



Geschichtstheorie am Werk
Theory of History at Work
La théorie de l'histoire à l'œuvre
La teoria della storia all'opera

“There are no truths outside the Gates of Eden” (Bob Dylan)

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“There are no truths outside the Gates of Eden” (Bob Dylan)

Theory of history is one of four pillars in history didactics. History didactics considers the educational value of history and before giving an estimate must first clarify what history really is. Theory of history explains what history is. The question of theories in history should be subordinate to the question of what history is.

Theory is a way of looking. There are various ways of looking at what history is. In this respect you might think there are several theories of history. Simply because answers differ does not justify speaking of theories of history. Theory of history as the field that concentrates on the question of what constitutes history is identical with philosophy of history. Philosophy of history gave and still gives partly essentialist and universalist answers to the question of what history is. It involves salvation narratives in secular guise. I do not consider viable essentialist, universalist, and teleological answers to the question of what constitutes history. My answer to the question is:

§1 History is narration, not the past. History singular should be replaced by histories plural. Narrations are texts or, more broadly, sign systems that link present, past and future. Narrations respond addressee-oriented to challenges of the present.

§1.1 Histories are a matter of attitude. Their creation is location-bound. I describe this location-boundness with the term *interest*. *Interest* is what moves narrators to tell stories the way they do. Histories are social constructs of reality. Their construction is intentional, since narrators want to achieve something with their story. Narrators can aim to either overwhelm or negotiate. They may wish to exclude or include certain groups of people. Narrators construct their story whatever way they want or can. Their story is a child of their present. Thus, what it tells is also one. I call the present interest's non-deceivability “epistemological presentism”.

§1.2 The addressees make what they want or can of the story. What applies to the production of histories also holds true for their reception. Which is why epistemological presentism is relevant here, too.

§1.3 Epistemological presentism makes the ideology-critical deconstruction of stories plausible. The fact that histories are told with reference to locations and the present must be considered. That is why epistemological presentism has educational value. Deconstruction itself, on the other hand, remains trapped in

epistemological presentism. This also applies to the academic production and reception of stories. Their added value and their unique selling point is the self-commitment to disclose their own location-boundness, a synonym for which is epistemological interest: science publishes the goals it pursues, the theoretical basis of its work and the methods it uses. Its rules are conventions on which the field of "science" has agreed. Science says how and why it creates, i.e., constructs knowledge for whom (production), and what material it uses in the process and how this was obtained, i.e., constructed (reception).

§1.4 Stories construct the past, present and future at the sign level. Stories connect these constructs with each other. I call this "phenographic historicity".

Phenographic historicity is past, present and future for us but not in itself. It represents an extended present, since the constructors' location is the present. Time is a social construct, a socially constructed reality expressed by how histories unfold. I distinguish between time in the B series or chronological time of a circular and linear making, on the one hand, and the A series or decision time, on the other. The A and B series are constructs. Decision time refers to the narrative linking of a past and a future, with the respective problem of the present, to produce an extended present. Due to this problem, narrations belong in the realm of necessity.

§2 The past beyond the sign level, the past itself, cannot be compared to stories.

§2.1 The past itself is at hand. It is withdrawn from our experience, perception, and recognition (*absconditus*). What it does to us, if anything, we can and must leave to the angels and the sparrows.

§2.2 The past itself can be there in our present. I call this its presence. It occurs when we are alienated by something we simultaneously recognize. What alienates us disturbs us in a positive or negative sense. This disturbance goes hand in hand with the presentness of the past. Presence is presentness.

§2.3 We are alienated by what blocks our extended present, what disturbs it or drops out of the framework of our narrations. We cannot recognize it. That is why we are unable to identify it. Consequently, the disturbance is there, but it is vacant. Present past is nothingness. In other words, there is no historical knowledge, that is, no epistemological historicity.

§2.4 Recognition refers the extended present to the Other and historicizes it. The dialectic of recognition and alienation unsettles the extended present, allows the past to emerge as something distinguishable beyond the level of signs and take its place beside the narratively extended present. Now it is there, that is, present.

§2.5 The present past disenchant the extended present in as much as the here and now is no longer alone. That is the educational value of the past that is present. It does not, however, disclose the nature of the alternative to the extended present of the status quo. The past is merely present in a vacant form of being there.

§2.6 The alienating past is quickly put aside because, empty as it is, it shows no signs of a befalling. A befalling is something that actually calls us into question. The past itself does not bite.

§2.7 We only allow it to come close to us when the Other in the familiar is avidly sought and appreciated as a positive disturbance to boring routines. This can occur in havens of freedom that interrupt the realm of necessity.

§2.8 The playful negotiating of Otherness makes it gradually familiar. The more routine in the game, the faster Otherness disappears and with it the past itself in a new extended present confined to the game. In a playful manner we have succeeded in assimilating Otherness. Playful here implies that the new extended present has no function in the realm of necessity. The game is played for the sake of playing. The new extended present can take the form of a narration or a practice.

§2.9 We incorporate the past that alienates us into the extended present. This occurs in a high-speed mode of thinking, that is, associatively, or in slow thinking. The latter could correspond to academic work. Both procedures lead to loss of the past because they make Otherness familiar.

§2.10 The extended present of the game can be taken seriously if deemed necessary. Then it's game over. The extended present that emerged at play shifts to the realm of necessity and competes with the status quo of the extended present established there. The new, alternative extended present, as distinct from the presence of an alienating past that has now faded in tandem with the construction of a new extended present, constitutes a not-yet-settled possibility for the future. Without wanting to diminish a loss of the past, it represents a gain for the present and the future.

Translated by Sunniva Greve

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