding insight of deconstruction is that every structure – be it literary, psychological, social, economic, political or religious – that organizes our experience is constituted and maintained through acts of exclusion. In the process of creating something, something else inevitably gets left out.

---

that in the university...or in any academic field, deconstruction should provoke not only a questioning of the authority of some models in composition, but also a new way of writing, of composing...Now, this new way is not simply a new model; deconstruction doesn't provide a new model. But once you have analyzed and questioned and destabilized the authority of the old models, you have to invent each time new forms according to the situation, the pragmatic conditions of the situation...

So I think through deconstruction you should study and analyze these models and where they come from, where their authority comes from, what the finality of these models is, what interests they serve – political, personal, ideological, and so on. So we have to study the models and the history of the models and then try not to subvert them for the sake of destroying them but to change the models and invent new ways of writing – not as a formal challenge, but for ethical, political reasons...' (Derrida 2003c, 65-66).

> These exclusive structures can become repressive – and that repression comes with consequences...what is repressed does not disappear but always returns to unsettle every construction, no matter how secure it seems...By struggling to find ways to overcome patterns that exclude the differences that make life worth living, he [Derrida] developed a vision that is consistently ethical. (Taylor 2004, 1)

Accordingly, my contention here is that learning how to work with/in this 'guiding insight' of deconstruction (as that which 'takes place...an event that does not await the deliberation, consciousness, or organization of a subject' – Derrida 2008, 4), and understanding this in an affirmative, emancipatory and 'ethical' way (where the condition of ethics is construed as the *aporia* – the 'impossibility to find one's way'[9] [Derrida 1999b, 73] – thus making *all* decisions pass through 'the very ordeal of the undecidable' [Derrida 1995c, 5]) *vis-à-vis* historical theorisation – a way that is simultaneously de-stablizing of all historical (re)presentation/production – is best articulated through Derrida's formulation of the *messianic*, an initial explanation of which, as well as of associated terms and my own development of messianic historical theory, I now provide.

Derrida has given numerous descriptions of and elaborations on (not least of all in responding to criticisms of it) his conception of the messianic across various texts, the most sustained to be found in *Specters of Marx* (1994) and 'Marx & Sons' (1999c), both of which are discussed in detail in Chapter Two. Here I want to draw upon a series of these descriptions/elaborations in order to set up an initial explanation of its most important facets and emphases, an explanation that will be further analysed and developed subsequently. In the course of setting up this explanation I also delineate, *inter alia*, those concepts/terms that Derrida most frequently links to the messianic.

[9] In the interview 'Hospitality, Justice and Responsibility: A dialogue with Jacques Derrida' (Derrida 1999b) Derrida argues that '[d]ecision, an ethical or a political responsibility, is absolutely heterogeneous to knowledge. Nevertheless, we have to know as much as possible in order to ground our decision. But even if it is grounded in knowledge, the moment I take a decision it is a leap, I enter a heterogeneous space and that is the condition of responsibility.' He immediately goes on to provide the following explanation of the *aporia* in relation to ethics: 'This is not only a problem but the *aporia* we have to face constantly. For me, however, the *aporia* is not simply paralysis, but the *aporia* or the *nonway* is the condition of walking: if there was no *aporia* we wouldn't walk, we wouldn't find our way; path-breaking implies *aporia*. This impossibility to find one's way is the condition of ethics.' (Derrida 1999b, 73) Discussions of the *aporia* (by Derrida) can also be found in Derrida 1993a, 14-21 and Derrida 2002c, 244-258.

For Derrida, then, the messianic – which he also describes as '*messianicity without messianism*' as it '*does not depend upon any messianism, it follows no determinate revelation, it belongs properly to no Abrahamic religion*' – is '*the opening to the future or to the coming of the other*' (Derrida 1998a, 17-18). This opening to the future or coming of the other is to be understood '*as the advent of justice, but without horizon of expectation and without prophetic prefiguration*.' (Derrida 1998a, 17) By *horizon* of expectation (and I read 'prophetic prefiguration' as a religious formulation of this 'horizon') Derrida denotes, from the Greek word, 'a limit from which I pre-comprehend the future...I wait for it, I pre-determine it, and thus I annul it'; he wants to 'free the value of the future from the value of ''horizon'' that traditionally has been attached to it' (Derrida and Ferraris 2001, 20). Therefore, he opposes the messianic to all notions of pre-determining limit(s) or teleology, arguing that the latter is 'the negation of the future, a way of knowing beforehand the form that will have to be taken by what is still to come' (Derrida and Ferraris 2001, 20). Rather, the messianic (which Derrida also calls the 'eschatological'[10], again something to be distinguished from, and opposed to, teleology), 'is nothing other than a relation to the future', a future that 'is so despoiled and indeterminate that it leaves being ''to come'' [*à venir*], i.e. undetermined.' (Derrida and Ferraris 2001, 20-21) The moment that 'a determinate outline is given to the future...the messianic loses its purity' (Derrida and Ferraris 2001, 21). Derrida emphasises the 'affirmation that is, moreover, a decision, implicit within any relation to the future', understood specifically as the 'reaffirmation of the eschatological and messianic as a structured relation to the future as such.' (Derrida and Ferraris 2001, 21) By 'the future as such' Derrida designates a future that 'cannot even announce itself', that 'cannot be pre-announced or over-announced except in the eschatological and messianic' where, crucially, these latter two terms are understood as the 'kenosis', or emptied out forms, of more determinate or concrete – in terms of content – versions (Derrida and Ferraris 2001, 20-21).

[10] Derrida explains his reasons for linking eschatology and messianism thus: 'I link up this value of eschatology with a certain value of messianism, in an attempt to free both dimensions from the *religious* and *philosophical* contents and manifestations usually attached to them; philosophical, for eschatology, the thought of the extreme, the *eschaton*; or religious, the messianism in the religions ''of the book''.' (Derrida and Ferraris 2001, 20)

Entwined with all of this is Derrida's claim that a certain conception of justice – which is not deconstructible since deconstruction just is justice[11] ('justice as it promises to be, beyond what it actually is') – is *a priori* eschatological and messianic, even for 'the non-believer' and/or 'someone who does not live according to a faith determined by Judeo-Christian-Islamic revelation' (Derrida and Ferraris 2001, 20). This is because the appeal of the future [*l'avenir*] – that 'which overflows any sort of ontological determination, which overflows everything that is and that is present', including 'the entire field of being and beings' and, crucially, 'the entire field of history' – is that which is 'committed to a promise or an appeal that goes beyond being and history': such an 'extremity' is 'beyond any determinable end of being or of history' and 'has necessarily to be the only absolute opening towards the non-determinability of the future.' (Derrida and Ferraris 2001, 20) Specifically, Derrida links the messianic to justice because he thinks of it as something that saves (preserves) 'the irruption of a future that is absolutely non-reappropriable' and that 'has' (again: imperative) 'to have the shape of the other'. This 'shape of the other' is not to be understood as just the configuration, outline and/or appearance of something in space that cannot be reached (or arrived at) but should also be thought of as a *singularity* which 'defies anticipation, reappropriation, calculation – any form of pre-determination' (Derrida 2001, 21). As Derrida puts it:

> There can be no future as such unless there is radical otherness, and respect for this radical otherness. It is here – in that which ties together as non-reappropriable the future and radical otherness – that justice, in a sense that is a little enigmatic, analytically participates in the future. (Derrida and Ferraris 2001, 21)

This participation of justice in the future 'is the experience of the other as other, the fact that I let the other be other'; this letting-the-other-be-other 'presupposes a gift without restitution, without reappropriation, and without jurisdiction.'[12] (Derrida

[11] See the essay 'Force of Law: The ''Mystical Foundation of Authority'' ' (in Derrida 2002c – an earlier version was first published simultaneously in French and English in 1990: see Derrida 2002a, *vi*): 'Justice in itself, if such a thing exist, outside or beyond law, is not deconstructible. No more than deconstruction itself, if such a thing exist. *Deconstruction is justice*.' (Derrida 2002c, 243) See also Derrida 1995d, 31.

[12] Derrida immediately follows this comment with some genealogical information relating to the development of this argument: 'Here I cross, at the same time that I displace them slightly, as I've attempted to do elsewhere, the heritages of several traditions: that of Levinas, when he simply defines the

2002b, 21) In the Derridean schema 'this messianic dimension cannot be separated from justice' (Derrida 2002b, 11) where justice is 'thought of as what overflows law [*droit*]' (Derrida and Ferraris 2001, 21) and is distinguished from 'right' (Derrida 2002b, 11), 'law' and 'from what *is* in general.' (Derrida and Ferraris 2001, 21)[13] Derrida thinks this is important because

> the instant one loses sight of the excess of justice, or of the future, in that very moment the conditions of totalization would, undoubtedly, be fulfilled – but so would the conditions of the *totalitarianism* of a right [*droit*] without justice, of a good moral conscience and a good juridicial conscience, which all adds up to a present without a future [*sans avenir*]. (Derrida and Ferraris 2001, 22)

Elsewhere (Derrida 2002b, 13), and again by way of setting out what is at stake, Derrida has linked this 'enigmatic' conception of justice (and 'event' – to be explained shortly) with that of 'revolution'. Derrida presents the event and justice as 'tied' to that which the 'horizon-deprived expectation' of the messianic relates: 'an *arrivant*', or stranger, 'who may come – or never come – but of whom, by definition' we 'must know nothing in advance'. This *arrivant* who may or may not come constitutes a revolutionary 'absolute rip in the foreseeable concatenation of historical time', also described as 'the rip of eschatology in teleology' (Derrida 2002b, 13). Therefore, Derrida argues that while it is possible to renounce certain revolutionary imagery, rhetoric and politics, it is nevertheless 'not possible to renounce revolution without also renouncing the event and justice.' (Derrida 2002b, 13) He deploys the word 'event' as one more designation ('name') for 'that which, in the thing that happens, we can neither reduce nor deny (or simply deny)' (Derrida 2002b, 11). As he goes on to parse it, the event

---

relation to the other as justice (''the relation to the other – that is to say, justice'' [Levinas 1969, 89]); and that which insists through a paradoxical thought whose initially Plotinian formulation is found in Heidegger, then in Lacan: give not only what you have, but what you don't. This excess overflows the limits of the present, property, restitution, and no doubt law, morality, and politics, too, at the same time that it breathes life into or inspires them.' (Derrida 2002b, 21-22)

[13] 'Justice has to be thought of as what overflows law [*droit*], which is always an ensemble of determinable norms, positively incarnated and positive. But justice has to be distinguished not only from law, but also from what *is* in general.' (Derrida and Ferraris 2001, 21) See also Derrida 2002b, 21 where he delineates what justice is not: 'I realize that the word justice may seem a bit vague. It is not law or right – it both exceeds and founds human rights – nor is it distributive justice. It is not even respect, in the traditional sense of the word, for the other as *human subject*.'

> is another name for experience itself, which is always experience of the other. The event cannot be subsumed under any other concept, not even that of being...The coming of the event is what we cannot and must never prevent, another name for the future itself. (Derrida 2002b, 11)

The *a priori* messianic experience (of opening to the future or to the coming of the other) is *a priori* 'exposed' to that which can only ever be determined *a posteriori*[14] by the event (Derrida 2002b, 13), albeit not rigidly so. Derrida stresses that the event cannot be reduced to the fact that something happens, giving the example of whether it may or may not rain:

> This will not be an absolute event because I know what rain is, if in any case and insofar as I know what it is, and, moreover, this is not an absolutely other singularity. What happens or comes to pass in this case [*Ce qui arrive là*] is not an *arrivant*. (Derrida 2002b, 13)

[14] The terms *a priori* ('from the earlier', independent of or without empirical evidence) and *a posteriori* ('from the later', dependent on and as a result of the empirical evidence obtained) distinguish two approaches to the problematic of epistemology. They are primarily used as adjectives to modify the noun 'knowledge', or taken to be compound nouns that refer to types of knowledge (for example, '*a priori* knowledge' which, I think, can also be understood as a kind of axiomatic 'faith' that can be further distinguished from 'empirical knowledge'). However, *a priori* is sometimes used as an adjective to modify other nouns, such as 'truth'. Additionally, this use is often modified. For example, 'apriority' and 'aprioricity' are sometimes used as nouns to refer (approximately) to the quality of being *a priori*. Gilles Deleuze, in his book *Kant's Critical Philosophy: The Doctrine of the Faculties* (Deleuze 2008), provides the following helpful definition of the *a priori* as it features in Immanuel Kant's work: 'The *a priori* is defined as being independent of experience, precisely because experience never ''gives'' us anything which is universal and necessary. The words ''all'', ''always'', ''necessarily'' or even ''tomorrow'' do not refer to something in experience; they do not derive from experience even if they are applicable to it. Now, when we ''know'', we employ these words; we say *more* than is given to us, we *go beyond* what is given in experience...

Kant asks first of all: What is the fact of knowledge (*Quid facti*)? The fact of knowledge is that we have *a priori* representations (which allow us to judge). Sometimes they are simple ''presentations'': space and time, *a priori* forms of intuition, intuitions which are themselves *a priori*, and are distinct from empirical presentations or from *a posteriori* contents (for example, the colour red). Sometimes they are, strictly speaking, ''representations'': substance, cause, etc.; *a priori* concepts which are distinct from empirical concepts (for example, the concept of lion). The question *Quid facti*? is the object of *metaphysics*. The fact that space and time are presentations of *a priori* intuitions is the subject of what Kant calls the ''metaphysical exposition'' of space and time. The fact that the understanding can make use of *a priori* concepts (categories), which are deduced from the forms of judgement, is the object of what Kant calls the ''metaphysical deduction' of concepts''.' (Deleuze 2008, 10-11) Deleuze goes on to describe the subjection of experience to our '*a priori* representations' *via* a 'transcendental principle' in Kant as follows: 'Representations which do not derive from experience are called ''*a priori* representations''. The principle by virtue of which experience is necessarily subject to our *a priori* representations is called a ''transcendental'' principle. This is why the metaphysical exposition of space and time is followed by a transcendental exposition, and the metaphysical deduction of the categories by a transcendental deduction. ''Transcendental'' qualifies the principle of necessary subjection of what is given in experience to our *a priori* representations, and correlatively the principle of a necessary application of *a priori* representations to experience.' (Deleuze 2008, 12)

By contrast 'the *arrivant* must be absolutely other'; that which we 'expect not to be expecting' and are not waiting for (or, more precisely, not *awaiting*, with its connotations of some horizon of expectation or determination). The expectation foregrounded here ('expect not to be expecting') is 'made of a nonexpectation' in that it is without any horizon of expectation as previously discussed (Derrida describing such horizons as enacting a certain knowledge that 'still anticipates and amortizes in advance'). If there is surety that there is going to be an event, this will not be an event; rather it will be a predetermined, calculable 'appointment'. Irrespective of whether we are talking about the Messiah or a friend, if we know who (or what) is coming, and are 'sure' that it or (s)he will come, then 'to this extent at least, this will not be an *arrivant*.' There is always the possibility that an absolutely other *arrivant* 'may always not come, like Elijah', and it is in 'the always-open hollow of this possibility', of 'non-coming' [*non-venue*] and 'absolute disappointment' [*déconvenue*], that Derrida locates our 'relation to the event: it is what may always not take place, too.' (Derrida 2002b, 13-14)

The coming of the other – which might also, Derrida cautions, be 'death' or 'radical evil' – 'can only emerge as a singular event when no anticipation sees it coming'; it 'can come as a surprise at any moment.' (Derrida 1998a, 17) The coming of the other as a singular event, the irruption of the future that is absolutely non-reappropriable and that has the shape of the other, are 'possibilities that both open and can always interrupt history, or at least the ordinary course of history.' (Derrida 1998a, 17) This 'ordinary course of history' is that which, Derrida asserts, 'philosophers, historians and often also the classical theoreticians of the revolution speak' and is interrupted, or torn apart, by deciding[15] to let the other 'come'. In preparation for – so as to preserve – this possibility, the messianic, which Derrida identifies as a 'general structure of experience'

> exposes itself to absolute surprise and, even if it always takes the phenomenal form of peace or of justice, it ought, exposing itself so abstractly, be prepared

[15] Derrida points out that this decision can also 'take the apparently passive form of the other's decision: even there where it appears in itself, in me, the decision is moreover always that of the other, which does not exonerate me of responsibility.' (Derrida 1998a, 17)

> (waiting without awaiting itself) for the best as for the worst, the one never coming without opening the possibility of the other. (Derrida 1998a, 17-18)

All of this should not give the impression that Derrida thinks it intrinsically 'good' that 'everything or anything might happen'; he stresses that we should not cease

> trying to prevent certain things from happening (for then there would be no decision, no responsibility, ethical, political or other). (Derrida 2002b, 11)

However, what should only ever be opposed are 'those events that we think obstruct the future or bring death', or, more precisely,

> events that put an end to the possibility of the event, to the affirmative opening for the coming of the other.[16] (Derrida 2002b, 11)

Nevertheless, Derrida's contention – his 'preference' we might say – is, on balance, as follows:

> It's better to let the future open – this is the axiom of deconstruction, the thing from which it always starts out and which binds it, like the future itself, to alterity, to the priceless *dignity* of alterity, that is to say, to justice.[17] (Derrida 2002b, 21)

Thinking the event in this way 'always opens a certain messianic space', a space that 'must' (imperatively) be 'abstract, formal, and barren' as well as 'un-religious' (Derrida 2002b, 11); in other words it is not a space that belongs to any *determinate* Abrahamic religion.[18] Thus, not only is the messianic an opening for the coming of the other but it is to be also understood as an *affirmative* opening (in the – again, imperative – sense of 'letting' and 'keeping' the future open) and so – for Derrida –

[16] See also Derrida 2002b, 21: '[I]t will always be possible to show that what we oppose, when we prefer, conditionally, that this or that thing not happen, is something that we think, rightly or wrongly, is going to obstruct the horizon – or even constitute the *horizon* (the word means *limit*) – for the absolute coming of the wholly other, for the future itself.'

[17] Derrida immediately adds that this priceless-dignity-of-alterity-as-*justice* to which deconstruction is bound 'is also democracy as democracy to come.' (Derrida 2002b, 21) This formulation of 'democracy to come' is discussed in Chapter Two.

[18] Derrida goes on to speak of the 'desert of a messianicity without messianism and therefore without doctrine and religious drama, this arid and horizon-deprived expectation retains nothing of the great messianisms of the Book except the relation to an *arrivant* who may come – or never come – but of whom, by definition, I must know nothing in advance.' (Derrida 2002b, 13)

cannot therefore be separated from justice. If, as Derrida suggests, the event is 'what comes, occurs, arises', he does not regard it as sufficient to acknowledge 'that this coming ''is'' not, that it cannot be reduced to some category of being.' (Derrida 2002b, 11) What is additionally required is to think the event through, or by, an affirmative articulation/expression of 'come' ('*viens*'):

> 'Come' is said to the other, to others that have yet to be determined as persons, subjects, equals (at least not in the sense of an equality that would be calculable). It is on condition of this 'come' that there is an experience of coming, of the event, of what is happening, and consequently, of that which, because it comes from the other, cannot be anticipated. There is not even a horizon of expectation for this messianicity before messianism. (Derrida 2002b, 11-12)

The messianic and the 'come/*viens*' are inextricable. If, Derrida suggests, 'horizon' – a kind of anticipation or programming – were to be introduced into this general structure of experience of coming/the event/that which comes from the other, then 'there would be neither event nor history.' (Derrida 2002b, 12) Yet, with regard to this messianicity-as-horizon-deprived-expectation, he also notes a difficulty (a hypothesis that can never be rationally excluded) to the effect that 'it is practically impossible to think the absence of a horizon of expectation.' (Derrida 2002b, 12) He admits that he has 'been struggling with this impossible concept, the messianic arrival [*arrivance*], for a long time.' (Derrida 2002b, 13) The suggestion here, one that I want to develop in this introduction, is that the messianic is one more motif[19] (albeit one that is 'religious' in figuration and, as such, has resonance and traction with/in 'our time[s]', which is what makes it a particularly interesting object of/for cultural criticism – or philosophical/theoretical prose – as I will discuss in the next section) at work in the movement of deconstruction which 'mark[s], precisely, the impossible, the limit of the possible.' (Derrida 2001a, 21) Such a marking, Derrida maintains, appeared in his work 'quite clearly from the beginning.' (Derrida 2001a, 21) All of these motifs – although I am particularly concerned with the messianic in

[19] According to Derrida, some of the other motifs include '*diffèrance*, the undecidable, the supplement, the pharmakon, the parergon, and so on.' He confirms that '[t]hese are not only names, but if we wanted to nominalise them, there would be fifty or so of them.' (Derrida 2001a, 20-21)

this thesis – are 'quasi-concepts or quasi-transcendentals[20] at work in deconstruction' (Derrida 2001a, 21), radicalisations of that transcendental questioning associated with Kantian philosophy which 'seeks to cast light on the unconscious structure that precedes and shapes experience.' (Karatani 2005, 1) They are 'inconceivable impossibilities, inconceivable concepts of neither/nor' (e.g. 'the trace is neither present nor absent, the specter...is neither living nor dead') that are closely associated with, and raise, the 'question of the conditions of possibility as conditions of impossibility.' (Derrida 2001a, 21) Put differently, attention is here being given to 'a law of contamination' which 'compromises and renders impure, without absolute rigor, the very thing that it makes possible.' (Derrida 2001a, 21) Of the various examples of the conditions of possibility as conditions of impossibility that Derrida provides[21], one of the most pertinent for this thesis – in that it involves explicit reference to the messianic – concerns the *performative*[22], that is, the doing or enacting something by way of saying it (a promise, threat, prayer, confession, declaration of love, etc.) so as to effect some kind of transformation. He argues that what makes the performative possible (enabling it) is the very same thing that threatens its possibility, therefore rendering its purity impossible. The 'risk' of

[20] In 'Remarks on Deconstruction and Pragmatism' (from the 1996 volume *Deconstruction and Pragmatism*) Derrida describes how in his work 'the question of the transcendental has been modified by the ''quasi'', and therefore if transcendentality is important to me, it is not simply in its classical sense' and that, despite 'the highly unstable, and slightly bizarre character of the transcendental', he learned from Husserl in particular 'the necessity of posing transcendental questions'. For Derrida, 'in order to avoid empiricism, positivism and psychologism...it is endlessly necessary to renew transcendental questioning.' But, crucially, 'such questioning must be renewed in taking account of the possibility of fiction, of accidentality and contingency, thereby ensuring that this new form of transcendental questioning only mimics the phantom of classical transcendental seriousness without renouncing that which, within this phantom, constitutes an essential heritage'. Derrida then moves to offering one formulation of his well known and oft-repeated argument regarding 'the necessity of defining the transcendental condition of possibility as also being a condition of impossibility' along with the admission that 'to define a function of possibility as a function of impossibility, that is, to define a possibility as its impossibility, is highly unorthodox from a traditional transcendental perspective, and yet this is what appears all the time, when I come back to the question of the fatality of aporia.' (Derrida 1996b, 81-2)

[21] Another example of the conditions of possibility as conditions of impossibility provided by Derrida is the taking place of the event: 'When the impossible is made possible, the event takes place – possibility of the impossible – and here it is, incontestably, the paradoxical form of the event. If an event is possible, that is, if it inscribes itself within the conditions of possibility, if it does nothing but make explicit, unveil, reveal, accomplish what is already possible, then it is not an event. For an event to take place, for it to be possible, as event, as invention, it must be the arrival of the impossible. There we see a poor proof, an evidence that is nothing less than evident. It is this evidence that will have never left off guiding us here between the possible and the impossible, and that often drove us to speak of conditions of impossibility.' (Derrida 2001a, 28)

[22] For a more detailed engagement by Derrida with the performative see his *Limited Inc* (Derrida 1988b). For two succinct and helpful summaries of the performative *vis-à-vis* Derrida's work see Royle 2003, 22-23 and Morgan Wortham 2010, 134-136.

‘infelicity’ (some kind of inapt expression; a failure or falling short of what is intended), which ‘must remain always open’, is precisely that which ‘makes possible and gives the performative event a chance’ while, at the same time, it instantly ‘renders its purity and its pure presence as performative impossible.’ This *condition of possibility as condition of impossibility* is a ‘recurrent expression’, a familiar refrain in Derrida’s work and, as he has pointed out, has signalled ‘some major stakes, namely the shock delivered to hardly calculable consequences.’ (Derrida 2001a, 21) The importance of these stakes is indicated in a powerful and suggestive way when Derrida links the performative with the general messianic structure of experience and a desire for emancipation (which is also an emancipatory desire):

> I none the less believe that there is no ethico-political decision or gesture without what I would call a ‘Yes’ to emancipation, to the discourse of emancipation, and even, I would add, to some messianicity.…of a messianic structure that belongs to all language. There is no language without the performative dimension of the promise, the minute I open my mouth I am in the promise. Even if I say that ‘I don’t believe in truth’ or whatever, the minute I open my mouth there is a ‘believe me’ in play. And this ‘I promise you that I am speaking the truth’ is a messianic apriori, a promise which, even if it is not kept, even if one knows that it cannot be kept, takes place and qua promise is messianic. And from this point of view I do not see how one can pose the question of ethics if one renounces the motifs of emancipation and the messianic. (Derrida 1996b, 82)

The messianic as the general structure of experience referred to earlier thus also belongs to (all) language in the performative form of the promise which, specifically, can be the emancipatory promise. For Derrida, the condition of ethico-political action (motivation and decision) and, as I will go on to show, for historical (re)presentation as one instantiation of such action, depends on, and is generated by, the affirmation of the messianic *a priori* and emancipatory promise – ‘yes’/‘come’/‘*viens*’/‘believe me’, etc. – towards (letting, preserving, maintaining, etc., through this affirmative thinking) the opening to the non-determinable future, to the coming of the event (the event as experience of the other, another name for the future itself; the opening of event-ness as the condition for the possibility of

histories of all kinds, as *radical historicity*[23] or – restated – *historicity as 'future-to-come'*) that may not come. Derrida refuses to 'call this attitude utopian' given that the messianic is experienced and engaged with in the 'here and now', a concept which should be dissociated from 'the present' and the connection with (or connotation of) presence[24] that this latter term ('the present') has:

> The messianic experience...takes place here and now; that is, the fact of promising and speaking is an event that takes place here and now and is not utopian. This happens in the singular event of engagement...there is an

[23] Leonard Lawlor defines 'historicity' as 'the condition for the possibility of factual histories' (Lawlor 2002, 131) and it is with a slightly modified version of this definition that I will be working throughout this thesis: historicity as the condition of possibility for all historical (re)presentation/historicization. Paul Ricoeur provides a useful discussion of the semantic trajectory of historicity and explores its *existential* dimensions (see Ricoeur 2004, 369-382), the latter also being an important concern for this thesis. Ricoeur claims that 'hermeneutics assigns itself the task of exploring the presuppositions, that can be termed existential...of actual historiographical knowledge.' These presuppositions 'are existential in the sense that they structure the characteristic manner of existing, of being in the world, of that being that each of us is. They concern in the first place the insurmountable historical condition of that being.' Ricoeur points out that 'To characterize this historical condition, one could have used, emblematically, the term ''historicity'' ', athough he decides against using this term 'because of the equivocations resulting from its relatively long history' as well as a 'more fundamental reason' that leads him 'to prefer the expression ''historical condition''.' (Ricoeur 2004, 283-284) He goes on to describe the positing by Heidegger of historicity as a level of temporalization (which Heidegger named *Geschichtlichkeit*) as 'the level at which the philosopher is held to encounter the epistemological claims of historiography' and opposes to the Heideggerian derivation of levels in terms of 'decreasing orders of primordiality and authenticity' an alternative derivation 'in terms of the existential condition of possibility with respect to historical knowledge.' (Ricoeur 2004, 369) Having made this point Ricoeur goes on to confirm what is at stake in the concept of 'historicity': 'It is indeed the word and the notion of history that are in question under the concept of *Geschichtlichkeit*: the condition of historical being.' (Ricoeur 2004, 370)

[24] Derrida situates presence in the experience of 'the systematic interdependence of the concepts of sense, ideality, objectivity, truth, intuition, perception, and expression' and immediately goes on to explain presence as follows: 'Their common matrix is being as *presence*: the absolute proximity of self-identity, the being-in-front of the object available for repetition, the maintenance of the temporal present, whose ideal form is the self-presence of transcendental *life*, whose idea identity allows *idealiter* of infinite repetition.' He adds, in relation to the present, that 'The living present, a concept that cannot be broken down into a subject and an attribute, is thus the conceptual foundation of phenomenology as metaphysics. While everything that is *purely* thought in this concept is thereby determined as *ideality*, the living present is nevertheless *in fact*, really, effectively, etc., deferred *ad infinitum*. This *differance* is the difference between the ideal and the nonideal.' (Derrida 1973, 99) For a succinct discussion of Derrida's arguments regarding the 'metaphysics of presence', see Morgan Wortham 2010, 103-105. See also Derrida 1997b where the concept of 'logocentrism as phonocentrism' is defined and linked with presence as follows: 'The notion of the sign always implies within itself the distinction between signifier and signified, even if, as Saussure argues, they are distinguished simply as the two faces of one and the same leaf. This notion remains therefore within the heritage of that logocentrism which is also a phonocentrism: absolute proximity of voice and being, of voice and the meaning of being, of voice and the ideality of meaning...

We already have a foreboding that phonocentrism merges with the historical determination of the meaning of being in general as *presence*, with all the subdeterminations which depend on this general form and which organize within it their system and their historical sequence (presence of the thing to the sight as *eidos*, presence as substance/essence/existence [*ousia*], temporal presence as point [*stigmè*] of the now or of the moment [*nun*], the self-presence of the cogito, consciousness, subjectivity, the co-presence of the other and of the self, intersubjectivity as the intentional phenomenon of the ego, and so forth). Logocentrism would thus support the determination of the being of the entity as presence.' (Derrida 1997b, 11-12)

> engagement…which consists in recognizing the irreducibility of the promise when, in the messianic moment, 'it can come' ('*ça peut venir*'). There is the future (*il y a de l'avenir*). There is something to come (*il y a à venir*). That can happen…that can happen, and I promise in opening the future or in leaving the future open. This is not utopian, it is what takes place here and now, in a here and now that I regularly try to dissociate from the present...I try to dissociate the theme of singularity happening here and now from the theme of presence and, for me, there can be a here and now without presence. (Derrida 1996b, 82-3)

Thus, the messianic experience is that singular engagement in the *here and now* that recognizes the irreducibility of the 'yes'/'come'/'*viens*' promise in opening, or leaving open, the future when something may – or may not – come. To state this differently, it is 'a certain experience of the impossible'[25] (Derrida 2007b, 15) in the here and now: of always-something-to-come (not present/presence), without horizon, that is promised, that we say 'yes' to. A messianic *a priori*, a promise, structures *all* language, *all* discourse, including historical discourse. This schema – of the condition of possibility as condition of impossibility – informs Derrida's insistence that:

> In order for there to be event and history, there must be a 'come' that opens and addresses itself to someone, to someone else that I cannot and must not determine in advance, not as subject, self, consciousness, nor even as animal, god, or person, man or woman, living or non-living thing. (Derrida 2002b, 12)

There is therefore something spectral (a 'specter') or ghostly (ghost – *revenant*) about that which the 'come' summons or appeals[26], to something that disturbs or de-stabilizes (which could be understood as an arrival, or return, of the excluded,

[25] In the essay 'Psyche: Invention of the Other' Derrida formulates and explains the phrase 'experience of the impossible' thus: 'And I would say that deconstruction loses nothing from admitting that it is impossible; also that those who would rush to delight in that admission lose nothing from having to wait. For a deconstructive operation, *possibility* is rather the danger, the danger of becoming an available set of rule-governed procedures, methods, accessible approaches. The interest of deconstruction, of such force and desire as it may have, is a certain experience of the impossible: that is...of the other – the experience of the other as the invention of the impossible, in other words, as the only possible invention.' (Derrida 2007b, 15) See also the interview 'Politics and Friendship' where Derrida makes the following statement: 'Deconstruction is not ''possible'' if ''possible'' means to work as a technical instrument functions or obeys a program. Deconstruction is an explanation *with*, an experience *of* the impossible. Moreover, it is to the extent that one does more and something other than developing the necessity and the possibilities of a program that something happens and a form of responsibility, a decision, an action *takes place* precisely where one begins to make out the limits of the possible.' (Derrida 2002d, 192-193)

[26] 'It must be possible to *summon* [appeler] a specter, to appeal to it [*en appeler à lui*], for example, and this is not just one example among others: perhaps there is something of the ghost [*revenant*] and of the ''come back'' [*reviens*] at the origin or end of every ''come''.' (Derrida 2002b, 12)

repressed, that which has never been figured[on]) – a 'haunting'[27] of sorts – but which, precisely because it does so, can also motivate us in emancipatory ways: we are always affirming – i.e. saying 'come' to, and working for the coming of – the future event, which might be the event of justice. This is given its fullest expression in *Specters of Marx* which, as previously mentioned, will be examined in some detail in Chapter Two.

Although wary of over simplification Derrida – in an interview conducted in 2000 (Derrida 2003d, 26) – stated that he understood his project as always having 'what sounded like a prophetic tone'. He linked this 'prophetic' – together with an 'eschatological' or 'apocalyptic' – tone with the emphases of 'the end of history' and 'the telos' in his *Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry: An Introduction* (Derrida 1989a), first published in French in 1962. However, he also stressed that at the same time he was 'so vigilant and so anxious not to give into or accept this tone' that he 'multiplied the signs of irony'[28] with the effect that from the very beginning of his work/project 'there was both this very prophetic, messianic, mystical tone, and its opposite.' (Derrida 2003d, 26-27) Derrida thought that if there is an 'idiomatic tone' in his texts it is this mixture of playing at being prophetic and, at the same time, of laughing at himself; it is summed up in his statement that 'my tone is prophetic, but I am not a prophet' and in his paradoxical confession that 'I am a prophet without prophecy, a prophet without being a prophet.'[29] (Derrida 2003d, 27) As for his 'later' texts, Derrida commented on their structurally prophetic content as follows:

[27] 'I say *the haunting* because the spectral structure is here the law both of the possible and of the impossible, and of their struggle intertwining.' (Derrida 2001a, 28)

[28] Derrida provides an example of this in discussing his essay 'Of an Apocalyptic Tone Newly Adopted in Philosophy', first published in 1982 (see Derrida 1992d). In this text he speaks 'apocalyptically, while, at the same time denouncing the strategy, the mystification, and all the abuses of this tone. I write as an *Aufklarer* in a certain way. There is both an apocalyptic tone and the tone of someone who denounces this, and both voices are intertwined. The theme of a multiplicity of voices within one voice is thematized in this text.' (Derrida 2003d, 26-27)

[29] Derrida situates/frames his confession as follows: 'If I may make a confession here: I have always had the feeling, even more so of late, that my destiny as a writer and as a thinker has something prophetic about it, even though I know that I have no particular prophecy to make, nothing to foresee, nothing except catastrophe. Sometimes prophets foresee catastrophe. In fact, almost all of them foresee catastrophe! So this is a permanent *Stimmung*: I am a prophet without prophecy, a prophet without being a prophet.' (Derrida 2003d, 27)

> [I]t is true to say that during the last ten years or so, something in the content of the texts – especially in the theme of the 'to come', the reference to messianicity, and the reference to justice as different from the law – is more explicitly recognizable as being intrinsically or structurally prophetic, that is, pointing to what is 'to come', which is not the future, in a certain way. (Derrida 2003d, 27)

Derrida suggests that there is something like this kind of prophetic thinking in his reading of Levinas, Heidegger and Nietzsche, and goes on to make a related point:

> Heidegger says somewhere that thinking is eschatological; when you think, you think the extreme, that is, the eschatological, the apocalyptical. The truth is apocalypse or, what he calls, 'unveiling'. (Derrida 2003d, 27)

In the course of some brief comments regarding the consideration of an analysis of the relationship between philosophy, thinking, poetry, and prophecy, Derrida stresses it as imperative that 'there is no thought without the inscription of ''the new'' ' and that 'you have to think poetically in order to think something new.' The relationship between poetry and prophecy is linked back to the messianic in a way that is worth quoting at length:

> The difference between poetry and prophecy is difficult to determine because there is something prophetic in every poetic gesture. There is a strong relationship between poetry and prophecy. Of course, in a very dry and cold way, when, like the speech-act theoretician, you pay attention to 'the promise', you will see that the promise has something prophetic in it, that the theory about the promise is a promise itself. The promise in language is in itself prophetic. Language is prophetic. You don't have to be a Messiah or to believe in one to say that the structure of language is messianic. I am simply saying, in a theoretical way, that the experience of language is messianic, and it is part of the experience of the messianic that the Messiah may come at any time. I am working on this limit between describing a prophecy and performing a prophecy without prophecy. (Derrida 2003d, 27)

Now, the implications for historical (re)presentation and theorisation of what I read Derrida as arguing for in this initial explanation of the messianic that I have just provided – the development of which constitutes the main argument running throughout this thesis – are, in my view, considerable and worthy of in-depth

exploration. Yet this thesis should not be understood as an attempt to provide a 'definitive' or 'encompassing/encapsulating' analysis of 'Derrida and historical (re)presentation' – all such attempts to 'hold' or 'contain' are futile[30] – and I readily concede that whether or not Derrida intended, or would agree with, the formulation of messianic historical theory that I am going to 'run' here – by taking the implications of the Derridean messianic for historical (re)presentation 'to the end of the line' – is, given that his work includes a sometimes 'tense' mixture of (or determinate oscillation between) references to the conventional or classical assumptions/presuppositions of 'history' *and* radical de-stabilizations of it (as I discuss in Chapter One), a moot point.[31] Nevertheless, my contention is that a messianic historical theory *can* be figured, one that is an irreducible affirmation of the unexpected openness of the future, the 'to-come' (*à venir*) *which includes what comes to 'us' from the past*. As the American philosopher John D. Caputo (after Derrida, the next most important interlocutor throughout my thesis) has pointed out, the messianic opens (and keeps open) the past as well as the future:

> [T]he 'messianic' structure of deconstruction does not only mean that it is turned always and already to the to-come, the *arrivants*, but it also means that deconstruction is a logic of haunting, or of being haunted, that it is constantly 'spooked' by the *revenants*, the ghosts of the dead who give us no peace... Deconstruction is 'hauntology', a way of worrying about the dead, of being spooked, of hearing the voiceless voices of the past.[32] (Caputo 2009, 161)

[30] Here, in relation to his own corpus, I affirm and am guided by that which Derrida wrote about the work of Homer, Shakespeare, Joyce and Hélène Cixous: 'Bigger and stronger than the libraries that act as if they have the capacity to hold them, if only virtually, they derange all the archival and indexing spaces by the disproportion of the potentially infinite memory they condense according to the processes of undecidable writing for which as yet no complete formalisation exists.' (Derrida 2006, 15)

[31] However, here I am proceeding in the same 'spirit' as Keith Jenkins who, in acknowledging the intellectual debts of his work to particular writers/theorists makes the following comment: 'Of course I do not expect...that they would accept my own way of thinking about things for which they have nevertheless been in part responsible, nor to agree with the particular argument they have on occasion been brought in to support, or even that I have understood them. Yet, I have read them, and I think I have personally benefited from having done so. Whether these benefits are obvious, or are communicated here to others either adequately or persuasively, I am not at all sure, but I hope that, at least in small part, their goodness shines through.' (Jenkins 2003, 8)

[32] However, this thesis is not primarily concerned with equating deconstruction to 'hearing the voiceless voices of the past' (and the theories that are often related to such phrases so as to make continuity with them: worked up notions of trauma, testimony, witnessing and remembrance). See Edith Wyschogrod's *An Ethics of Remembering: History, Heterology, and the Nameless Others* (1998) for a brilliant account of this emphasis. This thesis shares some of the philosophical concerns that provide the backdrop to the work of Wyschogrod's 'heterological historian': 'The historian who is driven by the urgency of a promise to the dead to tell the truth about them, a promise that is prior to her account of the facts, is the heterological historian. To be sure, she may be the member of a profession who seeks to dis-cover ''what happened'' and to re-cover these events by bringing them into discursive or visual reality. Yet hers is a

For Caputo (glossing one of Derrida's hypotheses) 'justice is due to the dead and the not yet born'; justice is equated with responsibility, including responsibility towards the dead and their heritage that has been passed on (Caputo 1997, 121). Attendant on this responsibility there is 'a revisitation of the so-called living present by the spirits of the past' which always disturbs/de-stabilizes: 'the *revenant* as *arrivant*' (Caputo 1997, 121). Accordingly, the messianic can be understood as structuring all historical (re)presentations of the past, all historicizations. This 'religious' motif of the deconstruction (which, as we have seen, Derrida stresses is not to be identified with any determinate religious tradition) that is at work in history thus helps us to understand the paradoxical condition in which historical (re)presentation and its theorisation have always already been and why historical (re)presentations and the historians who produce them are always bound to fail(ure) or a 'falling short' (the risk of infelicity) as regards the still dominant ideals – or commitments (often inscribed/enshrined in their [re]presentations either explicitly or implicitly) – of their profession/guild. Such commitments by historians 'of a particular kind' as the historical theorists Alun Munslow and Keith Jenkins have it[33], include aspirations to

---

radically new persona. She is the agent of an irrepressible desire, a passion for the dead others who are voiceless and who exist both inside and outside the threads of an articulated narrative, hidden and awaiting exhumation.

But this persona must be undone by the paradoxes it generates. The heterological historian is one who commits herself to an impossible ideal of truth telling, to the notion that historical narratives replicate events, that discourse can at least approximate ''what actually happened''. Yet she cannot renege on the impossible promise that precedes the recounting of events ''just as they were'' and presupposes a constituency to whom the promised is given, the dead others who cannot speak for themselves...the historian abides with the voiceless dead in the non-space of ethics, of the promise, yet empirical truth requires that the other be reinstated in a nexus of concrete events.' (Wyschogrod 1998, 38)

[33] Munslow, in an interview/conversation with Jenkins (published in 2011 and focussed on the intellectual career/contribution of the former), provides the following delineation of 'history of a particular kind': 'I have long come to the conclusion that in ''doing history'', form always precedes the content of the past.

In theorising this, I suppose the three guiding principles of so called proper history – or what, following your lead [Jenkins'], I call ''history of a particular kind'' – are three doubts. The first is to doubt the conventional notion of the operation of the correspondence theory of truth within what is a fictive narrative. Second, the unalloyed faith of most historians in metaphysical realism as defined and supposedly demonstrated in the epistemic connection between evidence and theory. And third is my belief that the ontological status of history is that of a linguistic-narrative and cultural artefact that, as [Hayden] White so famously said, is as much imagined as found.' (Munslow and Jenkins 2011, 575)

Subsequently in this conversation/interview, Munslow recounts and rejects a criticism of his work along the lines that he has erected 'a straw man' in his 'description of ''historians of a particular kind'' as being generally unwilling to examine what they do' (Munslow and Jenkins 2011, 578) and goes on to respond to a question from Jenkins as to why 'mainstream historians' refuse to 'get'/embrace the postmodern-type critiques and *liberating* arguments regarding 'history' – so as to 'move what is the most conservative of discourses toward a new form of life; of thinking and living and being alive and alert to future possibilities' (Munslow and Jenkins 2011, 578) – as follows: 'For me most historians today and still far

'truth-telling'; that is, that historical narratives can literally (re)present past events (with the emphasis on the work of resurrecting the fully present past); that 'our' histories can approximate to the actuality of an aspect of the 'before now' (the 'recovery' of the 'presence' of the past; absolute proximity of [re]presentation) so that 'we' know 'what happened' (the corollary of which is that we are able to measure this against the totality of the past); the deployment of historicizations to measure/gauge and assign essence/being and 'genuineness' (what something or someone 'is': *ousia*) and political worth as well as to regulate temporality.[34] For the messianic experience read as a kind of prophetic faith that structures all discourse, is anticipation for that which might (not) arrive, of which there is no determinate sighting, fulfilment or end in sight *vis-à-vis* any historicizing discourse. That future which is opened and addressed by the 'come' exceeds all formulations of history and the capacity of historians (their best efforts, for as long they continue to make them) to (re)present (i.e. determine) 'it'. As history in its various forms is widely regarded and used as the determining discourse *par excellence*, this is (a) problematic.[35] As such, what I think reflection on Derrida's messianic structure 'yields' (i.e. reveals or unveils) for historical theorisation is a fresh (re)statement – (re)figured in 'religious' terms – of the *impossibility* of history, i.e. of *the condition of history's possibility as the condition of its impossibility*. Messianic historical theory foregrounds the im-possibility[36] of 'history' (as just another discourse) –

---

too many theorists don't get it because (a) multi-sceptical criticism is philosophically unconvincing for them, (b) they dislike what they see as the dreadful cultural consequences if their beliefs and practices were suddenly dispensed with, (c) history is not just another narrative form, and (d) such changes would usher in the collapse of society as we know it. The contemporary rush to domesticate and thereby neuter poststructuralist thought is testament to this desire, I think. This is the direct result of the effort to shore up such failing but simplistic verities as correspondence truth, objectivity, practical realist common sense and representationalism.' (Munslow and Jenkins 2011, 578) See also Munslow's *A History of History* for a recent and sustained continuation of this critique of 'historians/histories of a particular kind' (Munslow 2012 – for example, pages 2, 7 and 186).

[34] Derrida writes in the essay 'The Supplement of Origin' (in Derrida 1973) that ' ''history'' has never meant anything but the presentation (*Gegenwärtigung*) of Being, the production and recollection of beings in presence, as knowledge and mastery.' (Derrida 1973, 102)

[35] Throughout this thesis, and particularly in relation to historical (re)presentation, I conceive a 'problematic' as an 'irresolvable': a paradox that cannot be reconciled *via* knowledge claims. Rather, problematics (and 'problematicisations') should be understood as challenges to be faced, as issues that need to be continually raised to consciousness by recasting – or reformulating – them in different ways. Here there are obvious resonances with Derrida's famous usage of *aporia* – the undecidability of the decision – and the conditions of possibility for all discourse – including of historical (re)presentation – as conditions of impossibility, all of which I will discuss in this thesis.

[36] Derrida sometimes utilised the hyphen in this way (im-possibility) so as to denote two concepts simultaneously (and the oscillation between them): possibility and impossibility. For example, see this usage throughout in Derrida 2001a. See also Derrida 2005c, 84, where Derrida writes of 'the title of the

specifically its enabling by that which exceeds and eludes it, that which is not historical – in all its derivations (e.g. historicization, historicism, historical interpretation, narration, [re]presentation, theorisation, etc.). In this sense it contributes towards that agenda, itself structured by and an exemplification (passing under another name) of messianic historical theory, proposed by Keith Jenkins and predicated on the irredeemable falling short – or lack – of all history-ing:

> For no matter how many 'differing interpretations' they may admit to, most mainstream historians still continue to strive for 'real historical knowledge', for objectivity, for the evidentially-based synoptic account and for truth-at-the-end-of-enquiry; in other words, for what are effectively interpretive *closures*...
> ...Consequently, the main aim...*is to try to work the discourse of history in the direction of that kind of radical, open-ended democracy that grasps the impossibility of enacting a total historical/historicising closure of the past whilst recognising that its refigured ways of figuring things out 'will never have been good enough'* – and that this is the most desirable thing. (Jenkins 2003, 2-5)

At the same time, and as obliquely suggested by Jenkins in the quote above, theorising the messianic as the possibility of the impossible permanently at work in history *also* offers an explanation for the ceaseless proliferation of historical (re)presentations that continue to circulate in both academic and popular culture(s); the 'striving' of history – epistemological or otherwise – that Jenkins has repeatedly identified so as to refigure. Messianic historical theorisation is responsive to Frank Ankersmit's call, prompted by 'the dramatic increase in scholarly production one may observe in history over the last few decades', to provide a 'more up-to-date ''psychoanalysis'' of the new state of mind of the historical discipline' (Ankersmit 1994, 187) (although my argument is that there is nothing 'new' about such a 'state of mind': history-ing has always been structured by the messianic). It stresses that the im-possibility of all forms of history – again: the condition of history's

---

im-possible'. Of this title he goes on to add 'This im-possible is not privative. It is not inaccessible, and it is not what I can indefinitely defer: it announces itself; it precedes me, swoops down upon and seizes me *here and now* in a nonvirtualizable way, in actuality and not potentiality. It comes upon me from on high, in the form of an injunction that does not simply wait on the horizon, that I do not see coming, that never leaves me in peace and never lets me put it off until later. Such an urgency cannot be *idealized* any more than the other as other can. This im-possible is thus not a (regulative) *idea* or *ideal*. It is what is most undeniably *real*. And sensible. Like the other. Like the irreducible and nonappropriable différance of the other.' (Derrida 2005c, 84)

possibility as the condition of its impossibility; its enabling by that which exceeds and eludes it, that which is not historical, historicity as 'future-to-come' – is also that which is generative of all historical discourse (including historical theorisation) and motivates the (meta)historians engaged in the production of it. As with all language/discourse, it construes every history, every attempt at (re)presentation, as an affirmative 'come', an opening/address to the promise of someone or something that cannot – and should not – be determined: the ('absolute') event in the shape of the singular other that may never come. Avowedly impossible histories (those that embrace messianic historical theory) – precisely because they recognise and respect as a condition of their construction that they are always bound to fail in (re)presenting the radical otherness of the past (to-come) – keep the future, or (to borrow from Reinhart Koselleck) 'futures past'[37], open. As with the future, the past – as radical otherness to-come – is non-reappropriable (irrecoverable) and any attempt to do so, to re-present (recover) it *via* historical determination, to actualise the absolute proximity – the 'presence' of the past – fails (although, as we know, history – as distinct from the past – is often presented as being able to re-present it in precisely such ways). It is this opening of/to futures/pasts 'to-come' that permits historical (re)presentation to continue, the impossibility of reducing it to any figure called 'history' that energises the production[38] of endless historicizations. Yet according to Derrida justice, from which the messianic dimension cannot be separated, 'participates' in the open future (letting the other be other), and messianic historical theory posits that this both motivates and can refigure our understanding of historical production as an emancipatory gesture without any claim to – precisely because it constantly underlines its inability to do so – absolute proximity with the

[37] See the title of Koselleck 2004.

[38] In using the concept of 'production' here and throughout this thesis I am conscious of Derrida's warning that '[t]he concept and the word ''production'' pose enormous problems' (Derrida 1988a, 148). Elsewhere, in the essay 'Différance' (in Derrida 1982a), Derrida elaborated on these problems/challenges as, on the one hand, the necessity of understanding/thinking concepts/words such as 'is produced' (as well as '[i]s constituted', 'is created', 'movement' and 'historically') 'beyond the metaphysical language in which they are retained, along with all their implications' and, on the other hand, our obligation ('[w]e ought') 'to demonstrate why concepts like *production*, constitution, and history remain in complicity with what is at issue here.' Nevertheless, while mindful of these problems/challenges I adopt the same strategy as Derrida who went on to explain why he continued to deploy these concepts/words as follows: 'I utilize such concepts, like many others, only for their strategic convenience and in order to undertake their deconstruction at the currently most decisive point.' (Derrida 1982a, 12) In Chapter One I discuss the tension in continuing to deploy concepts/words – specifically 'history' – that remain in complicity with metaphysical language (as well as the term metaphysics 'itself') while trying to understand/think them beyond 'it' (i.e. differently, in some other way).

past. Historians, through the production of their histories, can be understood as always affirming – i.e. saying 'come' to, and working for the coming of – the future event, which might be the event of justice. There is an emancipatory galvanization underway here: the profession of the ongoing failure of every (re)presentation simultaneously serves as a constant reminder and means to *resist* systems that determine dogmatically (i.e. 'unreflexively', although the concept of 'reflexivity' is cautiously – and problematically – deployed throughout this thesis given the implications of Derrida's discussion of 'the other' and 'the secret' for naïve notions of the 'self' [39]), systems that obstruct or 'arrest' the coming of the event in the shape of the singular other. This emancipatory galvanization is an affirmation of – a 'yes' to – keeping the discourse of emancipation in/at play (things could always be, or could have been, otherwise), of the dream of future justice (including future 'justice done to the past') that always exceeds all present social imaginaries[40], of keeping the future open(ing) so as to disrupt all historicizing propensities for totalization[41] – (re)presentations that 'close', 'close themselves off', and close the 'to come' – that can be associated with totalitarianism[42] (whilst recognizing that the generation of partial and provisional fixities is an unavoidable condition and function of discourse[43]). Thus, messianic historical theory can be read as something of an

[39] In relation to a discourse such as historical (re)presentation I take 'unreflexive' to connote a demonstrable lack of any critical 'self'-awareness about the processes of its' construction/production and political effects. The concept of 'reflexivity', predicated on notions of the 'self', will be problematicized *via* Derrida's discussion of 'the other' and 'the secret' in the following two chapters and both words (i.e. 'reflexive' and 'unreflexive') are placed in quotation marks throughout this thesis to indicate their inadequacy and the attendant need for qualification.

[40] Charles Taylor defines the term 'social imaginary' as 'the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations.' (Taylor 2004, 23)

[41] Totalization/totalizing, broadly construed, can be understood as the 'unreflexive' imposition and fixing/determination, *via* (re)presentational discourse in all its forms, of a uniform way of seeing, understanding, acting and valuing things on all activities and structures in all societies.

[42] 'Nondemocratic systems are above all systems that *close* and *close themselves off* from this coming of the other. They are systems of homogenization and of integral calculability. In the end and beyond all the classical critique of fascist, Nazi, and totalitarian violence in general, one can say that these are systems that close the ''to come'' and that close themselves into the presentation of the presentable.' (Derrida 2002d, 182)

[43] Here, I am – for the most part – in agreement with Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe who have made this point as follows: 'The impossibility of an ultimate fixity of meaning implies that there have to be partial fixations – otherwise, the very flow of differences would be impossible. Even in order to differ, to subvert meaning, there has to be *a* meaning. If the social does not manage to fix itself in the intelligible and instituted forms of a *society*, the social only exists, however, as an effort to construct that impossible object. Any discourse is constituted as an attempt to dominate the field of discursivity, to arrest the flow of differences, to construct a centre. We will call the privileged discursive points of this partial fixation,

apophatic strategy: the emphasis is placed on what history is not and can never be rather than a 'positive' description. Yet – recalling the dissociation of deconstruction from negative theology that Derrida made[44] – it is simultaneously and primarily affirmative (discoursing on that-which-a history/representation-is-not-and-will-always, already-fail-to-be also constituting an affirmation of sorts, an affirmation of – which is also an openness to – the futural wholly other). Historians, and the histories they produce, are therefore motivated by this general experiential – affirmative – messianic structure: by quasi-transcendental supposition(s) – conditions of possibility as those of impossibility – that can be understood as a kind of prophetic faith in, and affirmation of/openness to the future 'to-come (back)'. Messianic historical theory enables and explains (justifies?) the continuing failure of *all* historical (re)presentation by thinking through (and, in doing so, stressing and raising to consciousness) its im-possibility which can be understood as the affirmation of a historicity (the condition for the possibility of histories) that is beyond, and not recuperable by it; of a non-historical historicity as 'future-to-come', something not – to borrow again, this time from Martin Davies – 'imprisoned by history'[45]. Something wholly other experienced as and galvanized by faith (or by emancipatory promise) in the (justice) 'to-come'. Therefore, the messianic *is* deconstruction since, as Derrida confirms,

> Deconstruction is possible as an experience of the impossible, there where, even if it does not exist, if it is not *present*, not yet or never, *there is* justice [il y a *la justice*]. (Derrida 2002c, 243)

I close this 'first attempt to situate this thesis' by stressing that, despite the references to lack, infelicity and failure, messianic historical theory is *affirmative*. For to highlight the failure of the totalizing aspirations that have – for much of its recent theorisation – informed historical (re)presentation in the name of 'some *other*

---

nodal points.' (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, 112) However, in response to their point about the attempt of any discourse to dominate the field as described, Sande Cohen has posed a typically critical question: 'Is this proposition moral-political or aesthetic, a chimera of satisfaction?' (Cohen 2006b, 266*n*40)

[44] See the essay 'How to Avoid Speaking: Denials' (Derrida 1992c [first published in 1989], 77): 'No, what I write is not ''negative theology''.' A helpful discussion of Derrida and 'the apophatic'/negative theology is provided in Caputo 1997, 1-57.

[45] See the title of Davies 2010.

concept of history' (see the 'second attempt to situate this thesis' below) is to be welcomed and celebrated: affirmed. In this sense messianic historical theory is a creative restatement, a messianic refiguration that is shot through with a Derridean 'religious' impulse, of that joyous realisation that Keith Jenkins has tried to awaken in us:

> What is really excellent about historians' historical representations is that they always fail. There is no possibility that any historicization of 'the past' can ever be literally true, objective, fair, non-figural, non-positioned and so on, all of which opens up that which has happened 'before now' to interminable readings and rereading. I want to argue...that this professed ability to secure what are effectively interpretive *closures* – the continuing *raison d'être* of the professional historian in even these pluralist days despite sometime protestations – is not only *logically* impossible but also ethically, morally and politically desirable. The fact that 'the past' both as a whole and in its parts is so very obviously underdetermining vis-à-vis its innumerable appropriations (one past – many histories) is to be both celebrated and worked. It is to be celebrated because it is a positive democratic value when everybody can at least potentially author their own lives and create their own intellectual and moral genealogies, that there is no credible authoritative or authoritarian historicized past that one has to defer to over one's own personal history, or indeed to even acknowledge. And it is to be worked because it offers the impossible-to-prevent opportunity for those who still have the desire to articulate past-tensed fictions under the old name of history (for all histories are fictive, it is their value or lack of it that is at issue today) to do so in radical disobedience to the currently stultifying academic/professional *doxa*. The best (and perhaps the only) reason I can think of for saying that we might still need to have refigured histories that are simultaneously reflexive and emancipatory is that they may help to prise open the mental strait-jacket of modernist historical thinking for the benefit of those who have not yet managed to get out of it.
>
> ...What is finally being recommended here, then, is an attitude that disobeys orthodoxies and which replaces all definitive closures with a suggestive openness, any exhaustive conclusion with an etcetera, and any full-stop with an ellipsis... (Jenkins 2009, 150-151)

It is my contention that, as in the quotation above, this messianic structure – or marking (an imprimatur of sorts?) – can be discerned, albeit in less developed formulations, in a number of challenges raised by contemporary historical theorists (as I attempt to demonstrate below). Messianic historical theory travels under different names (and can be tracked as such) across a range of 'current' historical concerns and their theorisation.

Situating this Thesis: Attempt Two (On – Three – Beginnings)

An outline of the stages of this development and the defence of messianic historical theory inscribed in this thesis, as well as some other prefatory and qualifying remarks, is sketched out below. However, by way of further situating my argument (having provided an initial explanation of the crucial importance of the messianic and messianic historical theory above), I want to explain why I have chosen to alight on and develop the notion of 'messianic historical theory' by connecting it to some broader concerns. I will do this by briefly dwelling on the problematic of beginning(s) that Derrida emphasised and of which those expressing a fidelity to his work – those writing in his wake – invariably remind us, before going on to identify and link two extracts from his corpus with a third set of remarks from an assortment of historical theorists. In doing so my aim is to broadly delineate the multiple interests that determine, inform and intersect the field of this thesis: historical theory (or 'historiography' as it is sometimes used in relation to ways in which the writing of history is related to issues of critique, institution, stabilisation/determination, continuity and discontinuity and claims to actualise absolute proximity with – the presence of – the past), Derridean scholarship, and the (re)turn of religion in contemporary theoretical discussion. Expressed differently, this approach might also be understood as another preliminary indication of the ways in which the intellectual and political concerns that animate and are discussed throughout the chapters and conclusion that follow have been formed by various (con)texts.

A move that is frequently made in studies on Derrida is to draw attention to the challenges attendant on beginning to read and think-through his formidable body of work. As Michael Naas puts it:

> Because there is – as I believe – no proper place to begin reading Derrida on religion or anything else, because all one can do is prepare, calculate, strategize, and then give it a shot, I would like to begin with... (Naas 2012, 13)

Acknowledgements of such reading/thinking struggles[46] often reference and draw comfort from Derrida's famous – and in my view beautiful – imperative statement to the following effect:

> We must begin *wherever we are* and the thought of the trace[47]...has already taught us that it was impossible to justify a point of departure absolutely. *Wherever we are*: in a text where we already believe ourselves to be. (Derrida 1997b, 162)

The implications of Derrida's encouragement (as if we have a choice) for this thesis – and for any attempt to theorise historical (re)presentation – are, of course, profound. Nicholas Royle has explained[48] how Derrida's reading of Rousseau in *Of Grammatology*[49], where Derrida makes the remark about beginning 'in a text where we already believe ourselves to be', develops 'a logic of supplementarity' (Royle 1995, 20). This concept of the supplement, according to Derrida (together with 'the theory of writing'), designates 'textuality itself...in an indefinitely multiplied structure – *en abyme* [*in an abyss*]'. This abyss is not to be regarded as a 'happy or unhappy accident' but rather as a 'structural necessity' the theory of which he will gradually constitute in his reading. It is 'the indefinite multiplication...of representation' and the 'representation of representation' (theorisation?) from which 'the desire of presence' – to close down, or arrest, this multiplication of

[46] See, for example, Taylor 1984, 3 and the brief statements by Clare Connors and Peggy Kamuf in Gaston and Maclachlan 2011, 186 and 188.

[47] Simon Morgan Wortham provides a helpful explanation of the trace in Derrida's work: 'In *Of Grammatology* Derrida examines Saussure's theory of language as a signifying system (see also *Margins of Philosophy*, *Positions* and *Speech and Phenomena* for Derrida's reading of the concept of the sign within the Western tradition). For Saussure, the connection between the signifier and the signified is purely relational and arbitrary. Language is therefore construed by him as a system of differential relations. For Derrida, however, if every sign acquires its value only on the strength of its difference from other signs, nevertheless other signs leave their trace in the sense that they are constitutive of the difference that maintains the sign's identity. Every sign bears the traces of the others from which it differs, but to which it also defers in order to receive its value as a (differential) sign. The trace is thus not reducible to the sign, nor can it be turned into a sign. Instead, the trace calls to be thought in terms of the non-signifying difference that is ''originarily'' at play in all signification. However, since for Derrida the trace is always the trace of another trace, it does not give itself as simple origin. (For Derrida, trace is not a master word but an always replaceable term in an unmasterable series including *différance*, supplement, writing, cinder, and so on). Nor can the trace be thought in terms of the logic of presence. Since every sign in its manifestation or apparent ''presence'' always includes traces of others which are supposedly ''absent'', the trace can be reduced to neither side of the presence-absence opposition so prized by the metaphysical tradition. The trace thus redescribes the entire field which the metaphysics of presence seeks to dominate throughout history. The trace names that non-systematizable reserve which is at once constitutive and unrepresentable within such a field.' (Morgan Wortham 2010, 229-230).

[48] See Royle 1995, 20-22.

[49] See Derrida 1997b, 95-268.

representations – is 'born'. Derrida's summary remark here is that: 'The supplement itself is quite exorbitant, in every sense of the word.' (Derrida 1997b, 163) In relation to this, Royle reminds us that any reading 'will inevitably be a matter of tracing *and* adding to what has been written', and that 'to read or write *after Derrida* it is not possible merely to repeat' (Royle 1995, 20), although what Derrida calls a 'respectful doubling of commentary' should be part of any 'critical reading' (Derrida 1997b, 158). For Royle, the 'supposition of the already' in relation to beginning in a text where we already believe ourselves to be

> situates the mad law of the supplement, the surprising law of historicity, the states of emeregency out of which 'history' calls to be thought. It illustrates the 'axial proposition' that 'there is nothing outside the text'[50], in other words there is nothing outside context (even though, in or rather precisely because, context is non-saturable). (Royle 1995, 21)

This law of the supplement (also the law of 'historicity': that which cannot be [re]presented and which conditions all [re]presentation), which will be returned to and explored in more detail in Chapter One and the Conclusion, denotes the no outside/non-saturability of context in which we are always already situated. So with this thesis, which has already begun to 'trace and add' to what Derrida has written *vis-à-vis* history: to repeat differently.[51]

Of course – and I want to briefly note this 'of course' here by way of another beginning – none of this is to suggest, as Royle goes on to succinctly express it,

> that everything is textual, that everything can be treated as text, as happening in a book or on a computer-screen. Rather, there is nothing exempt from *effects* of textuality. 'The referent is in the text', as Derrida puts it in the interview on 'Deconstruction in America' in 1985. (Royle 1995, 21-22)

Given this point regarding the inescapability of the effects of textuality, Royle goes on to 'correctly' read Derrida as therefore being concerned

[50] These quotes are from Derrida 1997b, 163. See also page 158: '*There is nothing outside of the text* [there is no outside-text; *il n'y a pas de hors-texte*].'
[51] One expression of this idea is formulated by Derrida thus: 'Repetition, the law of iterability, is still the law of difference here.' (Derrida 1995d, 18)

> to elaborate readings which take rigorous account of the ways in which any text (in the traditional sense of that word) and any writer (the notion of the writer being itself 'a logocentric product') are variously affected, inscribed and governed by a logic of text, of supplementarity or contextualisation, which can never be saturated or arrested. (Royle 1995, 22)

Such an elaboration recognises and affirms that all texts, traditionally understood, have meaning – signify – only by 'belonging to a supplementary and ''indefinite multiplied structure''[52] of contextualisation and incessant recontextualisation.' (Royle 1995, 20-22) It is on this axial propositional basis that Derrida can argue that

> [t]he supplement is always the supplement of a supplement. One wishes to go back *from the supplement to the source*: one must recognize that there is *a supplement at the source*. (Derrida 1997b, 304)

Therefore, accepting this logic of the text and mindful of an irreducible supplementarity as it relates to the question of justifying a point of departure/beginning, I follow the approach of Naas and would now 'like to begin' by identifying and linking *three* different events/issues that 'contextualise' some starting points for thinking through the Derridean messianic in relation to historical (re)presentation/production.

1. In 1994 Derrida, Gianni Vattimo, Hans-Georg Gadamer and others took part in a conference on religion held on Capri. Out of this conference emerged a volume – *Religion* (edited by Derrida and Vattimo [1998]) – which included an essay by Derrida entitled 'Faith and Knowledge: the Two Sources of ''Religion'' at the Limits of Reason Alone' (Derrida 1998a). In this essay Derrida suggests that the question of religion today[53] 'appears in a new and different light'; that it seems that

[52] As cited earlier, this is a quotation from Derrida 1997b, 163.

[53] By way of justifying his suggestion of the 'theme' of 'religion' for the Capri meeting Derrida, in the course of 'Faith and Knowledge', comments that 'this justification would have become, today, my response to the question of *religion*. Of religion today. For, of course, it would have been madness itself to have proposed to treat religion *itself*, in general or in its essence; rather the troubled question, the common concern is: ''What is going on today with it, with what is designated thus? What is going on there? What is happening and so badly? What is happening under this old name? What in the world is suddenly emerging or re-emerging under this appellation?'' Of course, this form of question cannot be separated from the more fundamental one (on the essence, the concept and the history of religion *itself*, and of what is called ''religion'').' (Derrida 1998a, 38)

there is ‘an unprecedented resurgence, both global and planetary, of this ageless thing’ (Derrida 1998a, 4). He asks why ‘this phenomenon, so hastily called the ‘‘return of religions’’[54], is so difficult to think’ and why it is startling (‘surprising’ and ‘astonishing’) for those

> who believed naïvely that an alternative opposed Religion, on the one side, and on the other, Reason, Enlightenment, Science, Criticism (Marxist Criticism, Nietzschean, Genealogy, Freudian Psychoanalysis and their heritage), as though the one could not but put an end to the other? (Derrida 1998a, 5)

In contrast to these approaches Derrida argues for the necessity of a completely different schema as the point of departure for trying to think this return of the religious (Derrida 1998a, 5). In the course of carefully developing and nuancing this schema (e.g. ‘faith’ is not always ‘identifiable with religion, nor, another point, with theology’ – Derrida 1998a, 8) Derrida considers ‘the figure of the Promised Land’ as ‘the essential bond between the promise of place and historicity’ immediately going on to acknowledge that ‘by historicity, we could understand today more than one thing’, including – in relation to religion – ‘the history of its history’ (Derrida 1998a, 8). Furthermore, another aspect of this schema (that is to be deployed by way of reflecting on ‘this noun ‘‘religion’’...and of the bond it has contracted with the Abrahamic religions’) involves ‘taking on the meaning of engaging the historicity of history’ as well as ‘the eventfulness of the event as such’ – both of which I read as the condition for any history of religion(s), indeed any history *per se* – that Derrida also describes as ‘a historicity of revelation itself’. He immediately follows this description with a reference to the messianic and eschatological that is very much in accord with the initial explanation provided above:

[54] See also page 39 of this text where Derrida argues that the designation/title ‘*return* of religion’ requires further consideration: ‘Today once again, today finally, today otherwise, the great question would still be religion and what some hastily call its ‘‘return’’ To say things in this way and to believe that one knows of what one speaks, would be to begin by no longer understanding anything at all: as though religion, the question of religion was *what succeeds in returning*, that which all of a sudden would come as a surprise to what one believes one knows: man, the earth, the world, history, falling thus under the rubic of anthropology, of history or of every other form of human science or of philosophy, even of the ‘‘philosophy of religion’’. First error to avoid...the question of religion is first of all the question of the question. Of the origins and the borders of the question – as of the response. ‘‘The thing’’ tends thus to drop out of sight as soon as one believes oneself able to master it under the title of a discipline, a knowledge or a philosophy. And yet, despite the impossibility of the task, a demand is addressed to us: it should be delivered, done, or left to ‘‘deliver itself’’ – this discourse, in a few traits, in a limited number of words.’ (Derrida 1998a, 39)

> The messianic or eschatological horizon delimits this historicity, to be sure, but only by virtue of having previously inaugurated it. (Derrida 1998a, 9)

Here the suggestion is that historical (re)presentation, including historiography as 'history of history', is *both* summoned/called/enabled ('inaugurated') *and* released/loosed ('delimited') by a certain conception of the messianic/eschatological.

Now, as one might expect, Derrida is wary of unexamined codings[55] such as the 'return of religion' (see *n*54). And I think he is right to be so. However, he nevertheless engages with religion in a variety of texts, not least by developing a radicalised – and personal – conceptualisation of the term. For example, in 'Circumfession' (1993b) he wrote of that which his readers

> won't have known about me...my religion about which nobody understands anything...the constancy of God in my life is called by other names, so that I quite rightly pass for an atheist, the omnipresence to me of what I call God in my absolved, absolutely private language... (Derrida 1993b, 155)

Another example can be found in *The Gift of Death*[56] (1995c), where Derrida proposes a logic/thinking of 'the possibility of religion without religion' as follows:

---

[55] Sande Cohen has provided a helpful explanation of coding and its variants: '***Code:*** involves the isolation of the ways in which semantic materials are linked...Codes ensure that states (of mind), qualities (of value, predication), and responses (what one thinks) are simultaneously generated. The act of *encoding* is inferred from textual effects, and its isolation yields new knowledge; analysis of the transmission of messages passes through multiple *subcodes*, partial constructions (devices) that convey information about prior codings and present to the reader unforeseen arrangements; *undercoding* pertains to textual sections that are ambiguously connected to stronger (syntactic) codes; *overcoding* refers to predications where new information is reduced by subsumption to the already said, already known; and *recoding*, which dominates in the academic system, suggests the proliferation of ways in which meaning is recalibrated to favour the Same, the elimination of the untimely from meaning and thought. In all cases, coding is radically opposed to intellectual states of apertinence, asyntacticality, and semanticism: these latter categories are intolerable to bourgeois-academia since they scramble the production of continuous meanings.' (Cohen 1986, 327-328) Cohen's explanation is, in part, indebted to the discussion of coding in Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Deleuze and Guattari 2004b; see, for example, pages 41-43, 153-154, 217, 242-245).

[56] This text is, in part, a critical discussion of 'the Christian themes' that 'can be seen to revolve around the *gift* as gift of death, the fathomless gift of a type of death: infinite love (the Good as goodness that infinitely forgets itself), sin and salvation, repentance and sacrifice.' (Derrida 1995c, 49)

> [A] logic that at bottom (that is why it can still, up to a certain point, be called 'logic') has no need of *the event of a revelation or the revelation of an event*. It needs to think the possibility of such an event but not the event itself...If one takes into account certain differences, the same can be said for many discourses that seek in our day to be religious – discourses of a philosophical type if not philosophies themselves – without putting forth theses or *theologems* that would by their very structure teach something corresponding to the dogmas of a given religion...this tradition that consists of proposing...a *thinking* that 'repeats' the possibility of religion without religion. (Derrida 1995c, 49)

This radicalisation of 'religion' – religion without religion that collapses religious/atheist[57] binaries, religion that thinks and thus affirms/responds to the possibility of the event but resists determining the event 'itself' (waiting without awaiting), thereby closing off the future – is one that, gathered under/in the motif of the messianic (and as I have already begun to show), provides an important resource for ongoing historical theorisation. Indeed, this is suggested in the way that Derrida connects the 'return of religion' with the historicity of history and the eventfulness of the event. This thesis therefore develops such conceptualisations and connections in a sustained way, including in response to various rejections of/oppositions to the Derridean messianic and the introduction of notions of the return of religion into theoretical discussion that have been levelled by various cultural critics, philosophers and theologians (not all of whom, especially amongst the theologians, welcome the circulation of such an 'arid' and 'desolate' conceptualisation of religion). For I think that there can be little doubt that Derrida's work and the ways in which it has been appropriated have played a major role in (re)introducing and increasing the visibility of 'the religious'[58] in recent – and previously, for the most part, resolutely secular and resistant to all notions of religion – theoretical debates, debates that have morphed from initial (and ongoing) discussions of 'Derrida and Theology' or 'Deconstructing Theology' into a wider set of explicitly ethico-political concerns. Accordingly, what has taken place from the 1990s onwards (i.e. over, approximately, the last twenty years) is a *huge* expansion of theoretical work

[57] Derrida commented – to Catherine Malabou – with some humour/irony/bemusement that 'My atheism develops in the churches, all the churches, can you understand that, can you?' (Malabou and Derrida 2004, 95)

[58] A large number of examples could be provided here; for two that have the words 'Derrida' and 'religion' in the title see Llewelyn 2009 (*Margins of Religion: Between Kierkegaard and Derrida*) and Sherwood and Hart 2005 (*Derrida and Religion: Other Testaments*).

(work which can also be described as 'cultural criticism', understood as intellectual disruption of and opposition to all that is settled and official and which, broadly construed, I take as encompassing contemporary continental theory[59]) that focuses on the 'return of religion' or the 'religious turn' – religious language, concepts, motifs and issues broadly construed – which is sophisticated (and, in some cases, less so) and diversely positioned (positive, negative and ambivalent as regards this [re]turn). In response to this, and throughout this thesis (deliberately situated so as to prevent the isolation of historical theory from this important – if disputatious – current of contemporary intellectual life, named 'the return of religion', however inadequate that designation may be), I will be drawing upon a range of this impressive and growing body of literature. However, here I need to stress what this thesis is not *primarily* concerned with by way of organizing and making it manageable. For example, whilst drawing upon resources from some of the areas that I list below, it is *not* fixated with a sustained degree of specificity on any of them: thus, 'Phenomenology and the ''Theological Turn'' ' (Janicaud et al. 2000); 'Postmodern Theology or A/theology' (Taylor 1984, Ward 2001 and Hyman 2001); the relationship between universal claims (philosophy) and particularisms (religion) (de Vries 1999); reasserting the all-subsuming narrative power of 'Theology' over and beyond 'Secular Reason' (Milbank 1990[60]); discourses on appropriating aspects

[59] Theodor Adorno, in the first essay in his book *Prisms* (Adorno 1967) entitled 'Cultural Criticism and Society', has described the failure of fascists to 'recognize the extent to which culture and criticism, for better or for worse, are intertwined.' (Adorno 1967, 22) He goes on to assert that 'Culture is only true when implicitly critical, and the mind which forgets this revenges itself in the critics it breeds.' (Adorno 1967, 22) Vincent Pecora's understanding of cultural criticism draws on these arguments from Adorno and is one that I adopt throughout this thesis. Pecora's formulation of this term is as follows: 'Cultural criticism, at least in the way I am using the term here, is more or less coeval with a modern and secular sense of culture that we associate with the age of the Western nation-state and large-scale capitalism since the eighteenth century. The social differentiation, societalization, and rationalization invoked above as commonly accepted hallmarks of such a culture entail not only the spiritual and intellectual autonomy of the individual, with all the duties and rights of ''free expression'' this demands, but, further, that culture comes increasingly to define itself in its opposition to all that is 'Official'': ''Culture is only true when implicitly critical'' (Adorno, *Prisms* 22).' (Pecora 2006, 17) Pecora locates cultural criticism within the domain of the humanities: 'what we in America commonly call ''the humanities'' (*Geisteswissenschaften* in German, or *les sciences humaines* in France) – that is, literature, philosophy, history, and the arts, which is to say all the things that have come since Burckhardt and Arnold to be addressed by the term ''cultural criticism''.' (Pecora 2006, 197; see also 199 where he writes of 'the humanities, and the cultural criticism built on them') In the same text he also refers to 'postmodern cultural criticism': 'The Enlightenment idea of history as progressive development, or, what amounts to the same thing in an idealist key, the idea of history as progressive enlightenment, has been a central target of postmodern cultural criticism.' (Pecora 2006, 68)

[60] Interestingly, early on in his learned, brilliantly provocative and highly influential work, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, the theologian John Milbank comments that 'theology has rightly

of the 'Christian legacy' in the service of Marxism/'fighting materialism' (Lenin) and/or exploring its 'perverse core' (Žižek 2000 and 2003); notions of 'gnostic return in modernity' (O'Regan 2001); the 'rediscovery' and deployment of Saint Paul in the name of universalism – or otherwise – by 'atheistic'/'agnostic' philosophers that has put them into dialogue with theologians (Badiou 2003 and Milbank, Žižek and Davis 2010); codings of the 'post-secular' as articulated by Jürgen Habermas (Habermas 2008 and Habermas et al. 2010) or those with a 'Radical Orthodoxy' sensibility (Milbank 1990, Blond 1998 and Milbank, Pickstock and Ward 1999); debates around 'orthodoxy versus heterodoxy' or 'paradox versus dialectic' *vis-à-vis* Christianity (Žižek and Milbank 2009), political theology, 'radical' or otherwise (de Vries and Sullivan 2006, Crockett 2011, Critchley 2012); the aesthetics of (Christian) truth (Hart 2003); or 'overcoming onto-theology' (Westphal 2001), except as the latter is related to history *via* Derrida's criticisms of both (as will be discussed in Chapter One). Rather, I am concerned here to limit my thinking through/engagement to those discussions – wherever they occur across and/or outside of all of these fields ('the good, the bad, and the ugly') – of Derrida's conceptualisations of the religious and the messianic (and associated terms) that, in my view, yield the most important implications for historical theorisation. Pre-eminence throughout is given to the work – together with that of various interlocutors (of it), hostile and sympathetic – of the aforementioned John D. Caputo whose landmark 1997 text *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* constitutes an influential and arguably brilliant figuring of deconstruction in affirmative religious terms and whose subsequent works (e.g. Caputo 2001, 2002b and 2006) have continued to have a huge impact in contemporary continental philosophical/theoretical discussions of religion.

2. In the course of a roundtable discussion at the conference 'Religion and Postmodernism 3: Confessions', held at Villanova University (USA) in 2001, Elizabeth A. Clark, a historian of early Christianity (and author of an overview of

---

become aware of the (absolute) degree to which it is a contingent historical construct emerging from, and reacting back upon, particular social practices conjoined with particular semiotic and figural codings...my entire case is constructed from a complete *concession* as to this state of affairs' (Milbank 1990, 2).

historical theory: *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn*[61]), described how, until recently, social historians dismissive of intellectual history had dominated the American historical profession. Clark suggested that these social historians who 'often scorn intellectual history' and make claims that 'they work on ''documents'' not texts' were 'perhaps hoping to sidestep issues raised by literary-philosophical theory', and then went on to ask Derrida which aspects of his work he considered 'the most interesting, or useful, for historians' (Derrida 2005a, 31). In the course of his response, Derrida made the following comments:

> I think that historians have to [be] or should be interested in theory, in the status of the documents, of the texts, that they are analysing and interpreting, and not all of them do that. But in my own small case, on the one hand, I'm a very bad historian but I dream of being a historian. Really, I dream this. In fact, I think I said this somewhere, the only thing I'm interested in is history. But I'm not doing what I should do...I'm constantly trying to take into account the work of historians that I don't do myself but that I think is absolutely necessary. That's why I consider very unfair to me the judgments that say that what I'm doing is totally ahistorical. From the very beginning, in *Of Grammatology*, I was just doing history, in my own way, and of course I was also questioning the concept of history, which is assumed by historians and even by philosophers of history. Sometimes the concept of history – say, as theological – has to be questioned and deconstructed. There should be a deconstruction of the main assumptions of historians, of historiography, even of the philosophy of history, not in the name of the eternal, of something ahistorical, but in the name of some other concept of history. I am sure that the historians who are interested in strange texts, in texts which are not the usual corpus, are doing something indispensable. (Derrida 2005a, 31-32)

This thesis seeks to respond to Derrida's *confession* – being a 'bad' historian while dreaming of being a historian – and (although perhaps they are one and the same?) *call* by acknowledging and attending to (analyzing) the deconstruction of the assumptions of historians, historiographers and philosophers of history 'in the name of some other concept of history'. I understand and deploy 'deconstruction' here as a metonym for the messianic structural experience that is always already going on (taking place, at work, happening, etc.) in *all* historical representations and discourse (including all cultural criticism) more broadly. Deconstruction as the messianic/messianicity de-stabilizes (disturbs, damages, disrupts, etc.) every

[61] See Clark 2004.

historical (re)presentation in explicitly *religious* terms, so as to emphasise its 'always already' radical[62] contingency and development within a structure of *faith* belonging to all language.

Therefore, in the chapters that follow I utilise Derrida's corpus and readings of it largely drawn from a disparate group of scholars concerned with the (re)turn to and/or rejection of religious themes in contemporary cultural criticism (some, but not all, working within the field of contemporary continental philosophy of religion), so to engage with various tensions and problematics in current theorisations of historical (re)presentation and the associated 'reflexivity' of historians and their practice. Specifically, I attempt to do this by focussing on the messianic motif in Derrida's work, one of many neologisms in his texts to/with *différance* (others include 'dissemination', 'the trace', 'spacing' etc.; however the messianic is the one that has most marked and imposed itself on me during my reading of Derrida), in order to develop and defend from the rejections of/attacks on such obviously religious inflected and connoting terms that are also circulating in contemporary cultural criticism a Derridean messianic historical theory. As such this is an attempt that could only ever have come *after* Derrida's work given that it deploys his singular formulation of the messianic which, although in parts indebted to a certain genealogy[63] of twentieth-century messianic theorisations (for example, and perhaps most famously, that found in the work of Walter Benjamin which Derrida has often cited), is nevertheless significantly distinct from it.[64]

---

[62] Here, 'radical' denotes *more* than just a pallid admission of the built in 'fallibility' – this term still entertaining the possibility of propositional truth *via* the historical (re)presentation as, invariably, narrative – and 'finitude' – the always inadequate, because non-transcendent, knowledge production – of every historicization.

[63] I am aware of the Nietzschean and Foucauldian usages of 'genealogy'; see Douzinas 2007, 26-27 for a succinct summary of their genealogical methodology *vis-à-vis* historical (re)presentation. However, throughout this thesis, I will be working with a conception of genealogy as it has been articulated by Sande Cohen: 'Genealogy is a practice of critical thought that asks how readers, identities, and periodization are joined – and which processes are named and narrated *away* by any specific text of historical representation.' (Cohen 2006b, 261)

[64] Pierre Bouretz's *Witnesses for the Future: Philosophy and Messianism* (Bouretz 2010) is a monumental study of twentieth-century messianic theorisations in the work of Franz Rosenzweig, Walter Benjamin, Gershom Scholem, Martin Buber, Ernst Bloch, Leo Strauss, Hans Jonas and Emmanuel Levinas. Bouretz describes how the 'departure of the ''witnesses for the future'' from what Scholem calls the ''arid desert of German Judaism'' proceeds from different ways of conjugating faithfulness and utopia, and this distinguishes them from the preceding generation. If the learned who embodied the spirit of the preceding generation grasped the urgency of restoring Judaism's identity at a time when it risked disappearing into the midst of the nations, it was in the language of their time: in writing its history in order to claim a place

3. Issues relating to the (re)turn of religion can also be discerned, albeit in formulations that do not usually refer to the messianic, in a number of challenges raised by contemporary historical theorists. As I have already stated, messianic historical theory travels under different names (and can be tracked as such) across a range of 'current' historical concerns and their theorisation. Various examples can be provided. Something is 'stirring' in historiographic discourse and needs to be explored further when Kerwin Lee Kline writes – in the 'Afterword' (subtitled

---

in History. That approach broke deliberately with the way the Jews had always lived the time of their experience, between remembrance of the past and anticipation of the future...The monumental achievements of the founding fathers of the nineteenth-century ''science of Judaism'' [*Wissenschaft des Judentums*] movement rivalled those of the most glorious representatives of German historiography, which was their model...

...[I]n the nineteenth century, when assimilation to the surrounding culture led to internal collapse, historical science was the only way to recover a sense of self-awareness, to the point of becoming the ''faith of fallen Jews''. But the fathers of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, wanting to be no more than scribes of their own past, remained in the common conviction of a pure historicity of things. In order to break with that spirit, the following generation owed it to itself to reconstruct critical utopias and would turn most often to philosophy...in the form of a polemic with those of its contemporary currents that proclaimed the end of all transcendence.

This choice of a different kind of knowledge was brought about by a sense that the historian's knowledge was too limited to destroy the destruction brought about by the loss of memory, that even its best representatives remain by discipline ''men of transition'', and that modern Judaism's *temps perdu* could only be recovered by seeking to give a true meaning to Tradition. In order to do this, three conditions had to be met: to take issue with the idea of man's having become a purely historical being; to reject the idea of the past's ever being over and done with; to challenge the prediction of a blind future. In a certain sense, it might seem as if it were just a question of method: to consider that the past can only be understood by reporting how it really happended transforms it into an inanimate object and brings about a disenchantment of knowledge; the latter should be able to be corrected by attaching ourselves to the traces left by failures, the gaps opened up by unrealized dreams, and the slow labor of hope within the *imaginaires*. But in fact what is at stake is something else.

To preserve the presence of the past while retaining the representation of an unrealized future – this is what Judaism had done throughout its entire history...But in the age of secularization, had the world not definitively caught up with it? The historian asserts this to be the case, certain that this is the way of all things, whether in progress or decline. Must it be admitted that in matters of tradition everything is past? The philosophers gathered here refused to do so, sharing at least the conviction that man would be finished were he to cease believing that ''there is a mystery – a secret – in the world'' (Scholem). Can they by themselves restore to the Tradition a content that is not just old magic spells, folklore of words and past deeds orphaned from their goals, the phantom of an estranged Law? Not all of them have undertaken this task, or at least not in its entirety. But this book means to show that despite what separates them, this task is never absent from their thoughts, at the point where they intersect. It is this that enables us to grasp how they were able to be ''witnesses for the future'' in the darkest hours and how it is that they remain our contemporaries: the plaintiffs justifiably have not finished protesting against history; they defend the idea of a horizon beyond that of history.' (Bouretz 2010, 9-11) Twentieth-century messianic theorisations in relation to resisting/protesting against history/historicism are also discussed in David N. Myers's *Resisting History: Historicism and Its Discontents in German-Jewish Thought* (Myers 2003; see, for example, pages 108, 132, 144-148). Another messianic theorisation *vis-à-vis* philosophy is asserted by Adorno in the 'finale' of his *Minima Moralia* (Adorno 2005, originally published in 1951): 'The only philosophy which can be responsibly practised in face of despair is the attempt to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption. Knowledge has no light but that shed on the world by redemption: all else is reconstruction, mere technique. Perspectives must be fashioned that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its rifts and crevices, as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in the messianic light.' (Adorno 2005, 247)

'History and Theory in Our Time') – to his book *From History to Theory*, published in 2011, as follows:

> From the prospect of the early twenty-first century, in which the clash of new fundamentalisms threaten to eclipse the old ideological conflicts between fascism and communism...The scholarly turn toward words and tones associated with religious or at least postsecular discourse would have seemed impossible just a few decades ago. Yet in hindsight, we can say that the conditions of possibility for that change were already in place by the early years of the sixties. The critical vocabularies associated with French radicalism in 1968 – whether we call them postmodernist, post-structuralist, deconstructionist, or by some other elusive label – were important but not causal in any narrow sense...It is indeed ironic that discourses known for criticizing historiography as a form of metaphysics could become associated with languages far murkier than those of logical positivism...
>
> The politics of linguistic change have become the dark and bloody ground of historical discourse.[65] (Klein 2011, 163)

More broadly, Allan Megill has recently identified as 'one of the most important matters at issue in the contemporary world' the relation(s) 'of secular attitudes and institutions to religion, and of religion to secular attitudes' (Megill 2013, 110) and has called for 'continued critical attention' to be given to the theme of the postsecular. Prior to that call, and in a similar vein, Martin Jay (in a review essay entitled 'Faith-based History') had attributed to the return of religion (while asking 'did it ever really go away?') the generation of 'a tsunami of scholarly commentary in many different fields sweeping over the nascent twenty-first century' (Jay 2009, 76).

