

The Disturbing Strangeness of History

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THE “INQUIÉTANTE ÉTRANGÉTÉ” [“disturbing strangeness”²] of history is Paul Ricœur’s translation of *Unheimlichkeit*. While the expression, as we know, comes from Freud, it was in the course of Ricœur’s own contemplation of what he called “the great philosophical tradition,” that he came to apply it to history. Michel de Certeau, for his part, had already taken it up when his step by step reading of *Moses and Monotheism* led him to wonder about the place of historical discourse and the status of writing that acted as a *quid pro quo*³ as it came to take the place of tradition. Hence his conclusion, in a phrase which gave rise to much misunderstanding, that “science fiction is the law of history.” In order to pin it down, he spoke of its “disturbing familiarity.” Disturbing strangeness, disturbing familiarity, whichever translation is preferred, and I will come back to this, it always has to do with creating a feeling of surprise or even unease. Suddenly, as if in a mirror, an unexpected image of history appears that we do not recognize. Historians believe they know what history is (if only because they have ceased to wonder about it), and the gallery of ancestors they occasionally invite the curious guest to visit is a long one. Here, however, the points of reference waver and, suddenly, what I have called elsewhere “the obviousness” of history⁴ becomes blurred, or rather, is challenged.

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2. Translator’s note: In the English-speaking world *Unheimlichkeit* is better known as “the uncanny” or “uncanniness”. This literal translation of the French has been chosen to preserve the essay’s play on “strangeness” and “familiarity”.

3. Michel de Certeau, *L'Écriture de l'histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), 357

4. 2 François Hartog, *Évidence de l'histoire. Ce que voient les historiens* (Paris: Gallimard, coll. Folio, 2007).

The attention given to these two contemporary advocates of disturbing strangeness (in the sense that Ricœur spoke of advocates of rigor about Elias, Foucault, and Certeau) appears in a wider sense to be an invitation to observe the role of the discipline's *outsiders* whose reflections, considerations, or criticisms concerning history sometimes reverberated widely, directing the debates and, at least for a time, setting their terms. Trying one's hand at a history of history written in this way could only be instructive. The list of outsiders could be a long one. Among our contemporaries, Ricœur would certainly have a key position, as would Foucault and Lévi-Strauss, while de Certeau could feature as an outsider on the inside. There would be others too. While there is no reason to believe that such a suggestion works only for history, it does, I think, apply to it particularly well given its great age (think of Clio, Péguy's slightly rambling old woman) and, above all, the fact that it has always survived by borrowing. Who better than Aristotle to head this procession of outsiders?

Disturbing Strangeness and Estrangement

Returning to disturbing strangeness: in what way does Ricœur hold that history stems from it? What does he target with this term? This opening question leads to the pursuit of a line of thought that was taken by Ricœur himself within *Memory, History, Forgetting*. For the historian reading Ricœur, it raises and defines another question: that of the *estrangement* effect caused by this approach to history in the book, which I would say was, at the very least, unusual for ordinary historians, although already present in *Time and Narrative*. Aiming at the heart of the contemporary historiographical undertaking by starting with a meditation on Plato, Aristotle, and Augustine is not the most obvious thing to do. If Ricœur read historians, and everyone knows that he did, it was with a precise philosophical question (that of the *aporia* of time in *Time and Narrative*). To reflect on history, he begins by not starting from it. He comes to it at a certain point in his reflection or meditation because it is an essential gateway, a goal even. Moreover, history is never his only subject or his only objective in the melodious, never monodic approach he always cultivated. *Memory, History, Forgetting* is not (only) a critique of historical reason, still less a treatise on the historical method. It is a protest against a ruinous two-fold *hubris*: that of history seeking to curtail memory and that of collective memory aiming to subjugate history. He instead endeavors to steer us toward *phronêsis*, or an enlightened consciousness.⁵ At this point, we find ourselves in Greece and the realm of ethics. On the way there, using two examples, one ancient and one con-

5. ³Hartog, *Évidence de l'histoire*, 511.