[65] It should be pointed out that Klein goes on to make explicit his concerns regarding this scholarly turn toward words and tones associated with religious or postsecular discourse and, specifically, his reservations in relation to the arguments of those historians advocating such usage. He formulates his criticisms of such appropriation as follows: 'Perhaps the most surprising feature of this brief study has been the way that academics developed an ostensibly postmetaphysical theoretical discourse while seemingly unaware that much of the same language was mobilizing powerful antidemocratic forces outside of the academy. Today, many North American historians argue that they can separate their own discourse from popular discourses, and that, once transposed into an academic setting, our words can shelter themselves from their common and recurring and occasionally dangerous popular meanings. I find those arguments unpersuasive, and I believe that continuing commitments to the imperfect secularizing programs that have carried us from logical positivism to the hermeneutics of suspicion remain our best bet for decolonizing and democratizing historical discourse. But the convergence of deconstruction, decolonization, and dominion theology at the end of the twentieth century will not recur eternally. There will be new words.' (Klein 2011, 170)

There is also a further impetus for sustained exploration of these 'religious' tones and developments when, in their recent work, historians write of 'history's faith' and – in relation to this – exhort us to 'consider that faith need not have a canonical object' (Hoffer 2008,181), or when they state that 'History embodies a religious faith' (Fasolt 2004, 231). Furthermore, and very much connected to this language of religion and faith, these historians are also focusing their studies on exploring – in an almost confessional manner – the(ir) admissions that 'most historians will agree that history has failed, and keeps continually failing, to achieve the kind of objectivity to which history officially aspires' (Fasolt 2004, 36) and that '[i]t is easy to demolish the very *idea* of historical knowing but impossible to demolish the *importance* of historical knowing.' (Hoffer 2008, *ix*) Some historians, like the just cited Peter Charles Hoffer (who entitled his 2008 book *The Historians' Paradox: The Study of History in Our Time*), attempt 'to reconcile this paradox – that history is impossible but necessary' (Hoffer 2008, *x*). However, messianic historical theory identifies this paradox ('im-possibility'), which *cannot* ever be resolved (all attempts at resolution are futile, the last gasp of epistemologically striving historians who are slowly coming to their senses, as if awakening from a long modernist sleep), as precisely that which enables/sustains and propels history on, no longer – because it never was any such thing – in the guise of an objective science/method but instead as one more affirmation of emancipation: an expression of faith in the (justice) 'to-come'. It is this paradox that in my view should constitute the 'basic theory' – the *experience of the impossible* figured as *messianic* (a 'new' religious phenomenality?) – of the experimental history that Alun Munslow and Robert Rosenstone have called for (Munslow and Rosenstone 2004, 8). Would it be too much of an experiment to think of histories as affirmative prayers – markers of faith – to/in the future 'to-come' (including the future[s] 'to-come' of the past), galvanized by an emancipatory promise? Such figurations constitute certain ways in which history can be understood as both 'demanding' and 'demanded', as Geoffrey Bennington put it over twenty-five years ago[66] (Bennington 1987, 15). Furthermore,

[66] Bennington begins his essay 'Demanding History' (Bennington 1987) with the words/line 'History is demanding' and, in the following paragraph, elaborates as follows: 'It is difficult, it makes demands. Saying that it ''makes demands'' implies that history can be positioned as the sender, the *destinateur*, of prescriptive sentences, sentences the addressee and referent of which can vary.' He then goes on to assert that 'History is also demanded' and offers the following explanation: 'Here history is no longer the sender

messianic historical theory can also be understood as a response to that famous and still vitally important challenge issued by Hayden White in his essay 'The Burden of History' nearly fifty years ago (1966):

> [B]ut if the present generation needs anything at all it is a willingness to confront heroically the dynamic and disruptive forces in contemporary life. The historian serves no one well by constructing a specious continuity between the present world and that which preceded it. On the contrary, we require a history that will educate us to discontinuity more than ever before; for discontinuity, disruption, and chaos is our lot...History can provide a ground upon which we can seek that 'impossible transparency' demanded by Camus for the distracted humanity of our time. Only a chaste historical consciousness can truly challenge the world anew every second, for only history mediates between what is and what men think ought to be with truly humanizing effect. But history can serve to humanize experience only if it remains sensitive to the more general world of thought *and* action from which it proceeds and to which it returns (White 1978, 50)

It is these religious and existential formulations (which could go under other names), applied to the still pressing requirements in/of historical theory outlined by White (histories that will educate us to discontinuity, a chaste historical consciousness with which to challenge the world and humanize experience, sensitivity to the more general world of thought and action, etc.) that interest me. Closely related to these requirements I contend that such formulations also identify and usefully recast, or 'retool', in religious terms a familiar poststructuralist problematic neatly summarised by Paul Eisenstein in the introduction to his *Traumatic Encounters: Holocaust Representation and the Hegelian Subject* and which I think it is

---

of prescriptions, but their referent: this time sender and addressee are variable. A third possibility would make of history the addressee of a demand, that, for example, it deliver up its meaning or its secrets, leaving sender and referent unspecified.' Bennington then proceeds to complicate these three possibilities and problematicises the situation in terms that are particularly relevant for the field constituted by this thesis: 'Further, if the simplicity or propriety of the name ''history'' were to be questioned, in other words if it were to be positioned as addressee and referent of a new demand (a demand as to its meaning in these pragmatic scenes), and it were to be shown that neither that addressee nor that referent were stable, but divided (at least into the standard ambiguity according to which ''history'' names both a specific discourse and the referent of that discourse); and if then the word were itself ''historicised'' and the specificity of that ''specific'' discourse were shown to be problematic (with respect to the division between ''truth'' and ''fiction'', for example), then the reapplication of these divisions to each occurrence of the word ''history'' in all the possible permutations of the pragmatic scene would generate a proliferation of possibilities, each of which would in some sense inhabit all the others, and all further sentences, such as these, which attempted to position as their referent one or more of the pragmatic possibilities thus generated.' (Bennington 1987, 15-16)

imperative that we continue to *insist* on and, in so doing, *resist* abandoning or renouncing:

> In short, the sense of insufficiency that pervades every attempt to achieve some stable, universal point of reference has dictated an insistent problematizing of the relationship between particular narratives of history and identity and the goal of comprehensive knowledge to which such narratives aim to contribute. (Eisenstein 2003, 4)

My thesis, then, is *both* about the circulation of the (re)turn of religion in cultural criticism *and* a piece of cultural criticism itself (albeit of a certain kind: polemical and contentious but opposed to feigning – or deluding 'itself' that it occupies – any kind of transcendent epistemological/moral/ethical/political vantage point), in that it advocates the use of Derrida's conception of the messianic by way of opposition to the official – i.e. dominant – settlements within historical theory[67] that seek to gloss over (ignore or marginalize) this sense of insufficiency pervading every historicization with stabilizing and/or universalising intent identified by Eisenstein. *Deconstruction as the messianic* (which is *not* something to be 'applied', *not* a 'method' – as Derrida had to constantly remind his readers[68] – but more of a

[67] As Martin Jay has put it regarding his own brand of intellectual history so with my attempt at historical theorisation here: 'The checkered receptions of ideas, the tangled skein of misreading and misappropriations that characterize the afterlife of any idea or cultural creation worth studying, unavoidably includes those that dominate the historian's own era. In essence, then, intellectual history can itself be seen as the product of a force field of often conflicting impulses, pulling it in one way or another, and posing more questions than it can answer. Rather than positioned as the distanced observer of a cultural or discursive field, the intellectual historian must thus conceptualize his or her own vantage ''point'' as itself a field in play.' (Jay 1993, 2-3)

[68] One such reminder provided by Derrida is as follows: 'To deconstruct is a structuralist and anti-structuralist gesture at the same time: an edification, an artifact is taken apart in order to make the structures, the nerves, or as you say the skeleton appear, but also, simultaneously, the ruinous precariousness of a formal structure that explained nothing, since it is neither a centre, a principle, a force, nor even the law of events, in the most general sense of the word.

Deconstruction as such is reducible to neither a method nor an analysis (the reduction to simple elements); it goes beyond critical decision itself. That is why it is not negative, even though it has often been interpreted as such despite all sorts of warnings. For me, it always accompanies an affirmative exigency, I would even say that it never proceeds without love...' (Derrida 1995b, 83) See also Derrida 2001a, 20-21 where he formulates this reminder as follows: '[*D*]*econstruction*, if this word has a sense that does not let itself be appropriated, was indissociable from a process and a law of ex-propriation or ex-appropriation proper that resists in the last instance, in order to challenge it, every subjective movement of appropriation of the following sort: *I* deconstruct, or *we* deconstruct, or we have the *power* and the *method* that make it possible.'

radicalised *trope*[69] to help us understand what is always already going on, what happens[70], in every historical [re]presentation) could go under other names but, given the 'current' ruminations and concerns of historians/historical theorists described above, I think it might be helpful here to retain and reflect on usage of this term in relation to how we think about both history and religion. In academic circles 'religious' (even if non-determinate) or post-secular conceptualisations and theorisations of history – as distinct from 'religion' as a distanced ('in the past') object of historical enquiry – are still, for many, considered taboo: that which cannot be said or written about, often because it threatens lingering notions and advocacy of 'pure' or 'universal' reason.[71] Yet historical theory needs to not isolate itself from the debates about religious categories currently circulating more broadly in cultural criticism. Again, Hayden White poses this challenge best:

> [*T*]*he burden of the historian* in our time is to re-establish the dignity of historical studies on a basis that will make them consonant with the aims and purposes of the intellectual community at large, that is, transform historical studies in such a way as to allow the historian to participate positively in the liberation of the present from *the burden of history*. (White 1978, 40-41)

[69] Hayden White has persuasively argued that the tropical element is 'inexpungeable from discourse in the human sciences, however realistic they may aspire to be.' He goes on to elaborate as follows: 'Tropic is the shadow from which all realistic discourse tries to flee. This flight, however, is futile; for tropics is the process by which all discourse *constitutes* the objects which it pretends only to describe realistically and to analyze objectively...

The word *tropic* derives from *tropikos*, *tropus*, which in Classical Greek meant ''turn'' and in Koiné ''way'' or ''manner''. It comes into modern Indo-European languages by way of *tropus*, which in Classical Latin meant ''metaphor'' or ''figure of speech'' and in Late Latin, especially as applied to music theory, ''mood'' or ''measure''. All of these meanings, sedimented in the early English word *trope*, capture the force of the concept that modern English intends by the word *style*, a concept that is especially apt for the consideration of that form of verbal composition which, in order to distinguish it from logical demonstration on the one side and from pure fiction on the other, we call by the name *discourse*.' (White 1978, 1-2)

[70] For a confirmation of deconstruction as that which 'happens' see Derrida 2001a, 20: 'Deconstruction, if there be such a thing, happens; it is what happens and this is what happens: it deconstructs itself, and it can become neither the power nor the possibility of an ''I can''. I insist here on the ''it happens'' because what I would like to make clear later on is this affirmation of the event, of the arrival or the future at the beating heart of a reflection on the im-possible.'

[71] As Joshua Ramey puts it in the course of discussing Gilles Deleuze's engagement with hermetic themes, but which can just as well be used to describe the opposition to the introduction of religious or post-secular conceptualisations into discussions of historical theory: 'Perhaps most challenging of all is the general academic-philosophical prejudice against the threatening proximity of intuitive, mystical, or even simply more emotional modes of mind to the cold calculations of pure reason, especially when such calculations appear in principle to be open, democratic, and formally unimpeachable in contrast with the dark and esoteric yearnings expressed in the gnomic pronouncements of initiates.' (Ramey 2012, 6)

In attempting to be responsive to this intellectual burden myself, I am aware that my thesis might still be considered provocative and/or strange. However, drawing inspiration from the work of Sande Cohen – along with White another exemplary model of cultural criticism – I would argue that

> the job of an intellectual (critic, citizen) working in a mode of criticism is to add another perspective – to bring the stakes forward. (Cohen 2005a, 175)

Accordingly, this thesis should be read as the addition of another perspective, a work of criticism, that, as Cohen also puts it – summing up an important aspiration of this thesis – 'opens some space for thought.' (Cohen 2005a, 175) As such – i.e. by way of outworking this aspiration – my arguments seek, and are expressive of a desire, to de-stabilize (disturb) historicization in *all* its myriad forms. For 'unreflexive', under or non-theorised (i.e. unexamined) and, therefore, *stable* historicizations have a greater (pernicious?) potential to be unproblematically deployed as brilliantly described by Cohen:

> The difficulty of the 'object', which is plainly the concept *to historicize*, stems from its strange but normal practice that individuals, groups and institutions use to fuel as much legitimation as required so as to have credibility today and tomorrow. Narrative history, narrative thinking – is it now primarily set forth to remove claimants from the future?...[H]istorical writing is different now as culture has become virtually a war over claimants in every zone recognized by some narrator of a subject, the narrators in combat over legitimacy. Claimants over names and processes, claimants to 'firstness', claimants to intensity – *to historicize* also then means to lend time as a power to an existing claim. It is this sense of historical knowledge as deeply *selective* that marks *to historicize* as a transpolitical maneuver carried out in the very act of narrating. (Cohen 2006b, 10-11)

It is in order to contribute to disturbing/de-stabilizing and resisting precisely this kind of historicizing condition identified by Cohen that this thesis explores the metahistorical[72] implications – and their utility – of thinking deconstruction as a

[72] Hayden White provides the conceptualization of 'metahistory/metahistorical' that I work with throughout this thesis in his essay 'The Historical Text as Literary Artifact': 'In order to write the history of any given scholarly discipline or even of a science, one must be prepared to ask questions *about* it of a sort that do not have to be asked in the practice *of* it. One must try to get behind or beneath the

messianic structure (turned towards, and open to, both future and past) of radicalised *faith*, or *foi*, which, as Caputo points out (Caputo 2012a, 275), and as I will return to and discuss in the Conclusion, is to be distinguished from 'belief' or *croyance*. The former (*foi*) is 'a deeper, more elusive, more uncertain and unsafe ''faith'' ' (Caputo 2012a, 275) that always lies groundlessly and 'restlessly beneath', so as to ceaselessly destabilise, any and all determinate belief (*croyance*) relating to the content and form of every historicization, every discourse (including this one). I contend that figuring – or 'retooling' – the deconstruction always already going on in all historical (re)presentation in terms of *messianic historical theory* is an *alternative* way of enabling the 'full' breadth and depth of its implications to wash over the history guild afresh; an outflanking move at a time when some academic historians and cultural critics have developed temporal recodings that seek to reify the 'passing' – or *passé*-ness – of the poststructuralist (or, more broadly and imprecisely construed but often referred to as such by commentators/critics, 'postmodern') wave so as to neutralise and avoid the full force of its impact on their ongoing praxis.[73] A messianic historical theory understood as – in part – a vigilant

presuppositions which sustain a given type of inquiry and ask the questions that can be begged in its practice in the interest of determining why this type of inquiry has been designed to solve the problems it characteristically tries to solve. This is what metahistory seeks to do. It addresses itself to such questions as, What is the structure of a peculiarly *historical* consciousness? What is the epistemological status of historical *explanations*, as compared with other kinds of explanations that might be offered to account for the materials with which historians ordinarily deal? What are the possible *forms* of historical representation and what are their bases? What authority can historical accounts claim as contributions to a secured knowledge of reality in general and to the human sciences in particular?' (White 1978, 81)

[73] As Keith Jenkins has described it: 'Thus we are currently witnessing all manner of ''history makeovers'' as the attempt is made to upgrade and update those old staples of historical anti-relativism through various ''neo's'' (neo-realism, neo-empiricism, neo-epistemology), and that whole trend toward finding and pinning down hard varieties of *real* experiences (sublime or not it makes no difference) *via* the directness of testimony, witnessing, and various forms of personal and collective memory.' (Jenkins 2009, 11-12) Closely related to this, Gabrielle M. Spiegel claims to have discerned, and seems to support, a 'current movement away from structuralist and poststructuralist readings of history and historiography...governed by the needs and goals of social history, albeit of a kind quite different from that which preceded the advent of the ''linguistic turn''.' Given this, Spiegel is concerned to focus on 'revisions to social and cultural history' that she (re)presents as 'taking place in response both to the appropriation *and* the retreat from positions staked out during the high tide of ''linguistic turn'' historiography.' In order to 'understand the dynamics of this accomodationist strategy' she asserts the importance of understanding 'the image of poststructuralism that was polemically deployed in the first place, since it was a particular version of it that set the terms of the original debate', although she also points out that 'at issue were not necessarily the most accurate readings of Saussure, Foucault, Barthes, Lyotard, Derrida, and other avatars of the movement that came more generally to be known as postmodernism.' (Spiegel 2005, 4-5) In response, one suspects, to these kinds of readings, Joan W. Scott has provided an excellent and much needed riposte in defence of the ongoing importance and utility of 'poststructuralist theory' for historical (re)presentation and theorization, not least of all calling attention to the extremely high political stakes that are involved in this debate: 'It is fashionable these days to talk about poststructuralist theory in the past tense, as a disruptive moment that once threatened to undermine

thinking through and calling attention to the interactions between *foi* and *croyance* in every historicization can be developed so as to continue the devastating poststructuralist 'critique' of reactive historical culture[74]/production: the im-

---

the discipline of history, substituting fancy French distractions for serious empirical investigations. Orthodox disciplinarians, along with journalists, politicians and public intellectuals, have declared this theory to be dead. And not only dead, but thankfully so, since it is held responsible for all manner of ethical lapses...

Those who celebrate the passing of poststructuralism (and there is a convergence here of right and left) have in common a yearning for certainty, security and stability...In various humanities and social science disciplines there has been a recourse to scientific models of investigation to eliminate subjective assessments and replace them with solid facts. There has been, too, a closing of borders in what were once disruptive interventions on the left: the formalising of some theories that used to encourage innovation, the imposition of orthodoxy in formerly troublesome fields such as women's studies.

Among historians, the search for security takes various forms: a renewed emphasis on empiricism and quantitative analysis, the rehabilitation of the autonomous willing subject as the agent of history, the essentialising of political categories of identity by the ''evidence'' of experience, the turn to evolutionary psychology for explanations of human behavious, the endorsement of the timelessness of universal values, and the trivialisation and denunciation of the ''linguistic turn'' – an attempt to deny it a serious place in the recent life of the discipline. Often the return to traditional disciplinarity is depicted as innovation (once it was the ''*new* cultural history'', now it's the ''*new* empiricism'') but this should not mislead us...it's the old rules about the transparency of language (words mean what they say, analytic categories are objective) and the equally transparent relationship between social organisation and individual self-perception (there is no place for alienation, interpellation, subjectivation or the unconscious) that are being asserted as the only acceptable rules of the game...resistances in the name of the right way of doing history...have now become triumphalist proclamations that no longer engage debate; they simply declare victory...

I want to argue that such an obituary would not only be premature but foolish for at least two reasons. The first is that, like it or not, we are in a postmodern age, and poststructuralism – not to be confused...with postmodernism – is a critical practice for the postmodern age...postmodernism is an epistemic moment (of heterogeneity, discontinuity, fragmentation) with its own representational and critical demands (we are, in other words, no longer living in the nineteenth century), and I am arguing that poststructuralism meets some of these demands. This leads to the second reason: poststructuralism is one of the critical theories that inspired the practice of history as critique in its late twentieth-century form, a practice that needs to be protected and reinforced in the face of a conservative revolution that, in the academy as in politics, seeks to discredit critique as disruptive, discordant, even disloyal. Those on the left who welcome the end of poststructuralism in the name of the ''truth'' about the experiences of women, workers, post-colonial subjects and minorities unwittingly join their colleagues on the right who associate anti-relativism with morality. They are not only relinquishing an important critical weapon; they are becoming part of the consensus they say they want to challenge. My argument, to put it briefly, is that a poststructuralist history is not only possible, but necessary. Now more than ever.

The attack on poststructuralism by US historians (even by those who should know better) calls upon, probably reflexively, a long-standing discourse which positions history in opposition to philosophy. (This discourse is not an exclusively American phenomenon; it is characteristic of the nineteenth-century origins of scientific history).' (Scott 2007, 19-21)

[74] Cohen has provided a brilliant indictment of the reactive historical culture that blocks critical thought in and on the present and which this thesis seeks to de-stabilize/disturb: 'The academy recodes our reactive culture. A culture is reactive when it continues to narrativize itself despite, at any moment, being six minutes away (by missile) from its own nonnarrative obliteration. The dissemination of models of ''history'' promotes cultural subjects who are encouraged to think about nonnarrative relations – capitalism, justice, and contradictions – in a narrative manner. Narrating screens the mind from the nonnarrative forces of power in the present, insofar as ''historical'' narration reduces present semantic and pragmatic thought (connotation) to forms of story, repetition, and model, all of which service cultural redundancy. Historical thought is a manifestation of reactive thinking-about, which blocks the act of thinking-to. The ''perplexity of History'' (Arendt's term), a Liberal projection which also includes, unhappily, most of Western Marxism, arises, I argue, from the ill-conceived act of trying to make ''history'' relevant to critical thinking. What actually occurs by means of ''historical thought'' is the

possibility, 'perhaps'[75], of history, where this 'perhaps' haunts all historicization and signifies an openness to the de-stabilization (disturbance) of the unforeseeable: a historicity of (what is) 'to-come' and what we cannot 'see' or anticipate coming (back).[76] Yet, at the same time and paradoxically, it is also a deeply *affirmative* approach – always aware of and predicated on/out of the *radical* hermeneutical[77] *in*finitude[78] of 'our' (i.e. the human) condition which necessitates continuous

---

destruction of a fully semanticized present.' Cohen asks his readers to consider the 'assumptions, hypotheses, and reasonings concerning my starting point, the nonaccessibility of the presence of the present once narrative thinking dominates semantics, where an obligation to history generates the illusion of the autonomy of historical culture, which in turn reinforces the cultural debilitation of radical thought.' He argues that 'critical thinking is not possible when connected to academic historical thinking.' (Cohen 1986, 1-2)

[75] Derrida explains his usage of the word 'perhaps' (as category/modality) – a usage that I follow throughout this thesis – and its close association with reflection on the im-possible thus: 'And you have undoubtedly noticed that for all these ''impossibles'' – invention, the event, the gift, decision, responsibility, et cetera – I always cautiously say, ''if there be such a thing''. Not that I doubt that there ever were such a thing, nor do I affirm that it does not exist, simply if there be – this is why I say *if there be* such a thing – it cannot become the object of an assertive judgment, nor of an observing knowledge, of an assured, founded certainty, nor of a theorem, if you like, nor a theory. There is no theory on this topic. It cannot give rise to a theoretical proof, to a philosophical act of the cognitive sort, but only to testimonies that imply a kind of act of faith, indeed an act of ''perhaps''. Perhaps, Nietzsche says, and I quote him in *Politics of Friendship*, that the philosophers of the future will be the thinkers of the ''dangerous perhaps''. Philosophy in its Hegelian form, has always tried to disdain or ridicule the category of ''perhaps''. The ''perhaps'' would be for the classical philosopher an empirical and approximate modality that the philosopher should begin by being right about...Now without wanting to *rehabilitate* this category or this modality of ''perhaps'' – I say *perhaps* rather than *maybe* in order, precisely, to liberate this reference to the event, the happening from the thinking of being – I would be tempted to see in it only the element itself in which a possible/impossible decision always takes place, if it takes place.' (Derrida 2001a, 27-28)

[76] In *Politics of Friendship* Derrida describes the association of the 'perhaps' with 'what is going to come' as follows: 'What is going to come, *perhaps*, is not only this or that; it is at last the thought of the *perhaps*, the *perhaps* itself. The *arrivant* will arrive *perhaps*, for one must never be sure when it comes to *arrivance*; but the *arrivant* could also be the *perhaps* itself, the unheard-of, totally new experience of the *perhaps*. Unheard-of, totally new, that very experience which no metaphysician might yet have dared to think.' (Derrida 1997c, 29) In the following paragraph Derrida goes on, in the context of a discussion of the formulation of 'friendship to come', to state that 'there is no more just category for the future that that of the ''perhaps''. Such a thought conjoins friendship, the future, and the *perhaps* to open on to the coming of what comes...' (Derrida 1997c, 29)

[77] For more on the idea of a 'radical hermeneutics' see Caputo 1987 (*Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project*) and Caputo 2000 (*More Radical Hermeneutics: On Not Knowing Who We Are*).

[78] Caputo helpfully explains the ways in which Derridean *différance* is 'other' than the notion of 'finitude' as articulated in Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutical theory and cannot be absorbed/contained by it: '[H]ermeneutic finitude does not translate or precontain *différance*. If hermeneutics is a philosophy of transcendental finitude – a finitude which tends beyond itself and is stretched out into infinite fullness – then deconstruction is addressing that bad infinity which just goes on and on, spread out of control in every direction. Deconstruction is greeting not Gadamer's finitude but the uncontrollable transfers, transmissions, translations, and exchanges that go on and on *ad infinitum* in the postal play. Deconstructionist infinity is the mirror play *en abîme*, the endless transformation of phonic and graphic chains.' (Caputo 2000, 50-51) To reinforce this point Caputo then quotes from Derrida's text 'The Double Session' (in *Dissemination* – Derrida 1981a, 253): 'If polysemy is infinite, if it cannot be mastered as such, this is thus not because a finite reading, or a finite writing remains incapable of exhausting a superabundance of meaning. Not, that is, unless one displaces the philosophical concept of finitude and reconstitutes it according to the law and structure of the text...Finitude then becomes

interpretation *and* its ineradicable failure (as regards all certaintist pretensions) as our only means of getting around in (i.e. of experiencing) the world – in the name of some other concept of historicity (as 'future-to-come') and, thus, historical (re)presentation. Here, histories (in all their im-possibility) can be understood as just another infelicitous interpretative tool related by an experience of the emancipatory promise (towards the wholly other 'to-come') to ethico-political decision (action).[79] Foregrounding this messianic structure in which all (re)presentation/narrativization takes place conditions (not least of all *via* the religious inflections and connotations already noted) relations to both future and past in interesting ways that, while in no way recanting the necessity of the poststructuralist/postmodern challenge to historicization in all its forms (and, indeed, remaining loyal to it) goes beyond the secularist exclusivity of the vocabulary usually deployed and re-equips it with an expressive force that – tracking developments in contemporary cultural criticism, i.e. the 'religious turn' – better resonates with, so as to think and influence, the (i.e. my) time(s) *vis-à-vis* historical theorization.

Thesis Structure

I now want to set out the shape/organization of my thesis as 'emerging' from my remarks above; I begin with a brief summary (or re-statement) of my overall argument and then provide some detail about each chapter and the conclusion.

---

infinitude, according to a non-Hegelian identity.' Importantly, Caputo then links this polysemy and dissemination with the messianic, asserting that the former concepts provide the 'setting' in which the latter will be situated: 'We are not confronted with the infinite and eternal depths of the excess of meaning but with the endless play of grammatological superficiality. Derrida is not thereby consigning us to senselessness and confusion, for the polysemy and dissemination of which he speaks is the setting within which his later messianic affirmation of the justice to come is to be situated.' (Caputo 2000, 51)

[79] It is the familiar problematic of the 'basis/bases' for *political resistance* in a foundationless milieu (which has been ever thus) preoccupying so much of contemporary cultural criticism/theory 'today' that, in part, animates this thesis. It is a concern that I share with Stanley Fish who expresses this problematic as follows: '[I]n a world without certain foundations for action you avoid the Scylla of prideful self-assertion, on the one hand, and the Charybdis of paralysis, on the other hand, by stepping out provisionally, with a sense of limitation, with a sense of style...and so the question of the relationship between style and faith, or between interpretation and action and certainty, has been the obsessive concern of my thinking...I think there is *nothing* in my work that couldn't be generated from those two assertions and their interactions.' (Fish 2003, 82-83) My understanding of the political utility of the content/concerns of this thesis has been formed by Derrida's comment that 'the coming, the event, the 'come here' [*viens*] – of *différance* and the deconstruction of presence, is where I would begin to try to articulate a thinking of the political.' (Derrida 2002d, 182)

Given all of the above, I hope that it will be obvious by now that this thesis draws upon (and in the course of doing so evaluates the usefulness of) the conceptual resources of the '(re)turn to/of religion' in cultural criticism (and, particularly, its discussion of Derridean deconstruction) to illuminate the im-possible state of historical representation and suggest a way forward in terms of its theorisation. More specifically, the argument that I advance, develop and defend here is a relatively simple one (although the explication is necessarily more complex); namely, that historical (re)presentation is best theorised as being inescapably marked (for failure) and enabled by a future oriented faith, a messianic faith in futurity itself, a faith in the 'to-come'. Restated differently, the im-possibility of all historical (re)presentation is structured by an existential 'messianic experience' (or religious phenomenality[80]), by dreams of and faith in that which is always 'to-come'. The historical theory being argued for here, one that emphasises and is structured by a messianic faith in the futurity of someone or something 'wholly other' (*tout autre*) and non-determinable (for this is what the 'to-come' 'is': the messianic event as experience of the other), is indebted to Derrida and inconceivable without him. I therefore try to explore what it means to think historical (re)presentation and theorisation as emancipatory in the messianic sense Derrida outlines. What is the viability (and if so what are the implications) of theorising histories as 'messianic and emancipatory promises', the infinite (endless) failure of which help affirm – keep/maintain – the opening of the non-determinable future (including future pasts)? Such a theorisation explicitly recognises, foregrounds and affirms the 'im-possible' condition of *all* historical (re)presentation: *both* its unavoidable epistemological failure to determine the '*revenants* as *arrivants*' (no correspondence between 'the past/before now' and 'history' as narrative construct – two different things – and no fact/value entailment that can ever be demonstrated, historians always retrospectively imposing meaning on the past through their narrativizations) *and* its ceaseless proliferation/circulation (the uncontrollable overproduction of the history machine figured for the most part as disavowed or unconscious but which needs

[80] As Derrida put it regarding a certain emphasis in, or periodization of, his work: 'Above all...this ethico-political-juridicial, indeed, religious, phenomenality, this opening is indissociable from its very key, namely the urgency to reflect otherwise on the impossible. There you have it as for the emphasis or periodization.' (Derrida 2001a, 22)

raising to consciousness; an expression of and response to the messianic *a priori* and emancipatory promise that maintains the opening to the non-determinable future: the 'to-come' of the *arrivants* and '*revenants* as *arrivants*').

Accordingly, and because what I have to say about messianic historical theory makes best sense within the general context of Derrida's work on the metaphysics of presence and thinking a radically 'other' historicity (the condition for all historicizing), I spend some time in *Chapter One* ('In the name of ''some other concept of history'': Derrida, historicity and historical [re]presentation'), sketching out and analysing the main lines of his systematic deconstructive 'critique' against the history of meaning – which can also be understood as the 'permanent suspension of (re)presentation' – as well as the attempts of various historians and theorists to respond to/engage with it. In the course of doing this I will also consider the contested concept of an ethico-political 'turn' – or not, as the case may be – in Derrida's work and end with some suggestions as how all of this leads us to a messianic formulation of Derrida's critique of history. A key argument of this chapter will be the identification in Derrida's work of a constant determinate oscillation – and closely associated tension – between, on the one hand, references to the conventional or classic assumptions/presuppositions and deployment of historical (re)presentation *and*, on the other hand, a devastating problematicisation of it *via* a thinking of that which it is 'blind' to; that which escapes (or exceeds) but also conditions it.

In *Chapter Two* ('Are we all religious now? Developing a messianic historical theory: Derrida, Caputo and affirmationism'), I argue for an explicit recognition and acknowledgement that historical (re)presentation has 'always already' been messianic according to Derrida's articulation of that concept. Put differently, this argument can be restated as follows: historians have always operated with an unavoidable even if largely disavowed 'religious' – in the very specific Derridean sense of a 'messianic without messianism' – structure in relation to their work, one that keeps both past and future 'open' to that which, like 'the Messiah', is always about 'to-come' (*à-venir*), or the 'future-to-come' (*l'à-venir*), and the price of which

is the inescapable structural failure, insufficiency and/or or 'lack', that their historical (re)presentations are predicated on: there is never any 'arrival' or 'closure' for history production and, more broadly, historical culture. Derrida's messianic structure of experience foregrounds the 'impossible possibility' on which the whole history enterprise/project is 'founded'. In this chapter – consisting of two sections (excluding introductory remarks) – I turn to exploring and developing the details of a messianic historical theory through a consideration of a range of texts, both Derrida's – where he sets out and defends his particular idea(s) of the messianic – and those of John D. Caputo, who I consider to be his most important 'affirmationist' interlocutor on this subject.

I now come to my *Conclusion* ('Considering criticisms and objections: messianic historical theory reloaded as impossible histories of faithful resistance [the infinite task, or – perhaps – the end of history?]'). This is written in a more discursive style – dispensing pretty much with the 'slow' reading approaches that characterized previous chapters (although retaining the heavy footnoting) – and begins with a restatement of my overall argument followed by a discussion of Caputo's one substantive criticism of Derrida's messianic formulation. From this I then move into considering and responding to certain criticisms/objections made by a range of philosophers and theorists in relation to notions of the messianic and to 'religion without religion' as articulated by Derrida *and* subsequently developed by Caputo. In my view these criticisms for the most part lack the acuity or 'weight' to significantly damage the main argument that I am running. Nevertheless, in the light of these arguments I accept that *some* qualification and nuancing of the messianic historical theory I am proposing may be required as part of my response to them. Accordingly, I address *inter alia* several of Derrida's (and Caputo's) alleged shortcomings which suggest the following accusations: of empty formalism, of ignoring or scorning present actuality, of political quietism/passivity, of the preponderance of imperative exhortations or 'words of command', of irrational fideism and mysticism, of a futural openness without discernment/lack of criteria, of a hapless relativism (the texts can mean anything you want them to mean!), and a suspicious recourse to idealizing/ideality and the transcendent (critical thought

stoppers!), all of which I think can be refuted or rebutted or circumvented or – with the aforementioned qualification and nuancing – absorbed. Addressing such criticisms is my first task, and in the course of attending to it I propose a *hopefully* persuasive *reloaded* messianic historical theory now actually *strengthened* by its withstanding of such attacks. Closely related to this, and (again) in the course of discussing these criticisms and objections, I explore the possibilities for deploying this now 'strengthened' messianic theorisation of historical (re)presentation – in terms of the alternative *historical consciousness and knowledge* it could engender – as a tool of *critical resistance* by which I mean to indicate a resistance that is 'reflexive' about its own singular standpoint, situation, field, etc. *vis-à-vis* the currently hegemonic, totalising historical culture, such a deployment keeping faith with Derrida's association of the messianic with notions of a *quasi-transcendental justice* and *emancipation*. Through this messianic understanding of history, predicated on/conditioned by its *im-possibility*, 'we' can ('perhaps') enact a certain kind of political resistance, one that, I will argue, can be understood as a particular form of *infinite close reading*: resistance to the attempted totalizing determinations and closures of all historicization(s); resistance to all attempts in historical culture to close down the openness of the future, or, put differently, resisting any resistance to 'letting the future open'. In 'Section One' of this Conclusion I discuss an important criticism of the messianic put forward by the political theorist Ernesto Laclau which I deal with at the outset so as to help me be in a position to effectively address a series of more trenchant outright objections that follow. In 'Section Two' I then turn to focus on relevant debates regarding the (re)turn to religion in certain quarters of continental philosophy and cultural criticism that have taken place outside of the field of historical theory, debates profoundly informed, developed and shaped (even when being reacted against) by the Derridean *ouevre*. Specifically, there are now a growing number of attacks on any 'religious' reading of Derrida – the kind of reading exemplified in Caputo's work which I have already outlined and committed myself to – some of which I consider in *this* section. These attacks – constituting anti-religious and anti-messianic readings of Derrida (and Caputo) and forwarding powerfully articulated/expressive reservations regarding the possibility of any 'religious' or 'messianic' conception for the advancement of contemporary theory –

are given formidable (but very different) expressions by Quentin Meillassoux and Martin Hägglund whose arguments I examine and respond to. In 'Section Three' I turn to historical theory where it is Sande Cohen – presciently and practically alone within the field – who I think has delivered the most powerful critical reading of the religious/spiritual/mystical motifs in Derrida's *Specters of Marx*. Cohen expresses concerns about a prevailing ideality and the closure/cessation of thought which he understands various anti-intellectual terms/motifs (including the messianic) as constituting, symbolised for him in the figure of Derrida's 'new scholar' or, as he has it, 'new history scholar'. These are concerns that anyone wishing to draw on Derrida in relation to historical (re)presentation must reckon with. In 'Section Four', I briefly collect the main reflections of my thesis which allows me to reconfirm my argument as a whole, albeit an argument that – as I acknowledge and on the basis of its contents – 'will never be good enough'.

And so to some concluding remarks *vis-à-vis* this thesis *qua* thesis. *First*, as regards the originality of this thesis, although there is a plethora of work outside of historical theory on the *messianic*, the originality of this thesis lies in it being the *first* sustained attempt to think through the Derridean (and not – I stress – the Benjaminian or any other) conceptualisation of the term in relation to contemporary theoretical debates about historical (re)presentation (as opposed to metanarratival history). I am not aware of any work that develops and defends what I have termed a 'messianic historical theory', nor of any thesis length attempt to link and think historical (re)presentation and the (re)return of religion together *via* the Derridean messianic and those developments and oppositions to it that have taken place in the field of contemporary continental philosophy of religion and cultural criticism more broadly.

Second, this work can be read as an undertaking of/in *groundless relativity* or – to put it in a different way which I prefer – an analysis that stresses *affirmative faith*. By this I mean – and want to stress from the outset – that *if* my argument is

persuasive[81] then this should be a persuasion that is intrinsic to the testimonial arguments advanced regarding the messianic structure of historical (re)presentation itself (as they relate to the state of contemporary theorisations of history and debates in cultural criticism regarding the '(re)turn of the religious') and not to 'the apologetic mediation of a universal human reason' (Milbank 1990, 1) with its metaphysical-epstemological claims to an absolute ground which is also, of course, a philosophic-political project of ethical legislation and dominance. Rather, my 'project' is an avowedly singular and positioned attempt – nothing more than a 'model' or offering from 'the plane of modelling' that can never be exited[82] – to try and think through issues of historical (re)presentation in religiously aesthetic terms. It is my contention that the religious concept of 'the messianic' as developed by Derrida provides the critical lens through which historical (re)presentation may be best interrogated and understood afresh in our current milieu. Various questions relating to the precise formulation of messianic historical theory that I am here developing and defending alongside proposals as to how a 'raising to consciousness' of this messianic structure might impact the practice/theorisation and reception of historical (re)presentation – if, indeed, it is deemed worth continuing with – will be considered in some detail.

Third, and finally, I underline that this thesis as an exercise in historical theory/historiography is *also* generated out of – and galvinized by – the messianic structure of experience that I am setting out. For me, the messianic structures every discursive undertaking, including any theorisation. Therefore, you might read what

[81] Throughout this sentence I am heavily reliant on the approach and wording of John Milbank (Milbank 1990, 1).

[82] I am in agreement with Cohen's assessment of the 'modelling' or 'making concepts' function of the humanities and his assertion that they (the humanities) 'articulate without foundations'. Accordingly, this thesis is not exempt from precisely this condition, or state, that he describes: 'Knowledge claims in the humanities can be negatively expressed: someone got their facts wrong. But positive bases are contestable, since one is dealing with rhetoric, logic, sense, and affect, or belief, opinion, grounds, support, and so on. Discourse and epistemology conflict because statements fall in and out of epistemic coherence or sense. Consequently, the humanities can never leave the plane of modelling – making concepts that are at once socially used, as discourse, and epistemically shaky. Further, these models are necessarily discontinuous with each other – what counts as a thesis in cultural studies is a bias from another discipline's perspective. The humanities articulate without foundations and have no option but to categorize and conceptualise existence treated as discourse. This makes the humanities an interesting version of *contamination*, where the object of study affects the subject doing the study, with numerous variations, including those of group discourse and behaviour.' (Cohen 2006b, 263*n*13)

follows as a confession of my *own* hopes, dreams, aspirations and involvements (as well as complicities) situated by an explicit awareness and affirmation of the openness of the non-determined/unexpected future (the 'to-come': *à venir*) that, with Derrida, I regard it as imperative to maintain. This thesis thus marks or constitutes an experience of anticipation energised by the concerns I explore throughout: the theorisation of im-possible histories (perhaps) that help keep the future open in response to that which perpetually might (not) arrive. It too is messianic. We cannot write in any other way.

CHAPTER ONE: IN THE NAME OF 'SOME OTHER CONCEPT OF HISTORY': DERRIDA, HISTORICITY AND HISTORICAL (RE)PRESENTATION

Preliminaries

In the Introduction to this thesis I stated that my development and defence of a messianic historical theory, one which foregrounds the im-possibility of historical (re)presentation and that is predicated on a radically 'other' *historicity* (the condition for all historicization), makes best sense when situated within some of the broader and longer term concerns of Derrida's work (including his earliest published work on Edmund Husserl) on the interrelated *problems* and *paradoxes* of genesis (the origin as 'wholly other', a term that, as Leonard Lawlor points out and tracks, Derrida subsequently adopted from Emmanuel Levinas [see Lawlor 2002, 22 and 145-146]), the sign (or language[1]), and the metaphysics of presence.[2] In relation to this statement my argument is that an exploration of these issues – which I undertake

[1] As Derrida puts it in the 'Introduction' to *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs* (Derrida 1973): 'If language never escapes analogy, if it is indeed analogy through and through, it ought, having arrived at this point, at this stage, freely to assume its own destruction and cast metaphor against metaphor: all of which amounts to complying with the most traditional of imperatives, something which has received its most explicit but not most original form in the *Enneads* and has ceaselessly and faithfully been transmitted right up to the *Introduction to Metaphysics* (especially by Bergson). It is at the price of this war of language against itself that the sense and question of its origin will be thinkable. This war is obviously not one war among others. A polemic for the possibility of sense and world, it takes place in this *difference*, which, we have seen, cannot reside in the world but only in language, in the transcendental disquietude of language. Indeed, far from only living in language, this war is also the origin and residence of language. *Language preserves the difference that preserves language*.' (Derrida 1973, 13-14, italics mine) Commenting on this final sentence, Lawlor writes that 'This complex relation of conditioning and conditioned, of generator and generated – in which language constitutes the very differences by means of which language is determined – is, for Derrida, the paradox or problem of the sign.' (Lawlor, 2002, 23)

[2] Lawlor has it that the newness of deconstruction as a form of thinking 'consists in its difference from what Derrida calls ''the metaphysics of presence''.' (Lawlor 2002, 2) He goes on to provide 'precise definitions' of 'presence' and 'the metaphysics of presence', definitions that I work with throughout this chapter and thesis: 'Presence, for Derrida, consists in (a) the distance of what is over and against (object and form, what is iterable), what we could call ''objective presence'', (b) the proximity of the self to itself in its acts (subject and intuition or content), what we could call ''subjective presence'', and then (c) the unification of these two species of presence, that is, presence and self-presence, in the present (in the ''form of the living present'', which, Derrida will explain, mediates itself through the voice). ''The metaphysics of presence'' then, for Derrida, consists in the valorization of presence (as defined in this way, which can account for both ancient and modern philosophy as well as Husserl's phenomenology), that is, it consists in the validation of presence as a foundation. It is important to point out immediately that Derrida never contests the founding validity of presence; there can be no foundation without presence. Yet, for Derrida, there is a non-foundation below it, what we could call, following what Derrida says in ''Violence and Metaphysics'' [in Derrida 2001b, 97-192], the ''non-Greek'' non-foundation. The metaphysics of presence, however, has decided that the meaning of being is presence either as subject or object or as their unity. Thus it does not reopen the question of being; it remains above in the security of the foundation. It remains Greek.' (Lawlor 2002, 2-3)

in this chapter – demonstrates that while Derrida did not in any sustained way deploy the terms 'the messianic' or 'messianicity without messianism' until the 1990s[3], the general structure of experience which they designate (given that the messianic *is* deconstruction as *différance*), namely the relation of a certain transcendental alterity ('to-come') and faith, had been a consistent theme throughout his work prior to that. Given this argument, and here aligning myself with scholars such as Lawlor and John Caputo (whose work on Derrida will be discussed in detail in Chapter Two), I resist subscribing to any notion of a conventional *turn* in Derrida's work: to 'anything like a ''reversal'' or massive transformation' (Caputo, in Derrida 1997a, 127-128) in his thought from, put crudely, 'metaphysical' to 'ethico-political' concerns, or (even more unconvincing) of his metamorphosis from a 'a/non-political and literary' to 'ethico-political' and – even – 'religious' thinker.[4]

[3] An early usage of the term 'messianic' by Derrida can be found in 'Violence and Metaphysics: An essay on the thought of Emmanuel Levinas', first published in 1964, where – in the course of elucidating 'Levinas's ties to [Maurice] Blanchot' – he refers to 'messianic eschatology' (in Derrida 2001b, 128).

[4] Here I follow Derrida's own delineation of his work as articulated in *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason* (Derrida 2005c): '[T]here never was in the 1980s or 1990s, as has sometimes been claimed, a *political turn* or *ethical turn* in ''deconstruction'', at least not as I experience it. The thinking of the political has always been a thinking of différance and the thinking of différance always a thinking *of* the political, of the contour and limits of the political, especially around the enigma or the autoimmune *double bind* of the democratic. That is not to say, indeed quite the contrary, that nothing new happens between, say, 1965 and 1990. But what happens remains without relation or resemblance to what the figure that I continue to privilege here might lead one to imagine, that is, the figure of a ''turn'', of a *Kehre* or turning. If a ''turning'' turns by ''veering'' round a curve or by forcing one, like wind in one's sails, to ''veer'' away or change tack, then the trope of turning turns poorly or turns bad, turns into the wrong image. For it diverts thought or turns it away from what remains to be thought; it ignores or runs counter to the thought of the very thing that remains to be thought. If every send-off [*renvoi*] is differ*a*ntial, and if the trace is a synonym for this send-off, then there is always some trace of democracy; indeed every trace is a trace of democracy. Of democracy there could be but a trace. It is in this sense that I will later attempt a rereading of the syntagma ''democracy to come''.' (Derrida 2005c, 39) I want to support this assertion by Derrida regarding his work by reference to the perspectives of Caputo and Lawlor on the same issue. Caputo assesses things thus: 'What is true, I think, is that in his earlier writings, along with a series of important philosophical discussions of Husserl, Heidegger, Hegel, Plato, and Levinas, Derrida showed considerable interest in putting the resources of deconstruction to work in literary analysis, even as his reception in the United States was first extended by literary theorists. (And he has never been able to choose between philosophy and literature [see Derrida 1992a, 34]). Furthermore, he refused to sign on to the reigning Marxist orthodoxy or to pay his dues to the French Communist Party, in a country where the pockets of philosophers are routinely searched for their political credentials...

It is also true that, early on, Derrida had created in the unwary the impression of a certain French, post-structuralist Nietzsche – part of what Allan Bloom called somewhat crankily (given Nietzsche's notoriously reactionary politics) the ''Nietzscheanized left''. Now, without underestimating the serious debt of Derrida to Nietzsche's critique of metaphysics and of its ''faith in opposites'', such a characterization misses the profoundly Levinasian affirmation of the *tout autre*, the ''wholly other'', in deconstruction. As this Levinasian dimension has grown stronger and stronger over the years – ''Before a thought like that of Levinas, I never have any objection'', he would say in 1986 – the ethical and political dimension of deconstruction became more and more explicit. This tendency culminated in 1993 with the appearance, *contre temps*, of *Specters of Marx*...

Therefore, in this chapter I offer a reading of Derrida's work (as well as that of a selection of his interlocutors) that attempts to show that it has always been concerned with and patterned by 'the messianic' general structure of experience (of the im-possible) – albeit as it has passed under other names and was subject to further development in later texts – which, expressed in terms of the specific concerns of this thesis, is a *response* to a *call* (both structured by the messianic promise) of – or demand for – emancipation from, and resistance to, the totalizations (or totalizing power) of historical culture. If there can be said to be a 'turn' in Derrida's corpus it is only that consistent turn(ing) which is evident in his work from the outset towards the *question* that enables us to go 'beyond' (or at least press up against its limits) or, latterly, to the *promise* of the future 'to-come' and towards

---

I do not think there is anything like a ''reversal'' or massive transformation in Derrida's thought, of the sort one finds in Heidegger, say, anything like a Derrida I and a Derrida II. But I do think there is a progression in which this originally ethical and political motif in his work, deeply Levinasian in tone, has worked its way more and more to the front of his concerns in the writings of the 1980s and 1990s. This motif has been given an emphasis that even some of his more sympathetic readers had not quite anticipated, the effect of which has been to turn deconstruction in a more decidedly ethico-political (and even oddly religious) direction, but nothing that any attentive reader of the preface to ''The Ends of Man'' could not have seen coming [see Derrida 1982a, 111-114].' (Derrida 1997a, 126-127) Lawlor provides a helpful nuancing of Caputo's assessment when he writes as follows: 'As is well known, from 1967 on, Derrida's thought will develop in many directions and into many domains. In general, however, the concepts forged during this first period (from 1954 to 1967) remain in place in the later writings. In fact, the most remarkable thing about Derrida's vast corpus is its continuity; Derrida's thought does not, as one might think, shift *all of a sudden* from metaphysical issues to ethico-political issues. *Différance* and supplementarity continue to be basic concepts in the later writings, and in the early writings the ethico-political issues make an appearance...Nevertheless, it is undeniable that during this formative first period, the problem of genesis dominates; the deconstruction of metaphysics – this claim is very obvious – defines the early Derrida; and the ethico-political issues are generally in the background. As Derrida's ethico-political issues, however, gradually move to the foreground, these issues – the decline of communism, for example – require new concepts. This gradual shift of emphasis from metaphysics to ethics and politics results in one major conceptual event: the ''turn'' from the question to the promise. If we must say that the basic problem of phenomenology is the problem of genesis, then now (after 1967) we must say that Derrida conceives genesis not in terms of the question, but in terms of the promise. What Derrida realizes is that a question, interrogation, does not have the power to necessitate change; a response to a question only explicates the implicit sense of the question. When someone, however, says to me, ''Swear!'' and I swear to do what he or she commands, I must believe that I understand the command and I must believe that I can do what is commanded of me. The trace that poses a question does not have the force to necessitate such a change in me because the trace in the early Derrida is merely an impersonal ''what''. Derrida therefore must – although this change as well is more a shift in emphasis than a conceptual break – transform the trace into the ''revenant'', the ''returning'' or ''the ghost'', that is, into the specter; the specter is a personal memory *who* commands me to change. While in the formative first period, Derrida conceived deconstruction as responding to a question posed within (*à l'interieur*) metaphysics in order to go outside, now he conceives deconstruction as the keeping of a promise to a specter who needs to come inside, and thereby form a community. Either way – toward the outside (exiting the metaphysics of presence) or toward the inside (hospitality) – deconstruction concerns itself with the limit or the threshold.' (Lawlor 2002, 211-212) Lawlor goes on to assert that an investigation of *Specters of Marx* demonstrates *both* 'the continuity of Derrida's thought with his early interpretation of Husserl' *and* 'define[s] precisely the ''turn'' in Derrida's thinking.' (Lawlor 2002, 212)

keeping the future open: the turn towards *alterity* and *exteriority* or, restated, to a *marginality* that is irreducible to historical (re)presentation.

More 'specifically', the following reading sketches out and analyzes what are arguably the main 'developmental' lines of *Derrida's deconstructive 'critique'*[5] *of history* (i.e. against 'the history of meaning'), a 'critique' which can also be understood as *operating on the limit between describing and performing an intrinsically (or structurally) 'prophetic' permanent suspension – or disturbance/disruption – of historical (re)presentation by the (always) 'to-come'*. Emphasis throughout will be placed on the ongoing undecidability – understood as a *determinate oscillation*[6] with the attendant *tension(s)* such oscillation generates –

[5] Whether or not and/or the extent to which deconstruction can be considered a 'critique' is a contested issue. Barbara Johnson, in her introduction to her translation of Derrida's *Dissemination*, has it that Derrida 'forged the term ''deconstruction''...in elaborating a critique of ''Western metaphysics'', by which he means not only the Western philosophical tradition but ''everyday'' thought and language as well.' (Derrida 1981a, *viii*) Geoffrey Bennington has opposed Johnson's presentation of deconstruction (i.e. deconstruction as 'a form of critique') pointing out that the word 'critique' is 'used (sometimes, alack as a verb, which goes with debates and agendas) far too much out of excitement' and 'is also notoriously slippery between a Kantian sense and a Marxist inflexion of that sense.' (Bennington 1994, 14 and 24) Derrida made it explicit that 'deconstruction is neither an *analysis* nor a *critique*' (Derrida 2008, 4). Nevertheless, in this thesis I follow the example of Leonard Lawlor who insisted 'on calling deconstruction a critique' given that, on his reading of Derrida – and on mine – '[d]econstruction consists in limiting claims made by metaphysics (but also ethical and political claims) with experience; deconstruction is always enlightening: ''the violence of light'', as Derrida says in ''Violence and Metaphysics''.' (Lawlor 2002, 3) I return to this issue of deconstruction and critique later on in this chapter.

[6] As Derrida puts it in the text 'Afterword: Toward An Ethic of Discussion' (in *Limited Inc* – Derrida 1988a, 111-160): 'I want to recall that undecidability is always a *determinate* oscillation between possibilities (for example, of meaning, but also of acts). These possibilities are themselves highly *determined* in strictly *defined* situations (for example, discursive – syntactical or rhetorical – but also political, ethical, etc.). They are *pragmatically* determined. The analyses that I have devoted to undecidability concern just these determinations and these definitions, not at all some vague ''indeterminacy''. I say ''undecidability'' rather than ''indeterminacy'' because I am interested more in relations of force, in differences of force, in everything that allows, precisely, determinations in given situations to be stabilized through a decision of writing (in the broad sense I give to this word, which also includes political action and experience in general). There would be no indecision or *double bind* were it not between *determined* (semantic, ethical, political) poles, which are upon occasion terribly necessary and always irreplaceably singular. Which is to say that from the point of view of semantics, but also ethics and politics, ''deconstruction'' should never lead either to relativism or to any sort of indeterminism.

To be sure, in order for structures of undecidability to be possible (and hence structures of decisions and of responsibilities as well), there must be a certain play, *différance*, non-identity. Not of indetermination, but of *différance* or of non-identity with oneself in the very process of determination. *Différance* is not indeterminacy. It renders determinacy both possible and necessary. Someone might say: but if it renders determinacy possible, it is because it itself is ''indeterminacy''. Precisely not, since first of all it ''is'' in *itself* nothing outside of different determinations; second, and consequently, it never comes to a full stop anywhere, absolutely [*elle ne s'arrête nulle part*], and is neither negativity nor nothingness (as indeterminacy would be). Insofar as it is always determined, undecidability is also not negative in itself.' (Derrida 1988a, 148-149)

between the possibilities of 'history' discussed in his work (i.e., between the conventional or 'classical' references to actual 'history' that he makes and identifies) *and* a devastating questioning (problematicisation) of it *in the name of* '*some other concept of history*' *via* a thinking of that to which it is 'blind' (that which escapes, exceeds and cannot be [re]presented by it; that which is coming but may not come: 'the un[re]presentable') but which also conditions it: another historicity. This undecidability and determinate oscillation (with its attendant tensions), is the experience of the messianic structure/promise (again, even if it is not consistently designated as that in Derrida's texts) of the language of 'history' – and historical (re)presentation, historiography, etc., – which messianic historical theory foregrounds. As such it seeks to illuminate *and* disrupt/disturb the situation (the dominant binary settlement) existing in academic historical culture so acutely and presciently described by Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., in his text – published in 1995 – *Beyond the Great Story: History as Text and Discourse*:

> [A]s some scholars hail the end of theory or even of postmodernism itself, the time seems right for an assessment of the implications of postmodernism and poststructuralism for the practice of history...it seems important to explore the significant role claimed for historicization in both literary studies and the social sciences today. Poststructuralist and postmodernist theories question the possibility of writing history at the very time that such historicization has become a way of grounding literary studies and the social sciences. That historicization is considered so vital by some scholars just when its whole approach to representing the past is being challenged by others poses...[a] paradox...
>
> This paradox suggests that in view of the postmodernist and multiculturalist challenges both historians and scholars in other disciplines underestimate the difficulties of representing the past as history. Throughout these various disciplinary debates literary scholars and social scientists alike have too unproblematic a view of the nature of history when they theorize about historicization in their fields. Historians, on other hand, have too unproblematic a view of history as discourse and methodology when they defend their discipline against literary and rhetorical theorists. (Berkhofer, Jr. 1995, *ix*)

Now, it is my contention that Derridean deconstruction-in-the-name-of-some-other-concept-of 'history' damages (disturbs/disrupts) a whole range of assumptions and presuppositions regarding 'history' and historical (re)presentation/historicization held on *both* sides of the divide delineated by Berkhofer, Jr. However, in order to

broaden and fill in (populate) the 'backdrop' that he has provided I will also in the course of this chapter consider several issues in Derrida's work as they have been responded to – i.e. articulated and engaged with (not always with great understanding or rigour and some, it should be apparent, with *much* more than others) as well as disagreed over – by various scholars, both Derrida scholars *and* historians/historical theorists. Having done so, I then conclude with some comments as to how all of this should and indeed does lead us unfailingly to a messianic formulation of Derrida's critique of historical (re)presentation in all its forms (one that is predicated on a radical historicity that permits the opening up of the affirmative thinking of messianic historical theory). This conclusion, as a summation of my argument regarding that which has preceded it, reflects my construction and deployment of this chapter as something of a 'bridge' between the broad outline of the terms and concerns governing my thesis as set out in the Introduction and the *slow readings* of the messianic in Derrida and Caputo which make up Chapter Two and which provide the main resource for the detailed explication of messianic historical theory that I provide alongside them. To do all of the above I have divided the rest of this chapter into *six* sections which I itemise here so readers can have the development of this impure 'thematic' in mind from the start. The sections are:

1. Some remarks on the 'impure' thematization of 'Derrida and History'
2. Derrida's call/challenge for 'some other concept of history' and responses to it
3. The unfairness of (the judgement of) 'the rejection of history'
4. Some other concept of history I: systematizing a deconstructive 'critique' against the history of meaning
5. Some other concept of history II: further implications and responses
6. Conclusion: a radical historicity that permits the opening up of the affirmative thinking of the messianic

The formulation of these six sections is to some extent *arbitrary*. I am *not* attempting here to diligently track intimations (a 'sheltering under other names' and/or a 'coming to the fore') of the messianic throughout Derrida's corpus text by text in a *detailed* fashion (nevertheless, occasional suggestions/markers along these

lines can be found in the accompanying footnotes). Rather, what I *am* doing here is identifying particular debates in the critical literature on Derrida and history and suggesting that what lies beneath these debates (whether they are taking place between Derrida and his interlocutors *via* interviews/exchanges *and/or* between various theorists operating in, and contesting, fields constituted in the wake of Derrida's work) as they relate to the problematic of historical (re)presentation – what they 'rest' on, presuppose/assume or imply – is that which Derrida later designated 'the messianic' but which in his earlier work he figured in other ways (but, nevertheless, ways which can be shown to be consistent with the messianic historical theory explicated in Chapter Two given that language has always already been messianic).

Section One: Some remarks on the 'impure' thematization of 'Derrida and History'

I begin, then, by examining some of the ways in which I believe – this is my *proposal* – that the work of Jacques Derrida has, from the outset, problematicised ideas of history and historical (re)presentation consonant with the messianic historical theory I articulated in the Introduction and will develop in detail in Chapter Two. The explanation of this *thematic* may initially appear to be straightforward, but we know very well by now that nothing is straightforward in Derrida; that the *aporia* lurks everywhere, and that '*reflexive*'[7] and nuanced readings (including readings of a carefully qualified and nuanced '*reflexivity*', one that has allowed itself to be problematicised by Derrida's reflections on the 'other'[8]) are the

[7] Hilary Lawson defines 'reflexivity' as 'a turning back on oneself, a form of self-awareness' that 'has been part of philosophy from its inception' but which has – in the form of 'reflexive questions' – 'been given...special force in consequence of the ['modern'] recognition of the central role played by language, theory, sign, and text.' (Lawson 1985, 9) The social theorist Margaret S. Archer defines 'reflexivity' as 'the regular exercise of the mental ability, shared by all normal people, to consider themselves in relation to their (social) contexts and vice versa.' (Archer 2012, 1) Throughout this thesis I work with, albeit in a problematicised way, Lawson's definition of reflexivity.

[8] In his essay 'Deconstruction as Criticism' (in Gasché 1994) Rodolphe Gasché, in the course of considering the writings of Derrida in relation to the concept of 'reflexivity', describes 'the dream at the bottom of *all* of Western Philosophy of a pure reflection that would not have to rely on a nonproper mediator.' Gasché goes on to explain how '[t]his dream takes – in Husserl's phenomenology in particular and in philosophy in general – the shape of the idea of self-affection, of an auto-affection of the voice in the ''medium of universal signification'' [Derrida 1973, 79] that is the voice itself. This idea of self-affection is the matrix of all forms of self-reflexivity.' He then points out that 'what Derrida's deconstruction has in view is precisely the undoing of the idea of self-affection and, consequently, of all forms of self-reflexivity.' (Gasché 1994, 35) Later on in this essay Gasché delineates what he sees (at the

order of the day, everyday. This position is in close resonance with some comments made by Julian Wolfreys who has warned against approaching Derrida's work with any type of naïve 'thematic' intent. In the circumstances Wolfreys is strangely and ironically definitive about this: '*One cannot read Derrida thematically*.' (Wolfreys 2007, *ix*) So what does Wolfreys say? Here I give a lengthy quote since his view suggests a position I can work from:

> One cannot approach any of the texts by Derrida as if, in doing so, certain patterns might be discerned, the purpose being to learn those forms of thought and then 'apply' them to whatever it is you want to read. One cannot fit Derrida into a methodological or formal analytical frame. The very idea ignores just about everything Derrida says or does in writing…
>
> To thematize or order Derrida on the pretence or misguided, however well intentioned, belief that one has to start somewhere with Derrida is to believe in the idea of the finite or containable, schematic representation of 'Jacques Derrida', 'the work or thought of Derrida', 'deconstruction', and so on. Such phrases imply that there is an organic whole, so many species belonging through genetic relationship to a genus, whether that genus is identified as

---

time of writing) as the current situation in critical intellectual work in relation to understandings of deconstruction and self-reflexivity: 'Undoubtedly a theory that identifies deconstruction with self-reflexivity was, and to some extent still is, in the present state of critical consciousness, a better instrument for freeing the mind of traditional approaches than what necessarily would be understood as an out-and-out nihilism likely to paralyze the mental faculties of almost everyone. If, however, such an approach reveals its philosophical implications by straining the notion of self-reflexivity, the confusion between self-reflexivity and deconstruction can become fruitful. Indeed, a rigorous application of the idea of self-reflexivity leads to the elevation of thought (*Erhebung des Gedankens*) and the work of the concept (*Arbeit des Begriff*) that deconstruction measures swords with. It is thus not surprising that Paul de Man, who in his early work equates deconstruction with the self-reflexivity of the text, not only keeps identifying deconstruction with the generally more American methodology of self-reflexivity, but also abstains – with some irony, no doubt – from calling his more recent readings deconstructive.' (Gasché 1994, 53) Nevertheless, it is Gasché's argument that '[i]f deconstruction has been developed by Derrida (and Lyotard, as well) to account for the contradictions inherent in the conversion of reflection, it is precisely because deconstruction and self-reflection are not identical. Moreover, the ideas of self-reflection, specularity, self-referentiality, and so on, are essentially metaphysical and belong to logocentrism. Deconstruction, in contrast, by showing how the two asymmetrical moments of self-reflection are engendered by either a ''deep'' *structure* or a ''surface'' *scene*, opens a breach in the ideological closure of self-reflection.' (Gasché 1994, 55) In the essay 'Psyche: Invention of the Other' Derrida mentions the ' ''self-reflexivity'' so often at the core of Paul de Man's analyses' and comments on how it 'has occasioned some very interesting debates, notably in essays by Rodolphe Gasché ['Deconstruction and Criticism', discussed here] and Suzanne Gearhart.' (Derrida 2007b, 7) In what I read as an attempt to radicalise/problematicise the concept, Derrida also writes of 'a reflexive structure that not only does not produce coincidence with or presence to itself but instead projects forward the advent of the self, of ''speaking'' or ''writing'' of itself as other, that is to say, following a *trace*.' (Derrida 2007b, 7) Accordingly, I acknowledge, but do not explore further here (and so am bracketing them out for the purposes of this chapter), arguments about the extent to which advocacy of reflexivity presupposes and requires stable (because they have been stabilized) and/or unified notions of the self and subjectivity as well as whether such notions are, in any case, viable and, if so, the extent to which they can (and should) be problematicised *via* a projection towards 'the other' before they collapse, perhaps taking reflexivity with them. Aspects of these arguments will be explored in subsequent chapters of this thesis.

> ‘deconstruction’ or ‘Derrida’. Such thinking is what Derrida describes as *logocentric*. It is a dominant form of thinking in the history of Western thought, or metaphysics from Plato at least, to the present day. And such thinking is precisely what in tireless and endlessly inventive fashion, Derrida exposes for its limitations…All such gestures desire representation as the first and last word. They believe, mistakenly, that behind all the variable expressions, one can unearth or find a single semantic kernel.[9] (Wolfreys 2007, *ix-x*)

My exploration in this chapter is only in *partial* agreement with Wolfrey’s comments since my contention is that he *overstates* the degree to which it would be a mistake to ‘approach’ Derrida’s work on history (or anything else) ‘thematically’. To be sure, one can agree that it would be a mistake to reduce Derrida’s work to one with an essence of which thematics were a mere expression. And it would be a mistake if one approached a stylistically complicated book such as *Glas* (Derrida 1986) in a *merely* thematic manner. But it would also be a mistake to discount the fact that it is, in large measure, a book *about* Hegel and Genet. Additionally, while I think that a certain messianic structure of experience (even if it is not always identified as such and where its expression is in less developed form) *can* be discerned across a range of Derrida’s texts (from the earliest to the latest), I agree that it would be a violation of this structure to conceive of it as something that can be ‘applied’ rather than as something to be observed and foregrounded as *always already* going on ‘in’, say, historical (re)presentation.[10] So, what I take from Wolfreys is that it is precisely these qualifications, these hesitations, that actually characterises the ceaseless effort throughout Derrida’s own work to expose the limitations of what Wolfreys describes as gestures desiring (re)presentation as the first and last word and that therefore radically undermines widely held assumptions

[9] Derrida refers to this concept of the ‘semantic kernel’ during an interview from 1971 which will be discussed later in this essay (see Derrida 1981b, 58).

[10] In *Memoires for Paul de Man*, Derrida reminds us that ‘As we have seen, the very condition of a deconstruction may be at work, in the work, *within* the system to be deconstructed; it may *already* be located there, already at work, not at the center but in an ex-centric center, in a corner whose eccentricity assures the solid concentration of the system, participating in the construction of what it at the same time threatens to deconstruct. One might then be inclined to reach this conclusion: deconstruction is not an operation that supervenes *afterwards,* from the outside, one fine day; it is always already at work in the work; one must just know how to identify the right or wrong element, the right or wrong stone – the right one, of course, always proves to be, precisely, the wrong one. Since the disruptive force of deconstruction is always already contained within the architecture of the work, all one would finally have to be able to do deconstruct, given this *always already*, is to do memory work. Since I want neither to accept or to reject a conclusion formulated in these terms, let us leave this question hanging for a while.’ (Derrida 1989b, 73)

about, say, the 'nature' and purposes of history and the hegemonic historical culture (with its power to 'fix' meaning and essence, the finality of its determining that so often closes down/blocks the opening to the future) that it sustains. Here, and specifically focussed on the idea of historical (re)presentations as the first and last word, I am also in agreement with Nicholas Royle who, in the introduction to his excellent discussion of 'writing history *after Derrida*', points out that

> it is clear that the implications of his work for historiography in general are quite massive. In question here is everything that is brought together under Derrida's rubric of the notion of history as the history of meaning. (Royle 1995, 13)

For what I think Derrida's work does to/for both the academic history enterprise as it is outworked both within academic history departments *and* at the level of popular history, is to highlight the crucial *aporia* of what Sylvère Lotringer and Sande Cohen have described (in the context of a discussion of 'the synthetic ''point'' ' of that category of 'French theory' within which Derrida is often situated[11]) as 'the permanent suspension of representation' (Lotringer and Cohen 2001, 4). Derrida's work, for me, thus constitutes a ceaseless effort to radically challenge, in an affirmative way[12], *any* attempt in *any* (re)presentation – including historical representations, historical narratives, historicizations (including historical theorizations) of all kinds – to totalize; to definitively 'settle, answer, resolve, and

[11] Lotringer and Cohen argue that ' ''French theory'' is an American invention, going back to at least the eighteenth century, and no doubt belongs to the continuity of American reception to all sorts of European imports, an ongoing process.' They continue as follows: 'That such theory has often been rejected by the existing disciplines of academic institutions, especially history and philosophy departments attempting to protect the archaicisms of linearity and ''clear and distinct'' ideas, is both a fact of recent history and evidence of a structure that French theory set out to contest. We have been saturated by the invocation of repressive ideals against French theory – the ideal of regulative truth, the ideal of form fits fact, the ideal of metanarrative social cohesion, the ideal of language transparency.' (Lotringer and Cohen 2001, 1-2)

[12] As Derrida has commented, 'Deconstruction certainly entails a moment of affirmation. Indeed, I cannot conceive of a radical critique which would not be ultimately motivated by some sort of affirmation, acknowledged or not. Deconstruction always presupposes affirmation…I do not mean that the deconstructing subject or self affirms. I mean that deconstruction is, in itself, a positive response to an alterity which necessarily calls, summons, or motivates it. Deconstruction is therefore vocation – a response to a call. The other, as the other than self, the other that opposes self-identity, is not something that can be detected and disclosed within a philosophical space and with the aid of a philosophical lamp. The other precedes philosophy and necessarily invokes and provokes the subject before any genuine questioning can begin. It is in this rapport with the other that affirmation expresses itself.' (Derrida 1984, 149)

control the represented.'[13] (Lotringer and Cohen 2001, 4) Yet, at the same time, it is precisely this ceaseless, corrective challenge in Derrida's work that helps us to think differently about history and historical (re)presentation (should we want to[14]). A deconstructive disturbance/de-stabilization of conventional, dominant or hegemonic notions of/assumptions about 'history' – emphatically *not* a simple rejection – is a necessary undertaking for thinking about (the conditions for) 'some other concept of history' as called for by Derrida at, for example, Villanova University in 2001 (Derrida 2005a, 31-32, previously cited in the Introduction). This deconstructive disturbance/de-stabilization of 'history' keeps open a future for historical (re)presentation that necessitates a certain radical '*reflexivity*'; historical (re)presentations that, as a condition of their production, are always avowedly turned towards the future which is 'to-come' and, as a confession of/commitment to their orientation towards letting the future open ('come'), demonstrate an explicit self-awareness regarding their limitations, always falling short of – and now actively resisting – the determining epistemological and ontological claims hitherto made for them by modernist historical culture. This foregrounding of the permanent suspension of a definitive (re)presentation *via* a ceaseless, unconditional deconstructive challenge – in other words the development of an emphasis in historical writing that refuses and problematicises any attempt to settle and control – is what needs to take place in the 'field' of academic history if it is to be responsive to Derrida's call to deconstruct the assumptions of historians/historical (re)presentation and historiography 'in the name of some other concept of history.'

So, in order to 'run' these arguments, my arguments, whilst mindful of how the desire to 'begin' and to be 'clear' can easily slip into '*unreflexive*' definitive-like

[13] Lotringer and Cohen explain as follows: 'Most often, to represent means to settle, answer, resolve, and control the represented – the experiences of the world put in their ''right'' place. Instead, representation as conceived by French theory was turned to entirely critical and productive purposes – to make thought experiments. Instead of treating writing and books as conclusive models, books and writing were encouraged to support the idea that ''there is no difference between what a book talks about and how it is made.'' ' (Lotringer and Cohen 2001, 4; the quote at the end of this extract comes from Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* – see Deleuze and Guattari 2004a, 4)

[14] See Jenkins 1999 for a brilliantly argued account from one historical theorist – Keith Jenkins – who thinks that 'postmodern ways of thinking' (and he includes Derrida in this category) signal the end of history, thus freeing 'us' to 'live in time but outside history', or, in other words, 'under conditions where we can live our lives within new ways of timing time which do not refer to a past tense articulated in discourses that have become historically familiar to us.' (Jenkins 1999, 2) For Jenkins, such conditions are, crucially, to be *welcomed* and not despaired over.

thematicizing (for if no reading is definitive then this obviously also applies to my 'reading proposal' in this thesis), it is nonetheless necessary to commence this 'narrative' – and I am aware of all the accompanying dangers when using that word[15] – of the deconstruction of history somewhere. Simple refusal, as Wolfreys himself goes on to point out, is inadequate; we have to 'say something':

> It isn't enough to refuse the temptation of producing something in the space of an introduction though. You cannot simply refuse the call. Avoidance should be avoided, and one must accept an impossible responsibility, seeking to respond. (Wolfreys 2007, *x*)

This is the *aporia* – the impossible responsibility – that anyone seeking to write anything about the impact of Derrida's work on a particular academic field – for example 'Derrida and History' – must pass through. As Niall Lucy has argued, a deconstructive analysis[16] is distinguished by always beginning from an 'encounter

[15] Here I have been inspired by Sande Cohen's brilliant ongoing critique of the myriad of ways in which academic historical thinking 'recodes' our 'reactive' culture *via* narrativization. Cohen (1986) argues that '*recoding*, which dominates in the academic system, suggests the proliferation of ways in which meaning is recalibrated to favour the Same, the elimination of the untimely from meaning and thought.' Recoding (indeed, coding in all its forms) is 'radically opposed to intellectual states of apertinence, asyntacticality, and semanticism: these latter categories are intolerable to bourgeois-academia since they scramble the production of continuous meanings.' (Cohen 1986, 328) Cohen goes on to define narrativization as: 'the organization of signifiers so as to display transformations whereby subjects, actions, and sanctions install modalities of ''history'' in the form of a story. The term refers to the ways in which that which cannot be directly stated – an axiological projection, for example – is nevertheless manifested as a narrative answer…The reduction of meaning to stories.' (Cohen 1986, 330) As Cohen puts it at the beginning of his first book: 'A culture is reactive when it continues to narrativize itself despite, at any moment, being six minutes away (by missile) from its own nonnarrative obliteration. The dissemination of models of ''history'' promotes cultural subjects who are encouraged to think about nonnarrative relations – capitalism, justice, and contradictions – in a narrative manner. Narrating screens the mind from the nonnarrative forces of power in the present, insofar as ''historical'' narration reduces present semantic and pragmatic thought (connotation) to forms of story, repetition, and model, all of which service cultural redundancy. Historical thought is a manifestation of reactive thinking-about, which blocks the act of thinking-to.' (Cohen 1986, 1) Cohen raises difficult questions about the role of historians in 'blocking' critical thought in, and on, the present when they attempt to reduce, via historical narration, 'relations' such as 'capitalism' and 'justice' to stories. He regards attempts to make 'history' relevant – to relate it – to critical thinking as 'ill-conceived', arguing that the 'presence of the present' is nonaccessible to us 'once narrative thinking dominates semantics, where an obligation to history generates the illusion of the autonomy of historical culture, which in turn reinforces the cultural debilitation of radical thought.' (Cohen 1986, 1-2) The result, according to Cohen, is that 'critical thinking is not possible when connected to academic historical thinking.' (Cohen 1986, 2)

[16] A 'deconstructive analysis' (i.e. an identification and 'working through' of some concept, idea, comment etc. threaded within the text) and a 'deconstructive method' are not to be confused. The latter is a misunderstanding of deconstruction. Any attempt to appropriate deconstruction as *method* – i.e. as a methodology – would betray a misunderstanding of deconstruction as Derrida conceives it. As Derrida put it, deconstruction is 'indissociable from a process and a law of ex-propriation or ex-appropriation proper that resists in the last instance, in order to challenge it, every subjective movement of appropriation of the following sort: *I* deconstruct, or *we* deconstruct, or we have the *power* and the

with the aporias that must be overlooked in order to make presence seem undeconstructible.' (Lucy 2004, 1-2) And an 'unreflexive' thematic aspiration *vis-à-vis* Derrida's work runs the risk of 'making presence seem undeconstructible.' Yet here I also read Wolfreys as implying that some elements of a thematic approach are unavoidable, resulting in the development of an 'impure' thematic that demonstrates an explicit awareness of the tension to which he alludes: 'reflexively' engaging and resisting the metaphysical but unable to dispense with, or get beyond it. Derrida did not believe that it would be possible '*simply* to escape metaphysics'[17] (Derrida 1981b, 17) – i.e. gestures desiring (re)presentation as first/last word and that validate presence as foundation, suggesting certainty or onto-theological[18] conclusions – in

---

method that make it possible. Deconstruction, if there be such a thing, happens; and this is what happens: it deconstructs itself, and it can become neither the power nor the possibility of an ''I can''. I insist here on the ''it happens'' because what I would like to make clear…is this affirmation of the event, of the arrival or the future at the beating heart of a reflection on the im-possible.' (Derrida 2001a, 20) See also Derrida 1995b, 17: 'I have often had occasion to define deconstruction as that which is – far from a theory, a school, a method, even a discourse, still less a technique that can be appropriated – at bottom *what happens or comes to pass* [ce qui arrive].' Niall Lucy comments that 'Deconstruction is not a ''method'' that can be ''applied'' to something with a view to deconstructing it. If things are deconstructible, they are deconstructible already – as things.' (Lucy 2004, 11) Deconstruction is always already at work, within each work.

[17] In a dialogue with Richard Kearney that took place in 1981 Derrida responds to the question(s) as to whether it is possible to 'go beyond the logocentric system of metaphysics without employing the terminology of metaphysics' and – closely associated – whether if metaphysics can only be undone 'from the inside' this means 'that we are condemned to metaphysics even while attempting to deconstruct its pretensions' as follows: 'In a certain sense it is true to say that ''deconstruction'' is still *in* metaphysics. But we must remember that if we are indeed *inside* metaphysics, we are not inside it as we might be inside a box or a milieu. We are still *in* metaphysics in the special sense that we are *in* a determinate language. Consequently, the idea that we might be able to get outside of metaphysics has always struck me as naive. So that when I refer to the ''closure'' (*clôture*) of metaphysics, I insist that it is not a question of considering metaphysics as a circle with a limit or simple boundary. The notion of the limit and boundary (*bord*) of metaphysics is itself highly problematic. My reflections on this problematic have always attempted to show that the limit or end of metaphysics is not linear or circular in any indivisible sense. And as soon as we acknowledge that the limit-boundary of metaphysics is divisible, the logical rapport between inside and outside is no longer simple. Accordingly, we cannot really say that we are ''locked into'' or ''condemned to'' metaphysics, for we are, strictly speaking, neither inside nor outside. In brief, the whole rapport between the inside and the outside of metaphysics is inseparable from the question of the finitude and reserve of metaphysics as language. But the idea of the finitude and exhaustion (*épuisement*) of metaphysics does not mean that we are incarcerated in it as prisoners or victims of some unhappy fatality. It is simply that our belonging to, and inherence in, the language of metaphysics is something that can only be rigorously and adequately thought about from *another topos* or space where our problematic rapport with the boundary of metaphysics can be seen in a more radical light. Hence my attempts to discover the non-place or *non-lieu* which would be the ''other'' of philosophy. This is the task of deconstruction.' (Derrida 2004a, 143-144)

[18] Kevin Hart's description of 'onto-theology' is helpful here: 'The word is first used by Kant to denote the attempt to think God through pure reason. He reckons this attempt a failure. Heidegger gives the word a new spin. Since ontology is the laying out of being and theiology is the saying of the highest being (Greek: *theion*), onto-theiology (as it should be written) yields the structure of metaphysics: the gathering together of the general features of being and the study of the highest being. So metaphysics, on Heidegger's understanding, leagues beings to form a whole, the ground of which is being. Note that for Heidegger and for Derrida onto-theology arises in philosophy, not in religion, although some Christian

the same way that 'one can never break once and for all' from 'the imperatives of classical pedagogy', although submitting to them 'rigorously' should be avoided (Derrida 1988, 4). This is the liminal experience of (re)presentation: continually pressing up against – in an attempt to overcome, resist, or, in some cases, to signal/indicate the closest possible complicity with – that which can never be definitively broken with. It is what, I would suggest, partly galvanizes the continuing production of accounts such as this one and indeed *all* historical/historiographic (re)presentations whether explicitly acknowledged or not (the former constituting the stance of messianic historical theory). Sarah Wood also describes this tension very well in the course of her useful discussion of historicity in Derrida's *Writing and Difference*:

> In general, we can't help but accept what we would like to resist, even if only in order to resist it more effectively. To resist what should be resisted we must remain in the closest possible touch with its logic, without simply adopting it. (Wood 2009, 18)

The same tension identified and described by Wood in relation to Derrida's discussions about historicity is also helpfully supplemented and 'widened out' by Simon Morgan Wortham in relation to ongoing discussions concerned with the crises and futures of the humanities and the 'question of the university' (Morgan Wortham 2007). Morgan Wortham's interpretation of Derrida's institutional activism provides a helpful way of understanding how Derrida's approach to the problematicization of dominant notions of 'history', including theorizations of historical (re)presentation, can be read as part of the bigger 'agenda' of the institutional futures of the humanities as a working for institutions that keep (preserve) the future open(ing):

> We must not only reconstitute this history as a source of guidance or inspiration…but we must also countersign it, which means transforming it,

---

theologians have promoted onto-theological theses.' (Hart 2004, 164) According to this definition, and as Derrida asserts, an onto-theological concept of history is both possible and prevalent; messianic historical (re)presentation/theory – some other concept of history – is opposed to it. Rodolphe Gasché has it that 'The deconstructive undoing of the *greatest totality*, the totality of onto-theology, faithfully repeats this totality in *its* totality while simultaneously making it tremble, making it insecure in its most assured evidences.' (Gasché 1986, 180)

> borrowing from it and abusing it, both taking it and leaving it, in order to recast the 'counter' in ways that might seem somewhat unrecognizable from the perspective of such a history. (Morgan Wortham 2007, 11)

In relation to this recasting of the 'counter' Morgan Wortham goes on to discuss how Derrida points out in a number of texts that

> [t]he *contre* or counter implies a 'with-against' movement, a turning toward and away from, a measure both of distance and proximity (inordinately difficult to calculate, and therefore in constant need of reckoning), which – if one ties the term as intimately as Derrida does to the concept of the institution – implies a deeply complex and highly ambivalent relationship to orthodox academia, official organizations of all kinds, state and party politics, and so forth. (Morgan Wortham 2007, 1)

He further explicates 'this (counter) logic of the ''with-against'' ' – a specific expression of the oscillation I have already mentioned and which I think imbues and is evident throughout Derrida's approach to the concept of 'history' – by making the argument that while Derrida advocated and worked for a profound transformation of university institutions this was nevertheless, and crucially, a carefully nuanced call where categories of transition and 'negotiation' were stressed since,

> for Derrida, there can be no absolute suspension of various forms of legitimacy, authority, competence, or tradition (indeed, claims to this effect frequently reconstitute all the more stealthily yet forcefully the forms of power and control they ostensibly reject or deny). (Morgan Wortham 2007, 4)

It is in support of such readings by Sarah Wood and Morgan Wortham that I also want to appropriate for this chapter some remarks by David Wood as he establishes his narrative on the deconstruction of time, remarks which all historians who wish to produce their historical representations and/or rethink the university and the humanities in a 'reflexive' way would do well to take into account:

> Our story has its own logic, but there are a hundred ways in which it could be retold…I am not suggesting that all these options are equivalent; they are clearly not. But they each yield distinct fruits. *And what is particularly curious is that if one were to try to justify starting here rather than there, or to reflect on the very idea of 'starting' somewhere (as if we had not always already started), one would find oneself already thematizing an understanding of the*

> *significance of history*, tradition, development, progress, retrieval, reworking, and so on. In other words, one would find oneself already invoking fundamental temporal schemas and values. *And it is, to my mind at least, one of the real strengths of deconstruction that it allows one to acknowledge and negotiate such paradoxes without being paralyzed by them.* (Wood 2001, *xii*, italics mine)

With these 'reflexive' remarks on the trials and tribulations of any thematic in mind I now want to identify a beginning (an 'arbitrary' one, obviously) for the analysis that follows: two passages selected from Derrida's corpus that are examples suggesting the necessity of, and call or challenge for, further reflection on the dominant assumptions of historical culture in the name of some other concept of history.

Section Two: Derrida's call/challenge for 'some other concept of history' and responses to it

The two examples of *calls/challenges vis-à-vis* history are as follows.[19] *First*, in *The Truth in Painting* (Derrida 1987, 20) Derrida situates the intellectual work of *transforming the concept of history* in the context of a series of seminar reflections on the ways in which 'the philosophy of art' has thought about *both* the *historicity* of art *and* of art as *historical* in unproblematic terms; it is precisely a problematicization of these certain conceptions of the historicity/historicality of art hitherto established/enshrined in the philosophy of art that he wishes to disturb/displace:

> One can thus already say: as for history, we shall have to deal with the contradiction or the oscillation between two apparently incompatible motifs. They both ultimately come under one and the same logical formality: namely, that if the philosophy of art always has the greatest difficulty in dominating the history of art, a certain concept of the historicity of art, this is paradoxically, because it too easily thinks of art as historical. What I am putting forward here obviously assumes the transformation of the concept of history from one statement to the other. That will be the work of this seminar. (Derrida 1987, 21)

[19] Another example of a call/challenge *vis-à-vis* thinking history differently (i.e. for 'some other concept of history') that I could have selected is to be found in Derrida's *The Beast and the Sovereign, Volume 1* (Derrida 2009) where, in the course of a critical discussion of aspects of the work of Foucault and Giorgio Agamben, he describes and affirms the need 'to reconsider, precisely, a way of thinking history, of doing history, of articulating a logic and a rhetoric onto a thinking of history or the event.' (Derrida 2009, 332)

What Derrida seems to be calling for, in consonance with his Villanova comments, is the re-thinking of the presuppositions and predeterminations of historicity and notions of the historical, albeit as they occur at the philosophy/history of art discursive interface. Such a re-thinking is a response to the determinate oscillation between the possibilities of these words 'history' and 'historicity' so as to transform our conception of them.

Second, in *Memoires for Paul de Man* (Derrida 1989b), Derrida calls his readers to acknowledge the ways in which deconstruction challenges and confounds conventional notions of 'history':

> Deconstructive discources have sufficiently questioned, among other things, the classical assurances of history, the genealogical narrative, and periodizations of all sorts, and we can no longer ingenuously propose a tableau or a history of deconstruction. Similarly, no matter what their interest or their necessity may be today, the social sciences (notably those dealing with cultural or scientific and academic institutions) cannot, as such, claim to 'objectify' a movement which, essentially, questions the philosophical, scientific, *and* institutional axiomatic of those same social sciences. (Derrida 1989b, 15)

Deconstruction is that which cannot be historicized in the classical/conventional sense. History as a social science cannot 'objectify' – *the* assurance of classical history – that which questions its axioms (including the axiom of objectivity). And since every history is always already in the process of deconstructing there is something about each historical (re)presentation that cannot be objectified.

My contention is that these challenges issued by Derrida can be understood as exhortations to dwell on the workings of deconstruction within the specific discourse of 'history' and the historical (re)presentations that issue forth from it. Messianic historical theory is a response to such exhortations and attempts to repeat (but always differently, of course) the provocation of Derrida's thought in the still theoretically undernourished and resistant disciplinary 'field' of academic history (which also undergirds 'history-ing' at the popular culture level: film/television, heritage, etc.). Specifically, it reflects on and seeks to explain the determinate oscillation between the assumptions/presuppositions and possibilities of/for 'history'

that Derrida has identified by foregrounding its messianic structure and im-possible predication. Yet – and here I put aside the deployment of the terminology of the 'messianic' and 'impossibility' – it is nevertheless the case that the challenge of such reflection on the dominant assumptions, presuppositions and possibilities that are included under the name of 'history' has been responded to (including responses of virulent resistance to the 'French theory' within which Derrida is invariably included by most historians[20]) over several decades by historians and historical theorists with varying degrees of precision, patience and sympathy.[21] For example, on the spectrum of such responses is the assessment made by the historian Richard J. Evans that Derrida rejects 'the search for origins and causes as futile', a misreading that – in addition to indicating the metaphysical aspirations that some historians still harbour for their discipline particularly when they view it as under threat – was, as Evans himself later acknowledged, an inadequately supported assertion. (Evans 2000, 159-60 and 292) In a similar vein, Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob charge Derrida (and Foucault) with arguing 'vehemently against any research

[20] Cohen, in his essay 'Research Historians and French Theory', argues that there was a moment (linked to the perceived 'crisis' and 'decline' of the humanities) when 'French theory's resistance to historical representation encountered historian's resistance to a detailed examination of the language of research, the discourse of theory, the signs of interpretation, and the logics of events.' (Lotringer and Cohen 2001, 291) He describes this collision between French theorists and historians thus: 'French theorists shifted debates over history from the plausibility of metanarrative inclusion (and exclusions) to the *language* of plausibility, introducing *aporetics* into everything that the humanities, and especially history, thought settled. What was believed settled was the appropriateness of metanarrative to any and every human experience. French theory collided with that of modern Europeanists who refused to challenge Enlightenment notions of history, specifically the metanarratives of liberation and freedom, knowledge and understanding, reconciliation and amelioration. French theory argued that Enlightenment sense(s) of history were part of the problem and not a solution. Which problem? That the capitalization of experience had eliminated, for most people, the possibility of *making history*. The defeat of fascism was nothing to gloat over, since capitalism soon more deeply installed than ever before a terrorism without brownshirts, the terror of subjects-in-debt or repetition, endless encodings of identity and recognition.' (Lotringer and Cohen 2001, 291-2) Further on in his discussion of how various historians have resisted 'French Theory', Cohen argues that they continue to 'directly *politicize* against French theory *from the perspective of academic* ''*victors*''. So it is a curious thing, this injunction against French theory, since it never treats the arguments of the theories with anything like intellectual responsibility – as objects of research. In this sense the various denunciations have less to do with ''doing research'' than with the market share of what remains of metanarrative discource(s). Most of these historians are ''progressive'' Freudians and were given tenure in the mid-1970s, just as French theory became widely available in translation – not just Derrida, but many other writers. Further studies of the discursive armature of academic writing/institution would no doubt yield many interesting results concerning the academic wars of the past thirty years or so. What seems implausible is to give less than scepticism and criticism toward the historians when they turn their weapons on present rivals. There is too much purification of intellectual perspectives today; the ''victors'' act intolerant just at the moment of their ''victory''. But given the decline of the humanities, what do the victors now command?' (Lotringer and Cohen 2001, 300)

[21] Some of the better discussions from those operating in the 'field' of academic history/historical theory that are not referred to in any detail in this thesis are: Berkhofer, Jr. (1995), Bevernage (2012), Breisach (2003), Clark (2004), Ermarth (1992), Kellner (1989), LaCapra (1998), Pihlainen (1999), Raddeker (2007), Roberts (1995), and Roth (1995).

into origins (perhaps the classic historical approach to any problem)' (Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob 1995, 224). Another example, pitched at the introductory level, is to be found in Callum Brown's enthusiastic but flawed 'dedicated primer on postmodernism for the History student' which attempts to show how 'postmodernism works for the historian' and 'how the theory can be infused into what we [i.e. historians] all do.' (Brown 2005, back cover and 2) Here the reader is informed that Derrida has made 'the most famous statement of postmodernism: ''*il n'y a pas de hors-texte*'' ' (Brown 2005, 96; the quotation is from *Of Grammatology*, Derrida 1997b, 158). Furthermore, Brown describes how

> [t]his statement has been hotly debated, with critics claiming that Derrida seems to suggest that the world is a text and not real, whilst his defenders say it means getting outside of a text is impossible as that only creates another text. To describe a fact, you need to use another fact. In other words, humans are trapped in language in order to understand the world. Derrida has been a revered figure of postmodernism in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries... (Brown 2005, 96)

Quite apart from the problem of describing Derrida *via* reference to the term postmodernism – a term he viewed as 'foreign' to him[22] – there are some important and familiar qualifications that need to be made in relation to certain features of Brown's summary (although I am not suggesting that Brown himself holds such views), features that are typical of many discussions of Derrida's work by historians. I undertake these qualifications later in this chapter.

In addition to the above, there have been some major interventions into historical theory/historiography that have been associated with Derrida's work by commentators in the field. However, in relation to *some* of them, Derrida has asserted how the associations that have been made with his work are a product of misconstruing deconstruction as being 'inscribed in the ''linguistic turn'' when it

[22] Derrida declared that he found the term 'Postmodernism' 'foreign' to him (Malabou and Derrida 2004, 95) regarding it as imperative not to renounce a certain 'spirit' of the Enlightenment (Derrida 1994, 88) as well as desiring a new 'Enlightenment of our time' (Derrida 1995b, 428). See also the remarks made by John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon in their edited collection *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*: 'Derrida would describe himself not as a postmodern, but as a man of the Enlightenment, albeit of a *new* Enlightenment, one that is enlightened about the Enlightenment and resists letting the spirit of the Enlightenment freeze over into dogma.' (Caputo and Scanlon 1999, 2)

was in fact a protest against linguistics!' (Derrida and Ferraris 2001, 76) According to Derrida, such misconstruals gave rise to misunderstandings regarding his work in various disciplines, including history:

> There are some historians, epistemologists of history (Clifford Geertz, Hayden White, etc.), who have attempted to apply the linguistic turn[23] to history. And their work has been placed in the same camp as mine – quite wrongly, in my opinion. Though it may well be true that I have more of an affinity with them than with more classical historians. (Derrida and Ferraris 2001, 76)

Elsewhere Derrida has offered certain hints as to the specifics of this relative affinity with 'epistemologists' of history such as White (who once described Derrida as an 'Absurdist critic'[24]), an affinity that can be read in part as a sympathetic response regarding the widespread misunderstandings and hostile reactions to their work:

---

[23] François Cusset (Cusset 2008) describes the engagement (and, in the majority of cases, resistance) of the (American) academic history profession with 'the linguistic turn' in his survey of the impact of that construct known as 'French Theory' on the United States. Cusset (2008, 94) has it that the linguistic turn led (those working in the field of) the history of ideas 'to question its own methods and the status of the texts whose emergence it recounts, and to re-examine itself *in the mirror of* French theory'. He goes on to explain how, more broadly, 'the epistemological crisis that history had been undergoing since the end of the 1960s led to a more or less salutary phase of self-reflection, because, although conservative historiography refused the debate, a number of reputable voices were raised in the opposite direction – Hayden White, for example, who called for an ''opening'' of historical approaches, and Peter Novick, who directly posed the question of ''objectivity'' in history.' Cusset argues that 'the limits of such a dialogue between history and literary postructuralism involve, precisely, the status of texts. For, at a time when the literary theoreticians were reducing history to a distant (and ideologically suspect) context in their field, the historians would have little to do with the equivocalities or the unsaid of the text, or with the misreading to which it would give rise – concerned above all with replacing documents that were no longer considered trustworthy with others that were. Moreover, to interrogate the two disciplines in the same terms amounts to assuming a certain *continuity* between texts and historical facts.' To make the point that 'such a continuity could hardly be taken for granted', Cusset cites the work of the historian Lynn Hunt on how accepting such continuity has often led to 'simplistic causalities' (Cusset 2008, 94). In my view this is an under-theorised moot point.

[24] In the essay 'The Absurdist Moment in Contemporary Literary Theory' (first published in 1976) White, whose brilliant work has had a huge impact on historiography/historical theory and the history profession over the last forty years, described Derrida (together with Foucault and Barthes) as an 'Absurdist critic' (White 1978, 262). White put it thus: 'For many – though by no means all or even a majority of – modern critics, since everything is potentially interpretable as language, then everything is potentially interpretable as literature; or, if language is regarded as merely a special case of the more comprehensive field of semiotics, nothing is interpretable as a specifically ''literary'' phenomenon, ''literature'' as such does not exist, and the potential task of *modern* literary criticism (if the point is taken to the end of the line) is to preside over its own dissolution. The position is manifestly Absurd, for the critics who hold this view not only *continue to write* about the virtues of silence, but do so at interminable length and *alta voce*. In the thought of Bataille, Blanchot, Foucault, and Jacques Derrida, we witness the rise of a movement in literary criticism which raises the critical question only to take a grim satisfaction in the contemplation of the impossibility of ever resolving it or, at the extreme limit of thought, even of asking it. Literature is reduced to writing, writing to language, and language, in a final paroxysm of frustration, to chatter about silence.' (White 1978, 262) White asserts that '[w]hen the Absurdist critic – Foucault, Barthes, Derrida – comments on a literary artifact, it is always in the interest of making a *meta*critical point' and proceeds to ask 'Why should the cultural historian take Absurdist criticism seriously?' (White

> [I]f you don't take into account, or pay attention to the possibility of a serious historical narrative signed by a historian being a lie, a fiction or a perjury, then you miss the reference. You miss the real things. The real may be a lie. If historians were simply relying upon historical sources we could not say their work was in any way critical, but when a historian or historiographer does pay attention to fiction – let's take the case of Hayden White, for instance – immediately people get angry and, not trying to understand, charge him with saying 'everything goes, history is fiction.' Look at Carlo Ginzburg who got mad because a historian was simply paying attention to the fact that, in historical discourse, serious historical discourse, there was rhetoric, there were tropes and sometimes fictions. (Derrida 2003b, 27-28)

All of this, I think, impacts history at the level of both its upper (metanarrative) and lower (professional, academic) case forms as defined here by Keith Jenkins:

> By 'upper case history' I mean the consideration of the past in terms that assign objective significance to what are actually contingent events. It does this by identifying their place and function within a general schema of development; the past is used to advance a specific point of view. Examples are the more orthodox forms of Marxism or Whig progressive theories of history. By 'lower case history' I mean the 'disinterested' study of the past for its own sake, on its own terms, as objectively, impartially and thus as 'academically' as possible. This kind normally regards itself unproblematically as 'proper' history and thus as being non-ideological and non-positioned. But I take lower case history to be just as ideological and positioned/positioning as any other: history is always for someone.[25] (Jenkins 1999, 1-2)

1978, 262) For White, part of the answer to this question is as follows: 'Absurdist criticism brings the status of the text, textuality itself, under question. In doing so, it locates a stress point of conventional criticism and exposes an unacknowledged assumption of all previous forms of criticism, the assumption of the transparency of the text, the assumption that, with enough learning and cleverness, the text can be seen through to the ''meaning'' (more or less ambiguous) that lies below its surface texture...For the Absurdist critic, the notion of the text becomes an all-inclusive category of the interpretive enterprise; that or else the text is conceived to exist nowhere at all, to disappear in the flux of language, the play of signs.' (White 1978, 263) In a more recent interview with Ewa Domańska, White emphasizes that in calling Derrida 'an absurdist critic' he meant that 'he was a philosopher of the absurd. I did not mean that he was absurd...I was using an existentialist term, *absurdism*. And I characterized him as the philosopher of paradox, or of the absurd. But people thought that I meant that I was hostile to him, but I did not see it that way...I see Derrida as the philosopher who finally shows us how to analyze all of the kinds of binary oppositions that we take for granted in the conceptualization of relationships. And I think that is his principal function.' (Domańska 1998, 32-33)

[25] Here, I think Jenkins is seeking to affirm and remind the history profession, as well as cultural and political critics who appeal to history, of Claude Lévi-Strauss's formulation that 'History is therefore never history, but history-for.' (Lévi-Strauss 1966, 257)

Both types/levels of history can, I think, be found within academic history departments, and Derrida's radical critique problematicises them both.[26]

Section Three: The unfairness of (the judgement of) 'the rejection of history'

Robert Young has discussed an area of debate that needs attending to at this point concerning the possible 'end' of history. One way of accessing this area is *via* Derrida's 'insistence that history is a metaphysical concept according to which the meaning of history always amounts to the history of meaning.' (Young 2004, 100) History, in both its upper and lower case forms, cannot be exempted from the logocentric as it is exemplified in the uses and abuses of the historical culture that it sustains. As Young puts it:

> The Derridean critique of logocentrism necessarily includes the concept of history insofar as it depends on notions of presence and meaning determined as truth. For all its frequent invocation as the 'concrete', history must by definition entail a problematic represencing of an absence; Derrida therefore argues that, even in its 'materialist' conceptualization, it cannot avoid a certain metaphysics. (Young 2004, 100)

Yet as I have already emphasized and will continue to do so throughout this chapter, Derrida's critique of a metaphysical concept of history should *not* be taken to

[26] Derrida's radical critique also problematicises two conventional understandings of two terms sometimes associated with upper and lower case history: *historicity* and *historicism*. In this footnote I provide conventional definitions of these two terms. In an essay focusing on Derrida's engagement with history in his early writings, Peter Fenves explains the idea of *historicity* (that which conditions/possibilises history) as follows: '[T]he historicity of something is whatever makes it historical – in both senses of the term: dated (even if the precise date can never be determined) and capable of entering into public memory (even if it is only the most rudimentary calendar).' (Fenves 2001, 272) Such an understanding of historicity will be borne in mind in this chapter but only with a view to explicating Derrida's reading/proposal of a more radical, im-possible condition of/for history (something of which Fenves is well aware). The historical theorist Frank Ankersmit, in the course of a helpful 'terminological clarification' of historism and historicism, quotes Maurice Mandlebaum's definition of *historicism*, a definition that I work with throughout this chapter: 'Historicism is the belief that an adequate understanding of the nature of any phenomenon and an adequate assessment of its value are to be gained through considering it in terms of the place which it occupied and the role which it played within a process of development.' (Ankersmit 1996, 375) Of course, historicism can be understood in many different ways that need not be limited to (and in some cases exceed) Mandlebaum's definition, and any discussion of the extent to which Derrida is or isn't a historicist needs to take this into account. For example, historicism can also designate a belief in the ability to discover an inner meaning in, or essence of, the historical process with an attendant extrapolation of metaphysical or onto-theological conclusions. Other historicist theories privilege a mythical origin or event that negates everything that follows, thus constituting a desire to disrupt or go beyond history. In one sense, then, Derrida's 'some other concept of history' can be understood as a call marked by the rejection of what are actually covert metaphysical conceptions of historical (re)presentation and which questions history *tout court*.

constitute a wholesale rejection of history *per se*. As Geoffrey Bennington has commented:

> [I]t would not be difficult to construct an argument showing that deconstruction, insofar as it insists on the necessary non-coincidence of the present with itself, is in fact in some senses the most historical of discourses imaginable. (Bennington 1987, 17)

Deconstruction – and the messianic historical theory that I am developing and defending here as the analysis of (or dwelling on) its work within historical discourse specifically – thus constitutes a challenge in the name (and as the condition of) of 'some other concept of history' and not necessarily – 'perhaps' – its abandonment/end. In a similar vein, Young has argued as follows:

> It is only through difference, by which the same becomes other and produces a tissue of differences, that history could ever take place: for if full presence were possible, then there would be no difference, and therefore no time, space - or history. *Différance* means precisely that you can never get out of – and therefore have no need to get back to – history. It also means that if difference in its sense of non-identity sets up the possibility of history, then difference in its sense of delay means also that it can never be finally concluded, for such deferral will always inhibit closure. It is in this sense that Derrida argues that Husserl's *Origin of Geometry* sets up 'the possibility of history as the possibility of language' whereby 'difference would be transcendental': writing, in the general significance which Derrida gives it of a differential marking, must be the condition of any historicity.
>
> 'History as *différance*' then means that history will itself always be subject to the operations of *différance*, and that *différance* names the form of its historicity. The same conditions hold for totalization. Derrida argues that though history is given the form of a totality by Hegel, his *Aufhebung* shows that in order to achieve that totality it must constantly transcend itself in a movement of excess.[27] (Young 2004, 101-102)

The determinate oscillation between the possibilities for 'history' that can be identified in Derrida's texts are on display in these passages. On the one hand we

[27] By way of supporting/illustrating the points made in the latter paragraph of this quote Young immediately goes on to cite a passage from Derrida's essay 'Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas' (in Derrida 2001b) which I reproduce here at slightly greater length: '*Within history* which the philosopher cannot escape, because it is not history in the sense given to it by Levinas (totality), but is the history of the departures from totality, history as the very movement of transcendence, of the excess over the totality without which no totality would appear as such. History is not the totality transcended by eschatology, metaphysics, or speech. It is transcendence itself.' (Derrida 2001b, 146)

have the insistence that history is a metaphysical concept and cannot avoid certain metaphysical movements/operations (a problematical represencing of an absence) *and*, on the other hand, that deconstruction is historical in some other, non-conventional sense (with 'its' insistence on the necessary non-coincidence of the present with itself; through difference the same becoming other thus permitting history to take place; difference in its sense of non-identity *both* setting up the possibility of history *and* in its sense of delay preventing its final conclusion, given that deferral always inhibits closure, and so on). It is in this latter sense of 'some other concept of history' that Derrida invites us to think of history/historical (re)presentation as subject to the operation of *différance* (an endless play of differing and deferring) and conceive of *différance* naming the form of its historicity (that which conditions it). Here, then, we have messianic historical theory passing under other names, although it should also be pointed out that at least one historical theorist – Keith Jenkins – has attempted to re-formulate (or nuance) this 'history as *différance*' argument, by stressing the distinction between 'time' and 'history' so as to emphasize the all too seldom considered *contingency* of this word/concept 'history' that he thinks we can and should get out of/escape; that history is 'ending'.[28]

[28] Jenkins' argument, *contra* Young, is as follows: 'Young doesn't make – or doesn't work so much – the distinction I want to stress myself, between time and history, and the possibility of thinking the end of history aided by Derrida. For Young makes the point – which might seem to critique and subvert my own argument and use of Derrida – that, for Derrida, history *cannot* end because *différance* cannot end...

Now, as I say, I wish to stress the difference, in Derrida, between *différance* as interminable ''writing'' and the concept of history. My position is simply this. The operation of *différance* does indeed mean that ''meaning'' (''the meaning of history'') will never be known and that we cannot come to the end of something (history) we cannot ever finally ''define'' (i.e. transform into a transcendental signifier). In *that* sense, *différance* cannot end and history cannot end because they have been made *equivalent*. But Derrida makes the point...that any particular conceptualisation/organisation of *différance* which does not claim to have found the meaning of history can – and indeed *must* – be ended; this includes, for example, history in any logocentric, metaphysical format attempting a meaning-full closure (Hegelianisms; Hegelianized Marxism's, etc.). Here I agree with Derrida – that sort of history is now clearly an untenable kind; my argument is that, in addition, ''historicising'' discourses with epistemological and ontological ambitions (to know – or aim to try and know – ''the truth(s) of the past'') are also untenable; I mean by this ''certaintist''/modernist histories in the lower case.

And I think that the condition of postmodernity (a condition of which deconstructionism is an element) is thus the condition of the possibility of the end of the concept of history in both these modernist ''cases'' and, maybe, the possibility of the concept of history *per se* too. Thus, in this text, the argument is that time – ways of expressing temporalities – will continue without end, will continue interminably because of the actuality of *différance*, but that the peculiar and particular ways we have expressed time ''historically'' need not. The concept of time and the concept of history, are *not* necessarily connected or logically entailed, but are simply contingent phenomena; consequently, time remains to be thought of in all its differences forever, but this possibility of endlessly organizing time ''contingently'' need not include in its organizational permutations ''history'' – and certainly not ''history as we have known it''.

Elsewhere, Bennington (1993) has also helpfully clarified, *via* reference to Derrida's famous debate with Foucault over a reading of Descartes' *Meditations,* one sense in which deconstruction can be conceived of as a radicalized historical discourse (in the name of some other concept of history that is the predication of an im-possible historicity):

> The 'historian's' objection to Derrida, whose refutation we announced earlier, must invoke a necessity or obligation to put things (back) in their context in order to understand them, and the exchange between Derrida and Foucault around Descartes hangs in part on this question. Faced with such a demand, the point is not at all to claim the liberty to read out of context, which would be meaningless (one always reads in one or several contexts), but to interrogate the coherence of the concept of context deployed in this way. (Bennington 1993, 85)

However, this radically (meta)historicist point and the imperative to interrogate what it means to be a 'better' historian and/or historicist in the name of some other concept of history/historicism has not always been understood. Indeed, the notion is frequently lost, resulting in Derrida being perceived by some as *a*historical when, as Peter Fenves reminds us, the adjective *an-historical*, which he (Derrida) used, is more appropriate.[29] This widespread perception is identified by Claire Colebrook in her introduction to a collection titled *Deleuze and History* where she neatly summarizes some of the more common misreadings of Derrida's work by historians when she writes as follows:

> It was perhaps Jacques Derrida's deconstruction that has been most responsible for the perception that post-'68 French thought was a form of anti-historicism, idealism, textualism or overly individualist attention to events. (Colebrook 2009, 4)

Thus I have used Derrida here to support my argument for the interminability of temporal (and spatial) conceptualisations on the basis of *différance*, and for the desirability of ending modernist (and other) historicisations of time that would effect a definitive, meaningful closure. It is an argument for the desirability – perhaps made possible by postmodernity – of ''living in time but outside history'' ' (Jenkins 1999, 212-214*n*15).

[29] In a footnote to his essay 'Derrida and history: some questions Derrida pursues in his early writings' Peter Fenves notes that 'Instead of using the term *ahistorical*, which would suggest an eternal immunity from history, Derrida generally uses the adjective *an-historical* ['*an-historique*'], which implies a certain neutrality with respect to the distinction between the historical and the nonhistorical. Not all of Derrida's translators have respected this distinction.' (Fenves 2001, 293*n*20)

However, as Colebrook goes on to point out, Derrida's earliest work – his dissertation on Husserl written in 1953-54 for his diploma of advanced studies/'diplôme d'études supérieures' (Derrida 2003e) – began by focusing on the importance of *genesis* as 'the basic problem of phenomenology' (Lawlor 2002, 21) in terms that were distinctly un-*a*historical.[30] Colebrook explains Derrida's emphasis on and exploration of genesis (the history/histories of structures – see Megill 1987, 278) as an attempt at 'countering any structuralist forms of historicism that would simply place one cultural paradigm after another' by insisting that

> a truly responsible mode of thinking would have to account for the emergence of various historical totalities *and* their relation to truth, which could not be reduced to an infra-historical determination. (Colebrook 2009, 4)

What Derrida sought to do through this (metahistorical) emphasis was therefore to problematicize – precisely because of its importance – Husserl's work on the 'necessity of giving an account of the genesis of formal structures, such as language and logic' by highlighting/foregrounding 'those anarchic or untamed forces that disrupt any meaningful structure.' (Colebrook 2009, 4) Here Derrida can be understood as focussing on, and radicalizing, the paradox(es) and *aporia(s)* of genesis and origins of the world. In his various explorations of the idea that 'the origin of the world is and must be non-mundane and non-existent' since, if not, 'it would not be transcendental, it would not be an origin' (Lawlor 2002, 21[31]), Leonard Lawlor suggests that Derrida argues (in his introduction to Husserl's *Origin of*

[30] See, for example, Derrida's *The Problem of Genesis in Husserl's Philosophy* (Derrida 2003e, *xvii-xviii*) where he argues that: 'Running throughout this work, there will be two sets of problems that will continually mix with and imply each other. Were these to be susceptible of distinct definitions that could be strictly placed side by side, we would have to speak here of a "historical" set of problems and of a set of problems that is "speculative" or philosophical in a very wide sense. *But from the start we must say that we shall finish by adopting a philosophy of genesis which precisely denies the possibility of such a distinction; both through its conventions and its method, this philosophy will reveal to us [what are] the radical implications of this essential inseparability of these two worlds of meanings: history of philosophy and philosophy of history*.' (Derrida 2003e, *xvii*, italics mine)

[31] Lawlor is here summarising the claims of Husserl scholar Eugen Fink (writing in the 1930s and 'the only Husserl commentator that Derrida either cites or explicitly mentions in all three of his books on Husserl' – see Lawlor 2002, 11).

Geometry[32] [Derrida 1989a] in the context of reflecting on the concept of evidence, as well as in *Speech and Phenomena* [Derrida 1973] in a discussion of the concept of evidence) that:

> [O]n the one hand…such an origin must not only be determined as non-mundane and non-existence, but must also be determined as non-present and non-sense. An intuition, Derrida realizes, is always a finite intuition; evidence is always given in person. This intuition is always mundane, with the result being that an origin cannot be determined by presence and sense. To use language Derrida will adopt from Levinas, the origin is wholly other. On the other hand, the non-presence of the wholly other does not mean that it can never appear. The origin can and must be given *as* something. It can never and must never appear as such and yet it must appear as something in the world. It is this 'must' which unites transcendental and mundane, other and same, essence and fact, non-presence and presence; it is this necessity that constitutes the paradox of genesis. The necessity of never appearing as such and yet appearing as something, in a specific experience, defines what Derrida in *Voice and Phenomenon* calls 'différance' (or contamination). It is what Derrida implies when he says in the *Introduction to Husserl's* '*The Origin of Geometry*', 'the Absolute is Passage'[33] [Derrida 1978, 149]. This absolute passage between transcendental and mundane, etc., means that the origin is not really an origin in the sense of an absolute beginning – it is not an *arche* – and that the end, *la fin*, is never an absolute end – it is not a *telos*. The paradox for Derrida, is in-finite.' (Lawlor 2002, 21-22)

Colebrook complements Lawlor's account with her explanation of the way in which the 'untamed forces' described by Derrida problematicize any exploration into the origin/genesis of any 'meaningful structure' (Colebrook 2009, 4):

> Notoriously, Derrida would refer to such forces as '*écriture*', 'trace' or '*différance*': in order for an experienced sense to be transmitted through time it must be inscribed in some manner of formal system – ranging from a repeatable gesture to linguistic signifiers. But this would mean that any experience of the present would never be in full command of itself, for in order to live or experience a 'now' as this identifiable now I must have already marked or determined it in some way, anticipated its carrying-over into the future. Husserl

[32] The historian Alan Megill has it that 'the first of Derrida's writings to appear in print, his long introduction to Husserl's essay ''The Origin of Geometry''...deals with the problem of how history is to be understood phenomenologically.' (Megill 1987, 278)

[33] '*If there is any history*, then historicity can be only the passage of Speech [*Parole*], the pure tradition of a primordial Logos toward a polar Telos. But since there can be nothing outside the pure historicity of that passage, since there is no Being which has sense outside of this historicity or escapes its infinite horizon, since the Logos and the Telos *are* nothing outside the *interplay* (*Wechselspiel*) of their reciprocal inspiration, this signifies then that the *Absolute is Passage*.' (Derrida 1989a, 149)

> had already insisted that the lived present was composed of retentions and protentions; experience is always, in part, a retaining of what has been and a projection of what will come. Derrida radicalises this manoeuvre by arguing that this process is not consciousness' own in the narrow sense we would require something like writing or signs in order for consciousness to mark out a relation or series of times. (Colebrook 2009, 4)

Having now provided an initial response to what I consider to be the unfair charge of 'the rejection of history' made against Derrida (although, as I shall discuss in the next section, Derrida is not without considerable reservations concerning this word 'history'), I now want to turn to his more specific and explicit challenge to (or 'radical deconstructive critique' of) teleological history (and histories) – that is, a deconstruction of the history (and histories) of meaning but not a rejection of history *per se* – and consider this alongside, indeed as part of, his affirmatory call for 'some other concept of history'.

Section Four: Some other concept of history I: systematizing a deconstructive 'critique'[34] against the history of meaning

[34] In foregrounding the word 'critique' here in my section heading I wish to avoid giving the impression that I regard deconstruction as some variant on, or mutation of, a Marxist or Freudian critique of ideology. Rather, I follow Derrida's desire, expressed in the text *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* (Derrida 1994) which is discussed in detail in Chapter Two, to 'keep faith' with 'a *radical* critique, namely a procedure ready to undertake its self-critique. This critique *wants itself* to be in principle and explicitly open to its own transformation, re-evaluation, self-reinterpretation. Such a critical ''wanting-itself'' necessarily takes root, it is involved in a ground that is not yet critical, even if it is not, not yet, pre-critical. This latter spirit is more than a style, even though it is also a style. It is heir to a spirit of the Enlightenment which must not be renounced...deconstruction is not, in the last analysis, a methodical or theoretical procedure. In its possibility as in the experience of the impossible that will always have constituted it, it is never a stranger to the event, that is, very simply, to the coming of that which happens.' (Derrida 1994, 88-89) He goes on, in relation to a discussion of Marxism, to associate deconstruction with the work of distinguishing spirits which is, in turn, associated with critique, the critical idea or questioning stance and 'a certain emancipatory and *messianic* affirmation' as follows: 'For this apparently chemical analysis that will isolate in sum the spirit of Marxism to which one ought to remain faithful by dissociating if from all the other spirits – and one will observe perhaps with a smile that the latter include almost everything – our guiding thread...will be precisely the question of the ghost.

To critique, to call for interminable self-critique is still to distinguish between everything and almost everything. Now, if there is a spirit of Marxism which I will never be ready to renounce, it is not only the critical idea or the questioning stance (a consistent deconstruction must insist on them even as it also learns that this is not the last or first word). It is even more a certain emancipatory and *messianic* affirmation, a certain experience of the promise that one can try to liberate from any dogmatics and even from any metaphysico-religious determination, from any *messianism*. And a promise must promise to be kept, that is, not to remain ''spiritual'' or ''abstract'', but to produce events, new effective forms of action, practice, organization, and so forth.' (Derrida 1994, 88-89) Bernard Stiegler has argued that '[i]n my own view, deconstruction remains a critique, and it is as such that it remains invaluable.' (Stiegler 2010, 15) However, given Derrida's comments that I have just cited in this footnote, it is difficult to completely agree with Stiegler when he goes on to write the following: 'I would say that, in a way,

Keith Jenkins has commented that in his published writings Derrida appears to have paid 'little direct attention' to the *academic* discipline of history, 'although he did discuss it briefly in, for example, *Positions*.' (Jenkins and Munslow 2004, 224) I want to consider this discussion of history in *Positions* (Derrida 1981b) in some detail, specifically some comments made by Derrida in the course of an interview from 1971 with Jean-Louis Houdebine and Guy Scarpetta. Here Derrida – in response to criticisms made of his work by Christine Glucksmann during a colloquium (on the relationship between 'Literature and Ideologies') at Cluny in 1970 where she charges him with conceiving history that is 'too linearly as the history of meaning'[35] (Derrida 1981b, 49) – makes the following statement:

> [F]rom the first texts I published, I have attempted to systematize a deconstructive critique precisely against the authority of meaning, as the *transcendental signified* or as *telos*, in other words history determined in the last analysis as the history of meaning, history in its logocentric, metaphysical, idealist (I will come back to these words in a moment) representation. (Derrida 1981b, 49-50)

Derrida is adamant that this 'position' is 'legible on every page' of his work to the extent that he finds it difficult 'to see how a concept of history as the ''history of meaning'' can be attributed to me.' (Derrida 1981b, 50) He goes on to suggest that such a misunderstanding is the result of being

> constituted as the proprietor of what I [actually] analyze, to wit, a metaphysical concept of history as ideal, teleological history, etc. (Derrida 1981b, 50)

Seemingly by contrast, another objection raised (again at the Cluny colloquium) in relation to his work is that of the 'rejection of history' (Derrida 1981b, 51). Yet, as

---

deconstruction failed to critique its critique of critique, failed, that is, to critique the claim that the form taken by critique has historically been metaphysical. In other words, it has not clarified what a critique might be *were it no longer founded on a system of oppositions*.' (Stiegler 2010, 15) Stiegler may, perhaps, be understood here as 'running' an argument similar to that put forward by John Caputo – to be discussed in detail in Chapter Two and the Conclusion – who reads deconstruction as one more 'concrete messianism' that reflects 'the concrete deployment of deconstructive style in concrete circumstances by Derrida and others.' (Caputo 2012a, 321)

[35] Derrida outlines Glucksmann's criticisms during the course of the interview, quoting from the Colloquium acts: 'I come now to Christine Glucksmann's nuanced reservations: ''history conceived too linearly as the history of meaning'', ''a conception of a latent history...that seems to underestimate, if not to erase, the struggle between materialism and idealism...''. ' (Derrida 1981b, 49)

becomes apparent later in the interview when Derrida responds to another question, such an objection (as we have already noted in the last section) is unjustified. Scarpetta (in *Positions*), quoting from *Of Grammatology*, reminds Derrida that he wrote that 'The word ''history'' doubtless has always been associated with the linear consecution of presence', and he then asks him whether he can 'conceive of the possibility of a concept of history that would escape this linear scheme?', a concept of history that is 'neither a monistic nor a historicist history?' (Derrida 1981b, 56) Derrida replies in the affirmative but, again, stresses his wariness of

> the metaphysical concept of history…the concept of history as the history of meaning…the history of meaning developing itself, producing itself, fulfilling itself. And doing so linearly...in a straight or circular line. (Derrida 1981b, 56)

Derrida emphasizes that the 'metaphysical character of the concept of history', about which he has 'many reservations', is linked (as well as to linearity) with 'an entire *system* of implications', including

> teleology, eschatology, elevating and interiorizing accumulation of meaning, a certain type of traditionality, a certain concept of continuity, of truth etc. (Derrida 1981b, 57)

Consequently, by the force of this 'system of predicates' the concept of history 'can always be reappropriated by metaphysics.' (Derrida 1981b, 57) And yet, because Derrida thinks that no concept 'is by itself' and, therefore, 'in and of itself, metaphysical, outside all the textual work in which it is inscribed'[36], he continues to use – despite his many reservations about its metaphysical conceptualisation (as he puts it elsewhere – in the 1968 address and subsequently published essay 'Différance' – 'history...in and of itself' conveying 'the motif of a final repression of difference' [Derrida 1982a, 11]) – the word 'history' so as to 'reinscribe its force'[37]

[36] See Derrida 1982a, 11: '[T]he signified concept is never present in and of itself, in a sufficient presence that would refer only to itself. Essentially and lawfully, every concept is inscribed in a chain or in a system within which it refers to the other, to other concepts, by means of the systematic play of differences. Such a play, *différance*, is thus no longer simply a concept, but rather the possibility of conceptuality, of a conceptual process and system in general.'

[37] At this point in *Positions* (immediately following the phrase 'reinscribe its force') Derrida inserts an endnote in which he directs us to the following passage from the text 'Différance' (Derrida 1982a, 1-27), a passage that helpfully elucidates his reservations about the word 'history' as well as the contingency,

and ‘in order to produce another concept or conceptual claim of ‘‘history’’ ’ (Derrida 1981b, 57). Such an alternative concept/conceptual claim of history is, as he goes on to describe, ‘in effect a ‘‘monumental, stratified, contradictory’’ history’ (Derrida 1981b, 57). There is thus a continuity between the Derrida of 1971 and of 2001: the desire to develop ‘some other concept of history’, a conceptualisation of history that implies ‘a new logic of *repetition* and the *trace*’ given that ‘it is difficult to see how there could be history without it.’ (Derrida 1981b, 57) In formulating this other concept of history Derrida regards it as imperative to ‘distinguish between history in general and the general concept of history’ (Derrida 1981b, 57) and to this end enlists Althusser’s critique – one to which he has ‘always’ subscribed – of the Hegelian concept of history[38] (‘and of the notion of an expressive totality’ [Derrida 1981b, 58]), which

---

which is a matter of ‘strategic convenience’, of Derrida’s utilisation of it in relation to his designation of *différance*: ‘If the word ‘‘history’’ did not in and of itself convey the motif of a final repression of difference, one could say that only differences can be ‘‘historical’’ from the outset and in each of their aspects.

What is written as *différance*, then, will be the playing movement that ‘‘produces’’ – by means of something that is not simply an activity – these differences, these effects of difference. This does not mean that the *différance* that produces differences is somehow before them, in a simple and unmodified – in-different – present. *Différance* is the non-full, non-simple, structured and differentiating origin of differences. Thus, the name ‘‘origin’’ no longer suits it.

Since language, which Saussure says is a classification, has not fallen from the sky, its differences have been produced, are produced effects, but they are effects which do not find their cause in a subject or a substance, in a thing in general, a being that is somewhere present, thereby eluding the play of *différance*. If such a presence were implied in the concept of cause in general, in the most classical fashion, we then would have to speak of an effect without a cause, which very quickly would lead to speaking of no effect at all. I have attempted to indicate a way out of the closure of this framework via the ‘‘trace’’, which is no more an effect than it has a cause, but which in and of itself, outside its text, is not sufficient to operate the necessary transgression...

Retaining at least the framework, if not the content, of this requirement formulated by Saussure, we will designate as *différance* the movement according to which language, or any code, any system of referral in general, is constituted ‘‘historically’’ as a weave [or ‘tissue’] of differences. ‘‘Is constituted’’, ‘‘is produced’’, ‘‘is created’’, ‘‘movement’’, ‘‘historically’’, etc., necessarily being understood beyond the metaphysical language in which they are retained, along with all their implications. We ought to demonstrate why concepts like *production*, constitution, and history remain in complicity with what is at issue here. But this would take me too far today – toward the theory of the representation of the ‘‘circle’’ in which we appear to be enclosed – and I utilize such concepts, like many others, only for their strategic convenience and in order to undertake their deconstruction at the currently most decisive point.’ (Derrida 1982a, 11-12) From this I draw the conclusion that there is nothing ‘essentially’/in any way historical about *différance* that commits anyone to continue to use the word ‘history’ in relation to it (or, for that matter, in relation to anything else).

[38] Christopher Norris argues that Derrida’s tactic to avoid the Hegelian concept of history is as follows: ‘[T]he only adequate precaution against such Hegelian lures is a reading of history that steadfastly resists the temptation to interpret past and present events in accordance with a logic (no matter how avowedly ‘‘materialist’’ or ‘‘dialectical’’) which subsumes those events under some preordained conceptual scheme of things. Thus [quoting from Derrida 1981b, 59] ‘‘[w]hat I call *text* is also that which ‘practically’ inscribes and overflows the limits of such [a] discourse’’.’ (Norris 2002, *xiii*)

> aims at showing that there is not one single history, a general history, but rather histories different in their type, rhythm, mode of inscription – intervallic, differentiated histories. (Derrida 1981b, 57-58)

Yet this emphasis on multiple histories (i.e., a multiplicity/plurality of historical representations) raises further questions that Derrida goes on to formulate and consider:

> On the basis of what minimal *semantic kernel* [here we return to the comments made by Wolfreys cited at the beginning of this chapter] will these heterogeneous, irreducible histories still be named 'histories'? How can the minimum that they have in common be determined if the common noun history is to be conferred in a way that is not purely conventional or purely confused? (Derrida 1981b, 58)

Such dilemmas reintroduce 'the question of the system of essential predicates' (teleology, traditionality, continuity etc.), the issue here being not to simply capitulate to the ineluctability of 'metaphysical reappropriation' – which takes place rapidly and as soon as we ask the 'question of the concept and of meaning, or of the essentiality that necessarily regulates the risk' (Derrida 1981b, 58) – in an 'unreflexive' way:

> As soon as the question of the historicity of history is asked – and how can it be avoided if one is manipulating a plural or heterogeneous concept of history? – one is impelled to respond with a definition of essence, of quidity, to reconstitute a system of essential predicates, and one is also led to refurbish the semantic grounds of the philosophical tradition. A philosophical tradition that always, finally, amounts to an inclusion of historicity on an ontological ground, precisely. (Derrida 1981b, 58-59)

The inevitability of this metaphysical reappropriation can and should – indeed, *must* – be problematicized by asking about not only the 'essence' of history (i.e., 'the historicity of history') but also 'the ''history'' of ''essence'' in general'; any attempt to 'mark a break between some ''new concept of history'' ' and these questions (including 'the history of the meaning of Being') should appreciate that exploring such issues is 'a measure of the work which remains to be done' (Derrida 1981b, 59) in relation to such an aspiration. However, Derrida goes on to point out that despite this problematicization it is not just a case of subjecting the concept of history to a

‘simple and instantaneous mutation, the striking of a name from the vocabulary.’ (Derrida 1981b, 59) Rather than rejecting the metaphysical name/concept of history in favour, perhaps, of some form of, say, ‘temporal studies’, Derrida can be read as wanting to incrementally *transform* it. In the context of making some remarks about the concept of the sign (and semiology), remarks which I think also apply to the concept of history, he described this incremental process as follows:

> It is not a question of junking these concepts, nor do we have the means to do so. Doubtless it is more necessary…to transform concepts, to displace them, to turn them against their presuppositions, to reinscribe them in other chains, and little by little to modify the terrain of our work and thereby produce new configurations; I do not believe in decisive ruptures, in an unequivocal ‘epistemological break’, as it is called today. Breaks are always, and fatally, reinscribed in an old cloth that must continually, interminably be undone. This interminability is not an accident or contingency; it is essential, systematic, and theoretical. And this in no way minimizes the necessity and relative importance of certain breaks, of the appearance and definition of new structures... (Derrida 1981b, 24)

Later in *Positions* he describes how this subversive approach involves elaborating ‘a strategy of the textual work which at every instant borrows an old word from philosophy in order immediately to demarcate it.’ (Derrida 1981b, 59) Such ‘textual work’ involves ‘a double gesture or double stratification’ and involves *overturning* ‘the traditional concept of history’ at the same time as marking ‘the *interval*’, taking care that ‘by virtue of the overturning’ as well as ‘by the simple fact of conceptualization, that the interval not be *reappropriated*.’ (Derrida 1981b, 59) This work is crucial to developing a new concept of anything, including history, as it explicitly takes into account ‘the fact that conceptualization itself, and by itself alone, can reintroduce what one wants to ‘‘criticize’’ ’ (Derrida 1981b, 59); that is, the metaphysical concept of history. This is why textual work ‘cannot be purely ‘‘theoretical’’ or ‘‘conceptual’’ or ‘‘discursive” ’ (Derrida 1981b, 59), by which Derrida means that it cannot be ‘the work of a discourse entirely regulated by essence, meaning, truth, consciousness, ideality, etc.’ (Derrida 1981b, 59) What Derrida calls ‘*text*’ – ‘that which ‘‘practically’’ inscribes and overflows the limits of such a discourse’ (Derrida 1981b, 59) – or ‘general text’ (‘not limited…to writings on the page’ – Derrida 1981b, 60) is asserted and worked up by Derrida as follows:

> *There is* such a general text everywhere that (that is, everywhere) this discourse and its order (essence, sense, truth, meaning, consciousness, ideality, etc.) are *overflowed*, that is, everywhere that their authority is put back into the position of a *mark* in a chain that this authority intrinsically and illusorily believes it wishes to, and does in fact govern. This general text is not limited, of course, as will (or would) be quickly understood, to writings on the page. The writing of this text, moreover, has the exterior limit only of a certain *re-mark*. Writing on the page, and then 'literature', are determined types of this re-mark. They must be investigated in their specificity, and in a new way, if you will, in the specificity of their 'history', and in their articulation with the other 'historical' fields of the text in general. (Derrida 1981b, 59-60)

Having developed his response thus, Derrida confirms – but way of concluding – that it explains why he 'so often' uses the word 'history' but does so with 'quotation marks and precautions', measures that 'may have led to the attribution to me of...a ''rejection of history''.' (Derrida 1981b, 60)

Now, this is not the place for a *detailed* discussion of 'general text' as 'a limitless network of differentially ordered signs', a network that 'is not preceded by any meaning, structure, or *eidos*, but itself constitutes each of these.' (Critchley 1999, 38) But what I want to emphasize – drawing briefly on Simon Critchley's work – is that it is 'upon the surface of the general text, that there ''is'' deconstruction…that deconstruction takes place.' (Critchley 1999, 38) Here the deconstruction of the metaphysical concept of history occurs; the general text unsettles the 'pretensions to authority and autonomy' of this concept and 'grounds' it in what it does not control within a system to which it is 'blind.' (Gasché 1986, 260) As Rodolphe Gasché reminds us, the 'deconstruction effected by the general text is both a destruction and a ''regrounding'' or reinscription.' (Gasché 1986, 260) Gasché goes on to summarize some of the consequences of this deconstruction as effected by the general text in relation to philosophy and literature specifically, consequences which I think, and as Derrida made clear[39] (Derrida 1992a, 34), also include and impact

[39] In the text ' ''This Strange Institution Called Literature'': An Interview with Jacques Derrida' Derrida comments that 'No doubt I hesitated between philosophy and literature, giving up neither, perhaps *seeking obscurely a place from which the history of this frontier could be thought or even displaced – in writing itself and not only by historical or theoretical reflection*. And since what interests me today is not strictly called either literature or philosophy, I'm amused by the idea that my adolescent desire – let's call

upon our conceptualisation of historical (re)presentation (the literary dimensions of which have been convincingly explored by Hayden White and others):

> Consequently, if Derrida puts the transcendental authority of the categories of philosophy, in particular that of being, into question, or if he questions whether the literary operation yields to the philosophical demand of evaporating the signifier on behalf of the signified, it is not in order to annul them but rather to understand them within a system to which they are blind. Without the general text as that which inscribes literature and philosophy within that angle that marks them from a certain outside, no philosophy, no logocentrism, no authority of being would be possible. Without the general text, there would be no literature, or what has been called literature in the history of literature. (Gasché 1986, 260-261)

As with the literary operation, messianic historical theory questions the operations of historical (re)presentation 'not in order to annul but rather to understand them within a system to which they are blind'. This amounts to the same thing (although using different language) as foregrounding the assertion that it is the notion of the general text which inscribes historical (re)presentation within that angle to which it is blind, that which it cannot comprehend by (re)presenting but out of which the historicity that conditions its im-possibility is calling it, and that marks it from a certain outside 'to-come'. As Critchley puts it in his text (1999) *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas* (having cited what he regards as an important passage from *Of Grammatology* where Derrida states his aim/goal/wish to 'reach the point of a certain exteriority in relation to the totality of the age of logocentrism' – see Derrida 1997b, 161):

> It is from such a point of exteriority that deconstruction could cut into or penetrate the totality, thereby displacing it. The goal of deconstruction, therefore, is to locate a point of otherness within philosophical or logocentric conceptuality and then to deconstruct this conceptuality from that position of alterity.[40] (Critchley 1999, 26)

---

it that – should have directed me toward something in writing which was neither the one nor the other. What was it?' (Derrida 1992a, 34, italics mine)

[40] A few pages later in this text Critchley makes the same point – but restated and so worth including here – where (following Derrida) he deploys the language of *marginality* and *representation*: 'Derridian deconstruction attempts to locate 'a non-site, or a non-philosophical site, from which to question philosophy' [Derrida 2004a, 143-144]. It seeks a place of exteriority, alterity, or marginality irreducible to philosophy. Deconstruction is the writing of a margin that cannot be represented by philosophy. In

With the stress on alterity this is, again, messianic historical theory passing under other names. Critchley goes on to point out that, crucially, there is a 'paradox that haunts Derrida's and all deconstructive discourse'; namely, that 'the only language that is available to deconstruction is that of philosophy, or logocentrism' (Critchley 1999, 29). Therefore,

> [t]o take up a position exterior to logocentrism, if such a thing were possible, would be to risk starving oneself of the very linguistic resources with which one must deconstruct logocentrism. The deconstructor is like a tight-rope walker who risks 'ceaselessly falling back inside that which he deconstructs' [Derrida 1997, 14] Deconstruction is a double reading that operates within a double bind of both belonging to a tradition, a language, and a philosophical discourse, while at the same time being incapable of belonging to the latter. This ambiguous situation of belonging and not belonging describes the problem of *closure*. (Critchley 1999, 29)

Such is the paradoxical and oscillatory experience of all historical (re)presentation that messianic historical theory attempts to foreground and inculcate in historians: the experience of the im-possibility of history-ing; messianic historians (those who – as will be discussed in Chapter Two – Derrida calls 'new scholars') as tight-rope walkers who simultaneously belong and do not belong to their tradition/disciplinary discourse.

It is also the notion of the general text that accounts for and provides Derrida with one of his axiomatic starting points: 'no meaning can be determined out of context, but no context permits saturation' (Derrida 1979, 81). And I now want to link this discussion of 'general text' and 'no context permitting saturation' with a statement that Derrida makes early on in *Of Grammatology*: 'writing opens the field of history'[41] (Derrida 1997b, 27). Here I want to explore some of the implications of

---

question is an other to philosophy that has never been and cannot become philosophy's other, but an other within which philosophy becomes inscribed.' (Critchley 1999, 29)

[41] It is worth quoting from the text that surrounds this statement: 'The concept of writing should define the field of a science. But can it be determined by scholars outside of all the historico-metaphysical predeterminations that we have just situated so clinically? What can a science of writing begin to signify, if it is granted:

...that historicity itself is tied to the possibility of writing; to the possibility of writing in general, beyond those particular forms of writing in the name of which we have long spoken of peoples without writing

this systematized deconstructive critique of the history of meaning for the academic history profession, examining how a range of historians and historiographers (broadly construed) have responded to it.

Derrida has described *Of Grammatology* as being a 'history book through and through' (Derrida 1992a, 54) and, in the course of responding to a question about demonstrating 'literature's historical solidarity with the metaphysical tradition', has stressed the following point:

> Contrary to what some people believe or have an interest in making believe, I consider myself very much a historian, very historicist…Deconstruction calls for a highly 'historian's' attitude (*Of Grammatology*, for example, is a history book through and through) even if we should also be suspicious of the metaphysical concept of history. It is everywhere. (Derrida 1992a, 54)

My contention here would be that it is in the light of these comments that we should understand that in *Of Grammatology* Derrida is resisting a metaphysical concept (and/or classical formulations) of history[42] in the name of 'some other concept of history'; he is not resisting history/histories *per se*. This is made clear again in the Preface where his stated aim to produce 'the problems of critical reading' is linked to 'the guiding intention of this book' (Derrida 1997b, *lxxxix*):

> My interpretation of Rousseau's text follows implicitly the propositions ventured in Part 1; propositions that demand that reading should free itself, at least in its axis, from the classical categories of history – not only from the

---

and without history. Before being the object of a history – of an historical science – writing opens the field of history – of historical becoming. And the former (*Historie* in German) presupposes the latter (*Geschichte*).

The science of writing should therefore look for its object at the roots of scientificity. The history of writing should turn back toward the origin of historicity. A science of the possibility of science? A science of science which would no longer have the form of logic but that of *grammatics*? A history of the possibility of history which would no longer be an archaeology, a philosophy of history or a history of philosophy?

The *positive* and the classical sciences of writing are obliged to repress this sort of question. Up to a certain point, such repression is even necessary to the progress of positive investigation. Beside the fact that it would still be held within a philosophizing logic, the ontophenomenological question of essence, that is to say of the origin of writing, could, by itself, only paralyze or sterilize the typological or historical research of *facts*.' (Derrida 1997b, 27-28)

[42] See, for example, Derrida's comments on 'the styles of an historical movement which was meaningful – like the concept of history itself – only within a logocentric epoch' (Derrida 1997b, 4) and 'History and knowledge, *istoria* and *epistémè* have always been determined (and not only etymologically or philosophically) as detours *for the purpose of* the reappropriation of presence.' (Derrida 1997b, 10)

> categories of the history of ideas and the history of literature but also, and perhaps above all, from the categories of the history of philosophy. (Derrida 1997b, *lxxxix*)

This intention to follow propositions demanding that reading free itself from the classical categories of history involves understanding how what Derrida calls *logocentrism* – 'the metaphysics of phonetic writing (for example, of the alphabet)...the most original and powerful ethnocentrism' – has controlled '*the history of* (the only) *metaphysics*', that which has 'always assigned the origin of truth in general to the logos' (Derrida 1997b, 3). For Derrida, 'the history of truth, of the truth of truth' has almost always constituted 'the debasement of writing, and its repression outside ''full'' speech.' (Derrida 1997b, 3) However, in *Of Grammatology*, Derrida also seeks to demonstrate that, as Royle puts it, 'a certain notion of writing is the condition of possibility of history.' (Royle 1995, 18) It is through 'patient mediation and painstaking investigation on and around what is still provisionally called writing' that we may 'merely glimpse the *closure*' of the 'historico-metaphysical epoch' of logocentrism (Derrida 1997b, 4). In an important passage which I deploy here so as to link this patient/painstaking investigation on and around writing and writing as opening the field of history *with* a historicity of the 'to-come' – the impossible conditioning of historical (re)presentation – Derrida makes the following suggestion/assertion:

> Perhaps patient meditation and painstaking investigation on and around what is still provisionally called writing, far from falling short of a science of writing or of hastily dismissing it by some obscurantist reaction, letting it rather develop its positivity as far as possible, are the wanderings of a way of thinking that is faithful and attentive to the ineluctable world of the future which proclaims itself at present, beyond the closure of knowledge. The future can only be anticipated in the form of an absolute danger. It is that which breaks absolutely with constituted normality and can only be proclaimed, *presented*, as a sort of monstrosity. For that future world and for that within it which will have put into question the values of sign, word, and writing, for that which guides our future anterior, there is as yet no exergue. (Derrida 1997b, 4-5)

So here, in the so called 'early Derrida' we can see/discern a way of thinking 'history' that is faithful and attentive to the ineluctable future which proclaims itself; a way of thinking 'history' turned towards a future (coming) that can (only?) be

anticipated (figured) in the form of an absolute danger and, therefore, which seeks to break radically with the constituted normality of logocentric metaphysical history. This undertaking 'in the name of some other concept of history' is conditioned by a thinking (proclamation/presentation) of the future as necessarily 'monstrous'[43] (monstrosity), a future breaking with/open the (hegemonic?) logocentric 'historico-metaphysical epoch' of which Derrida thinks 'we merely glimpse the closure' but not the 'end' (Derrida 1997b, 4). This coming future ('to-come') and that within it (that which is 'to-come': the unrepresentable Messiah) puts into question all the values of sign, word, and writing that go under the name of 'history'. According to my reading of this passage from *Of Grammatology*, which is, in turn, informed by my reading of the texts previously discussed, I would suggest that here we can discern most strongly that a messianic thinking of some other concept of history (one that I am calling, developing and defending as *messianic historical theory*) is evident in some of Derrida's very earliest work, albeit under another name; namely, that of a thinking of the future, a thinking of history and historicity that is orientated not backwards *but* forwards.

Of course, it should be stressed that the comment 'writing opens the field of history' should *not* be interpreted as a simple case of history being determined by the 'writings of the past' (in the conventional 'historical' sense) which form 'the bulk of the traces/sources of the past actuality used by historians – archival deposits, journals, books, etc.' (Jenkins 1999, 51) Rather, as Royle again clarifies, a different conception of how history is constituted is being posited here:

[43] In the interview 'Passages – from Traumatism to Promise' (in Derrida 1995b) Derrida explains his usage of the word(s) 'monster/monstrous/monstrosity' in his thinking/figuration of the future: 'I think that somewhere in *Of Grammatology* I said, or perhaps it's at the end of *Writing and Difference*, that the future is necessarily monstrous: the figure of the future, that is, that which can only be surprising, that for which we are not prepared, you see, is heralded by species of monsters. A future that would not be monstrous would not be a future; it would already be a predictable, calculable, and programmable tomorrow. All experience open to the future is prepared or prepares itself to welcome the monstrous *arrivant* [i.e., that which or the one who arrives], to welcome it, that is, to accord hospitality to that which is absolutely foreign or strange, but also, one must add, to try to domesticate it, that is, to make it part of the household and have it assume the habits, to make us assume new habits. This is the movement of culture. Texts and discourses that provoke at the outset reactions of rejection, that are denounced precisely as anomalies or monstrosities are often texts that, before being in turn appropriated, assimilated, acculturated, transform the nature of the field of reception, transform the nature of social and cultural experience, historical experience. All of history has shown that each time an *event* has been produced, for example in philosophy or in poetry, it took the form of the unacceptable, or even of the intolerable, of the incomprehensible, that is, of a certain monstrosity.' (Derrida 1995b, 386-387)

> To say that history is radically determined by writing, then, is to say that it is constituted by a general or unbounded logic of traces and remains – general and unbounded because these traces and remains, this work of remainders and remnants, are themselves neither presences nor origins: rather, they too are constituted by traces and remains in turn…Derrida's argument, however, is that speech and the experience of self-presence are themselves only possible on the basis of a logic of writing, that is of repetition and difference, of traces and remains. 'Writing' then is not simply (as Rousseau phrases it) a 'supplement to the spoken word' [Derrida, 1997b, 7]: as mark, trace, spacing, it inhabits speech (and the very experience of self-presence) as its condition of possibility, while at the same time being nowhere either present or absent. (Royle 1995, 19-20)

On the basis of this understanding of how writing opens up the field of history – history as writing constituted by a 'general or unbounded logic of traces[44] and remains' – Keith Jenkins has developed a devastating critique of both its upper and lower case forms, specifically around the unavoidable epistemological failure of *all* historical (re)presentations in terms of any claims made for their objectivity, literal truth, nonpositioned and non-figural constructions (Jenkins 1999, 37-55). The implication of this 'unbounded situation' is that all of us, including historians, will 'never really know where to start or end our accounts', and that the way 'those reminders and remnants [of 'the past' or 'the before now'] are carved up, emplotted and troped is ultimately one of choice.' (Jenkins 1999, 51) This situation reminds historians that

> how to contextualise, combine, recombine, connect, disconnect is not in the 'things themselves'…we get no definitive help from the 'seamless past' in these matters, and where any help we do derive from the always already 'framed'

[44] Simon Morgan Wortham provides an excellent account of Derrida's logic of traces in his *The Derrida Dictionary*: 'For Derrida...if every sign acquires its value only on the strength of its difference from other signs, nevertheless other signs leave their trace in the sense that they are constitutive of the difference that maintains the sign's identity. Every sign bears the traces of the others from which it differs, but to which it also defers in order to receive its value as a (differential) sign. The trace is thus not reducible to the sign, nor can it be turned into a sign. Instead, the trace calls to be thought in terms of the non-signifying difference that is ''originarily'' at play in all signification. However, since for Derrida the trace is always the trace of another trace, it does not give itself as simple origin. (For Derrida, trace is not a master word but an always replaceable term in an unmasterable series including *différance*, supplement, writing, cinder, and so on). Nor can the trace be thought in terms of the logic of presence. Since every sign in its manifestation or apparent ''presence'' always includes traces of others which are supposedly ''absent'', the trace can be reduced to neither side of the presence-absence opposition so prized by the metaphysical tradition. The trace thus redescribes the entire field which the metaphysics of presence seeks to dominate throughout history. The trace names that non-systematizable reserve which is at once constitutive and unrepresentable within such a field.' (Morgan Wortham 2010, 229-230)

> historicised past is actually always ultimately through encounters with it – with ourselves, as textuality. And these arbitrary ways of carving things up are compounded by the fact that we readers and writers are ourselves part of this process of the general and unbounded logic of traces and remains, we are ourselves textual. We too are the stuff of history, of textuality, unable to access any Archimedean point outside of ourselves from whence we might issue forth, omniscient narrator style. (Jenkins 1999, 52)

It seems to me that such reminders of the problematical 'notion' of all historicization(s) can, and should, be linked up to Sande Cohen's wholly convincing arguments regarding the ongoing and multiple uses and abuses of contemporary historical (re)presentation[45] (see Cohen 2006b). Accordingly, my argument is that it is still necessary – indeed urgent – to issue such 'blended' reminders in order that the agendas of historians and cultural/political commentators/operators who still make 'unreflexive' recourse to a metaphysical concept of history (so often used to legitimize particular agonistic interests so as to remove – and install – claimants to the future – see Cohen 2006b, 10-11 and 254) are disrupted – are damaged...beyond repair!

In response to the question about where historians should begin and end their accounts Jenkins (like Royle) finds the answer in Derrida's comments that (as discussed in the Introduction to this thesis) it is 'impossible to justify a point of departure absolutely' and that: 'We must begin *wherever we are…Wherever we are:* in a text where we already believe ourselves to be.' (Derrida 1997b, 162) Interestingly, Royle has drawn attention to the 'syntactically enigmatic supposition of the ''already'' ' in this quotation and the question that it raises: '[A]re we in a text before we believe or in some sense as an effect of believing?' (Royle 1995, 21) It is this 'already' that 'situates' the 'surprising law of historicity, the states of emergency out of which ''history'' calls to be thought.' (Royle 1995, 21) This assumption of the already illustrates the 'axial proposition' that 'there is nothing outside the text' (Royle 1995, 21, quoting from Derrida 1997b, 163), that is, that 'there is nothing outside context (even though, or rather precisely because, context is

[45] 'The use and abuse of history is a critical study that tries to specify conceptual, linguistic, and philosophical mechanisms of such use and abuse.' (Cohen 2006b, 10-11)

non-saturable).' (Royle 1995, 21) Jenkins addresses the misunderstanding of this proposition by some historians (those both receptive and hostile to Derrida's work) as follows:

> Derrida's statement does not mean that, say, the actual past never existed outside of literal texts, or that houses and factories, wars and concentration camps are literally texts. All this is so obvious that the point should not need to be made, but apparently it is needed, not least because this way of reading Derrida…remains common. (Jenkins 1999, 52)

In this way Jenkins aligns himself with Critchley who reminds us that in the 'Afterword' of *Limited Inc* (Derrida 1988a), Derrida reformulates 'there is nothing outside the text' as 'there is nothing outside context.' (Derrida 1988a, 136) Critchley further points out that

> [t]his redefinition is required because the word 'text', despite Derrida's many corrections, is still understood empirically and thereby reduced to a refutable slogan. To say it once again, the text is not the book…A generalized concept of the 'text' does not wish to turn the world into some vast library; nor does it wish to cut off reference to some 'extra-textual realm'. Deconstruction is not bibliophilia. Text *qua* context is glossed by Derrida as 'the entire "real-history-of-the-world" ' [Derrida 1988a, 136]; and this is said in order to emphasize the fact that the world 'text' does not suspend reference 'to history, to the world, to reality, to being *and especially not to the other*' [Derrida, 1988a, 137]...All the latter appear in an experience which is not an immediate experience of presence – the text or context is not present…but rather the experience of a network of differentially (or *différantially*) signifying traces which are constitutive of meaning. *Experience or thought traces a ceaseless movement of interpretation within a limitless context*. (Critchley 1999, 39)

As such, Jenkins suggests that 'the implications of Derrida for history really should be apparent' (Jenkins 1999, 53) and goes on to quote Royle by way of elaborating his point *vis-à-vis* historical (re)presentation:

> 'The referent is in the text', as Derrida puts it in the interview on 'Deconstruction in America' in 1985. His concern is to elaborate readings which take rigorous account of the ways in which any text (in the traditional sense of that word) and any writer (the notion of the writer being itself 'a logocentric product') are variously affected, inscribed and governed by a logic of text, of supplementarity or contextualisation, which can never be saturated or arrested. Every text (in the traditional sense of that term) has meaning only on

> the basis of belonging to a supplementary and 'indefinitely multiplied structure' [Derrida, 1997b, 163] of contextualisation and incessant recontextualisation. As Derrida declares towards the end of Part II of *Of Grammatology*: 'The supplement is always the supplement of a supplement. One wishes to go back *from the supplement to the source*: one must recognize that there is a *supplement at the source*' [Derrida, 1997b, 304]…Language, text and writing are constituted by supplementarity, by a network of traces and referents, references to other references, a general referability without simple origin, presence or destination. (Royle 1995, 21-22)

Given this, Jenkins (again drawing from Royle who is, in turn, quoting from *Of Grammatology*) therefore thinks it crucial that historians understand the following point:

> Reading…cannot legitimately transgress the text toward something other than it, toward a referent (a reality that is metaphysical, historical, psychobiographical, etc.) or toward a signified outside the text whose content could take place, could have taken place outside of language, that is to say, in the sense that we give here to that word, outside of writing in general. (Derrida 1997b, 158, quoted in Royle 1995, 23 and Jenkins 1999, 54)

By putting together in his work all of these challenges for historical (re)presentation, Jenkins has repeatedly sought to make explicit the full implications of this systematized deconstructive critique of the history of meaning (the metaphysical concept of history) as it disrupts both upper and lower case historicization(s). And here I want to emphasize that this radical deconstructive critique should not be viewed as a kind of methodological application to, and taking apart (dismemberment) of, historical accounts (historical narratives/historicizations), but more as a disclosure or foregrounding of what is always already inscribed in any history. Deconstructing history is a kind of highlighting of that which unsettles all – including historical – (re)presentation(s), *that is, deconstruction always already at work within the historical (re)presentation/account as a kind of 'force'.*[46] As Jenkins puts it:

> 'History as a text' as understood here, then, can obviously never be finished. All the limits erected by the historian – the world, the real, reality, the facts,

[46] For more on the use of the concept of 'force' in Derrida's work, see *Writing and Difference* (Derrida 2001b, 1-35) and *Acts of Religion* (Derrida 2002a, 230-98).

> teleology, immanence, essence – in opposition to the incessant and interminable exploitation of readings, are transgressed. History in general and in its modernist upper and lower case genres can never be stabilised, definitively known. Locked into the uncertainties of ontology and epistemology, methodology is no high road to truth, to meaning. (Jenkins 1999, 54)

What is debatable (perhaps) is the *extent* to which Jenkins' reading of Derrida as being 'happy' with this situation is one that is acknowledged and affirmed by his readers in both historicist and *a*historicist academic settlements:

> Derrida hopes that historians of the future – of histories to come (if we still bother with them) will be histories without end(s); histories of surprise, of risk, of democracies to come – and come again. (Jenkins 1999, 54)

Section Five: Some other concept of history II: further implications and responses

I now move to make some remarks about the further implications of such a deconstructive challenge to history. My argument is that embracing this challenge is the first step to developing that 'some other concept of history' which Derrida is calling for.

By way of (once again) beginning, I think it is important to recognize the following 'concession' as articulated by Christopher Norris:

> Now Derrida is indeed sceptical *up to a point* as concerns the truth-claims and values of enlightened modernity. Thus he raises questions – searching questions – about truth, knowledge, meaning and representation. He is also sceptical (again up to a point) about the possibility that we could somehow reassemble or reconstitute historical knowledge in such a way as to speak with any confidence about historical progress or the emergence of better, more enlightened forms of ethical, political and social thought…Derrida can be said to share the attitude of postmodern scepticism with regard to any metanarrative account that claims a privileged access to truth, or to the unfolding logic of historical events as revealed in the wisdom of teleological insight. (Norris 2002, *xii-xiii*)

The credibility – in an objectivist, empirical sense – of upper case history is irreparably damaged by such scepticism, whether we wish to call it postmodern or not. And yet I also think that it is clear that such scepticism, arising out of the radical

deconstructive challenge previously described, also has a profound impact on lower case history in its disinterested, own-sakist forms (which, albeit more covertly, are just as 'positioned' as upper case histories). Theoretically sophisticated historians like David Harlan have recognized and accepted the implications of Derrida's work on historical (re)presentation and have gone on to reflect on the challenges of this for what they do and how the discipline of history could be reconceived in the light of it. As Harlan puts it, in a humorous take on the hostility of many historians to Derrida's work:

> We historians must somehow get ourselves to the point where we no longer feel that if we cannot refute contemporary scepticism – or if, in some moment of inexcusable weakness, we allow ourselves to be seduced by the likes of Henry Adams or William Faulkner (not to mention the white-haired archfiend himself, holed up somewhere in Paris, writing yet another treatise on death and deconstruction) – then all is lost, history will slide into fiction, Holocaust deniers will rise up everywhere, and we will have to fight the Second World War all over again. (Harlan 1997, *xxxi*)

Harlan then goes on to argue not for the 'scrapping' of historical (re)presentation but rather the abandonment of the pretensions of objectivity and truth-telling that many historians still operate with:

> The Polish philosopher Leszak Kolakowski recently pointed out the obvious in a way that may help us here: none of the great metaphysical questions have ever been resolved. It is as intellectually respectable to be a nominalist – or an antinominalist, or a realist, or an idealist – at the end of the twentieth century as it was at the end of the twelfth century. So it is with the question of historical objectivity, which is why we should simply drop the whole shopworn subject. It has not gotten us anywhere in our long, twisted past, and it is not going to get us anywhere in the crooked future that looms ahead of us. God knows we have wasted a lot of time and bored a lot of students with all our dreary polemics on this subject. (Harlan 1997, *xxxi*)

Harlan explores – in a wonderfully lucid and suggestive fashion – the question of what historical writing would look like as well as what benefit and utility it might have 'if we abandoned our by now threadbare pretense to objectivity and truth telling?' (Harlan 1997, *xxxii*) He demonstrates the possibility of affirmative and sophisticated responses by historians/historiographers to Derrida's work in the name

of developing 'some other concept of history'. Alun Munslow and Robert Rosenstone are two more historians/historical theorists who – like Harlan – recognize and embrace the creative possibilities that Derrida's work 'release' for the historian. In his Introduction to their jointly edited collection *Experiments in Rethinking History*, Munslow celebrates the way in which such criticism

> has had the effect for history of releasing the creativity of the historian. Instead of pursuing the knowability of the past and the grand narrative of givenness (which we can still do if that is our preferred epistemological choice), we have been launched into a state of engagement with the sublime nature of the past. Learning to live, in other words, with its unknowability in terms of what it means and how, as a result, we can explore its multiple meanings through experiments with form. In other words, explore its own nature as a form of representation. (Munslow and Rosenstone 2004, 10)

In other texts, Munslow has also stressed – a point which, as has been previously discussed, Derrida was also in part at pains to repeatedly emphasize – that

> [w]e should not be misled here: Derrida does not doubt referentiality *per se*, only knowable original meanings. All the historian has are endlessly deferred and undecidable and undecipherable meanings. (Munslow 2006, 84)

All of this constitutes a more than desirable state of affairs as far as Jenkins is concerned, who sums up the situation in an affirmative tone thus (and as previously quoted in the Introduction):

> What is really excellent about historians' historical representations is that they always fail. There is no possibility that any historicization of 'the past' can ever be literally true, objective, fair, non-figural, non-positioned and so on, all of which opens up that which has happened 'before now' to interminable readings and rereading…this inability to secure what are effectively interpretive closures – the continuing raison d'être of the professional historian in even these pluralist days despite sometime protestations – is not only logically impossible but also ethically, morally and politically desirable. The fact that 'the past' both as a whole and in its parts is so very obviously underdetermining *vis-à-vis* its innumerable appropriations (one past – many histories) is to be both celebrated and worked. (Jenkins 2003, 367)

If one accepts Jenkins' argument – I mean why not? – then questions need to be asked and explored regarding the *motivational factors* that remain for historians in

continuing to produce their histories after Derrida. Is the historian's task – the production of historical (re)presentations, historicizing 'the past', etc. – rigorously an impossible and pointless one or, paradoxically, can the impossibility of this task be conceived as signalling the very possibility of a new beginning and a fresh motivation; a chance for historians to re(con)figure their understanding of the task itself in a way that allows them to be more explicit and positioned about what they do, to take ownership and control of their historical (re)presentations in a more radical way? To put it differently: can a historical theory be developed that has come to terms with an explicit awareness of the unavoidable epistemological failure of any historical (re)presentation and yet both permits and motivates historians to continue to work at producing subsequent historicized articulations and appropriations of the past? What kind of historical theory is capable of energizing historical praxis following the way in which Derrida's work has foregrounded this epistemological failure? Well, it is my contention that there is – *pace* Jenkins – a future (or futures) for particular kinds of historical (re)presentations(s) produced by 'reflexive' historians 'after Derrida', and I now want to describe some of the emphases that, in my view, such (re)presentations should display.

Young has observed that in his view

> [h]istory cannot be done away with any more than metaphysics: but its conditions of impossibility are also necessarily its conditions of possibility. (Young 2004, 103)

In support of this statement, Young cites Rodolphe Gasché's observation that

> [t]he mimicry of totality and of the pretension to systematicity is an inseparable element of deconstruction, one of the very conditions of finding its foothold within the logic of being deconstructed. (Gasché 1986, 180)

On this basis and in accordance with Gasché's observation, Young claims that Derrida

> does not in any sense abjure history (or totality) but rather attempts to reinscribe it by writing histories that set up supplementary figures whose logic

> simultaneously invokes and works against historical totalities. (Young 2004, 103)

Therefore, the historical (re)presentations produced by historians after Derrida *should* always make explicit that they have meaning only on the basis of supplementarity, that is, of ceaseless recontextualization. Such (re)presentations draw attention to and do not try to conceal that there is a supplement at every origin (i.e. they are not origins at all) and that, as (re)presentations, they are constituted by supplementarity: a general referability without origin or presence. In which case, all historical (re)presentations would auto-'reflexively' *embrace* the implications of Derrida's work – the deconstruction of the history of meaning, a metaphysical concept of history – as part of the process of their production/construction. Munslow also underlines the importance of this 'reflexive' project:

> Because history shares the same epistemological status as all cultural and representational discourses – it is never neutral but always partial (usually ideological) with open meanings – it becomes extremely important that we deconstruct or dissect the mechanisms by which we create it. The central principle of experimental history should now be obvious – it is to hunt out and confront the myth of the given. (Munslow and Rosenstone 2004, 9)

Experimental histories that aim to confront and expose 'the myth of the given' – including in relation to their own production – constitute, in my view, a valid future for historical (re)presentations after Derrida. And I think that despite recent comments by historians such as Gabrielle Spiegel *vis-à-vis* 'the retreat from positions staked out during the high tide of ''linguistic turn'' historiography' (Spiegel 2005, 4) with which, as we have seen, Derrida has been wrongly (according to him) associated, arguably there is still value in theorizing and developing the kinds of historical (re)presentations I have described. As the cliché goes, it is less a case of tried and found wanting and – with some exceptions – more a case of not tried at all by vast swathes of the academic history profession.

Questions have, of course, been raised regarding the utility of the kind of deployment for historical (re)presentations that I am advocating here. Gayatri Chakavorty Spivak, in her classic essay (first published in1985) 'Subaltern Studies:

Deconstructing Historiography' (Spivak 1996, 203-235), has made some important responses to some of these questions that should figure prominently in the considerations of historians as they produce their 'reflexive' historical (re)presentations. In the context of a consideration of the discussion of rumour by the Subaltern Studies group, Spivak describes the question as follows:

> What is the use of pointing out that a common phonocentrism binds subaltern, elite authority, and disciplinary-critical historian together, and only a reading against the grain discloses the espousal of illegitimacy by the first and the third? Or to quote Terry Eagleton:
>
> 'Marx is a metaphysician, and so is Schopenhauer, and so is Ronald Reagan. Has anything been gained by this manoeuvre? If it is true, is it informative? What is ideologically at stake in such homogenizing? What differences does it exist to suppress? Would it make Reagan feel uncomfortable or depressed? *If what is in question for deconstructionism is metaphysical discourse, and if this is all-pervasive, then there is a sense in which in reading against the grain we are subverting everything and nothing*.' (Spivak 1996, 225, italics mine)

In the course of her response to these questions, Spivak suggests that

> [n]ot all ways of understanding the world and acting upon it are *equally* metaphysical or phonocentric. If, on the other hand, there *is* something shared by elite…colonial authority, subaltern, and mediator…that we would rather not acknowledge, any elegant solution devised by means of such a refusal would merely mark a site of desire. *It is best to attempt to forge a practice that can bear the weight of that acknowledgement*. And, using the buried operation of the structure of writing as a lever, the strategic reader can reveal the asymmetry between the three groups above. *Yet, since a 'reading against the grain' must forever remain strategic, it can never claim to have established the authoritative truth of a text*, it must forever remain dependent upon practical exigencies, never legitimately lead to a theoretical orthodoxy. In the case of the Subaltern Studies group, it would get the group off the dangerous hook of claiming to establish the truth-knowledge of the subaltern and his consciousness. (Spivak 1996, 225-226, italics mine)

I would argue that we can see here some important characteristics of some other concept of history in the name of which Derrida called for a deconstruction of metaphysical history. What is to be strived for are historical (re)presentations that explicitly acknowledge (and, in so doing, try to minimize their covert metaphysicality) their unavoidable complicity in an all-pervasive metaphysical

discourse but that try to 'bear the weight of that acknowledgement' in terms of the ways in which they are constructed and in the claims they do and don't make (no claims to 'truth-knowledge' or 'meaning' shored up by cognitive proofs). In the context of a response to Thomas R. Flynn, John Caputo (whose work, as previously noted, is discussed in detail in Chapter Two) has suggested the role that historical (re)presentations (e.g. histories) conceived in this way might have in 'offering practical resistance' to any account – including their own, as well as other histories – that presents something as 'given', any account that attempts to 'nail things down once and for all'. Such resistance takes the form of historical analyses 'that expose the historical contingency of the various ways we have been constituted.' (Caputo 2003b, 197) Continuing in this vein, Caputo has argued as follows:

> Writing a history is as powerful a way to deconstruct something as one could desire, for a history shows that something that is trying to pass itself off as having dropped from heaven has been historically constituted…how we tend to be taken in by various contingencies trying to pass themselves off as necessities. Whence the apophatic strategy: we do not know who we are and every time someone tries to tell us who we are we can write a history that exposes the contingency of the construction of that identity. *The histories keep the future open, while the metaphysics wall us in*. (Caputo 2003b, 197-198, italics mine)

Caputo's contribution to the development of 'some other concept of history', greatly influenced by Derrida's work, is a valuable one I think, helpfully spelling out the ways in which historians who have embraced the messianic historical theory that I am arguing for in this thesis might think afresh the purpose of their (re)presentations, abandoning once and for all any aspiration (if, even now it still survives) towards the epistemologically futile and ontologically (realist, objectivist) oppressive methodological dream of *wie es eigentlich gewesen* (writing history in such a way as to reconstruct/relate only that which actually happened in the past and show how it essentially was: Leopold von Ranke's well known dictum[47]) in favour of re-conceiving their narratives/historicizations as one more discursive tool for *resisting* the hegemonic totalizing power of historical culture (turning history against

[47] In his 'Preface to the First Edition of *Histories of the Latin and Germanic Peoples*' Ranke, making explicit his aim for this study, writes as follows: 'To history has been given the function of judging the past, of instructing men for the profit of future years. The present attempt does not aspire to such a lofty undertaking. It merely wants to show how it essentially was (wie es eigentlich gewesen).' (Ranke 2011, 86)

itself so as to betray the disciplinary culture which it is meant to uphold and reify; in the fight any weapon, etc.) by keeping the future (and future-pasts) open. Such a re-conceptualisation, again as mentioned in the Introduction, also resonates with the call by Jenkins to celebrate the 'one past – many histories' situation:

> It is to be celebrated because it is a positive democratic value when everybody can at least potentially author their own lives and create their own intellectual and moral genealogies, that there is no credible authoritative or authoritarian historicized past that one has to defer to over one's own personal history, or indeed to even acknowledge. (Jenkins 2003, 367)

Any such re-conceptualisation should, in my view, take into account Dominick LaCapra's diagnosis that some historians (predominantly those who produce 'lower case' histories) view Derrida as having failed to adequately understand the point of the work historians do, particularly their 'interest and involvement in the archive.' (LaCapra 2004, 26) LaCapra has produced an incisive and wholly convincing critique of such arguments, specifically in relation to Carolyn Steedman's original and stimulating book *Dust* (Steedman 2001) which includes a discussion of Derrida's *Archive Fever* (Derrida 1996a). LaCapra summarizes Steedman's position as follows:

> The historian is not engaged in a metaphysical search for origins, and one should disengage this supernal quest from the more everyday, humble, and often grubby activity of the historian. (LaCapra 2004, 26)

LaCapra reads Steedman as trying to draw 'a divide between deconstruction and history', of fetishizing the archive and turning it 'into a sanctuary somehow impermeable to deconstructive and perhaps all critical-theoretical approaches.' (LaCapra 2004, 27) According to LaCapra (and I am in agreement with him here), establishing such a position

> puts forth an undefended and altogether dubious opposition between history as written text and 'reading matter found in the archive', as if the way archival material is itself put together by those who create the archive, and actively read

> and made into the historical work by the historian, were not itself a problematic issue for critical reflection. (LaCapra 2004, 27-28)

LaCapra charges Steedman with driving 'an impenetrable wedge between historical research and metahistorical or critical-theoretical analysis' (LaCapra 2004, 28) and poses the following question: 'Is there nothing the historian, including the archival historian, can learn from varieties of deconstruction concerning historical processes, the problem of temporality, and ways of accounting for them?' (LaCapra 2004, 28) The answer, of course, is that there is much to be learned by historians wanting to develop 'reflexive' historical (re)presentations in spite of, or, perhaps, precisely because of, the unsettling effects of such a learning curve.

Section Six: Conclusion: a radical historicity that permits the opening up of the affirmative thinking of the messianic

The kinds of unsettling of historical (re)presentation (in the name of some other concept of history) that I have considered above can be considered dangerous *vis-à-vis* what currently passes under the sign of 'history'. For such 'unsettling' results in historical (re)presentation slipping into, as Royle has figured it, 'states of emergency' (Royle 1995, 30). Yet, *paradoxically*, it is this reconceptualization of historical (re)presentations as states of emergency that also suggests something important about their future: historical (re)presentations, histories, 'open up the future'. As Royle explains:

> What we have…are states of emergency, states which would be apocalyptic but at the same time a deconstruction of the apocalyptic. Not *a* state, but *states*: there is no singular…History comprises states of emergency; but there can be no history, and therefore no states of emergency, without that which surprises and deconstructs every emergence, the emergence of every 'I' and the emergence of every event...More generally, we could say that Derrida is concerned with a notion of surprise that would itself be deconstructive… comparatively little attention has been given to the notion that history, like deconstruction, is less about the past than about the opening of the future. Writing history has to do with states of emergency, states given both to an acknowledgement that 'The future can only be anticipated in the form of an absolute danger' [Derrida, 1997b, 5] and to a recognition that the past was never present. (Royle 1995, 32-33)

Here, some comments from Colebrook are helpful in unpacking Royle's acute insights that history is 'less about the past than about the opening of the future' and that 'the past was never present'. Colebrook points out that in *Specters of Marx* Derrida extended his earlier critique – or radicalization – of Husserl's ideas about the lived present to argue for 'the necessity of mourning, ghosts and spectrality at the heart of experience or spirit.' (Colebrook 2009, 4) As Colebrook, glossing aspects of *Specters of Marx*, goes on to explain:

> We cannot simply follow Marx and see consciousness or man as having a proper human and self-commanding essence that falls into the division of labour but then retrieves its proper potential when it understands its own history. Indeed, to be faithful to the spirit of Marx and Marx's materialism, we must recognise that we inherit the past as a body of work to be read; this means that the sense or potential of the past is never fully given, for its ghosts, and possible futures, may always be re-read or re-encountered. This does not lead to an ahistorical free for all; on the contrary, it is precisely because the past remains as a spectre or ghostly present, haunting us, that 'our' future is always open. To read Marx, or the past, is to open the present to that which it does not fully command or comprehend. (Colebrook 2009, 4-5)

What such analyses of Derrida's work highlight is that while, as Young has put it, 'Derrida has not been concerned to formulate a new philosophy of history' (Young 2004, 100), this is *not* to say that Derrida lacks a *concept* of history or, expressed differently (and not I suspect in a way that Derrida would have regarded as unproblematic, although perhaps he would not have rejected it either?), a 'weak theorisation' of the messianic structure of all historical (re)presentation. Here I am in agreement with Caputo (in Derrida 1997a) who, drawing on material from Derrida's *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe* (Derrida 1992e), has formulated the following argument:

> On the contrary, by depriving himself of the idea of either a teleological or an eschatological heading, Derrida has developed a more spare and radical idea of historical happening. For a culture to be 'on the move' with otherwise-than-a-heading[48] means to hold itself more radically open to a future (*l'avenir*), to what

[48] Caputo (in Derrida 1997a) explains the term 'the Other Heading' thus: 'To signal the notion of a culture that articulates difference, Derrida makes use of a navigational term, ''the other Heading'' *(l'autre cap)* (from the Latin *caput*, head, one of my favourite words), as in the heading of a ship or plane. The expression suggests a mindfulness of the heading of the *other*, which forces us to be a little more accommodating about those who are headed otherwise, headed elsewhere, than are we. Beyond that, the

> is to-come (*á venir*). History, thus, is not a course set in advance headed towards its *telos* as toward a future-present, a foreseeable, plannable, programmable, anticipatable, masterable future. History means, rather, to set sail without a course, on the prow for something new. Such an open-ended, non-teleological history is just what Derrida means by history, which means for him that something – an event – is really happening, e-venting (*é-venir*), breaking out, tearing up the circular course of Greco-German time. History is not programmed in advance, for Derrida, not set to work within a pre-set archeo-teleological horizon, kept all along on course, keeping its head and its heading by way of some sort of ontological automatic pilot. That is why when something comes along that nobody foresaw, that surprises the daylight out of us, we say it is very 'historical'. (Caputo in Derrida 1997a, 117-118)

Yet, as he points out in *Specters of Marx*, the possibility (im-possibility) of Derrida's 'some other concept of history' begins at precisely that place where the classical/metaphysical assumptions/presuppositions of the history of meaning with its fixity of determination (i.e. totalizing [re]presentations), so devastatingly undermined by his deconstructive critique, come to an end:

> [I]n the same place, on the same limit, where history is finished, there where a certain determined concept of history comes to an end, precisely there the historicity of history begins, there finally it has the chance of heralding itself – of promising itself.[49] (Derrida 1994, 74)

Caputo's description run together with Derrida's remarks cited immediately above are, I think, nicely summarised in the 'brief recollections' of the latter in *Specters of Marx* – constituting, for my purposes in this chapter, a kind of arbitrary culmination – to the effect that

---

title suggests something "other than" a heading. By this Derrida does not mean an anarchic anti-heading or ''beheading'' – as an international traveller himself, he would be the last one to suggest, for example, that Air France jettison its navigational equipment – but delimitation of the idea of ''planning ahead'' in favour of an openness to the future that does without the guardrails of a plan, of a teleological head, an *arche* heads resolutely or ineluctably – either way, frontally – toward its own, proper *telos* inscribed deep upon its hide (or engraved upon its brow, *frons)*, gathering itself to itself all the more deeply in an archeo-teleological unity that ''becomes itself''. The trick in deconstruction, if it is a trick, is to keep your head without having a heading.' (Caputo in Derrida 1997a, 116)

[49] So as to make clear that the end of the certain determined concept of history that he has in mind here is *not* to be equated with Francis Fukuyama's 'end of history' thesis (Fukuyama 1992), Derrida goes on to add the following: 'There where man, a certain determined concept of man, is finished, there the pure humanity of man, of the *other man* and of man *as other* begins or has finally the chance of heralding itself – of promising itself. In an apparently inhuman or else a-human fashion. Even if these propositions still call for critical or deconstructive questions, they are not reducible to the vulgate of the capitalist paradise as end of history.' (Derrida 1994, 74)

> a certain deconstructive procedure, at least the one in which I thought I had to engage, consisted from the outset in putting into question the onto-theo- but also archeo-teleological concept of history – in Hegel, Marx, or even in the epochal thinking of Heidegger. Not in order to oppose it with an end of history or an anhistoricity, but, on the contrary, in order to show that this onto-theo-archeo-teleology locks up, neutralizes, and finally cancels historicity. It was then a matter of thinking another historicity – not a new historicity or still less a 'new historicism', but another opening of event-ness as historicity that permitted one not to renounce, but on the contrary to open up access to an affirmative thinking of the messianic and emancipatory promise as promise: as *promise* and not as onto-theological or teleo-eschatological program or design. (Derrida 1994, 74-75)

Therefore, it is this matter of thinking another historicity, prevalent in Derrida's work from the outset as I hope I have shown that, in my view, should condition – generate/motivate – historical writing/(re)presentation. Derrida's response to the call 'in the name of some other concept of history' can be read as a vital part of his 'profession of faith…in the Humanities of tomorrow.' (Derrida 2005e, 11) Another historicity – one that opens up access to an affirmative thinking of the messianic and emancipatory promise *of that which is unrepresentable* and, in so doing, resists the totalizing onto-theological or teleo-eschatological determinations and agendas of 'classical' (modernist upper and lower case) history and historical culture – is required so that the 'new Humanities' is able to take on the 'tasks of deconstruction, beginning with the deconstruction of their own history and their own axioms.' (Derrida 2005e, 13) This infinite task includes, of course, the endless deconstruction of the history of H/history – all its upper and lower case expressions – and its own axioms. As Derrida, asserting the importance of 'some other concept of history' to the (re)thinking of the university and the possibilities of institutional transformation, puts it:

> One of the tasks to come of the Humanities, would be, *ad finitum*, to know and to think their own history, at least in the directions that can be seen to open up (the act of professing, the theology and the history of work, of knowledge and of faith in knowledge, the question of man, of the world, of fiction, of the performative and the 'as if', of literature and of the *oeuvre*, etc., and then all the concepts that can be articulated with them). (Derrida 2005e, 18)

My argument here is that another way of formulating this motivational challenge for historians (and others who confess/profess faith in the Humanities and university of tomorrow and its [re]presentational endeavours) – the only (im-)possibility that I think remains for their work and profession/guild after Derrida's disruption of their discipline – is for them to respond to this call by thinking and developing historical (re)presentation in *messianic* terms. That is my *thesis*. Such a 'religious' (re)thinking and (re)development of history will involve the rediscovery and acknowledgement of the *faith* (the *promise* of language) that inhabits (or, if you prefer, 'lies beneath') what they do. Historians who have ears to hear are being 'called out' to formulate and embrace a Derridean *messianic historical theory* that is mindful of and responsive to the surprise of the imminent *tout autre* (this is the *radical 'reflexivity'* that I have been advocating). This is an affirmative conceptualisation of historical (re)presentation, of im-possible histories (predicated on an/other – im-possible – historicity) turned towards the emancipatory promise of the 'to-come'. And it is to a more detailed, slow reading, formulation/conceptualisation of this messianic historical theory and its im-possible histories that I now turn to in the next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO: ARE WE ALL RELIGIOUS NOW? DEVELOPING A MESSIANIC HISTORICAL THEORY: DERRIDA, CAPUTO AND AFFIRMATIONISM

Introduction

Towards the end of the last chapter I argued that the only motivational factor remaining for historical (re)presentation 'after Derrida' should be a responsiveness to the 'matter of thinking another historicity' – so prevalent in his work from the 'outset' – in 'the name of some other concept of history', a historicity of the 'perhaps'[1] (of the *arrivant*). I also asserted that another way of stating this motivation is to conceptualise historical (re)presentation as affirmatory in the messianic terms set out by Derrida; in short, to develop a Derridean *messianic historical theory*. Part of my argument in this chapter is that to engage in such a project will involve explicitly recognising and acknowledging that historical (re)presentation has 'always already'[2] been messianic according to Derrida's articulation of that concept. Put differently, this argument can be restated as follows: historians have always operated with an unavoidable, even if largely disavowed, 'religious' – in the very specific Derridean sense of a 'messianic without messianism' – structure in relation to their work, one that keeps both past and future 'open' to that which is always about 'to-come' (*à-venir*) (like 'the Messiah') or the 'future-to-come' (*l'à-venir*[3]). This religio-messianic structure conditions – and

[1] In the course of this chapter the importance of the 'perhaps' in Derrida's work – specifically in *Specters of Marx* (Derrida 1994) – will continue to be discussed. In *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* Derrida remarks that he is 'always tempted' to 'stress this essential modality of the *perhaps*', averring that it seems, to him, 'irreducible' and pointing out, by way of alignment, that 'Nietzsche claimed to recognize the thinkers of the future by their courage to say *perhaps*.' (Derrida 1996a, 49)

[2] The expression 'always already' is frequently used by Derrida and, as a result, is often deployed in this thesis. As Jean-Paul Martinon, in his excellent study of notions of futurity in Derrida's work (as well as that of Catherine Malabou and Jean-Luc Nancy), points out: 'The important thing about this expression is that it must not be seen to reflect an *a priori* of time, but a trace structure, that is to say, a priority without determinable priority.' (Martinon 2007, 193*n*6)

[3] Commenting on Derrida's usage of 'l'à-venir' (Derrida 1994, *xix*) Peggy Kamuf, the translator from French into English of *Specters of Marx* (Derrida 1994), explains that 'Derrida writes ''l'à-venir'', which spaces out the ordinary word for the future, *avenir*, into the components of the infinitive: to come. Wherever this insistence recurs, we will translate ''future-to-come'', but in general one should remember that even in the ordinary translation as simply ''future'', *avenir* has the sense of a coming, an advent.' (Derrida 1994, 177*n*5) It is helpful to note alongside this explanation from Kamuf the careful qualification provided by Martinon, which I work with throughout my thesis, regarding 'two crucial typographical characteristics' in relation to 'the translation… of *à-venir* into the English ''to-come'' ', namely 'the quotation marks and the hyphen': 'The quotation marks are important because they indicate that it is not a simple or straightforward self-contained expression referring to an event that can be empirically experienced. The quotation marks indicate a hesitation as to the nature of this provocation.

messianic historical theory stresses – the inescapable failure (an infelicity of sorts), insufficiency and/or 'lack', of *all* historical (re)presentation: there is never any 'arrival' or 'closure' for history production and, more broadly, for historical culture.[4] Derrida's messianic structure of experience foregrounds the 'impossible possibility' (im-possibility) on and out of which the entire historicizing enterprise/project is predicated and galvanized: a radicalised historicity as 'future-to-come'. In this chapter, which consists of two sections *excluding* these introductory remarks, I turn to exploring and developing the details of a messianic historical theory through

---

This hesitation is essential because *à-venir* cannot pretend to aspire to the unity of a concept and even the quotation marks around it should never in turn guarantee the rigour of a distinction. The hyphen simply marks the difference between the verbal expression *à-venir* [''to-come''] and the verb to come [*venir*]. It also marks the intimate relation between ''to'' – this preposition indicating direction – and the disjointedness in the movement itself. ''To-come'' is at once *yet*-to-come [*avenir*] in the way it relates to some future present (action), and coming [*avenant*] in the sense of a secret ''unhingement'' that comes to disturb the future present, this *avenir*, action, or event.' (Martinon 2007, 3) Jean-Michel Rabaté, as well as providing a succinct and helpful 'etymological investigation' into 'the specifically French opposition' between *avenir/l'avenir* and *futur/le future*, remarks – in the course of discussing Derrida's engagement with the work of the historian Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi (see Derrida 1996a, specifically page 68) – that '[t]he assertion of *l'avenir* is assertion itself, a pure *yes* insofar as it conditions all promises and hopes.' (Rabaté, 2001, 180)

[4] Although the argument that I am running in this sentence might be considered to 'logically' be the case at least two questions remain in relation to this unavoidable religio-messianic structure to historical (re)presentation, both of which I address in detail in the Conclusion but nevertheless think it worth raising now in brief. Firstly, how is it possible to reduce the contingencies of the past and future to the figure of that which, like 'the Messiah', is always 'to-come' – i.e. to a transcendental such as (as Derrida would have it and as I will go on to explicate in this chapter) 'Justice'? In response I would posit – and hope to have demonstrated at different points in this thesis – that it is the crucial function of Derrida's messianic structure to maintain this (quasi-)transcendental signified as an irreducible 'formalist' (but *not* 'ideal/ized' – see the discussion in my Conclusion) type: because of this structure the 'selected' figure can never be fully realised or closed down; rather, it is always 'to-come'. This messianic universal structure of experience ensures that there is always an *excess* 'to-come' and that because of this there is *no figure*, no event that is anything less than *irreducible* despite the futile efforts of historical (re)presenters to suggest otherwise in/through their work. This messianic structure is both the downfall of the empirico-certaintist ('beyond all reasonable doubt') pretensions of historical (re)presentations and the motivational-generative spur that has always made possible their continued production. Thus the messianic has always already implicated historical (re)presentation, and historical culture more broadly, in a sort of paradoxical tension, forcing it to ceaselessly oscillate between these possibilities. By making this messianic structure to all historical (re)presentation explicit Derrida's call for *some other concept of history* is supported (on the basis that some other concept of history, one that might be considered a transitional moment in helping us to 'get out of history' – see *n*8 – is better than the one that has and continues to dominate). These points lead to the second question: why is it likely that historians will continue to demonstrate extreme ideological resistance to this logically unavoidable religio-messianic structure of historical (re)presentation that I am arguing for, choosing instead to continue to use historical writing as a means of removing – as Sande Cohen puts it – 'claimants from the future' and waging 'a war over claimants in every zone recognized by some narrator of a subject, the narrators in combat over legitimacy' (Cohen 2006b, 11)? Any response to this question needs to recognize the complexity of the conscious and unconscious disavowals and political settlements that continue to discipline (bind?) the academic history profession. At this point I want to make clear my hope that this thesis contributes to fatally undermining the effectiveness of this system of disavowal thereby unsettling the political perniciousness of the innumerable 'unreflexive' and unacknowledged (i.e. not made explicit) narrative moves made by historians and users of historical culture more broadly with the aim of 'loosening the bonds' of the history profession and 'setting the captives free' from the restrictiveness of a moribund historical culture. I return to this hope – which infuses this thesis with life – in the Conclusion.

consideration of a range of texts, both Derrida's – where he sets out and defends his particular idea(s) of the messianic – and those of John D. Caputo who I consider to be his most important 'affirmationist' interlocutor on this subject. Together, I think these readings constitute the *first* detailed *reading* of the messianic in Derrida and Caputo that is related specifically to a sustained theorisation of 'lower case' historical (re)presentation/historicization in all its forms (a theorisation which is also a critique of historical culture); this is the burden of my thesis.

Now, given the 'novelty' of this reading, it has to be said that the difficulties of 'connecting' with and arranging the material on the messianic in the Derridean corpus *vis-à-vis* historical (re)presentation are not to be underestimated. In recognition of this and in order to firstly establish his particular formulation(s) of the messianic, I begin in the first section with a tightly focussed and detailed (one might best categorize it as 'slow') reading/discussion that concentrates on *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* (hereafter referred to as *Specters*), published in English in 1994 and where, according to Vincent B. Leitch (2007, 25), Derrida's discussion of 'the messianic without messianism' was 'famously first assembled'.[5] I follow this with a shorter and less detailed discussion of Derrida's subsequent 'response' to various critical engagements with that work in 'Marx & Sons', published in 1999 in *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida's 'Specters of Marx'* (hereafter referred to as *Ghostly Demarcations*), a collection edited by Michael Sprinker. Having carried out a reading of these two texts[6] (and limiting the number of extraneous citations to points of technical/terminological clarification and/or connections to related debates in historical theory), the second section continues this

[5] Leitch goes on to say of the 'messianic without messianism' that it 'featured regularly thereafter' in Derrida's work (Leitch 2007, 25). Arguably, the concept of the messianic going under other names can be 'found' much earlier in the Derridean corpus. See, for example, the exergue in *Of Grammatology* (Derrida 1997b, 4-5) – first published in French in 1967 – where Derrida suggests that 'patient meditation and painstaking investigation on and around what is still provisionally called writing' constitute 'a way of thinking that is faithful and attentive to the ineluctable world of the future'. Here 'the wanderings' of this way of thinking 'on and around' writing constitute a structural affirmation of the future (*l'avenir*) and can be considered an alternative formulation of the messianic. Here, the future (*l'avenir*) – that 'which proclaims itself at present, beyond the closure of knowledge' and 'can only be anticipated in the form of an absolute danger' – is 'that which breaks absolutely with constituted normality and can be proclaimed, *presented*, as a sort of monstrosity'.

[6] In this chapter I limit myself to those passages in 'Marx & Sons' that help to set out/exegete the 'basic' Derridean conception of the messianic.

'exegesis' of the messianic *via* a broadening out of the range of references, including discussion of other work(s) by Derrida and, crucially, to the aforementioned 'affirmationist'[7] contribution of Caputo, perhaps the most prominent and in my view the most influential 'countersigner' of the Derridean conception of the messianic. Throughout these two sections – *the first considerably longer than the second* – I utilise, *inter alia*, the messianic motif and associated material (e.g. the concept of 'hauntology', the 'logic' of the event, the absolute *arrivant* and *revenant*, hospitality, the experience of the impossible, etc.) to outline and argue *for* a *new* messianic historical theory, a metahistorical theorisation that dwells on and is informed by a radicalised conception of historicity and that refigures the production of historical (re)presentations in both upper and lower case forms and articulates the task of the historian in explicitly messianic terms. In different places my arguments in this chapter will be linked back to the Introduction's messianic concerns and to Chapter One so as to emphasize the point that, given Derrida's 'ceaseless radical (i.e. deconstructive) critique' of all historical (re)presentation (the argument of Chapter One), the most useful way to think about both upper and lower case history forms – should we want to persist in trying[8] – is to (re)conceive them in the messianic terms – or 'mode of thought' – set out in his work.

So, and by way of a final restatement, my overall aim in *this* chapter is to explore in some detail Derrida's arguments regarding the messianic as well as those of Caputo and, in the course of doing so, explicate their utility and importance for thinking some other concept of history/historical (re)presentation *per se*.

[7] My understanding and deployment of the term 'affirmationist' differs significantly from that of Benjamin Noys in his excellent discussion of 'the persistence of the negative' in contemporary continental philosophy (Noys 2010). Here and throughout (for example, in my Introduction), my usage of this term should be taken to denote the work of thinkers often – but not exclusively – drawn from the 'field' of contemporary continental philosophy of religion who – to varying extents – have focussed sympathetically on and been galvanised by the messianic emphasis in Derrida's work.

[8] I want to acknowledge that while historical (re)presentation in all its forms is predicated on this unavoidable religio-messianic structure the two are not the same. In other words while the messianic structure I will go on to discuss will *never* stop or disappear, it is entirely possible that the name of 'history/historical (re)presentation' will, and that the benefits arising from this possibility should be considered.

Section One: Reading the messianic in *Specters of Marx* and 'Marx & Sons'

In their Editor's Introduction to Derrida's *Specters* (Derrida 1994, *vii-xi*) Bernd Magnus and Stephen Cullenberg recount (*ix-x*) that in 1993[9] Derrida gave a plenary address at the conference 'Whither Marxism? Global Crises in International Perspective', held at the University of California, Riverside. Derrida's lecture at that conference entitled 'Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International', became the basis for the (expanded) book of the same name. For Magnus and Cullenberg the purpose of *Specters* was to 'address questions about the connection between the death of communism and the fate of Marxism' as well as to 'explore the effects' of 'global crises engendered by the collapse of communism' on 'avant-garde scholars' (*xi*). For the Derrida of 'Marx & Sons', *Specters* raised 'three questions' regarding the work and name of Marx: of 'the essence, tradition and demarcation of the ''political'' ', of 'philosophy *qua* ontology', and of the 'topoi...beneath...the name ''*Marx*'' ' (Derrida 1999c, 217). Looking back, Derrida regarded the thesis of *Specters* as presupposing the 'indissociability' of these three questions but asserts that 'virtually none' of the texts authored by the contributors to *Ghostly Demarcations* has taken them 'seriously or directly into account as a question.' (Derrida 1999c, 217) Whilst disappointing, this is perhaps understandable given that, as Michael Sprinker in his introduction to *Ghostly Demarcations* points out, the 'immediate occasion' that led to the production of *Specters* was 'perhaps not the most auspicious for producing the long-awaited direct encounter between Derrida and Marxism.'[10] (Sprinker 1999, 1) As Sprinker explains:

> The original lecture that later became a book was delivered at an academic conference held in a region, if arguably not a university, dominated politically by the Right...at a moment (April 1993) when the future of Marxism seemed bleaker than at any time since the defeat of the Second German Revolution in 1923. The environment for Derrida's lecture thus seemed an unlikely one for

[9] Some of the 'historical' (i.e. chronological) details given by Magnus and Cullenberg are as follows: 'The conference itself was organized and managed by the Center for Ideas and Society at the University of California, Riverside. It began on Thursday, April 22, 1993 with Jacques Derrida's plenary address and ended on Saturday, April 24, 1993. His plenary address was delivered in two parts, on the evenings of April 22nd and 23rd.' (Derrida 1994, *ix-x*)

[10] In relation to this narrativization of Derrida's 'long awaited ''encounter'' with Marxism', Jason Smith, in his excellent 'Jacques Derrida, ''Crypto-Communist?'' ', declares that the 'sole task' of his essay is to 'complicate this rather pat story' (Smith 2009, 626).

> him to renew, if not precisely to redeem, an old pledge[11]: to confront head-on the relationship of deconstruction to Marxism... (Sprinker 1999, 1)

Accordingly, Sprinker provides an early warning that the reader 'will almost certainly be disappointed' if they come to *Specters*

> in the hope that now, at long last, Derrida's (or deconstruction's, which is not quite the same thing) relationship to Marxism will be profoundly clarified or definitively resolved... (Sprinker 1999, 1)

However, despite this and the related 'condemnation' that Sprinker describes as being levelled against Derrida's mode of engaging Marx's texts as well as Marxism more generally by the majority of contributors who 'tend to be on the Marxist side of the deconstruction/Marxism divide'[12] (Sprinker 1999, 1-2), for the purposes of this thesis what most interests me in *Specters*[13] is the formulation of the messianic that it – and 'Marx & Sons' – contain and, closely related to this, its arguable status as his most sustained and significant contribution to historical theory.

---

[11] In the course of an interview with Jean-Louis Houdebine and Guy Scarpetta in *Positions* (Derrida 1981b, originally published in France in 1972) Derrida – responding to a question from Houdebine on 'the necessity of marking out' an inevitable deconstructive 'encounter' with 'the materialist text' and the way in which this 'marking out' had, up until the time of the interview, been done 'in a lacunary fashion', including 'leaving in suspense...any reference to Marx' – asks that it be believed that 'the ''lacunae'' to which you alluded are explicitly calculated to mark the sites of a theoretical elaboration which remains, *for me*, at least, *still to come*.' (Derrida 1981b, 62) In 'Marx & Sons' Derrida states that *Specters* was meant to be 'after its fashion, a kind of ''response'', and only a response – as much to a direct invitation as to an urgent injunction, but also to a longstanding demand.' (Derrida 1999c, 213)

[12] As Sprinker is quick to point out, 'it is among the several burdens of Derrida's argument to challenge this very binarism' (Sprinker 1999, 2). Sprinker cites a well known passage from *Specters* (which I quote here at slightly greater length): 'Deconstruction has never had any sense or interest, in my view at least, except as a radicalization, which is to say also *in the tradition* of a certain Marxism, in a certain *spirit of Marxism*. There has been, then, this attempted radicalization of Marxism called deconstruction...But a radicalization is always indebted to the very thing it radicalizes.' (Derrida 1994, 92)

[13] There are many aspects of *Specters* that, due to the emphasis on the messianic that I want to maintain in this chapter, it is not possible to explore. For example, the tripartite subtitle (*The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*) was, in part, concerned with the 'state' of the world that many were, at the time, identifying as 'post-Marx/ist' (although not Derrida who resisted, but not without problematizing, this 'dominant discourse' – Derrida 1994, 55), to the 'work' of mourning that this and the 'plagues' of the 'new world order' induced, and to a call for the formation of a 'New International' in response to various crises in international law (Derrida 1994, 77-88). There is also a meditation on the conflict in the Middle East (Derrida 1994, 58-61), an intervention into the 'end of history/triumph of capitalism' debate by way of a dissection of Francis Fukuyama's 1992 book *The End of History and the Last Man* (Derrida 1994, 56-69) and fascinating insights into commodification and commodity fetishism/effect/relation (Derrida 1994, 148-167).

Derrida begins the first chapter of *Specters* ('Injunctions of Marx' – Derrida 1994, 4[14]) by quoting from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* ('Act I, scene v') and proceeds to make a link between the first sentence of *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*, ' ''A specter is haunting Europe – the specter of communism'' ' (5) and the aforementioned play:

> As in *Hamlet*, the Prince of a rotten State, everything begins by the apparition of a specter. More precisely by the *waiting* for this apparition. (4)

Derrida stresses the intensity of the 'anticipation' involved in this waiting:

> The anticipation is at once important, anxious, and fascinated: this, this thing ('this thing') will end up coming. The *revenant*[15] is going to come. It won't be long. But how long it is taking. (4)

In the final endnote to *Specters* Derrida points out that 'a *revenant* is always called upon to come and to come back' and that because of this 'the thinking of the specter...signals toward the future.' (196*n*39) Thus, crucially:

> It is a thinking of the past, a legacy that can come only from that which has not yet arrived – from the *arrivant* itself. (196*n*39)

Accordingly, Derrida devotes much of *Specters* to exploring the linkage of these ideas of 'thinking the past' with 'intense anticipation' for what 'has not yet arrived'. This is a crucial conceptual emphasis in the development of a messianic historical theory (other important details and qualifications are provided at different points in *Specters*): the thinking of the past – 'the thinking of the specter', this 'fascinated', 'anxious', 'anticipation' for some-thing that comes back – 'signals toward the future'.

[14] Throughout the 'slow reading' of *Specters* in the rest of this section all page references in the main text – including those accompanying block quotations – that are *not* preceded by the author name and publication date in the usual way are to Derrida 1994 (i.e. to *Specters*).

[15] Peggy Kamuf, who translated *Specters* from the French, writes the following of the word *revenant*: 'A common term for ghost or specter, the *revenant* is literally that which comes back.' (Derrida 1994, 177*n*1)

Later in the first chapter, in the course of further reflections on the quotation from *Hamlet* – focussing on the lines ' ''The time is out of joint. O cursèd spite,/That ever I was born to set it right!'' ' (20-21)[16] – and, specifically, on whether 'right or law stems from vengeance' as he thinks Hamlet 'seems to complain', Derrida formulates, and problematicises the temporality of, several related questions:

> [C]an one not yearn for a justice that one day, a day belonging no longer to history, a quasi-messianic day, would finally be removed from the fatality of vengeance? Better than removed: infinitely foreign, heterogeneous at its source? And is this day before us, to come, or more ancient than memory itself? If it is difficult, in truth impossible, *today*, to decide between these two hypotheses, it is precisely because 'The time is out of joint' (21-22)

The quasi-messianic day that Derrida describes here – a day that, paradoxically and aporetically, is *both* always before us ('to come') *and* 'ancient' – disrupts history because it escapes it; it no longer 'belongs' to history or, rather, is heterogeneous to it. Here Derrida seems to suggest that it might be possible for the hegemonic power of historical (re)presentation/historicization and the historical culture it generates to be *unsettled* (disturbed/disrupted) by the explicit contemplation of that (i.e. the messianic day of justice, or a messianic mode of thought that thinks the 'to-come' of justice) which is beyond or outside its own pervasiveness (thereby also challenging the presuppositions of arguments regarding the inescapability of – including the undesirability of ever trying to escape or 'get out of' – historical culture). Not everything 'belongs' to history: the messianic disturbs perceptions of its endlessly immanent, absorptive and consolidating power. This day 'to-come' evades all forms of historical determination, all attempts at historical (re)presentation. Another way of putting this is to say that the quasi-messianic day that is both before us/to come and ancient/behind us, is that which *disjoints* – it dis-joints time – the event of justice that is yearned for. Some pages further on, during a discussion of the use of

[16] Prior to Derrida, Gilles Deleuze – in his *Kant's Critical Philosophy: The Doctrine of the Faculties* (Deleuze 2008, originally published in French under the title *La Philosophie Critique de Kant* in 1963 and which predates Derrida's *Specters*) – drew attention to (as the first of '*four poetic formulas which might summarize the Kantian philosophy*') what he described as 'Hamlet's great formula, ''The time is out of joint''. Time is out of joint, time is unhinged. The hinges are the axis around which the door turns.' (Deleuze 2008, *vii*)

'*Un-Fug*' (the disjointure, or disjoining or – '*Un-Fuge*' – disjunction; see 26-27) in Heidegger's work, Derrida suggests that 'justice as relation to the other' supposes 'the irreducible excess' of a 'disjointure or an anachrony...some ''out of joint'' dislocation in Being and in time itself.' Such 'disjointure' that always risks 'the evil, expropriation, and injustice' towards which 'no calculable insurance' can be opposed is alone able 'to *do justice* or to *render justice* to the other as other'. This *doing* or *rendering* of justice exceeds unproblematic or programmable notions of 'action' (including programmable acts of resistance) and 'restitution' respectively (27). Derrida's 'interpretation' of 'the *Un-Fug*', of 'the irreducible possibility...of the anachronic disjointure' from which deconstruction 'draws...the very resource and injunction of its reaffirmed affirmation', is where 'the relation of deconstruction to the possibility of justice' is 'played out' (27-28). Repetitive imperative stress is placed on 'the relation of deconstruction' to

> what must (without debt and without duty) be rendered to the singularity of the other, to his or her absolute *pre*cedence or to his or her absolute *pre*viousness, to the heterogeneity of a *pre-*, which, to be sure, means what comes before me, before any present, thus before any past present, but also what, for that very reason, comes from the future or as future: as the very coming of the event.[17] (28)

Derrida goes on to explain that the 'necessary disjointure, the de-totalizing condition of justice, is indeed that of the present'; it is 'the very condition of the present and of the presence of the present.' (28) Derrida situates this necessary disjointure, this de-totalizing condition (in this case of justice) as where deconstruction would 'always begin to take shape'; deconstruction 'as the thinking of the gift and of

[17] Elsewhere Derrida has reminded his readers that 'an event implies surprise, exposure, the unanticipatable' (Derrida 2007a, 223). Martinon's discussion of 'event' is particularly apposite and helpful here: 'An event concerns the intimacy between consciousness, space, and time and marks the *condition* of all appearing. An event characterizes that which emerges or surges *out of* the disjuncture (provoked by) *à-venir*. It always already represents *something* that is *in excess*, something that *adds* itself to reality and allows consciousness to perceive it as a phenomenon. An event – even a past event – always relates to something new, an invention, a recollection, a ''first time'', that is, something singular that *appears* and constitutes an inaugural act of production or understanding that is recognized, legitimized, and even sometimes countersigned by a social consensus. An event effectively *produces* meaning and for this reason, belongs exclusively to phenomenology. The crucial characteristic of an event is that, as Derrida says in relation to inventions, it also necessarily marks ''*a last time*: archaeology and eschatology acknowledge each other here in the irony of the *one and only* instant'' [Derrida 2007b, 6]. An event therefore signals both a beginning and an end, something determinable – temporally or historically – as such.' (Martinon 2007, 2)

undeconstructible justice' (28). Here he 'repeats'[18] what has become his well known formulation of justice as 'the undeconstructible condition of any deconstruction' This condition 'is itself *in deconstruction*' and there is an 'injunction' that it must remain 'in the disjointure of the *Un-Fug*.' (28) For justice not to remain 'in the disjointure' (i.e. of the quasi-messianic day that is both before us/to come and ancient/behind us) will be for it to rest 'on the good conscience of having done one's duty' and lose 'the chance of the future'. Derrida develops this 'chance of the future' as

> the promise or the appeal, of the desire also (that is its 'own' possibility), of this desert-like messianism (without content and without identifiable messiah), of this also *abyssal* desert, 'desert in the desert'...one desert signalling toward the other, abyssal and *chaotic* desert, if chaos describes first of all the immensity, excessiveness, disproportion in the gaping hole of the open mouth - in the waiting or calling for what we have nicknamed here without knowing the messianic: the coming of the other, the absolute and unpredictable singularity of the *arrivant*[19] *as justice*. (28)

Thus Derrida links the possibility ('chance') of the future to a 'promise' or 'appeal', to the desire of a barren ('desert-like') *messianism* that, perhaps surprisingly given the loaded connotations of the word, is without determinative features (i.e. no content and no identifiable messiah). This desert-like *messianism* is associated with/in an endless ('abyssal') 'desert in the desert' – *khora* [20] – that is unpredictable

[18] In the text 'Force of Law: The ''Mystical Foundation of Authority'' ' – the first part of which was read at the Cardozo Law School in October 1989 (predating *Specters*) entitled 'Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice' – Derrida writes that 'Justice in itself, if such a thing exist, outside or beyond law, is not deconstructible. No more than deconstruction itself, if such a thing exist. *Deconstruction is justice*.' (Derrida 2002c, 243)

[19] Peggy Kamuf explains that 'arrivant' can be translated as 'the one who or that which arrives, or simply the arriving' (Derrida 1994, 181*n*4). Thomas Dutoit has it that 'Arrivant can mean ''arrival'', ''newcomer'', or ''arriving''.' (Derrida 1993a, 86*n*13)

[20] In the course of a discussion with Jean-Luc Marion on the gift, Derrida provides an extremely helpful explanation of this 'desert in the desert' that clarifies the irreducibility of *khora* to history: '[W]hen I refer to *khora*, I refer to some event, the possibility of taking place, which is not historical, to something non-historical that resists historicity. In other words, there might be something that is excluded by this problematic…That is why I refer to what I call the ''desert in the desert''. There is a biblical desert, there is an historical desert. But what I call a ''desert in the desert'' is this place which resists historicization, which is, I will not say ''before'', because that is chronological, but which remains irreducible to historicization, humanization, anthropo-theologization of revelation…That is what I point to when I refer to *khora*. But this place of resistance, this absolute heterogeneity to philosophy and the Judeo-Christian history of revelation, even to the concept of history, which is a Christian concept, is not simply at war with what it resists. It is also, if I may use this terrible word, a *condition of possibility which makes history possible by resisting it* [emphasis/italics mine]. It is also a place of non-gift which makes the gift possible by resisting it. It is the place of non-desire. The *khora* does not desire anything, does not give

('chaotic'). Here, the word 'chaos' is used to describe the significance, uncontainability and accentuation ('immensity', 'excessiveness', 'disproportion') of the *waiting* or *calling* (presented here as 'the gaping hole of the open mouth') for what Derrida names – 'without knowing' – the *messianic*, this opening to 'the coming of the other' (that Derrida has as an 'absolute', 'unpredictable' and 'singular' justice; a coming justice that has not yet arrived: 'the absolute and unpredictable singularity of the *arrivant*[21] *as justice*'). It is this formulation of the

---

anything. It is what makes taking place or an event possible. But the *khora* does not happen, does not give, does not desire. It is a spacing and it remains absolutely indifferent. Why do I insist on this, on this perplexity?...I think this reference to what I call *khora*, the absolutely universal place, so to speak, is what is irreducible to what we call revelation, revealability, history, religion, philosophy, Bible, Europe, and so forth. I think the reference to this place of resistance is also the condition for a universal politics, for the possibility of crossing the borders of our common context – European, Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and philosophical. I think this reference to this non-history and non-revelation, this negativity has heavy and serious political implications. I use the problematic of deconstruction and negative theology as a threshold to the definition of a new politics. I am not saying this against Europe, against Judaism, Christianity, or Islam. I am trying to find a place where a new discourse and a new politics could be possible. This place is the place of resistance – perhaps resistance is not the best word – but this non-something within something, this non-revelation within revelation, this non-history within history, this non-desire within desire, this impossibility. I would like to translate the experience of this impossibility into what we could call ethics or politics.' (see p76-77 of 'On the Gift: A Discussion between Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion' in Caputo and Scanlon 1999). Additionally, in his preface to *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason* (2005, *xiv-xv*), Derrida draws upon the image of a 'desert in the desert' to link the ideas of a 'messianic without messianism' (i.e. the structure of the 'to-come') with *khōra*. He describes the 'common affirmation' of the two lectures contained within *Rogues* as resembling 'an act of messianic faith – irreligious and without messianism' and that 'such an affirmation would resound through another naming of *khōra*.' A helpful discussion of *khōra* follows: 'A certain reinterpretation of Plato's *Timaeus* had named *khōra* (which means *locality* in general, spacing, interval) another *place* without age, another ''taking place'', the irreplaceable place or placement of a ''desert in the desert'', a spacing from ''before'' the world, the cosmos, or the globe, from ''before'' any chronophenomenology, any revelation, any ''as such'' and any ''as if'', any anthropotheological dogmatism of historicity.

But what would allow these to take place, without, however, providing any ground or foundation, would be precisely khōra. Khōra would make or give place; it would give rise – without ever giving anything – to what is called the coming of the event. Khōra receives rather than gives. Plato in fact presents it as a ''receptacle''. Even if it comes ''before everything'', it does not exist for itself. Without belonging to that which it gives way or for which it makes place [*fait place*], without *being a part* [*faire partie*] of it, without *being of it*, and without being something else or someone other, giving nothing other, it would give rise or allow to take place...

No politics, no ethics, and no law can be, as it were, *deduced* from this thought. To be sure, nothing can be *done* [*faire*] with it...But should we then conclude that this thought leaves no trace on what is to be done – for example in the politics, the ethics, or the law to come?

On it, perhaps, on what here receives the name *khōra*, a call might thus be taken up and take hold: the call for a thinking of the event *to come*, of the democracy *to come*, of the reason *to come*. This call bears every hope, to be sure, although it remains, in itself, without hope. Not hopeless, in despair, but foreign to the teleology, the hopefulness, and the *salut* of salvation.' (Derrida 2005c, *xiv-xv*)

[21] In *Aporias* Derrida asks 'What is the *arrivant* that makes the event arrive?' There follows a helpful delineation of the 'new' or 'absolute *arrivant*' – to which Derrida's question relates and which is to be distinguished from various other arrivants – in the course of which Derrida makes the following remarks: 'The new *arrivant*, this word can, indeed, mean the neutrality of *that which* arrives, but also the singularity of *who* arrives, he or she who comes, coming to be where s/he was not expected, where one was awaiting him or her without waiting for him or her, without expecting *it* [*s'y attendre*], without knowing what or whom to expect, what or whom I am waiting for – and such is hospitality itself, hospitality toward the event. One does not expect the event of whatever, of whoever comes, arrives, and

messianic (as always-about/future 'to-come') that Derrida believes 'remains an *ineffaceable* mark – a mark one neither can nor should efface – of Marx's legacy' as well as 'of *inheriting*, of the experience of inheritance in general.' (28) It is this ineffaceability of the mark that preserves 'the event-ness of the event, the singularity and the alterity of the other.' (28)

At one point during this explication Derrida indicates that later in the book he will discuss the 'desert in the desert' (28). When that point is reached (167ff) he attempts to delineate the formulations of 'messianism' and 'messianic', these 'two deserts' (168). This delineation takes place in the context of an articulation of 'what is at stake' in 'work to come' and which links the 'general question of fetishization' to 'the question of phantomatic spectrality.' (167) For Derrida 'everything which today links Religion and Technics[22] in a singular configuration' is at stake. More specifically, what is firstly at stake is that which takes 'the original form of a return of the religious, whether fundamentalist or not' (167). According to his analysis this 'return of the religious'

---

crosses the threshold…But if the new *arrivant* who arrives is new, one must expect – without waiting for him or her, without expecting it – that he does not simply cross a given threshold. Such an *arrivant* affects the very experience of the threshold, whose possibility he thus brings to light before one even knows whether there has been an invitation, a call, a nomination, or a promise…What we could here call the *arrivant*, the most *arrivant* among all *arrivants*, the *arrivant* par excellence, is whatever, whoever, in arriving, does not cross a threshold separating two identifiable places…the absolute *arrivant*…is not even a guest. He surprises the host…enough to call into question, to the point of annihilating or rendering indeterminate, all the distinctive signs of a prior identity, beginning with the very border that delineated a legitimate home and assured lineage, names and language, nations, families and genealogies. The absolute *arrivant* does not yet have a name or an identity…This is why I call it simply the arrivant, and not someone or something that arrives…Since the *arrivant* does not have any identity yet, its place of arrival is also de-identified: one does not yet know or one no longer knows…the home in general that welcomes the absolute *arrivant*. This absolute *arrivant*…no more commands than is commanded by the memory of some originary event where the archaic is bound with the *final* extremity, with the finality par excellence of the *telos* or of the *eskhaton*. It even exceeds the order of any *determinable* promise. Now the border that is ultimately most difficult to delineate, because it is always already crossed, lies in the fact that the absolute *arrivant* makes possible everything to which I have just said it cannot be reduced…Yet this border will always keep one from discriminating among the figures of the *arrivant*, the dead, and the *revenant* (the ghost, he, she, or that which returns).' (Derrida 1993a, 33-35)

[22] Morgan Wortham provides a helpful explanation of Derrida's thinking of 'technicity': 'For Derrida, the metaphysical tradition prioritizes speech over writing by construing the spoken word as a living expression issuing from a vital source of meaning. In contrast, writing is depicted as the merely *technical* instrument of potentially detachable representations...writing is subordinated *precisely* as a technology or technical tool. Yet Derrida's thinking of an irreducible supplement at the ''origin'' leads him to rethink *techné* in terms of a making, fabrication, or fabulation that is in fact originary – even for ''truth'' itself...To the extent that the ''technological'' is therefore called up by the ''other'' of itself, it cannot be thought of in terms of an ''essence''; nor, for that matter, can it be determined merely as an ''object'' – and, thus, a technical instrument – of knowledge.' (Morgan Wortham 2010, 206-208)

> overdetermines all questions of nation, State, international law, human rights, Bill of Rights – in short, everything that concentrates its habitat in the at least symptomatic figure of Jerusalem or, here and there, of its reappropriation and of the system of alliances that are ordered around it. (167)

It is immediately after making this point that Derrida asks the following question:

> How to relate, but also how to dissociate the two messianic spaces we are talking about here under the same name? (167)

In response he provides a clarificatory summing up (this in the last ten pages of the main text of *Specters*) of the 'messianic appeal' which, with equivocation ('If'), he suggests can be distinguished from, so as 'to *think* it *with*', the 'figures of Abrahamic messianism' (167):

> [T]he messianic appeal belongs properly to a universal structure, *to that irreducible movement of the historical opening to the future*, therefore to experience itself and to its language (expectation, promise, commitment to the event of what is coming, imminence, urgency, demand for salvation and for justice beyond law, pledge given to the other inasmuch as he or she is not present, presently present or living, and so forth)... (167, italics mine)

Subsequently, Derrida proceeds to raise a number of questions and hypotheses that 'do not exclude each other. At least for us and for the moment' (168), including whether Abrahamic messianism could and should be considered 'but an exemplary pre-figuration, the pre-name [*prénom*] given against the background of the possibility' that is being named, i.e. the *messianic*, and which one of these 'two deserts...first of all, will have signalled toward the other?' (168). He prefers to use the word *messianic* rather than *messianism* 'so as to designate a structure of experience rather than a religion' (167-168) but recognises that this nuanced usage begs a question:

> [W]hy keep the name, or at least the adjective...there where no figure of the *arrivant*, even as he or she is heralded, should be pre-determined, prefigured, or even pre-named? (167-168)

Derrida queries whether it is possible to 'conceive an atheological heritage of the messianic' (168). He recognises that no heritage is ever natural and that 'one may inherit more than once, in different places and at different times' (168). In exploring heritage(s) one may choose strategically 'to wait for the most appropriate time, which may be the most untimely'[23] and 'write about it according to different *lineages*, and sign thus more than one *import*.' (168) This qualification helps to set up Derrida's preferred position, or emphasis, *vis-à-vis* the messianic motif/figuration that he is developing, a position/emphasis which he describes as follows:

> Ascesis[24] strips the messianic hope of all biblical forms, and even all determinable figures of the wait or expectation; it thus denudes itself in view of responding to that which must be absolute hospitality, the 'yes' to the *arrivant(e)*, the 'come' to the future that cannot be anticipated... (168)

The messianic as absolute hospitality is open, 'waiting for the event *as* justice': 'this hospitality is absolute only if it keeps watch over its own universality.' (168)

Thus for Derrida (and again by way of clarificatory summary):

> The messianic, including its revolutionary forms (and the messianic is always revolutionary, it has to be), would be urgency, imminence but, *irreducible paradox, a waiting without horizon of expectation*.[25] (168, italics mine)

The *messianic* desert has a 'quasi-atheistic dryness' or barrenness about it, but Derrida points out that this can be taken to be 'the condition of the religions of the Book, a desert that was not even theirs' (168). In this desert can be recognized 'the arid soil' in which blossomed ('grew') and withered ('passed away') 'the living

---

[23] This is possibly, in part, a reference to the less than auspicious 'immediate occasion' that generated the 'long-awaited' engagement between Derrida and Marx (and that in turn led to *Specters*) as well as the 'condemnation' that Derrida incurred for the mode of his engagement, both alluded to by Sprinker, as discussed earlier.

[24] *Ascesis* is the practice of self-discipline or training.

[25] Catherine Malabou helps to clarify this description of the Derridean messianic as follows: 'The absolute *arrivant* thus has no name and no identity. The imminence of his or her or its coming demands a hospitality without reserve, the opening of the Same to an unassimilable difference. This hospitality is not an anticipation. To wait for or expect the coming of the *arrivant* necessarily comes down to lessening the surprise of such an event. What is required here is a waiting without any horizon of waiting [i.e. *a*waiting], a singular waiting that Derrida calls the ''messianic''.' (Malabou and Derrida 2004, 235-6)

figures of all the messiahs, whether they were announced, recognized, or still awaited.' (168) Indeed, it may be considered that these are 'the only events on the basis of which we approach and first of all name the messianic in general' (168).

Recognised here is that one 'may deem strange, strangely familiar and inhospitable all at the same time (*unheimlich*, uncanny)' the 'figure of absolute hospitality' (168) that is developed in *Specters*. Specifically, that strangeness resides in choosing to entrust this 'promise' of 'absolute hospitality'

> to an experience that is so impossible, so unsure in its indigence, to a quasi-'messianism' so anxious, fragile, and impoverished, to an always presupposed 'messianism', to a quasi-transcendental 'messianism' that also has such an obstinate interest in a materialism without substance: a materialism of the *khôra* for a despairing 'messianism'. (168-169)

Here 'strangeness' leads to a form of despair. Yet crucially such despair or lack of certainty about what is coming is indispensable; it is the disjointure, or disjoining, of the 'to-come' that makes possible affirmatory hope since 'if one could *count* on what is coming, hope would be but the calculation of a program.' (169). To proceed on the basis of being able to count on what is coming, a form of *knowing* ([re]presentation as determinative and ontologising, as fixity) rather than *faith* (in that which is 'to-come' as un[re]presentable) would result in a 'prospect' that curtails the 'wait for anything or anyone' and constitute 'law without justice' (169). And, of course, Derrida doesn't want to be without a desire for the event of justice; the justice that he longs for is to be irreducibly delineated from, and evasive of, the programmatic calculation of the law. An acquiescence to 'law without justice' leads to a situation where one 'would no longer invite...no longer receive any visits, no longer even think to see', or '[t]o see coming' (169); with the erosion of this (imperative) waiting/hospitality that is without/blind to anticipation there is no more future (or history). What Derrida emphasises here is the challenge to become familiar with the 'curious taste' of this 'despairing ''messianism'' ' (169). He utilises the concepts of 'despair', 'taste' and 'desire' in anticipating and accepting the following query:

> Some, and I do not exclude myself, will find this despairing 'messianism' has a curious taste, a taste of death. It is true that this taste is above all a taste, a foretaste, and in essence it is curious. Curious of the very thing it conjures – and that leaves something to be desired. (169)

This challenge to engage with this despairing yet curious messianism is further delineated by Derrida in the context of considering how the 'deployment of *tekhnē,* of techno-science or tele-technology...obliges us to think...another space for democracy' and, more precisely, 'for democracy-to-come and thus for justice' (169). For Derrida, it is in 'the virtual space of all the tele-technosciences' and 'the general dis-location to which our time is destined' that 'the messianic trembles on the edge of this event itself': the event of democracy-to-come/justice (169). This trembling which is also a 'hesitation' *is* the messianic. The messianic 'has no other vibration' apart from this trembling/hesitation ('it does not ''live'' otherwise') (169). Derrida stresses that the messianic 'would no longer be messianic if it stopped hesitating'; and that which it is hesitating over is precisely what I think constitutes *the* challenge for all (re)presentation (including historical [re]presentation): the question of 'how to give rise and to give place [*donner lieu*], still' or, put differently, 'to render it [i.e. the event of democracy-to-come/justice], this place, to render it habitable' yet doing so 'without killing the future in the name of old frontiers' (169). How can historical (re)presentation be conceived as operating in a way that is responsive to/affirming of the 'to-come' and yet resist closing down (killing) the future (*via* ontologizing and totalizing [re]presentations and determinations that produce even more continuity with the past and/or previous historicizations of the past)? This is the aporetic despair/trembling/hesitation that messianic historical theory foregrounds and which, irrespective of whether it is acknowledged or not, structures the im-possibility of *all* histories and thereby disturbs/disrupts the dominant assumptions/presuppositions of historical culture. However, the messianic structure does not necessitate the paralysis or cessation of historical (re)presentation (although I think that the latter is a logical option that cannot be excluded). As Derrida reminds us:

> This messianic hesitation does not paralyze any decision, any affirmation, any responsibility. On the contrary, it grants them their elementary condition. It is their very experience. (169)

Here I read Derrida as posing in part something of an inescapable challenge to those, historians included, who would think in messianic terms. Accordingly, my contention is that the challenge for *all* propagators of historical culture (historicizers) is to (re)conceptualise what they do – i.e. historical (re)presentation – as messianic. Such a (re)conceptualisation should involve the development and awareness of – an acclimatisation to – a certain axiomatic messianic experience as a kind of professional formation process; namely, that any attempt to explicitly think the past in this messianic way will highlight a 'lack', a 'falling short', an ever-incomplete understanding ('despair', 'foretaste', 'curious') of what is being conjured or called forth, the object of the hope – methodological, political, etc. – that is being affirmed in/by their (re)presentations. There is thus an irreducible, future-oriented, unavoidable structural dissatisfaction (or disjointure/disjoining) about our thinking of the past that takes place in the here and now. Awareness of and acclimatisation to this axiomatic messianic experience should thus inculcate an appreciation (a messianic sensibility) that there always will be *more* that is left for historians to 'desire', more that *exceeds* and/or *evades* their (re)presentations of the past; always already more that is 'to-come'. This reading is supported, I would argue, by arguments Derrida makes early on in *Specters* in relation to the concepts of 'hauntology' and the 'logic' of the event. So I now discuss, *inter alia*, these concepts with the aim of demonstrating how Derrida, through various moves, develops their close relationship with the messianic in *Specters*.

A few pages into the first chapter of *Specters* Derrida considers the question occupying the Riverside colloquium: 'Whither Marxism?' (9). He responds by asking a series of questions of his own:

> In what way would it [i.e. the question 'Whither Marxism?'] be signalling toward Hamlet and Denmark and England? Why does it whisper to us to *follow* a ghost? Where? Whither? What does it mean to follow a ghost? (10)

Crucially, Derrida speculates that following a ghost – here he is concerned with the *plurality* of specters[26] of Marx – might involve 'being followed by it [a ghost]...persecuted perhaps by the very chase we are leading' (10). On this basis what appears as being 'out front, the future, comes back in advance from the past, from the back.' (10) Consequently, my argument here is that Derrida's point is thus applicable to *all* historical (re)presentation which, in his terms, can be understood as *a future oriented mode of following – or responding to – the ghosts of the past (revenants)*. The 'persecution' that arises from following – or responding to – ghosts will always involve the unsettling of all future oriented aspirations – i.e. the *futures*, possible legacies or 'spirits' of 'the past' to be affirmed – that constitute (or are contained within) and galvanise the production of historical (re)presentations. Historical culture and (re)presentation is always already permanently challenged by such haunting[27]: 'thinking the past' – which can also be better described, perhaps, as *the thinking of the specter* – involves endless 'intense anticipation' for what 'has not yet arrived', for some-thing that comes back that 'signals toward the future'. This haunting marks 'the very existence', and opens 'the space and the relation to self'[28] (4), of that which we seek to (re)present, of our thinking of the past. Haunting emphasises[29] the coming(-back) of the forgotten, repressed or unexplored legacies of the 'before now', an opening up and generation of the ceaseless process of historical (*re*)clamation (every [*re*]presentation, every [*re*]reading, is a [*re*]clamation) that has the *potential* to disrupt all and every dominant narrativisation that affects continuity with 'the past' in the name of some ontological determination or teleological destiny: 'A spectral asymmetry interrupts here all specularity. It de-synchronizes, it recalls us to anachrony' (6-7). Here Derrida's use of anachrony suggests the

[26] Having emphasised that 'It will always be a fault not to read and reread and discuss Marx' and that there will be 'no future without Marx, without the memory and the inheritance of Marx...of at least one of his spirits' Derrida propounds the 'hypothesis' or 'bias' that '*there is more than one of them, there must be more than one of them*.' (Derrida 1994, 13)

[27] Derrida remarks that in proposing his title (*Specters of Marx*) he was 'initially thinking of all the forms of a certain haunting obsession' that, in his view, 'organise the *dominant* influence on discourse today.' In a formulation that can be read as providing a succinct definition of deconstruction he states that 'Hegemony still organizes the repression and thus the confirmation of a haunting. Haunting belongs to the structure of every hegemony.' (Derrida 1994, 37) Nowhere is this more applicable than to historical culture/(re)presentation, as the hegemonic structure *par excellence*.

[28] Derrida makes these remarks in relation to the historicizing of Europe, but again my argument is that they are applicable to all historical (re)presentations.

[29] I am indebted to Sande Cohen's brilliant analysis of *Specters* (see Cohen 2006a) for helping to formulate my approach to some of the discussions of haunting that follow.

untimely, a disjunction, an 'out-of-time-ness'; haunting unsettles the present, subverting and alienating us from any/all settled, smooth temporalities/chronologies: 'The time is out of joint' (see also 18-20[30] and 110-112). On this reading the messianic and spectrality, the latter also termed 'hauntology' by Derrida (10), can be understood as that constitutive *différance* always already at work in language[31] and, therefore, in any thinking of the past: the deconstruction of historical theorising and (re)presentation with a spiritual hue. For hauntology encompasses both the ceaselessly *re*petitive aspects of historiography/historical culture – the constant *re*turn, *re*calling, *re*reading, *re*coding, *re*clamation, etc., that Sande Cohen describes as 'all the work of the *re*' (Cohen 2006a, 164) – at the same time as emphasising the *singularity* of the event – i.e. the coming(back) of that which is affirmed through historicization: 'Marx, Europe', etc., that will always exceed (*re*)presentation:

> Repetition *and* first time: this is perhaps the question of the event as question of the ghost. *What is* a ghost? What is the *effectivity* or the *presence* of a spectre, that is, of what seems to remain as ineffective, virtual, insubstantial as a simulacrum? Is there *there*, between the thing itself and its simulacrum, an opposition that holds up? Repetition *and* first time, but also repetition *and* last time, since the singularity of any *first time* makes of it also a *last time*. Each time it is the event itself, a first time is a last time. Altogether other. Staging for the end of history. Let us call it a *hauntology*. (10)

This hauntology or 'logic of haunting', is both 'larger and more powerful than an ontology or a thinking of Being' and shelters 'within itself' – although 'like

[30] Elsewhere in *Specters* Derrida understands that 'history' [by which I understand historical (re)presentation in both upper and lower case forms] 'can consist in repairing, with effects of conjuncture (and that is the world), the temporal disjoining' that is here signified by 'The time is out of joint'. I take this to mean that historical representation usually tries desperately to smooth out a perceived 'problematic' of time being '*disarticulated*, dislocated, dislodged, time is run down, on the run and run down [*traqué et détraqué*], *deranged*, both out of order and mad' (18) in favour of continuity. Yet '*can*' doesn't mean that historical (re)presentation *has* to privilege this approach and this is, I think, one of the most important 'yields' of a reading of *Specters* for historical theorists.

[31] In the essay 'Shibboleth: For Paul Celan', Derrida, in the course of discussing some lines of Celan's poetry, asserts that 'once dead, and without sepulcher, these words of mourning, themselves incinerated, may still come back.' For Derrida, words 'come back as phantoms' (Derrida 2005d, 53). Beginning the passage that follows with the statement 'Spectral errancy of words' he makes the following remark: 'This revenance does not befall words by accident...*All* words, from their first emergence, partake of revenance. They will always have been phantoms...What is called poetry or literature, art itself (let us make no distinction for the moment) – in other words, a certain experience of language, of the mark, or of the trait *as such* – is perhaps only an intense familiarity with the ineluctable originarity of the specter. One can, naturally, translate it into the ineluctable loss of the origin...It is experience, and as such, for poetry, for literature, for art itself.' (Derrida 2005d, 53) My argument is that it is *precisely* this spectral experience of *différance* that imbues *all* historical (re)presentation.

circumscribed places or particular effects' – 'eschatology and teleology themselves' (10). Hauntology comprehends these eschatological/teleological discourses/(re)presentations of/about 'the end' – e.g. 'the end of history' – 'but incomprehensibly', irresolvably problematicising them in familiar deconstructive fashion:

> How to *comprehend* in fact the discourse of the end or the discourse about the end? Can the extremity of the extreme ever be comprehended? And the opposition between 'to be' and 'not to be'? *Hamlet* already began with the expected return of the dead King. After the end of history, the spirit comes by *coming back* [revenant], it figures *both* a dead man who comes back and a ghost whose expected return repeats itself, again and again. (10)

The terminal finality of the discourses of eschatology and teleology are always surprised, exceeded and disrupted and so not comprehended (i.e. resisted, not privileged, or submitted to) by such ghostly/spectral repetitious event-ing over which such (re)presentations of 'the end' cannot exert control:

> A question of repetition: a specter is always a *revenant*. One cannot control its comings and goings because it *begins by coming back*. (11)

Accordingly, such uncontrollable spectral movements, such *actuality* (in the sense of their contemporariness, relevance and effectuality) which – as well shall see – blurs or blunts the distinction with *inactuality* (in the sense of their anachronicity, potentiality and virtuality), cannot be 'settled down' into a continuous direction/trajectory through the mechanism of historical (re)presentation, for such movements haunt those guardians of historical culture (e.g. historians and historiographers) who now have, as scholars, a seemingly 'almost impossible' (11) task:

> [T]o speak always *of the* specter, to speak *to the* specter, to speak with it, therefore especially *to make or to let* a spirit *speak*. (11)

Such acknowledgement of, and explicit engagement with these present/non-present ghosts/specters, constitutes a recognition of and a commitment to (i.e. calling for)

end-less return/repetition. Here Derrida identifies problems in how most sustainers of historical culture continue to operate in relation to (re)presentation:

> As theoreticians or witnesses, spectators, observers, and intellectuals, scholars believe that looking is sufficient. Therefore, they are not always in the most competent position to do what is necessary: speak to the specter. (11)

For 'there has never been a scholar who really, and as scholar, deals with ghosts', who believes in 'the virtual space of spectrality' (11). Rather, what most scholars believe in are 'sharp' distinctions

> between the real and the unreal, the actual and the inactual, the living and the non-living, being and non-being ('to be or not to be', in the conventional reading), in the opposition between what is present and what is not, for example in the form of objectivity. Beyond this opposition, there is, for the scholar, only the hypothesis of a school of thought, theatrical fiction, literature, and speculation. (11)

Accordingly, and in response to this condition, Derrida argues for a change to such dominant beliefs about scholarship (I mean, is the above quotation not, in part, a paradigmatic *description* of the majority of the history profession and its continuing obsession with spurious notions – invariably deployed for clandestine, and sometimes explicit, political purposes – such as claims to objectivity, ontological[32] assertions, rigid demarcations between history and literature, and a separating off of, and opposition between, the past and present?), drawing on Shakespeare's Marcellus who, he suggests, was anticipating and calling for 'the coming, one day, one night, several centuries later, of another ''scholar'' ' (12). This other or *new* scholar, Derrida's *preferred* scholar, the *new* historian, will be equipped and able to think beyond 'the opposition between presence and non-presence, actuality and

[32] Here I follow Cohen's understanding of 'ontological'. As noted in Chapter One, Cohen takes 'ontological' to mean 'the ways in which empirical relations become almost unthinkable in any other way' (Cohen 2006b, 3). Such a meaning is arrived at *via* Cohen's analysis of 'the uses and abuses of history' that 'presupposes that competition, negotiation, and selection are active forces of social life that require ''historical representation'' but that such representation is secondary to the politics of culture. An institution changes the way it ranks, evaluates, and selects its objects of value according to internal professional rivalries...as well as offering various public things worth seeing (reading, thinking); ''history'' follows from competition even if it seems to drive it. In this tangle, *selection* is a highly contested term, but it seems clear that its various forms have become nearly ontological.' (Cohen 2006b, 2-3)

inactuality, life and non-life'; in other words be able to think 'the possibility of the specter, the specter as possibility'. 'He' [*sic*] would know 'how to address himself to spirits' and that 'such an address is not only already possible' but also 'will have at all times conditioned, as such, address in general'. Arguably, there is a dramatic change in role and responsibility being advocated here (although the issue of whether this is precisely what the upholders of historical [re]presentation have always done without being aware of – disavowing – it is one that I will return to later), and Derrida acknowledges this when he writes of this *new scholar*: '[H]ere is someone mad enough to hope to *unlock* the possibility of such an address.' (12)

And there is more. For connected to this (re)figuring of the 'other/new' scholar is the issue of, and emphasis on, *obligation*. In the course of some comments on the 'eschatological themes' of end-ist debates – including especially Fukuyama's 'end of history' and the reading or analysis of what he suggests could be nicknamed 'the classics of the end...the canon of the modern apocalypse'[33] (14-15) – Derrida, continuing his disruption of certain forms of eschatology and teleology, asks the following question: 'How can one be late to the end of history?' (15) He asserts that this is a 'question for today':

> It is serious because it obliges one to reflect again, as we have been doing since Hegel, on what happens and deserves the name of *event*, after history; it obliges one to wonder if the end of history is but the end of a *certain* concept of history. (15)

Indeed. Thus the new scholar/historiographer is obliged to *think the event*, a task which in turn is related to (re)thinking history beyond the end of certain conceptions towards the possibility of 'some other concept of history' (here we are revisiting themes discussed in the Introduction and Chapter One). All obligation(s), including the obligation to rethink (re)presentation, involve decisions about how to respond to

[33] This 'canon of the modern apocalypse' is elaborated on by Derrida: 'end of History, end of Man, end of Philosophy, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Heidegger, with their Kojevian codicil and the codicils of Kojève himself' (15). The last two citations in this list are to the Marxist political philosopher Alexandre Kojève (1902-1968).

that which we are obligated, that which we wish to inherit[34] (for the historian selected remnants and legacies of 'the before now'). As Derrida points out, because inheritance is marked with 'radical and necessary *heterogeneity*', or 'the difference without opposition...a ''disparate'' and a quasi-juxtaposition without dialectic' (16) and is, therefore, a matter of plurality and never unity, then all scholars are obliged to *choose*:

> An inheritance is never gathered together, it is never one with itself. Its presumed unity, if there is one, can consist only in the *injunction* to *reaffirm by choosing*. (16)

This injunction for the scholar to 'reaffirm by choosing' is crucial. It is an imperative (words of command):

> 'One must' means one must filter, sift, criticize, one must sort out several different possibles that inhabit the same injunction. And inhabit it in a contradictory fashion around a secret. If the readability of a legacy were given, natural, transparent, univocal, if it did not call for and at the same time defy interpretation, we would never have anything to inherit from it. We would need to be affected by it as a cause – natural or genetic. One always inherits from a secret - which says 'read me, will you ever be able to do so?' The critical choice called for by any reaffirmation of the inheritance is also, like memory itself, the condition of finitude. The infinite does not inherit, it does not inherit (from) itself. The injunction itself (it always says 'choose and decide from among what you inherit') can only be one by dividing itself, tearing itself apart, differing/deferring itself, by speaking at the same time several times – and in several voices. (16)

Now, it is my contention that this description of the obligatory affirmatory imperative for the new scholar/historiographer simply makes explicit (in a Foucauldian move I wish to avoid deploying the concept of 'raising to consciousness' here in favour of the language of 'sapping' the power of the covert ontologizing of historians through their historical [re]presentations[35]) what historians

[34] As Derrida puts it at another point in *Specters*: 'There is no inheritance without a call to responsibility. An inheritance is always a reaffirmation of a debt, but a critical, selective, and filtering reaffirmation, which is why we distinguished several spirits.' (91-92)

[35] Foucault, in a conversation with Gilles Deleuze, rejected the task of intellectuals as one of 'awakening consciousness' in favour of 'sapping' and 'taking' power and provided the following explanation: 'In the most recent upheaval [May 1968], the intellectual discovered that the masses no longer need him to gain knowledge: they *know* perfectly well, without illusion; they know far better than he and they are certainly

have always already done, even if most would (and do) refuse to admit it; disavow it. For actually this ceaseless task of always incomplete 'repetition-as-reaffirming-by-choosing' is all that historians can *ever* do; it is what sustains and energizes a certain conception of historical (re)presentation that has moved beyond – what are illusory in any case – the binarisms of objectivity. Derrida has it that the legacies of the before now both 'call for and at the same time defy interpretation' and, on my reading of his position in *Specters* were this not the case then historical culture would become static and atrophy ('we would never have anything to inherit from it'). For the historian there is always the haunting experience of something or someone, some 'other' to-come, something more, something that exceeds all (re)presentational efforts. In other words there is a messianic structure to historical (re)presentation, a paradoxical desire, a secret from which we inherit (' ''read me, will you ever be able to do so?'' ') that drives the scholar to continue to engage in/with 'it' whether s/he knows it or likes it or not.

This emphasis on the reaffirmation of inheritance by the historian necessitates the making of critical choices (filtering, sifting, 'siding with', etc.). To avow and work with a messianic historical theory involves foregrounding and negotiating the structural possibility of failure: things could always be otherwise. Derrida highlights that in such a structure

> [t]o fail in everything, it is true, will always remain possible. Nothing will ever give us any insurance against this risk, still less against this feeling. (17)

---

capable of expressing themselves. But there exists a system of power which blocks, prohibits, and invalidates this discourse and this knowledge, a power not only found in the manifest authority of censorship, but one that profoundly and subtly penetrates an entire societal network. Intellectuals are themselves agents of this system of power – the idea of their responsibility for ''consciousness'' and discourse forms part of the system. The intellectual's role is no longer to place himself ''somewhat ahead and to the side'' in order to express the stifled truth of the collectivity; rather, it is to struggle against the forms of power that transform him into its object and instrument in the sphere of ''knowledge'', ''truth'', ''consciousness'', and ''discourse''.

In this sense theory does not express, translate, or serve to apply practice: it is practice. But it is local and regional, as you said, and not totalizing. This is a struggle against power, a struggle aimed at revealing and undermining power where it is most invisible and insidious. It is not to ''awaken consciousness'' that we struggle (the masses have been aware for some time that consciousness is a form of knowledge; and consciousness as the basis of subjectivity is a prerogative of the bourgeoisie), but to sap power, to take power; it is an activity conducted alongside those who struggle for power, and not their illumination from a safe distance. A ''theory'' is the regional system of this struggle.' (Foucault 1977, 207-8)

Nevertheless, the new scholar/historiographer will need to work with and work-through this feeling of failure that haunts or possesses their work (here I would argue that the kind of ceaseless challenge involved in this task can be helpfully understood, although in a non-foundational and non-teleological sense, in the form of the exhortation from Samuel Beckett's *Worstward Ho*: 'Try again, Fail again. Fail better'[36]); they are 'pledged' to continue to 'reaffirm-by-choosing'[37] multifarious legacies of the past and, in doing so, accept that it is precisely their endless strivings and their unavoidable failures to (re)present these opted for aspects of 'the before now' that keeps (lets) the future open; that names – i.e. affirms – 'the *coming* of the event, its future-to-come' rather than the arrival of the event itself (that will always be deferred):

> And a 'since Marx' continues to designate the place of assignation from which we are *pledged*...the 'since' marks a place and a time that doubtless precedes us, but so as to be as much *in front of us* as *before us*. Since the future, then, since the past as absolute future, since the non-knowledge and the non-advent of an event, of what remains to be: to do and to decide...If 'since Marx' names a future-to-come as much as a past, the past of a proper name, it is because the proper of a proper name will always remain to come. And secret. It will remain to come not like the future now [*maintenant*] of that which 'holds together' the 'disparate'...What has been uttered 'since Marx' can only promise or remind one to maintain together, in a speech that defers, deferring not what it affirms but deferring just *so as to* affirm, to affirm *justly*, so as to have the power (a power without power) to affirm the coming of the event, its future-to-come itself. (17)

The 'proper of a proper name' (or event) that is (re)presented will thus 'always remain to come'. Here it is helpful to make a distinction (albeit without binary rigidity and at the same time as recognising their dependence on each other) between *à-venir* as a (re)conceptualization of futurity and 'event'. While the latter indicates the possibility of a determinable temporal/historical beginning *and* end, the former is 'that which provokes, unhinges, or disjoints an event' and so 'disturbs the very possibility of the event itself.' (Martinon 2007, 2) Ironically perhaps, historians who

[36] Cited in Žižek 2010, 210.

[37] Much of this discussion of reaffirmation by choosing one's past finds another expression in Hayden White's figure-fulfillment model of narrativity. See White's paper 'History as Fulfillment' (White 2013, 35-45) in the collection of essays on his work – edited by Robert Doran (Doran 2013) – entitled *Philosophy of History After Hayden White*. Unfortunately, Doran's collection, which centers on White's notion of 'choosing one's past(s)', came too late for me to integrate it into this thesis.

confirm their willingness to engage with this problematic on an ongoing basis – with the ceaseless productive activity (or disruptive profligacy?) of their innumerable (re)presentations – constantly affirm this messianic structure of the event. Indeed, here a further metahistorical point should be made by thinking this messianic structure in relation to historical (re)presentation and historical theorising 'themselves': there is always the possibility of the event of a historical (re)presentation/theorisation 'to-come' (that 'does justice' to the past). Historical culture has always been conditioned by this 'secret' (gnostic?[38]) messianic dimension.

Crucially, then, any such event remains always 'to-come' and yet also demands a response from the historian in 'the here-now'. As Derrida explains:

> It is there that differ*a*nce, if it remains irreducible, irreducibly required by the spacing of any promise and by the future-to-come that comes to open it, does not mean only (as some people have too often believed and so naively) deferral, lateness, delay, postponement. In the incoercible differ*a*nce the here-now unfurls. Without lateness, without delay, but without presence, it is the precipitation of an absolute singularity, singular because differing, precisely [*justement*], and always other, binding itself necessarily to the form of the instant, *in imminence and in urgency*: even if it moves toward what remains to come, there is the *pledge* [gage] (promise, engagement, injunction and response to the injunction, and so forth). The pledge is given here and now, even before, perhaps, a decision confirms it. (31)

[38] The arguments for the appropriateness of giving a 'gnostic' labeling to the post-Enlightenment discourse of historical (re)presentation conceived in messianic terms, including the extent to which the respective attributions of 'gnostic' and 'messianic' should constitute aligned or rival conceptualizations of 'it' is an interesting one. Cyril O'Regan's work on the ways in which Gnosticism haunts certain modern discourses is particularly useful in this regard (O'Regan 2001). Here I will restrict myself to remarking that, while acknowledging the often vague and cheap ascriptions of this term, such a labeling can be considered appropriate *prior* to a 'making explicit' of the messianic structure and features to/of all histories as a way of radically revising our understanding of the operations of historical culture; after this argument has been made historical (re)presentation remains a 'gnostic' discourse only to the extent that historians fail to demonstrate the kind of 'reflexivity' (as problematic as this word/concept is in Derridean discourse) and political responsiveness that open engagement with the Derridean messianic generates. By their fruits you shall know them. Given the ongoing and manifest resistance to undomesticated poststructuralist thought within the vast majority of the academic history discipline it is, of course, possible that one of the many dismissals of the arguments that I am running here that could be made by historians (outside, perhaps, of a small – mustard-seed size – 'cult' of messianic historical theorists?) will be to describe them as 'gnostic'.

Accordingly, the expectation of what remains 'to-come', this *a priori* messianic structure of the past(s) and the future(s) that belongs to all language[39] (and all historicizations), 'constitutes/produces' a pledge or a promissory engagement in the here and now that precedes (perhaps) any confirmatory decision/response on the part of the historian. Yet this messianic structure also necessitates that the historian *must* (the imperative tone which is threaded throughout *Specters*) respond to this here-now pledge/promise that is given 'without delay' to 'the demand of justice', which 'by definition is impatient, uncompromising, and unconditional' (31). In a point that stresses the importance and urgency of this here-now pledge – and the subsequent imperative confirmatory decision made *via* the endless (re)petition of historical (re)presentation – for justice (a point that Derrida had to make numerous times in response to accusations that deconstruction both mitigates against/postpones societal transformation and encourages political quietism in the present[40]), he avers that there is '[n]o differ*a*nce without alterity, no alterity without singularity, no singularity without here-now' (31).

This haunting, messianic structure (*différance*) puts, or subsumes, historical (re)presentation, the endless repetitive pulse of historical culture, in the service of that which is always 'to-come' and undeconstructible: justice. This is the refigured 'here-now' challenge for the academic history profession (and more broadly for those proponents of historical culture that are parasitic upon it). Such a challenge involves historians *forsaking* any lingering objectivist, certaintist pretentions that animate their historical (re)presentations and, instead, (re)conceptualise them as expectant responses (confirmatory decisions or even 'prayers' as Caputo has put it, and as I will go on to discuss in this chapter) in the here-now to/for justice: histories for a justice 'to-come'.

Now, it will perhaps be obvious by this point that this radical, messianic (re)conceptualising of historical (re)presentation and the task of the new scholar/historian is not without various inescapable paradoxical tensions and

[39] See Derrida 1996b, 82 (previously cited in the Introduction).
[40] See the Conclusion for a detailed discussion of, and Derrida's response to, such accusations.

oscillations; indeed, it is predicated on them (as is all of Derrida's work). Derrida signals this when, in the course (34-35) of exploring the problematics of 'thinking knowledge' and of how to 'understand' and 'inherit' the legacies of the before now – e.g. aspects of Marx, his ideas, his texts/works, *Capital*, etc. – he admits that, because of the 'disjunction of the injunctions' within Marx and 'the fact that they were *untranslatable* into each other', these things 'may appear impossible' and that 'we have to acknowledge, it is probably impossible'. For Derrida, this point sums up both the subject of the lecture that became *Specters* and 'the avowed distortion of its axiom'. Given this, he turns the objection around as follows:

> Guaranteed translatability, given homogeneity, systematic coherence in their *absolute forms*, this is surely (certainly, *a priori* and not probably) what renders the injunction, the inheritance, and the future – in a word the other – *impossible*. *There must be* disjunction, interruption, the heterogeneous if at least *there must be, if there must be* a chance given to any 'there must be' whatsoever, be it beyond duty. (35)

Paradoxically, the impossibility of historical (re)presentations ever delivering these things in relation to the 'other' or the 'to-come' event of inheritance (and the future) – that is, the delivery of any absolute 'guaranteed translatability, given homogeneity and systematic coherence' – is actually the condition of their possibility *and* the condition that accounts for their proliferation. Messianic histories, (re)presentations that have been invested with and predicated on a responsiveness to/expectation of the event – justice to-come (the other) – will acknowledge and affirm the experience of the impossible:

> Once again, here as elsewhere, wherever deconstruction is at stake, it would be a matter of linking an *affirmation* (in particular a political one[41]), *if there is any*, to the experience of the impossible, which can only be a radical experience of the *perhaps*. (35)

These 'impossible histories' are conditioned by and responsive to a messianic appeal then, a universal structure (logic) of 'that irreducible movement of the historical [i.e.

[41] What are historical (re)presentations if not politicised affirmations?

the constitution of language, or any other code, as a weave or tissue of differences[42]] opening to the future' (167). This affirmation of a radical experience of 'the *perhaps*' (the impossible) is a response to that which escapes historical culture; it is a confession of that which will never be (re)presentable in its disruptive excess: justice 'to-come', that which is yearned for and is beyond, or heterogeneous to, history. It is this repetitious confession which can also be described as a desire for 'the coming of the future-to-come' (36) that motivates the ongoing production of histories and is inscribed in each one. To cease production of historical (re)presentations would be to constitute a giving up on – a forsaking of – affirmation.

Accordingly, in this way historical theory, metahistorical thinking, is refigured by the Derridean impossible. This radical experience of the 'perhaps' – the impossible – *foregrounds* not-knowing and undecidability for ever:

> *One does not know* if the expectation prepares the coming of the future-to-come or if it recalls the repetition of the same, of the same thing as ghost... (36)

However, 'This not-knowing is not a lacuna' given that

> [n]o progress of knowledge could saturate an opening that must have nothing to do with knowing. Nor therefore with ignorance. (37)

Historical (re)presentations therefore cannot and should not – for this is no longer their purpose – determine this opening through their contribution to knowledge (of Marx or any other chosen legacy of the before now). Rather, historians/histories can help preserve openness, the opening through which the future comes unexpectedly, by precisely acknowledging their failures and their explicit refusals to capture, settle, ontologize (i.e. 'this is it, this is what it *is*') and thus close off. The future that is being (re)affirmed, that which is always 'to-come' and which will always exceed our (re)presentations with 'otherness' is beyond and irreducible to knowledge: justice exceeds and is thus irreducible to the law; to any figure: history *qua* history is

[42] See Derrida 1982a, 12 (previously cited in Chapter One).

unfigurable. Consequently, the plethora of (re)presentations in historical culture are to be understood as *both* an imperative confirmatory decision by, *and* an imminent/urgent reminder for, historians to continually *defer* claims to epistemic knowing/closure so as to affirm the coming of the event, the future-to-come. Here the stakes are high for the new scholar/historian/historiographer: this not-knowing (which paradoxically historical [re]presentations must foreground and celebrate) is the opening through which the affirmed and/or reaffirmed (we never know which) future will always come:

> The opening must preserve this heterogeneity as the only chance of an affirmed or rather reaffirmed future. (37)

Formulating various temporal subversions, Derrida emphasises that this heterogeneity 'is the future itself, it comes from there. The future is its memory.' (37) Furthermore, this future-to-come can be understood, or situated, as follows:

> In the experience of the end, in its insistent, instant, always imminently eschatological coming, at the extremity of the extreme today, there would thus be announced the future of what comes. More than ever, for the future-to-come can announce itself as such and in its purity only on the basis of a *past end*: beyond, *if that's possible*, the last extremity. (37)

Here Derrida draws upon eschatological language and a certain nuancing of eschatology (given the incomprehensible comprehending, or problematicization, of this concept by the logic of haunting) to negotiate the tensions of (re)presentation (or inheritance choosing) in light of the 'perhaps' of the impossible. The problem he foregrounds is how to 'suspend' the question of the future-to-come 'without *concluding in advance*, without reducing in advance both the future and its chance', in other words without 'totalizing in advance' (37). So, how does the Derridean messianic exceed determinations (i.e. settling, ending, closing off) of the future-to-come in (re)presentation? What conceptual support does the messianic provide in sustaining the deferred, not-knowing affirmations of a future-to-come in our (re)presentations that must also include sustaining not-knowing whether there is any such future ('If that's possible, *if there is any* future') (37)? Responding to this problem Derrida argues that it is again imperative ('we must') to distinguish

(‘discern’) ‘between eschatology and teleology’ (37). These concepts need to be distinguished in the awareness that ‘the stakes of such difference risk constantly being effaced in the most fragile and slight insubstantiality’ (37). This is a risk in which we will ‘always and necessarily’ be ‘deprived of any insurance’ (37). However, given all of this, in rhetorical mode Derrida asks:

> Is there not a messianic extremity, an *eskhaton* whose ultimate event (immediate rupture, unheard-of interruption, untimeliness of the infinite surprise, heterogeneity without accomplishment) can exceed, *at each moment*, the final term of a *phusis*, such as work, the production, and the *telos* of any history? (37)

The structural ‘logic’ of this ‘messianic extremity’ as an eschatological[43] breaking-in or interruption (something/one new could turn up at any moment) is opposed to, and ‘can exceed, at each moment’, all attempts at settling and continuity – including any invocations of finality – that are produced by historical (re)presentations and theories. This is the impossible possibility that historical culture *needs* to experience, explicitly welcome and constantly keep before ‘itself’, unhidden.

This thinking of historical (re)presentation as messianic is further developed (‘deepened’) in a passage wherein Derrida announces ‘the tone and the general form’ (54) of his conclusions in relation to the inheritance of Marxism. Here he argues for pro-activity on the part of the new scholar/historiographer, insisting that ‘one *must assume the inheritance* of Marxism, assume its most ‘‘living’’ part’, and that ‘this inheritance must be reaffirmed by transforming it as radically as will be necessary’ (54). Importantly, this approach (‘deprived of any insurance’ as we have

[43] As Martinon points out, the usage of the terms ‘eschatology’ or ‘eschatological’ by Derrida should not be thought of ‘in the sense of a theological understanding of endings or last things in general’ – such as ‘death, resurrection, judgement, etc.’ – but, rather, ‘in a way that refers to a thought of the extreme, a thought of the *eschaton*, of *what is furthest*.’ (Martinon 2007, 10) Martinon goes on to explain Derrida’s deployment of *eskhaton*/*eschaton* as follows: ‘One cannot dissociate the (messianic) articulation of (the) ‘‘to-come’’ from the thought of the *eschaton*. This *eschaton* is not a *horizon* of expectancy; it is not a welcoming situation or a final relief from dislocation. The *eschaton* has nothing to do with edges or limits – ‘‘points’’ from which one can comprehend space and time. The *eschaton* cannot be figured either as if a door or a series of gates from which the Messiah might come – no matter how disorienting the doors or gates can be. The *eschaton* can only evade this vocabulary precisely because it is the extremity in which the vacillation between promises and comings ‘‘takes place’’. It is *at* this (im)possible extremity, here on this page, on earth or anywhere else in the universe, that *à-venir* divides, disjoints, or unhinges and allows (us) to hesitate, undecided.’ (Martinon 2007, 10)

seen) links affirmation to *faith* [44] which in turn is linked to that task of mourning always before us:

> Such a reaffirmation would be both faithful to something that resonates in Marx's appeal – let us say once again in the spirit of his injunction – and in conformity with the concept of inheritance in general. Inheritance is never a *given*, it is always a task. It remains before us just as unquestionably as we are heirs of Marxism, even before wanting or refusing to be, and, like all inheritors, we are in mourning. In mourning in particular for what is called Marxism. (54)

Affirmation and faith symbiotic with mourning, with despair and the structural possibility (logic) of failure: these things can be read, for me, as precisely constituting the professional formation of the new historian/historiographer and a metahistorical inheritance that *Specters* bequeaths to historical culture.

To be sure, although the content of this inheritance could always be otherwise Derrida, in a spiritual recasting of 'il n'y a pas de hors-texte' (Derrida 1997b, 158), argues that we are always heirs:

> To be, this word in which we earlier saw the word of the spirit, means, for the same reason, to inherit. All the questions on the subject of being or of what is to be (or not to be) are questions of inheritance...That we *are* heirs does not mean that we *have* or that we *receive* this or that, some inheritance that enriches us one day with this or that, but that the *being* of what we are *is* first of all inheritance, whether we like it or know it or not. (54)

And this is no less the case for Derrida himself who, in formulating his concept of the 'messianic without messianism', assumes/chooses the inheritance of aspects (what he considers the 'living parts') of Walter Benjamin's thought which he transforms by the very act of affirmation. In the course of his discussion regarding the decision to continue to place trust in the 'Marxist code' – in the critical analysis of hegemonic forces – and whilst not denying or dissimulating 'the problematic character of this gesture' and maintaining suspicion 'of the simple opposition of

[44] Derrida also relates faith to borrowing: 'Inheritance from the ''spirits of the past'' consists, as always, in borrowing. Figures of borrowing, borrowed figures, figurality as the figure of borrowing. And the borrowing *speaks*: borrowed language, borrowed names, says Marx. A question of credit, then, or of faith.' (Derrida 1994, 109)

dominant and *dominated*' – or, 'more radically', of 'the idea that force is always stronger than weakness' (55) – Derrida points out in relation to the latter that

> Nietzsche and Benjamin have encouraged us to have doubts on this score, each in his own way, and especially the latter when he associated 'historical materialism' with the inheritance, precisely, of some 'weak messianic force'. (55)

In a long endnote in *Specters* (180-181*n*2) on Benjamin's *Theses on the Philosophy of History* (Benjamin 1999, 245-55), Derrida links messianism or, more precisely, messianic without messianism, with Benjamin's concept of a 'weak messianic power' (Benjamin 1999, 246). Before quoting a passage from Benjamin[45] Derrida avers that he is doing so by way of indicating

> what is consonant there, despite many differences and keeping relative proportions in mind, with what we are trying to say here about a certain messianic destitution, in a spectral logic of inheritance and generations, but a logic turned toward the future no less than the past, in a heterogeneous and disjointed time. What Benjamin calls *Anspruch* (claim, appeal, interpellation, address) is not far from what we are suggesting with the word *injunction*. (181)

The similarities and differences between Derrida's concept of a 'messianic without messianism' and Benjamin's 'weak messianic power' is something that, as will be explored later in this chapter, Derrida had reason to return to in 'Marx & Sons'.

Historical (re)presentations that are produced in light of an explicit thinking of, and responsiveness to, Derrida's 'messianic without messianism' structure will thus both avoid and be opposed to ontologisation in all its myriad forms: to all attempts to

[45] The passage that Derrida quotes from is as follows: 'The past carries with it a temporal index by which it is referred to redemption. There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. Our coming was expected on earth. Like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a *weak* messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim. That claim cannot be settled cheaply. Historical materialists are aware of that.' (Benjamin 1999, 245-6) Derrida writes of Benjamin's 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', that 'We should quote and reread here all these pages – which are dense, enigmatic, burning – up to the final allusion to the ''chip'' (shard, splinter: *Splitter*) that the messianic inscribes in the body of the at-present (*Jetztzeit*) and up to the ''strait gate'' for the passage of the Messiah, namely, every ''second''. For ''this does not imply, however, that for the Jews the future turned into homogeneous, empty time''.' (Derrida 1994, 181*n*2, quoting from Benjamin 1999, 264)

settle and determine, to all invocations of finality. Such productions will expose by foregrounding in various ways – by rhetorical moves or 'confessions' (again, see the discussion of Caputo's work to follow) – an awareness of a disavowed messianic eschatology that has always already been carried with any attempt at ontologically grounding any (re)presentational project/science/critique. For I think that what Derrida writes of Marxism is equally applicable to all attempts (why privilege Marxism or specific religions – determinate messianisms – when, with varying degrees of transparency, this structure of messianic eschatology is already at work in all [re]presentational discourse?) when we assume or choose an inheritance/legacy, that is, to all attempts at transforming and opening up an aspect of 'the before now':

> This transformation and this opening up of Marxism are in conformity with what we were calling a moment ago the *spirit of Marxism*. If analysis of the Marxist type remains, then, indispensable, it appears to be radically insufficient there where the Marxist ontology grounding the project of Marxist science or critique also itself carries with it and must carry with it, necessarily, despite so many modern or post-modern denials, a messianic eschatology. (59)

What Derrida is *not* claiming is that

> this messianic eschatology common both to the religions it criticizes and to the Marxist critique must be simply deconstructed. While it is common to both of them, with the exception of the content [but none of them can accept, of course, this *epokhē* of the content, whereas we hold it here to be essential to the messianic in general, as thinking of the other and of the event to come], it is also the case that its formal structure of promise exceeds them or precedes them. (59)

This argument returns us, once more, to the *logic* of the event: justice can never be directly accessed by knowledge claims/bids in the form of systematized, ontologising projects or (re)presentations; it always eludes and/or disrupts such (re)presentational striving.

For Derrida, then, what will always remain 'irreducible to any deconstruction' and 'undeconstructible as the possibility itself of deconstruction' is – 'perhaps' (see *n*1) – this 'certain experience of the emancipatory promise' (59) which can be summarised as follows:

> [I]t is perhaps even the formality of a structural messianism, a messianism without religion, even a messianic without messianism, an idea of justice – which we distinguish from law or right and even from human rights – and an idea of democracy – which we distinguish from its current concept and from its determined predicates today... (59)

It is the formality of a structural 'messianic without messianism' which can be understood as an idea of justice and/or democracy that – again in relation to Marxism but applicable, more broadly, to all (re)presentational acts of assuming/choosing an inheritance/legacy – 'is perhaps what must now be thought and thought otherwise' so that the new scholar/historian might ask 'where Marxism is going...where Marxism is leading...where it is to be led'. Associated questions regarding 'where to lead it by interpreting it' (as for 'us' all continual interpretation is the inescapable operational function of the historian and is what drives, moves/shifts and re-locates the legacies of the before now) should be asked with an awareness that such leading-interpretation 'cannot happen without transformation'; that which we (re)present will not remain either 'as it is' or 'such as it will have been'. (59)

To further develop the nuances of this 'certain experience of the emancipatory promise' Derrida discusses the idea of a 'democracy to come', making these remarks:

> [T]he idea...of democracy to come, its 'idea' as event of a pledged injunction that orders one to summon the very thing that will never present itself in the full form of presence, is the opening of this gap between an infinite promise (always untenable at least for the reason that it calls for the infinite respect of the singularity *and* infinite alterity of the other as much as for the respect of the countable, calculable, subjectal equality between anonymous singularities) and the determined, necessary, but also necessarily inadequate forms of what has to be measured against this promise. (65)

Just as present/past determinate democratic projects should always be understood as necessarily inadequate when measured against the promise of democracy to come that 'orders one to summon' it and yet, structurally, will 'never present itself in the full form of presence', so it is with historical (re)presentation. In metahistorical

terms there will always be the promise, the impossible possibility, of a history-of-a -past 'to-come' against which the inadequacy of all determined, necessary histories can be measured. The continuing proliferation of (re)presentations is generated by the messianic hope they carry. Therefore my argument is that every discourse/(re)presentation is galvanised by messianic hope, by the promise carried with or harboured with/in it? For the 'effectivity or actuality' of any promise – Derrida is here making a point specifically in relation to the democratic and communist promise(s) – including the promise of an emancipatory (re)presentation of the past (justice done to the past), will

> always keep within it, and it must do so, this absolutely undetermined messianic hope at its heart, this eschatological relation to the to-come of an event *and* of a singularity, of an alterity that cannot be anticipated. (65)

Thus Derrida's conceptualisation of messianic hope denotes an eschatological relation to the 'to-come structure' of an event; something 'other' which is always on its way but which never presents itself as full presence; that can break in at any moment but which it is not possible to anticipate. In an extraordinary passage that brings together all the ideas of the messianic, the event and spectrality that we have discussed in this chapter, Derrida equates this messianic hope/eschatological relation to 'hospitality without reserve' as follows:

> Awaiting without horizon of the wait, awaiting what one does not expect yet or any longer, hospitality without reserve, welcoming salutation accorded in advance to the absolute surprise of the *arrivant* from whom or from which one will not ask anything in return and who or which will not be asked to commit to the domestic contracts of any welcoming power (family, State, nation, territory, native soil or blood, language, culture in general, even humanity), *just* opening which renounces any right to property, any right in general, messianic opening to what is coming, that is, to the event as the foreigner itself, to her or to him for whom one must leave an empty place, always, in memory of the hope – and this is the very place of spectrality. (65)

The messianic is a 'just opening' to what is coming (the event). In the context of reflecting on historical (re)presentation the imperative to leave an empty place in the memory of the hope (the place of spectrality) can be understood as the motivational need to continue the work of deferring so as to affirm, to resist invocations of

finality and completeness (i.e. rhetorical completist moves and [re]codings that imply or assert coherence, the subordination of differences, smoothed-out temporalities, continuity, and that all/everything is 'present and correct').

Derrida argues that this 'hospitality without reserve' is therefore 'the condition of the event and thus of history' because 'nothing and no one would arrive otherwise' (although, this is, of course, 'a hypothesis that one can never exclude'). Indeed, hospitality without reserve

> is the impossible itself...this *condition of possibility* of the event is also its *condition of impossibility*, like this strange concept of messianism without content, of the messianic without messianism, that guides us here like the blind. But it would be just as easy to show that without this experience of the impossible, one might as well give up on both justice and the event. (65)

Messianic historical (re)presentation thus recognises that it is predicated on this *logic* of the event ('this condition of possibility of the event is also its condition of impossibility') as exemplified – interchangeably – by the paradoxical conceptualisations of 'hospitality without reserve' or 'messianic without messianism'. Messianic historical theory – *a poststructuralist critique of history given a religious twist and one that asserts that, in a non-determinate and structural sense, 'we are all religious now' and, indeed, have always already been so* – constantly draws the discussion back (albeit in an infinite variety of ways) to the point that it is this axiomatic experience of the impossible that *both* irretrievably problematises *and* makes possible/sustains the work of the historian, albeit in a massively reconfigured way. There is an element of non-negotiability here. Those historians who reject, or refuse to acknowledge or disavow this experience of the impossible *vis-à-vis* their work are rejecting Derrida's emphasis on justice and the event. Messianic historical (re)presentation is for those historians who acknowledge that their work in the present is informed by expectation(s) of the future. Historical (re)presentation can now become something to enable and sustain a focus on the task that is always before us. It exerts a kind or professional formational effect on its practitioners and theorisers: to become the sort of people that keep the future open and through which the event can (or may not) come at any moment.

And yet while messianic historical theory constitutes an explicit and massive reconfiguration of historical (re)presentation and the task of the historian, it doesn't signal its end *in toto*. Here my argument for this judgement links back to Chapter One: Derrida's consistent commitment to 'some other concept of history' is evident in *Specters*. For example, in the course of a discussion of Kojève's reading of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*[46], Derrida suggests that

> there is some future and some history, there is perhaps even the beginning of historicity for post-historical Man, beyond man and beyond history such as they have been represented up until now. (73)

Derrida thinks it imperative ('[w]e must') to 'insist on this specific point precisely because it points to an essential lack of specificity' which can also be understood as 'an indetermination that remains the ultimate mark of the future' (73). He thinks it a vital obligation for us to maintain that it is indetermination/lack of specificity that marks the future '*whatever may be the case concerning the modality or the content* of this duty'[47] (73). Yet, he also stresses that this 'indifference to the content...is not an indifference, it is not an *attitude* of indifference'. Rather, on the contrary,

> [m]arking any opening to the event and to the future as such, it therefore conditions the interest in and not the indifference to anything whatsoever, to all content in general. Without it, there would be neither intention, nor need, nor desire, and so on. (73)

Derrida acknowledges that this indifference to the content is '[a]pparently ''formalist'' ' – which, as I will discuss in my Conclusion, some philosophers and theorists have identified as a cause for concern in the course of their considerations of the Derridean notion of the messianic – and suggests that it has, 'perhaps', the merit of 'giving one to think the necessarily pure and purely necessary form of the

[46] See Kojève 1980.

[47] Derrida emphasises that this imperative obligation/duty constitutes a 'necessary law/law of necessity' as follows: '[T]his necessity, this prescription or this injunction, this pledge, this task, also therefore this promise, this necessary promise, *this ''it is necessary'' is necessary, and that is the law*.' (Derrida 1994, 73)

future as such'[48] in 'the necessarily formal necessity of its possibility – in short, in its law.' (73) This is a law 'that dislodges any present out of its contemporaneity with itself' (73). As he explains:

> Whether the promise promises this or that, whether it be fulfilled or not, or whether it be unfilfillable, there is necessarily some promise and therefore some historicity as future-to-come. It is what we are nicknaming the messianic without messianism. (73)

Therefore the necessity of some promise possibilises 'some historicity as future-to-come'. This 'historicity as future-to-come' goes under the name of 'the messianic without messianism' which is, in turn, the possibility of a messianic historical theory predicated on 'some other concept of history' which maintains an opening for the 'to-come' of the event (historicity as 'future-to-come').

By way of reinforcing my argument (and returning briefly to the discussion in Chapter One) I now want to make it as clear as possible that I read *messianic historical theory* as one of the outcomes of the 'certain deconstructive procedure' which – as he states in *Specters* – Derrida thought he *had* to engage in (74). This procedure

> consisted from the outset in putting into question the onto-theo- but also archeo-teleological concept of history – in Hegel, Marx, or even in the epochal thinking of Heidegger. Not in order to oppose it with an end of history or an anhistoricity, but, on the contrary, in order to show that this onto-theo-archeo-teleology locks up, neutralizes, and finally cancels historicity. (74)

Such a demonstration required, as I hope I have shown, 'thinking another historicity'. However, this 'rethinking of historicity' does not constitute a 'new history or still less a ''new historicism'', but rather another and different opening of event-ness as historicity' (75). This 'opening of event-ness as historicity' permits Derrida (and presumably those new scholar-historians who align themselves with it)

[48] Derrida immediately goes on to qualify this 'necessarily pure and purely necessary form of the future' in the following terms: '[I]n its being-necessarily-promised, prescribed, assigned, enjoined' (Derrida 1994, 73).

> not to renounce, but on the contrary to open up access to an affirmative thinking of the messianic and emancipatory promise as promise: as *promise* and not as onto-theological or teleo-eschatological program or design. (74-75)

Derrida's use of the word 'emancipatory' here provides a crucial indication as to the potential political utility of a messianic historical theory and is something that we will be returned to in more detail in the Conclusion. But for now it is important to underline the urgent imperative formulated by Derrida as follows:

> Not only must one not renounce the emancipatory desire, it is necessary to insist on it more than ever, it seems, and insist on it, moreover, as the very indestructibility of the 'it is necessary'. This is the condition of a re-politicization, perhaps of another concept of the political. (75)

This indestructibility of the necessity of not renouncing the emancipatory desire is not just the condition of 'another concept of the political' but also – because they are inseparable – of another concept of the historical, of historical (re)presentation and historical culture more broadly. The envisaged task is to (re)think both of these in emancipatory rather than hegemonic ways, and this can best be done through some other concept of history that privileges an affirmative thinking of the messianic. This affirmative messianic thinking is emancipatory in that it 'keeps faith' – again Derrida is making a specific reference to Marxism but my argument is that it can also be applied, in metahistorical fashion, to historical (re)presentation – with an idea of '*radical*[49] critique' which he defines as 'a procedure ready to undertake its self-critique' (88). Derrida explains that

[49] Given the ubiquitous and overused status of the term 'radical' it is necessary to briefly describe Derrida's precise understanding of the term as set out in *Specters*. At one points he asserts that 'a radicalization is always indebted to the very thing it radicalizes. That is why I spoke of the Marxist memory and tradition of deconstruction, of its Marxist ''spirit''.' (Derrida 1994, 92-93) In a linked and long footnote, Derrida then attempts to articulate the meaning of 'to radicalise'. This articulation is developed with specific reference to Marxism but it can, I think, be equally well applied to the development of thinking the historicization of any inheritance/legacy as a form of radical critique: 'But what does ''to radicalize'' mean? It is not, by a long shot, the best word. It does indicate a movement of going further, of course, and of not stopping. But that is the limit of its pertinence...The point would be not to progress still further into the depths of radicality, of the fundamental, or the originary (cause, principle, *arkhē*), while taking another step in the same direction. One would try instead to go there where the schema of the fundamental, of the originary, or of the radical, in its *ontological* unity and in the form in which it continues to govern the Marxist critique, calls for questions, procedures of formalization, genealogical interpretations that are *not* or *not sufficiently* put to work in what dominates the discourses that call themselves Marxist...The stake that is serving as our guiding thread here, namely, the concept or the schema of the ghost, was heralded long ago, and in its own name, across the problematics of the work

> this critique *wants itself* to be in principle and explicitly open to its own transformation, re-evaluation, self-reinterpretation. (88)

Messianic historical (re)presentation predicated on such an idea of radical critique 'is heir to a spirit of the Enlightenment which must not be renounced' (88). It must be distinguished from 'other spirits' of (say, again, Marxist) historical (re)presentation; namely, those that postulate its grounding and ability to access a 'supposed systemic, metaphysical or ontological reality' (88). The deconstruction of the determinative ontologising moves perpetrated by historical (re)presentation/culture (or Marxism) is therefore 'not, in the last analysis, a methodological or theoretical procedure' (89). This is because deconstruction, the possibility of which is always constituted by the experience of the impossible,

> is never a stranger to the event, that is, very simply, to the coming of that which happens. (89)

Derrida thus remains faithful to the 'call for interminable self-critique' (89) whilst remaining overwhelmingly unequivocal that there is 'a spirit of Marxism' which he will 'never be ready to renounce'. This spirit 'is not only the critical idea or the questioning stance' (although a 'consistent deconstruction must insist on them' while also recognising 'that this is not the last or first word'), but is also, and even more,

> a certain emancipatory and *messianic* affirmation, a certain experience of the promise that one can try to liberate from any dogmatics and even from any metaphysico-religious determination, from any *messianism*. (89)

This certain experience of the promise (and the messianic is a structure of experience that is open to the promise) involves promising to keep a promise in order

---

of mourning, idealization, simulacrum, *mimesis*, iterability, the double injunction, the ''double bind'', and undecidability as condition of responsible decision, and so forth.' (Derrida 1994, 184*n*9)

> not to remain 'spiritual' or 'abstract', but to produce events, new effective forms of action, practice, organization, and so forth. (89)

For Derrida the deconstructive thinking that he is concerned with in *Specters* 'has always pointed out the irreducibility of affirmation and therefore of the promise' in addition to 'the undeconstructibility of a certain idea of justice (dissociated here from law).' (90) For these reasons deconstructive thinking 'cannot operate without justifying the principle of a radical and interminable, infinite...critique' (90). This radical, interminable and infinite critique

> belongs to the movement of an experience open to the absolute future of what is coming, that is to say, a necessarily indeterminate, abstract, desert-like experience that is confided, exposed, given up to its waiting for the other and for the event. (90)

In terms of the 'pure formality' of this radical critique and in 'the indetermination that it requires' Derrida confirms that 'one may find yet another essential affinity between it and a certain messianic spirit' (90).

In 'Marx & Sons' Derrida emphasises the extreme distance between the concepts of 'messianicity' and 'spectrality' (i.e. endless anticipation for what is 'to-come' [back]) 'at the heart' of *Specters* and those of 'Utopia or Utopianism' (Derrida 1999c, 248[50]). Responding to what he regards as Fredric Jameson's repeated attempts to translate 'everything I say about the ''messianic'' as ''Utopianism'' ' (248), Derrida provides a helpful restatement of the former term:

> Messianicity (which I regard as a universal structure of experience, and which cannot be reduced to religious messianism of any stripe) is anything but Utopian: it refers, in every here-now, to the coming of an eminently real, concrete event, that is, to the most irreducibly heterogeneous otherness. (248)

Such 'messianic apprehension' is both 'realistic' and 'immediate'; it is a 'straining forward toward the event of him who/that which is coming.' (248). Here Derrida's

[50] Throughout the 'slow reading' of 'Marx & Sons' in the rest of this section all page references in the main text – including those accompanying block quotations – that are *not* preceded by the author name and publication date in the usual way are to Derrida 1999c (i.e. to 'Marx & Sons').

use of the term ‘apprehension’ indicates that this experience of straining forward toward the event ‘is at the same time a waiting without expectation [*une attente sans attente*]’ (249) an attitude that is to be understood as

> an active preparation, anticipation against the backdrop of a horizon, but also exposure without horizon, and therefore an irreducible amalgam of desire and anguish, affirmation and fear, promise and threat. (249)

Therefore, messianicity, as Derrida deploys it, should be understood as ‘a universal structure of relation to the event’ where the event is ‘the concrete otherness of him who/that is coming’; it is ‘a way of thinking the event ‘‘before’’ or independently of all ontology’ (249). Here, on the one hand, Derrida acknowledges that this conception of messianicity involves an element of *waiting* – to be understood as ‘an apparently passive limit to anticipation’ because it is not possible for any finite being to ‘calculate everything, predict and program all that is coming, the future in general, etc.’ – while pointing out that

> this limit to calculability or knowledge is also, for a finite being, the condition of praxis, decision, action and responsibility. (249)

Yet, crucially, on the other hand, he also stresses that

> this exposure to the event, which can either come to pass or not (condition of absolute otherness), is inseparable from a promise and an injunction that call for commitment without delay [*sans attendre*], and, in truth, rule out abstention. (249)

While granting that his description of messianicity might seem ‘abstract’, Derrida asserts that we are dealing with here is ‘the most concrete urgency, and the most revolutionary as well.’ (249) Thus Derrida is adamant that messianicity is ‘anything but utopian’ because it ‘mandates that we interrupt the ordinary course of things, time and history *here-now*’ and that ‘it is inseparable from an affirmation of otherness and justice.’ (249)

Now, the implications of all of this for historians should, I think, be understood as both urgent and inescapable. Messianicity is 'unconditional' and – again – it is imperative that it '*must* thereafter negotiate its conditions in one or another singular, practical situation' (249), including every history. On my reading the messianic structure of historical (re)presentation is to be regarded as the locus of an analysis and evaluation of all aspects of historical culture and, inseparable from this, of a 'responsibility' in relation to it (even if that responsibility is to undermine, 'get out of' and/or 'forget' it). This analysis, evaluation and attendant responsibility that must be manifested by the Derridean *new* scholars, those advocates of messianic historical theory, should be 're-examined at every moment, on the eve and in the course of each event' that innumerable historical (re)presentations long to usher in. Derrida invokes the power of the '*re*' to emphasise that it is this ceaseless re-examination that the sustainers and analyzers of historical discourse have to carry out 'without delay'. Messianicity makes possible, ineluctable and imperative this 're-examination without delay' of their historical (re)presentations of the selected inheritances of the past; it mandates their ongoing work. Because such imperative, ceaseless re-examination is 'always here-now, in singular fashion' it is resistant to 'the allure of Utopia' in terms of 'what the word literally signifies or is ordinarily taken to mean.' (249) Derrida goes on to make the point – one that I think applies equally well to historical (re)presentation in all its forms – that

> one could not so much as account for the possibility of Utopia in general without reference to what I call messianicity. (249)

Having argued that his way of thinking messianicity is 'non-Utopian', Derrida also asserts that neither does it 'belong' – in the sense that it can be reduced to – 'the Benjaminian tradition'. While, as we have seen, Derrida evokes Benjamin's work of the messianic in an endnote in *Specters*[51], in 'Marx & Sons' he reminds his readers that he mentions both the differences as well as the consonance between their conceptions. Here he strengthens the emphasis on the differences:

[51] See Derrida 1994, 180-1*n*2.

> I do not believe...that the continuity between the Benjaminian motif and what I am attempting is determinant – or, above all, that it is sufficient to account for what is going on here. (249)

This comment about 'the possibility of this discontinuity with Benjamin' is made not so as to make a claim to originality but, rather, to clarify, 'in programmatic fashion', various important points (250). Derrida regards the references to *Jewish* messianism in Benjamin's 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' (Benjamin 1999, 246, 247, 254, 255) to be 'constitutive' and 'ineradicable'. While he accepts that he could be mistaken, Derrida thinks that

> a considerable effort would be required to dissociate the Benjaminian allusion to a 'messianic power', however 'weak', from any and all forms of Judaism, or, again, to dissociate a certain Jewish tradition from the usual figures or representations of messianism, of the kind that can dominate, not only the prevailing *doxa*, but sometimes even the most sophisticated orthodoxies. (250)

Derrida is not, then, in principle, trying to work towards such a dissociation (although he humbly accepts that his work could be read otherwise), preferring to stress that his 'use of the word ''messianic'' bears no relation to any messian*istic* tradition', hence 'messianicity *without* messianism' (250). He cites a sentence from the endnote in *Specters* previously mentioned where he relates the 'messianic without messianism' – an interpolated phrase that is Derrida's – to Benjamin's 'weak messianic power'. However, the relation between the two that Derrida forges here is a complex one: the messianic without messianism is not 'an appositional phrase, translation, or equivalent expression' (250). Instead, he is attempting to

> mark an orientation *and* a *break*, a tendency running *from* weakening *to* annulment, from the 'weak' to the 'without'...Between 'weak' and 'without', there is a leap – perhaps an infinite leap. (250)

Consequently, Derrida suggests that his proposal of the messianic without messianism should be conceived as 'the asymptote[52], and *only the asymptote*, of a *possible* convergence of Benjamin's idea' (250). Such a conception of this

[52] An asymptote is a line that continually approaches a given curve but does not meet it at a finite distance.

messianicity *without* messianism also involves appreciating that it is not 'a watered-down messianism' that dilutes or diminishes 'the force of messianic expectation' but is rather 'a different structure, a structure of existence' that should be taken into account 'by way of a reference less to religious traditions than to possibilities'. It is the analyses put forward by these possibilities that Derrida wishes 'to pursue, refine, complicate, *and* contest' (250). Accordingly, and although it is not specifically mentioned in this text, my contention is that the standard analyses offered up 'by' – and 'of' – historical (re)presentations should be considered as important 'religious (but without religion) possibilities' to be pursued, refined, complicated and contested by taking into account, and relating them closely to, this messianicity *without* messianism.

In 'Marx & Sons' the specific possibilities that Derrida puts forward to be thought with/through his messianic structure of experience include

> the analysis offered by a theory of speech acts or a phenomenology of existence (in the twofold Husserlian and Heideggerian tradition): the possibility of taking into account, *on the one hand*, a paradoxical experience of the performative of the promise (but also of the threat at the heart of the promise) that organizes *every* speech act, every other performative, and even every preverbal experience of the relation to the other; and, *on the other hand*, at the point of intersection with this threatening promise, the horizon of awaiting [*attente*] that informs our relationship to time – to the event, to that which happens [*ce qui arrive*], to the one who arrives [*l'arrivant*], and to the other. (250-251)

Complicating this analysis – one which is highly relevant for historical culture given that every historical (re)presentation is a performative that informs our relationship to time and to the event of the potentiality of a selected inheritance of the past – by thinking it in relation to the messianic involves the explicit recognition of an idea of 'a waiting *without* waiting' (i.e. waiting without *a*waiting) which can also be described as 'a waiting for an event' (251). Derrida explains this idea as

> a waiting whose horizon is, as it were, punctuated by the event (which is waited for *without* being awaited); we would have to do with a waiting for an event, for someone or something that, in order to happen or 'arrive', must exceed and surprise every determinant anticipation. No future, no time-to-come [*à-venir*],

> no other, otherwise; no event worthy of the name, no revolution. And no justice. (251)

Here, at the 'point of intersection...but also against both' of these two styles of thinking – i.e. 'speech act theory and the onto-phenomenology of temporal and historical existence' – Derrida suggests that his proposed 'interpretation of the messianic...does not...much resemble Benjamin's.' (251) The Derridean messianic has no 'essential connection' with what messianism, including its Benjaminian strain, has hitherto been widely accepted as meaning:

> [O]n the one hand, the memory of a determinate historical revelation, whether Jewish or Judeo-Christian, and, on the other, a relatively determinate messiah-figure. (251)

Derrida thinks it important to qualify that although 'the very structure of messianicity *without* messianism itself suffices to exclude these two conditions' he does not think it imperative (i.e. it is not a 'must') that they should be rejected (251). The 'historical figures of messianism' do not necessarily have to be denigrated or done away with. Yet, crucially,

> they are only possible on the universal and quasi-transcendental ground of the structure constituted by this '*without* messianism'. (251)

One of the things being foregrounded here is our understanding of the status of the 'without' in the Derridean 'messianicity *without* messianism'. Derrida acknowledges 'in passing' that 'everything seems to come down to the interpretation and ''logic'' of the little word ''without'' ' and that he has 'treated this question elsewhere at length, in connection with Blanchot, and in his wake.'[53] (251) However, by way of replying to further criticisms of his work, he does go on to emphasise the following point that is important in any thinking through of his formulation of messianicity *without* messianism, including the way in which it

[53] The text Derrida is referring to is 'Pas' ['*Pa*ce Not(s)'] in *Parages* (Derrida 2011, 11-101). In 'Marx & Sons' Derrida provides the following summary of Blanchot's usage of the word 'without': 'It is well known that Blanchot makes apparently paradoxical use of the preposition ''without'', sometimes placing it between two homonyms that are virtually synonymous, between two homonyms whose synonymy is broken up at the very heart of the analogy which fuses their meanings (*la mort* sans *mort*, *le rapport* sans *rapport*, etc.).' (Derrida 1999c, 251)

structures and is generative of (the failure of) ongoing historicizations that promulgate inevitable/unavoidable abstractions *that* – or *of the* – 'there is':

> 'Without' does not necessarily designate negativity; even less does it designate annihilation. If this preposition effects a certain abstraction, it also accounts for the necessary effects of abstraction in so doing – of the abstraction of the 'there is', of the abstraction *that* 'there is'. (251)

Derrida – while admitting that he is expressing it somewhat 'hastily' – argues that 'the figures of messianism would have to be...deconstructed as ''religious'', ideological, or fetishistic formations' whereas, by contrast, 'messianicity without messianism remains, for its part, undeconstructible, like justice.' (253) The Derridean messianic remains undeconstructible for the simple reason that 'the movement of any deconstruction presupposes it' (253). This presupposition of the movement of any deconstruction should not be understood as a 'ground of certainty, the firm ground of a *cogito*...but in line with another modality.' (253) Thus, Derrida describes his formulation of the messianic as a universal structure[54], as a ' ''quasi-transcendental[55]'' supposition' (253). For thinking with/through the messianic as quasi-transcendental allows Derrida to continue to delineate and contrast his position with the Benjaminian tradition. In discussing Benjamin's deployment of weak messianic power he states that '*I am not sure* I would define the messianicity I speak of as a power[56]' (253-4, italics mine). However, he adds that if he were to 'define it as a power[57]' he would never say 'that it is strong or weak, more or less strong or more or less weak.' (254) Derrida can take this view because

[54] Here, Derrida describes this universal structure as 'waiting without awaiting another future-to-come and an other in general; promise of a revolutionary justice that will interrupt the ordinary course of history, etc.' (Derrida 1999c, 253)

[55] The status of the quasi-transcendental in Derrida's thought was briefly discussed in the Introduction and I will return to it in more detail in the Conclusion in the context of various criticisms of the messianic.

[56] Immediately following on from this statement, in the same sentence and in brackets, Derrida adds that 'it is, no less, a vulnerability or a kind of absolute powerlessness' (Derrida 1999c, 254).

[57] Again, immediately following on from this statement, and despite 'not being sure' that he would define his conception of messianicity as a power, Derrida adds a number of alternative formulations of the messianic: '[A]s the movement of a desire, as the attraction, invincible élan or affirmation of an unpredictable future-to-come (or even of a past-to-come-again), the experience of the non-present, of the non-living present in the living present (of the spectral), of that which lives on [*du sur-vivant*] (absolutely past or absolutely to come, beyond all presentation or representability, etc.)' (Derrida 1999c, 254).

> the universal, quasi-transcendental structure that I call messianicity without messianism is not bound up with any particular moment of (political or general) history or culture (Abrahamic or any other); and it does not serve any sort of messianism as an alibi, does not mime or reiterate any sort of messianism, does not confirm or undermine any sort of messianism. (254)

Yet Derrida thinks it imperative to 'further complicate this schema.' (254) Crucially for the argument of this thesis, he also anticipates and engages a rather obvious argument regarding his attachment to – i.e. the selection and extensive usage of – the word 'messianic'. Derrida summarises this criticism[58] thus:

> Since you say that the 'messianic' is independent of all forms of 'messianism' ('without messianism'), why not describe the universal structure in question *without even mentioning* the messianic, without making allusion to any messiah whatever, to the Messiah-figure who so evidently maintains an ultimate affiliation with one language, one culture and one 'revelation'? (254)

His response to this objection – which he regards as legitimate – is threefold. *First* ('on the one hand', 254), Derrida accepts that the word 'messianic' is 'relatively arbitrary or extrinsic' and that he uses it for its 'merely rhetorical or pedagogical value': the cultural familiarity of the term facilitates understanding ('in certain contexts') of 'what that which I accordingly call messianicity resembles', although '*without* identifying itself with it, or reducing itself to it'. Derrida can envisage a future context where his conception of messianicity has been understood so that it can be discussed 'not only without reference to traditional messianism or a ''Messiah'', but even without the 'without'; however 'by that point, under the old words, all the names will have been changed' (254), including, presumably, that of 'history'. But *second*, Derrida also points out that 'beneath this arbitrary choice and pedagogical usefulness, there lurks perhaps, a more irreducible ambiguity.' (254) He formulates this 'irreducible ambiguity' (or problematic, given that it is irresolvable) as follows:

[58] On the previous page of 'Marx & Sons' Derrida puts it thus: 'And why maintain the reference to the messianic, even while claiming to rule out all messianism, precisely in describing a universal structure (waiting without waiting another future-to-come and an other in general; promise of a revolutionary justice that will interrupt the ordinary course of history, etc.)? Why this name, the *messianic* or the *messiah*?' (Derrida 1999c, 253)

> I find it hard to decide whether messianicity without messianism (*qua* universal structure) precedes and conditions every determinate, historical figure[59] of messianism (in which case it would be radically independent of all such figures, and would remain heterogeneous from them, making the name itself a matter of merely incidental interest), or whether the possibility of thinking this independence has only come about or revealed itself as such by way of the 'Biblical' events which name the messiah and make him a determinate figure. (254-255)

Derrida admits that he has to leave this latter possibility open and suspended given that he has no answer to the question posed in that form. Furthermore, he has opted to retain the word 'messianic' precisely to help sustain this open suspension – '*so that* the question remains posed' (255). *Third*, and still related to this latter possibility, Derrida provides four reasons (he implies that there may be more) as to why 'it is harder to treat the reference to the messianic as a provisional, didactic tool' in spite of understanding it as 'strictly determined as ''without messianism''.' (255) He thinks it imperative not to avoid recognizing and granting that 'the event named ''Marx''...is rooted in a European and Judeo-Christian culture' and that Marx and indeed every Marxism 'have appeared in a culture in which ''messiah'' means something', adding that 'this culture has not remained ''local'' or easily circumscribable in the history of humanity.' (255) Derrida also thinks it 'always useful to recall this sedimentation, if only to draw diverse political consequences from it.' (255) Related to the political consequences of this sedimentation is the participation of Marxist culture in what he calls 'mondialatinization' (or 'globalatinization'[60]) and the consequent difficulty 'to purge it of every messianic reference' (255). It is at this point that Derrida remarks that his 'essay on Marx', a reference to *Specters*, 'is only an element in a structure [*dispositif*] that is not limited to Marx' (255), hence foregrounding a messianic universal structure that applies to

[59] It will be apparent from my argument(s) up to this point that I think that Derrida's statement here regarding how his messianicity without messianism 'precedes and conditions every determinate, historical figure' is just another way of stating that the messianic structures *all* historical (re)presentation; there can, of course, be no 'determinate *historical* figure' that is not produced by a '*historical* (re)presentation'.

[60] See Samuel Weber's translator's note in 'Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of ''Religion'' at the Limits of Reason Alone' first published in French in 1996 and in English in 1998 (both coming after the English publication of *Specters* in 1994 but prior to the English publication of 'Marx & Sons' in 1999): 'Derrida...consistently uses the French term ''*mondialisation*'' and the neologism ''*mondialatinisation*'', which have been translated throughout as ''globalization'' and ''globalatinization''.' (Derrida 1998a, 76*n*35)

all historical (re)presentation including that in relation to Marx but also going far beyond into every aspect of historical culture. Yet while Derrida has called for a deconstruction of the figures of messianism he is at the same time also at pains to underline that 'no critique of *religion*, or of *each determinate* religion', even a radical deconstructive critique, 'should or can, in my view, impugn *faith* in general.' (255) Derrida thinks of 'the experience of belief, of credit' as 'faith in the pledged word (beyond all knowledge and any 'constative' possibility)' (255) which can be understood as faith in the event, that which is 'to-come'. He thinks that this faith in the event 'to-come' is

> part of the structure of the social bond or the relation to the other in general, of the injunction, the promise, and the performativity that all knowledge and all political action, and in particular all revolutions, imply. (255-256)

If this argument is thought persuasive, which I think it is, then it is inconceivable – and this is the crucial point – that this messianic faith-structure could *not* have conditioned (im-possibilised) from the outset *all* notions of historical (re)presentation whether acknowledged or not.

The critique of religion that Derrida has called for, a deconstructive critique that is in *actuality* a critique of historical (re)presentation (there can be, of course, no determinate historical figure without a determining historical [re]presentation), is one that 'itself' (i.e. in turn) 'as a scientific or political understanding, makes appeal to this [Derridean conception of] ''faith''.' (256) Given this, Derrida avows that '[i]t therefore seems to me impossible to eliminate all reference to faith.' For Derrida, *all* critique, including the radical critique that is deconstruction, just is *faith-based*. And for this reason he explains that

> [t]he expression 'the messianic without messianism' appeared to me well suited to translating this difference between faith and religion, at least provisionally. (256)

No discourse, then, whether or not one is a cultured despiser of religion and/or intent on a critique of a determinate historical figure, is immune from this messianic structure of deconstruction.

However, despite his distinction between faith and religion, Derrida is not yet finished with the latter concept, going on to deploy it in a discussion of 'the ''question of ideology''.' (256) Musing rhetorically as to what can be said regarding 'the *concept* of ideology, the 'indestructibility of the ideological' and, most importantly, 'the exemplary – that is, irreplaceable – role which religion plays in the emergence of this Marxian concept' Derrida asks those

> who do not want to take my use of the word 'messianic' and my reference to a spectral logic seriously to reread certain passages of *Specters of Marx*. I am thinking, in particular, of everything which seeks to pave the way for a response to the question 'What is ideology?' by insisting on two forms of 'irreducibility': *on the one hand*, 'the irreducibly specific character of the specter', and, *on the other*, 'the irreducibility of the religious model in the construction of the concept of ideology'.[61] 'Only the reference to the religious world allows one to explain the autonomy of the ideological'[62]; or again: 'The religious is thus not one ideological phenomenon or phantomatic production among others.'[63] (256)

Derrida therefore admits that the consequences of these arguments, if they are accepted, are formidable; namely, that 'every ideological phenomenon would be marked by a degree of religiosity' (256). And of course, this includes historical (re)presentation as *the* ideological phenomenon *par excellence*. On this basis 'we' – i.e. we historians, historiographers, and historical theorists, all of us who trade off and actively perpetuate historical culture, even from a position of radical critique – are all 'religious' *now* in the Derridean sense.

Section Two: Reading religion and the messianic elsewhere: John D. Caputo and affirmationism

As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, this section is shorter than the previous one but, I think, no less important and crucial to my argument. For what Caputo has

[61] Derrida 1994, 148.
[62] Ibid., 165.
[63] Ibid., 166.

done – in my view with greater distinctiveness and brilliance than anyone else working in the field of contemporary continental philosophy of religion – is to seize upon, emphasize/affirm and develop (i.e. *interpreting* and *enlisting* according to his own singular project and desire without betraying that which enables it) in significant ways the various 'religious' dimensions of Derrida's work that have been discussed in this chapter (as well as in the Introduction). And it is precisely this invaluable 'countersigning'[64] of/on Derrida's corpus by Caputo – a re-affirmation of deconstruction that stresses its religious tones and that I think constitutes *the* 'key' strategic move in the maturation and 'tongue loosening'[65] of his own deeply impressive intellectual contribution[66] – that I now appropriate so as to further 'illuminate' (i.e. strengthen my argument regarding) the 'always already' religio-messianic-affirmative structure of historical (re)presentation that historians *qua* historians operate with(in). This religio-messianic-affirmative structure that Caputo more than anyone else has drawn attention to and dwelt on keeps both past and future open to that which is always about 'to-come' and, in doing so, conditions and

[64] Derrida, in an interview with Mark Dooley, offers the following explanation as to why Caputo reads him the way he 'loves' to be read: 'Firstly, he reads me the way I not only enjoy being read, but also in the way I strive to read others – that is, in a way which is generous to the extent that it tries to credit the text and the other as much as possible, not in order to incorporate, replace, or to identify with the other, but to ''countersign'' the text, so to speak. This involves approving and affirming the text, not complacently or dogmatically, but in and through the gesture of saying ''yes'' to the text.

What I love in Jack Caputo is this willingness to say ''yes'', as well as his willingness to countersign and to try and understand what he reads. He does this without giving up his own demanding rigor, his own culture and memory, as well as his singular relation to other texts that I don't know. So even when he is apparently reading me I learn from him because he illuminates my text with his own culture and insight. To take an example, because he knows the work of many theologians, such as Meister Eckhart, Luther, and Kierkegaard, better than I do, he is able to write his own text according to his own trajectory and his own desire without, at the same time, betraying me. So that is why I don't really consider him simply as a commentator or interpreter. It is another kind of gesture.' (Derrida 2003d, 21)

[65] Caputo's volume *On Religion* (Caputo 2001) is dedicated 'To Jacques Derrida, who loosened my tongue'. Elsewhere he credits Derrida 'more than anyone else' with helping to 'break the spell of Heidegger over me' (which he considers an irony of his relationship with Derrida given that 'he [Derrida] treats Heidegger with more filial *pietas* than I do') following a period of time when he had 'wandered about in those Schwarzwaldian woods' (Caputo's early academic work was on Heidegger). (Caputo 2003a, 37)

[66] In 2000 (at the end of the aforementioned interview with Mark Dooley) Derrida commented on Caputo's work as follows: 'I think people will consider Jack Caputo's work as a major contribution because of the way he has provided a powerful interpretation, not just of my own work, but also of the texts of Meister Eckhart and Heidegger. His legacy will be the legacy of someone who has transformed the picture in the United States, in the English-speaking world, transformed the relation between religion and philosophy through a confluence of the most radical attempts of the twentieth century – Heidegger and deconstruction. He has left behind a field in which thinking, writing, and religion have a new relationship, where religion would not be enclosed in a dogmatic field of revelation, but open up to radical deconstructive questioning, open, without being threatened, to the naked minimal experience of faith. So that will provide a field in which new ways of reading and teaching will become available.' (Derrida 2003d, 33)

stresses the inescapable *failure* of *all* historical (re)presentation, foregrounding its im-possibility on and out of which the entire historicizing enterprise/project is predicated and galvanized: a radicalised historicity as 'future-to-come'.

As with Derrida's work, the difficulties of connecting with and arranging the material on the religious and specifically the messianic in Caputo's prodigious textual output are not to be underestimated. However, as indicated in the Introduction, I am going to begin by focussing on the overall argument(s) of his landmark text *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* (hereafter referred to as *Prayers and Tears*) (1997) which inaugurated an influential and arguably brilliant[67] new figuring of deconstruction in affirmative religious terms. Having sketched out this argument I will then move to briefly considering aspects of several of Caputo's subsequent works written in the intellectual/critical wake of *Prayers and Tears* and that develop a number of specific arguments from it. My 'exegesis' of the Derridean messianic and, *inter alia*, closely related concepts continues throughout this section, but here the main focus of my reading shifts to *Caputo's* understanding of these terms and is supported *via* (subsidiary) references to work(s) by Derrida *other* than *Specters* and *Ghostly Demarcations*. Also continuing throughout this section will be my attempt to relate all of this to the formulation of the details of a messianic historical theory: a 'weak' metahistorical theorisation that (re)figures the production of historical (re)presentations and the task(s) of the historian in explicitly messianic terms, terms in service of the hoped for 'future' to-come.

Writing several years after its publication, Caputo wrote that his hypothesis in *Prayers and Tears*

[67] The theologian David Bentley Hart is one example of a scholar who is critical of *Prayers and Tears*: 'This is a poor book in many ways, not least because Caputo's *apologia pro Derrida suo* is so ferocious (and often sanctimonious) that the author never pauses to confront the weaknesses of his own arguments or the recklessness with which he employs certain words (''Jewish'', ''Christian'', ''religion'', for instance); but it provides an exhaustive and accurate survey of its topic.' (Hart 2003, 89*n*95) Certainly in relation to Caputo's usage of the word 'religion' this criticism of recklessness is, as I show in the course of my discussion of *Prayers and Tears* in this section, unfair. Hart also describes the 'messianic' and 'impossible' (gift) as 'mystifications' (Hart 2003, 89). I will return to this 'mystificatory' criticism in my Conclusion.

> is that the key to understanding deconstruction is also the key to understanding religion, viz., that both are brewed from a devilish mix of 'faith and atheism' (Caputo 2003a, 36).

He goes on to remark that this 'impudent hypothesis' and 'impious piety' is 'calculated to scandalize the faithful and the secularists alike', specifically his assertion that

> deconstruction gives words to something close to the heart of religion and of faith, but it is faith that is but a heartbeat removed from heartless, radical doubt. We require the heart to have a faith that is really faith rather than a rod with which to thrash the infidels or to bewail the decline of the middle ages. (Caputo 2003a, 37)

This religious articulation/expression 'by' deconstruction of the (imperative) requirement for *faith* barely separated from radical doubt pervades *Prayers and Tears*. Early on, this 'improbable, unlikely, impossible hypothesis' is introduced *via* the formulation that 'Derrida has religion, a certain religion, his religion, and he speaks of God all the time.' (Caputo 1997, *xviii*) Caputo has it that the 'point of view of Derrida's work as an author is religious' but – crucially – that this needs to be understood as religion 'without religion and without religion's God'. His task in *Prayers and Tears* is therefore to raise awareness about Derrida's 'alliance' [*alliance,* covenant] with religion about which 'no one understands a thing'; he seeks to question and explore 'this link that does not quite hold yet does not quite break' between the religion with which Derrida personally identifies/associates ('my religion' as Derrida puts it in 'Circumfession'[68]) and his public status or reputation 'as this leftist, secularist, sometimes scandalous, post-Marxist Parisian intellectual' (Caputo 1997, *xviii*). Having situated his undertaking thus, and drawing on some of Derrida's self-affective dialogue-as-reflection in his 'Circumfession' (Derrida 1993b, 314), Caputo immediately goes on to parse the broad contours of Derrida's

[68] As stated in the Introduction, Derrida wrote in 'Circumfession' of 'my religion about which nobody understands anything...the constancy of God in my life is called by other names, so that I quite rightly pass for an atheist, the omnipresence to me of what I call God in my absolved, absolutely private language' (Derrida 1993b, 155).

religion *without* religion *vis-à-vis* the impossibility of the wholly other (*tout autre*) to-come:

> He has his whole life long been 'hoping sighing dreaming' over the arrival of something 'wholly other', *tout autre*, praying and weeping over, waiting and longing for, calling upon and being called by something to come. Day and night Derrida has been dreaming, expecting, not the possible, not the eternal, but the impossible...As Jacques says to Derrida, as 'Jackie' says to Jacques...:
> '...you have spent your whole life inviting calling promising, hoping sighing dreaming, convoking invoking provoking, constituting engendering producing, naming assigning demanding, prescribing commanding sacrificing (...*Circum*., 314)'
> (Caputo 1997, *xviii*)

Caputo's deployment of this list of affirmative verbs (which he describes as 'six times three, eighteen ways' to, variously, 'pray and weep, to dream of the innumerable, to desire the promise of something unimaginable' as well as to 'think and write' – Caputo 1997, *xix*) from Derrida's 'autobiographic' (although, typically, not unproblematically so) text, so as to formulate the content/form and tone of his own argument, is important both here and throughout *Prayers and Tears*. Derrida underlined the importance of this move, commenting (in 2000) in relation to *Prayers and Tears* that Caputo was the first to 'bring the most philosophical and theoretical of my writings together with those which are most autobiographical' (these two kinds of writing being, for Derrida, 'sometimes indistinguishable') (Derrida 2003d, 22). He regards Caputo as having the generosity and competence to read these philosophico-theoretical and autobiographical texts/writings together, paying attention 'to the *philosophemes*, so to speak, which are sometimes buried, sometimes embodied in an argument' and to 'the most idiomatic and singular references...tiny details which are very significant for me' (Derrida 2003d, 22). For Derrida, Caputo

> is the only one who really pays attention to significant motifs, details, metonymies, or subtle tropes and connections, which, as far as I can say, go unnoticed even by my most generous readers, my most friendly readers. (Derrida 2003d, 22)

These 'eighteen prayers or performatives, eighteen openings and reopenings, eighteen ways to make or keep a promise' are, according to Caputo, ways of being

impassioned and moved (in the sense of beginning/getting underway) '*by* the impossible' which can be understood as being 'set in motion by the prospect of the unforeseeable', that unknowable something which 'calls us before we open our mouths' and that 'seeks me out before I seek it.' (Caputo 1997, *xix*) Caputo utilises this conception of impassioning/moving (beginning) by the impossible to place the stress on action in the here and now, privileging a kind of Augustinian (and Kierkegaardian) approach 'to *do* the truth (*facere veritatem*)' (Caputo 1997, *xix*) and which requires putting justice before truth as well as, and crucially for my purposes here, passion before discursive (re)presentation. He thinks that the Derridean prayers or performatives of 'Circumfession' constitute 'ways to teach and learn' or 'in short: to do whatever you need, whatever you are needed to do' – including, presumably, whatever historians/historiographers need to do and are needed to do (if anything at all?) – and figures them as 'instructions in the religion without religion of Jacques Derrida, in a new *alliance*.' (Caputo 1997, *xix*)

The figuring of these instructions in Derrida's religion *without* religion, a 'religion' prioritising justice and passion before (or over and above, reversing/inverting their customary ordering) truth and (re)presentation, allows Caputo to continue with and heighten the strong affirmative tone running throughout *Prayers and Tears* as exemplified in the following passage:

> What we will not have understood about deconstruction, and this causes us to read it less and less well, is that deconstruction is set in motion by an overarching aspiration, which on a certain analysis can be called a religious or prophetic aspiration, what would have been called, in the plodding language of the tradition (which deconstruction has rightly made questionable), a movement of 'transcendence'. Vis-à-vis such transcendence, the immanent is the sphere not only of the actual and the present, but also of the possible and the plannable, of the foreseeable and the representable, so that deconstruction, as a movement of transcendence, means excess, the exceeding of the stable borders of the presently possible. Deconstruction is a passion for transgression, a passion for trespassing the horizons of possibility, which is what Derrida calls, following Blanchot, the *passion* of the *pas*, the *pas* of *passion*...What we will not have understood is that deconstruction stirs with a passion for the impossible, *passion du lieu*, a passion for an impossible place, a passion to go precisely where you cannot go. (Caputo 1997, *xix*)

On Caputo's reckoning, then, deconstruction is motivated by overarching religio-prophetic affirmative aspiration or movement of transcendence: to exceed the sphere or chain(s) of the actual-present-possible-plannable-foreseeable. All types, or expressions, of (re)presentation – including, of course, its *historicizing* expression – are disturbed/de-stabilized (in the continual course of the ongoing movement or attempt to go beyond, accelerate past, escape/be free from, elude, etc.) by this aspiration. An affirmative *passion* for transgression, for transgressing the limits (horizons) of possibility in favour of the im-possible ('to go where it is impossible to go', as Derrida – 1995a, 59 – puts it[69]), trumps (because it is heterogeneous to) (re)presentation while – as I will continue to argue – simultaneously enabling it. For, as Caputo puts it, 'Deconstruction is called forth in response to the unrepresentable' (Caputo 1997, *xix*) and it is this responsive 'calling forth' that conditions and is always already at work in *all* historicizations. Predicated on failure to (re)present the un(re)presentable (which can also be understood as a highlighting of the radical incommensurability of justice and law, and/or passion and [re]presentation) they continue to be structured and produced out of this impossible historicity of which a responsive deconstruction (called forth by this impossible *khôral* historicity) 'serves' to constantly remind us. The thinking of that which is always 'to-come' (the unrepresentable 'wholly other') conditions/possibilizes and galvanizes the production of further (re)presentatory endeavours given that, as both Derrida and Caputo emphasize and as will be discussed below, 'the Messiah' (who/which can be associated with the presence, or a definitive recuperation of, the future-past; of doing justice to the past, actualised in the present) to who 'we' (historians, historiographers and historical theorists) are responding is never meant to arrive; the historical

[69] Interestingly, Derrida suggests that even 'the language of ab-negation or of renunciation is not negative' when thought in relation to this impossible aspiration/passion: 'And the language of ab-negation or of renunciation is not negative: not only because it does not state in the mode of descriptive predication and of the indicative proposition simply affected with a negation (''this is not that''), but because it denounces as much as it renounces; and it denounces, enjoining; it prescribes overflowing this insufficiency; it mandates, *it necessitates* doing the impossible, necessitates going (*Geh*, Go!) there where one cannot go. Passion of, for, the place, again. I shall say in French: *il y a lieu de* (which means *il faut*, ''it is necessary'', ''there is ground for'') rendering oneself *there where* it is impossible to go. Over there, toward the name, toward the beyond of the name *in* the name. Toward what, toward he or she who remains – save the name [*sauf le nom*, or ''safe, the name'' – Ed.]. Going where it is possible to go would not be a displacement or a decision, it would be the irresponsible unfolding of a program. The sole decision possible passes through the madness of the undecidable and the impossible: to go where (*wo, Ort, Wort*) it is impossible to go.' (Derrida 1995a, 59)

enterprise is kept 'open' by the just one's always imminent (non-)arrival, by the futural thinking of the 'to-come'.

One of the most impressive aspects of *Prayers and Tears* that is sustained throughout is Caputo's inventive and powerful way of expressing and developing this condition(ing) of/by the impossible (although he isn't concerned in this text to develop the notion of an impossible historicity in any comprehensive way; his focus is on the implications of deconstruction for an understanding of religion and faith and not historical theorisation *per se*) *via* recourse to a religious and mystical (not to be confused with 'mystificatory') vocabulary and metaphor/imagery with an affirmationist tenor. Deconstruction is 'large with expectation', 'provoked by the promise', 'impregnated by the impossible', 'hoping in a certain messianic promise of the impossible', and Caputo considers that these conceptualizations are the 'stuff' of 'Derrida's religion...his new alliance' (Caputo 1997, *xix*) without ignoring that Derrida 'rightly passes for an atheist' (Derrida 1993b, 155).[70] Deconstruction is

[70] In 'Circumfession' Derrida writes that 'the constancy of God in my life is called by other names, so that I quite rightly pass for an atheist, the omnipresence to me of what I call God in my absolved absolutely private language being neither that of an eyewitness nor that of a voice doing anything other than talking to me without saying anything...' (Derrida 1993b, 155). Looking back on the construction of *Prayers and Tears*, Caputo has stated that his 'whole hypothesis' in the book 'turned' on '*why* he [Derrida] said ''I quite rightly pass for an atheist'', instead of just saying he *is* an atheist'. By way of explaining the importance of this question to the argument of *Prayer and Tears*, Caputo adds that 'For there is something deeply religious about Derrida's atheism – that is what I love – even as there is something atheistic about this religion, a bond existing between them that is ''without continuity and without rupture'', which I also love.' (Caputo 2003a, 36) When, during an interview in 2000, Mark Dooley puts Caputo's question to Derrida (Caputo having encouraged Dooley to do so), he replies as follows: 'Once again, I am being ironic. Firstly, I prefer to refer to what *they* say, even if they are right in saying so, and even if they have good reasons for saying this, it is still what *they* say. So I feel free because *I* am not saying this. Even when I say that *they* have good reasons for saying this, *I* am not saying this of myself. *I* am just referring to them, to what *they* say. It is, however, not that simple. For I am more than one: I am the atheist they think I am, which is why I say that I ''rightly'' pass for an atheist, but I would also approve of those people who say exactly the opposite. Who is right? I don't know. I don't know whether I am or not. Sometimes it depends on the moment or the hour. It is not a matter of knowledge. I would prefer not to say who I am myself.' (Derrida 2003d, 32). In the same interview, Derrida confirms that he is comfortable saying that he has a 'religion without religion' and that this can be understood as a religion of justice, an openness to the other (Derrida 2003d, 32). He also outlines the certain sense in which he is religious: 'I try in more ''scholarly'' texts to explain what religion is or is not, and to explain the difference between faith and knowledge. So in a certain sense of ''religion'' I am religious. I am a very religious person, not because I pray or because I go to church or the synagogue, but in my relation to others, in my behaviour as a citizen, as a father, and so on. I am obsessed with the problem of ''perjury'', and someone who is obsessed with the problem of perjury is someone who hates perjury, who wants to respect the other and the sacred. I have a religious temper without piety and practice.' (Derrida 2003d, 32) Elsewhere, in responding to a question from Caputo regarding some comments he made in 'Circumfession' about being 'a man of prayers and tears', Derrida has problematicised the autobiographic/confessional status (i.e. the idea that all the statements made therein can be simply 'read off' as Derrida's or as having been the one who has 'signed it') of this text: 'In the

engaged ‘by the promptings of the spirit/spectre of something unimaginable and unforeseeable’ and is always moved and moving – indeed it articulates/nominates (‘gives words to’) that movement – by ‘the provocation of something calling from afar that calls it beyond itself, outside itself.’ (Caputo 1997, *xix*) It ‘works the provocation of what is to come, *à venir*, against the complacency of the present’ so as to ‘prevent it from closing in on itself, from collapsing into self-identity’; such closure would constitute ‘the simple impossibility of *the* impossible, the prevention of the invention of the *tout autre*’ and be considered by affirmationists (i.e. re-affirmers of Derrida’s conception of deconstruction) such as Caputo as ‘the height of injustice’ (Caputo 1997, *xx*). Caputo repeats/countersigns this familiar imperative formulation of deconstruction by giving it a religious (but still imperative) twist, describing it as a ‘passion and a prayer for the impossible, a defense of the impossible against its critics’ that is also ‘a plea for/to the experience of the impossible’, which he asserts ‘is the only real experience, stirring with religious passion’ (Caputo 1997, *xx*). This religious countersigning paves the way for Caputo to give us his definition of religion (and which, *contra* the criticism of David Bentley Hart [see *n*67], is anything but a reckless utilisation of the word given the careful ‘set up’ that has preceded it):

> By religion I mean a pact with the impossible, a covenant with the unrepresentable, a promise made by the *tout autre* with its people, where we are all the people of the *tout autre*, the people of the promise, promised over to the promise...Deconstruction is a child of the promise, of the covenant, of the *alliance* with the *tout autre*, of the deal cut between the *tout autre* and its faithless, inconstant, self-seeking followers who are in regular need of prophets to keep them on the straight and narrow and to remind them of the cut in their flesh, to recall them to the call that they no longer heed. (Caputo 1997, *xx*)

Now, if, as I have argued, all historical (re)presentation is conditioned by the impossible (the unrepresentable) then, according to the terms of Derrida’s religion

---

text you quote, which you know better than others, even better than me, you assume that I am the man who signed it, a man who asks if I ought to tell people that I pray. But you know that the status of this text remains suspended. I have not simply signed this text. The text has the structure of a confession. It is a text that turns around a possible-impossible confession, around circumcision, and around confession. I am not making a confession. I am not signing a confession. I am not speaking in my own name. The text in intertwined with quotations from Saint Augustine. It has a very complex structure, in which it is difficult even for me to decide who is speaking, who is saying something about his prayer, his way of praying, and so on.’ (Derrida in Sherwood and Hart 2005, 28-30)

without religion set out here by Caputo, it is also inescapably *religious*. Messianic historical theory foregrounds that *all* historical/historiography is religious now (and has always already been so) in this precise sense: it has a pact with the impossible – a covenant with the unrepresentable – that moves it and allows it to get going. It is responsive to the promise made by the wholly other: historians are people of the *tout autre*. Messianic historical theory, as a re-affirmation of deconstruction at work in historical discourse specifically, is a child of this promise/covenant/*alliance*, a prophetic reminder and – as Derrida reminds us of deconstruction – *experience*[71] of its im-possibility that needs to be regularly given to those perpetuators of historical culture – historians ('faithless, inconstant, self-seeking followers' who need to be reminded/recalled 'to the call that they no longer heed'?) – who have forgotten the passion to transgress and would deny that their work is predicated 'upon' this radical historicity of 'to-come'.

To strengthen these arguments, his arguments, Caputo makes regular reference to Kierkegaard in *Prayers and Tears*, contending that Derrida's religion without religion meets the 'rigorous requirements of Johannes de Silentio's [one of several pseudonyms with which Kierkegaard signed a number of 'his' texts[72]] delineation of the traits of the religious', where making 'a pact with the possible is mere aestheticism, and with the eternal, mere rationalism', as opposed to 'expecting', 'making a deal with', and 'being impassioned by' *the* impossible, which is 'the religious' and 'religious passion' (Caputo 1997, *xx*). As Caputo puts it, glossing comments by Johannes Climacus (another Kierkegaard pseudonym):

[71] Derrida pointed out and affirmed the definition of deconstruction as the *experience* of the possibility of the impossible: 'This thought seems strangely familiar to the experience of what is called deconstruction. Far from being a methodical technique, a possible or necessary procedure, unrolling the law of a program and applying rules, that is, unfolding possibilities, deconstruction has often been defined as the very experience of the (impossible) possibility of the impossible, of the most impossible, a condition that deconstruction shares with the gift, the ''yes'', the ''come'', decision, testimony, the secret, etc. And perhaps death.' (Derrida 1995a, 43) Regarding this possibility of the impossible he added that '[t]he possibility of the impossible, of the ''more impossible'' that as such is also possible (''more impossible than the impossible''), marks an absolute interruption in the regime of the possible that nonetheless remains, if this can be said, in place.' (Derrida 1995a, 43)

[72] As Caputo explains in his short book *How to Read Kierkegaard*: 'He [Kierkegaard] used pseudonyms not because he was a sceptic but because he regarded the author as a matter of ''indifference''…As the author, he argued, he himself is nobody, as good as dead, infinitely light relative to the gravity of the reader's existential fate. What matters is the dance, the dialectical play of ideal possibilities into which the reader is to be personally drawn. The books are not occasions for readers to be induced, even seduced, into making a decision for themselves.' (Caputo 2007a, 6)

> The ultimate passion of thought, Johannes Climacus says, is to discover something that thought cannot think, something impossible, something at the frontier of thought and desire, something paradoxical. That is what gives it passion – otherwise it is a 'mediocre fellow'. (Caputo 1997, *xx*)

It is this ultimate passion of thought to discover something that thought cannot think – that which is at the frontier of thought and desire and conditions all (failed and failing) attempts at (re) presentation; that which is impossible and paradoxical – that messianic historical theory attempts to inculcate in historical culture so as to disturb the satisfied settlements of its hegemonic determinations. It seeks to awaken (fan into flame) this religious passion – in this certain Derridean-Caputoian-Kierkegaardian sense – in historians/historiographers/historical theorists, encouraging them to renew their pact with the impossible (unrepresentable) as the condition for what they do; to de-stabilise historicization by drawing attention to what has always already lain beneath and in it. Caputo's project is to make us more aware of this pervasive religion – Derrida's religion – which 'is what we will not have known about Derrida and deconstruction' and about which our ignorance has caused us – according to Derrida – 'to read him less and less well.' (Caputo 1997, *xx*) Drawing again on some of Derrida's remarks in 'Circumfession' regarding what related him to Judaism with which his alliance is 'broken in every aspect' (Derrida 1993b, 154), Caputo presents him as having 'broken one deal to make another, broken one pact to form another', to have become 'a Jew *sans* Judaism' (Caputo 1997, *xx*) so as to

> enter into a new *alliance,* a new covenant (*convenire*) with the incoming (*invenire*), which 'repeats'...the movements of the first covenant in a religion without religion. (Caputo 1997, *xx-xxi*)

This notion of the 'repeating' by the 'new' covenant the movements of the 'first' covenant is, as Derrida pointed out, crucial to thinking the possibility of religion without religion; a thinking that repeats this possibility and which belongs to a tradition (that, in Derrida's view includes 'a certain Kant...Hegel, Kierkegaard...and...for provocative effect, Heidegger') that 'consists of proposing a nondogmatic doublet of dogma, a philosophical and metaphysical doublet' (Derrida

1995c, 49). As Caputo, referencing *Specters*, puts it, deconstruction 'repeats the structure of religious experience[73], i.e., of a specifically biblical, covenantal, Abrahamic experience' (Caputo 1997, *xxi*) but does so (i.e. 'regularly, rhythmically' repeating 'this religiousness')

> *sans* the concrete, historical religions; it repeats nondogmatically the religious structure of experience, the category of the religious. (Caputo 1997, *xxi*)

More specifically, what Caputo thinks deconstruction repeats is 'the passion for the messianic promise and messianic expectation, *sans* the concrete messianisms', the latter (concrete messianisms) being those 'positive religions that wage endless war and spill the blood of the other' (Caputo 1997, *xxi*). Deconstruction

> ceaselessly repeats the *viens*, the apocalyptic call for the impossible, but without calling for the apocalypse that would consume its enemies in fire and damnation; it repeats the work of circumcision as the cut that opens the same to the other *sans* sectarian closure; it repeats Abraham's trek up to Moriah and makes a gift without return of Isaac, *sans* the economy of blood sacrifice, repeating the madness of giving without return; it repeats the movements of faith, of expecting what we cannot know but only believe – *je ne sais pas, il faut croire*[74] – of the blindness of faith *sans savoir, sans avoir, sans voir*[75] in the impossible, but without the dogmas of the positive religious faiths. (Caputo 1997, *xxi*)

The repeating by deconstruction of the passion for the messianic promise and messianic expectation (*sans* the dogmatics of concrete messianisms) constitutes an experience ('a certain experience of the promise[76]')

> where 'experience' is taken not in Husserlian terms as the presence of the given but in Abrahamic and messianic terms as the expectation of something unrepresentable, running up against the foreseeable, a certain absolute experience. (Caputo 1997, *xxi*)

[73] See *Specters*, 168 (Derrida 1994).
[74] 'I don't know, one has to believe...' (Derrida1993c, 129).
[75] 'But will I have been able to say, to you, *come*, without knowing, without having, without seeing [*sans savoir, sans avoir, sans voir*] in advance what ''come'' [''*venir*''] means to say?' (Derrida 2011, 15)
[76] See *Specters*, 89 (Derrida 1994).

It is the 'passion of this promise' that is 'the very heart of deconstruction' and which provokes 'the prayers and tears of Jacques Derrida' that can also be understood as 'the religion, the religious aspiration of deconstruction' or 'expectation, in the time of a promise'. Deconstruction 'is driven mad by a passion for the promise, by an impossible ideal, by a covenant cut with the *tout autre*.' (Caputo 1997, *xxi*)

Caputo picks up on and develops another of Derrida's religiously toned instantiations of this messianic experience of expectation (waiting without *a*waiting) for something unrepresentable with which he (Caputo) is particularly fascinated: the question – formulated by Saint Augustine – 'What do I love when I love my God?'[77], a question that I think can be usefully deployed so as to develop further messianic historical theory. Caputo maintains that what has not been understood about deconstruction is 'its passion for God, for ''my God'', his, Jackie's' and that, given this, the question is 'not whether there is a *désir de Dieu*, a passion for God, in Jacques Derrida' (Caputo 1997, *xxii*) but, rather, is the one put by his 'compatriot'[78] (Derrida 1993, 18) Augustine: 'What do I love when I love my God?' (Derrida 1993, 122, cited in Caputo 1997, *xxii*):

> Upon the groundless ground of this beautiful and bottomless question, which is as much a sigh and a hope and a prayer as a question, *quid ergo amo, cum deum meum amo?*, Derrida's life and work is an extended commentary. 'Can I do anything other than translate this sentence by SA into my language', he writes, 'the change of meaning and of reference turning on the *meum*?'[79] To what do I pray, over what do I weep, when in *my* language, I pray and weep to *my* God? For what am I 'hoping sighing dreaming' when I hope and sigh and dream of my God? For what do I call when I call, in my language, *viens*? By what am I impassioned in my passion for God? To what am I promised, to what do I consent, in this pact with the impossible? What do I expect when I expect the impossible? (Caputo 1997, *xxii*)

[77] At the beginning of his book *On Religion*, Caputo writes that 'By religion, therefore, let me stipulate, I mean something simple, open ended, and old fashioned, namely, the love of God. But the expression ''love of God'' needs some work. Of itself it tends to be a little vacuous and even slightly sanctimonious. To put it technically, it lacks teeth. So the question we need to ask ourselves is the one Augustine puts to himself in the *Confessions*, ''what do I love when I love God?'', or 'what do I love when I love You, my God?', as he also put it, or, running these two Augustinian formulations together, ''what do I love when I love my God?''. Augustine, I should say at the start, will be my hero throughout these pages, although with a certain post-modern and sometimes unorthodox twist that might at times have provoked his Episcopal wrath (he was a bishop, with a bishop's distaste for unorthodoxy).' (Caputo 2001, 1-2)

[78] This is a reference to North Africa, which both Derrida and Augustine have in common.

[79] Derrida 1993b, 122.

This question (sigh/hope/prayer) – 'What do I love when I love my God?' – upon the groundless ground of which Derrida's life-work is a commentary, highlights those concerns attendant on and generated by *the passion of a pact/covenant with the unrepresentable – as impossible historicity of the to-come – raised to consciousness, which is another way of articulating messianic historical theory*. Restating (translating) this question somewhat so as to foreground these concerns/issues that messianic historical theory wants to give a (fresh) prominence and hearing to yields various – and, it is to be hoped, startling – interrogative phrases or expressions (or models/concepts without foundation). To what do historians pray/weep when they pray and weep to their 'God' (the constancy of that word in their lives passing under other names privileged by their professional guild: 'meaning', 'truth', 'objectivity', 'balance', 'fairness', etc.), i.e. when they produce their (re)presentations in response to the call of the unrepresentable wholly other? For what are historians hoping-sighing-dreaming when they hope and sigh and dream of – aspire to/expect – the unrepresentable (the return/coming of the presence of the past)? For what do historians call when they call, in their language, *viens* ('the past to-come back')? By what are historians impassioned in their passion for that which cannot be (re)presented? To what are historians promised, to what do they consent, in this pact with the impossible condition of their continued work and professional 'life'? What do historians expect when they expect the impossible – never to be fulfilled – *vis-à-vis* their work (a radical re-conceptualisation of what they do, the basis on which they do it, and its political utility/'worth')? These are, of course, all undecidable[80] (i.e. both not belonging to the order of knowledge *and* not wanting to know: the Messiah – or the just one – is always 'to-come' and never present but *is* imminent, with the messianic structure breaching/opening the present for this/its imminent arrival) questions and, as such, constitute the disturbing/de-stabilizing tensions with(in) which messianic historical theory requires all historians/historiographers to live, just as Derrida did. Indeed, Caputo (in rhetorical

[80] As Derrida explains: '[T]o be in undecidability does not mean simply that I don't *know*. It means, firstly, that it does not belong to the order of knowledge, and, secondly, that I don't *want* to know. I know that I should not know. If I could rely on this translatability there would be no God anymore.' (Derrida 2003d, 28)

mode) asks whether Derrida has ever been able 'to do anything his whole life long other than try to translate this question?' (albeit in a problematicized way which is careful to resist relying on or assuming a 'transparent translatability' that thinks that 'the impossible' and 'God' are 'replaceable one for the other'[81] – see Derrida 2003d, 28), perceiving it (this question) as 'a powerful wind that blows from thousands of years of Judaism' and belonging 'to a past that was never present' (Caputo 1997, *xxii*). The power of this question, Caputo argues, disturbs everything, overturning 'every idol of presence, every graven image, making every constituted effect tremble in insecurity'; its passion makes 'everything questionable, opening the doors and the barriers of everything that wants to keep itself closed', including opening (and here is a vivid reminder of the hauntology encompassing, or groundlessly grounding, the ceaselessly *re*petitive cycle of historical [re]presentation/culture; the constant galvanization of, and provocation to, *re*turn, *re*call, *re*read, *re*code, *re*claim, etc., which could be read as the repetition of the 'drive to appropriate the other for oneself, the truth, being, the event, etc.'[82] – Derrida 1997c, 65 – *or*, undecidably, as a response/attempt to keep the future open)

[81] Derrida has pointed out that 'the difference between the passion for *the* impossible on the one hand, and the passion for ''God'' on the other, is the *name*.' He elaborates as follows: ' ''*The* impossible'' is not a name, it is not a proper name, it is not some*one*. ''God'' – I do not say divinity – is someone with a name, even if it is a nameless name like the Jewish god. It is a nameable nameless name, whereas *the* impossible is a non-name, a common name, a non-proper name. ''God'' is a proper nameable nameless name. ''*The* impossible'' is a common non-proper name, or nameless common name. Now, you cannot and you should not translate one into the other. If there is a transparent translatability ''the faith'' is safe, that is, it becomes a non-faith. At that point, it becomes possible to name. It becomes possible because there is some*one* whom you can name and call because you know who it is that you are calling. Not only can I not say this, but I would not and should not say this. If I were sure that it was possible for me to replace ''*the* impossible'' by ''God'', then everything would become possible. Faith would become possible, and when faith becomes simply possible it is not faith anymore. So I see a danger for faith and for something which is the abyss of faith. This danger consists in stating that, or in believing in, the mere translatability between these two things. I keep oscillating between the two.' He then goes on to explain what it means to be in undecidability as stated in the previous footnote (*n*80), adding the following comment: 'Now, when the God comes, when the Messiah comes, we will see! But I cannot foresee and program this. That is why I am an atheist *in a certain way* – a faithful one! I am faithful to this sort of atheism. So I agree...there is this undecidability, but to say that there is such undecidability doesn't mean that the two terms are replaceable one for the other. That is the problem of God.' (Derrida 2003d, 28)

[82] Derrida writes this in the course of exploring the im-possibility of the 'new' and our impatience to see 'the messianic interruption': 'If ''new'' always means, again and again, once again, *anew*, the appropriative drive, the repetition of the same drive to appropriate the other for oneself, the truth, being, the event etc., what can still take place anew? Anew? What remains to come? And what will become of our just impatience to see the new coming, the new thoughts, the new thinkers, new justice, the revolution or the messianic interruption? Yet another ruse? Once again the desire of appropriation?

Yes. Yes, perhaps.' (Derrida 1997c, 65)

> even the graves of the dead to let their specters soar, disturbing everything that wants to rest in peace, stalking the world with ghosts? (Caputo 1997, *xxii*)

The determinative power of constituted idols/graven images – i.e., of endless historicizations – must be overturned and this imperative at the heart of messianic historical theory can be observed in the translations and adaptations of 'What do I love when I love my God?' by/in Derrida's religion without religion (and the impossible condition of all (re)presentational discourse that it foregrounds), given that they include disturbing/de-stabilizing interrogatives such as 'Who am I? Who are you? What is coming?' (Caputo 1997, *xxii*), interrogatives with which historians should be obsessed in relation to their work. Caputo is convinced that we will have 'understood less and less of the provocation of Derrida' and 'the events that the name 'Derrida' provokes' if we have not discerned ('heard') 'the promise of this question and the question of this promise' that 'sweeps over' Derrida and 'comes to us, so long as we let it come.' (Caputo 1997, *xxiii*) It is here that Caputo's affirmationist credentials are clearly on display, as when he goes on to write the following of Derrida:

> The passion of the promise resonates in every sentence he writes, yes, and in every fragment of a sentence, yes, every word and shard of a word, every play and, yes, every argument. We will read him less and less well unless we hear the yes that punctuates and accents the text, the yes to the promise that resonates throughout all his works, a yes first, a yes last, a constant yes. *Oui, oui*. The yes comes from him to us, to 'you' (he means us), and to him from a distant time and place, from who knows where. He is 'convoking invoking provoking', we are responding, yes, language is happening, *il y a la langue*, the impossible is happening, yes, the *tout autre* is breaking out.[83]
>
> Yes, yes. *Oui, oui*.[84] (Caputo 1997, *xxiii*)

[83] This is a reference to some comments in Derrida's text 'Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce' relating to the delimiting 'work' that contrives 'the breach necessary for the coming of the other, whom one can always call Elijah, if Elijah is the name of the unforeseeable other for whom a place must be kept' (Derrida 1992a, 294-295).

[84] Also in 'Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce', Derrida asserts that we 'call to each other across a *yes*, which always inaugurates a scene of call and request: it confirms and countersigns. Affirmation demands *a priori* confirmation, repetition, safekeeping, and the memory of the *yes*. A certain narrativity is to be found at the simple core of the simplest *yes*...A *yes* never comes alone, and we never say this word alone.' (Derrida 1992a, 288) He also states that 'the *yes* always appears as a *yes, yes*. I say the *yes* and not the word ''yes'', because there can be a *yes* without a word.' (Derrida 1992a, 296) Elsewhere, Derrida identifies/links this moment of the 'yes' with what he loves: '[T]he only thing I love is the moment...of the ''vast and boundless Yes''...of the ''yes'' that ''we have in common'' ', to the extent that, in response to an interviewer, he makes the following statement: 'You ask me about theory, politics, and so forth: let us say that when I do not hear there, even from a distance, this ''yes, come'' or

So, by way of attempting a summary of Caputo's affirmationist reading of Derrida that I have sketched out so far, it should by now be apparent that the 'sails of deconstruction strain toward what is coming', are 'bent by the winds of *l'avenir*, by the promise of the in-coming, of the in-venire', in other words by/of 'the wholly other, *tout autre*, *l'invention de l'autre*.' (Caputo 1997, *xxiii*) Caputo continually stresses the 'prophetic, messianic bent of deconstruction, its posture of expectancy, its passion for *the* impossible', that 'which is always and structurally to come'. This prophetic/messianic bent of deconstruction, with its expectancy and passion, runs so deep, Caputo goes on to say, that

---

one of its translations, I am very bored, very bored indeed.' (Derrida 1995b, 65) In another interview ('Nietzsche and the Machine'), Derrida provides an extremely helpful delineation of this 'double affirmation' of the 'yes-yes': 'I believe all the problems we have been discussing in this interview are to be found in the very reduced and highly schematized form of what I call *double affirmation*. To consider the problem in a slightly simple, pedagogical way: the ''yes'' is neither a descriptive observation nor a theoretical judgment; it is precisely an affirmation, with the performative characteristics that any affirmation entails. The ''yes'' must also be a reply, a reply in the form of a promise. From the moment that the ''yes'' is a reply, it must be addressed to the other, from the moment that it is a promise, it pledges to confirm what has been said. If I say ''yes'' to you, I have already repeated it the first time, since the first ''yes'' is also a promise of this ''yes'' being repeated. To say ''yes'' is to acquiesce, to pledge, and therefore to repeat. To say ''yes'' is an obligation to repeat. This pledge to repeat is implied in the structure of the most simple ''yes''. There is a time and a spacing of the ''yes'' as ''yes-yes'': it takes time to say ''yes''. A single ''yes'' is, therefore, immediately double, it immediately announces a ''yes'' to come and already recalls that the ''yes'' implies another ''yes''. So, the ''yes'' is immediately double, immediately ''yes-yes''.

This immediate duplication is the source of all possible contamination – that of the movement of freedom, of decision, of declaration, of inauguration – by its technical or technical double. Repetition is never pure. Hence the second ''yes'' can eventually be one of laughter or derision at the first ''yes'', it can be the forgetting of the first ''yes'', it can equally be a recording of it. Fidelity, parody, forgetting, or recording – whatever, it is always a form of repetition. Each time it is originary *iterability* that is at play. Iterability is the very condition of a pledge, of responsibility, of promising. Iterability can only open the door to these forms of affirmation at the same time as opening the door to the threat of this affirmation failing. One cannot distinguish the opening from the threat. This is precisely why technics is present from the beginning. What duplicity means is this: at the origin there is technics.

All this is true before we even get to the word *yes*. As I argue in ''Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce'', the ''yes'' does not necessarily take on the form of the word *yes* in a particular language; the affirmation can be pre-verbal or pre-discursive. For example, the affirmation of life in the movement toward self-repetition, toward assistance, may well be pre-verbal. Both movements can also be ones of degeneration, they can be an act of mockery, a copy, an archive, and so forth. With this duplicity we are at the heart of the ''logic'' of contamination. One should not simply consider contamination as a threat, however. To do so continues to ignore this very logic. Possible contamination must be assumed, because it is also opening or chance, our chance. Without contamination we should have no opening or chance. Contamination is not only to be assumed or affirmed: it is the very possibility of affirmation in the first place. For affirmation to be possible, there must always be at least two ''yes's''. If the contamination of the first ''yes'' by the second is refused – for whatever reasons – one is denying the very possibility of the first ''yes''. Hence all the contradictions and confusion that this denial can fall into. Threat is chance, chance is threat – this law is absolutely undeniable and irreducible. If one does not accept it, there is no risk, and, if there is no risk, there is only death. If one refuses to take a risk, one is left with nothing but death.' (Derrida 2002d, 247-248)

> if the messiah ever showed up, in the flesh, if, as Blanchot recounts[85], someone were to recognize him living incognito among the poor and the wretched on the outskirts of the city (or in the bowels of the inner city), the one question we would have for him is 'when will you come?' (Caputo 1997, *xxiv*)

Here, the emphasis is on the imperative not to 'quench' the passion for the impossible and to keep the future open for 'the one who is coming, the just one, the *tout autre*' who 'can never be present' and, as such, *must* 'always function as a breach of the present, opening up the present to something new', or, in other words 'to something impossible.' (Caputo 1997, *xxiv*) For, 'were the horizon of possibility to close over, it would erase the trace of justice' given that 'justice is the trace of what is to come beyond the possible'; therefore,

> [t]he law of the impossible, the 'impossible-rule', is never to confuse his coming (*venue*) with being present, never to collapse the coming of the just one into the order of what is present or absent. (Caputo 1997, *xxiv*)

Accordingly, messianic historical theory *wants* historians to take seriously and abide by this impossible law/rule, to cultivate a passionate sensibility (an embracing of this messianic structure of experience which is much more than an unproblematicized 'reflexivity'), a 'being-towards' (a concept developed by Caputo to be discussed shortly) the wholly other that resists all attempts to collapse the

[85] Caputo is referring to Derrida's quotation/citation (in *Politics of Friendship* – Derrida 1997c, 36-37 and 46*n*14 – and elsewhere [Derrida 1997a, 24-25]) of a passage from Maurice Blanchot's *The Writing of Disaster*: 'Jewish messianic thought (according to certain commentators), suggests the relation between the event and its non-occurrence. If the Messiah is at the gates of Rome among the beggars and lepers, one might think that his incognito protects or prevents him from coming, but, precisely, he is recognized: someone, obsessed with questioning and unable to leave off, asks him: ''When will you come?'' His being there is, then, not the coming. With the Messiah, who is there, the call must always resound: ''Come, Come''. His presence is no guarantee. Both future and past (it is said at least once that the Messiah has already come), his coming does not correspond to any presence at all. Nor does the call suffice. There are conditions – the efforts of men, their virtue, their repentance – which are known; there are always other conditions which are not. And if it happens that to the question ''When will you come?'' the Messiah answers, ''Today'', the answer is certainly impressive: so, it is today! It is now and always now. There is no need to wait, although to wait is an obligation. And when is it now? When is the now which does not belong to ordinary time, which necessarily overturns it, does not maintain but destabilizes it?' (Blanchot 1995, 141-142) In *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*, Derrida says of this story that 'I think this is very profound. It means that there is some inadequation between the now and now. He is coming now; the messianic does not wait. This is a way of waiting for the future, right now. The responsibilities that are assigned to us by this messianic structure are responsibilities for here and now. The Messiah is not some future present; it is imminent and it is this imminence that I am describing under the name of messianic structure.' (Derrida 1997a, 24)

(future) ‘to-come’ into the present order(ings) of historical culture and (re)presentation. Their (and ‘our’) decision to observe this impossible law/rule, and the extent of their (our) success in doing so, is, of course, conditioned by undecidability, as Caputo reminds us:

> [U]ndecidability...is the condition of a decision that each of us, one by one, must make. We must, on our own, sort out how much...To what extent am I too, or you, ‘hoping sighing dreaming’, impassioned by the impossible, caught up in a deal with the *tout autre*? I will always be a little lost, betwixt and between the appropriating proper name of Jacques and the circumcised signature that opens to the other. For the one cannot be insulated from the other, not if we are going to speak of the prayers and tears of Jacques Derrida, of the passion of Jacques Derrida, seeing that ‘deconstruction’, *‘la’ deconstruction*, if there is any such thing, cannot sigh or pray or weep or bend a knee or ever feel a thing. (Caputo 1997, *xxv*)

Historians/historiographers who would embrace – as *new* scholars – messianic historical theory are dogged by the tensions of following this impossible law/rule, by this undecidability, by the extent to which they are impassioned by the impossible (historical [re]presentation that opens to the other, keeps the future open) or by the appropriating drive (the ‘proper name’ of history/historical (re)presentation that seeks to appropriate the other for oneself, the truth, being, the event etc., *via* historicization). The one cannot be insulated from the other, not if we understand deconstruction as being always already at work within all (re)presentation/discourse as its groundless ground and not separate from it as a discrete essence; this prophetic/messianic and therefore religious bent of deconstruction is a ‘general structure, which is borne on the wings of repetition’ and yet...and yet...it needs to be appreciated – as Caputo identifies ‘and here is all the difficulty’ – that it ‘cannot take the form of an essence or a universal’. As Caputo puts it:

> It cannot be the effect of an *epoche* (which means a cutting off) of his circumcision. It is too Jewish to be catholic (*katholou*), even though it proceeds *sans* Judaism. It is not as if we are seeking some sort of invariant transcendental, some uncircumcised, Hellenistic *eidos,* some *essentia sans* circumcision. Even if it is borne on the wings of repetition, this ‘religion’ cannot circle high above us in an essentialistic, Hellenistic sky, like the *aigle* of *savoir absolute,* some bloodless *transcendens* soaring beyond us bloodied

> mortals below. For then this Jewish bird would be cooked (*cuit*). (Caputo 1997, *xxv*)

Rather, deconstruction as this general religious structure that cannot take the form of an essence (cut off 'from the absolute', its 'word' cut off 'from the final word, from the totalizing truth or *logos* that engulfs the other' – Caputo 1997, *xxvi*) proceeds 'not by knowledge but by faith and by passion, by the passion of faith'; it is 'impassioned by the unbelievable, by the secret that there is no secret'[86] and 'called

[86] This 'secret that there is no secret' is explicated by Caputo in his text *More Radical Hermeneutics: On Not Knowing Who We Are* (Caputo 2000), where he makes the claim, 'which is more of a confession than a claim', that 'we are not (as far as we know) born into this world hard-wired to Being Itself, or Truth Itself, or the Good Itself, that we are not vessels of a Divine or World-Historical super-force that has chosen us as its earthly instruments, and that, when we open our mouths, it is we who speak, not something Bigger and Better than we. We have not been given privileged access to The Secret, to some big capitalized know-it-all Secret, not as far we know. (If we have, it has been kept secret from me.) The secret is, there is no Secret, no such access to The Secret, which is what Jacques Derrida means by the *absolute* secret, or a more originary experience of the secret. The absolute secret keeps things safely secreted away, not passingly but in principle, due neither to mischievousness on its part nor to a failure on our part to try hard enough to crack it. It is just not anything we are going to get to know; it is not even a matter of knowing.

...The absolute *secret means that there is no privileged access to what the philosophers* call *die Sache selbst, la meme chose,* the *rerum natura,* or the way things *kath'auto*. There is no royal road that some philosopher's Method or divine Revelation will open to us, if only we obey its methodological strictures, or pray and fast...The absolute secret means that we all pull on our pants one leg at a time, doing the best we can to make it through the day, without any Divine or Metaphysical Hooks to hoist us over the abyss...

But this is not all bad news and I am not complaining. For if by being in on The Secret one can lie and cheat and acquire an unfair power over others [Here, Caputo is paraphrasing from Derrida 1995a, 30: 'One can try in this way to secure for oneself a phantasmatic power over others'], then that means the absolute secret can keep us safe. Whatever difficulty and discomfiture the absolute and more originary secret causes us, and that I do not deny, it is on the whole a saving and salutary thing to be ''in the secret – which does not mean we know anything''. It is this absolute secret that no one knows, and that is not a matter of knowing, that impassions hermeneutics and drives hermeneutics on. It is the absolute and unconditional secret, this structural blindness, that *radicalizes* hermeneutics.' Caputo goes on to acknowledge that 'for Derrida, of course, hermeneutics is always a ''mistake'', the mistake of trying to ''arrest the text in a certain position, thus settling on a thesis, meaning, or truth.'' [This is a quotation from Derrida 1995b, 96] Derrida thinks that hermeneutics seeks to decode The Meaning, to break through the play of signs to the Meaning of the Author who gives meaning to the signs he uses, to find The Truth behind the surface of the sign. Derrida thinks hermeneutics is searching for The Secret that sits silently behind the text...But if Derrida can distinguish The Secret from a *more originary* experience of the secret, then it is only fair that I be allowed to distinguish hermeneutics from a more originary experience of hermeneutics, or what I like to call a ''more radical hermeneutics'', which signifies the situation we find ourselves in once we have given up the dream of pure *Sinn* and accepted our consignment to signs and the multiple play of meanings, in the plural. In displacing the rule of Meaning, I confess or affirm a multiplicity or profusion of meanings, of too many meanings, through which and among which we have to sort our way.' Caputo therefore attempts in this text to 'run together hermeneutics and deconstruction, letting deconstruction hound and harass hermeneutics (for its own good, you understand)', something that he thinks 'Derrida might at best call a hermeneutics *without* hermeneutics (but remember that the *sans* is never reducible to a simple negation).' Caputo avers that this 'more radical hermeneutics signs on to the idea of reading that Derrida has in mind when he says that ''the readability of the text is structured by the unreadability of the secret, that is, by the inaccessibility of a certain intention, meaning, or of wanting-to-say'' [This is a quotation from Derrida 1992b,152] that lies beneath the surface of the text...''Literature'' is the exemplary secret for Derrida, just because we are there deprived, absolutely and paradigmatically, of the luxury of laying aside the text and taking a peek around the curtain of signs to see what is really

forth by a promise, by an aboriginal being-promised over to language and the future' (Caputo 1997, *xxvi*). Messianic historical theory proceeds by way of an aporetic non-plannable/programmable[87] *faith* rather than (a plannable/programmable) knowledge: a structural non-knowing[88] (which should *not* be understood as the *limit* of knowledge but rather that which is heterogeneous to it, a 'more ancient, more originary experience, if you will, of the secret'; Derrida was, it should be stressed, 'all for knowledge' and 'analysis' – see Derrida 1995b, 201). This *faith* is, as Derrida argued, a faith that 'cannot be simply mastered or domesticated or taught or logically understood, a faith that is paradoxical' and 'something that is presupposed

---

going on. In the hermeneutics that issues from confessing to the absolute or unconditional secret, things are always like that, not only in literature, but also, *mutatis mutandis*, in ethics, politics, science, or theology, where everything depends upon our skill in working out all the mutations and mutabilities in the *mutatis mutandis*.' (Caputo 2000, 1-3) In the text *On the Name*, Derrida associates what he calls 'the lure of reflexivity' with 'the disavowal of a secret that is always *for me alone*, that is to say *for the other: for me* who never sees anything in it, and hence *for the other* alone to whom, through the dissymmetry, a secret is revealed.' As he goes on to explain, and providing a helpful explication of his concept of the secret: 'For the other my secret will no longer be a secret. The two uses of ''for'' don't have the same sense: at least in this case the secret that is for me is what I can't see; the secret that is for the other is what is revealed only to the other, that she alone can see. By disavowing this secret, philosophy would have come to reside in a misunderstanding of what there is to know, namely, that there is secrecy and that it is incommensurable with knowing, with knowledge and with objectivity, as in the incommensurable ''subjective interiority'' that Kierkegaard extracts from every knowledge relation of the subject/object type.

How can another see into me, into my most secret self, without my being able to see in there myself and without my being able to see him in me? And if my secret self, that which can be revealed only to the other, to the wholly other, to God if you wish, is a secret that I will never reflect on, that I will never know or experience or possess as my own, then what sense is there in saying that it is ''my'' secret, or in saying more generally that a secret *belongs*, that it is proper to or belongs to some ''one'', or to some *other* who remains some*one*? It is perhaps there that we find the secret of secrecy, namely, that it is not a matter of knowing and that it is there for no-one. A secret doesn't belong, it can never be said to be at home or in its place [*chez soi*]. Such is the *Unheimlichkeit* of the *Geheimnis*, and we need to systematically question the reach of this concept as it functions, in a regulated manner, in two systems of thought that extend equally, although in different ways, beyond an axiomatic of the self or the *chez soi* as *ego cogito*, as consciousness or representative intentionality, for example, and in an exemplary fashion in Freud and Heidegger. The question of the self: ''who am I?'' not in the sense of ''who am I'' but ''who is this 'I' '' that can say ''who''? What is the ''I'', and what becomes of responsibility once the identity of the ''I'' trembles *in secret*?' (Derrida 1995a, 91-92)

[87] Caputo has it that Derrida 'is...much taken with aporias and impasses...[and] thinks that you are really getting somewhere only when you are paralyzed and it is impossible to advance, only when there is no plannable, programmable way to proceed' (Caputo 1997, *xxvii*).

[88] In the interview '<< There is No *One* Narcissism >> (Autobiophotographies)', Derrida describes this structural non-knowing and, in the course of doing so, clarifies (with some amusement) that 'I am all for knowledge [laughter], for science, for analysis...So, this non-knowing...it is not the limit...of a knowledge, the limit in the progression of a knowledge. It is, in some way, a structural non-knowing, which is heterogeneous, foreign to knowledge. It's not just the unknown that could be known and that I give up trying to know. It is something in relation to which knowledge is out of the question. And when I specify that it is a non-knowing and not a secret, I mean that when a text appears to be crypted, it is not at all in order to calculate or to intrigue or to bar access to something that I know and that others must not know; it is a more ancient, more originary experience, if you will, of the secret. It is not a thing, some information that I am hiding or that one has to hide or dissimulate; it is rather an experience that does not make itself available to information, that resists information and knowledge, and that immediately encrypts itself.' (Derrida 1995b, 201)

by the most radical deconstructive gesture', given that 'you cannot address the other, speak to the other, without an act of faith, without testimony.'[89] (Derrida 1997a, 22)

I now come towards the 'end' of this summary of Caputo's affirmationist reading of Derrida as set out in *Prayers and Tears* by making two further points. *First*, although I hope it is clear enough by now, it is important to note that what Caputo is arguing for is 'a messianic deconstruction' (Caputo 1997, *xxvi*). Indeed, he states early on that his discussion of the messianic in *Prayers and Tears* is 'the pivot of this text' and 'the point at which the path of deconstruction swings off in an unmistakably prophetico-messianic direction'. For Caputo, the messianic therefore touches 'upon the heart of Derrida's religion, of the call for a justice, a democracy' and for 'a just one to come' which can be understood as

> a call for peace among the concrete messianisms, issuing from a neo- *Aufklärer* looking for a (post-secular) religion within the limits of (a certain) reason alone (almost). This messianicity means to bring, if not eternal peace, at least a lull in the fighting in the wars among the concrete messianisms. (Caputo 1997, *xxviii*)

[89] Derrida makes these comments about faith in the course of addressing the question of religion at a Roundtable held at Villanova University in 1994, providing the important qualification that, in terms of an object of study, '[f]or me, there is no such thing as ''religion''. Within what one calls religions – Judaism, Christianity, Islam, or other religions – there are again tensions, heterogeneity, disruptive volcanos, sometimes texts, especially those of the prophets, which cannot be reduced to an institution, to a corpus, to a system. I want to keep the right to read these texts in a way which has to be constantly reinvented. It is something which can be totally new at every moment.' Having made this qualification he then goes on to distinguish between religion and faith as follows: 'Then I would distinguish between religion and faith. If by religion you mean a set of beliefs, dogmas, or institutions – the church, e.g. – then I would say that religion as such can be deconstructed, and not only can be but should be deconstructed, sometimes in the name of faith. For me, as for you, Kierkegaard is here a great example of some paradoxical way of contesting religious discourse in the name of a faith that cannot be simply mastered or domesticated or taught or logically understood, a faith that is paradoxical. Now, what I call faith in this case is like something that I said about justice and the gift, something that is presupposed by the most radical deconstructive gesture. You cannot address the other, speak to the other, without an act of faith, without testimony. What are you doing when you attest to something? You address the other and ask, ''believe me''. Even if you are lying, even in a perjury, you are addressing the other and asking the other to trust you. This ''trust me, I am speaking to you'' is of the order of faith, a faith that cannot be reduced to a theoretical statement, to a determinative judgment; it is the opening of the address to the other. So this faith is not religious, strictly speaking; at least it cannot be totally determined by a given religion. That is why this faith is absolutely universal. This attention to the singularity is not opposed to universality. I would not oppose...universality and singularity. I would try to keep the two together. The structure of this act of faith I was just referring to is not as such conditioned by any given religion. That is why it is universal. This does not mean that in any determinate religion you do not find a reference to this pure faith which is neither Christian nor Jewish nor Islamic nor Buddhist, etc.' (Derrida 1997a, 21-22)

Although Derrida subsequently queried Caputo's implication that 'messianism is on the side of war and messianicity is on the side of peace'[90] (Caputo and Scanlon 1997, 135), in my view it is 'clear' that the messianic (this 'apophatico-apocalyptico-quasi-atheistic messianic' – Caputo 1997, *xxviii*) is that which (as Caputo argues in a text developed around a conversation with Derrida that he edited and wrote a long commentary for, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*) turns deconstruction towards the future:

> The messianic tone that deconstruction has recently adopted (which is not all that recent and not only a tone) is the turn it takes toward the future. Not the relative and foreseeable, programmable and plannable future – the future of 'strategic planning' – but the absolute future, the welcome extended to an other whom I cannot, in principle, anticipate, the *tout autre* whose alterity disturbs the complacent circles of the same. The messianic future of which deconstruction dreams, its desire and its passion, is the unforeseeable future to come, absolutely to come, the justice, the democracy, the gift, the hospitality to come. Like Elijah knocking on our door! The first and last, the constant word in deconstruction is come, *viens*. If Derrida were a man of prayer – which he is, as I have elsewhere tried to show – 'Come' would be his prayer.
>
> *Viens, oui, oui*. That is deconstruction in a word, in three words. In a nutshell. (Caputo in Derrida 1997a, 156-157)

Second, then, I think that we can see that by taking deconstruction 'in a nutshell' (with the *aporia* of this task, of summarising deconstruction 'in a nutshell', explicit/palpable throughout this text – see, for example, Derrida 1997a, 16, 31-32 and 201-202) as a messianic turn or orientation towards the future, as a prayer of 'come', as '*Viens, oui, oui*', its *affirmationist* notes/tones – according to the Caputoian reading/schema – are privileged and irreducibly foregrounded. Accordingly, Caputo writes in *Prayers and Tears* that:

[90] In a 1999 volume of conference papers and responses (*God, the Gift and Postmodernism* – Caputo and Scanlon 1999) Derrida makes the following remarks in discussion with Caputo and Richard Kearney: 'I would add just one last point, because this *tout autre est tout autre* is also the axiom of what I call messianicity. I am not sure I would say, as perhaps Jack Caputo has said, the messianism is on the side of war and messianicity is on the side of peace. I do not know if he said that literally. Of course, there is always a risk of war with messianicity; messianicity is not peace. I would not identify messianism in the classical sense as the experience of wars. But again, according to the same logic of contamination, if I make reference to the Messiah, to the tradition of messianisms in our culture, in order to name messianicity, it is in order to keep this memory. Even if messianicity is totally heterogeneous to messianism, there is this belonging to a tradition, which is mine as well as yours. I do not refer to it the way you do here, but it is our language, our tradition, and I would try to translate one into the other without erasing the heterogeneity of the two.' (Caputo and Scanlon 1999, 135)

> Deconstruction is never merely negative; its desire is never satisfied with 'no, no'. Deconstruction is thoroughly mistrustful of discourses that prohibit this and prohibit that, that weigh us down with debts and 'don'ts'. Deconstruction is so deeply and abidingly affirmative – of something new, of something coming – that it finally breaks out in a vast and sweeping amen, a great *oui, oui – à l'impossible*, in a great burst of passion for the impossible. So over and beyond, this first, preparatory and merely negative point, deconstruction says yes, affirming what negative theology affirms whenever it says no. Deconstruction desires what negative theology desires and it shares the passion of negative theology – for the impossible. (Caputo 1997, 3-4)

This affirmationist passion for the impossible thus outlined is also one that is shared by messianic historical theory, which is just one worked-up religiously toned testimony of/to the perceived work of deconstruction always already going on in historical [re]presentation. Of course, and as previously mentioned, this affirmationist passion or stance has been subjected to a growing body of criticism in recent years so that, at the very least, it needs to be carefully qualified and nuanced ('reloaded') if messianic historical theory is to constitute a sufficiently convincing intervention in the contemporary state (of emergency) and politics of historical culture. I undertake this task – a review/discussion of, and response (defence) to, these criticisms so as to develop a 'reloaded' messianic historical theory in my Conclusion.

I now bring this section and the chapter as a whole to a close by briefly discussing *three* key points regarding the Derridean messianic. Specifically, I want to look at three additional texts by/involving Caputo, produced in the wake of *Prayers and Tears*, and put aspects of their 'yield' into the service of further developing this initial formulation of messianic historical theory prior to its 'reloading' in the Conclusion. In order to make these points in fairly rapid succession I utilise a notational style/approach. The three points are:

1. In a discussion with Richard Kearney in 1997 (following the paper 'Desire of God' given by Kearney), Caputo confirms that, in his view, the distinction between the messianic and the messianisms is to be understood as 'a tension that we inhabit and it would never be a question of choosing one or the other' (Caputo and Scanlon

1999, 130-131). He then goes on to make three brief points. *First*, he asserts that 'the notion of justice as *à-venir* refers structurally to the vulnerable', in other words 'to the victim, not the producer of the victim'. He is adamant that it would 'never be the case that the 'other' one to come would be...some plunderer or rapist' given that 'the very notion of the to-come refers to the one who is not being heard', the one 'who is silenced, victimized by the existing structures'. It is always the case, he avers, 'that someone is being injured by the present order' and, in light of this, 'the worst injustice would be to say that present order represents perfect justice.' (Caputo and Scanlon 1999, 131) Although, these assertions by Caputo are, of course, open to various criticisms, I want to signal here that the messianic historical theory I am developing refers to and affirms *both* the vulnerable who are not 'heard' – (re)presented – *and* those who are victimized – 'historicized' in overly determined and oppressively ontologizing ways – by the existing structures of the (re)present(ing) historical culture. *Second,* Caputo suggests that the 'point' of distinguishing 'justice' and 'law' and/or the closely related 'messianic and concrete messianisms' is 'to prevent the existing traditions, which are all we have, from closing in upon themselves', and 'from becoming monoliths'. Rejecting the falsity of there being 'one tradition' – the 'prestige' of which is inevitably 'rife with conflicts, silenced voices' and 'implicated in the dead bodies it produced in order to establish itself' – he nevertheless thinks that we 'must both mourn everything that has been erased' in the multiplicity of 'traditions, languages, cultures, social and institutional structures' and 'legacies' that we have, *and* 'pray for the justice' that they 'promise' (Caputo and Scanlon 1999, 131). Accordingly, deconstruction and therefore messianic historical theory 'seeks to inhabit the tension between mourning and promise' which, stated differently, is 'between recognizing that this is the only world [i.e. the disciplinary apparatus of 'history' as (re)presentational/interpretative tool] I have and appreciating its finitude', which involves 'keeping it open to what it cannot foresee.' (Caputo and Scanlon 1999, 131) As Caputo puts it in relation to concrete/determinate religious traditions but which I think can also serve as a by-line for, or *raison d'être* of, messianic historical theory (which wants historians, historiographers and historical theorists to 'inhabit', 'assume' and 'live' – as much as 'understand' – the impossible 'tensions' of historicization, just as Derrida

described[91] – see Derrida 1995b, 413): 'I can only inhabit my tradition justly if I appreciate that it is blind' and that 'my' tradition (academic history) 'tends structurally to close itself off from its other.' (Caputo and Scanlon 1999, 131) *Third*, he is concerned about the desire for/introduction of criteria into the messianic moment (of deconstruction). Caputo thinks that although we have 'situated decisions in contexts and traditions, about which we need to know as much as possible' there nevertheless 'comes a moment when all our knowing, all our study or norms and standards, fails us.' As a result, there then 'comes the moment in which we need to choose'; this 'is not decisionism'[92] but, rather, 'a profound responsibility to everything in that situation which has hold of me'. At that moment, I am 'in that

[91] During an interview ('*Honoris Causa*: ''This is *also* extremely funny'' '), Derrida describes how deconstruction is to be found at the heart of tensions: 'What is called ''deconstruction'' is concerned with (theoretically) and takes part in (practically) a profound historical transformation (technico-scientific, political, socio-economic, demographic) which affects the canons, our relation to language and to translation, the frontiers between literature, literary theory, philosophy, the ''hard'' sciences, psychoanalysis and politics and so on. *Deconstruction therefore finds itself at the heart of what you call ''tensions''. It is a question of assuming these tensions, of ''living'' them as much as of ''understanding'' them*. Those who fear and wish to deny the inescapable necessity of these transformations try to see in deconstruction the agent responsible for such changes, when in my eyes it is above all else a question of trying to understand them, of interpreting them, so as to respond to them in the most responsible fashion possible.' (Derrida 1995b, 413, italics mine)

[92] Specifically, it is not 'decisionism' because, for Caputo, 'it does not have to do with an autonomous ego making a wild leap' (Caputo and Scanlon 1999, 131). In this he is following Derrida who delineated a decision that is not decisionism as follows: 'So there must be a decision, not in the sense of decisionism, as Jack said. But what is the difference?...Whose decision is it? If it is my decision, my own decision, meaning by that a possibility which lies in myself, a potentiality – ''I am able to make such a decision'' – this would mean the decision would be mine because it would simply follow my own habitus, my own substance, my own subjectivity. It would look like a predicate of myself. The decision follows from what I am. If I give because I am generous, the gift is a predicate of my generosity, of my nature, so it would be my decision because it would follow what I am myself, my own subjectivity. For this very reason, the decision wouldn't be a decision. So here we reach the most difficult point, where a responsible decision, to be responsible, must not be mine. My own decision, my own responsible decision, must in myself be the other's; if it's simply mine, it's not a decision. When I say that a decision must be the other's in myself, I do not mean that I am irresponsible, that I am simply passive or simply obeying the other. I must deal with this paradox. That is, my decision is the other's. Otherwise we will fall into Schmitt's decisionism in which the notions of subject, of will, of the sovereignty of the subject are again revalidated or confirmed. No, we have, not to account for, but to experience the fact that the freest decision in myself is a decision of the other in myself. The other is in me, the other is my freedom, so to speak.' Derrida went on to translate these arguments into the language of 'desire': 'You can transfer what I'm saying about decision to desire. The desire of my desire is not mine. That's where desire stops. If my desire for the other, for the *tout autre*, were simply *my* desire, I would be enclosed in my desire. If my desire is so powerful in myself, it is because it is not mine. That does not mean that I'm simply passively registering or welcoming another's desire. It simply means that I experience my own desire as the other's desire. Of course, God, what may be called God's desire, is part of this scenario. When I say in French *tout autre est tout autre*, which is difficult to translate, this does not mean, as you say, inclusiveness. It means simply that every other, without and before any determination, any specification, man or woman, man or God, man or animal, any other whatever is infinitely other, is absolutely other. That is the only condition for the experience of otherness. This sentence is virtually an objection to Levinas, of course, for whom *le tout autre* is first of all God. Every other is infinitely other. That is not a logic of inclusion but, on the contrary, a logic of alterity.' (Caputo and Scanlon 1999, 134-135)

Augenblick, on my own', and this 'demands an act of radical responsibility in a singular situation', a singular and thus never-before-encountered situation 'in which I cannot excuse myself by saying that I am just doing what the rules require' (Caputo and Scanlon 1999, 130-131). Messianic historical theory emphasises this profound/radical responsibility that is required on the part of the historian and historiographer to that – the singular(ly) unrepresentable – which calls them; to operate/transgress without (because heterogeneous to) *rules*, the rules of the history discipline/guild. It foregrounds the moment by moment madness of the messianic which historians are called to embrace by acknowledging and calling our attention to the ways in which their 'faith-based' choices have produced their (re)presentations (the declaration or confession that their histories are structured by a structural non-knowing); the testimony of these faith(ful) markings on/in their (re)presentations given in the name of letting/keeping the future open(ing). Interestingly, and during the same discussion involving Caputo and Kearney, Derrida makes a comment about 'resistance' which is very much in keeping with this emphasis in messianic historical theory on keeping the future open. In acknowledging 'the problem of hospitality', specifically the problem of founding the politics of hospitality 'on the principle of unconditional hospitality, of opening the borders to any newcomer' he clarifies that 'when we control a border', which involves discriminating (e.g. between 'enemy' and 'friend' or 'monster' and 'god') according to criteria that we have tried to find/create/work-up, the 'act of knowing, discriminating, adjusting the politics, is indispensible, no doubt' (Caputo and Scanlon 1999, 132-133). However, it is also 'a way of limiting hospitality' and 'we have to be aware that, to the extent that we are looking for criteria' ('conditions', 'passports', 'borders', etc.), we are 'limiting hospitality, hospitality as such, if there is such a thing.'[93] (Caputo and Scanlon 1999, 133) Therefore, if we want to understand the meaning of hospitality

[93] Derrida describes his usage of the phrase 'if there is such a thing' in relation to the various 'impossibles', including the impossible of hospitality mentioned here, as follows: 'And you have undoubtedly noticed that for all these ''impossibles'' – invention, the event, the gift, decision, responsibility, et cetera – I always cautiously say, ''if there be such a thing''. Not that I doubt that there ever were such a thing, nor do I affirm that it does not exist, simply if there be – this is why I say *if there be* such a thing – it cannot become the object of an assertive judgment, nor of an observing knowledge, of an assured, founded certainty, nor of a theorem, if you like, nor a theory. There is no theory on this topic. It cannot give rise to a theoretical proof, to a philosophical act of the cognitive sort, but only to testimonies that imply a kind of act of faith, indeed an act of ''perhaps''.' (Derrida 2001a, 27-28) As stated in the Introduction, messianic historical theory is not a theoretical proof or cognitive act in the 'strong' sense outlined here but, rather, a 'weak' theory of the order of testimony or an act of faith.

‘we have to think of unconditional hospitality, that is, openness to whomever, to any newcomer’; it is the utilisation of criteria (e.g. to know in advance or distinguish ‘the good immigrant and the bad immigrant’) that closes or blocks this thinking of unconditional openness and our relation to the other (Caputo and Scanlon 1999, 133). In order ‘to welcome the other as such’ it is imperative that we ‘suspend the use of criteria’. It is not, then, that Derrida is recommending ‘giving up all criteria, all knowledge and politics’ but he is asserting that any improvement in the conditions and politics of hospitality must refer to/think this pure/unconditional hospitality as some kind of Kantian regulating idea (if only to ‘have a criterion to distinguish between the more limited hospitality and the less limited hospitality’ and ‘to control the distance between in-hospitality, less hospitality, and more hospitality’), albeit in an unorthodox or radicalised form which might, therefore, ‘lead us beyond Kant’s own concept of hospitality as a regulating idea.’ (Caputo and Scanlon 1999, 133) Here, then, is the tension. Namely, that at some point we ‘have to take into account the need for criteria’, and yet, ‘without really believing that this need for criteria has an essential link to hospitality’ and/or ‘to the relation to the other as such, or to the singular other.’ (Caputo and Scanlon 1999, 133) Derrida then moves from this articulation of the impossibility, and impossible tension, of hospitality to address the question of where to draw the/a ‘line in the sand between deconstruction as desertification of God and as desertion of God’, avowing that, for him, ‘[t]here is no line.’ (Caputo and Scanlon 1999, 133) This is because the moment I look for such a clear line ‘between desertification and desertion’ or ‘between an authentic God and a false God or false prophet’ (something Derrida thinks we cannot help doing, just as historians cannot help historicizing/interpreting both the past and the present in continuity with their [re]presentations of the past) and depend on this desire – thinking I have achieved an adequate criterion for the task – ‘that is the end of faith’ and I ‘can be sure that God has left.’ (Caputo and Scanlon 1999, 133) Indeed, at that moment when I am sure that I have identified ‘the real one’ and that I ‘have a criterion to identify Him’ I can be sure that I ‘have the desert, the bad one.’ (Caputo and Scanlon 1999, 133) Derrida stresses that he is not pleading or advocating for faith and/or religion but ‘just analyzing a structure.’ As soon as we think we have a ‘line’ or criterion/criteria with which we can

distinguish 'desertification of God and desertion of God', we have lost it, lost what we're looking for. Crucially, then, Derrida thinks it imperative 'to resist this resistance to this openness to a possible monstrosity[94] and to this evil.' (Caputo and Scanlon 1999, 133) This is *the* axiom of messianic historical theory (as deconstruction in historical discourse) recast in the language of *resistance.* Messianic historical theory as a form of resistance (an idea which will be discussed in the Conclusion) stresses the impossibility of historical (re)presentation so that it might be used, perhaps, to resist all resistance to openness, all attempts to close down, block or arrest the 'to-come' and the relation to the wholly other; it turns historical (re)presentation to(wards) the future so as to 'convert' it into another discursive tool at our disposal (should we want to continue using it) for keeping, or 'letting', the future open and with which to resist the hegemonic determinations of historical culture; it turns history against itself. For historians, the opportunity for such resistance will occur at precisely that point of difficulty identified (i.e. confessed and experienced) by Derrida: at the point when, taking all of this into account, they 'nevertheless have to make decisions, for instance political decisions, ethical decisions.' (Caputo and Scanlon 1999, 133) At this point of having 'not only to discover but to produce criteria, to invent politics, for instance' historians who have made a pact/covenant with the 'to-come' will want to emphasize and

[94] Elsewhere, Caputo – glossing some of Derrida's comments in *Politics of Friendship* (1997c) – has indicated that there is terror as well as hope in the messianic expectation. Because we cannot count on who/what is going to arrive it might (possibility) be something that we want to resist, an enemy and/or something monstrous: 'Certainly, it is in the course of a commentary on Nietzsche's philosophers of the future that Derrida retells the old rabbinic story of the Messiah who is to come that he learned from Blanchot's *The Writing of the Disaster*. According to this story, which is quite central to Derrida's notion of the *à venir*, the Messiah is *always* and *structurally* ''to come'', so that even if he were actually to show up one day, the question we would put to him is, ''when will you come?'' That is because his coming is something that is both given and deferred, as also something we both long for and fear. Later on, Derrida comes back to the story and adds that ''there is nothing fortuitous' in the fact that Nietzsche's discourse on the philosophers to come exhibits the same ''teleiopoetic'' and messianic structure as the line attributed to Aristotle – ''O my friends, there is no friend''. Both are addressed to someone, who must accordingly really be present, while also calling for them to come. Something is addressed to the other, but in such a way that ''a chance is left for the future needed for the coming of the other, for the event in general'' [Caputo is here quoting from Derrida 1997c, 173]. There is both terror and hope in the messianic expectation, because we cannot count on exactly *who* is going to arrive, for the nature of this call is that I must leave the coming of the other to the other. Were I to determine or predetermine the coming in advance, that would represent more of the coming of the same. There is an inevitable intertwining of what is desired and resisted, of friend and enemy, so that this is not a self-assured, self-identical messianic hope but a hope against hope [reference to Derrida 1997c, 173-174], a certain *dés-espoir*, a faith-filled despair that does not give up hope [reference to Derrida 1997c, 220].' (Caputo 2000, 74-75)

foreground for their readers the inevitable *negotiation* 'between this absolute non-knowledge or indeterminacy' (to be understood as 'a necessary openness to the singularity of others') and 'the necessity of criteria, politics, ethics and so on' (Caputo and Scanlon 1999, 134). For what is involved (but so often disavowed) in any attempt at (historical) (re)presentation is the imperative 'to negotiate between what is non-negotiable and what has to be negotiated.' (Caputo and Scanlon 1999, 134) As Derrida stated, 'this is a terrible moment...but this is the moment of decision.'[95] (Caputo and Scanlon 1999, 134) And – as with thinking pure/unconditional hospitality – it is the explicit testimonies (prayers, tears, etc.) of/by historians regarding this messianic introduction of disruption/madness[96] into their (terrible) decision making *vis-à-vis* the production of their impossible histories that can help resist and loosen the bonds of oppressive historical culture.

2. Following on from the point immediately above, I now want to nuance the language of resistance just used *via* a brief consideration of some of Caputo's comments on what he sees as Derrida's 'interventionism'. I do this as both *resistance* and *interventionism* understood in Derridean/Caputoian terms (although

[95] Derrida continues his reflections on the terrible moment of decision relating to hospitality, but equally translatable and applicable – in my view – to the experience of decision making in relation to the production of *impossible* histories (the only sort that there are) of pasts that are *never* present, as follows: 'You have to make a decision not simply to open your house, that's not the decision, you open your house to anyone, this is pure hospitality, it requires no decision. It's impossible but it requires no decision. Now if you close the border and the house, no decision either, no hospitality. The decision occurs when you want to reach an agreement between your desire for pure unconditional hospitality and the necessity of discrimination. It is filtering. I don't want to host anyone who would destroy not only me but my wife and children. For this decision, I have no criteria. That's what makes a decision a decision. If I had criteria, a set of norms, that I would simply apply or enforce, there would be no decision. There is a decision to the extent that even if I have criteria, the criteria are not determining, that I make a decision beyond the criteria, even if I know what the best criteria are, even if I apply them, the decision occurs to the extent that I do more than apply them. Otherwise it would be a mechanical development, a mechanical explication, not a decision.' (Caputo and Scanlon 1999, 134)

[96] Derrida has described the 'disruption' and 'madness' introduced in the concept of hospitality – and so with all the other Derridean impossibles – by the messianic thus: 'It is as if there were a competition or a contradiction between two neighbouring but incompatible values: *visitation and invitation*, and, more gravely, it is as if there were a hidden contradiction between hospitality and invitation. Or, more precisely, between hospitality as it exposes itself to the visit, to the visitation, and the hospitality that adorns and prepares itself [*se pare et se prépare*] in invitation...Visitor and invited, visitation and invitation, are simultaneously in competition and incompatible; they figure the non-dialectizable [*non-dialectisable*] tension, even the always imminent implosion, in fact, the continuously occurring implosion in its imminence, unceasing, at once active and deferred, of the concept of hospitality, even of the *concept* in *hospitality*. To wait without waiting, awaiting absolute surprise, the unexpected visitor, awaited without a horizon of expectation: this is indeed about the Messiah as hôte, about the messianic as hospitality, the messianic that introduces deconstructive disruption or madness in the concept of hospitality, the madness *of* hospitality, even the madness *of the concept of* hospitality.' (Derrida 2002a, 362)

not unproblematically so) are crucial facets of messianic historical theory's disruption/disturbance of historical culture. I link this consideration into some further comments – again, drawing on Caputo's language/arguments – regarding the 'to-come' and the absolute demand to which it submits all present structures (including the structures of contemporary historical culture).

Caputo reminds his readers that, for Derrida, the idea of the Messiah keeps the future open (and 'alive') and that the messianic (or messianicity) signifies abiding 'by the structure of the ''promise'' ' (Caputo 2000, 118). This means that, for example, in relation to the messianicity of the 'democracy to come' (*la démocratie à venir*, mentioned in previous section), democracy will not be realized tomorrow nor does it refer to a future democracy[97] 'in which the world will be made over in *toto*'. It is, rather, 'a way of keeping the future structurally open' (Caputo 2000, 118, referring to Derrida 1996b, 83). Accordingly, Caputo argues that the ghost or specter in Derrida 'is not a Gothic angel of deliverance' but much more of 'a figure...meant to contest the self-presence of the present', showing 'that the present is always ''inwardly disturbed'', or ''haunted'' ', and 'where the whole idea is to get a wedge into this rupture' so as to 'open up the chance of something new.' (Caputo 2000, 118) This emphasis on the contesting/disturbing/haunting/rupturing of the self-presence of the present indicates that Derrida, as far as Caputo is concerned, is 'something of a piecemealist, rather than a revolutionary' (Caputo 2000, 118). However, Caputo makes the important qualification that Derrida 'is also not a piecemeal ''reformist''...but rather what might better be called an *interventionist*.' (Caputo 2000, 118) This interventionist designation is given because of Derrida's putting into question any notion of an absolute starting point, his famous and beautiful assertion that we 'always begin where we are, in the midst of existing frameworks, amidst the texts and traditions' – as well as the 'institutions and

[97] 'The messianic experience of which I spoke takes place here and now; that is, the fact of promising and speaking is an event that takes place here and now and is not utopian. This happens in the singular event of engagement, and when I speak of democracy to come (*la démocratie à venir*) this does not mean that tomorrow democracy will be realized, and it does not refer to a future democracy, rather it means that there is an engagement with regards to democracy which consists in recognizing the irreducibility of the promise when, in the messianic moment, 'it can come' ('*ça peut venir*'). There is the future (*il y a de l'avenir*). There is something to come (*il y a à venir*). That can happen...that can happen, and I promise in opening the future or in leaving the future open.' (Derrida 1996b, 82-83)

structures – that 'we have inherited, which have more or less constituted us to be the beings that we are' and 'which constitute something of a maze in which we wander.' (Caputo 2000, 118) Given this condition of beginning-where-we-are, Caputo has it that 'we then seek to *intervene* on these pregiven operations, try to inhabit their blind spots', trying 'to get a wedge in their cracks and crevices, in order to open possibilities', possibilities 'that the prevailing system currently forecloses, to let many flowers bloom.' (Caputo 2000, 118) Derrida speaks/writes of democracy to come because, according to Caputo, it is the one system out of all those currently in place that he 'can with the least discomfort associate' *and* because it is upon these (democratic) structures of the West 'in which he finds himself that he would intervene' (although here I would query whether, if we always already find ourselves in a structure such as democracy or any other, we have any choice about intervening in it. Isn't our every action/response – even not acting/responding – an intervention of sorts? Perhaps it is a question of the degree and direction of our explicitly manifest volition, of the intensity and intention in our interventions and whether they are in keeping with the preference of the messianic for the voiceless and marginalized?). This intervening involves seeking 'to open up beyond their present limits' these democratic structures (and all present/prevailing structures, including those of historical culture), thereby 'exposing them to the possibility of something presently unforeseeable within the settings of their current horizons.' (Caputo 2000, 118) One conclusion that Caputo draws from this is that

> despite his talk of a purely formal and desertified messianic, Derrida's work has all the marks of the twentieth-century urbanized democracies of western Europe and the United States in which he is factically situated, and therefore it bears the marks of still *another* concrete democractic messianism. Like the rest of us, like it or not, he begins where he is. (Caputo 2000, 118-119)

This expression by Caputo of his one substantive criticism of Derrida will be revisited in my third and final point below and will be considered in more detail in my Conclusion. However, putting this aside for a moment, the point I want to make here is that I am in agreement with Caputo's characterization of Derrida's interventionism as one that is 'decidedly *open-ended*.' (Caputo 2000, 119) By this, Caputo means that he put 'no constraints, or as few as possible, upon the democracy

to come' which was certainly not confined 'to reforming the presently prevailing form of democracy, although that is where we begin.' (Caputo 2000, 119) Caputo wants us to appreciate that 'the democracy to come will never get here' and, crucially, that 'it is not supposed to get here, its function is entirely *critical*, not *predictive*.' (Caputo 2000, 119) Although democracy 'is contingent and may not last forever', both Derrida and Caputo think it currently signifies best what is most open to what is to come' – understood as 'the ''messianic'' hope from which any deconstructive discourse...must set out' – and is therefore utilised by Derrida to 'preserve the right to criticism and keep things open for the coming of the other' (in this instance from keeping 'the polity from closing in upon itself'). (Caputo 2000, 66) The prophetico-religious tones are re-introduced into Caputo's argument as he describes how the messianic (or messianicity of the) democracy to come

> is prophetic not in the sense of telling the future but in the sense of denouncing the limits of the present, the way the Jewish prophets were famous for giving their contemporaries a hard time, which usually cost them their necks. (Caputo 2000, 119)

The democracy to come (not really, after all, a Kantian regulative idea in the strict sense[98], nor, as we have already discussed, a utopian program 'that we hope against hope will come and save us') 'is *structurally* ''to come'' ', which 'does not mean it is empty or vacuous, a white ghost or phantom sublime', but that it 'functions like a kind of *white light* to hold against the flesh of the present', a white light 'which mercilessly exposes the blemishes of the current age.' (Caputo 2000, 119) *Messianic historical theory, then, is conceived as an open ended, critical interventionism; a*

[98] Derrida makes this explicit in *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*: 'the ''democracy to come'' has to do neither with the *constitutive* (with what Plato would call the paradigmatic) nor with the *regulative* (in the Kantian sense of a regulative Idea).' (Derrida 2005c, 37) He goes on to explain that 'if we come back…to the strict meaning that Kant gave to the *regulative* use of ideas (as opposed to their *constitutive* use)…I thought it necessary at least to note, in principle, how circumspect I would be to appropriate in any rigorous way this idea of a ''regulative Idea''…

…I, without ever giving up on reason and on a certain ''interest of reason'', hesitate to use the expression ''regulative Idea'' when speaking of a to-come or of democracy to come. In *The Other Heading* (1991) I explicitly set aside the ''status of the regulative Idea in the Kantian sense'' and insisted at once on the absolute and unconditional urgency of the *here and now* that does not wait and on the structure of the promise, a promise that is kept in memory, that is handed down [*léguée*], inherited, claimed and taken up [*alléguée*]. Here is how the ''to come'' was there defined: ''not something that is certain to happen tomorrow, not the democracy (national or international, state or trans-state) of the *future*, but a democracy that must have the structure of a promise – *and thus the memory of that which carries the future, the to-come, here and now*''.' (Derrida 2005c, 85-86; quoting from Derrida 1992e, 78)

white light shone on historical culture so as to expose its blemishes. Closely related to such interventionism – and as Caputo writes of Derrida – messianic historical theory is *anti-essentialist*, although an anti-essentialism that is 'a function not of skepticism or despair but of a respect for irrepressibility and excess' which is always labouring 'in the service of what is to come' (Caputo 2000, 130). It 'always has a ''messianic'' twist, more like a critique of the idols of Aaron', made 'in the name of the *tout autre* than some sort of nihilistic attack on structure.' (Caputo 2000, 130-131). It is noteworthy for my development of messianic historical theory that in Caputo's more recent writings he has continued to place the stress on the 'to-come' in the formulation(s) of the 'democracy (or justice, or friendship, or hospitality, etc.) to come'. For example, in his essay 'Temporal Transcendence: The Very Idea of *à venir* in Derrida' (Caputo 2007b[99]) and explicating some remarks made by Derrida in the interview 'Politics and Friendship'[100] (in Derrida 2002d), he writes that

> in the expression 'democracy to come', and in every expression of the same form (the *x* to come), say, the 'justice to come' or the 'friendship to come' – in formulations of this same form that we cannot presently even imagine and are still to come – what is important is not the 'democracy' or the 'justice' but the 'to come'. The 'to come' matters more than the 'democracy', the word democracy being just a way to mark a promise, just a way of keeping the future open, the most promising foothold we can get in the present on the promise of the future. (Caputo 2007b, 195)

Caputo then goes on to state again the by now familiar creedo that '[t]he very idea of the to come is the idea of what does *not* come' and/or 'of what is coming but never comes.' (Caputo 2007b, 196) This creedal imperative is, by way of illustration, linked once more to that specific dimension of Jewish messianic thought delineated by Blanchot – that 'the very idea of the Messiah is to *not* arrive, his arrival always being much awaited' – which Caputo regards as 'the very structure of expectation and historical time, of hope and promise, of faith and the future.' (Caputo 2007b,

[99] An earlier version of Caputo's essay/paper is referred to by Derrida in *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason* (Derrida 2005, 37); see Caputo 2007a, 201 for further details.

[100] The remarks by Derrida that Caputo is referring to are as follows: 'What's important in ''democracy to come'' is not ''democracy'', but ''to come''. That is, a thinking of the event, of what comes. It's the space opened for there to be an event, the to-come, so that the coming be that of the other. There is no coming or event that is not, that does not imply the coming of the heterogeneous, the coming of the other. ''To come'' means ''future'', not the present future, which would be present and presentable tomorrow. It means the space opened for the other and others to come.' (Derrida 2002d, 182)

196) Given this, Caputo follows with a succinct expression of the crucial point that were 'the Messiah ever actually to arrive, that would be like death, like the end of time and history' (which is why even where/when there is a belief 'that the Messiah has arrived, we are forced to ask him to please come *again*'[101]) (Caputo 2007b, 196).

For Caputo, this 'non-arrival of the Messiah' clarifies that the 'to-come', far from being the 'name of some future-present moment or condition that we are eventually going to reach' (not without time/effort/challenge, etc.), should be understood as 'our *being-toward* (*sein-zu*) the future and of the future's *being-ahead* of us' (Caputo acknowledges that he is using here 'a little Heideggerianese') (Caputo 2007b, 196). Such a notion requires 'our passion' rather than 'our patience' as the to-come is *not* 'the name of an occurrence that will transpire at some distant era in the future' for which we patiently wait, but a 'structural relationship with the future that is always in place no matter what time it is' – and irrespective of 'what actually transpires in time' – that 'fires our passion.' (Caputo 2007b, 196-197) All of this amounts to appreciating that the to-come is *not* 'some happening that occurs *in* time' but 'to do with the very structure *of* time.' (Caputo 2007b, 2197) It also suggests that messianic historical theory which privileges the 'to-come' above all else operates according to very different (to the dominant norm in contemporary historical culture) notions of (quasi-) transcendentality and temporality (notions which could be described as aspiring to transcend 'the classical sense of transcendence' so as to to take time now 'in a new and more radical way' – Caputo 2007b, 188-9). Caputo then goes on raise the question of what it means 'to have *being-toward* something that is *always ahead* but never comes', immediately suggesting that the answer has 'two sides': the first 'having to do with our being-toward' and the second having to

[101] Interestingly, Caputo thinks that being forced to ask the Messiah to please come again 'is – in a nutshell – the story of Christianity, the history of which is opened by *différance*, by the deferral of the coming *again*. The earliest Christians were surprised to find that they were to live on and so to have a ''history''. A ''second'' coming is necessary in virtue of the very idea of the to-come, for otherwise, if the Messiah ever showed up in the flesh, were he ever *leibhaft gegeben* in some final and definitive form, that would spell death and the end of everything. The very idea of the messianic is to keep the future open, which is possible only with the deferral of his appearance. Like the alter ego in Husserl's Fifth Meditation, the very phenomenality of the Messiah depends on his *not* appearing; that is what the phenomenon of the Messiah is or means or does. For otherwise, what would there be to sigh and hope for? What would there be to dream of and desire? What would there be to pray and weep for? If the Messiah ever appeared, the curtains of time and history would draw closed. The Messiah, the messianic figure, is a figure of the very work of time.' (Caputo 2007b, 196)

do with 'time itself and the structure of the being-ahead.' (Caputo 2007b, 197) These issues – of our being-toward in relation to the being-ahead and of the structuring of time/temporality by the quasi-transcendental condition and experience of im-possibility that messianic historical theory highlights and affirms – can I think be utilised to develop/formulate a certain notion of 'resistance' that constitutes another important facet of messianic historical theory and which will be explored in the Conclusion.

3. As has already been mentioned, Caputo has made *one* substantive criticism of Derrida's messianic and in my view any attempt to develop a (Derridean) messianic historical theory needs to be cognizant of it and actively take it into account. Accordingly, here in this third and final 'point' with which I conclude this chapter, I want to examine this specific concern raised by Caputo whilst *reserving* his response to it – his 'solution' – until my Conclusion where it might best be addressed in the context of other (and some similar) objections: this/his response is 'to come'. The most detailed exposition of Caputo's concern is set forth in a section of *Prayers and Tears* entitled 'A Number of Messianisms' (Caputo 1997, 139-43), but in fact he has repeated and modified this criticism in several places[102] so that here I refer to the most recent version of it which is provided in the context of a long essay response to various criticisms of his work entitled 'On Not Settling for an Abridged Edition of Postmodernism: Radical Hermeneutics as Radical Theology' (Caputo 2012a, 319-322, in the volume *Reexamining Deconstruction and Determinate Religion: Toward a Religion with Religion*), and which, given its compactness of expression, allows me to get to the heart of the matter swiftly.

So, Caputo claims that 'right from the start' he had 'expressed concern about Derrida's distinction between the formal messianic and the concrete messianisms' (Caputo 2012a, 320). He expressed this concern 'because it too readily conformed to the form/matter, essence/fact distinction' which he thinks 'implies everything that deconstruction is out to deconstruct' and, related to this, exposing 'deconstruction to slipping back into a straightforwardly transcendental, rather than a quasi-

[102] See, for example, Caputo 2002a, 129-130 and Derrida 1997a, 168-178.

transcendental mode.' (Caputo 2012a, 320) Although he acknowledges that Derrida 'tried to put this distinction into question, posing to himself a kind of which-came-first question' (as discussed in the previous section of this chapter) Caputo is of the view that 'his question is too easily answered by an equally classical distinction', that is 'between the order of knowledge and order of being.' (Caputo 2012a, 320) In particular, he expresses a fear that the *formal messianic/concrete messianisms* distinction is likely 'to fuel the complaint' that he perceives as 'circulating among orthodox confessional theologians' (and it can be added, in the context of the field constituted by this thesis, 'orthodox' – i.e. decidedly modernist and anti-postmodern, anti-poststructuralist, etc. – historians), namely, that 'deconstruction dallies with structure without content, with the empty and the indeterminate' and that deconstruction 'is fearful of the concrete and determinate', something that Caputo remarks as being 'exactly the opposite objection inspired by the early Derrida.' (Caputo 2012a, 320) Even though he is concerned about this *formal messianic/concrete messianisms* distinction, Caputo regards this actual complaint as a 'red herring.' (Caputo 2012a, 320) As he puts it:

> To deny that any particular concrete and determinate religious tradition has access to an 'exclusive' truth – if you do not believe it, you are wrong or in the dark – that has not been 'revealed' to others is not to encourage a love affair with the indeterminate but to embrace the contingency of the determinate and the multideterminate, and it implies a practice of hospitality among the multiple traditions, where traditions are invited not to close themselves off from their own future or from one another. (Caputo 2012a, 320)

This complaint on the part of Derrida's critics (theologians but also historians and theorists among their number) that deconstruction dallies with structure without content and with the empty and the indeterminate threatens, for Caputo, 'to become an alibi for confessional theologians to call in sick when asked to deal with deconstruction' (and – again – we might include modernist/orothodox historians amongst those who would reach enthusiastically for this alibi) (Caputo 2012a, 320-321). Caputo states that he was worried then and that his worries have since been confirmed 'that by making this distinction Derrida was bringing this criticism down on his own head.' (Caputo 2012a, 321) He nuances this remark by calling us to remember that the *formal messianic/concrete messianisms* distinction 'was meant to

apply only to the three religions of the Book' and 'was not proposed as the defining mark of ''religion'' in general' given that 'there is none such for Derrida' (see *n*89 in this chapter) (Caputo 2012a, 321). Indeed, Caputo has it that the distinction had 'almost the opposite intention', which was 'to show how porous is the distinction between the religious messianisms and the ''philosophical' messianisms'' ' (those of Hegel, Marx, Heidegger, and presumably others, including those – avowed and disavowed – of generations of the history/historiographic guild that have accrued in and propagated historical culture), to show 'how easily the messianic migrates between the two', and 'the sense in which they, too, practiced a religion sans the dogmas of the monotheisms.' (Caputo 2012a, 321) In response to this distinction Caputo has asserted that 'deconstruction, too, would have to be counted as another concrete messianism', a concrete messianism to be considered

> a fourth (added to the three monotheisms) or a seventh (counting the three philosophical messianisms), viz., the concrete deployment of deconstructive style in concrete circumstances by Derrida and others. (Caputo 2012a, 321)

So, for Caputo, deconstruction needs to be construed/counted as another concrete messianism in this way because 'by the very terms of deconstruction, the messianic does not exist.' (Caputo 2012a, 321) The messianic is, on his reading, 'an event, an insistence not an existent' and, as such, is 'neither a being nor a hyperbeing, neither a past-present nor a future present being.' (Caputo 2012a, 321) Somewhat startlingly, then, Caputo argues as follows:

> The only thing that exists is the concrete messianisms in the sense that the only thing that exists is the particular historical beliefs and practices upon which human communities settle, which form and deform us all, and that goes for deconstruction, too. *I do not believe in the existence of the messianic (or of deconstruction, for that matter) but in its insistence*. (Caputo 2012a, 321, italics mine)

Although he goes on to develop his argument in powerfully suggestive ways, it is here, with Caputo's concern-articulated-as-a-confession that he doesn't believe in the *existence* of the messianic but, rather, in its *insistence* that I conclude this chapter. For it is precisely with this concern that Caputo gives a serious reason for us to 'pause for thought'. I mean, how can a messianic historical theory be developed

when (or so it is argued) it transpires that deconstruction is arguably just another concrete messianism and that the messianic doesn't exist (yet insists)? This is a problem (one of several) whose 'overcoming' is best addressed, as previously noted, within the context of my summarising Conclusion – where it meshes in with other 'reservations' that will also occupy me – and to which I now turn.

CONCLUSION: CONSIDERING CRITICISMS AND OBJECTIONS: MESSIANIC HISTORICAL THEORY RELOADED AS IMPOSSIBLE HISTORIES OF FAITHFUL RESISTANCE (THE INFINITE TASK, OR – PERHAPS – THE END OF HISTORY?)

By way of situating and structuring this conclusion I begin with a brief résumé of my overall argument thus far. I am advocating in this thesis – as its thesis – the development of (or, put differently, I am 'testifying'[1] to) a historical theory that draws on the various articulations of the *messianic* motif and, *inter alia*, the closely related concepts of the im-possible, the event, and the coming of the other (the 'to-come') that can be found in Derrida's texts. I am also asserting that given the continuing high profile of discourses arguing both for and against the 'return of religion' in contemporary cultural criticism (and following White's call in 'The Burden of History' [White 1978, 27-50] that historical theory should not be isolated from broader intellectual debates) that a viable and *indexical* way forward is to conceive of *all* historical (re)presentation as *messianic*. This messianic theorisation can be expressed as follows: what should be explicitly recognised, acknowledged and *affirmed* as always already at work in historical (re)presentations, is that general structure of experience – deconstruction figured as *messianicity* – that is oriented toward the future 'coming of the other' and the 'letting the other come'; of facilitating the 'event' and letting something 'happen'. Lingering asymptotically or 'touching' on this messianic general structure of experience[2], an experience of the

[1] On the subject of 'testifying' and its associations with 'faith' – crucial for my argument throughout this conclusion – Derrida, in *Monolingualism of the Other; or, The Prosthesis of Origin* (Derrida 1998b) avers as follows: 'For one can *testify* only to the unbelievable. To what can, at any rate, only be believed; to what appeals only to belief and hence to the given word, since it lies beyond the limits of proof, indication, certified acknowledgement [*le constat*], and knowledge. Whether we like it or not, and whether we know it or not, when we ask others to take our word for it, we are already in the order of what is merely believable. It is always a matter of what is offered to faith and of appealing to faith, a matter of what is only ''believable'' and hence as unbelievable as a miracle. Unbelievable because *merely* ''credible''. The order of attestation itself testifies to the miraculous, to the unbelievable believable: to what must be believed all the same, whether believable or not. Such is the truth to which I am appealing, and which must be believed, even, and especially, when I am lying or betraying my oath. Even in false testimony, this truth presupposes veracity – and not the reverse.' (Derrida 1998b, 20-21)

[2] In the text *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy* (Derrida 2005b) Derrida describes the linkages that Levinas makes between 'the experience of the caress and its ''not knowing''...with pure temporalization as absolute anticipation' as 'quasi-messianic' (Derrida 2005b, 78). In a footnote he goes on to make the following admission: 'Speaking of my unspeakable temptation, I should confess to being tempted: to go all the way and say that the caress not only touches or borders on the messianic, but that it is the only capable, possible, and signifying experience for the messianic to show through. The messianic can only be stroked.' (Derrida 2005b, 330*n*18) *Accordingly, my argument is that messianic historical theory refigures all historical (re)presentations – irrespective of whether or not they explicitly acknowledge it –*

im-possible that is predicated on the axiomatics of the 'other' and the 'to-come' (of justice, democracy, etc.), allows us to identifiy the im-possible historicity of all historical production: that 'other' which is to-come calls forth and generates (possibilises/conditions) ongoing forms of specifically *historical* (re)presentation, consciousness and thinking which *simultaneously* undercuts all putative claims and aspirations/aims for itself as a 'true' discourse, highlighting such failure(s) (impossibility) with devastating effect.[3] This identification of the messianic structure

---

as attempts at 'caressing' or 'stroking' the messianic. Later on in this book Derrida makes these comments on the relationship between philosophy and touch/touching 'on' which I think help to contextualize this argument: 'There is thus, apparently, a *figure of touch* there, for philosophy, literally, has never touched anything. Above all, nobody, no body, no body proper has ever touched – with a hand or through skin contact – something as abstract as a limit. Inversely, however, and that is the destiny of this figurality, all one ever does touch is a limit. To touch is to touch a limit, a surface, a border, an outline. Even if one touches an inside, ''inside'' of anything whatsoever, one does it following the point, the line or surface, the borderline of a spatiality exposed to the outside, offered – precisely – on its running border, offered to contact. In addition, here in the case of this figure (''philosophy has touched the limit of the ontology of subjectivity'', and so forth), another need comes to light as far as this figure is concerned, throughout the chain of a remarkable demonstration whose stages I cannot reconstruct here. This surface, line or point, this limit, therefore, which philosophy might have ''touched'' this way, finds itself to be at the same time touchable and untouchable: it is as is every limit, certainly, but also well-nigh at and to the limit, and on the exposed, or exposing, edge of an abyss, a nothing, an ''unfoundable'' unfathomable, seeming still less touchable, still more untouchable, if this were possible, than the limit itself of its exposition. Philosophy will have ''touched''...upon the untouchable twice, both on the limit and on the unfoundable abyss opening beneath it, beyond it – under its skin, as it were. And because this touching, this contact, this tact will have just been able to touch on something untouchable [*de l'intouchable*]...literally there can only be a *figure* of touch. One only touches by way of a figure here; the object, the touchable's thing, is the untouchable. The touchable is what it is impossible to touch (to attain, to rape, to violate in its inaccessible immunity, in its soundness). The ''thing itself'' gives itself, opens (itself), opens an opening only in the history of this figure – some would say of this fiction. History of the untouchable, therefore – of the immune, the sound, the safe. Save or safe – *touching*. Is this ''good news''?' (Derrida 2005b, 103-105)

[3] In an interview entitled 'As If It Were Possible, ''Within Such Limits''...' Derrida links the im-possible with deconstruction and a number of closely associated terms (faith, testimony, aporia, undecidability, responsibility, failure, event, etc.) in opposition to a certain teleological concept of history as follows: 'But how is it possible, one will ask, that that which makes possible makes impossible the very thing that it makes possible, thus, and introduces – as its chance – a non-negative chance, a principle of ruin into the very thing it promises or promotes? The *im-* of the im-possible is indeed radical, implacable, undeniable. But it is not simply negative or dialectical: it *introduces* the possible; it is its *gatekeeper today*; it makes it come, it makes it turn either according to an anachronic temporality or according to an incredible filiation – which is, moreover, also the origin of faith. For it exceeds knowledge and conditions the address to the other, inscribes all theorems into the space and time of a testimony (''I am talking to you, believe me''). In other words – and this is the introduction to an aporia without example, an aporia of logic rather than a logical aporia – here is an impasse of the undecidable through which a decision cannot not pass. All responsibility must pass through this aporia that, far from paralyzing it, puts in motion a new thinking of the possible. It ensures its rhythm and its breathing: diastole, systole, and syncope, the beating of the *im*possible possible, of the impossible as condition of the possible. From the very heart of the impossible, one hears, thus, the pulsion or the pulse of a ''deconstruction''.

Hence, the condition of possibility gives the possible a chance but by depriving it of its purity. The law of this spectral contamination, the impure law of this impurity, this is what must be constantly re-elaborated. For example, the possibility of failure is not only inscribed as a preliminary risk in the condition of the possibility of the success of a performative (a promise must *be able not to* be kept, it must risk not being kept or becoming a threat to be a promise that is freely given, and even to succeed; whence the originary inscription of guilt, of confession, of the excuse and of forgiveness in the promise).

of historical (re)presentation and its attendant disturbance/disruption of the resolutely epistemological, modernist and secular strongholds of the history guild by a previously repressed *religious* (albeit coded by Derrida and Caputo as 'religion without religion' which could, according to Michael Naas, be read as a way of naming an 'originary secularity' – Naas 2008, 239*n*5[4]) and *confessional* vocabulary ('I am talking to you, believe me') is *continuous* with and *faithful* to – given that it is both indebted to and inconceivable without it – that analysis of, and assault on, the uses and abuses of history (inspired of course in large part by Nietzsche[5]) running through various strands of postmodern and poststructuralist thought broadly construed whilst repeating it differently, in a refigured way. It is my contention that messianic historical theory thus undermines *all* historicizations that feign continuity with the past and suggest, imply or invoke 'its' plenitude (i.e. spurious notions of actualising a fully present past, and of accessing its 'being', 'how it really was',

---

The possibility of failure must continue to mark the event, even when it succeeds, as the trace of an impossibility, at times its memory and always its haunting. This impossibility is therefore not the simple opposite of the possible. It only seems opposed to it but it also gives itself over to possibility: it runs through possibility and leaves in it the trace of its withdrawal [*enlèvement*]. An event would not be worthy of its name; it would not make anything arrive, if it did nothing but deploy, explain, actualize what was already possible, that is to say, in short, if all it did was to implement a program or apply a general rule to a specific case. For there to be an event, the event has to be possible, of course, but there must also be an exceptional, absolutely singular interruption in the regime of possibility; the event must not *simply* be possible, it must not reduce itself to the explanation, the unfolding, the acting out of a possible. The event, if there is one, is not the actualization of a possible, a simple acting out, a realization, an effectuation, the teleological accomplishment of a power, the process of a dynamic that depends on ''conditions of possibility''. The event has nothing to do with history, if by history one means a teleological process. The event must interrupt in a certain manner this kind of history. It is according to these premises that I spoke, particularly in *Specters of Marx*, of messianicity without messianism. *It is imperative* [il faut], thus, that the event also announce itself as impossible or that its possibility be threatened.' (Derrida 2002d, 361-362)

[4] In his book *Derrida From Now On* (Naas 2008) Naas offers the following apposite assessment of Caputo's position as articulated in *Prayers and Tears*: 'Caputo can thus acknowledge Derrida as ''a secularist and an atheist'' (xxiii) and as a thinker of a messianic promise that goes beyond every positive religion and can even act as a critical lever against every concrete messianism, a ''religious'' thinker, therefore, who is more profitably thought in relation to the prophetic discourses of Judaism rather than the apophatic discourses of Christianity, and especially those of negative theology...What Caputo calls a ''religion without religion'' might thus well be another way of naming what I call here an ''originary secularity'', so long as *that which opens up and drives this original secularity is faith in the very opening to the future rather than in a transcendental, unthinkable, or unknowable God, that is, as Caputo makes clear, so long as this faith is thought in terms of opening and promise and not of a relationship to the hyper-essentiality of negative theology*.' (Naas 2008, 239*n*5, italics mine) In response, Caputo has confirmed that his 'own work on Derrida and religion, as Michael Naas points out clearly, is no less informed by protecting what Derrida calls *laiceté*. I try to work from a position both within and without religion' (Caputo 2011, 33) and has praised this reading 'in which Naas succinctly states my views on Derrida and religion with a judiciousness that is completely absent from the critics of the religious turn.' (Caputo 2011, 33*n*2)

[5] I am thinking here specifically of 'On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life' (Nietzsche 1997, 57-123). See, for example, pages 59, 67, 77, and 95.

etc.). It understands historical (re)presentation as both predicated on and irretrievably stricken by the promise of the future to-come – the opening to the future – and is offered up in the name of this other concept of history (im-possible historicity) as a kind of responsive intercessory 'prayer' calling for(th) and hastening the end of history/histories of a 'certain kind'.

Having restated my argument what further development might it need; has it got weaknesses needing defending? On reflection I think that *two* closely associated concerns need to be addressed. *First*, supposing that Derrida's 'worked-up' formulation[6] of the messianic and his suggested/proposed linkage of it with another historicity (a detailed development of which I have provided in earlier chapters) is taken seriously – and my thesis is that it *should* be – have Derrida's sometime critics made any *critical* points of sufficient density or robustness regarding the *messianic* so as to require me to 'pause for thought' *vis-à-vis* my advocacy of it? In this conclusion I consider and respond to certain such criticisms/objections made by a range of philosophers and theorists in relation to notions of the messianic and to 'religion without religion' as articulated by Derrida *and* subsequently developed by Caputo. In my view these criticisms for the most part lack the acuity or 'weight' to significantly damage the main argument that I am running. Accordingly, I address *inter alia* several of Derrida's (and Caputo's) alleged shortcomings which run on the following lines: of empty formalism, of ignoring or scorning present actuality, of political quietism/passivity, of the preponderance of imperative exhortations or 'words of command', of irrational fideism and mysticism, of a futural openness without discernment/lack of criteria, of a hapless relativism (the texts can mean anything you want them to mean!), and a suspicious recourse to idealizing/ideality and the transcendent (critical thought stoppers!), all of which I think can be refuted or rebutted or circumvented or, with *some* qualification and nuancing, absorbed. Addressing such criticisms is my first task, and in the course of attending to it I propose a *hopefully* persuasive *reloaded* messianic historical theory now actually *strengthened* by its withstanding of such attacks. *Second*, and (again) in the course of discussing these criticisms and objections, I explore the possibilities for deploying

[6] Here 'formulation' is not to be confused with the charge of 'empty formalism' that has been levelled at Derrida's messianic by several critics and which I consider later in this chapter.

this now 'strengthened' messianic theorisation of historical (re)presentation – in terms of the alternative *historical consciousness and knowledge*[7] (both, again, refigured in messianic terms, given the well-known doubts that have been expressed about the unambiguous specificity of the term 'historical'[8]) it could engender – as a tool of *critical resistance* by which I mean to indicate a resistance that is 'reflexive' about its own singular standpoint, situation, field, etc. (see *n*11) *vis-à-vis* the currently hegemonic, totalising historical culture, such a deployment keeping faith with Derrida's association of the messianic with notions of a *quasi-transcendental justice* and *emancipation*.[9] Derrida 'loved' the word 'resistance' and regarded it as

[7] My understanding and usage of the terms 'historical', 'historical consciousness' and 'historical knowledge' follows that of Hayden White as set out in *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (White 1973). Here White makes the following introductory and definitional remarks about 'the *problem of historical knowledge*' and 'that mode of thought which is called ''historical'' ': 'What does it mean to *think historically*, and what are the unique characteristics of a specifically *historical method* of enquiry? These questions were debated throughout the nineteenth century by historians, philosophers, and social theorists, but usually within the context of the assumption that unambiguous answers could be provided for them. ''History'' was considered to be a specific mode of existence, ''historical consciousness'' a distinctive mode of thought, and ''historical knowledge'' an autonomous domain in the spectrum of the human and physical sciences.

...I will consider the historical work as what it most manifestly is – that is to say, a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse that purports to be a model, or icon, of past structures and processes in the interest of *explaining what they were by representing* them.' (White 1973, 1-2)

[8] Hayden White has provided us with the following reminder of the range of doubts that have been expressed in relation to notions of a specifically 'historical' consciousness/form of knowledge: 'In the twentieth century, however, considerations of these questions have been undertaken in a somewhat less self-confident mood and in the face of an apprehension that definitive answers to them may not be possible. Continental European thinkers – from Valéry and Heidegger to Sartre, Lévi-Strauss, and Michel Foucault – have cast serious doubts on the value of a specifically 'historical' consciousness, stressed the fictive character of historical constructions, and challenged history's claims to a place among the sciences.' (White 1973, 1-2)

[9] In 'Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of ''Religion'' at the Limits of Reason Alone' (Derrida 1998a) Derrida makes the linkage of justice and the messianic as follows: '*An invincible desire for justice is linked to this* [messianic as general structure of experience] *expectation. By definition, the latter is not and ought not to be certain of anything, either through knowledge, consciousness, conscience, foreseeability or any kind of programme as such. This abstract messianicity belongs from the very beginning to the experience of faith, of believing, of a credit that is irreducible to knowledge and of a trust that ''founds'' all relation to the other in testimony. This justice, which I distinguish from right, alone allows the hope, beyond all ''messianisms'', of a universalizable culture of singularities, a culture in which the abstract possibility of the impossible translation could nevertheless be announced. This justice inscribes itself in advance in the promise, in the act of faith or in the appeal to faith that inhabits every act of language and every address to the other.*' (Derrida 1998a, 18, italics Derrida's own) In *Specters of Marx* emancipation and the messianic are linked thus: 'It was then a matter of thinking another historicity – not a new historicity or still less a ''new historicism'', but another opening of event-ness as historicity that permitted one not to renounce, but on the contrary to open up access to an affirmative thinking of the messianic and emancipatory promise as promise: as *promise* and not as onto-theological or teleo-eschatological program or design. Not only must one not renounce the emancipatory desire, it is necessary to insist on it more than ever, it seems, and insist on it, moreover, as the very indestructibility of the ''it is necessary''. This is the condition of a re-politicization, perhaps of another concept of the political.' (Derrida 1994, 74-75)

something crucial to cultivate and 'save'.[10] Such urgency around salvaging a workable conceptualisation of resistance and, in so doing, dealing coherently with certain questions of a deceptively 'basic' looking kind, can be observed in various recent discussions in cultural criticism/contemporary theory (for example in the work of David Hoy[11] and the exchanges between Simon Critchley and Slavoj Žižek[12]). In other words (last restatement!) what are the prospects of history being

[10] In *Resistances of Psychoanalysis* (1998c) Derrida avers as follows: 'Ever since I can remember, I have always loved this word. Why? How can one cultivate the word ''resistance''? And want to save it at any price?' He goes on to articulate the following questions and admissions: 'This word, which resonated in my desire and my imagination as the most beautiful word in the politics and history of this country, this word loaded with all the pathos of my nostalgia, as if, at any cost, I would like not to have missed blowing up trains, tanks, and headquarters between 1940 and 1945 – why and how did it come to attract, like a magnet, so many other meanings, virtues, semantic or disseminal chances? I am going to tell you which ones even if I cannot discern the secret of my inconsolable nostalgia – which thus remains to be analyzed or which resists analysis, a little like the navel of a dream.

Why have I always dreamed of resistance? And why should one worry here about a navel?' (Derrida 1998c, 2)

[11] David Hoy's *Critical Resistance: From Poststructuralism to Post-Critique* (Hoy 2005) is an excellent survey of how various theorists have engaged with the concept of resistance. Having cited Nietzsche's *Twilight of the Idols* at the beginning of his book ('How is freedom measured in individuals and peoples? According to the resistance which must be overcome, according to the exertion required, to remain on top. The highest type of free men should be sought where the highest resistance is constantly overcome: five steps from tyranny, close to the threshold of the danger of servitude.' – Nietzsche 1954, 542; cited in Hoy 2005, 1) Hoy offers the following concluding thoughts which serve to highlight the complexity of any contemporary discussion of resistance: 'Freedom, according to the quotation from Nietzsche at the outset of this book, can be measured by the exertion required in resisting the resistance to it. This passage by itself does not see all resistance as emancipatory, because emancipatory resistance will also meet with resistance. Resistance will have to be critical, then, and it will have to make an effort to understand what Bourdieu calls its own field, that is, its own standpoint and situation. Moreover, it will also have to be self-critical, and reflect on its own contingent circumstances and contextual limitations. Being critical and even self-critical does not guarantee that resistance will succeed in increasing freedom and decreasing domination. Nothing can guarantee success. However, if there is one point to which all the theorists whom I have discussed could agree, it is that resistance that was unwilling to be both critical and self-critical would not even be worth attempting in the first place.' (Hoy 2005, 237-239) Hoy states that he finds in Derrida's recent writings 'an interest in responsibility and duty that points to an effective program for critical resistance' going on to elaborate that 'In relation to critique, Derrida himself speaks in both *The Other Heading* [Derrida 1992e] and *Aporias* [Derrida 1993a] of a *duty* to criticize totalitarian dogmatism, and therefore of a further duty to cultivate ''the virtue of such *critique, of the critical idea, the critical tradition*, but also submitting it, beyond critique and questioning, to a deconstructive genealogy that thinks and exceeds it without yet compromising it.'' [Derrida 1993a, 18; here Derrida is quoting himself – see Derrida 1992e, 76-78] So critique is a duty, but it is important to go beyond critique and actually aim at positive social change. Critique cannot provide one with a good conscience, and in *Aporias* he insists that ''one must avoid good conscience at all costs.'' [Derrida 1993a, 19] In *The Gift of Death* he laughs at those who label a certain skepticism about good conscience ''nihilist'', ''relativist'', ''poststructuralist'', or (worst of all) ''deconstructionist.'' [Derrida 1995c, 85]

...More abstractly, I take him to be saying that a foundationless ethics would have to be willing to take back its judgments, and it could not claim theoretically that it was more than a possible interpretation of persons and their social duties. The form of its arguments will tend to be negative: without X there would not be Y. An ethics that eschewed foundationalist claims could therefore not aspire to the certainty of good conscience, and it would see such self-certainty as misrecognizing the risk involved in responsible decision and normative engagement.' (Hoy 2005, 178-179) Hoy discusses Derrida's work *vis-à-vis* critical resistance at various points: for example, see Hoy 2005, 186-189; 227-230; 237-238.

[12] For an example of Žižek's repeated criticisms of theorisations of/exhortations to resistance see Žižek 2006, 334: 'Better to do nothing than to engage in localized acts whose ultimate function is to make the

system run more smoothly (acts like providing space for the multitude of new subjectivities, and so on). The threat today is not passivity but pseudo-activity, the urge to ‘‘be active’’, to ‘‘participate’’, to mask the Nothingness of what goes on. People intervene all the time, ‘‘do something’’; academics participate in meaningless ‘‘debates’’, and so forth, and the truly difficult thing is to step back, to withdraw from all this. Those in power often prefer even a ‘‘critical’’ participation, a dialogue, to silence – just to engage us in a ‘‘dialogue’’, to make sure our ominous passivity is broken.

The anxious expectation that nothing will happen, that capitalism will go on indefinitely, the desperate demand to do something, to revolutionize capitalism, is a fake. The will to revolutionary change emerges as an urge, as an ‘‘I cannot do otherwise’’...

The deadlock of ‘‘resistance’’ brings us back to the topic of parallax: all [that] is needed is a slight shift in our perspective, and all the activity of ‘‘resistance’’, of bombarding those in power with impossible ‘‘subversive’’ (ecological, feminist, antiracist, antiglobalist...) demands, looks like an internal process of feeding the machine of power, providing the material to keep it in motion.’ See also Žižek 2008, 1: ‘Things look bad for great Causes today, in a ‘‘postmodern’’ era when, although the ideological scene is fragmented into a panoply of positions which struggle for hegemony, there is an underlying consensus: the era of big explanations is over, we need ‘‘weak thought’’, opposed to all foundationalism, a thought attentive to the rhizomatic texture of reality; in politics too, we should no longer aim at all explaining systems and global emancipatory projects; the violent imposition of grand solutions should leave room for forms of specific resistance and intervention...If the reader feels a minimum of sympathy with these lines, she should stop reading and cast aside this volume.’ Contra Žižek, and – in my view – far more convincing both for the argument I am running here and in general, is Simon Critchley’s response who has it that ‘Žižek’s critique of my work casts light on an important, indeed perennial, political debate: the conflict between authoritarianism and anarchism that is focused historically in the polemics between Marx and Bakunin, or between Lenin and the anarchists. Žižek’s initial article was entitled ‘‘Resistance Is Surrender’’. Really, the title says it all: all forms of political resistance are simply surrender unless they seize hold of the state. Žižek criticizes those on the ‘‘postmodern left’’, such as myself...who call for a ‘‘new politics of resistance’’ by withdrawing from the domain of state power in order to create ‘‘new spaces outside of its control’’. Žižek claims that such a ‘‘politics of resistance is nothing but the moralizing supplement to a Third Way Left’’. Such a politics of protest, he asserts, simply shows the symbiotic relation between the state and resistance: the latter is permitted and even encouraged by the former but poses no threat to the existence of the liberal democratic state. On the contrary, resistance greases the wheels of the state machine. This is how Žižek reads the anti-war protests of 2003, and by implication all forms of mass street protest and demonstration...By contrast, real politics cannot simply waste its time in resisting state power: it should ‘‘grab’’ it and ‘‘ruthlessly’’ exploit it.

The logic of Žižek’s position is Leninist, and recalls the argument of *State and Revolution*.’ (Critchley 2012, 227-228) Critchley then goes on to assert that ‘Žižek gets it back to front’ given that ‘[i]n political action, it is not a question of issuing infinite demands that cannot be fulfilled. By their very exorbitance, such demands can easily be accommodated by being ignored. What is infinitely demanding, rather, is the ethical disposition of being open and attentive too what exceeds the finite situation in which we find ourselves. ‘‘Infinite’’ here does not consist in the demands that I make, but in finding something in the situation that exceeds its limits. Infinite demands are not issued by a subject, but are the mark of the subject’s responsiveness to and responsibility for what is unlimited in a situation. In a concrete action – a wage dispute, say – we might indeed begin with a finite demand, a demand for a living wage or for the right to join a union. Such a demand will either be accommodated or not, and that might be the end of the matter. The problem with restricting struggles to ‘‘*precise, finite* demands’’ is that once those demands have been either met or ignored, then the struggle is at an end. Such is the politics of accommodation. But there can also be a politics that refuses to be satisfied with accommodation at the level of state or government. In such political actions, the finite demand around which a struggle organizes itself extends itself beyond the limits of the identity of the concerned group and becomes something more radical and far-reaching. In this way, the concrete struggles of particular groups and interested parties, defined by region or ethnic identity, say, can rapidly become radicalized and perhaps begin to place in question the entire governmental framework or socio-economic state of the situation. By limiting oneself to finite demands, one loses the radical potential of struggles to extend beyond their particularity, to link with other struggles in other locations and to become generalized. The key to any genuinely emancipatory politics consists in an openness to the possibility of a generalized struggle that exceeds any particularity or any claim to identity. What is infinitely demanding is that process by which specific, perhaps self-interested or defensive struggles become something else: they open onto something hitherto unknown about the situation in which one finds oneself. What is infinitely demanding, to reiterate, is this ethical

turned against itself in the name of some other concept of history (im-possible historicity as messianic historical theory), a turning that – at the very least – can contribute to the end of a certain hegemonic kind of historicized culture/life? It is in large part on the basis of the traction deemed to have been gained in responding to these two concerns – criticisms of/objections to the messianic and its usefulness in relation to a recuperation of a viable concept of 'historical' resistance – that the utility of developing and defending a messianic historical theory can be gauged.

So, having sketched out the broad 'content' of my Conclusion I want to now briefly outline the specific details of its structure; it has *four* sections. In 'Section One' I *return* to Caputo's one substantive criticism of Derrida's messianic (discussed at the end of Chapter Two) and consider a/his solution. I then move to discuss several of the more commonly made criticisms of both the Derridean messianic and other concepts/motifs associated with deconstruction – most importantly that put forward by the political theorist Ernesto Laclau – with which I want to deal at the outset so as to help me be in a position to effectively address a series of more trenchant outright objections in the subsequent section. In 'Section Two' I turn to focus on relevant debates regarding the (re)turn to religion in certain quarters of continental philosophy and cultural criticism that have taken place outside of the field of

---

commitment towards a possibility as yet unknown and inexistent in the situation, but still powerfully imagined: a supreme fiction.

As we saw above, the infinite demand is a double, meontological demand: to see what is in terms of what is not yet, and to see what is not yet in what is. Such is the implication of taking up the Messianic standpoint, seeing all things *hos me*, as not, for ''the form of this world is passing way''. This means embracing a double nihilism, an affirmative nihilism: both what we called above, with Benjamin, ''the nihilism of world politics'', and trying to focus attention on that which has no existence in such a world politics. Politically, the demand exerted on us by the finite context exceeds the content of any finite demand that might be accommodated at the level of government or state. Literally speaking, the infinite demand is nothing – but a massively creative nothing.' (Critchley 2012, 244-245) Critchley's book – *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology* – concludes with the following meditation on *faith* (again, crucial to my argument throughout this chapter): 'Faith is the enactment of the self in relation to a demand that exceeds my power, both in relation to my factical thrownness in the world and the projective movement of freedom achieved as responsibility. Faith is not a like-for-like relationship of equals, but the asymmetry of the like-to-unlike...[it is] a subjective strength that only finds its power to act through an admission of weakness: the powerless power of conscience. Conscience is the inward ear that listens for the repetition of the infinite demand. Its call is not heard in passive resignation from the world, but in the urgency of active engagement. It has been my contention in this book that such an experience of faith is not only shared by those who are faithless from a creedal or denominational perspective, but can be experienced by them in an exemplary manner. Like the Roman centurion of whom Kierkegaard writes, it is perhaps the faithless who can best sustain the rigor of faith without requiring security, guarantees, or rewards: ''Be it done for you, as you believed''.' (Critchley 2012, 251-252)

historical theory, debates profoundly informed, developed and shaped (even when being reacted against) by the Derridean *ouevre*. Specifically, there are now a growing number of attacks on any 'religious' reading of Derrida – the kind of reading exemplified in Caputo's work which I have already outlined – some of which I consider in *this* section. These attacks – constituting anti-religious and anti-messianic readings of Derrida (and Caputo) and powerfully articulated/expressive reservations regarding the possibility of any 'religious' or 'messianic' conception for the advancement of contemporary theory – are given formidable (but very different) expressions by Quentin Meillassoux and Martin Hägglund whose arguments I examine and respond to. In 'Section Three' I turn to historical theory where it is Sande Cohen – presciently and practically alone[13] within the field – who I think has

[13] Warren Breckman (Breckman 2013, 160-162) and Richard Wolin (2004, 220-255) are two examples of intellectual historians who have offered up readings of Derrida's messianic. However, their readings are focussed on the impact of Derrida's work on *political* rather than *historical* theorisation and possibilities; Cohen, by contrast, highlights the inextricability of, and porousness between, the two. Wolin, in his provocatively entitled book *The Seduction of Unreason: The Intellectual Romance with Fascism from Nietzsche to Postmodernism* (Wolin 2004), is concerned with what he perceives as a degradation and exclusion of democracy and liberalism by Derrida – specifically in his formulation of the messianic – in *Specters of Marx*. He portrays things as follows: 'Ironically, the tenets of political Messianism also play a key role in Derrida's turn towards Marx, whose thought was resolutely atheological. For given Derrida's radical disenchantment with contemporary politics, which he disparages as an age of ''global techno-capitalism'', Messianism provides him with an important element of radical theoretical leverage (especially in comparision with the proponents of democratic theory such as Habermas and Rawls). In contrast to Derrida, democratic theorists remain ''mired'' in the realm of immanent criticism insofar as they believe that democratic societies retain an internal capacity for progressive political change. Derrida, conversely, seems to believe that qualitative change can only come from *without* – which helps to explain his need to legitimate political change in messianic terms. For these reasons Derrida, along with Benjamin and Schmitt, flirts with a ''re-theologization of politics''.' (Wolin 2004, 245-246) A few pages later Wolin asserts that 'mirroring ''Force of Law'', in *Specters of Marx* we are presented with a set of Manichean extremes: on the one hand, the depredations of ''world capitalism''; on the other, Derrida's own esoteric appeal to a messianic condition to come (*à venir*)...Marx's critique of capitalism, we are told, points in the direction of this messianic future, this spectre or ghost of a utopia à venir.

What hinders Derrida's analysis is a dearth of mediating elements: concepts or terms that could bridge the gap between the two extremes he sets forth. In lieu of such mediating elements, one is left with a stark opposition between the perdition of the historical present and the sublimity of the messianic era to come...The later Heidegger once famously quipped that, so forlorn and hopeless are conditions in the modern world, ''Only a god can save us''. By relying on a messianic idiom and a discourse of ''negative theology'' to ground social criticism, Derrida – true to the left Heideggerian legacy – follows closely in the Master's footsteps.

In *Specters of Marx* Derrida degrades democracy and liberalism to expressions of capitalist hegemony...potentials for constructive social reform that Derrida excludes by virtue of his chosen apocalyptical discourse.' (Wolin 2004, 249-250) I do not intend to respond to and correct Wolin's egregious misreading of Derrida's work in detail here but, rather, hope that the rest of my conclusion – together with what has preceded it – provides sufficient redress. I will, however, make the tangential point that David Hoy has helpfully delineated the messianic from the apocalyptic in Derrida's thought, thus undermining the equating of the 'messianic idiom' with an 'apocalyptical discourse' that is asserted by Wolin: 'Messianicity looks to the future, but it does so in a different way from what Derrida calls the apocalyptic. The apocalyptic rhetoric involves the assumption of teleological progress toward an eschatological endpoint... In contrast to this apocalyptic story, messianicity separates the teleology from

delivered the most powerful critical reading of the religious/spiritual/mystical motifs in Derrida's *Specters of Marx*. Cohen expresses concerns about a prevailing ideality and the closure/cessation of thought which he understands various anti-intellectual terms/motifs (including the messianic) as constituting, symbolised for him in the figure of Derrida's 'new scholar' or, as he has it, 'new history scholar'. These are concerns that anyone wishing to draw on Derrida in relation to historical (re)presentation must reckon with. In 'Section Four', I briefly collect together the main reflections of my thesis which allows me to reconfirm my argument as a whole, albeit an argument that – as I acknowledge and on the basis of its contents – 'will never be good enough'.

Finally, I need to briefly refer to the 'style' of this conclusion. My thesis – as noted in the Introduction and throughout – has taken the form of a detailed exegesis of Derrida's work, a close, slow reading (where the 'difficulty' of the text necessitates both attention to detail, to key concepts, to modes, etc.) so that the radical nature of Derrida's (and Caputo's) readings are not lost but underlined, thence to be 'generalised'. This conclusion is written in a far more discursive style – most, if not all, details now taken 'as read' – so the slow reading approach that characterized previous chapters has been largely dispensed with. However, the heavy footnoting has been retained so as to continue to situate the various debates that inform this thesis – a continuation of the 'intertextual literature review' underpinning it throughout – but in such a way as to hopefully still avoid diluting or distracting from the 'pace' of my argument in the main text.

Section One: Solutions (Caputo and Laclau), fideism 'all the way up', empty formalism, and the dangers of 'letting the other come'

At the end of Chapter Two I noted Caputo's one substantive criticism of Derrida's messianic formulation, namely the distinction the latter makes between a formal

---

the eschatology. Messianicity drops the teleological story of progress, but retains the eschatological aspect whereby a breakthrough event can erupt at any moment.' (Hoy 2005, 188-189) This eschatological/teleological distinction/separation is one that I will return to later in this Conclusion.

messianic and concrete messianisms.[14] I now want to consider initially Caputo's solution to his own reservations which he achieves by reading deconstruction as one more concrete messianism reflecting 'the concrete deployment of deconstructive style in concrete circumstances by Derrida and others.' (Caputo 2012a, 321) This solution is predicated upon Caputo's belief that the messianic does not exist in the sense that concrete messianisms – or formational beliefs and practices which are, of course, not just restricted to determinate religious expressions – exist. For Caputo, rather than existing, the messianic as event *insists* (insistence not existence) and this being the case he thinks that we encounter the following *aporia*:

> The aporetic situation is that deconstruction is a second-order theory of the messianic, but it also cannot help but be itself another first-order concrete messianism, just by virtue of the fact that you cannot have a pure transcendental disengagement from or reflection upon anything. If on one side deconstruction is a 'how', on its other side the particular views, commitments, positions, and dispositions adopted by any given work of deconstructive analysis, any 'application' of deconstruction, will always take a concrete form. Of course, the theory/application distinction is eminently deconstructible: one does not apply events to cases; one actualizes events in words and deeds. (Caputo 2012a, 321)

Given this *aporia* Caputo thinks it better to consider 'the ''pure'' messianic...as what the young Heidegger called a ''formal indicator''.'[15] (Caputo 2012a, 321) It is

[14] Caputo's criticism – as set out in Caputo 2012a, 320-321 – can be briefly summarized as follows: he wishes to escape the form/matter, essence/fact distinction and the attendant risk of falling into an unreflexive transcendental – as opposed to quasi-transcendental – proposition. Although he acknowledges that Derrida sought to problematize this distinction he is unconvinced by that attempt (See Derrida 1997a, 168-78 and Derrida 1999c, 254-255; the latter reference is discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis). Caputo's main concern is that such a distinction leaves deconstruction vulnerable to charges of dalliances with 'structure without content', an 'empty' and 'indeterminate' formalism that is wary of/allergic to the 'concrete and determinate'. He wants to rebut such charges *not* in the name of indeterminacy – which Derrida differentiated from undecidability (see *n*32) – but to encourage an acceptance/welcoming of 'the contingency of the determinate and multideterminate' in order to inculcate the practice of hospitality throughout multiple religious traditions by way of inviting them 'not to close themselves off from their own future or from one another.' In other words Caputo wants religious traditions to have to deal/engage with the deconstruction always already taking place in their determinate belief system (doctrinal, ecclesiological, etc.).

[15] Caputo goes on to explain his proposal that 'the ''pure'' messianic' be considered a 'formal indicator' thus: 'Heidegger came up with this idea in connection with his interpretation of Aristotle, where for example the schema of justice that the *phronimos* possesses is considered not as a universal concept under which particular cases are subsumed, but as a potency that is actualized in the concrete performance, where the actualization is higher and more perfect than the schema. That is especially true here, because the coming of the event is the advent of the possible, or rather of the possibility of the impossible that exceeds the horizon of possibility or expectation. Making a first-order religion out of the pure messianic is like a musicologist who would rather study a score than hear the music actually played; but closing off the pure messianic is like claiming that one performance is definitively and exclusively correct. Every

a ‘weak force’, a ghost/specter ‘which keeps the messianisms structurally open to what is otherwise.’ (Caputo 2012a, 321)

Whatever else might be said about this problem and its proposed solution, it is for the purposes of developing the overall argument of my thesis that I want to make just two points of my own in relation to it, the first regarding *faith* and *fideism* and the second to do with the messianic as an *empty formalism* that always requires supplementation. *First*, I think it is important to note that Caputo’s solution – which he has repeatedly made[16] in part as a riposte to confessional theologians who he reads as advancing a postmodern critique emphasising and descending from Kant rather than Hegel so as to delimit knowledge in order to make room for and protect their *determinate* (principally, but not restricted to, Christian) *faith*[17] – is intended to highlight a much more radical conception of irreducible faith and, therefore, of a particular sort of fideism (as a decision without or beyond knowledge), that will

---

performance is haunted by the ghost of alternative performances, of the *tout autre*... But the pure messianic is higher in the realm of ghosts, where possibility, the ghost of a chance, the *peut-être*, is higher than actuality, especially when it is a question of the possibility of the impossible. (What the young Heidegger calls a formal indicator gets a little more charge if you call it a ghost, a specter.)’ (Caputo 2012a, 321-322)

[16] For two other examples of Caputo making similar arguments, see the comments he makes in an interview with B. Keith Putt – ‘What do I love when I love my God? An interview with John D. Caputo’ – (Putt 2002, 165) as well as a section in *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* entitled ‘A Number of Messianisms’ (Caputo 1997, 139-143).

[17] In ‘On Not Settling for an Abridged Edition of Postmodernism: Radical Hermeneutics as Radical Theology’ (Caputo 2012a, 271-353) Caputo, responding at length to various interlocutors, sets out his reading of the situation and delineates his position thus: ‘The overarching difference between the other contributors and me can be seen as a debate between a postmodernism that descends from Kant and a postmodernism that descends from Hegel. We both take our lead from postmodern critiques of modernist rationality, but we strike out on different paths from that common point of departure. They think that postmodernism plays the role of Kant on the contemporary scene, whereas I think it plays the role of Hegel. They think postmodernism is the contemporary way to delimit knowledge in order to make room for faith. I think that it is a strategy they have come up with for limiting the exposure of Christian faith to postmodern analysis...Although we all agree the only safe way to have faith is to appreciate that faith is not safe, the results of my analysis is to make it a good deal more *un*safe than in theirs.’ (Caputo 2012a, 271-272) Later on in this text he makes the following related assertions: ‘On the Kantian model, what is made to pass for ‘‘overcoming onto-theology’’...means that just because postmodern analysis severely rocks the boat of classical metaphysics, that does not stop us from believing it anyway as a matter of faith (which is what Kant said to the Newtonians about ethics). That is what nowadays is being criticized by Quentin Meillassoux as ‘‘fideism’’, and on this point at least Meillassoux is right. But on the Hegelian model...all [are] made to tremble by being returned to *différance*...It is the underlying events that need to be examined, so that postmodern analysts reach much further than they think or are willing to concede. The Kantian model is defensive and apologetic, a retrenchment in the face of the latest wave of an ongoing series of Copernican revolutions, which takes the form here of a vigorous confessional apologetic...

The Hegelian model is more robust. It does not start with faith as a given but it puts faith into question. It does not ask how faith is possible, but about what is going on in historical effects like faith’ (Caputo 2012a, 274-275).

always already underpin and inhere in any discursive construct, including historical (re)presentations. What is needed here is to distinguish determinate faith (whether of an avowedly 'religious' variety or not, given that the formational beliefs and practices of the hegemonic academic history guild can be understood as constituting a determinate doctrinal statement of sorts, one that demands assent or – perhaps – a 'heretical' break necessitated by an alternative allegiance...) from its more radical conception, and to allow the latter to disturb/disrupt the former. Lying beneath every determinate faith – every discursive construct – is a 'deeper', groundless faith. Here, by way of precision, we return to the distinction made by Caputo that was mentioned in the Introduction to this thesis where he talks of

> a deeper, more elusive, more uncertain and unsafe 'faith' (*foi*) stirring restlessly beneath historical Christian 'belief' (*croyance*). In that sense, we postmodern Hegelians could sneak into the Kantian camp one night and steal their slogan and say that we have found it necessary to delimit 'belief' (*croyance*) in order to make room for 'faith' (*foi*). I hasten to add that even though its range of 'critical' analysis extends much wider than in the abridged version of postmodernism...the full version of postmodernism is also more deeply *affirmative* – and precisely of a more radical *faith*. But this faith is a much more restless and obscure thing and it can only make those who gather within the protective walls of an orthodox *croyance* very nervous, wary of a wider wave of critical analysis of the human condition...
>
> ...I am more interested in unfolding affirmatively the form of life that unfolds in religion, its affirmation of the impossible, the *foi* that is going on in *croyance*... (Caputo 2012a, 275-276)

Caputo is primarily concerned with the critical analysis of religion[18] but I think the distinction he outlines can also be applied to any discursive construction of historical

[18] In his book *Derrida and Theology* (Shakespeare 2009) Steven Shakespeare makes the following point regarding what he describes as Derrida's 'critique' of religion: 'He is not seeking to abolish the need for specific communities or religions, any more than he sought to abolish truth and reference. The traces left by Judaism and Christianity in his work are irreducible. However, Derrida does aim to unsettle a certain politics of truth that would deny or suppress the impossible and undecidable aspects of faith, decision, the promise and the gift. These things can only be thought and acted upon in specific material ways and contexts, because there is no meaning apart from this. Their role is to expose the paradoxes inherent in our belief and action, and to elicit our protest when such impossibilities are smoothed over or trampled down in the name of unity, freedom, brotherhood and Truth. They do not paralyze us in abstraction. Without the incalculable and unforeseeable, we would have no decision to make' (Shakespeare 2009, 140-141). To support this point Shakespeare then immediately goes on to quote Derrida (from *Politics of Friendship*): 'Undecidability...is not a sentence that a decision can leave behind. The crucial experience of the *perhaps* imposed by the undecidable – that is to say, the condition of decision – is not a moment to be exceeded, forgotten or suppressed. It continues to constitute the decision as such; it can never again be separated from it; it produces it *qua* decision *in and through* the undecidable.' (Derrida 1997c, 219)

(re)presentation and its theorisation – including mine. So I have no hesitation in appropriating it as a tenet of messianic historical theory. Indeed, far from regarding accusations of fideism as a criticism to be overcome (as if that were possible after the postmodern critique of all foundations) I consider it a designation and condition (of historicity) to be *embraced* precisely because, as Derrida's work helps us to understand, it is unavoidable in *all* discursive endeavours, endeavours that are (im-)possibilised by the *promise* that is equated with faith.[19] Historical (re)presentation is conditioned by that to which it is blind – that which cannot be determined – and which throws the historian back on to 'trusting' (responding to) the other: a blind faith.[20] Any discussion of (absolute) *arrivance* – that which generates/motivates the work of the historian as well as confounding the modernist epistemological claims (beliefs) that they have traditionally made for it – cannot avoid an always already act of faith.[21] Accordingly, messianic historical theory continually stresses this unsafe, radical, affirmative faith (*foi*) in its critique of the epistemological/ontological claims (beliefs) made for every historicization; it seeks to remind historians, consumers and thus residents in historical culture of the *radical contingency* out of – and in which – every historicization is produced. The terms faith (*foi*) and fideism – so closely associated with the messianic – understood and deployed in this Derridean/Caputoian way, are for me – in a time when the (re)turn of religion is so prominent – indexical refigurations of and entirely in

[19] '*This justice inscribes itself in advance in the promise, in the act of faith or in the appeal to faith that inhabits every act of language and every address to the other.*' (Derrida 1998a, 18, italics Derrida's own)
[20] 'If we refer to faith, it is to the extent that we don't see. Faith is needed when perception is lacking; when I see something I don't need to have faith in it. For example, I don't see the other, I don't see what he or she has in mind, or whether he or she wants to deceive me. So I have to trust the other, that is faith. Faith is blind.' (Derrida 1999b, 80)
[21] In 'A Certain Impossible Possibility of Saying the Event' (Derrida 2007a) Derrida provides the following explanation that emphasizes the connection(s) between the verticality of the event/*arrivance* and the act of faith: 'By [the] verticality [of the event], what I meant was that the foreigner, what is irreducibly *arrivant* in the other – who is not simply a worker, or a citizen, or someone easily identifiable – is that which in the other gives me no advance warning and which exceeds precisely the horizontality of expectation. What I wanted to emphasize, in speaking of verticality, was that the other does not wait. She does not wait for me to be able to receive her or to give her a resident's permit. If there is unconditional hospitality, it has to be open to the visitation of the other who may come at any time, without my knowledge. This is also the messianic: the messiah can arrive, he can come at any time, from on high, where I don't see him coming. In my discourse, the idea of verticality doesn't necessarily have anymore the often religious of theological use that rises to the Most High. Maybe religion starts here. You can't talk the way I do about verticality, about absolute *arrivance*, without the act of faith having already commenced – and the act of faith is not necessarily religion, a given religion – without a certain space of faith without knowledge, faith beyond knowledge. I'd accept, therefore, that we speak of faith here.' (Derrida 2007a, 242-243)

sympathy/continuity with postmodern critiques of modernist rationality. In unashamed continuity with those strands of postmodern critique that posited history as 'theoretical all the way down', messianic historical theory posits that it as 'fideistic all the way up'.[22] Perhaps this is just a fresh expression of the same point? Either way there seems to be no escape!

Following on from and closely related to this excursus regarding *faith* and *fideism* is my *second* point regarding the criticism of the messianic as an *empty formalism*. It is here that, whilst I am arguing that a messianic historical theory *can* be developed as another concrete messianism[23], I also think that there is a vulnerability at the level of both the 'pure' and 'concrete' to two charges of formalism, the first more easily dealt with than the second. The first charge is provided by Richard Kearney in his book *Anatheism: Returning to God After God* (Kearney 2010), who thinks that Derrida's 'abstract' messianic structure does not allow for a 'discernment of spirits' or 'a hermeneutics of interpretation or commitment to holy rather than unholy

[22] Of course I am not suggesting that knowledge is not deployed by historians (leading up to, or subsequently) to calculate and justify the choices that they have made as regards their (re)presentations ('reasons', 'evidence', etc.) nor the complexity of these intellectual operations and how they are formed/disciplined. Yet however sophisticated this edifice undoubtedly is I maintain that it is predicated on and emerges out of the radical contingency (the aleatoric) that lies beneath every discursive commitment (philosophical, theoretical, epistemological, aesthetic, ethical, political, etc.) and, consequently, a certain fideism is inescapable. As Derrida asserted, the decision to think – whether 'historical' or not – requires what is beyond reason (faith): ' ''Thinking'' requires *both* the principle of reason *and* what is beyond the principle of (academic) reason, the *arche* and an-archy. Between the two, the difference of a breath or an accent, only the *enactment* of this ''thinking'' can decide. That decision is always risking; it always risks the worst. To claim to eliminate this risk through an institutional program is quite simply to erect a barricade against a future. The decision of thinking cannot be an intra-institutional event, an academic moment.' (Derrida 2004b, 153) See also the comments made by Derrida during a dialogue with Elizabeth Roudinesco: 'Between knowledge and decision, a leap is required, even if it is necessary to know as much and as well as possible before deciding. But if decision is not only under the authority of my knowledge but also *in my power*, if it is something ''possible'' for me, if it is only the predicate of what I am and can be, I don't decide then either. That is why I often say, and try to demonstrate, how ''my'' decision is and ought to be the *decision of the other* in me, a ''passive'' decision, a decision of the other that does not exonerate me from any of my responsibility. This is a scandalous proposition for common sense and for philosophy, but I believe I can rationally demonstrate (though I can't do it here) its ineluctable necessity and its implications. When I say ''rationally'', I am obviously appealing to a history of reason, and therefore also to its future, its ''future-to-come''. To the one who or which comes under the name of reason.' (Derrida and Roudinesco 2004, 52-53)

[23] My contention that a messianic historical theory *can* be developed as another concrete messianism involves understanding it as an expression of deconstruction as it is always already at work in historical [re]presentation specifically *and* which challenges historians to explicitly recognise and affirm the structural openness to what is otherwise – *faith* in the very opening to the future – of their discursive constructions. Such a theorisation draws attention to (i.e., asymptotically – and paradoxically – 'caressing' or 'stroking') the 'pure' messianic general experience that – as 'insistence not existence' – is *not* separate from historical (re)presentation but always already stirring restlessly beneath and within it (as im-possibility, *khōra*, promise, absolute *arrivance*, etc.).

ghosts.'[24] (Kearney 2010, 64) Kearney is concerned about the lack of criteria (discernment) and/or method (interpretation or commitment) *vis-à-vis* the messianic which might leave us unable to oppose the appearance of all manner of unholy ghosts. *Must* we be 'open-armed' to anything and anybody that might come? Kearney writes as a sympathetic reader and inheritor of Derrida's work unlike Deborah E. Lipstadt who, in her book *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory* (Lipstadt 1994) and without naming Derrida, has put forth an extreme version of this criticism in which she deems 'deconstructionism' as responsible for creating 'an atmosphere of permissiveness toward questioning the meaning of historical events' with the consequence that it became 'hard for its proponents to assert that there was anything ''off limits'' for this skeptical approach.'[25] (Lipstadt 1994, 18) Yet Derrida anticipated and repeatedly responded to this aspect of the 'empty formalism' criticism. For whilst there is nothing intrinsically good about the event or unconditionally preferable about the future, nevertheless, any opposition to something coming and/or a preference that it *not*

[24] By way of further contextualisation it may be helpful to quote Kearney's criticism more fully. For him, Derrida's messianicity 'serves less as a sacred, incarnate presence in the world than as an abstract structure for the condition of possibility of religion in general, that is, religion understood as an endless waiting with no sense of what kind of divine (or undivine) Other might appear. There is no room here for a ''discernment of spirits''. No real option of a hermeneutics of interpretation or commitment to holy rather than unholy ghosts. (For deconstructors all gods are ghosts). There seems to be no possibility, in other words of reading the face beyond or through the name. Faith in messianicity, for Derrida, seems at times to mean a radical absence of any historical instantiation of the divine…

In sum, faith serves here as a purely transcendental move, a ''formal structure of promise'' that does not call for realization or incarnation in the world of particular beliefs…Here messianicity becomes, arguably, so devoid of any kind of concrete faith in a person or presence (human or divine) that it loses any claim to historical reality. Which leaves me with this question: does deconstructive ''faith'' not risk becoming so empty that it loses faith in the here and now altogether?' (Kearney 2010, 64-65)

[25] For further contextualisation of these remarks see Lipstadt 1994, 17-18 where she writes of a 'deconstructionist approach' and 'deconstructionism', goes on to characterize them as 'skeptical' and 'relativistic' (in their 'approach to the truth'), and links these terms with claims 'that there was no bedrock thing such as experience' and that 'experience was relative and nothing was fixed'. In fairness, and immediately before going on to make her assertion regarding the atmosphere of permissiveness that she thinks it engenders, Lipstadt also acknowledges that '[t]he scholars who supported this deconstructionist approach were neither deniers themselves nor sympathetic to the deniers' attitudes; most had no trouble identifying Holocaust denial as disingenuous.' In a footnote to his dialogue with Elizabeth Roudinesco – *For What Tomorrow...A Dialogue* (Derrida and Roudinesco 2004) – Derrida makes the following comments: 'This [1993] was the year when, in the *New York Times* as well as in a book by Deborah Lipstadt (*Denying the Holocaust*) and in the discussion around it, there appeared suspicions that were as odious as they were ridiculous. Deconstruction was suspected not actually of ''negationism'' but of opening the way for it by creating an ''atmosphere of permissiveness'' for the ''questioning of historical facts'', or of engendering ''skepticism''. I think the exact opposite is the case. It is this sort of dogmatism that engenders skepticism. And even the ''negationist'' temptation. Only someone who has not read or understood anything, who has become entrenched in this stubborn ignorance, could put forth such gratuitous and violently insulting suspicions. – J.D.' (Derrida and Roudinesco 2004, 224*n*46)

happen demonstrates precisely the passion (or determination) that the horizon not be 'obstructed'; Derrida was always keen to insist that for every discourse, including history in its lower case forms, it is 'better to let the future [be] open – this is the axiom of deconstruction' (Derrida 2002b, 21).[26] What is crucial is to preserve the 'to come', that im-possible 'space opened for the other and others to come' (Derrida 2002d, 182), so that *all* our discursive constructs (offerings) – even, as some of the most perceptive Derrida scholars have pointed out, those discourses that espouse the notion of 'no future'[27] – are *continually disturbed/unsettled*. In its critical analysis of

[26] 'It's better to let the future open – this is the axiom of deconstruction, the thing from which it always starts out and which binds it, like the future itself, to alterity, to the priceless *dignity* of alterity, that is to say, to justice. It is also democracy as democracy to come. You can imagine the objection. For example, someone will say: ''Sometimes it's better that this or that thing not happen. Justice demands that certain events be prevented from happening (that certain '*arrivants*' be prevented from arriving or coming to pass). The event is not good in and of itself, the future is not unconditionally preferable''. Granted, but it will always be possible to show that what we oppose, when we prefer, conditionally, that this or that thing not happen, is something that we think, rightly or wrongly, is going to obstruct the horizon – or even constitute the *horizon* (the word means *limit*) – for the absolute coming of the wholly other, for the future itself. There is, here, a messianic structure (if not a messianism – in my book on Marx, I also distinguish messianicity, as a universal dimension of experience, from all determinate messianisms) which knits the promise of the *arrivant*, the unanticipatability of the future, and justice inextricably together. I'm not able to reconstitute this demonstration here, and I realize that the word justice may seem a bit vague. It is not law or right – it both exceeds and founds human rights – nor is it distributive justice. It is not even respect, in the traditional sense of the word, for the other as *human subject*. It is the experience of the other as other, the fact that I let the other be other, which presupposes a gift without restitution, without reappropriation, and without jurisdiction. Here I cross, at the same time that I displace them slightly, as I've attempted to do elsewhere, the heritages of several traditions: that of Levinas, when he simply defines the relation to the other as justice (''the relation to the other – that is to say, justice''); and that which insists through a paradoxical thought whose initially Plotinian formulation is found in Heidegger, then in Lacan: give not only what you have, but what you don't. This excess overflows the limits of the present, property, restitution, and no doubt law, morality, and politics, too, at the same time that it breathes life into or inspires them.' (Derrida 2002b, 21-22) See also, and compare, Derrida 2002d, 104-105.

[27] I have in mind Nicholas Royle's succinct and insightful reading of Lee Edelman's book *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Edelman 2004) where he makes a crucial point regarding thinking the future otherwise (than, say, 'reproductive futurism'), namely as embracing the im-possible and the 'impossible project'. This is the thinking and orientation of messianic historical theory. Here, then, is Royle on Edelman: 'On another little by-path, close yet almost out of the picture, I see the figure of Lee Edelman, or more specifically his provocative book *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Though resolutely Lacanian and curiously silent on Derrida, Edelman's book has notable affinities with our concerns here. In particular, we might think of the stress he gives to a deconstructive notion of ''irony'', ''that queerest of rhetorical devices'' as he calls it (p. 23); or his characterisation of queer theory in terms of a ''refusal...of every substantialisation of identity...and, by extension, of history as linear narrative...in which meaning succeeds in revealing itself – *as itself* – through time'' (p. 4). In other respects Edelman's argument might seem entirely contrary to what we are trying to elucidate in these pages: ''queer'', for him, ''comes to figure the bar to every realisation of futurity, the resistance, internal to the social, to every structure or form'' (p. 4). Queerness, he thus comes to assert, ''promises, in more than one sense of the phrase, absolutely nothing'' (p. 5). Edelman's work is predicated on the force of its polemical negative: think queer, he says, as ''no future''. Queer would be that which ''cuts the thread of futurity'' (p. 30), above all insofar as that future comprises ''reproductive futurism'' (pp. 4, 27). This may look quite far from Derrida's thinking, especially if one recalls the latter's repeated affirmation of the ''democracy to come'' and his cautioning against ''los[ing] sight of the *excess*...of the future'': the notion of ''no future'' in this respect would be linked with totalitarianism. But Edelman's polemic is, I think,

the condition(ing) of historical (re)presentation, messianic historical theory opposes *all* historicizations – and alternative theorisations of the same – that are constructed in such 'unreflexive' ways that they 'close and close themselves off' (Derrida 2002d, 182) from the coming of the other. Such unproblematicized (re)presentations and theorisations are, albeit at different levels and with varying degrees of awareness, *nondemocratic* and *totalitarian*. By contrast, messianic historical theory stands and works for 'democracy to come' in the field of academic history/historiography.[28] Although it can be risky ('a risk and a chance', for monsters abound) it opposes any event that would mean closing down the opening for the other, actively '*resisting* any *resistance*' to such openness such that, in this sense, it is *not* an empty formalism. This position is similar to that developed by Jean-François Lyotard and Jean-Loup Thébaud in their dialogue/text *Just Gaming* where they define what is 'unjust' as any attempt at *excluding* any 'partner' from 'the possibility of continuing to play the game of the just'; as that 'which prohibits that the question of the just and the unjust be, and remain, raised' (Lyotard and Thébaud 1985, 66-67) and which I read as an alternative expression or exhortation to keep (letting) the future open.[29] Nor do I think that the Derridean messianic (and

---

considerably closer to Derrida than it may initially appear. For the force of his argument is in fact bound up with what I have just been referring to as the deconstructive optative: what is at issue is not so much ''no future'' as it is a thinking of the future in terms of a *wilful* commitment to ''disturbing, [or] queering, social organisation as such'' (p. 17), in terms of ''embrac[ing]'' this as precisely ''the impossible'' (p. 109), an ''impossible project'' that we ''*might* undertake'' (p. 27, emphasis added). No ''no future'' without deconstructive desire, without ''what is queerest'', namely the ''*willingness* to insist intransitively – to insist that the future stop here'' (p. 31, emphasis added).' (Royle 2009, 124-125)

[28] 'What's important in ''democracy to come'' is not ''democracy'', but ''to come''. That is, a thinking of the event, of what comes. It's the space opened for there to be an event, the to-come, so that the coming be that of the other. There is no coming or event that is not, that does not imply the coming of the heterogeneous, the coming of the other. ''To come'' means ''future'', not the present future, which would be present and presentable tomorrow. It means the space opened for the other and others to come. Nondemocratic systems are above all systems that *close* and *close themselves off* from this coming of the other. They are systems of homogenization and of integral calculability. In the end and beyond all the classical critique of fascist, Nazi, and totalitarian violence in general, one can say that these are systems that close the ''to come'' and that close themselves into the presentation of the presentable. What I have said elsewhere about the coming, the event, the ''come here'' [*viens*] – of *différance* and the deconstruction of presence, is where I would begin to try to articulate a thinking of the political.' (Derrida 2002d, 182)

[29] 'Absolute injustice would occur if the pragmatics of obligation, that is, the possibility of continuing to play the game of the just, were excluded. That is what is unjust. Not the opposite of the just, but that which prohibits that the question of the just and the unjust be, and remain, raised. Thus, obviously, all terror, annihilation, massacre, etc., or their threat, are, by definition, unjust. The people whom one massacres will no longer be able to play the game of the just and the unjust. But moreover, any decision that takes away, or in which it happens that one takes away, from one's partner in a current pragmatics, the possibility of playing or replaying a pragmatics of obligation – a decision that has such an effect is necessarily unjust. But of course one must imagine this effect, these effects....' (Lyotard and Thébaud

the messianic historical theory I am deriving from it) is an empty formalism in the sense of any culpability regarding crudely assembled accusations of relativism and indeterminacy of meaning (i.e., lacking a stabilising content, method, hermeneutic, etc., then anything goes...). For Derrida rejected both charges if not without some careful delineation. To be sure, he *could* indeed be considered a relativist if by that term we understand 'that the other is the other, and that every other is other than the other' (Derrida 1999b, 78). In other words, Derrida *is* a relativist (as I am) *if*, by relativism, we mean: (a) attending to *singularities* variously construed (singularity of the other, the situation, language, etc.), and, (b) holding that 'there are two zero points here and there, and that you cannot reduce the difference' (Derrida 1999b, 78-79). Yet this is *not* how he understood relativism, defining it instead as a classical philosophical doctrine where 'there are only points of view with no absolute necessity, or no references to absolutes' and as 'a way of referring to the absolute and denying it' and stating that 'there are only cultures and that there is no pure science or truth.' (Derrida 1999b, 78) Derrida was adamant that on the basis of this definition he was not a relativist and indeed was saying the opposite. (Derrida 1999b, 78) Similarly he was also keen to refute attributions to him of advocating indeterminacy of meaning, for which read 'you can read the text any way you like' or 'the text means anything'[30], emphasising instead – and in contrast to indeterminacy – 'interpretations which determine the meaning'[31] as well as undecidability and determinability. The only caveat that Derrida made on this point – a crucial one in my view – was to do with the 'indeterminacy of the coming of the

1985, 66-67). For a helpful commentary on this passage that relates it to matters of historical theorization see Jenkins 2009, 178-180.

[30] 'Usually they charge me with saying that the text means anything, a charge made even in academic circles, not only in the media. If I were saying such a stupid thing, why would that be of any interest? Who would be interested in that, starting with me? There must be something else. Why are they anxious about their own interpretation of what I say? They are anxious that a text *may* call for interpretation, that there may be some complication in a text. I would say that a text is complicated, there any many meanings struggling with one another, there are tensions, there are over-determinations, there are equivocations; but this doesn't mean that there is indeterminacy. On the contrary, there is too much determinacy. That is the problem. So these charges really have to be interpreted.' (Derrida 1999b, 79)

[31] Here I am reminded of, and follow, Paul de Man's definition of 'interpretation': 'And since *interpretation is nothing but the possibility of error*, by claiming that a certain degree of blindness is part of the specificity of all literature we also reaffirm the absolute dependence of the interpretation on the text and of the text on the interpretation.' (de Man 1983, 141, italics mine). In terms of my argument I think it apposite to substitute 'historical (re)presentation' for 'literature' in this quotation.

future', although he insisted that he did not consider that as constituting 'relativity of meaning.'[32] (Derrida 1999b, 79)

The second charge of formalism has a much greater density to it, however, and has to be 'taken on board' and absorbed (if it can be!) into any development of a messianic historical theory. This charge has been brilliantly articulated by Ernesto Laclau in an essay on *Specters of Marx* entitled ' ''The Time is Out of Joint'' ' (Laclau 1996, 66-83; see especially pages 77-79). Laclau's concern is located in the linkage that he perceives Derrida making in *Specters of Marx* 'between the promise as a (post-) transcendental or (post-) ontological (non-) ground and the ethical and political contents of an emancipatory project.' (Laclau, 1996, 77) He is unconvinced by such a linkage and highlights the ongoing potential for 'an illegitimate logical transition' to be made (if not by Derrida then 'frequently...by many defenders of deconstruction' – Laclau 1996, 77 – who have gone ahead and done exactly what he describes). Laclau argues as follows:

> The illegitimate transition is to think that from the impossibility of a presence closed in itself, from an 'ontological' condition in which the openness to the event, to the heterogeneous, to the radically other is constitutive, some kind of ethical injunction to be responsible and to keep oneself open to the heterogeneity of the other necessarily follows. This transition is illegitimate for two reasons. First, because if the promise is an 'existential' constitutive of all experience, it is always already there, before any injunction...But, second and most important, from the fact that there is the impossibility of ultimate closure and presence, it does not follow that there is an ethical imperative to 'cultivate' that openness or even less to be necessarily committed to a democratic society. I think the latter can certainly be defended from a deconstructionist perspective, but that defence cannot be logically derived from constitutive openness – *something more has to be added to the argument*. (Laclau 1996, 77, italics mine)

[32] '*Undecidability is the competition between two determined possibilities or options, two determined duties. There is no indeterminacy at all; a word in a text is always determined. When I say that there is nothing outside the text, I mean there is nothing outside the context, everything is determined*. Now, because there are contexts and singularities, there are movements, processes and transformations, and for transformations to occur something has to be determined, something is determinable. *Determinability is not indeterminacy; to take into account determinability you must assume that what is determinable is still undetermined regarding the coming determination, but it is not undetermined*. Let me take an example: if I say I have to make a decision and I shall tell you what the decision is tomorrow. This is determinable. Of course, what I shall do tomorrow is undetermined, but this indeterminacy is not an empty something. *Everything is totally determined. There is, however, the future, what is to come, and I would say there is indeterminacy of the coming of the future. But that is not relativity of meaning*.' (Derrida 1999b, 79, italics mine)

On the basis of this criticism (that there is no entailment from *is* to *ought*) Laclau goes on to suggest that in exactly the same way as for democracy 'a case for totalitarianism can be presented starting from deconstructionist premises.'[33] (Laclau 1996, 78) And this is difficult to disagree with. Of course the whole drift of Derrida's work is anti-totalitarian (i.e. his preference for resistance to all totalitarian discourses that obstruct or – better – create a horizon [limit], that close and close themselves off from the disruptive/disturbing coming of the other), nevertheless, I accept Laclau's overall contention that no *strong* ethical injunction[34] of responsibility and *positively* keeping oneself open to the heterogeneity of the other is logically entailed (derivable) from the messianic structure. I also accept that making the assumption that there is a legitimate *logic* to this transition is an ever present danger and one that messianic historical theory needs to avoid (although I share Derrida's preference – an act of *faith/fideism*? – and, consequently, so does the historical theorisation I am developing). And, turning back to Derrida, it is possible to identify several places where he responded to this strand of the formalist criticism *agreeing*, for example, that 'I don't think deconstruction ''offers'' anything *as* deconstruction' in terms of concrete/determinate proposals for knowledge and/or action (although adding that 'everything that I do is concerned with the question of power everywhere') (Derrida 1999b, 74).[35] More specifically, in the course of a

[33] 'Precisely because of the undecidability inherent in constitutive openness, ethico-political moves different from or even opposite to a democracy ''to come'' can be made – for instance, since there is ultimate undecidability and, as a result, no immanent tendency of the structure to closure and full presence, to sustain that closure has to be *artificially* brought about from the outside. In that way a case for totalitarianism can be presented starting from deconstructionist premises. Of course, the totalitarian argument would be as much a *non sequitur* as the argument for democracy: either direction is equally possible given the situation of structural undecidability.' (Laclau 1996, 77-78)

[34] Laclau develops his argument regarding the lack of entailment between structural undecidability and ethical injunction as follows: 'We have so far presented our argument concerning the non-connection between structural undecidability and ethical injunction, starting from the ''ontological'' side. But if we move to the ''normative'' side, the conclusions are remarkably similar. Let us suppose, for the sake of the argument, that openness to the heterogeneity of the other is an *ethical* injunction. If one takes this proposition at face value, one is forced to conclude that we have to accept the other as different *because* she is different, whatever the content of that heterogeneity would be. This does not sound much like an ethical injunction but like ethical nihilism. And if the argument is reformulated by saying that openness to the other does not necessarily mean passive acceptance of her but rather active engagement which includes criticizing her, attacking her, even killing her, the whole argument starts to seem rather vacuous: what else do people do all the time without any need for an ethical injunction?' (Laclau 1996, 78)

[35] In 'Hospitality, justice and responsibility: a dialogue with Jacques Derrida' (Derrida 1999b) Derrida comments that 'I don't think deconstruction ''offers'' anything *as* deconstruction. That is sometimes what I am charged with: saying nothing, not offering any content or any full proposition. I have never ''proposed'' anything, and that is perhaps the essential poverty of my work. I never offered anything in

discussion of *khōra* (as locality/place, spacing, interval) which, as we have previously seen, is linked to 'an act of messianic faith' (Derrida 2005c, *xiii*), he accepts that no 'politics, no ethics, and no law can be, as it were, *deduced* from this thought', and that 'nothing can be *done* [*faire*] with it' (Derrida 2005c, *xv*). However, and in his own defence, he qualifies these statements by asking, in rhetorical mode, whether 'this thought leaves no trace on what is to be done' in, for example, 'the politics, the ethics, or the law to come' (Derrida 2005c, *xv*). For Derrida it is 'on' (without ground/foundation: like the messianic – they are one and the same – its limits can only be stroked/caressed) the basis (thinking trace) of *khōra* that a thinking of the to come 'rises': 'a thinking of the event *to come*, of the democracy *to come*, of the reason *to come*' that 'bears every hope' (Derrida 2005c, *xv*).[36] Such thinking reminds us – in a disturbing/unsettling way – that no concrete messianism or determinate discursive construct is possible without this messianic structural opening (it is its im-possibility).[37] With this important qualification

---

terms of ''this is what you have to know'' or ''this is what you have to do''. So deconstruction is a poor thing from that point of view.

Now, perhaps using the strategy of deconstruction, you may for yourself understand, not what power is, but what powers may be in such and such a context. Of course, if I wanted to justify at any cost what I am doing, I would say that everything that I do is concerned with the question of power everywhere. The question of power is so pervasive, however, that I could not isolate the place where I deal with *just* the question of power.' (Derrida 1999b, 74) See also *Specters of Marx* where Derrida acknowledges the '[a]pparently ''formalist''...indifference to the content' of the promise/historicity as future-to-come that he is 'nicknaming the messianic without messianism', albeit – and crucially – an indifference that is not without 'the value of giving one to think the necessarily pure and purely necessary form of the future as such' (Derrida 1994, 73).

[36] 'But what would allow these to take place, without, however, providing any ground or foundation, would be precisely khōra. Khōra would make or give *place*; it would give rise – without ever *giving* anything – to what is called the coming of the event...

...On it, perhaps, on what here receives the name *khōra*, a call might thus be taken up and take hold: the call for a thinking of the event *to come*, of the democracy *to come*, of the reason *to come*. This call bears every hope, to be sure, although it remains, in itself, without hope. Not hopeless, in despair, but foreign to the teleology, the hopefulness, and the *salut* of salvation. Not foreign to the *salut* as the greeting or salutation of the other, not foreign to the *adieu* (''come'' or ''go'' in peace), not foreign to justice, but nonetheless heterogeneous and rebellious, irreducible, to law, to power, and to the economy of redemption.' (Derrida 2005c, *xiii-xiv*)

[37] 'The promise of which I speak, the one of which I was saying above that it remains threatening (contrary to what is generally thought about the promise) and of which I am now proposing that it promises the impossible but also the possibility of all speech; this strange promise neither yields nor delivers any messianic or eschatological *content* here. There is no salvation here that saves or promises salvation, even if on the hither or the other side of any soteriology, this promise resembles the salvation addressed to the other, the other recognized as an entirely different other (the entirely other is entirely other where a knowledge or recognition does not suffice for it), the other recognized as mortal, finite, in a state of neglect, and deprived of any horizon of hope.

But the fact that there is no necessary determinable *content* in this promise of the other, and in the language of the other, does not make any less indisputable its opening up of speech by something that *resembles* messianism, soteriology, or eschatology. It is the structural opening, the messianic*ity*, without without which *messianism* itself, in the strict or literal sense, would not be possible. Unless, perhaps, this

Derrida can therefore be read as being in agreement with Laclau's claim, even going so far as to admit that he 'mistrusts' some of the messianic related formulas that he uses ('opening to the other', 'impossible possibility', etc.) – formulas that this thesis has focused on throughout – and that in isolation and 'without any other contextualization, without *supplementary discourse* and precautions' there is the potential for them to 'become politically quite dangerous and compromised with that which should have been avoided' (Derrida 2002d, 194, italics mine).[38]

Laclau's criticism is an important one, then, and his argument has been drawn upon by a number of scholars (e.g., Bevernage 2012, 173-175[39], Fritsch 2005, 190-191[40],

---

originary promise without any proper content is, precisely, messianism. And unless all messianism demands for itself this rigorous and barren severity, this messianicity shorn of everything. Let us never rule it out.' (Derrida 1998b, 68)

[38] Derrida makes this admission in the interview 'Politics and Friendship': 'However, I mistrust the formulas I've just used. Taken in themselves, alone, without any other contextualization, without supplementary discourse and precautions, they can become politically quite dangerous and compromised with that which should have been avoided: ''opening to the other'' has already become a moralizing and unpalatable stereotype; ''possibility of the impossible'' or ''impossible possibility'' is not far from the formulas with which Heidegger defines being-for-death. Without wishing to set myself in opposition either to the ethics of opening to the other or to the existential analytic of *Dasein* as being-for-death (here associated in a very significant way with *the other and death*), I would not want what I've just said about the subject of the impossible and of the other to be simply assimilated to the discourses I have evoked. I will thus, for lack of time, space, and appropriate situation, keep in reserve a great number of precautions necessary for avoiding these confusions – precautions that would also be, to a certain extent, political. I believe that those interested in this can find the principle and the development in several of my texts, for example, those on Heidegger and Levinas. I would add other protocols. The themes of the impossible and the incalculable can allow for the worst abuses if they are not articulated carefully, I dare say if one does not *calculate* their articulation with calculation, the possible, the measurable, the homogeneous, etc. One must master and calculate democratically also; there must be votes, thus identifiable subjects, subjects by right, majorities, determinable legalities, etc. – a perpetually indispensable negotiation between the singular opening to the impossible, which must be safeguarded, and the method, the right, the technique, the democratic calculation; between democracy to come and the limited present of democratic reality. The law of *iterability*, which I recalled earlier, but which I cannot explain here (cf. ''Signature Event Context'' and *Limited Inc*) is decisive here for defining the possibility, chance, risks involved in such a negotiation between singularity and concept. This negotiation is indispensible: it is included with the rules, but ''in the last instance'' (yes!) it is without rule and guaranteed rigor.' (Derrida 2002d, 194-195)

[39] Berber Bevernage, in his book *History, Memory, and State-Sponsored Violence: Time and Justice* (Bevernage 2012), draws upon Laclau's argument as follows: 'Finally, let me return to the issue of the relationship between time and ethics with which I opened this book. One central question remains: Can we decide on the transitional justice dilemma now that we have criticized the irreversible time of history and claimed the existence of the irrevocable? No, unfortunately (or perhaps fortunately) the simple recognition of the non-contemporaneity of the living present and the spectral survival of the past does not deliver us a direct solution to the dilemma of the proper temporal orientation of ethics. Here I want to take some critical distance from Derrida's position and the theory of justice that comes with his account of spectrality. Ernesto Laclau is right when he critically remarks that one cannot legitimately make the logical transition from an argument about the disadjustment of time and a (post-)ontological claim about specters to a binding ethical injunction to be responsible to them...

Again I agree with Ernesto Laclau when he remarks that the ethical significance of Derridean deconstruction ''is that by enlarging the area of structural undecidability it enlarges also the area of responsibility – that is, of the decision''. Although the deconstruction of presence cannot help us decide

and Žižek 2003, 141) and in his own paper Laclau goes on to forward his own resolutely secular phrased solution[41], faithful to his own reading of Derridean deconstruction, which is interesting to compare in terms of significant resonances and differences with Caputo's religiously figured proposal that I discussed at the

---

on the transitional justice dilemma or on the proper temporal orientation of ethics in general, the recognition of the irrevocable past *does* unmask the false premises from which discussions of historical justice all too often start out.' (Bevernage 2012, 173-174)

[40] Matthias Fritsch, in his book *The Promise of Memory: History and Politics in Marx, Benjamin, and Derrida* (Fritsch 2005), utilises Laclau's argument to supplement Derrida with Benjamin (and *vice versa*) as follows: 'As Derrida himself points out, originary responsibility, as a constitutive openness, names the condition of possibility of more concrete moral and political responsibilities. But, as Ernesto Laclau, for one, has argued, if constitutive openness has to be affirmed as it makes subjects possible, no ethical injunction to cultivate that openness follows without further arguments of a normative kind. I have argued elsewhere that the quasi-transcendental argument by itself does not permit Derrida to translate the responsiveness of constitutive openness into the more concrete ethico-political injunctions in favour of a democracy to come, for example. This is so because the quasi-transcendental argument puts into doubt the logic of noncontradiction that would be needed to ask subjects to follow through on those obligations that appear logically derived from what makes subjects possible, on pain of contradictions. From the fact that subjects are always already indebted, and have always already responded, as their condition of possibility, to an anterior otherness, no ethical injunction to cultivate this otherness and to recognise the debt need to follow. For these reasons, I suggest that Benjamin's memory of the oppressed of capitalist modernity be regarded as a necessary contribution to Derrida's insistence on the memory of specters, especially in light of the political responsibility that follows from Benjamin's considerations. Since originary responsibility is not yet responsibility in the face of capitalist modernity, Benjamin's claim is needed to allow a deconstructive affirmation of the ''emancipatory promise''.' (Fritsch 2005, 190)

[41] Laclau outlines his solution to the problem he has identified as follows: 'Yet I think that deconstruction *has* important consequences for both ethics and politics. These consequences, however, depend on deconstruction's ability to go down to the bottom of its own radicalism and avoid becoming entangled in all the problems of a Levinasian ethics (whose proclaimed aim, to present ethics as *first* philosophy, should from the start look suspicious to any deconstructionist). I see the matter this way. Undecidability should be literally taken as that condition from which no course of action necessarily follows. This means that we should not make it the necessary source of *any* concrete decision in the ethical or political sphere. In a first movement deconstruction extends undecidability – that is that which makes the decision necessary – to deeper and larger areas of social relations. The role of deconstruction is, from this perspective, to *reactivate* the moment of decision that underlies any *sedimented* set of social relations. The political and ethical significance of this first movement is that, by enlarging the area of structural undecidability, it also enlarges the area of responsibility – that is of the decision. (In Derridean terms: the requirements of justice become more complex and multifaceted *vis-à-vis* law.)

But this first movement is immediately balanced by another one of the opposite sign, which is also essential to deconstruction. To think of undecidability as a bottomless abyss that underlies any self-sufficient ''presence'' would still maintain too much of the imagery of the ''ground''. The duality undecidability/decision is something that simply belongs to the logic of any structural arrangement. Degrounding is, in this sense, also part of an operation of grounding except that this grounding is no longer to refer something back to a foundation which would act as a principle of derivation but, instead, to reinscribe that something within the terrain of the undecidables (iteration, re-mark, difference, etcetera) that make its emergence possible. So, to go back to our problem, it is no longer a question of finding a ground from which an ethical injunction should be *derived* (even less to make such a ground of undecidability itself). We live as *bricoleurs* in a plural world, having to take decisions within incomplete systems of rules (incompletion here means undecidability), and some of these rules are ethical ones. It is because of this constitutive incompletion that decisions have to be taken, but because we are faced with incompletion and not with total dispossession, the problem of a *total* ethical grounding – either through the opening to the otherness of the other, or through any similar metaphysical principle – never arises. ''The time is out of joint'' but, because of that, there is never a beginning – or an end – of time. Democracy does not need to be – and cannot be – radically grounded. We can move to a more democratic society only through a plurality of acts of democratization. The consummation of time – as Derrida knows well – never arrives. Not even as a regulative idea.' (Laclau 1996, 78-79)

beginning of this section – although it appears that Laclau published his argument before Caputo did his. However, what I want to remain focussed on here is the 'agreement' that the messianic – and, therefore, the messianic historical theory which is derived from it and which I am advancing – requires a supplement in the sense that something more needs to be added to the argument. Broadly construed of course, any supplement – that which is added on, one thing to another so as to develop (enrich) our discursive constructs, making them 'more' than they were – opens up to an infinite task in the sense that it *also* reminds us that all our theorisations/(re)presentations are always already missing and, therefore, in need of something (lack, self-difference at the supposed origin, etc.). Another way of expressing this recognition of the unavoidable condition of supplementarity is as the irreducibility of messianic faith in what is to-come, *conditioning*, and *disturbing* every discourse.[42] Recognising the unavoidability and necessity of supplementation (a necessity also picked up on by theorists apart from Laclau[43]), I hope it is clear from the critical resources that I have drawn upon throughout this thesis that my strategy for the avowedly Derridean messianic historical theory I am developing is to supplement it with the perspectives and approaches of John Caputo (from *outside* the field of historical theorisation) together with those of Sande Cohen, Keith Jenkins and Hayden White from *within* it. It is from them that I appropriate further content, emphases, caveats and the identification of specific theoretical questions/lines of enquiry so as to navigate both the formalism charge and to seek to avoid the potential political dangers and compromises that Derrida himself acknowledged in using these messianic related formulas. I will revisit this issue of

[42] For two helpful discussions of the supplement see Morgan-Wortham 2010, 203-204 and Royle 2003, 47-59.

[43] For example David Michael Levin, in his book *The Philosopher's Gaze: Modernity in the Shadows of Enlightenment* (Levin 2003), discusses the necessity of supplementation as follows: 'The attempt at a re-collection of the ground must not perpetuate an abstract relationship to the being of beings. We need it to become engaged with a concrete, material re-collection – a re-collection, for example, of the ground that presences for our sight in the figure-ground *Gestalt*. Moreover, its ontological significance, as a gesture in the direction of openness to the absolutely Other, must be *supplemented* (in Derrida's sense of this term) by the imperative to respond with justice to the claims of all those whose suffering and misery have been marginalized or rendered invisible, thrust into the background and forgetfulness of our perception. As an effort to engage with the openness of the ground, an effort to respond to the absolutely Other, this re-collection of the ground must become, as Marcuse says, ''a remembrance of what could be''. A remembrance with all the critical, disruptive force – and all the compassion – that this imperative has carried in the discourse of the Frankfurt School. A remembrance that is responsible to, and for, the mortals of Otherness whose suffering and injustice the prevailing *Gestalt* of perception is bent on overlooking.' (Levin 2003, 169)

supplementation in ‘Section Three’ in relation to Cohen’s critical analysis of *Specters of Marx* where I aim to show, in the course of responding to his formidable criticisms, that his work is significantly closer to Derrida’s than might at first be thought *and*, this being the case, that the ways in which their synergy informs and enriches messianic historical theorisation maximises disruption to the dominant history culture; causes damage.

I conclude this section with a final point in response to the formalism criticism, one that has been made by Adam Thurschwell in the course of an exchange with Richard Beardsworth regarding the utility of the Derridean messianic *vis-à-vis* socio-political analysis and resuscitating the concept of the political (in Bradley and Fletcher 2010, 15-43). While accepting that it does not add to the ‘intellectual weapons available to the theorist of ‘‘historical actuality’’ [I would question what the word ‘historical adds here] and its ‘‘fields of force’’ ’ (Thurschwell 2010, 32) Thurschwell argues that there is an important ‘dimension’ of the ‘formalism’ of the messianic that is sometimes missed and which he describes as follows:

> What it offers instead is hope – hope that there *is* another way of theorizing, one that does not reduce to just another variation on the theme of sovereign self-interest, whether that sovereign is a state, an individual, or an economic class defined by its shared self-interest. That hope is based on the indelible ethical moment inscribed – purely formally, as the opening to the absolute future, the *à venir*, and therefore to the Other, to freedom, and to responsibility – in every historical moment. The formal element of Derrida’s messianism thus goes not to the content of progressive political thinking but to its motivation. (Thurschwell 2010, 32)

Notwithstanding some qualification being needed in relation to deployment of the words ‘ethical’ (i.e. this usage is very much Levinasian), particularly after our discussion of Laclau and ‘messianism’ – surely Thurschwell means ‘messianic’ or ‘messianicity’? – I agree with this point and (as discussed in previous chapters) think it also goes direct to the *motivation* of historical (re)presentation and its theorisation (as messianic historical theory seeks to foreground).

Section Two: On the quasi-transcendental, fideism (again) 'after finitude' and 'radical atheism': Quentin Meillassoux, Martin Hägglund and the 'anti-religious (re)turn'

In this section I have selected[44] some of the more trenchant objections which I wish to briefly recount so as to *dismiss* rather than *absorb* and, in the process of doing so,

[44] By way of being open about my closures – or acts of exclusion – but also to signal my awareness of their existence I want to comment on some objections/criticisms, specifically regarding the Derridean messianic, that I have *not* selected for discussion in my main text. Not all of these objections/criticisms constitute anti-religious readings. I have not, for example, chosen to discuss Giorgio Agamben's assessment and characterization – as set out in his *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans* (see Agamben 2005, 102-104) – of Derrida's messianic (as arche-trace) as 'a principle of infinite deferment' and of deconstruction as 'a thwarted messianism, a suspension of the messianic' (given that, for Agamben, '[i]n our tradition...[w]hat is essentially messianic and *historic* is the idea that fulfilment is possible by retrieving and revoking foundation, by coming to terms with it') (Agamben 2005, 103-104). Regarding Agamben's writing on the messianic and his 'radical rejection' of Derrida see some comments made by Jean-Luc Nancy to Lorenzo Fabbri in the course of an interview ('Philosophy as Chance: An Interview with Jean-Luc Nancy' – Fabbri 2007): 'He [Agamben] showed himself in this respect to be extremely unjust – I mean philosophically speaking. To speak, as he did, of *différance* as a perpetual delay is to deliberately refuse to read the texts. Or else to write about messianism after Derrida without mentioning him is aggressive and unscholarly (and I know that this was intentional)...And I know that this blatant but never argued hostility was painful to Derrida.' (Nancy in Fabbri 2007, 217) In the same interview Nancy expresses his own doubts about the usage of the term 'messianic' by Derrida: 'It makes sense to me to want to retain from Marx (I would say Marx here rather than Marxism) a certain force or vehemence, a demand for truth and justice, for the truth of justice. I myself did not want to call this messianism, or even messianicity without messianism because there are too many religious connotations attached to this word. I said that in writing, and Derrida was in fact more or less in agreement (and he wrote me to say so), though he also responded in an interesting way (in *Marx & Sons*) by speaking of a transcendental messianicity that would be constitutive of the West even beyond Judeo-Christianity. The idea of the Messiah, even if without Messiah, is fascinating because, when seen through a prism at once Jewish (the Messiah to come) and Christian (the Messiah already come), it defies both the themes of identity and accomplishment (messianic time as outside of time). There is probably an equivalent in the Shiism of the twelfth imam, as well as, though in a less visible way, in the Hegelian coming of Spirit. But in all this, and despite everything, there are for me too many connotations of a salutary or saving event. I would want to go further than this, beginning with my debate with Derrida, which will have had the great merit of confronting head-on a formidable question: how is one to designate an advent that is not an apotheosis?' (Nancy in Fabbri 2007, 218) Nor have I chosen to discuss Catherine Malabou's criticisms of the messianic that can be found in her texts *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing: Dialectic, Destruction, Deconstruction* (2010) – where she affirms 'the impossibility of any transcendence, of any ''disappearance in appearance'', of any messianicity' in favour of 'the political, theological, and ontological resistance of plasticity' which 'survives or transgresses its own deconstruction' as part of an attempt 'in the wake of deconstruction, to bring the trace up to date' by preventing 'the trace's nondeconstructed sanctification' so as to develop a 'new materialist/plastic vision of time, which no longer opposes trace to form' (Malabou 2010, 76-77) – and *Ontology of the Accident: An Essay on Destructive Plasticity* (2012) – where she asserts that '[i]t is not true that the structure of the promise is undeconstructible. The philosophy to come must explore the space of this collapse of messianic structures.' (Malabou 2012, 88) Slavoj Žižek criticises the messianic in his book *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Žižek 2003, 139-141) during which he draws on the work by Laclau that I have already discussed (Žižek 2003, 141). Žižek begins his book with the following words: 'Today, when the historical materialist analysis is receding, practiced as it were under cover, rarely called by its proper name, while the theological dimension is given a new lease on life in the guise of the ''postsecular'' Messianic turn of deconstruction, the time has come to reverse Walter Benjamin's first thesis on the philosophy of history: ''The puppet called 'theology' is to win all the time. It can easily be a match for anyone if it enlists the service of historical materialism, which today, as we know, is wizened and has to keep out of sight''.' (Žižek 2003, 3) In the introduction to their edited collection, *The Politics to Come: Power, Modernity and the Messianic* (2010), Arthur Bradley and Paul Fletcher

make some further points towards a *reloaded* messianic theory (either way what I undertake here constitutes further supplementation). The objections considered are located *outside* of historical theory, and attack either the religious turn/postmodern religion or theology (imprecise and problematical as these terms are but used here as a convenient shorthand) in general and/or (explicitly or implicitly) any specific 'religious' reading of Derrida as exemplified here by Caputo's work. These *anti-religious* and *anti-messianic* readings for the most part – if not entirely – reject any such informed production of contemporary theory in favour of what Caputo describes as 'a more hard-nosed, materialist, realist atheist line of thought' which he thinks constitutes 'a crisis for continental philosophy' that has been triggered 'by the so-called ''religious turn'' ' (Caputo 2011, 32)[45], a term about which he also has

---

helpfully sketch out the terrain of contemporary criticisms of the messianic as follows: 'In many ways, Derrida's deconstruction remains the single most influential contemporary philosophy of the messianic – and it is certainly the one with which the vast majority of contributors to this collection feel obliged to engage – but the ''messianic turn'' has arguably intensified in the years since *Specters of Marx*. To be sure, Giorgio Agamben is the next indispensable point of reference here. Agamben sees messianic time as a means of criticizing the sovereign order – which reaches its apotheosis in the normalization of the state of exception and the politicization of bare life – in the name of a people or community ''to come'' whose belonging-together presupposes no common identity, still less a molecular or biological substance, so much as a shared – if always singular – *potentiality*. However, it is also striking that the messianic has sparked the interest of a group of thinkers who are deeply antagonistic not simply to ''religion'' or ''theology'' per se but to the phenomenological tradition in which it is still invariably received. It is not, of course, that Alain Badiou, Slavoj Žižek and their followers *embrace* the ''messianic turn'' within contemporary thought – quite the contrary – but rather that their critique of the prevailing conditions of contemporary thought still feels it necessary to take the form of a *counter-reading* of the messianic tradition: we can only resist messianism by *affirming* its radical – even perverse – core. According to Badiou, the problem with Levinas, Derrida and their phenomenological successors is that the messianic other to which they appeal is either too ''other'' or never quite ''other'' enough: the ethical is either inflated into a quasi-theological piety – the absolute alterity of the Judaeo-Christian God – or collapses into a flaccid liberal toleration of difference, individuality and so on. For Badiou, what enables us to critique this phenomenological species of messianism is not simply the mathematical ontology of *Being and Event*, though, but a new reading of Pauline messianism itself: Paul's subjective fidelity to the event of Christ's resurrection becomes the basis – not for yet another affirmation of absolute alterity – but for a new universal truth that collapses the difference between Judaic Law and Greek *Logos*. Just as Badiou counters Levinas's messianic alterity with a messianic universality, so Slavoj Žižek seeks to resist Derrida's messianic futurity by celebrating the revolutionary urgency of Pauline messianism. If Žižek is disdainful of what he sees as the vacuous piety of Derrida's appeals to an empty, infinitely deferred messianic arrival, his critique takes the form of a renewed insistence upon the unconditional *urgency* of the messianic moment. In Žižek's account, what defines Pauline messianism is that the expected messiah has *already* arrived – we are already redeemed – even if the full implications of that redemption have not yet unfolded.' (Bradley and Fletcher 2010, 3-4)

[45] At the start of a brilliant ninety-two page (rebuttal) article – 'The Return of Anti-Religion: From Radical Atheism to Radical Theology' (Caputo 2011) – which I discuss later in this section, Caputo describes the context in which he is writing as follows: ' ''Postmodern theology'' has come of age. It now has its own counter- movement, a new generation of philosophers marching under the flag of materialism, realism, and anti-religion who complain that the theologians are back at their old trick of appropriating attempts to kill off religion in order to make religion stronger. A younger generation has become impatient with Derrida and with all the *soixante-huitaires*, the dead white elders who dominated continental philosophy for nearly half a century, fed up with their so called relativism and postmodern

doubts.[46] Two of the most formidable but very different examples of these readings are those by Quentin Meillassoux in his book *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency* published in 2008 (hereafter *After Finitude*), and Martin Hägglund in his book *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life* also published in 2008 (hereafter *Radical Atheism*). I want to stress that it is not my intention here to undertake a detailed critical reading of either text *qua* text because both of them have already been subjected to considerable critical attention elsewhere.[47] Rather, having outlined their respective theses I want to concentrate on several key aspects relevant to the Derrida I have expounded here.

---

religion. They are tired of hearing about undecidability, religious turns, and the ethics of the other, and they are looking for a more hard-nosed, materialist, realist atheist line of thought. This presents a crisis for continental philosophy whose style of thinking from Kant to the present is being challenged by a new and in my view justified complaint that continental philosophy has been resistant to and defensive about the hard sciences. The crisis is all the more interesting because it has been set off in no small part by the so-called ''religious turn'': if religion is where continental philosophy leads us, the argument seems to go, then so much the worse for continental philosophy! The specters of religion have sparked panic selling in the market for continental thinking as we know it. This is an issue that must be addressed. Given the historical violence religion has provoked and the reactionary meanness and stupidity of the Religious Right in American politics today, I am no less anxious about ''religion''. That makes it all the more important for me to sort out what I am saying and what I am not, since my own work on Derrida and religion, as Michael Naas points out clearly, is no less informed by protecting what Derrida calls *laiceté*. I try to work from a position both within and without religion, although the Christian Right considers me something of a resident alien.' (Caputo 2011, 32-33)

[46] In the course of responding to criticisms of his work by Martin Hägglund – discussed later in this section – Caputo is clear that 'I am not advocating a ''religious turn'' in deconstruction. I do not think and I cannot find any place where I have ever said that there is any such turn. I agree with Derrida that the whole idea behind ''deconstruction'' has always been the same, from OG [*Of Grammatology*] to 2004: a hyperbolic movement that passes through the rule governed to the hyperbolic force of singularity, which he called in OG the ''passage through the transcendental'', where the whole point is to keep the future open, whatever future happens to be under discussion (from literature to God). The idea has always been to keep the play of traces open in whatever order one happens to find oneself, and to ward off and evade the forces that want to cut it off. There is no religious turn because the experience of the impossible, and hence the religious structure, ''has been there from the very beginning'', as he himself says [see Derrida 2003b, 134]. It was there back when the usual subject matter of deconstruction was literature not ethics or politics.' (Caputo 2011, 121)

[47] For example critical engagements with Meillassoux's *After Finitude* by a number of authors can be found in the edited collection *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism* (Bryant, Srnicek, and Harman 2011); see pages 84-91 (Alberto Toscano), 92-113 (Adrian Johnson), and 114-29 (Martin Häglund). There have been several debates concerning Hägglund's arguments/criticisms in *Radical Atheism*. One exchange with Ernesto Laclau can be found in *Diacritics* (Vol. 38, No. 1-2, Spring-Summer 2008); see pages 180-189 (Laclau), 190-199 (Hägglund). Another exchange with Derek Attridge is in *Derrida Today* (Vol. 2, No. 2, November 2009 – see pages 271-281 [Attridge] – and Vol. 3, No. 2, November 2010 – see pages 295-305 [Häglund]). A third exchange with John Caputo is in the *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* (Vol. 11, No. 2, Spring 2011 – see pages 32-124 [Caputo] – 126-150 [Häglund]). A special issue of *CR: The New Centennial* (Vol. 9, No. 1, 2009) – entitled 'Living On: Of Martin Häglund' – was also dedicated to his work and includes various critical responses to *Radical Atheism*.

Meillassoux's undeniably brilliant if ultimately unconvincing work *After Finitude* is, to put it mildly, intended to give supporters of that which passes under the banner of the 'religious turn' in contemporary theory pause for thought.[48] His expressed intention is to 'reactivate the Cartesian thesis in contemporary terms' which he states as follows:

> [A]*ll those aspects of the object that can be formulated in mathematical terms can be meaningfully conceived as properties of the object in itself*. (Meillassoux 2008, 3)[49]

Meillassoux confirms that upholding this statement involves the defence of a twofold thesis:

> [O]n the one hand we acknowledge that the sensible only exists as a subject's relation to the world; but on the other hand, we maintain that the mathematizable properties of the object are exempt from the constraint of such a relation, and that they are effectively in the object in the way in which I conceive them, whether I am in relation with this object or not. (Meillassoux 2008, 3)

He acknowledges that such a thesis may be regarded as 'absurd' in the contemporary philosophical milieu (Meillassoux 2008, 3)[50] and spends some time explaining why this is so. This involves an initial painstaking 'setting-up' of the idea of 'correlation'

---

[48] Here I am in agreement with Adrian Johnston who has written that '*After Finitude* has many striking virtues, especially in terms of its crystalline clarity and ingenious creativeness, and deserves credit for having played a role in inspiring some much-needed discussions in contemporary Continental philosophy' (Johnston, 2011, 113). I also want to emphasise that I deliberately limit my comments in this section to Meillassoux's *After Finitude* and do not consider the published excerpts from his work *The Divine Inexistence* (*L'Inexistence divine*) (in Harman 2011, 175-238) or his text *The Number and the Siren* (Meillassoux 2011).

[49] Meillassoux immediately goes on to expand upon this statement: 'All those aspects of the object that can give rise to a mathematical thought (to a formula or to digitalization) rather than to a perception or sensation can be meaningfully turned into properties of the thing not only as it is with me, but also as it is without me.' (Meillassoux 2008, 3)

[50] 'The reason why this thesis is almost certain to appear insupportable to a contemporary philosopher is because it is resolutely pre-critical – it seems to represent a regression to the ''naïve'' stance of dogmatic metaphysics. For what we have just claimed is that thought is capable of discriminating between those properties of the world which are a function of our relation to it, and those properties of the world as it is ''in itself'', subsisting indifferently of our relation to it. But we all know that such a thesis has become indefensible, and this not only since Kant, but even since Berkeley. It is an indefensible thesis because thought cannot get *outside itself* in order to compare the world as it is ''in itself'' to the world as it is ''for us'', and thereby distinguish what is a function of our relation to the world from what belongs to the world alone.' (Meillassoux 2008, 3-4). Richard Rorty (who is not referred to in *After Finitude*) has much to say about the situation that Meillassoux describes here and is trying to 'get out of' – see his *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Rorty 1989, *passim*).

that Meillassoux perceives as 'the central notion of modern philosophy since Kant', defined by him as our always being restricted (i.e. only ever having access) to the 'correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other.' (Meillassoux 2008, 5) 'Correlationism' is what he designates as 'any current of thought which maintains the unsurpassable character of the correlation so defined' and on this basis regards 'every philosophy which disavows naïve realism' as 'a variant of correlationism.' (Meillassoux 2008, 5) More precisely, correlationism is to be understood as

> disqualifying the claim that it is possible to consider the realms of subjectivity and objectivity independently of one another. Not only does it become necessary to insist that we never grasp an object 'in itself', in isolation from its relation to the subject, but it also becomes necessary to maintain that we can never grasp a subject that would not always-already be related to an object. (Meillassoux 2008, 5)

In opposition to this disqualification of correlationism, and whilst stressing that he has 'no desire to call into question the contemporary desuetude of metaphysics' in terms of its 'illusory manufacturing of necessary entities' (i.e. various dogmatic/absolutist claims to the necessary existence of things that *must* be the way they are), Meillassoux – in accordance with his previously stated intentions – is resolved that '*we must uncover an absolute necessity that does not reinstate any form of absolutely necessary entity*.' (Meillassoux 2008, 34)[51] Here it is important to note the symptomatic use of the imperative 'must' as it and other such words of command occur frequently in the early (set-up) stages of Meillassoux's text, an issue I will return to later in my discussion.

Therefore, in order to demonstrate and defend his thesis it is this construal of correlationism that Meillassoux sets out to *demolish*[52] and specifically that variety of

[51] 'In other words', Meillassoux clarifies, 'we must think an absolute necessity without thinking anything that *is* absolutely necessary...

...our problem consists in demonstrating that not all speculation is metaphysical, and not every absolute is dogmatic – it is possible to envisage an *absolutizing* thought that would not be *absolutist*.' (Meillassoux 2008, 34)

[52] I agree with Alberto Toscano that there is an '*ideological operation*, aimed at terminating correlationism's collusion with irrationalism' (Toscano, 2011: 84) going on in *After Finitude* and, in that sense, its arguments on how definitions and practices of knowledge should be rethought can be regarded

it which he calls 'the strong model of correlationism' that he sums up in the proposition '*it is unthinkable that the unthinkable be impossible*.' (Meillassoux 2008, 41)[53] His characterization of *one* type of 'strong correlationism' (he envisages there being *two* 'fundamental types' of the aforementioned that can be distinguished in relation to their differing responses to the question '[D]oes the de-absolutization of thought also imply the *de-universalization* of thought?' – Meillassoux 2008, 42-43[54]) subsumes specifically all of

> those philosophers, such as the partisans of 'radical finitude' or of 'postmodernity', who dismiss every variety of universal as a mystificatory relic of the old metaphysics [and who] will claim it is necessary to think the facticity of our relation to the world in terms of the *situation that is itself finite*, and hence modifiable by right; a situation which it would be illusory to think we could gain enough distance from to formulate statements that would be valid for all humans, in all times and all places. Accordingly, the correlations which determine 'our' world will be identified with a situation anchored in a determinate era of the history of being, or in a form of life harbouring its own language-games, or in a determinate cultural and interpretative community, etc. (Meillassoux 2008, 43)

Meillassoux argues that the 'contemporary predominance' of the strong correlationism that he has thematized is attributable to and intertwined with 'the immunity from the constraints of conceptual rationality which religious belief currently seems to enjoy.' (Meillassoux 2008, 43) He goes on to formulate 'the fundamental postulate of strong correlationism' as '*being and thinking must be thought capable of being wholly other*' which he sees as a trajectory culminating in

---

as one more example ('inauguration'?) of a new (or same old?) political formation that brings with it constraints on what can be said and written, i.e. closing down the 'religious turn'.

[53] This proposition is immediately clarified by Meillassoux as follows: 'I cannot provide a rational ground for the absolute impossibility of a contradictory reality, or for the nothingness of all things, even if the meaning of these terms remains indeterminate.' (Meillassoux 2008, 41)

[54] The other fundamental type of strong correlationism contrasted with that set out in the next quotation in my main text following this footnote – and, specifically, differing in its response to this question of whether the de-absolutization of thought also implies its de-universalization – is characterized by Meillassoux as follows: 'Those philosophers who respond to this question in the negative will situate themselves as heirs of Kant's critical legacy and will attempt, in the wake of Kant, to uncover the universal conditions for our relation to the world, whether these be construed as conditions for empirical science, conditions for linguistic communication between individuals, conditions for the perceptibility of the entity, etc. But even a ''strong'' correlationist who claims to remain faithful to the spirit of Critical philosophy will not allow herself to justify the universality of non-contradiction by invoking its putative absoluteness – rather than characterizing the former as a property of the thing-in-itself, she will construe it as a universal condition for the sayability of the given, or for intersubjective communication – it will be a norm of the thinkable, not of the possible.' (Meillassoux 2008, 42-43)

the ‘disappearance of the pretension to *think* any absolutes, *but not in the disappearance of absolutes*’ (Meillassoux 2008 44). This is because, generated by awareness of its own ‘irremediable limitation’, the reasoning of correlationism ‘legitimates *all* those discourses that claim to access an absolute’ with the crucial proviso ‘*that nothing in these discourses resembles a rational justification of their validity*.’ (Meillassoux 2008, 44-45) Meillassoux argues that ‘*by forbidding reason any claim to the absolute*’ the situation that we are consequently faced with is that ‘*the end of metaphysics has taken the form of an exacerbated return of the religious*.’ (Meillassoux 2008, 45)[55] This situation is in turn related to Meillassoux’s identification and assault on *fideism* which is where I want to concentrate my discussion. For him ‘the de-absolutization of thought boils down to the mobilization of a *fideist* argument’[56] which he regards as ‘fundamental’ rather than ‘historical’; in other words, it is not a case of a fideism belonging to one determinate religion or concrete messianism but ‘a fideism that has become thought’s defence of religiosity in general’ (Meillassoux 2008, 46). His characterization is that ‘[f]ideism invariably consists in a sceptical argument’ aimed at both ‘the pretension of metaphysics’ and ‘of reason more generally’ in terms of the (in)ability of either ‘to access an absolute truth capable of shoring up’ or, all the more importantly, ‘of denigrating...the value of faith.’ (Meillassoux 2008, 46) It is in this context that Meillassoux sees ‘the contemporary end of metaphysics’ as ‘victory of such a fideism’[57], going so far as to state that:

[55] Meillassoux provides this clarificatory sketch of the situation he has just asserted: ‘Or again: the end of ideologies has taken the form of the unqualified victory of religiosity. There are certainly historical reasons for the contemporary resurgence of religiosity, which it would be naïve to reduce to developments in philosophy alone; but the fact that thought, under the pressure of correlationism, has relinquished its right to criticize the irrational when the latter lays claim to the absolute, should not be underestimated when considering the extent of this phenomenon.’ (Meillassoux 2008, 45)

[56] ‘Once the absolute has become unthinkable, even atheism, which also targets God’s inexistence in the manner of an absolute, is reduced to a mere belief, and hence to a religion, albeit of a nihilist kind. Faith is pitched against faith, since what determines our fundamental choices cannot be rationally proved.’ (Meillassoux 2008, 46)

[57] ‘But it is our conviction that the contemporary end of metaphysics is nothing other than the victory of such a fideism…we see scepticism as an authentic fideism, which is dominant today, but in a form that has become ‘‘essential’’, which is to say, *one that has shrugged off every particular obedience to a determinate belief system*. Historical fideism is not the ‘‘guise’’ that irreligiosity wore at its beginnings; rather it is religiosity as such, which adopted the ‘‘guise’’ of a specific apologia (on behalf of one religion or belief system rather than another), before revealing itself to be the general argument for the superiority of piety over thought. *The contemporary end of metaphysics is an end which, being sceptical, could only be a religious end of metaphysics*.’ (Meillassoux 2008, 46)

> *The contemporary end of metaphysics is an end which, being sceptical, could only be a religious end of metaphysics*. (Meillassoux 2008, 46)

What has emerged according to Meillassoux's analysis is 'a generalized becoming-religious of thought, viz., in *a fideism of any belief whatsoever*.' (Meillassoux 2008, 46)[58] Although he goes on to note that 'the religionizing of reason does not designate the act of faith as such' and that faith 'can obviously prove extremely valuable'[59], he nevertheless designates the contemporary closure of metaphysics as 'sceptico-fideist' one and identifies fideism as 'merely the *other name* for strong correlationism.'[60] (Meillassoux 2008, 48)

Now, given that I have already defended a certain conception of fideism by promulgating messianic historical theory, my response to Meillassoux's text is obviously informed by this; indeed, it might be said to constitute messianic historical theory at work. For messianic historical theory is preoccupied with questions such as 'What presuppositions or axioms are being maintained in this text?' More specifically in the particular case of Meillassoux, it might be concerned with the following enquiries: To/in the name of what does Meillassoux express fidelity? Isn't there, in Meillassoux's text, a primacy placed on a particular vision, similar to that which can be read in work that is informed by affirmations of the

[58] 'Scepticism with regard to the metaphysical absolute thereby legitimates *de jure* every variety whatsoever of belief in an absolute, the best as well as the worst. The destruction of the metaphysical rationalization of Christian theology has resulted in a generalized becoming-religious of thought, viz., in *a fideism of any belief whatsoever*. We will call this becoming-religious of thought, which finds its paradoxical support in a radically sceptical argumentation, the *religionizing* [*enreligement*] of reason: this expression, which echoes that of rationalization, denotes a movement of thought which is the exact contrary to that of the progressive rationalization of Judaeo-Christianity under the influence of Greek philosophy.' (Meillassoux 2008, 46-47)

[59] 'It is important to note that the religionizing of reason does not designate the act of faith as such – since the latter can obviously prove extremely valuable. The religionizing of reason designates the contemporary form of the *connection* between thinking and piety – and hence a movement of *thought* itself relative to piety; specifically, its non-metaphysical subordination to the latter. Better still: its subordination to piety via a specific mode of the destruction of metaphysics.' (Meillassoux 2008, 47)

[60] 'Thus, the contemporary closure of metaphysics seems to us to amount to a ''sceptico-fideist'' closure of metaphysics, dominated by what one could call the thought of the ''wholly-other''...For the apex of fideism occurs at the point where it becomes the thought of piety's superiority to thinking, without any specific content being privileged, since it is a matter of establishing through thinking that it is the prerogative of piety, and of piety alone, to posit its own contents. Accordingly, the contemporary devolution towards the wholly-other (the otherwise empty object of the profession of faith) is the strict and inevitable obverse of interpreting the obsolescence of the principle of sufficient reason as reason's discovery of its own essential inability to uncover an absolute – thus, fideism is merely the *other name* for strong correlationism.' (Meillassoux 2008, 48)

religious/messianic (e.g. those unnamed but obvious targets of Meillassoux's work: Derrida, Caputo, Gianni Vattimo, Richard Kearney, etc.)? Can any fidelity to any project ever be recuperated from fideism? Aren't all fidelities, including those of Meillassoux's (and of his intellectual supporter Alain Badiou[61]), however much they reject hermeneutic conceptions of philosophy as openness, as question or questioning (given, in large part, that they perceive them as paving the way for a return of the religious[62]), inescapably loyal to and indeed reproductive of fideism? Crudely, isn't it just a matter of a preferred sensibility that constitutes the only significant difference between such visions given that both solicit fidelity and call forth a certain kind of imaginative desire and creative hospitality (affirming certain emancipations to come) that blurs or even collapses the boundaries of worked-up 'piety and thought' binaries? In exploring these questions messianic historical theory argues that there is a disavowed messianic structure (of a Derridean kind) in Meillassoux's work (because it structures *every* discourse, including speculative materialist, anti-correlational ones) which both generates and destabilises his critique of, and resistance to, the religious turn. As such *After Finitude* might be read as the latest in a long line of brilliant yet futile attempts to escape the messianic. Accordingly, such a messianic theorisation of Meillassoux's work is intended to *both* honour it *and* guard against it installing an indirect soft-coercion about things that can no longer be said (counter intuitively perhaps given that this is the very criticism that Meillassoux makes of fideism and strong correlationism). It reads Meillassoux's work as an exercise in highlighting contradictions that give way to disjunctions – disjunctions being harder to resolve – that are present in every text (but in this case in relation to discussion of the religious turn in contemporary

[61] Badiou wrote the preface to *After Finitude* (see Meillassoux 2008, *vi-viii*).

[62] Badiou, in the course of a discussion of Althusser, positions himself in relation to 'the return of the religious' as follows: 'In Althusser's *dispositif*, the great virtue of the affirmative form of philosophy – the thesis of the thesis – is that it rejects any idea of philosophy as question or questioning. Within philosophy itself, it also distances it from all hermeneutic conceptions of philosophy. This is an extremely precious heritage. The idea of philosophy as questioning and openness always paves the way, as we know, for the return of the religious. I use ''religion'' here to describe the axiom according to which a truth is always a prisoner of the arcane of meaning and a matter for interpretation and exegesis. There is an Althusserian brutality to the concept of philosophy that recalls, in that respect, Nietzsche. Philosophy is affirmative and combative, and it is not a captive of the somewhat viscous delights of deferred interpretation. In terms of philosophy, Althusser maintains the presupposition of atheism, just as others, such as Lacan, maintain it in anti-philosophy. That presupposition can be expressed in just one sentence: truths have no meaning. It follows that philosophy is an act and not an interpretation.' (Badiou 2009, 67)

theory) and understands these as a set of political choices (decisions put into starker relief) and/or the limiting of political options that raises the ante on existential choices. In other words, messianic historical theory *resists* any axiomatic 'ruling out' of certain discussion so as to 'let the future open' precisely by focussing on the *actuality* of 'reflexive' and metacritical moves, codings (how thought has been organized to make various commitments to ideals, theories, hypotheses, associations, logics, predictions, etc. – see Cohen 1986) and poetics (the ways in which attention is given in a text to the process of its own construction) in every text and offers up for debate the tensions that emerge through this process of *dwelling on these fidelities or faith/fideistic commitments* (disavowed or not).

Whether one follows a Badiouian notion of *fidelity* to the event ('a sustained investigation of the situation, under the imperative of the event itself...that is never inevitable or necessary' – Badiou 2001, 68) or that proposed by Richard Kearney, *après* Paul Ricoeur and Charles Taylor (*fidelity* understood as 'narrative wagers' that 'differ from Pascalian wagers in that they are more about imagination and hospitality than calculation and blind leaps' – Kearney 2010, *xvii*), I think it is difficult not to understand Meillassoux's fidelity as structured by the Derridean/Caputoian messianic expression of radical faith (*foi*). Such an expression of faith exceeds and delimits 'mere' belief and Meillassoux is right to try and differentiate the two. In response to a question posed by Graham Harman, Meillassoux is adamant that:

> I do not 'believe' in an objective world independent of thought because I maintain that it is possible to *demonstrate*, in a precise sense, that such a world external to thought does indeed exist, and necessarily so. I 'know' that there is such a world – and that is what makes me a materialist, not a believer.' (Harman 2011, 168)

As previously noted he is just as clear in *After Finitude* that 'the religionizing of reason does not designate the act of faith as such' given that 'the latter can obviously prove extremely valuable.' (Meillassoux 2008, 47) Yet, can such a distinction – the religionizing of reason separated off from acts of faith/fideism – be maintained? What coding, so as to service the ideological operation to which Meillassoux gives

fidelity, is going on here? When we are told of the 'sceptico-fideist' closure of metaphysics that is 'dominated by what one could call the thought of the ''wholly-other'' ' (Meillassoux 2008, 48) we need to ask how this can be understood alongside his statement that

> absolute contingency...designates a *pure possibility*; one which may never be realized. For we cannot claim to know for sure whether or not our world, although it is contingent, will actually come to an end one day. We know in accordance with the principle of unreason that this is a real possibility...but we also know that there is nothing that necessitates it. (Meillassoux 2008, 62)

Reading Meillassoux against himself, doesn't the above quotation provide an at least partial example of the *fideist* condition (the messianic experience of im-possibility) – albeit not an affirmatory one – that he diagnoses in the first? To what extent do his criticisms of fideism accurately identify the tensions in his *own* attempts to maintain the *absolute necessity of contingency*? As already noted, this assertion regarding absolute contingency is preceded (and followed) by numerous *imperatives* – convictions, words of command, calls to faithful action because the stakes are high, etc. For example, Meillassoux impresses upon the reader that:

> If thought is to *avoid* an infinite regress while submitting to the principle of reason, it is *incumbent* upon it to uncover a reason that would prove capable of accounting for everything, including itself – a reason not conditioned by any other reason, and which only the ontological argument is capable of uncovering. (Meillassoux 2008, 33, italics mine)

As Graham Harman has pointed out, Meillassoux assumes that infinite regress 'is impermissible, without explaining why' (Harman 2011, 34). For such axioms, groundless faith-based starting points, are actually necessary to get his ideological operation underway. Further on, the anti-fideistic imperatives[63] (ideological

[63] Of course no discursive construct (including this one) is free from imperatives/words of command. Indeed my argument is that what we are witnessing in the debates over the return of religion and anti-religion in contemporary cultural criticism is the struggle between rival sets of imperatives/commands (affirm, reject, etc.), one set of axiomatic starting points for another. Are not both sets of discourses demonstrative (affirmative – avowedly or not) of a kind a messianic structure? The terrain of undecidability?

operations) – '[w]e *must* convert facticity into the real property'[64]; '[w]e *must* grasp how the ultimate absence of reason...is an absolute ontological property'[65] (Meillassoux 2008, 53, italics mine) – continue to drive the argument and, as such, can be read as moves with and within a groundless fidelity: they are marked precisely by the *fideism* they are seeking to rule out.

It is therefore unsurprising that in a review of Christopher Watkin's *Difficult Atheism: Post-Theological Thinking in Alain Badiou, Jean-Luc Nancy and Quentin Meillassoux* (Watkin 2011), Caputo has underscored this disavowed fideism in Meillassoux's work, situating it thus:

> The very notions of thinking and rationality, of necessity and contingency are all contingent and subject to change in the future. If they are not, then they are necessary and exempt from the principle of the factial.[66] Meillassoux either erects a God-like idol out of thinking and rationality (parasitic atheism) or requires an act of faith that reason will not mutate under the force of hyperchaos (ascetic atheism).' (Caputo 2012b, 5)

The requirement that to hold a conviction that reason will not mutate in order to operationalise the argument is, and despite the coding of ascetic atheism (and, given that, as the historian Stefanos Geroulanos has written in his study of the emergence of antihumanism in various intellectual spheres in interwar and postwar France entitled *An Atheism that is Not Humanist Emerges in French Thought*, atheism can be understood as 'the promise of a world without promises' – Geroulanos 2010, 315[67] – which, for me, is still a promise marked by *fidelity*), still an act of *faith*.

[64] 'We must convert facticity into the real property whereby everything and every world *is* without reason, and is thereby *capable of actually becoming otherwise without reason*.' (Meillassoux 2008, 53)
[65] 'We must grasp how the ultimate absence of reason, which we will refer to as ''unreason'', is an absolute ontological property, and not the mark of the finitude of our knowledge.' (Meillassoux 2008, 53)
[66] Earlier in his review – before this quotation – Caputo provides a succinct explanation of Meillassoux's 'factial': 'The ''speculative'' position is to assert the necessity of contingency, the necessity *that* everything is contingent, which Meillassoux calls the principle of the ''factia'' (*le factual*). It cannot be that the contingency of things is itself contingent...' (Caputo 2012b, 4).
[67] Geroulanos concludes his work of intellectual history that focuses on a period in France running, approximately, from 1930 to 1954 with the following paragraph, a paragraph that includes this description of 'the promise of a world without promises': '[T]his book ends at a moment of profound ambiguity in French thought, a moment that anticipates the different antihumanisms and new humanisms of the 1960s and 1970s: from structuralist antihumanism to the celebratory humanisms of late Marxism and May '68, from the anticolonial thinkers of the 1950s like Franz Fanon to the new theorists of democracy of the 1970s like Claude Lefort, Pierre Rosanvallon, and Cornelius Castoriadis, and to the many postmodern obsessions and critiques of the 1970s and 1980s. All of these movements owed a great

Further problematization of Meillassoux's text is offered up – slightly more surprisingly – by Žižek in his *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (Žižek 2012). Here Žižek argues (and in doing so provides an example the kind of intellectual move that those holding to messianic historical theorisation will have frequent recourse to making) that:

> [W]hen Meillassoux sarcastically notes how the Kantian critique of idealist rational metaphysics opens up the space for irrational fideism, he strangely overlooks how the same is true of his own position: does not his materialist critique of correlationism also open up the path to a new divinity? (Žižek 2012, 627-8)

In a closely related point the intellectual historian Knox Peden has commented[68] that '[i]n Meillassoux's vision, God remains a possibility in the future', not due to any 'covert messianism' but, rather, 'because Meillassoux is *philosophically committed* [which I think can be understood as a certain *fidelity* or *faith* at work] to the notion of absolute contingency.'[69] (Peden 2010, 588, italics mine) Irrespective of any

---

deal (to paraphrase Pascal's famous term) to the reproportioning of man that occurred in the second quarter of the twentieth century, even if they frequently doubted or refused this debt. At the same time, this postwar moment was one that could see the atheist humanism that emerged with the Enlightenment and the nineteenth century as in need of being overcome and perhaps indeed coming to a close. This is the goal established and pursued with the new nonhumanist atheism and the turn toward a negative anthropology. Insofar as the early postwar period is the moment when European thought became conscious of its own finitude, we can say, without doubt or velleity, that antihumanism is precisely the signature of this self-consciousness: the promise of a world without promises, the violence of a world hoping to ending violence, the humanity of men no longer able or willing to trust any humanity at all.' (Geroulanos 2010, 314-315)

[68] Peden (2010) provides a succinct and helpful reading of Meillassoux's *After Finitude* in the course of an incisive review of Ray Brassier's (2007) book *Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction*.

[69] In relation to this point made by Peden regarding Meillassoux's philosophical commitment to absolute contingency, Žižek has helpfully summarized 'the properly *speculative* crux of Meillassoux's argument', namely 'how to justify this passage from (or reversal of) epistemological limitation to (or into) positive ontological feature' (Žižek 2012, 635). Žižek notes that 'for the transcendentalist, there is always the radical ''possibility of ignorance'' [Meillassoux 2008, 58]: we are ignorant of how reality really is, there is always the possibility that reality is radically other than how it appears to us.' (Žižek 2012, 635) He then cites a passage from *After Finitude* which he thinks illustrates the 'deeply Hegelian way' in which Meillassoux makes 'the step from this epistemological limitation to the unique access to the absolute' by locating 'in this very point the paradoxical overlapping of possibility and actuality'; the citation from *After Finitude* that Žižek provides reads as follows: 'How are you able to *think* this ''possibility of ignorance''...? The truth is that you are only able to think this possibility of ignorance because you have *actually* thought the *absoluteness* of this possibility, which is to say, its non-correlational character.' (Meillassoux 2008, 58) Žižek then goes on to remark of this passage that '[t]he ontological proof of God is here inverted in a materialist way: it is not that the very fact that we can think the possibility of a Supreme Being entails its actuality; it is, on the contrary, that the very fact that we can think the possibility of the absolute contingency of reality, the possibility of its being-other, of the radical gap between the way reality appears to us and the way it is in itself, entails its actuality, that is, entails that reality in itself is radically contingent.' (Žižek 2012, 635) One issue here is whether this argument could

concrete/determinate ‘messianism’ (‘covert’ or otherwise) is not the Derridean *messianic* structure of experience ‘at/in play’ here?

But, even more important for my argument is Žižek’s point regarding Meillassoux’s rejection of ‘the transcendental position’, important given that my development and defence of a messianic historical theory is heavily dependent on the concept of the *quasi-transcendental* a discussion of which Žižek’s criticism helpfully leads us into. Žižek asserts that:

> Meillassoux is also too hasty in dismissing the transcendental position: (what we experience as) reality is always transcendentally constituted…although language is ultimately part of reality, reality (the way it appears to us) is always already transcendentally constituted through language. Or, to put it another way: we cannot gain full neutral access to reality *because we are part of it*. The epistemological distortion of our access to reality is the result of our *inclusion* in it, not of our distance from it…the agent of this distortion is desire’ (Žižek 2012, 646)

Accordingly, I would suggest that it is precisely this ‘hasty’ move on Meillassoux’s part that constitutes, ironically, a fideistic position and which thus accounts for the fact that he cannot fully accomplish his ‘strategic jettisoning of the transcendental’ in ‘an attempt to see the problem anew’ (Ennis 2011, 47). What has been missed or unaccounted for in *After Finitude* is, as Žižek has again pointed out (although in the course of so doing launching an attack on Derrida as being ‘caught in the circle of what Meillassoux calls ‘‘failed correlationism’’ ’ – Žižek 2012, 642[70]), the importance of the ‘quasi’ or – as Žižek has Derrida describing it (Žižek 2012, 642) –

---

not just as well be represented as a fideistic/undecidable decision or imposition of will based on a fidelity to this absolute possibility and a groundless principle of non-contradiction. Such a fideistic decision/imposition is what I think is taking place in the speculative process as described by Meillassoux: ‘[S]peculation proceeds by *accentuating* thought’s relinquishment of the principle of reason to the point where this relinquishment is converted into a principle, which alone allows us to grasp the fact that there is absolutely *no* ultimate Reason, whether thinkable or unthinkable.’ (Meillassoux 2008, 63) How, apart from a fideistic desire/drive/decision, can such accentuation *convert* concepts and discourses (and decisions made about them, even ones of perceived relinquishment) into principles?

[70] ‘Incidentally, if there is a philosopher who effectively seems to be caught in the circle of what Meillassoux calls ‘‘failed correlationism’’, it is Derrida, whose thought oscillates in its deconstructive analyses between two poles: on the one hand, he emphasizes that there is no direct outside (of metaphysics), that the very attempt to directly break out of the circle of logocentrism has to rely on a metaphysical conceptual frame; on the other hand, he sometimes treats writing and difference as a kind of general ontological category, talking about ‘‘traces’’ and ‘‘writing’’ in nature itself (genetic codes, etc.).’ (Žižek 2012, 642*n*28)

the 'arche' transcendental[71], a concept which can best be understood by returning to Derrida's work along with that of some of his more acute commentators.

There are, of course, various 'types' of transcendental. It was, as Derrida acknowledged, Rodolphe Gasché who developed his own reference to the 'quasi-transcendental'.[72] In his *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection* (1986) Gasché described metaphoricity as a 'quasitranscendental' and stated that he was deploying the 'quasi-' so as to indicate that it has 'a structure and a function similar to transcendentals without actually being one.' (Gasché 1986, 316)[73] He defined the quasi-transcendental by 'demarcating' it from other formulations in Heidegger and Kant[74] and representing it as a function of Derrida's explorations of 'the conditions of possibility and impossibility of the logic of

[71] Derrida linked the thinking of the trace – including the arche-trace – to the transcendental in the following way: 'The trace is not only the disappearance of origin – within the discourse that we sustain and according to the path that we follow it means that the origin did not even disappear, that it was never constituted except reciprocally by a nonorigin, the trace, which thus becomes the origin of the origin. From then on, to wrench the concept of the trace from the classical scheme, which would derive it from a presence or from an originary nontrace and which would make of it an empirical mark, one must indeed speak of an originary trace or arche-trace. Yet we know that that concept destroys its name and that, if all begins with the trace, there is above all no originary trace. We must then *situate*, as a simple *moment of the discourse*, the phenomenological reduction and the Husserlian reference to a transcendental experience. To the extent that the concept of experience in general – and of transcendental experience, in Husserl in particular – remains governed by the theme of presence, it participates in the movement of the reduction of the trace...*That is why a thought of the trace can no more break with a transcendental phenomenology than be reduced to it*. Here as elsewhere, to pose the problem in terms of a choice...is to confuse very different levels, paths, and styles. In the deconstruction of the arche, one does not make a choice.' (Derrida 1997b, 61-62)

[72] 'It is because of the highly unstable, and slightly bizarre character of the transcendental that, in *Glas*, I wrote ''quasi-transcendental'' and Rodolphe Gasché has made a great deal of this ''quasi''.' (Derrida 1996b, 81)

[73] 'Metaphoricity, because of its structure and the problems it accounts for, is thus not to be confused with its empirical (philosophic or literary) homologue. In Derrida's sense, metaphoricity is a structure of referral that accounts for the possibility and impossibility of the philosophical discourse, yet not insofar as this discourse may be construed as literary (sensible, fictional, and so on) because of its inevitable recourse to metaphor and poetic devices, but insofar as it is a *general discourse on the universal*. The literary dimension of the philosophical text is by nature incapable of pointing to, let alone accounting for, this constituting nonorigin of philosophy. Seen in this perspective, metaphoricity is a transcendental concept *of sorts*. Although it is likely that the term I propose will meet with a good bit of disapproval, I shall call metaphoricity a *quasitranscendental*. With *quasi-* I wish to indicate that metaphoricity has a structure and a function similar to transcendentals without actually being one.' (Gasché 1986, 316)

[74] 'In conclusion, let me elaborate briefly on what I understand by such a notion. It certainly makes sense here to define the quasitranscendental by demarcating if from that to which it seems to correspond in Heidegger's philosophy, from what I should like to call *finite* or *immanent transcendentals*. Awaiting further systematic and technical clarification of the notion of a finite transcendental, and its difference from and continuity with Kant's a priori forms of objective knowledge – forms that characterize the finite subjectivity and reason of the human subject of cognition – I shall call finite those structures in Heidegger's fundamental ontology that characterize *Dasein*. Since *Dasein* is, according to the Heidegger of *Being and Time*, the exemplary locus of the understanding of the meaning of Being – that is, of the *transcendens* pure and simple – the finite transcendentals are those existential structures that constitute Being as Being understood and interpreted.' (Gasché 1986, 316-317)

philosophy as a discursive enterprise.' (Gasché 1986, 317) As Gasché put it, the notion of quasi-transcendentals 'upon which philosophy's universality is grounded are no longer simply transcendental' but, rather, 'conditions of possibility and impossibility concerning the very conceptual difference between subject and object' (Gasché 1986, 317). The quasi-transcendental is *not* finite and is 'situated at the margin of the distinction between the transcendental and the empirical.' (Gasché 1986, 317) It dislocates 'the opposition of fact and principle' and seems 'to be characterized by a certain irreducible erratic contingency' or 'aleatory heterogeneity' which is 'that of the structural constraints that simultaneously open up and close philosophy's argumentative discursivity.' (Gasché 1986, 317-318)[75] In the wake of Gasché's work scholars such as Caputo and Merold Westphal have helpfully discussed the extent to which Derrida's quasi-transcendental remains Kantian in respect of the retained transcendental move involving, or appealing to, the 'conditions' (of im-possibility as Derrida would have it) of any discourse.[76] Yet I

[75] Gasché goes on to argue as follows: 'Instead of inquiring into the a priori and logical credentials of the philosophical discourse, Derrida's heterology is the setting out of a law that is written on the tinfoil of the mirrors between which thought can either maintain the separation of fact and principle in an endless reflection of one another, or sublate them in an infinite synthesis.' (Gasché 1986, 318)

[76] The philosopher Merold Westphal's reading of Derrida on this particular point is as follows: 'Derrida regularly insists that the issues he is discussing are theological, and we have already seen that *deconstruction is the denial that we are divine*...As the desire and demand to see things *sub specie aeternitatis*, metaphysics is the not terribly subtle desire and demands to be God: and *deconstruction is the continuous reminder that we are not God*. In fact, it claims, we cannot even peek over God's shoulder.

Derrida's arguments are quasi-transcendental arguments about the conditions of the possibility of human meaning. They are Kantian arguments in the sense that they show, when they are successful (which I think is quite frequently), that we cannot have Absolute Knowledge, cannot stand at the Alpha or Omega points that look in on time from the security of a *pou sto* outside of it. Properly construed, they have Kantian limits. They show us something about human thought and language, but nothing about what else, if anything, there may be.' (Westphal 2001, 189) Caputo's argument in relation to this issue is formulated and runs thus: 'Derrida is a transcendental philosopher – *almost*. He is close to the edge of transcendental philosophy; he hovers around its margins, is in between the columns of *Glas*, in their interplay, working the levers between the columns. Derrida is also supplying the presuppositions for thinking that whatever sense language does make will also be unmade, that the things we do with words will come undone. One of the things about ''iterability''...is that it allows us to repeat and recontextualize...so that it is always possible to find some context in which an otherwise false statement is true, or an otherwise true statement is false, or an otherwise straight comment is funny, etc., and this tends therefore to undo the universalizability that we would want to attribute to a transcendental property...Derrida is asserting that, and explaining why, final vocabularies are never final, that and why final vocabularies are always contingent and revisable, and that one needs different vocabularies for different things...That point...is the point of calling the trace or iterability a *quasi*-transcendental, borrowing a (pretty funny) move in *Glas* (although the joke dies under Gasché's glass) in which Derrida commenting on the analysis of Antigone in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, addresses the question of something which a system cannot assimilate (a constant issue in *Glas*): ''And what if what cannot be assimilated, the absolute indigestible, played a fundamental role in the system, an abyssal role, rather, playing...'' The text in the left column breaks here and is followed by twelve pages of inserted text drawn

think it remains the case that, however useful such commentaries are, the status of the 'quasi' and its logic is an ongoing problem(atic) in contemporary theory as Ernesto Laclau has convincingly outlined.[77]

---

from Hegel's letters to and about his sister, and then continues: ''...a quasi-transcendental role...'' [Derrida 1986, 151-62a]

...The fragment on the sister makes the system both possible and impossible, that is, it plays a ''quasi-transcendental role''. So the second step in Derrida's ''quasi-theory'' is to see to it that it is a theory which says that one cannot have a theory in a strong sense, without the ''quasi-''. Derrida is arguing that linguistic systems are differential; that they produce nominal and conceptual unities as effects of the differential play (or spacing) that is opened up between the marks or traces; that this differential spacing is, as Louis Hjelmslev shows, indifferent to the distinction between phonic and graphic marks; and finally that this notion of meaning as an effect of differential spacings displaces the primacy of intentional subjects expressing their thoughts by means of external signs.' (Caputo 2000, 97-98) A little later on in the same text Caputo makes the following comments: 'Derrida is a philosopher who gives reasons if one disagrees with him or makes fun of him. It is also true that Derrida is not a transcendental philosopher. For what Derrida comes up with when he starts talking like a philosopher is that one cannot come up with anything like a hard philosophical theory, or with rigorous distinctions between theory and practice, or the *Geisteswissenschaften* and *Naturwissenschaften*, or analytic and synthetic, at least not for long. For sooner or later the differential play in what one's theory is trying to stick together will make it come undone. Sooner or later, someone will give us a close reading; they will descend upon us and disclose that our *arche*/*principium*/emperor-prince has no clothes, that the distinctions we are making have sprung a leak, that we need and use what we are excluding, that our metaphorics contradicts our thematic, that we cannot make the distinction between metaphorical and literal stick, and so on...And that goes for deconstruction too were deconstruction ever to be so foolish as to state itself baldly as a theory in a strong sense.

The Parisian way to say this is to say that Derrida is both inside and outside philosophy, on the ''margins'' of philosophy, that he is a ''certain kind'' of philosopher...

Now this marginality, this non-positionality of being inside/outside, which constitutes the ''quasi-transcendental'' motif in Derrida, is the moment of what he calls in *Glas* the quasi-transcendental ex-position (out of place). Antigone's place is both necessary and impossible. It is necessary because it provides the transition from natural to spiritual desire...The sister has transcendental status for Derrida because she is a possibility which the system must exclude even as she is needed as a stop or a station in the progress of absolute knowledge, an interruption to be assimilated, on the way to the reconciliation of divine and human law. We cannot have absolute knowledge without the sister, but once we do, we do not have the system any longer. It makes the system possible and impossible. The sister is inside and outside the system. The very thing that is excluded is what makes the system possible and must be included.

That is what Derrida is always doing with philosophical texts, showing how the very thing that makes them possible also makes them impossible, that is, destabilizes them, which is something he can predict will happen inasmuch as any assembly of signifiers is always already set adrift by *différance*...That is his almost transcendental, quasi-transcendental role, his broken or split transcendental. It is not a ''logical space'', exactly, but the space of *khôra*, of spacing itself, and it produces a lot more than logic...

...One other important thing about Derrida's quasi-transcendental is that it is a transcendental without a subject, a kind of anonymous transcendental, an impersonal field, populated by neither an empirical nor a transcendental subject, by no subject at all, but only by the play of differences. The standard transcendental is a subjective condition which makes the unity of objects possible, but the field of *différance* is a different transcendental, which makes any kind of unity, subjective or objective, things or subjects, possible and impossible (im/possible).' (Caputo 2000, 99-101)

[77] Laclau (following a dialogue with Judith Butler) has identified this problem(atic) as follows: 'I have used the word ''transcendental'' *ex professo*, because it is the status of the transcendental which is at the root of many of the most crucial problems in contemporary theory. Most people would agree that transcendentalism, in its classical formulations, is today unsustainable, but there is also a generalized agreement that some kind of weak transcendentalism is unavoidable. In the deconstructionist tradition, for example, the notion of ''quasi-transcendentals'' has acquired considerable currency. But most theoretical approaches are haunted by the perplexing question of the precise status of that ''quasi''. The problem touches on, on the one hand, the question of ''metalanguage''; on the other, the status, in theory building, of categories that apparently refer to empirical events but that in practice have a quasi-transcendental

Drawing all of this together, what is the upshot? It is this. I am arguing that messianic historical theory and the historical (re)presentations that they theorize are predicated on the notion of the quasi-transcendental where the prefix 'quasi' is used by way of acknowledging the paradox of philosophical/theoretical accounts that seek to demonstrate why we cannot have a final account of how things are or, in the case of histories, of the impossibility of arriving at a final account of how things were (or have been thought to have been). The 'quasi' destabilizes invocations of non-contradiction. Such quasi-transcendental accounts are *a priori* and pose insoluble problems as to issues of knowledge and historical (re)presentation. In other words the problematic of historicization (and the historical culture that it sustains) is foregrounded and, as noted in my introduction, a problematic can never be resolved. We need instead to deal creatively with the tension that is highlighted rather than try to resolve it (by, for example, any unproblematicised notion of dialectics). All history and historical theorisation thus operate within this quasi-transcendental bind. What I mean by this is that there can be no escaping an appeal at some point in the theorisation of the condition of any discourse to an *a priori* axiomatic-presupposition whereby a certain conception of faith/fideism is again apparent. One criticism of the quasi-transcendental argument is that it makes little sense to hold to such abstract, principled *a priori* conceptions/convictions in the political sphere. I will return to this in the next section as part of my discussion of Cohen's work.

In the meantime my treatment of Martin Hägglund's work is considerably briefer than that given to Meillassoux's text. In part this is because Hägglund's *Radical Atheism* has already received much critical attention. Of such responses I think that the most impressive (not least because *Radical Atheism* contains an attack on his

---

status, operating as the a priori conditions of intelligibility of a whole discursive domain. What is the status in psychoanalysis, for instance, of categories such as ''phallus'', of the ''castration complex''? Because of the undecided status of the ''quasi'', we are confronted with a plurality of alternatives, whose two polar extremes would be a total hardening of those categories, which would thus become a priori conditions of all possible human development, and a no less extreme historicism which sees in them only contingent events, products of particular cultural formations. The first extreme is confronted with the whole array of problems emerging from any transcendentalization of empirical conditions; the second, with the difficulties derived from not dealing with those conditions which make possible even a historicist discourse. The logic of the ''quasi'' tries to avoid both extremes, but it is extremely unclear in what that logic would consist. These are questions which have not been dealt with enough, in either Butler's approach or in mine; but they are issues to which both of us will have to return – perhaps in future exchanges. (Butler and Laclau 2004, 342)

work and a certain 'religious' interpretation of Derrida more generally) is Caputo's detailed and arguably brilliant ninety-two page rebuttal of aspects of Hägglund's reading of Derrida entitled 'The Return of Anti-Religion: From Radical Atheism to Radical Theology' (Caputo 2011). In this text, and whilst not unappreciative of some of the merits of his book (see Caputo 2011, 47), Caputo takes issue with what he describes as Hägglund's 'abridged edition' of Derrida, one that has been 'cut to fit the new materialism' that he perceives the former as representing.[78] I am in substantive agreement with Caputo's riposte to Hägglund and do not endeavour to provide a wholesale review or reconstruction of it here. Instead I summarize Hägglund's main argument and then draw upon a small number of comments on it by Caputo and one other respondent (William Egginton) by way of further developing and defending aspects of the messianic historical theory that I am advancing in this thesis.

[78] Early on in his article Caputo provides this overall assessment of *Radical Atheism*: 'Martin Hägglund's *Radical Atheism* is a closely argued contribution to the recent debate that fits hand in glove with the new counter-movement. His book has reinvented Derrida for the younger generation of restless realists and comes as a timely refutation of any attempt to reduce Derrida to an anti-realist or anti-materialist. The book is especially welcome in the light of Meillassoux's caricature of ''correlationism'', which treats continental philosophers from Kant on as ''creationists''. (That is not an exaggeration. I understand the need to kill the father, but one ought at least to make some sense when asked for the motive for the murder. Besides, such caricatures invite an obvious counter-argument: if treating Derrida and Foucault as creationists is where the new realism leads, then so much the worse for the new realism!) Since reinventing things for the future is what deconstruction is all about, RA is to that extent an impressive exercise in deconstruction. If Kant set out to deny knowledge to make room for faith, which left the barn door open to ''fideism'', as Meillassoux argues, Hägglund uses deconstruction to pursue the opposite strategy, to deny religion in order to make room for materialism. So while I am happy to affirm the strategic advantages of this book, I am less than happy with its substantive results. In my view it presents a certain deconstruction, and a certain logic of deconstruction, but in an abridged edition of Derrida cut to fit the new materialism, all scrubbed up and sanitized, nothing written in the margins, deconstruction as logic not *écriture.* I wish it well. But in my view not only is the *un*abridged edition of deconstruction considerably more interesting it also provides the basis for a criticism of religion from within, rather than mounting a frontal attack from without that tries to hammer religion senseless. In deconstruction religion is more than one, and that opens up a possibility never considered in RA, what we might call a religious materialism, a religion without the immaterialism of two-worlds Augustinianism, another Augustine and another religion, which is in fact the unedited view of Jacques Derrida. Interestingly, Meillassoux himself tried his hand at propounding something of a religious materialism, one that even sounds a bit like the ''specter'' of a ''coming god'' in Derrida, but with ridiculous results (a fanciful version of eternal recurrence). His position is especially ridiculous when viewed against the subtle and careful analysis of a certain faith and a certain religion and a certain *à venir* that Derrida provides, an analysis that is unfortunately completely suppressed in Hägglund's abridged edition of deconstruction.' He goes on to add that 'Hägglund has proposed a comprehensive interpretation of Derrida which requires not a few good one-liners squeezed into a standard book review but a re-narration of deconstruction as a whole, because a great deal of what Derrida is saying is opposed to the way he is framed in RA, which in particular occludes Derrida's own contribution to the way in which religion can be reopened under the subtle auspices of deconstruction.' (Caputo 2011, 33-34)

Hägglund's introduces *Radical Atheism* as 'a sustained attempt to reassess the entire trajectory of Derrida's work' that involves '[r]efuting the notion that there was an ethical or religious 'turn' in Derrida's thinking' (Hägglund 2008, 1). Instead he seeks to demonstrate that 'a radical atheism' – which he differentiates from 'traditional atheism' – informs Derrida's writings 'from beginning to end.' (Hägglund 2008, 1) In contrast with traditional atheism, this radical atheism *questions* 'the desire for God and immortality' that the former has simply *denied*. (Hägglund 2008, 1) In developing the 'logic' of radical atheism he argues that

> the so-called desire for immortality dissimulates a desire for survival that precedes it and contradicts it from within. (Hägglund 2008, 1)

Hägglund regards this 'notion of survival' as 'incompatible with immortality, since it defines life as essentially mortal and as inherently divided by time.'[79] (Hägglund 2008, 1) He argues that 'every moment of life is a matter of survival' given that 'it depends on what Derrida calls the structure of the trace', going on to describe this point as follows:

> The structure of the trace follows from the constitution of time, which makes it impossible for anything to be present *in itself*. Every now passes away as soon as it comes to be and must therefore be inscribed as a trace in order to be at all. The trace enables the past to be retained, since it is characterized by the ability to remain in spite of temporal succession. The trace is thus the minimal condition for life to resist death in a movement of survival. The trace can only live on, however, by being left for a future that may erase it. This radical finitude of survival is not a lack of being that is desirable to overcome. Rather, the finitude of survival opens the chance for everything that is desired and the threat of everything that is feared. (Hägglund 2008, 1-2)

Hägglund is categorical that '[t]he key to radical atheism is what I analyze as the unconditional affirmation of survival', an affirmation which he regards as 'not a matter of choice that some people make and others do not' but rather 'unconditional because everyone is engaged by it *without exception*.' (Hägglund 2008, 2) There is no escape here: 'one has to affirm the time of survival, since it opens the possibility to live on' and therefore 'to want something or to do something...in the first place.'

[79] 'To survive is never to be absolutely present; it is to remain after a past that is no longer and to keep the memory of this past for a future that is not yet.' (Hägglund 2008, 1)

(Hägglund 2008, 2) Hägglund argues that it is precisely this unconditional affirmation of survival that 'allows us to read the purported desire for immortality against itself' in the following way:

> The desire to *live on* after death is not a desire for immortality, since to live on is to remain subjected to temporal finitude. The desire for survival cannot aim at transcending time, since the given time is the only chance for survival. There is thus an internal contradiction in the so-called desire for immortality. If one were not attached to mortal life, there would be no fear of death and no desire to live on. But for the same reason, the idea of immortality cannot even hypothetically appease the fear of death or satisfy the desire to live on. On the contrary, the state of immortality would annihilate every form of survival, since it would annihilate the time of mortal life. (Hägglund 2008, 2)

Hägglund then establishes his radical atheist logic which involves sustained attention to the notions of 'spacing' as 'the shorthand for the becoming-space of time and the becoming-time of space' as he reads it in Derrida's work. (Hägglund 2008, 2)[80] Attention is given to 'the ontological status of spacing', with Hägglund arguing that *différance* – 'as a name for the spacing of time – is 'an *absolutely general condition*' with the consequence that 'there cannot even in principle be anything that is exempt from temporal finitude.' (Hägglund 2008, 2-3)

In the fourth chapter of his book ('Autoimmunity of Life: Derrida's Radical Atheism'), Hägglund elaborates on and contrasts his reading of Derrida's radical atheism with what he describes as 'numerous theological accounts of deconstruction' (here he has particularly in mind Caputo, Hent de Vries, and

[80] Here is Hägglund's sketch of his exploration of spacing in *Radical Atheism*: 'To establish the logic of radical atheism, I proceed from Derrida's notion of spacing (*espacement*). As he points out in his late work *On Touching*, spacing is ''the first word of any deconstruction, valid for space as well as time'' (181/207). More precisely, spacing is shorthand for the becoming-space of time and the becoming-time of space. Although this complication of space and time defines all of Derrida's key terms (such as *trace*, *arche-writing*, and *différance*), it has received little attention in studies of his work. Derrida himself does not undertake a detailed elaboration of how the becoming-space of time and the becoming-time of space should be understood, while maintaining that it is the minimal operation of deconstruction that is at work in everything that happens. My aim with regard to this matter is threefold. I seek to develop the philosophical significance of Derrida's argument by accounting for *why* spacing is irreducible, *how* it should be understood, and *what* implications follow from thinking it as a constitutive condition. All these issues will be addressed at length in the chapters that follow, so I will limit myself to emphasizing the aspect that is most crucial for radical atheism. This aspect concerns the ontological status of spacing. Derrida repeatedly argues that *différance* (as a name for the spacing of time) not only applies to language or experience or any other delimited region of being. Rather, it is an *absolutely general condition*, which means that there cannot even in principle be anything that is exempt from temporal finitude.' (Hägglund 2008, 1-3)

Richard Kearney), generated by the 'proliferation of apparently religious terms in Derrida's later work' (Hägglund 2008, 11). He argues that 'Derrida relies on the desire for mortal life' so that he is able 'to read even the most religious ideas against themselves' and that '[m]essianic hope is for Derrida a hope for temporal survival'; that 'faith is always faith in the finite' and that 'the desire for God is a desire for the mortal, like every other desire.' (Hägglund 2008, 11) He offers a reading of Derrida's 'Circumfession' in order to demonstrate how Derrida 'stages the radically atheist desire for survival in his own confessional writing.' (Hägglund 2008, 11) It is in this chapter that Caputo is accused of 'a fundamental misunderstanding of what Derrida means by the impossible'[81] (Hägglund 2008, 120) and that his 'account of how the impossible justice becomes possible in the kingdom of God' – frankly a bizarre misreading by Hägglund – 'cancels out the very condition of justice.'[82] (Hägglund 2008, 123) Hägglund contrasts Caputo's position with Richard Kearney's who receives little better treatment but who has at least – for the author of *Radical*

[81] 'For Derrida, on the contrary, it is a matter of thinking a constitutive desire for mortal life that undercuts the religious ideal of immunity from within. If one can only desire the mortal, one cannot desire immortality, since it would eliminate the mortal *as mortal*. Hence, I will demonstrate that Derrida relies on the desire for mortal life to read even the most religious ideas against themselves. Messianic hope is for Derrida a hope for temporal survival, faith is always faith in the finite, and the desire for God is a desire for the mortal, like every other desire.

The common denominator is Derrida's claim that desire is a desire for *the impossible*. The desire for the impossible is quite central for Caputo, who argues that it testifies to ''the religious aspiration of deconstruction''...According to Caputo, ''the impossible, being impassioned by the impossible, is the religious, is religious passion''...This argument, however, is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of what Derrida means by the impossible...When Derrida writes that something is impossible, Caputo takes it to mean that it is impossible for us mortals but not for God [cf. Mark 10:27, which Hägglund has Caputo as quoting and often alluding to and which he takes as ''the matrix for Caputo's systematic misreading of Derrida'']...Derrida's passion for the impossible would thus answer to religious passion and especially to the passion of prophetic eschatology that Caputo detects in Derrida's writings on justice and the gift...

The impossible is thus figured as an ideal possibility that we desire, even though it is inaccessible for us. What we desire is impossible given our mortality, but we dream of it becoming possible in the kingdom of God. The dream of such an impossible kingdom is the dream of an absolute immunity, where the good would be immune to evil, justice immune to injustice, and the gift immune from being a poison.' (Hägglund 2008, 120)

[82] 'When Derrida argues that the coming of time is the undeconstructible condition of justice, he thus emphasizes that it is a ''de-totalizing condition'', which inscribes the possibility of corruption, evil, and mischief at the heart of justice itself. If this impossibility of absolute justice were to be overcome, all justice would be eliminated. Accordingly, Caputo's account of how the impossible justice becomes possible in the kingdom of God cancels out the very condition of justice. For God to count our every tear and do justice to all, he would have to be a totalizing instance that can encompass everyone and everything. If he were not a totalizing instance, he would have to pay attention to some at the expense of others and commit the injustice of discrimination. Absolute justice is thus incompatible with the coming of time, since the coming of time exceeds any totalization. But by the same token absolute justice entails that nothing can happen to cause the concern for justice in the first place. As Caputo points out, there is no reason to worry about tomorrow in the kingdom of God, since God will provide everything we need.' (Hägglund 2008, 123)

Atheism – the merit of recognizing that there is 'a serious problem' with the issue of 'unconditional openness to the coming of the other' (or, restated by Hägglund glossing Derrida, 'that the other who comes can be anyone whosoever or anything whatsoever'[83]) (Hägglund 2008, 124-125). He reads Derrida as undermining 'the religious ideal of absolute immunity, which informs both Caputo's and Kearney's reasoning.' (Hägglund 2008, 127)

[83] 'Kearney proceeds from Derrida's argument that there is an unconditional openness to the coming of ''the other''. As we have seen, Derrida emphasizes that the other who comes can be anyone whosoever or anything whatsoever. This is the claim that troubles Kearney. Following Caputo, Kearney assumes that deconstruction ''awaits the coming of the just one''. Kearney links the coming of the just one to the notion of ''a transcendent God who will come to save and liberate''...but he is worried about how the coming of such a Good God can be compatible with the exposure to a radically unpredictable future. Caputo ignores the problem by launching two mutually exclusive arguments. On the one hand, he reiterates Derrida's claim that justice concerns the relation to an other who cannot be predicted. On the other hand, he asserts that the other is always ''the victim, not the producer of the victim. It would never be the case that the 'other' to come would be Charles Manson, or some plunderer or rapist''. Caputo's assertion is quite contrary to Derrida's logic of alterity. The other to come can always be a plunderer or rapist, since the other who comes cannot be anticipated and can change its character at any juncture.

Unlike Caputo, Kearney recognizes that there is a serious problem here. Given that the other who comes is always ''able to change in order to become no matter what other'' (as Derrida writes in *Sauf le nom*), Kearney asks how we can discriminate ''between true and false prophets, between bringers of good and bringers of evil, between holy spirits and unholy ones''...The point for Kearney is that there ought to be criteria that enable us to ''substantively distinguish''...between whether the other is good or evil and thus to separate ''those thieves that come in the night to rob and violate'' from ''those who come to heal and redeem''...By not providing such criteria, Derrida supposedly underestimates ''the need for some kind of critical discernment – based on informed judgment, hermeneutic memory, narrative imagination, and rational discrimination''...For the same reason, Kearney is concerned that Derrida does not illuminate how we can make decisions ''if we can never *know* (for certain), or *see* (for sure) or have (a definite set of criteria)''.

...It is true that Derrida does not provide substantive criteria for how to distinguish between whether the other who comes is good or evil. But this does not mean that he underestimates the need for identification, recognition, and discriminatory decisions. On the contrary, Derrida argues that such acts are necessary *because* of the undecidable future that exceeds them. We seek to identify, recognize, and make decisions because we cannot know in advance what the other will bring about. If we knew (for certain) or saw (for sure) or had (a definite set of criteria), we would know in advance what the other would do and thus be able to predict the future. But by the same token there would be no need for any decisions. If the future could be predicted, there would be nothing to decide on and no reason to act in the first place.

Every recognition is thus haunted by a possible misrecognition, every identification by a misidentification, and every decision by an undecidable future that may call it into question. When Kearney asks for criteria that would relieve this problem, he asks for criteria that would allow us to decide *once and for all* whether the other is good or evil. But such a final identification is incompatible with the relation to the other, since the other may always change. The structural uncertainty in the relation to the other has nothing to do with a cognitive limitation that would prevent us from having access to the true nature of the other. There is no true nature of the other, since the other is temporal and cannot know what it will become. The reason why the other cannot finally be identified or recognized is not because it is an ineffable Other that belongs to another realm, but because it is inherently mutable and may come to contradict any given identification or recognition.

Hence, Derrida maintains that even the other who is identified as good may always *become* evil and that ''this is true even in the most peaceful experiences of joy and happiness''. Even when I invite a good friend and we have a great time, it is an irreducible condition that ''the experience might have been terrible. Not only that it *might* have been terrible, but the threat remains. That this good friend may become the devil, may be perverse. The perversity is not an accident which could be once and for all excluded, the perversity is part of the experience''.' (Hägglund 2008, 124-125)

In response to all of this I want to highlight just a few points. *First,* and as I have already noted, Caputo has responded robustly to Hägglund's critique of his position describing it as 'baffling commentary...on my work' (Caputo 2011, 42). For example, he contests (persuasively I think) Hägglund's criticism that he has misunderstood Derrida's notion of the impossible (Caputo 2011, 35-36).[84] He also denies that he is 'theologizing philosophy' (as opposed to deconstructing Christianity) (Caputo 2011, 37-39) and points out Hägglund's confusion over his (Caputo's) references to the New Testament (Caputo 2011, 45-46*n*35) and responses to the issue of openness to the coming of the other (Caputo 2011, 83-84*n*89).[85] *Second,* and crucially, Caputo (now going on the offensive) takes issue with those aspect of Hägglund's reading that interpret Derrida as 'primarily engaged in offering a theory of time' rather than 'what is going on in and through time, in the event which takes place in and as time.' (Caputo 2011, 53) This counter-reading – that 'Derrida is not primarily interested in ''time'', which is a classical philosopheme' but rather focuses on the 'weak force of the *à venir*, which makes the future (*l'avenir*) and hence time-effects possible' (Caputo 2011, 53) – is one that historians and historical theorists overly keen to draw on a certain 'deconstructive' (*sic*) theorisation of time/temporality which think they have located in Hägglund's work would do well to note. His comments about Derrida and time are surrounded by and linked with a series of points regarding the 'ultra-' or 'quasi-' transcendental (see Caputo 2011, 52-55; 62-63) which, in the terms that he thinks Derrida understood it,

[84] Caputo's response to Hägglund on this point is as follows: 'Like Žižek, I agree the therapy is over when you see there is no Big Other. The possibility of the impossible is not about a Big Being coming to save you by doing the impossible things that you yourself cannot possibly do, but about the future and responsibility. This amazing misunderstanding of my views on this point deforms everything Hägglund says about my work in RA and constituted, as Hägglund says of me in an excellent phrase, the matrix of his systematic misreading of everything I say (RA, 120). Once you ''have'' an identifiable Big Being like that, once you ''know'' it, you have undermined the experiential structure (the possible/impossible) under analysis. That is why like Derrida I deny that the impossible *is* God, that God is what the impossible is or means, *simpliciter* or *tout court*. That would collapse the possibility of the impossible into something proper and identifiable.' (Caputo 2011, 36)

[85] 'When Richard Kearney, Derrida and I discussed this point at Villanova, I pointed out that the moment of singular decision in Derrida would be undermined by ''criteria'', a point I have been making ever since *Radical Hermeneutics* and *Against Ethics.* But I am also looking for a way to make Derrida's second point, that in closing the door to Charles Manson, we still keep the door open to the ''to come'', in closing off Charles Manson we are not closing off the coming of the other. Hägglund rejects Derrida's view of this matter, which is why he attributes to me ''two mutually exclusive arguments''. See RA, 124 and *God, the Gift and Postmodernism*, eds. John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 131.' (Caputo 2011, 83-84*n*89)

Caputo regards as undoing/undermining Hägglund's assumptions and stated aims (although he regards both Hägglund and himself as organizing their respective readings of deconstruction under this 'rubric'[86]). As he puts it in an important passage deserving reproducing at length here:

> Hence, what Derrida means by the ultra-transcendental undermines the central assumption of RA and Hägglund's conception of an ultra-transcendental aesthetics. As an ultra-transcendental, *différance* is an account *of* space and time but it is not identical *with* space and time in any of its 'transcendent' versions. In this sense, as I have been saying, deconstruction is not a philosophy of time at all but of the quasi-transcendental conditions under which time-effects are possible, where 'time' is a species of presence that appears in various metaphysical forms, as an imitation of eternity, a succession of now points, a form of intuition, a bad infinity, etc. *Différance* is not time but, as Derrida puts it, *différance* provides what in traditional philosophy is called 'the ''originary constitution'' of space and time' (*Margins*, 8). *Différance* does not mean spatio-temporal being – which is the fate it suffers in RA – but in the language of traditional philosophy a 'constitutive, productive, and originary causality' (*Margins*, 9), a constitutive spacing-and-timing, spatializing and temporizing, the constitutive interval between the moments of time and of the constitutive distance between the *partes extra partes* of space, a play of 'retention and protention of differences, a spacing and temporization' (*Margins*, 15). As an ultra-transcendental structure, *différance* is not spatio-temporal being but it includes spatio-temporal being among its constituted effects, or rather all the varieties of space and time that can be constituted, and the test of the notion is its power to accommodate any and every version of constituted space and time. (Caputo 2011, 58-59).

Third, from here Caputo goes on to distinguish his understanding of Derrida's concept of the future from Hägglund's designation of 'an infinite finitude', suggesting that what Derrida meant could be called 'a finite infinity' closely connected to his talk of 'infinite responsibility' (Caputo 2011, 60).[87] This is a

[86] 'Like Hägglund I organize everything in deconstruction under the rubric of the quasi- or ultra-transcendental, which I like to call a ''weak'' transcendental, but I do so with considerably different results.' (Caputo 2011, 54-55)

[87] 'The future for Derrida is not what Hägglund calls an infinite finitude. There is a *fundamentum in re* for what Hägglund is saying inasmuch as for Derrida the future is an unforeseeable course of coming to be and passing away. But it is more than that and more importantly what could be called a finite infinity, that is, an open-ended and undeconstructible call that elicits a finite and always deconstructible response, which is why Derrida can talk about our infinite responsibility. In a hyperbolic ethics, we address ''infinite responsibility'' with finite responses. The to-come is infinite not with the infinity of Christian Neoplatonism but with the infinity of grammatology, the infinity of an in-finitive, open-ended while endlessly contracted and determined in the finitude of the moment. The time of infinite finitude is an irreducible component not in a positive infinity in the Hegelian sense but of an open-ended infinitival infinity in the deconstructive sense, the time of the to-come, the to-come of time, the ''*à venir*'' of

responsibility – which I think can also be understood as a form of *resistance* – that messianic historical theory works to acknowledge and encourage/respond to in the field of academic history: historical theorization and (re)presentation as 'infinitivizing' that which it analyzes (concepts, 'essences', determinations, dis/continuities, uses and abuses, politicizations, etc., relating to constructions and deployments of historicizations of the past). Caputo draws attention to the 'unconfessed metaphysics' that he discerns in Hägglund's argument (although as he also immediately and wryly points out, Hägglund has in fact 'confessed' it: see Caputo 2011, 62-63)[88], and of which there are resonances in a similar kind of ideological operation that has been identified in Meillassoux's *After Finitude*.[89] Caputo thus situates Hägglund as having 'recoded deconstruction' so as to 'obscure' that 'side' of it that is 'driven' by 'a hyperbolic, open-ended, fetching albeit dangerous injunction that is structured like a religion.' (Caputo 2011, 81) Such a recoding, Caputo asserts, 'sells Derrida short' *vis-à-vis* what he 'does for rethinking

---

l'avenir. Derrida's infinity is not metaphysical but grammatological. The *à venir* does not possess the positive infinity of Augustine's Divine Providence or of Hegel's absolute *Geist*, which is the metaphysical correlate of Augustine, but the infinity of the undeconstructible, of an open-ended expectation and promise. An infinite finitude is the endlessly destructible course of time. A finite infinity is the undeconstructible to-come which charges time and the moment with all its finite urgency. Deconstruction may well be described as a process of infinitivizing the concepts it analyzes, so that the discussion is never merely about the finite empirical reality of ''democracy'', for example, but about democracy *in the infinitive*, in the *to-come*, opened up in terms of its future, of its hope and promise, which has nothing to do with denying its threat since every promise is co-constituted by a threat. To deconstruct a concept is to turn a noun into an infinitive, to expose in a finite name an infinite-infinitival promise, which is never safe from an infinite threat.' (Caputo 2011, 60)

[88] '[T]here is what I would call an ''unconfessed metaphysics'' in this argument, except that Hägglund has confessed it, that to be is to be in time, that time is all in all, since time is transcendent being and indeed all the transcendent being there is. Indeed, if time is all in all, then one wants more time, because time is all there is. But if one does not accept that presupposition, namely, the definition of time as all in all, then one might very well want something else, something that is that is not subject to time. The desire for immortality is not contradicted from *within* by temporal experience; it is contradicted from *without*, by imposing the conditions of temporal experience upon eternity. It is not contradicted from within because the desire for eternity does not include the premise that time is all in all among its axioms. The desire for immortality would ''dissimulate'' a desire for more time only if there are independent grounds for establishing that time is all in all, that time is the absolutely necessary condition of possibility of being in general, not a condition of experience. If there are independent grounds for establishing that time is all in all, *différance* is not one of them, for *différance* is a condition of experience, not a metaphysical principle.' (Caputo 2011, 62-63)

[89] Caputo makes the following comparison between Hägglund and Meillassoux (two very different thinkers and by no means allies): 'But Hägglund uses ultratranscendental to stress the ultimacy of the ''space-time of the trace'', a *ne plus ultra* spatio-temporality, the inescapable horizon ''from which nothing can be exempt'' (RA, 10). When Kant established the transcendentality of space and time, Kant made room for faith in things in themselves, which opens the door to what Meillassoux calls ''fideism''. Hägglund uses the word ''ultratranscendental'' to close that same door, to say that space and time go all the way down and are not mere appearances, which is the point at which RA and *After Finitude* are very much on the same page.' (Caputo 2011, 53)

religion' and therefore 'for undoing the harm done in the name of religion.' (Caputo 2011, 124)

I find Caputo's response to Hägglund to be convincing and revealing. Despite its clarity, originality, ambition and sustained intellectual force, *Radical Atheism* is, for me, laden with 'unreflexive' imperatives, by which I mean – recognizing that the use of imperatives is inescapable – the absence of the Derridean 'perhaps' to qualify them, the 'perhaps' in which messianic historical theory puts so much store in the face of a historical culture predicated on rigid determinations. To say that *Radical Atheism* is unequivocal in the extreme is, given the multi-faceted vastness of the Derridean *oeuvre* which is so 'open' to interpretation as the always already possibility of failure and failed readings, not to render a compliment.[90] There is too much ruling out, too much legislation about what can and cannot be said; an untroubled narrowing of options. In short, there is just too much unproblematic closing down and closing off (to which messianic historical theory is opposed), even when it might be 'reasonable' to do so; too much certainty. And to some extent this is recognized even by those with considerable sympathy for Hägglund's project. William Egginton, a supporter of Hägglund and full of praise for his work, makes an insightful point along these lines which highlights the inescapable necessity of a faith commitment even for a radical atheist and with which I conclude this section:

> [Hägglund's] *certainty* concerning the ultratranscendental nature of spacing and hence of the desire for survival makes the operativity of desire's illusions untenable even in the face of empirical evidence of their operativity. My claim is more modest: desire's illusions do fall apart – after sustaining us, inciting us, disappointing us, and perhaps leading us into violence, delusion, or death – and as far as the human is concerned, a theory of drive or chronolibido is a good name for the internal incoherence that undermines them. But to believe that

[90] By way of illustrating this point see the comments with which Hägglund ends his introduction to *Radical Atheism*: 'One question that is bound to arise, then, is whether there are aspects of Derrida's work that do not adhere to the radically atheist logic I develop, especially since it stands in sharp contrast to the readings proposed by many other major interpreters. My response is that even if one is able to find passages in Derrida that cannot be salvaged by the logic of radical atheism, it is far from enough to refute the reading I propose here. Like everyone else, Derrida was certainly liable to be inconsistent. However, in order to turn these inconsistencies into an argument against the logic of radical atheism that I establish, one has to show that they are not in fact inconsistencies but rather testify to the operation in Derrida of a different logic altogether.' (Hägglund 2008, 12) By contrast, this thesis is written in a different – more partial, confessional and testificatory (Hägglund's use of the word 'testify' in the quotation above is interesting: is this deconstruction at work?) – spirit.

> their incoherence robs them of any influence in the world of human affairs, one has to have a *faith* in human reason unlimited by the sensible realm. I do not believe Martin's would accept this premise, but I believe his position entails it. (Egginton 2009, 206, italics mine)

Section Three: Mystical spellbinding? Sande Cohen's critique of Derrida

Sande Cohen's essay 'Derrida's ''New Scholar'': Between Philosophy and History' (Cohen 2006a, 153-181) is a brilliant sustained reading of *Specters of Marx* (hereafter *Specters*) as it relates to matters of historical theorisation and the attendant political issues making it easily the most acute critique produced thus far by any scholar working in the fields of historical theory/historiography. As Cohen admits elsewhere (and I think that its acuity is, in part, because of this) it is a 'quarrelsome wrestling match with Derrida's premises and his intellectual offering of tasks that historical consciousness cannot perform.' (Cohen 2006b, 8) Given this – and while *everyone* working in the field of historical theory *should* read Cohen's work (here I am in agreement with remarks made by Keith Jenkins in relation to Cohen's indexical importance – Jenkins 2009, 289-293) – *anyone* discussing Derrida's messianic as it might relate to historicization in any of its forms *must* read this essay; all such radical proposals require the kind of critique that Cohen offers. Accordingly, in this section I seek to welcome/affirm his critique by identifying and engaging with its main concerns and, in so doing, complete my *reload* of the messianic historical theory I am putting forward. Many of the issues that have already been considered in this chapter are drawn together in some of Cohen's superbly expressed comments and although I am not uncritical of his reading of Derrida at points I also aim to demonstrate – as per my previously stated intention to supplement messianic historical theory with Cohen's perspectives (or is it the other way round?) – that his work is significantly closer to Derrida's than might at first be thought. Once again I want to stress that this section does not follow a close/slow reading of Cohen's essay as such (I have undertaken that elsewhere[91]) but homes in on what I take to be major relevant points of contention.

[91] See Mason 2008.

Some details, then, on what I read as the main aspects of Cohen's critique. He is particularly interested in the 'new scholar(s)' described by Derrida – and offered up to the 'historiographic project' of *Specters* (Cohen 2006a, 154) – and returns to their proposed role and status throughout his reading, raising a number of questions.[92] He finds *Specters* 'a deeply problematical text in theory of history and politics' with one of the reasons being 'because of certain ''spells'' of language that inform even this most reflexive of texts' ('which' – he adds – 'does not mean free of blindness') (Cohen 2006a, 154). There is a focus 'on a strain of anticriticism'[93] that he detects in *Specters* and links this with 'the book's very smart commitment to European Idealist philosophy' (Cohen 2006a, 155) going on throughout the essay to identify/critique what he has earlier described as 'Derrida's idealizing' (Cohen 2006b, 8). He is concerned with what he calls the 'Derrida-effect' which he describes as 'the transference of Derridean discourse into issues concerning the philosophy of history' as well as 'the politics of scholarship' and the perhaps too easy way in which Derrida's deconstruction promises 'to *re*model long-standing cultural-political issues.'[94] (Cohen 2006a, 157) Another consistent theme is the attention paid to the 'command utterances' in *Specters*, the 'domination' of '[t]he syntax of paradox and

[92] Cohen signals his questions and arguments regarding this 'new scholar' early on in his essay: 'Linking historiography to the role of a new scholar is to play for rather large stakes, yet both are hardly matters of urgency for, say, the public. How is the scholar to register a productive social difference? Is it possible – foreswearing agreement with Derrida that it is possible because already impossible. I am going to argue that *Specters of Marx* joins philosophical work and politics through a model historiographer, a new scholar, a someone who announces, opens, against ordinary historical writing and thinking, *new needs*. *Specters*, however, flirts with, if not goes over to, an historiography of the ''chosen'', which in Derrida's idiom means self-selecting, self-reflexive, on-the-edge-of-thought intellectuals and artists. As we will see, it is a question here of a discourse that has the nerve to demand an ideal, of a communion with ''ghosts'' available only to a special faculty of a scholar properly attuned. In this sense, *Specters of Marx* may well be continuous with lines of writing that mistake the idealized *subjectivity of a scholar-ideal* for the subjectivity of any subject whatsoever, an ideal hard pressed today, which gives *Specters* great persuasive force for some artists and intellectuals.' (Cohen 2006a, 154-155)

[93] Cohen contrasts his position with the anticriticism he identifies in *Specters* as follows: 'I think criticism should make cultural satisfaction, of every sort, harder; and *Specters of Marx* is nothing if not resolute in its anticriticism.' (Cohen 2006a, 155)

[94] 'I want to specify more closely why I am reading Derrida *today* in terms of philosophy of history and its political implications. For...there is the question as to the ''Derrida-effect'': the transference of Derridean discourse into issues concerning the philosophy of history and the politics of scholarship, the ease with which notions of Derrida's version of deconstruction's promise to *re*model long-standing cultural-political issues. There is nothing strange about this – historiography can be understood as *recoding*, e.g., the replacement of legal modes of history (dominant in the 1920s) with psychological models, in turn giving way to other formations. Foucault's idea of epistemic cohesion seems apposite – recoding offers a kind of intellectual safety, where concepts are brought to historiography in the name of ''opening'' it but actually have the effect of a further *control* of it.' (Cohen 2006a, 157-158) Later in his text (and, I think, related to all of this) he points out that '[i]n fact, ''haunted by history'' is already a social trope, circulating between the academy and places where the academy touches the public' (Cohen 2006a, 163).

negation' and the 'insistence on disjunction in present life' (actuality) which is reliant on 'a transcendental injuction', namely the imperative (as command utterance) that there be 'no disavowal of ghosts'[95] (Cohen 2006a, 163). Cohen also observes such command utterances/imperatives involving 'this opening to ghosts and specters' in the work of friendly commentators on *Specters*[96] and asks whether all of this is 'also a move toward the threshold of a connoisseurship of the netherworld?' (Cohen 2006a, 163) Cohen thinks that *Specters* is recoding historicity as 'a metahistorical[97] identity of the repression/repetition of specters and ghosts.'

[95] 'As in all of Derrida's efforts, intellectual work is directed against presencing, but this against is presented as a command utterance: ''Spirits. And one must reckon with them. One cannot not have to'' (xx). Let one be clear about this: the negation of presence is accomplished by a greater presencing – of what is not present (spirit, ghost). The syntax of paradox and negation dominates here, and it is not unfair to say that even the gesture of writing with disjunction *functions* as another mode of conjunction. What White called absurd can be considered schizophrenic – the writing affirms what it denies, in the name of a specific mode of intellectual practice, a tactic in the spiritualization of cultural warfare(s). The *survival* of disjunction, in short carries with it a stronger injunction: the Ghosts of History matter. In this sense, it is textually clear – as such things can be – that insistence on disjunction in present life relies on a transcendental injunction, no disavowal of ghosts...But is this also a move toward the threshold of a connoisseurship of the netherworld?' (Cohen 2006a, 162-163)

[96] Cohen cites a remark by Werner Hamacher which contains an imperative ('must'). This passage from which it is taken – heavy with repeated usages of 'must' – reads as follows: 'The promise, the messianic, ammessianic promise, opens itself as a time cleft. And indeed as the time cleft of a world, as a world cleft. Marxism is historically the first promise that made a claim of unlimited universality in freedom and justice, the first and only not biased by racisms, nationalisms, cultisms, or class ideologies, but promising instead a world common to all and to each his own. This world must be promised, demanded, desired, and made possible before it can exist. But if it is ever to exist, it will be a world under the conditions of this promise, of this longing and this rendering possible; it will therefore be an aporetic world whose idea lies in infinite conflict with its every singular actualization and in conflict with its always possible annulment. This conflict is unavoidable as the promise from which it arises. What can never be conclusively avoided but, to be sure, can be opposed – what *must* be opposed – is the possibility contained within the promise's tendency not to be a promise but instead to be a totalitarian program, an immutable prescription, or a plan, or instead, quite simply, not to be at all. What must be opposed is the organization of the future; and what fights against it is the longing that the future might be otherwise, other than other, not merely *a* future and not merely *future*. This is the rift in the world that the world has opened up with the Marxist promise of a *world*. It has become no longer necessarily a cleft between different classes – but it is still this class antagonism as well. It is first of all a rift between a future that opens other futures and not merely futures, and a future that would be the end of all futures, the end of history in the automatized terror of private interests, in the tortures of exploitation and self-exploitation, in the vacuous self-sufficiency and ritualized mutilation of others and of the other possibilities of history. What must be opposed is the mutilation of past history – but how past? – and future history – but future beyond every arrival – and thus the destruction of the present that opens itself to the entrance of history. What *must* be opposed is the death of the promise that precedes both, declaring that neither is sufficient, that both must let themselves be opposed, and that this ''must'' and this ''let'' must be able to exist beyond certainty and complacency, beyond this death.' (Hamacher 2001, 176-177)

[97] Later in his essay Cohen develops the idea of the 'haunting' he reads about in *Specters* as 'meta-metahistorical': 'To put this directly in historiographic terms: if *metahistory* refers to the conditions of possibility in the writing of a narrative (the use of criteria to select things to narrate), then isn't haunting meta-metahistorical, because it not only controls the field of representations but is always there, timeless, i.e., the condition of conditions? If one believes in history as haunted, then one must believe in meta-metahistory as that which *opens* to what the new scholar can achieve by way of discursive and political mediation, which itself becomes metamediation, an opening that is not reducible to metahistory or the use

(Cohen 2006a, 165) Here we are returned to the role and status of the 'new scholar' who Cohen argues is being 'turned from opposition (criticism, disruption)' into becoming 'an actant' who confronts 'the specters internal to scholarship', who is able to grasp the *secrets* of Marx and who is pledged to '[a]ffirmation in this time that is ''out of joint'' ' (Cohen 2006a, 165). What concerns Cohen about all of this is the negation *by* affirmation of 'any sense of a philosophy of history that takes up opposition and disjunction' and is able to work 'these concepts into criticism of existing authorities.' (Cohen 2006a, 166) Warnings about the promotion of affirmations by scholars are 'brushed aside' by making 'the scholar's time...transcendental to opposition/disjunction' so as to not 'lead back to a critique of injustice, a ''mere'' ontological relation, a relation of chronicity.' (Cohen 2006a, 166) Cohen sees all of this as having the following result:

> If intellectuals emphasize injustice, this is an affirmation of the *wrong time*, a time of vengeance, of righting wrongs, and, compared to this, intellectuals must sever connection with critique/opposition. *Différance* into specter also then is offered as negation of criticism. (Cohen 2006a, 166)

Cohen deploys some powerful description as he continues to make variations on these critical points. For example, '[t]he scholar is modelled as the medium for a passage to the transcendent' and – because the intellectual/new scholar 'must not be caught speaking for an interest that can be *returned* to actualities' that are 'fraught with political interests' – '[p]hilosophy of history must sever its ties with reciprocity.' (Cohen 2006a, 166) In his reading of *Specters* he formulates crucial questions regarding the 'testamentary dimension' and the metahistorical 'perhaps' (as experience of the impossible) as they relate to intellectual life/historiography (Cohen 2006a, 167), questions that are almost always concerned with imperatively framed idealizing, the shutting down of criticism, and the associated rejection/marginalizing of actuality all *via* recourse to the transcendental.[98]

---

of narrative forms, whether such forms are literary structures (tragedy) or existential structures, as with the ''middle voice''.' (Cohen 2006a, 168-169)

[98] '*Specters of Marx* isolates...the ''testamentary dimension''. This sense of the testamentary is called the true historiographic legacy of Marx, as it beckons to the contemporary scholar to follow this legacy by surrendering to Marx's injunction (to change the world), immediately put onto the tracks of absolute identity...[35]...The desperation signalled in the repetition of so many ''there must be's'' are lines to the impossible: the testamentary is beyond history, it is ''a matter of linking an *affirmation* (in particular a

Closely linked to these concerns, the messianic and 'the language of eschatology' in *Specters* also come in for sustained criticism from Cohen. He has it that Derrida's 'messianic extremity' (Derrida 1994, 37) 'evokes the idea of an informed *historiographic avant-garde*' that is 'set against philosophy of history whenever it invokes any final term.' (Cohen 2006a, 167) Cohen draws upon Karl Löwith's work (Löwith 1949, 18) in an attempt to argue that 'the idea of the *eskhaton* is inseparable from the related notion of telos'[99] and asks both 'why eschatology is favoured as the medium of a deconstruction of Marx and Marxism' and how to consider the *eskhaton* 'if there are no examples of it that are not also instances of teleology?' (Cohen 2006a, 167) The questions regarding the 'affirmation of messianic eschatology' that Cohen reads as worked up in *Specters* continue specifically in relation to its designation as an 'idea of justice' where, coming back to the issue of actuality, he asks:

> How can 'an idea of justice' be more important than 'human rights'? For whom does the impossible matter more than actuality or even virtuality? (Cohen 2006a, 171)

He asserts that, for Derrida, 'the true matter of philosophy of history' is a 'democracy to come' (and not, of course, a future present democracy) that is in no way 'enmeshed in conflict over means, ends' (Cohen 2006a, 171) and completely separate from such agonistics, something that he (Cohen) thinks constitutes an undesirable and dangerous abandonment of actuality. Derrida's use of 'command utterances' to insist on not asking anything in return from the messianic *arrivant* or hope (Derrida 1994, 65) is, for Cohen, a bringing into existence of 'the end of reciprocity' (the role for the 'new scholar') (Cohen 2006a, 171). The messianic is 'stitched to the nonreciprocal' with Cohen suggesting that the terms 'messianic

---

political one) *if there is any*, to the experience of the impossible, which can only be a radical experience of the perhaps'' (35). Does this approach a ground zero of intellectual life today, the inheritance of Marx's writings now the desert of ''perhaps''? Is this ''perhaps'' a recoding of the famous historiographical notion of necessity, which cannot be addressed now except as the impossible? Actual determinations, how the social is put together, its rules and mechanisms, are squeezed out by the ''perhaps'' of metahistory.' (Cohen 2006a, 167)

[99] Löwith, in his *Meaning in History*, puts it as follows: 'Not only does the *eschaton* delimit the process of history by an end, it also articulates and fulfils it by a definite goal.' (Löwith 1949, 18)

hope' and the 'to-come' are thus 'thought-stoppers' (Cohen 2006a, 172-173). This 'meta-metahistorical' move dissolves 'ordinary historical representation' (Cohen 2006a, 171) and reciprocity (Cohen 2006a, 173) and is called by Cohen 'a historiography without history' (Cohen 2006a, 173); part of his judgment of it runs as follows:

> Calling for the impossible while accepting the inevitable impossibility of the impossible is a figure that nearly defies rhetoric, but the concept of numbness might apply. So much energy is devoted by Derrida to resisting intellectual work as production within immanence, as if to say, no more fragments. Indeed, to call the logic of the messianic something insensible is not a harsh judgment, but a move *Specters* affirms: since there are no actual historical determinations that matter by comparison to keeping watch for the specter's return, the intellectual or new scholar is *re*turned to the job of to 'bear witness, at least, to the justice which is demanded'. (Cohen 2006a, 175)

He immediately goes on to point out both the privileged place of the new scholar in this field of historiography without history and what he sees as its restoration of telos in the name of an Enlightenment to-come:

> As witnesses of the real protected by the ideal, the new scholar will of course continue as before to occupy a position akin to the infamous third party of representation, the one who can discuss criteria and ratios for sorting out good and bad measures to evaluate the ideal and the actual. A tautology? The messianic depends on the 'pure formality' of the messianic spirit, rendered a 'gesture of fidelity', an 'imperative', a 'priority', all this for 'a new Enlightenment for the century to come'. Thus telos is *re*stored by *Specters of Marx* as it denounces the very idea of the telic. (Cohen 2006a, 175-176)

Shortly after having run these criticisms Cohen coins the term 'historiospectography'[100] (Cohen 2006a, 177) to illustrate the trajectory of the 'new scholar' ('[f]rom history to historiography to historiospectography – such is the trajectory of the new scholar' – Cohen 2006a, 178). He goes on to ask how this meta-metahistorical mode of thinking can be transmitted to and received by the new

[100] Cohen describes historiospectography as follows: '[*H*]*istoriospectography*...determines, as presence, ''rights of succession'' or fills in the form of inheritance: if one does not agree to engage with the specters inside and out, one cannot participate in this new ''law of the fiduciary'' [Derrida 1994, 109]. What I am calling Derrida's historiospectography is the unlimited awareness of being-haunted, ''as general as it is irreducible'', where all temporal convolutions go the way of an impossible temporality, a ''disadjustment which will no doubt ever end'', since relations with specters, once grasped as the ''it is necessary'', are interminable. What kind of historical consciousness is that?' (Cohen 2006a, 177)

scholar (Cohen 2006a, 179)[101] and, by way of answering this, asserts that *Specters* 'idealizes a new scholar who can speak to absences of all kinds', who is 'hardly a *bricoleur* but more a spirit engineer – a master of impossibles and incalculables.' (Cohen 2006a, 179)

In summary, then, Cohen reads indications of a '*re*treat to idealism' in *Specters* (Cohen 2006a, 180). In considering 'the issue of why desire for the messianic comes today' he suggests that it might be 'compelling' due to 'a sense of historical impasse' (Cohen 2006a, 180). This is, I think, the case (a vacuum that the debate regarding the 'return of religion' in cultural criticism has effectively filled). Yet, for Cohen, there is a 'refusal' in *Specters* to think through the messianic in terms of it constituting 'a specific discourse with specific textual and social effects', a refusal which he thinks illustrates a 'high degree of intellectual fear that the messianic will go the way of the telic, into unlimited disagreements.' (Cohen 2006a, 180)

Such an incisive critique causes my thesis the biggest 'pause for thought' that it has encountered so far and this is, in part, why I have chosen to save Cohen till the end. Here my aim is to attempt a critical engagement with the above aspects of his work as well as an appropriation of aspects of it – *vis-à-vis* Derrida himself (to which I restrict my comments here) and more broadly (see my introduction) – as a much needed supplement to messianic historical theory understood as a 'concrete messianism' touching on the limit of the pure messianic always already conditioning historical [re]presentation. By way of response I want, *first*, to clarify that – *contra* Cohen and Cohen's reading of Löwith – in Derrida's notion of the messianic the concepts of the eschatological and teleology *are* distinguished and *are* separated. Whereas for Derrida teleology is 'the negation of the future' and a 'knowing beforehand the form that will have to be taken by what is still to come', the eschatological – the messianic – is 'a structured relation to the future as such' (i.e. a

[101] 'Historiospectography: how does the mode of thinking that must be available to the new scholar transmit instruction on all this? How does the new scholar ''receive''? [Derrida 1994, 161]...Deep transmission: repetition is history, history is repetition, but timeless and before. The new scholar must break with philosophy and politics as we know them, since both domains of experience and concept are wedded to illusions of resolvability. The hunter knows it can be hunted. The new scholar of historiography has a feel for ''began before''.' (Cohen 2006a, 179)

future that 'cannot even announce itself...cannot be pre-announced or over-announced'[102]) (Derrida and Ferraris 2001, 20-21). Here eschatology is 'weaker' than telic thought and despite concerns about turning concepts like democracy or Enlightenment to come into goals, a *telos* is not intrinsic to their deployment by Derrida (they are always to come, albeit with a sense of urgency). Rather, for Derrida, eschatology is the 'rip' in teleology, the 'absolute rip in the foreseeable concatenation [i.e. (re)presentation] of historical time.' (Derrida 2002b, 13) *Second*, in relation to Cohen's criticisms of the mystical language in *Specters* including that associated with the new scholar and their function – 'spirit engineers', 'connoisseurship of the netherworld', etc. – and while not wanting to dismiss the possibility that this language could always be used in exclusionary ways, I nevertheless think that it constitutes a creative (but perhaps no longer fresh) restatement of a decidedly non-mystical point. The crucial point here and one already made by Bill Readings but *not* directly in relation to a reading of *Specters* –

[102] 'Why do I claim that justice is eschatological and messianic, and that this is so *a priori*, even for the non-believer, even for someone who does not live according to a faith determined by Judeo-Christian-Islamic revelation? Perhaps because the appeal of the future [*l'avenir*] that we spoke of a moment ago – which overflows any sort of ontological determination, which overflows everything that is and that is present, the entire field of being and beings, and the entire field of history – is committed to a promise or an appeal that goes beyond being and history. This is an extremity that is beyond any determinable end of being or of history, and this eschatology – as extreme beyond the extreme, as last beyond the last – has necessarily to be the only absolute opening towards the non-determinability of the future.

It is perhaps necessary to free the value of the future from the value of ''horizon'' that traditionally has been attached to it – a horizon being, as the Greek word indicates, a limit from which I pre-comprehend the future. I wait for it, I pre-determine it, and thus I annul it. Teleology is, at bottom, the negation of the future, a way of knowing beforehand the form that will have to be taken by what is still to come.

Here, what I call the eschatological or the messianic is nothing other than a relation to the future so despoiled and indeterminate that it leaves being ''to come'' [*à venir*], i.e., undetermined. As soon as a determinate outline is given to the future, to the promise, even to the Messiah, the messianic loses its purity, and the same is true of the eschatological in the sense we are giving it now. We could find ourselves with a sort of messianic eschatology so desertic that no religion and no ontology could identify themselves with it. If we had the texts on hand, it would be interesting to look at the passages where Heidegger talks about eschatology. In any case, what we have here is an affirmation that is, moreover, a decision, implicit within any relation to the future – a reaffirmation of the eschatological and messianic as a structured relation to the future as such. If there is a future as such, it cannot even announce itself, it cannot be pre-announced or over-announced [*se sur-annoncer*] except in the eschatological and messianic – but in a messianic and an eschatological that would be the kenosis of the eschatological and messianic. This kenosis does not necessarily have to be the object of a mystical exercise or ascetic despoilment. Nevertheless, we do have to recognize the fact that it works messianically and eschatologically on our present, our ''now'', our everydayness. And this ''now'' is not a present.

How can the desert of this kenosis be linked to justice? It may be said: ''with a despoilment of this sort, even if it be granted you, you will never render justice to justice; justice has nothing to do with it''. But I do not agree. What has to be ''saved'' by this kenosis, if it is the irruption of a future that is absolutely non-reappropriable, has to have the shape of the other, which is not simply the shape of something in space that cannot be reached. That which defies anticipation, reappropriation, calculation – any form of pre-determination – is *singularity*. There can be no future as such unless there is radical otherness, and respect for this radical otherness.' (Derrida and Ferraris 2001, 20-21)

is that 'we do not know in advance the nature of our obligations to others'; that these are 'obligations that have no origin except in the sheer fact of the existence of Otherness' – whether it be 'people, animals, things other to ourselves', etc. – and that it thus 'comports an incalculable obligation.'[103] (Readings 1996, 188) *Third*, I want to make the meta- (or meta-meta) theoretical point that Cohen's essay on Derrida (and his wider intellectual project) could itself be read as subject to the messianic general structure of experience that he has critiqued in the sense that it seems resolved to let the future remain permanently open and thus reject any attempt to 'close' or 'close off'. To that extent the force of his arguments – seeking to disturb and unsettle historical culture in all its forms (including that radically different one which he perceives as being set up in *Specters*), straining to get out of/abandon historical narrativization, etc. – can be understood precisely as an expression of the deconstructive desire (messianic promise, experience of the im-possible, etc.) that I have been arguing for. Cohen would be the first to admit, I think, that radical openness to the future is crucial in any critical-intellectual undertaking, although he is obviously wary of the tendency for ideals to be turned into prescriptions, i.e. determinative, imposed visions (imperative exhortations/injunctions) that cannot be discussed and that so often accompany theoretical work that is futurist in orientation. So, I think that the case could be made that Cohen's own work ironically constitutes a response to the unconditional imperative/injunction of a close reading and/or post-historical future to come. The vocabulary changes but the imperative/injunction remains. And this is because I don't consider it possible to escape the dilemma of every/any critique of the politicization of concepts always being made in the name of the other: no possibility (precisely because they im-possibilise – conditions of possibility – our accounts) any of us can avoid (because we are answering/responding to the always already promise/'believe me') the imperative words of command that Cohen so brilliantly

[103] 'Of course, once one begins, as I have done, to speak of a non-finite obligation, people easily think of religion, since this is precisely the discursive sphere in which the awareness of the possibility of an incalculable (and hence unpayable) debt has been preserved as an anachronism in modernity. This is why it is easy to sound mystical when speaking of incalculable obligation or unknowable (and hence unpayable) debt, of non-finite responsibility toward the Other. But I am not trying to sound mystical. I am saying something rather simple: that we do not know in advance the nature of our obligations to others, obligations that have no origin except in the sheer fact of the existence of Otherness – people, animals, things other to ourselves – that comports an incalculable obligation.' (Readings 1996, 188)

discusses. Derrida, who emphasized the need for critical awareness regarding the 'one must'[104], acknowledged that the grammar of the future-to-come 'imposes the very injunction of its ''it is necessary'' '; therefore, and given that '[w]hat remains to be thought remains to come and thus resists thinking' (Derrida 2002f, *xxxiii*), Cohen is correct to raise the issue of 'thought stoppers'. Yet I maintain that this insoluble paradox, this problematic, has always structured *every* discursive construct, including that of history. From my point of view what is crucial for Cohen and Derrida is that we are allowed to go on discussing and critiquing and allow others to do the same. Nothing off limits, nothing closed or closed off. And here I want to stress that, far from prohibiting it or constituting 'part of the problem', the foregrounding of the messianic structure of experience enables and impels this ongoing discussion and critique – our engagement with/action in the actuality of the here and now – in ways that I think resonate strongly with Cohen's work of intellectual criticism (including his analysis of the uses and abuses of history). I will return to this latter point shortly.

But for now, in light of the above, what assumes a heightened level of importance is the status with which we invest these imperative injunctions to which so much recourse is made: the 'transcendental' or the 'quasi-transcendental'. Here I think Caputo has provided a helpful recoding of these terms in a way which helps address Cohen's criticism of Derrida's alleged idealizing when he distinguishes between 'Ideal' (transcendental) and 'Intensification' (quasi-transcendental) (Caputo 2007b, 199-200). He describes this distinction as follows:

> The only 'content' of the to-come is the content of hope in a promise, of expectation of a coming, of faith in the future – like a prayer for the coming of

[104] In the volume *Who's Afraid of Philosophy? Right to Philosophy 1* (Derrida 2002e) Derrida's makes this emphasis in relation to institutional and pedagogical politics: 'One must not forget that. One must (try, first of all, just to see, a discourse without ''one must'', and not just without an obvious ''one must'', one that is visible as such, but without a hidden ''one must''; I propose to bring these to light in so-called theoretical, indeed trans-ethical discourses, even when they do not claim to be discourses of teaching; at bottom, in the latter, the teaching discourses, the ''one must'' – the lesson given continuously, from the moment the floor is taken – is perhaps, naively or not, only more declared, which can, in certain conditions, disarm it more quickly), one must therefore avoid naturalizing this place.
Naturalizing always, very nearly at any rate, amounts to neutralizing.
By naturalizing, by affecting to consider as natural what is not and has never been natural, one neutralizes. One neutralizes what? One conceals, rather, in an effect of neutrality, the active intervention of a force and a machinery.' (Derrida 2002e, 68-69)

the Messiah, like a movement of desire that extends any given content infinitely forward, not in the mode of making *infinite progress toward an Ideal* but in the mode of an *infinite intensification of hope*. The infinity in this infinitive *à venir* is not quantitative or progressive but qualitative or intensive. Being-toward the *à venir* is a movement of infinite intensification and not of idealization...The affirmation of the *à venir* intensifies what it affirms infinitely, and this shatters the empirical figure – of democracy, hospitality, or anything else – rather than extending it to ideal completion. Idealization perfects what it idealizes rather than shattering it. If anything, being-toward the *à venir* is a *counter*-idealization, which takes the view that there is no Infinite Ideal, no *eidos*, for that would always be finite relative to the infinite intensity unleashed by the *à venir*. The to-come is not a future *eidos* up ahead toward which we are making gradual progress, but an intense and merciless 'white light' under which the present is made to pass. It is not a datable future time but a demand, an expectation, a hope, a desire – so much fuel for the passion for the impossible. (Caputo 2007b, 199)[105]

[105] The rest of Caputo's argument – continuing straight after the passage quoted in the main text – continues as follows: 'From the point of view of the *à venir* a Kantian Ideal is finite because what it extends to completion beyond any possible empirical confirmation is a definable and determinable concept. As an operation of idealization, this corresponds politically to imagining a utopian ideal within the finite framework defined and circumscribed by the concept of democracy. But being-toward the *à venir* does not mean idealizing a determinate empirical content, thereby bringing it to its essential fulfilment. The affirmation of the *à venir* intensifies what it affirms infinitely, and this shatters the empirical figure – of democracy, hospitality, or anything else – rather than extending it to ideal completion. Idealization perfects what it idealizes rather than shattering it. If anything, being-toward the *à venir* is a *counter*-idealization, which takes the view that there is no Infinite Ideal, no *eidos*, for that would always be finite relative to the infinite intensity unleashed by the *à venir*. The to-come is not a future *eidos* up ahead toward which we are making gradual progress, but an intense and merciless ''white light'' under which the present is made to pass. It is not a datable future time but a demand, an expectation, a hope, a desire – so much fuel for the passion for the impossible. The affirmation of the *à venir* will never be appeased by anything, not because it despairs but because it always demands and hopes for more. The infinite intensity of the ''to-come'' means that it submits a presently available historical structure – such as any existing democracy – to an absolute demand, an infinite exaction, an impossible requirement, to be what it cannot be, to go where it cannot go. The *à venir* makes a merciless demand for mercy, an implacable insistence on justice.

''Democracy'' is an historical and determinate political form, a finite empirical structure, a positive system of law aimed at providing equal rights and uniform protections to all; while the democracy *to come*, the democracy that has been infinitely charged by the to-come, demands infinite respect for each and every singularity, requiring that we count every tear and take heed of every hair on the head of the least among us. Thus there is something within the positive political concept of democracy, Derrida says, that ''exceeds politics'' [see *Negotiations*, 181], namely, an infinite demand that is demanded not by any finite political form but by the implacable demands of the to-come...Like the idea of the perfect map, the idea of the democracy to come is auto-deconstructing. That is because this idea cannot be brought to the completion of an Ideal; it is not an ''idealization'' of empirical democracies, nor an ideal form against which empirical democracies can be held up. It is a white light that is directed upon every historical formation – an infinite intensification of a promise that stirs within the word democracy, that mercilessly exposes the defects of any given historical actuality. The democracy to-come demands more, demands something different, something *au-delà*, and this because it demands the impossible, something that will not and cannot come. It is not a finite Ideal but an infinite expectation. There is no capitalized Ideal or Idealization-process, only an endless process of self-transformation and auto-deconstruction, a fragile series that is fully exposed to the risk that these transformations will not make progress but make things worse, which is not only not desired but down-right dreaded. Once exposed to the harsh demands of the ''to-come'', the *present* in any order of representation or desire – the order, for example, of what is today called the gift, hospitality, forgiveness, democracy, justice, friendship – becomes absolutely intolerable. The present is radically relativized and opened up vis-à-vis the absolute future of that order – the gift to

Messianic historical theory therefore regards the imperative injunctions in Derrida's work which Cohen critiques in *Specters* as intensifications (quasi-transcendentals) and *not* ideals (transcendentals). It wants to draw attention to and in so doing explicitly re-orient historical (re)presentation/theorization as 'being-toward the *à venir*' – this intense white light of the to-come so that it becomes 'radically relativized and opened up vis-à-vis the absolute future' (Caputo 2007b, 200). What this quasi-transcendental structure attempts to avoid is precisely a rigid *a priorism* on one hand and utter contingency (not the same as radical contingency) on the other. One expression by Derrida of this challenge is as follows:

> It is only a question of bringing out that the lack of foundation is basic and nonempirical and that the security of presence in the metaphorical form of ideality arises and is set forth again upon this irreducible void. (Derrida 1973, 7)

Perhaps Cohen would not want to modify at all the language of the transcendental due to his concerns about possible overcoding, and I suppose that even intensifications can lead to prescriptions (although here I read Derrida as alert to this danger by refusing to speak of quasi-transcendentality as/in 'a single code', referring to it as 'at once ironic and serious'[106] – Derrida 1996b, 81). Yet any alternatives would have to establish an interpretation or other approach that is not always already structured by the messianic experience (im-possibilised).

In any case, I now return to the point I made earlier *vis-à-vis* any closing down of possibilities that there is a strong emphasis in Derrida's work on precisely resisting overcoding, albeit expressed in different terms. For him the exercise of

---

come, the hospitality to come, and so on, all of which might in the end be the same thing. Or different: Who knows?' (Caputo 2007b, 199-200)

[106] 'Do I just speak of this ''quasi'' in an ironical, comic or parodic manner, or is it a question of something else? I believe both. There is irony and there is something else...Now, I claim this right to make noises of both sorts in an absolutely unconditional manner. I absolutely refuse a discourse that would assign me a single code, a single language game, a single context, a single situation; and I claim this right not simply out of caprice or because it is to my taste, but for ethical and political reasons. When I say that quasi-transcendentality is at once ironic and serious, I am being sincere. There is evidently irony in what I do – which I hope is politically justifiable – with regard to academic tradition, the seriousness of the philosophical tradition and the personages of the great philosophers. But, although irony appears to me necessary to what I do, at the same time – and this is a question of memory – I take extremely seriously the issue of philosophical responsibility.' (Derrida 1996b, 81)

responsibility, both theoretical and ethico-political, 'prescribes that nothing be a priori exempted from the deconstructive questions' and that 'deconstruction consists in nothing less than putting this responsibility to work'[107] (Derrida 1989b, 259*n*44) in ongoing analysis. Indeed, Derrida identified deconstruction with a form of 'hyperanalyticism' (Derrida 1998c, 34-37). There was/is a duty that dictates relentlessly criticizing 'totalitarian dogmatism'[108] (Derrida 1992e, 77). For Derrida responsible *action* – political, ethical, etc. – 'requires a task of *infinite close reading*' (Derrida 1999b, 67, italics mine), including 'a close reading of the call' (of the father – Derrida is discussing Hamlet) which involves filtering and making decisions about heritage, so as to inherit (inheriting implying selection, choice, decision, etc.).[109]

---

[107] 'Why do people overlook the fact that the exercise of (theoretical and ethico-political) responsibility prescribes that nothing be a priori exempted from the deconstructive questions? Because, in my view, deconstruction consists in nothing less than putting this responsibility to work, especially when it analyzes traditional and dogmatic axioms concerning the concept of responsibility. Why do people pretend not to see that deconstruction is anything but a nihilism or a skepticism? Why can one still read this claim despite so many texts that *explicitly, thematically, and for more than twenty years* have been demonstrating the opposite? Why the charge of irrationalism as soon as anyone asks a question about reason, its forms, its history, its mutations? Or the charge of antihumanism, with the first question put to the essence of man and the construction of its concept? I could go on citing examples of this sort, the same thing occurs whether it is a matter of language, literature, philosophy, technicity, democracy, of all institutions in general, and so forth. In short, what are people afraid of? Whom do they want to make afraid? Which homogeneity are they trying to protect behind this barrier? Whom do they want to silence in the name of consensus, or any case its ''rallying cry'' [*mot d'ordre*]? To what order, precisely, are we being recalled by these sinister disciplinary counsels with their gravely intoned litanies? Is it merely to the order of boredom? No, I fear it is more serious than that.

No doubt I will come back to these questions elsewhere, of course – and once again, because I have done so often. But I want at least to note, here and now, the most general trait of this philosophic-political conjuncture. There is a kind of law here, an invariant whose necessity has to be pondered. It is *always* in the name of ethics – a supposedly democratic ethics of discussion – it is always in the name of transparent communication and of ''consensus'' that the most brutal disregard of the elementary rules of discussion is produced (by these elementary rules, I mean differentiated reading or listening to the other, proof, argumentation, analysis, and quotation). It is *always* the moralistic discourse of consensus – at least the discourse that pretends to appeal sincerely to consensus – that produces in fact the indecent transgression of the classical norms of reason and democracy. To say nothing of elementary philology. Why? What is this a sign of today, in the actual state of our political, academic, or mediatistic institutions?' (Derrida 1989b, 259*n*44)

[108] 'The *same duty* dictates *criticizing* (''in-both-theory-and-in-practice'', and relentlessly) a totalitarian dogmatism that, under the pretense of putting an end to capital, destroyed democracy and the European heritage. But it also dictates criticizing a religion of capital that insititutes its dogmatism under new guises, which we must also learn to identify – for this is the future itself, and there will be none otherwise.' (Derrida 1992e, 77)

[109] In response to a question Derrida comments as follows: 'At some point, and perhaps you were trying to provoke me, you said that if we practise close reading we will never act. On the contrary, I would assume that political, ethical and juridical responsibility requires a task of infinite close reading. I believe this to be the condition of political responsibility: politicians should read. Now, to read does not mean to spend nights in the library; to read events, to analyse the situation, to criticize the media, to listen to the rhetoric of the demagogues, that's close reading, and it is required more today than ever. So I would urge politicians and citizens to practise close reading in this new sense, and not simply to stay in the library.

In the case of Hamlet, I try to show in *Specters of Marx* that the responsibility in front of the father's call, for it to be a responsibility, demands that choices be made; that is, you cannot remember everything

Although, as we have seen, responsibility to the 'I/we must' – immediate imperative – involves, *paradoxically* (a dilemma that Derrida acknowledges but thinks there is no solution for), engaging with a process in the name of that which is foreign to the process, this does *not* constitute an evasion or a spurning of actuality.[110] On the contrary. Derrida has pointed out that responding critically to the urgency of actuality *requires* the incalculable, the untimely, and the discord of the quasi-transcendental imperative (messianic experience) (Derrida 2002d, 91-92).[111] Derrida

---

for a fact; you have to filter the heritage and to scrutinize or make a close reading of the call. This means that to inherit, or to keep memory for a finite being implies some selection, some choice, some decision. So the son has to make a decision; even if he wants to be true to the father, or to remember the father, as a finite being he has to select within the heritage and that is again the question of undecidability. Of course, that is the classical interpretation of Hamlet as a victim of undecidability, he doesn't know and he gets paralysed. Nevertheless, if we assume that Hamlet is a figure of paralysis or neurosis because of undecidability, he might be also a paradigm for action: he understands what actions should be and he undergoes the process of undecidability at the beginning.' (Derrida 1999b, 67-68) Simon Critchley has provided a helpful explanation of the challenges/tensions for the kind of responsible action arising out of this task of infinite close reading, or, put differently, in relation to an infinite demand/call, that he thinks is 'employed by Derrida in his late work': 'For him [Derrida], responsible political action can only consist in the negotiation between contradictory, irreconcilable, and yet indissociable demands. On the one hand, political action has to be related to – in our terms – a moment of the infinite demand or the Biblical command if it is not going to be reduced to the prudential, pragmatic needs of the moment. Action needs to be articulated in relation to a notion of the infinite that exceeds the finitude of any context. But, on the other hand, such an infinite demand cannot – or, for Derrida, *must* not – be permitted to *program* political action, where specific decisions would be algorithmically deduced from incontestable moral precepts. Action is guided by taking a decision in a situation that is strictly undecidable, and where responsibility consists in the acceptance of an ineluctable double bind.' (Critchley 2012, 221)

[110] '[T]he ''we must'' has no process; it is foreign to the process. When I feel that ''I must'', on the one hand, of course, I enter a process, but in the name of something which doesn't tolerate the process. It's immediate. For instance, I must answer the call of the other: it's something which has to be absolute, unconditional and immediate, that is, foreign to any process.

Now, of course, if I want to be responsible to the ''I must'', to the immediate imperative, the unconditional ''I must'', then in the name of this just response I have to engage myself in a process; that is, to take into account conditions, strategy, and rhetoric and so on. That is a great dilemma, I have no solution to that. If I told you that I have a solution I would be lying. I think there is no solution, no rules or norms for that.

... So to repeat, when we talk of this ''we must'', of this responsibility, the ''we must'' is always foreign to the process. However, in the name of this ''we must'' we have to enter the process, and to analyze and to transform infinitely. This is a strange logic indeed. But I would not simply oppose, on the one side, the field of politics, ethics and rhetoric, and, on the other side, justice. We have to pay attention to their heterogeneity, I would insist on that. They are heterogeneous, and because of this one calls for the other: they are indissociable. If I wanted to formalize in a very abstract, empty, or formal way, this situation, I would say that there is at the same time heterogeneity, radical heterogeneity, between two terms, but at the same time the two terms are indissociable. Decision, an ethical or a political responsibility, is absolutely heterogeneous to knowledge. Nevertheless, we have to know as much as possible in order to ground our decision. But even if it is grounded in knowledge, the moment I take a decision it is a leap, I enter a heterogeneous space and that is the condition of responsibility.

This is not only a problem but the *aporia* we have to face constantly. For me, however, the *aporia* is not simply paralysis, but the *aporia* or the *non-way* is the condition of walking: if there was no *aporia* we wouldn't walk, we wouldn't find our way; path-breaking implies *aporia*. This impossibility to find one's way is the condition of ethics.' (Derrida 1999b, 72-73)

[111] 'But this is just another manner of evasion, you will say, another manner of not speaking about what you have called the *present* or *actuality*. The first question, the one I would have sent back to you, like an echo, would be this one: but what does it mean to speak of the present? Of course it would be easy to

is concerned with what conditions and qualifies critiques of actuality. What is this, then, if not a critical approach? And, staying with the issue of actuality but now linking it up with the Derridean notion of justice that Cohen is also rightly concerned about, it is not that human rights and ethico-political progress in the present-near future are *unimportant*, but rather that the 'excess' of messianic justice is precisely necessary to prevent 'totalization' and 'the *totalitarianism* of a right [*droit*] without justice'[112] in relation to such issues (Derrida and Ferraris 2001, 22). It is precisely the imminent *excess* of messianic justice pressing urgently on the here

show that, in fact, I have only ever been occupied with problems of actuality, of institutional politics, or simply of politics. One could then multiply (please do not ask me to do this myself) the examples, references, names, dates, places. But I do not want to give in to this mediagogical facility and take advantage of this tribunal to indulge in self-justification. I do not feel that I have the right to do this, and whatever I may do not to shrink my political responsibilities, it is not enough, and I will always reproach myself for not doing enough.

But I also try not to forget that it is often the untimely approaches to what is called *actuality* that are most ''occupied'' with the present. In other words, to be occupied with the present – as a philosopher, for example – is perhaps to avoid the constant confusion of the present with actuality. There is an anachronistic way of treating actuality that does not necessarily miss what is most present today. The difficulty, the risk or chance, the incalculable, might perhaps take the form of an untimeliness that comes on time: precisely this one and not another, the one that comes *just on time*, *just* because it is anachronistic and out of joint (like justice itself, which is always measureless, oblivious to what is appropriate [*justesse*] or to the adaptive nor, heterogeneous even to rights over which it should preside), more present than the present of actuality, more in tune with the singular measurelessness [*démesure*] that marks the irruption [*effraction*] of the other in the course of history. This irruption always takes an untimely, propheric, or messianic form; for this it has no need for clamor or spectacle. It can stay almost unapparent. For the reasons we discussed a moment ago, it is not in the daily papers that one speaks the most about this more-than-present of today [*ce plus-que-présent de l'aujourd'hui*]. Which is also not to say that it happens every day in the monthlies or the weeklies.

The response, a response that is responsible to the urgency of actuality demands these precautions. It requires discord, the disaccord or discordance of this untimeliness, the right [*juste*] disadjustment of this anachrony. One must, at the same time, defer, keep a distance, linger *and* rush. This must be done properly [*il faut le faire comme il faut*] to get as close as possible to what is happening by way of actuality. At the same time, every time and each time is another time, the first and the last. In any case, I like the gestures (rare as they are, no doubt even impossible, and in any case nonprogrammable) that bring together in themselves the hyperactual with the anachronous. And to prefer the alliance or the alloy of these two styles is not only a matter of taste. It is the law of response or responsibility, the law of the other.' (Derrida 2002d, 91-92)

[112] 'I can well imagine the objections raised here by people concerned with law, politics and morals against such a phantom idea of justice – objections that have to be answered. The question of the political, ethical, juridical, consists in finding, as the occasion demands, the schemata required to articulate justice and law, justice and politics, justice and history, justice and ontology. But with all due respect for the enormity of the problems – which are indeed the problems we have to resolve whenever we make a decision or take political action – I think that the instant one loses sight of the *excess* of justice, or of the future, in that very moment the conditions of totalization would, undoubtedly, be fulfilled – but so would the conditions of the *totalitarianism* of a right [*droit*] without justice, of a good moral conscience and a good juridical conscience, which all adds up to a present without a future [*sans avenir*]. I do not want to take sides in a war of religions, but the religions for which the Messiah has arrived, where the messianic vocation has already been accomplished, always run the risk of lacking this transcendence of justice and the to-come with respect to totality.' (Derrida and Ferraris 2001, 22)

and now that will not allow us to defer our response to them.[113] (Derrida and Ferraris 2001, 23-24) In the course of responding to an interview question from B. Keith Putt, Caputo has provided a response which helpfully ties together many of these points and provides a useful overview for a historical theory that takes its inspiration from the Derridean messianic yet wishes to remain cognizant of, so as to avoid, the powerful criticisms made by Cohen regarding its potential to negate disjunction as well as opposition to/criticism of existing authorities (i.e. negating action against capitalism in the now). Caputo comments to Putt that:

> There is a point, a center, which is the object of desire, but it is never present. To put it in biblical terms, it would be a kind of idolatry to treat something that is present as undeconstructible. His [Derrida's] critics now say this is the myth of Sisyphus all over again, a futile passion, nothing we will ever be able to do. If it is impossible, why bother? First he is criticized for the endless play of dissemination; now he is criticized for being a dreamer dreaming the impossible dream. But this is a perverse misreading, because the point of the 'impossible' or the 'undeconstructible' is to make us intolerant of the injustice of the structures that are around us, to offset complacency and to raise the pitch of our sensitivity to those who suffer injustice, those who are excluded, those who are marginalized. He wants to make us discontent with anything that we have now so that we can do better...[so] that the present structure not be allowed to close around itself. The present is always marked by injustice; there are always those who are left out...Derrida wants to keep us open to what still solicits us, to make us distrustful of identifying the present arrangement with justice or with the truth because it is not, not as long as we live in time. (Caputo in Putt 2002, 162)

And this is also what messianic historical theory – as a form of *resistance* to all historicized settlements, dominant or otherwise that are not prepared to 'let the future be open' – *wants* and sets out to do in relation to historians, their (re)presentations and to historical culture more broadly. Messianic historiographers carry out infinite close readings of historical narratives by way of keeping them open to that which solicits and conditions them. And they are all the while mindful that the 'perhaps' of the messianic general structure of experience may not just

[113] 'I would like to anticipate an objection, which goes like this: since justice is always in excess with respect to right, it can never be attained, is always deferred, and so is not even an infinite idea in the Kantian sense but is even further removed, and is excessive in any case – and therefore one may be excused for not attaining it. But not at all! This excess *presses* urgently here and now, *singularly*. It does not wait. Imminence means that it presses in every instant: *this* is never present, but *this* will not be put off to tomorrow: *this*, the relation to the other – death.' (Derrida and Ferraris 2001, 23-24)

disturb history in the name of some other concept of it but that it could also, in fact, signal the end of history and the dismantling of the 'discipline' *per se.* We'll see; vigilant attention: at all times.

Section Four: Closing comments and testifying to stupidity before the other

In this last section I want to conclude with a few final reflections on the *re*load of messianic historical theory that I have developed and defended in this thesis. *First*, I hope it is clear that my overall position (intellectual and political sympathies, intertextual influences, etc.) is in unashamed and unrepentant continuity with the postmodern/poststructuralist critique of history (upper and lower case, in all its forms broadly construed) within which I *include* Derrida. If such an allegiance 'means' anything it is surely that I do not think it possible – and have made every effort throughout this thesis not to pretend otherwise – that any argument, including my own, should be taken as any kind of final last word. Rather, what I have aimed to do is (as lucidly expressed by Keith Jenkins with whom I am happy to claim continuity):

> [*T*]*o try to work the discourse of history in the direction of that kind of radical, open-ended democracy that grasps the impossibility of enacting a total historical/historicising closure of the past whilst recognising that its refigured ways of figuring things out 'will never have been good enough'* – and that this is the most desirable thing. (Jenkins 2003, 5)

Therefore, while I think that this thesis *does* make a useful contribution to working the discourse of history in the direction described by Jenkins it is also appropriate that I admit, in that precise sense that he sets out, that it 'will never have been good enough'. To feign otherwise would be to imbue it with a false objectivity or (non-quasi-) transcendence that no discursive construct could ever possess. This is not to say, and I am not saying it, that I have not made every effort to put things under descriptions and give – relative to those descriptions – argumentative support for them to the best of my ability. And I have done so on the basis of a set of preferences and by utilising what I consider to be the best theoretical tools available for the job within the social formation that I operate in. And this brings me to my *second* point which is to do with the way in which I have attempted to *reaffirm* the

heritage with which I have stated I am in continuity. Derrida pointed out that to reaffirm 'means not simply accepting' a heritage 'but relaunching it otherwise and keeping it alive'; such a reaffirmation 'both continues and interrupts' and 'resembles...a selection, a decision': mine '*as* that of the other: signature against signature.' (Derrida and Roudinesco 2004, 3-4) Accordingly, and on the basis of my own preferences – a desire to disrupt any claim that postmodern/poststructuralist critiques of history are *passé*, and the intention of helping to ensure that historical theory is not isolated from current debates taking place in contemporary cultural criticism – I have attempted to relaunch 'my' heritage ('otherwise' – so that it 'lives on') by equipping it with a religious vocabulary, principally that of the messianic. I accept that this will not be to everyone's taste (to say the least) but I hope that, whilst I have no particular desire for warfare, it might nevertheless restore some of the strangeness, provocativeness and potential to cause outrage (disrupt/disturb) that this heritage once had. As with Derrida's deconstructive motifs, new critiques of history need to be developed – or established critiques 'retooled' – in order that their force for disjointure is preserved (not absorbed, co-opted, or pinned down). *Third*, none of this should give the impression that I am committed to the word 'messianic' at all costs. Like Derrida I view it as 'relatively arbitrary or extrinsic', although I acknowledge its 'rhetorical or pedagogical value' (Derrida 1999c, 254) and – in particular – the profound indexicality that it currently has given the debates that continue to circulate in contemporary cultural criticism/theory. I have no difficulty in accepting that, some day, what Derrida intended by messianicity may be discussed 'without reference to traditional messianism or a ''Messiah'' ' but, as he also pointed out, 'by that point, under the old words, all the names will have been changed.' (Derrida 1999c, 254)

To end. This thesis – the *messianic historical theory* that has been *developed* and *defended* – constitutes a testimony of sorts, given that '[t]estimony, which implies faith or promise, governs the entire social space' and that 'theoretical knowledge is circumscribed within this testimonial space.'[114] (Derrida 1999b, 82) It is a testimony

[114] 'Testimony, which implies faith or promise, governs the entire social space. I would say that theoretical knowledge is circumscribed within this testimonial space. It is only by reference to the

in and for a time when religion has returned to contemporary cultural criticism (for good or ill). As such, and given all that I have discussed, it is persuaded of the inescapable necessity of engaging with a certain ethical, political, existential and very messianic concern (or demand) arising out of that which Avital Ronell has articulated in the form of the utterance 'I am stupid before the other.'[115] (Ronell 2004, 54) For it is the contention of messianic historical theory that this statement sums up precisely what historical (re)presentation and historiography – historicization in all its forms (including its theorisation) – has always already constituted and taught 'us', whether avowedly or not. Historians can do nothing else but (the more actively and explicitly the better) *testify* – endless words heaped up in a myriad of infinite historicizations, theorisations and close readings that are inscribed with failure because they are conditioned by that which they can never determine – *to their/our stupidity before the messianic other*, to that im-possible ineffable and 'un(re)presentable' futural excess which 'we' *must* in the end learn to love (*amor fati*) and keep ourselves open to ('let come') by way of resisting the stultifying totalizations of historical culture.[116]

---

possibility of testimony that deconstruction can begin to ask questions concerning knowledge and meaning.' (Derrida 1999b, 82)

[115] Avital Ronell – as interviewed by Diane Davis in a text entitled 'Confessions of an Anacoluthon: On Writing, Technology, Pedagogy, and Politics', which first appeared in *JAC: Journal of Advanced Composition Theory* 20, no. 2 (2000): 243-81, and which is reprinted in Wolfreys 2004 from which I am quoting – explains one of her intellectual projects as follows: 'First of all, I am writing out of an ethical concern that I articulate in the utterance, ''I am stupid before the other''. What happens when one humbles oneself and says, ''I am stupid before the other''? I raise a question about how it is that in the unwritten history of stupidity there has always been an alterity, a nonappropriable other, that has been trashed and bashed and has received the accusatory sting of being called ''stupid''. So I am interested in this naming in which executive and executing decisions are made about the status of the other...I call for a kind of rewriting – rephrasing in Jean-François Lyotard's sense – according to which one would say, ''I am stupid before the other''. I think that would involve a surprising reformatting of what we think we know and how we think we can evaluate and judge...I am interested in the humbling that occurs when one says, ''I am stupid before the other'', which is absolutely a taboo. You cannot imagine someone in a university saying, ''I am stupid'' or ''I am stupid before my students''. This humbling and destabilizing of the *sujet supposé savoir* – of the subject who is supposed to know or who is posed as functionary of knowing – creates minor insurrections that interest me. But, of course, one of the most stupid reflexes is to think that you know what stupidity is all about. This situation calls for another type of activism that begins with ''I'm not sure I know''. And you don't close the book; you don't throw the book at anyone...Suffice it to say that it would provide for a very different politics to say, ''I don't know'' or ''I am stupid before the other'', but not in the oppositional sense that stupidity is the opposite of whatever opposes it – let's say, provisionally, ''intelligence''.' (Ronell 2004, 54-55)

[116] In relation to the issue of the un(re)presentable and resisting the totalizations of historical culture I affirm and situate this thesis in explicit continuity with the exhortations of Jean-François Lyotard in the appendix (entitled 'Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?') to his *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Lyotard 1984). As regards the un(re)presentable Lyotard argues as follows: 'The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unpresentable in

presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unpresentable.' (Lyotard 1984, 81) Messianic historical theory could be considered as constituting one such 'postmodern' expression as described here by Lyotard. His concluding paragraph – worth quoting in full given that it is entirely in accordance with my concluding remarks and the overall motivational concerns that I have expressed throughout this thesis, albeit expressed differently – links the un(re)presentable with resisting totalization(s) in a way that is entirely resonant with/of the messianic historical theory that I have developed and defended: 'Finally, it must be clear that it is our business not to supply reality but to invent allusions to the conceivable which cannot be presented. And it is not to be expected that this task will effect the last reconciliation between language games (which, under the name of faculties, Kant knew to be separated by a chasm), and that only the transcendental illusion (that of Hegel) can hope to totalize them into a real unity. But Kant also knew that the price to pay for such an illusion is terror. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries have given us as much terror as we can take. We have paid a high enough price for the nostalgia of the whole and the one, for the reconciliation of the concept and the sensible, of the transparent and the communicable experience. Under the general demand for slackening and for appeasement, we can hear the mutterings of the desire for a return of terror, for the realization of the fantasy to seize reality. The answer is: *Let us wage a war on totality; let us be witnesses to the unpresentable; let us activate the differences and save the honor of the name*.' (Lyotard 1984, 81-82, italics mine)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adorno, T., (1967). *Prisms*. Translated by Samuel Weber and Shierry Weber. Cambridge: The MIT Press.

Adorno, T., (2005). *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*. Translated by E. F. N. Jephcott. London: Verso.

Agamben, G., (2005). *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*. Translated by Patricia Dailey. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

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

Ankersmit, F. R., (1996). *Aesthetic Politics: Political Philosophy Beyond Fact and Value*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Ankersmit, F. R., (2001). *Historical Representation*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

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

Appleby, J., Hunt, L., and Jacob, M., (1995). *Telling the Truth About History*. New York: W. W. Norton and Company.

Badiou, A., (2001). *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*. Translated by Peter Hallward. London: Verso.

Badiou, A., (2003). *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*. Translated by Ray Brassier. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Badiou, A., (2009). *Pocket Pantheon: Figures of Postwar Philosophy*. Translated by David Macey. London: Verso.

Balakrishnan, G., (2009). *Antagonistics: Capitalism and Power in an Age of War*. London: Verso.

Benjamin, W., (1999). 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in Benjamin, W., *Illuminations*. Edited by Hannah Arendt. Translated by Harry Zorn. London: Pimlico.

Bennington, G., (1987). 'Demanding History', in Attridge, D., Bennington, G., and Young, R., (eds.) *Post-structuralism and the Question of History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bennington, G., (1993). 'Derridabase', in Bennington, G., and Derrida, J., *Jacques Derrida*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Berkhofer, Jr., R. F., (1995). *Beyond the Great Story: History as Text and Discourse*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Bevernage, B., (2012). *History, Memory, and State-Sponsored Violence: Time and Justice*. London: Routledge.

Blanchot, M., (1995). *The Writing of the Disaster*. Translated by Ann Smock. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Blond, P., (ed.) (1998). *Post-secular Philosophy: Between Philosophy and Theology*. London: Routledge.

Bouretz, P., (2010). *Witnesses for the Future: Philosophy and Messianism*. Translated by Michael B. Smith. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Bradley, A., and Fletcher, P., (eds.) (2010). *The Politics to Come: Power, Modernity and the Messianic*. London: Continuum.

Brassier, R., (2007). *Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Breckman, W., (2013). *Adventures of the Symbolic: Post-Marxism and Radical Democracy*. New York: Columbia University Press

Breisach, E., (2003). *On the Future of History: The Postmodernist Challenge and its Aftermath*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Brown, C. G., (2005). *Postmodernism for Historians*. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.

Butler, J., and Laclau, E., (2004). 'Appendix I: the uses of equality', in Critchley, S., and Marchant, O., (eds.) *Laclau: A Critical Reader*. London: Routledge.

Caputo, J. D., (1987). *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Caputo, J. D., (1997). *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Caputo, J. D., (2000). *More Radical Hermeneutics: On Not Knowing Who We Are*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Caputo, J. D., (2001). *On Religion*. London: Routledge.

Caputo, J. D., (2002a). 'Hoping in hope, hoping against hope: a response', in Olthuis, J. H., (ed.) *Religion with/out Religion: The Prayers and Tears of John D. Caputo*. London: Routledge.

Caputo, J. D., (ed.) (2002b). *The Religious*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

Caputo, J. D., (2003a). 'A Game of Jacks: A Response to Derrida', in Dooley, M., (ed.) *A Passion for the Impossible: John D. Caputo in Focus*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Caputo, J. D., (2003b). 'Hounding Hermeneutics: A Response to Flynn', in Dooley, M., (ed.) *A Passion for the Impossible: John D. Caputo in Focus*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Caputo, J. D., (2006). *The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Caputo, J. D., (2007a). *How to Read Kierkegaard*. London: Granta Books.

Caputo, J. D., (2007b). 'Temporal Transcendence: The Very Idea of *à venir* in Derrida', in Caputo, J. D., and Scanlon, M. J., (eds.) *Transcendence and Beyond: A Postmodern Inquiry*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Caputo, J. D., (2009). 'Hearing the Voices of the Dead: Wyschogrod, Megill, and the Heterological Historian', in Boynton, E., and Kavka, M., (eds.) *Saintly Influence: Edith Wyschogrod and the Possibilities of Philosophy of Religion*. New York: Fordham University Press.

Caputo, J. D., (2011). 'The Return of Anti-Religion: From Radical Atheism to Radical Theology', in *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 32-124.

Caputo, J. D., (2012a). 'On Not Settling for an Abridged Edition of Postmodernism: Radical Hermeneutics as Radical Theology', in Simmons, J. A., and Minister, S., (eds.) *Reexamining Deconstruction and Determinate Religion: Toward a Religion with Religion*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.

Caputo, J. D., (2012b). 'Review of *Difficult Atheism: Post-Theological Thinking in Alain Badiou, Jean-Luc Nancy and Quentin Meillassoux* by Christopher Watkin', Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews at http://ndpr.nd.edu/news/31269-difficult-atheism-post-theological-thinking-in-alain-badiou-jean-luc-nancy-and-quentin-meillassoux/, accessed on 6/7/12.

Caputo, J. D., and Scanlon, M. J., (eds.) (1999). *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

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

Cohen, S., (1986). *Historical Culture: On the Recoding of an Academic Discipline*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Cohen, S., (2005a). 'Disparity, Information, and Consumption – Hello to an Agonistics of the Future', in Cohen, S., and Rutsky, R. L., (eds.) *Consumption in an Age of Information*. Oxford: Berg.

Cohen, S., (2006a). 'Derrida's ''New Scholar'': Between Philosophy and History', in Cohen, S., *History Out of Joint: Essays on the Use and Abuse of History*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Cohen, S., (2006b). *History Out of Joint: Essays on the Use and Abuse of History*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Colebrook, C., (2009). 'Introduction', in Bell, J., and Colebrook, C., (eds.) *Deleuze and History*. Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press.

Critchley, S., (1999 – 2nd Edition). *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Critchley, S., (2012). *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology*. London: Verso.

Crockett, C., (2011). *Radical Political Theology: Religion and Politics After Liberalism*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Cusset, F., (2008). *French Theory: How Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, & Co. Transformed the Intellectual Life of the United States*. Translated by Jeff Fort. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Davies, M. L., (2010). *Imprisoned by History: Aspects of Historicized Life*. London: Routledge.

de Man, P., (1983 – 2nd Edition). *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*. London: Routledge.

de Vries, H., (1999). *Philosophy and the Turn to Religion*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

de Vries, H., and Sullivan, L. E., (eds.) (2006). *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-secular World*. New York: Fordham University Press.
Deleuze, G., (2008). *Kant's Critical Philosophy: The Doctrine of the Faculties*. Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam. London: Continuum.
Deleuze, G., and Guattari, F., (2004a). *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Brian Massumi. London: Continuum.
Deleuze, G., and Guattari, F., (2004b). *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane. London: Continuum.
Derrida, J., (1973). *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*. Translated by David B. Allison. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
Derrida, J., (1979). 'Living On: Border Lines', in Bloom, H., de Man, P., Derrida, J., Hartman, G. and Hillis Miller, J. *Deconstruction and Criticism*. New York: Continuum.
Derrida, J., (1981a). *Dissemination*. Translated by Barbara Johnson. London: The Athlone Press.
Derrida, J., (1981b). *Positions*. Translated by Alan Bass. London: The Athlone Press.
Derrida, J., (1982a). *Margins of Philosophy*. Translated by Alan Bass. New York: The Harvester Press Limited.
Derrida, J., (1986). *Glas*. Translated by John P. Leavey, Jr., and Richard Rand. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
Derrida, J., (1987). *The Truth in Painting*. Translated by Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
Derrida, J., (1988a). 'Afterword: Toward An Ethic of Discussion', in Derrida, J., *Limited Inc*. Translated by Samuel Weber. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
Derrida, J., (1988b). *Limited Inc*. Translated by Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
Derrida, J., (1989a). *Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry: An Introduction*. Translated by John P. Leavey, Jr. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
Derrida, J., (1989b – Revised Edition). *Memoires for Paul de Man*. Translated by Cecile Lindsay, Jonathan Culler, Eduardo Cadava, and Peggy Kamuf. New York: Columbia University Press.

Derrida, J., (1992a). *Acts of Literature*. Edited by Derek Attridge. London: Routledge.

Derrida, J., (1992b). *Given Time: 1. Counterfeit Money*. Translated by Peggy Kamuf. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Derrida, J., (1992c). 'How to Avoid Speaking: Denials', in Coward, H., and Foshay, T., (eds.) *Derrida and Negative Theology*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Derrida, J., (1992d). 'Of an Apocalyptic Tone Newly Adopted in Philosophy', in Coward, H., and Foshay, T., (eds.) *Derrida and Negative Theology*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Derrida, J., (1992e). *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe*. Translated by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael B. Naas. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Derrida, J., (1993a). *Aporias*. Translated by Thomas Dutoit. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Derrida, J., (1993b). 'Circumfession', in Bennington, G., and Derrida, J., *Jacques Derrida*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Derrida, J., (1993c). *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*. Translated by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Derrida, J., (1994). *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*. Translated by Peggy Kamuf. London: Routledge.

Derrida, J., (1995a). *On the Name*. Translated by David Wood, John P. Leavey, Jr., and Ian McLeod. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Derrida, J., (1995b). *Points...Interviews, 1974-1994*. Translated by Peggy Kamuf and others. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Derrida, J., (1995c). *The Gift of Death*. Translated by David Wills. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Derrida, J., (1995d). 'The Time is Out of Joint', in Haverkamp, A., (ed.) *Deconstruction is/in America: A New Sense of the Political*. New York: New York University Press.

Derrida, J., (1996a). *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. Translated by Eric Prenowitz. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
Derrida, J., (1996b). 'Remarks on Deconstruction and Pragmatism', in Mouffe, C., (ed.) *Deconstruction and Pragmatism*. London: Routledge.
Derrida, J., (1997a). *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*. Edited and with a Commentary by John. D. Caputo. New York: Fordham University Press.
Derrida, J., (1997b – Corrected Edition). *Of Grammatology*. Translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
Derrida, J., (1997c). *Politics of Friendship*. Translated by George Collins. London: Verso.
Derrida, J., (1998a). 'Faith and Knowledge: the Two Sources of ''Religion'' at the Limits of Reason Alone', in Derrida, J., and Vattimo, G., (eds.) *Religion*. Translated by Samuel Weber. Cambridge: Polity Press.
Derrida, J., (1998b). *Monolingualism of the Other; or, The Prosthesis of Origin*. Translated by Patrick Mensah. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
Derrida, J., (1998c). *Resistances of Psychoanalysis*. Translated by Peggy Kamuf, Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael B. Naas. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
Derrida, J., (1999a). *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*. Translated by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael B. Naas. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
Derrida, J., (1999b) 'Hospitality, Justice and Responsibility: A dialogue with Jacques Derrida', in Kearney, R., and Dooley, M., (eds.) *Questioning Ethics: Contemporary Debates in Philosophy*. London: Routledge.
Derrida, J., (1999c). 'Marx & Sons', in Sprinker, M., (ed.) *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida's 'Specters of Marx'*. London: Verso.
Derrida, J., (2001a). 'Deconstructions: The Im-possible', in Lotringer, S., and Cohen, S., (eds.) *French Theory in America*. London: Routledge.
Derrida, J., (2001b – Routledge Classics Edition). *Writing and Difference*. Translated by Alan Bass. London: Routledge.
Derrida, J., (2002a). *Acts of Religion*. Edited by Gil Anidjar. London: Routledge.
Derrida, J., (2002b). 'Artifactualities', in Derrida, J., and Stiegler, B., *Echographies of Television*. Translated by Jennifer Bajorek. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Derrida, J., (2002c). ‘Force of Law: The ‘‘Mystical Foundation of Authority’’ ’, in Anidjar, G., (ed.) *Acts of Religion*. London: Routledge.
Derrida, J., (2002d). *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews, 1971-2001*. Edited and Translated by Elizabeth Rottenberg. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
Derrida, J., (2002e). *Who’s Afraid of Philosophy? Right to Philosophy 1*. Translated by Jan Plug. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
Derrida, J., (2002f). *Without Alibi*. Edited and Translated by Peggy Kamuf. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
Derrida, J., (2003a). ‘Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides – A Dialogue with Jacques Derrida’, in Borradori, G., *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
Derrida, J., (2003b). ‘Following theory: Jacques Derrida’, in Payne, M., and Schad, J., (eds.) *Life After Theory*. London: Continuum.
Derrida, J., (2003c). ‘Jacques Derrida’, in Olson, G. A., and Worsham, L., (eds.) *Critical Intellectuals on Writing*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
Derrida, J., (2003d). ‘The Becoming Possible of the Impossible: An Interview with Jacques Derrida’, in Dooley, M., (ed.) *A Passion for the Impossible: John D. Caputo in Focus*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
Derrida, J., (2003e). *The Problem of Genesis in Husserl’s Philosophy*. Translated by Marian Hobson. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
Derrida, J., (2004a). ‘Deconstruction and the Other’, in Kearney, R., *Debates in Continental Philosophy: Conversations with Contemporary Thinkers*. New York: Fordham University Press.
Derrida, J., (2004b). *Eyes of the University: Right to Philosophy 2*. Translated by Jan Plug and others. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
Derrida, J., (2005a). ‘*Confessions* and ‘‘Circumfession’’: A Roundtable Discussion with Jacques Derrida’, in Caputo, J. D., and Scanlon, M. J., (eds.) *Augustine and Postmodernism: Confessions and Circumfession*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
Derrida, J., (2005b). *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy*. Translated by Christine Irizarry. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Derrida, J., (2005c). *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*. Translated by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
Derrida, J., (2005d). 'Shibboleth: For Paul Celan', in Derrida, J. *Sovereignties in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan*. Edited by Thomas Dutoit and Outi Pasanen. New York: Fordham University Press.
Derrida, J., (2005e). 'The Future of the Profession or the Unconditional University (Thanks to the ''Humanities'', What Could Take Place Tomorrow)', in Trifonas, P. P., and Peters, M. A., (eds.) *Deconstructing Derrida: Tasks for the New Humanities*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
Derrida, J., (2006). *Geneses, Genealogies, Genres and Genius: The Secrets of the Archive*. Translated by Beverley Bie Brahic. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
Derrida, J., (2007a). 'A Certain Impossible Possibility of Saying the Event', in Mitchell, W. J. T., and Davidson, A. I., (eds.) *The Late Derrida*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
Derrida, J., (2007b). *Psyche: Inventions of the Other, Volume I*. Edited by Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
Derrida, J., (2008). *Psyche: Inventions of the Other, Volume II*. Edited by Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
Derrida, J., (2009). *The Beast and the Sovereign, Volume 1*. Translated by Geoffrey Bennington. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
Derrida, J., (2011). *Parages*. Translated by Tom Conley, James Hulbert, John P. Leavey, and Avital Ronell. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
Derrida, J., and Ferraris, M., (2001). *A Taste for the Secret*. Oxford: Polity Press.
Derrida, J., and Roudinesco, E., (2004). *For What Tomorrow...A Dialogue*. Translated by Jeff Fort. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
Derrida, J., and Vattimo, G., (eds.) (1998). *Religion*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
Domańska, E., (1998). *Encounters: Philosophy of History after Postmodernism*. Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia.
Doran, R., (ed.) (2013). *Philosophy of History After Hayden White*. London: Bloomsbury.

Douzinas, C., (2007). *Human Rights and Empire: The Political Philosophy of Cosmopolitanism*. Abingdon: Routledge-Cavendish.
Edelman, L., (2004). *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Durham: Duke University Press.
Egginton, W., (2009). 'On Radical Atheism, Chronolibidinal Reading, and Impossible Desires', in *CR: The New Centennial Review*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 191-207.
Eisenstein, P., (2003). *Traumatic Encounters: Holocaust Representation and the Hegelian Subject*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
Ennis, P. J., (2011). 'The Transcendental Core of Correlationism', in *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 37-48.
Ermarth, E. D., (1992). *Sequel to History: Postmodernism and the Crisis of Representational Time*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
Evans, R. J., (2000 – Reprinted with an Afterword). *In Defence of History*. London: Granta.
Fabbri, L., (2007). 'Philosophy as Chance: An Interview with Jean-Luc Nancy', in Mitchell, W. J. T., and Davidson, A. I., (eds.) *The Late Derrida*. Translated by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
Fasolt, C., (2004). *The Limits of History*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
Fenves, P., (2001). 'Derrida and history: some questions Derrida pursues in his early writings', in Cohen, T., (ed.) *Jacques Derrida and the Humanities: A Critical Reader*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Fish, S., (2003). 'Stanley Fish (1991)', in Olson, G. A., and Worsham, L., (eds.) *Critical Intellectuals on Writing*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
Foucault, M., (1977). 'Intellectuals and Power: A conversation between Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze', in Foucault, M., *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*. Edited by Donald F. Bouchard. Translated by Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon. New York: Cornell University Press.
Foucault, M., (1991). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. London: Penguin Books.
Fritsch, M., (2005). *The Promise of Memory: History and Politics in Marx, Benjamin, and Derrida*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Fukuyama, F., (1992). *The End of History and the Last Man*. London: Penguin Books.

Gasché, R., (1986). *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Gasché, R., (1994). *Inventions of Difference: On Jacques Derrida*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Gaston, S., and Maclachlan, I., (eds.) (2011). *Reading Derrida's 'Of Grammatology'*. London: Continuum.

Geroulanos, S., (2010). *An Atheism that is Not Humanist Emerges in French Thought*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Habermas, J., (2008). 'Notes on a post-secular society', http://print.signandsight.com/features/1714.html, accessed on 12/2/13.

Habermas, J., (et al.) (2010). *An Awareness of What is Missing: Faith and Reason in a Post-Secular Age*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Hägglund, M., (2008). *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Hamacher, W., (2001). 'Lingua Amissa: The Messianism of Commodity-Language and Derrida's ''Specters of Marx'' ', in Rand, R., (ed.) *Futures: Of Jacques Derrida*. Translated by Kelly Barry. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Harlan, D., (1997). *The Degradation of American History*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Harman, G., (2011). *Quentin Meillassoux: Philosophy in the Making*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Hart, D. B., (2003). *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

Hart, K., (2004). *Postmodernism*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications.

Hoffer, P. C., (2008). *The Historians' Paradox: The Study of History in Our Time*. New York: New York University Press.

Hoy, D. C., (2005). *Critical Resistance: From Poststructuralism to Post-Critique*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.

Hyman, G., (2001). *The Predicament of Postmodern Theology: Radical Orthodoxy or Nihilist Textualism?* Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.

Jameson, F., (2009). *Valences of the Dialectic*. London: Verso.

Janicaud, D., Courtine, J-F., Chrétien, J-L., Henry, M., Marion, J-L., and Ricoeur, P., (2000). *Phenomenology and the 'Theological Turn': The French Debate*. Translated by Bernard G. Prusak. New York: Fordham University Press.

Jay, M., (1993). *Force Fields: Between Intellectual History and Cultural Critique*. London: Routledge.

Jay, M., (2009). 'Faith-based History', in *History and Theory*, 48, 76-84.

Jenkins, K., (1991). *Re-thinking History*. London: Routledge.

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

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

Jenkins, K., (2009). *At the Limits of History: Essays on Theory and Practice*. London: Routledge.

Jenkins, K., and Munslow, A., (eds.) (2004). *The Nature of History Reader*. London: Routledge.

Johnston, A., (2011). 'Hume's Revenge: À Dieu, Meillassoux?', in Bryant, L., Srnicek, N., and Harman, G., (eds.) *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism*. Melbourne: re.press.

Karatani, K., (2003). *Transcritique: On Kant and Marx*. Translated by Sabu Kohso. Cambridge: The MIT Press.

Kearney, R., (2010). *Anatheism: Returning to God After God*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Kellner, H., (1989). *Language and Historical Representation: Getting the Story Crooked*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press.

Klein, K. L., (2011). *From History to Theory*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Kojève, A., (1980). *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the 'Phenomenology of Spirit'*. Assembled by Raymond Queneau. Edited by Allan Bloom. Translated by James H. Nichols, Jr. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Koselleck, R., (2004). *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*. Translated by Keith Tribe. New York: Columbia University Press.

LaCapra, D., (1998). 'History, Language, and Reading: Waiting for Crillon', in Fay, B., Pomper, P., and Vann, R. T., (eds.) *History and Theory: Contemporary Readings*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

LaCapra, D., (2004). *History in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory* Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Laclau, E., (1996). *Emancipation(s)*. London: Verso.

Laclau, E., and Mouffe, C., (2001 – 2nd Edition). *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. London: Verso

Lawlor, L., (2002). *Derrida and Husserl: The Basic Problem of Phenomenology*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Lawson, H., (1985). *Reflexivity: The Post-Modern Predicament*. London: Hutchinson.

Leitch, V. B., (2007). 'Late Derrida: The Politics of Sovereignty', in Mitchell, W. J. T., and Davidson, A. I., (eds.) *The Late Derrida*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Levin, D. M., (2003). *The Philosopher's Gaze: Modernity in the Shadows of Enlightenment*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.

Levinas, E., (1969). *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.

Lévi-Strauss, C., (1966). *The Savage Mind*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lipstadt, D. E., (1994). *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory*. London: Penguin Books.

Llewelyn, J., (2009). *Margins of Religion: Between Kierkegaard and Derrida*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Lotringer, S., and Cohen, S., (eds.) (2001). *French Theory in America*. London: Routledge.

Löwith, K., (1949). *Meaning in History*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Lucy, N., (2004). *A Derrida Dictionary*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

Lyotard, J-F., (1984). *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Lyotard, J-F., and Thébaud, J-L., (1985). *Just Gaming*. Translated by Wlad Godzich. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Malabou, C. (2010). *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing: Dialectic, Destruction, Deconstruction*. Translated by Carolyn Shread. New York: Columbia University Press.

Malabou, C., (2012). *Ontology of the Accident: An Essay on Destructive Plasticity*. Translated by Carolyn Shread. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Malabou, C., and Derrida, J., (2004). *Counterpath: Traveling with Jacques Derrida.* Translated by David Wills. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Martinon, J-P., (2007). *On Futurity: Malabou, Nancy and Derrida*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Mason, M., (2008). 'Historiospectography? Sande Cohen on Derrida's *Specters of Marx*', in *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice*, Vol. 12, No. 4, 483-514.

Megill, A., (1987). *Prophets of Extremity: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Megill, A., (2013). 'History, Theoreticism, and the Limits of the Postsecular', in *History and Theory*, 52, 110-129.

Meillassoux, Q., (2008). *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*. Translated by Ray Brassier. London: Continuum.

Meillassoux, Q., (2011). *The Number and the Siren: A Decipherment of Mallarme's 'Coup de Dés'*. Translated by Robin Mackay. Falmouth: Urbanomic.

Milbank, J., (1990). *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Milbank, J., Pickstock, C., and Ward, G., (eds.) (1999). *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*. London: Routledge.

Milbank, J., Žižek, S., and Davis, C., (with Catherine Pickstock) (2010). *Paul's New Moment: Continental Philosophy and the Future of Christian Theology*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press.

Morgan Wortham, S., (2007). *Counter-Institutions: Jacques Derrida and the Question of the University*. New York: Fordham University Press.

Morgan Wortham, S., (2010). *The Derrida Dictionary*. London: Continuum.

Munslow, A., (2006 – 2nd Edition). *The Routledge Companion to Historical Studies*. London: Routledge.

Munslow, A., (2012). *A History of History*. London: Routledge.

Munslow, A., and Jenkins, K., (2011). 'Alun Munslow: in conversation with Keith Jenkins', in *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice*, Vol. 15, No. 4, 567-586.

Munslow, A., and Rosenstone, R., (eds.) (2004). *Experiments in Rethinking History*. London: Routledge.

Myers, D. N., (2003). *Resisting History: Historicism and Its Discontents in German-Jewish Thought*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Naas, M., (2008). *Derrida From Now On*. New York: Fordham University Press.

Naas, M., (2012). *Miracle and Machine: Jacques Derrida and the Two Sources of Religion, Science, and the Media*. New York: Fordham University Press.

Nietzsche, F., (1954). *The Portable Nietzsche*. Edited and Translated by Walter Kaufman. London: Penguin Books.

Nietzsche, F., (1997). 'On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life', in Nietzsche, F., *Untimely Meditations*. Translated by R. J. Hollingdale. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Norris, C., (2002a). 'Derrida's *Positions*, Thirty Years On: Introduction to the Second English Language Edition', in Derrida, J., *Positions* (2nd Edition). Translated and by Alan Bass. London: Continuum.

Noys, B., (2010). *The Persistence of the Negative: A Critique of Contemporary Continental Theory*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

O'Regan, C., (2001). *Gnostic Return in Modernity*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Pecora, V. P., (2006). *Secularization and Cultural Criticism*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Peden, K., (2010). 'Ray Brassier: Nihil unbound: enlightenment and extinction', in *Continental Philosophy Review*, Vol. 42, 583-589.

Pihlainen, K., (1999). *Resisting History: On the Ethics of Narrative Representation*. Turku: University of Turku.

Putt, B. K., (2002). ‘What do I love when I love my God? An interview with John D. Caputo’, in Olthuis, J. H., (ed.) *Religion with/out Religion: The Prayers and Tears of John D. Caputo*. London: Routledge.

Rabaté, J-M., (2001). ‘The ‘‘Mujic of the Footure’’: Future, Ancient, Fugitive’, in Rand, R., (ed.) *Futures: Of Jacques Derrida*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Raddeker, H. B., (2007). *Sceptical History: Feminist and Postmodern Approaches in Practice*. London: Routledge.

Ramey, J., (2012). *The Hermetic Deleuze: Philosophy and Spiritual Ordeal*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Ranke, L. V., (2011). *The Theory and Practice of History*. Edited by Georg G. Iggers. London: Routledge.

Readings, B., (1996). *The University in Ruins*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Ricoeur, P., (2004). *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Translated by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Roberts, D., (1995). *Nothing But History: Reconstruction and Extremity after Metaphysics*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Ronell, A., (2004). ‘Confessions of an Anacoluthon: On Writing, Technology, Pedagogy, and Politics’, in Wolfreys, J., *Thinking Difference: Critics in Conversation*. New York: Fordham University Press.

Rorty, R., (1989). *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Roth, M. S., (1995). *The Ironist’s Cage: Memory, Trauma and the Construction of History*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Royle, N., (1995). *After Derrida*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Royle, N., (2003). *Jacques Derrida*. London: Routledge.

Royle, N., (2009). *In Memory of Jacques Derrida*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Scott, J. W., (2007). ‘History-writing as critique’, in Jenkins, K., Morgan, S., and Munslow, A., (eds.) *Manifestos for History*. London: Routledge.

Shakespeare, S., (2009). *Derrida and Theology*. London: T &T Clark International.

Sherwood, Y., and Hart, K., (eds.) (2005). *Derrida and Religion: Other Testaments*. London: Routledge.

Smith, J., (2009). 'Jacques Derrida, ''Crypto-Communist?'' ', in Bidet, J., and Kouvelakis, S., (eds.) *Critical Companion to Contemporary Marxism*. Chicago: Haymarket Books.

Spiegel, G., (ed.) (2005). *Practicing History: New Directions in Historical Writing after the Linguistic Turn*. London: Routledge.

Spivak, G. C., (1985). 'Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography', in Landry, D., and Maclean, G., (eds.) (1996). *The Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*. London: Routledge.

Sprinker, M., (ed.) (1999). *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida's 'Specters of Marx'*. London: Verso.

Steedman, C., (2001). *Dust*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Stiegler, B., (2010). *For a New Critique of Political Economy*. Translated by Daniel Ross. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Taylor, C., (2004). *Modern Social Imaginaries*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Taylor, M. C., (1984). *Erring: A Postmodern A/theology*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Taylor, M. C., (2004). 'What Derrida Really Meant', http://www.press.uchicago.edu/books/derrida/taylorderrida.html, accessed on 21/2/13.

Terdiman, R., (2005). *Body and Story: The Ethics and Practice of Theoretical Conflict*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Thurschwell, A., (2010). 'Politics without the Messianic or a ''Messianic without Messianism''?: A Response to Richard Beardsworth', in Bradley, A., and Fletcher, P., (eds.) *The Politics to Come: Power, Modernity and the Messianic*. London: Continuum.

Toscano, A., (2011). 'Against Speculation, or, A Critique of the Critique of Critique: A Remark on Quentin Meillassoux's After Finitude (After Colletti)', in Bryant, L., Srnicek, N., and Harman, G., (eds.) *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism*. Melbourne: re.press.

Ward, G., (ed.) (2001). *The Blackwell Companion to Postmodern Theology*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

Watkin, C., (2011). *Difficult Atheism: Post-Theological Thinking in Alain Badiou, Jean-Luc Nancy and Quentin Meillassoux*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Westphal, M., (2001). *Overcoming Onto-theology: Toward a Postmodern Christian Faith*. New York: Fordham University Press.

White, H. V., (1973). *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

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

White, H. V., (1987). *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

White, H. V., (2013). 'History as Fulfillment', in Doran, R., (ed.) *Philosophy of History After Hayden White*. London: Bloomsbury.

Wolfreys, J., (2004). *Thinking Difference: Critics in Conversation*. New York: Fordham University Press.

Wolfreys, J., (2007). *Derrida: A Guide for the Perplexed*. London: Continuum.

Wolin, R., (2004). *The Seduction of Unreason: The Intellectual Romance with Fascism from Nietzsche to Postmodernism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Wood, D., (2001 – with a New Preface). *The Deconstruction of Time*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

Wood, S., (2009). *Derrida's 'Writing and Difference'*. London: Continuum.

Wyschogrod, E., (1998). *An Ethics of Remembering: History: Heterology and the Nameless Others*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Young, R. J. C., (2004 – 2nd Edition). *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*. London: Routledge.

Žižek, S., (2000). *The Fragile Absolute – or, Why is the Christian legacy worth fighting for?* London: Verso.

Žižek, S., (2003). *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.

Žižek, S., (2006). *The Parallax View*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.

Žižek, S., (2008). *In Defense of Lost Causes*. London: Verso.

Žižek, S., (2010). ‘How to Begin From the Beginning’, in Douzinas, C., and Žižek, S., (eds.) *The Idea of Communism*. London: Verso.

Žižek, S., (2012). *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism*. London: Verso.

Žižek, S., and Milbank, J., (2009). *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?* Edited by Creston Davis. Cambridge: The MIT Press.