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temporary, far from trying to limit disturbing strangeness, I would like to sketch out a way of prolonging and questioning it, of putting it to work by adding a further twist.

In *Time and Narrative*, the history which Ricœur must first confront is the one practiced by those historians who, since the mockery of Lucien Febvre, have turned their backs on narrative history. This type of history effectively obscures three elements: narrative, event, and character. However, in order to read Braudel's *The Mediterranean* (held by Ricœur to be the "manifesto" of the *Annales School*), to recognize the three controversial temporal stages for what they are, and so, at the end of the work, to reach the point of formulating the notions of quasi-narrative, quasi-plot, and quasi-event, one must begin by ... meditating on Aristotle's reflections on tragic poetry! It is he, in fact, whose *Poetics* provide the "initial impulse," while not themselves dealing with time! While there is no disturbing strangeness (yet), there is plenty to be surprised about right from the start!

It is obviously not my intention to retrace the path that leads from Aristotle to Braudel. We will stick to the start and the finish. Poetics, according to Aristotle, are the art of composing plots; this dynamic art is one of *mimesis*. And the objective (as stated by Ricœur) of this recourse to *Poetics* is to recognize "the operation of emplotment, which Aristotle elevates to the rank of the dominant category in the art of composing works that imitate an action," and then to "extract from Aristotle's *Poetics* the model of emplotment I am proposing to *extend to every composition we call a narrative.*"⁶ (The italics are mine.)

In this (Greek) game of *poros* and *aporia*, the philosopher works to find the *poros*, *that is*, the path that makes it possible to go to the limits of narrativity, which are then presented as a response to the (ultimate) inscrutability of time. Thus, "the ultimately narrative character of history" is established, whereby it contributes in its own way to refiguring time, which for Ricœur is the "joint work" of fictional *and* historical narrative. However, before arriving at this conclusion (which validates the basic thesis of the study), queries about the reality of the historical past encounter an "enigma:" the connection between the real past and historical knowledge. Faced with the "spontaneous realism" of the historian, Ricœur suggests the concept of "*standing-for*", which he described as "difficult" (and expressly distinguished from that of representation). It expresses:

The claim of a *Gegenüber* no longer in existence today on the historical discourse that intends it ... The elusive character of this *Gegenüber*, however imperative it may be, has led us into a logical game where the

6. Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 35.

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categories of the Same, the Other, and the Analogous give shape to the enigma without resolving it.⁷

From these early days, then, let us retain the strangeness of an approach, together with the acknowledgment of an “enigma” surrounding the real, which, by acknowledging his debt, makes the “master of the plot” “a servant of the memory of past human beings.”⁸ It is an enigma that is not resolved, but can at best be “given shape.”

Let us now consider *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Fifteen years after *Time and Narrative*, history does not appear alone any more than it did before. When Ricœur published *Time and Narrative* (all dates are for the French originals in 1985), memory was coming to the forefront of the public space: *The Realms of Memory*, 1984; Lanzmann’s *Shoah*, 1985; and *Assassins of Memory* by Vidal-Naquet, 1987. There is then a time lag between the complete emergence of the phenomenon of memory and its being taken up by philosophy. Ricœur refers to this as a “gap” in his analysis, which led him to place temporal experience and the narrative operation “directly in contact,” and thereby to create an “impasse with respect to memory and . . . forgetting,” which he identified as “the median levels between time and narrative.”⁹ As the title of the work states, history is placed between memory (the start of all reflection) and forgetting (which closes the inquiry into the historical condition). The latter is seen as the vehicle of a “disturbing threat” and emblematic of the vulnerability of the historical condition. Finally, there is the epilogue, which begins with the *eschaton* of forgiveness.

This time, the disturbing strangeness (*Unheimlichkeit*) is present at the outset. In Plato’s Greek it is called *pharmakon*.

I have amused myself in my own fashion . . . in reinterpreting, if not rewriting the myth his *Phaedrus* recounts concerning the invention of writing. The question of whether the *pharmakon* of history-writing is remedy or poison . . . will continue to accompany our study as a kind of background music.¹⁰

For in this myth of the origins of writing, Ricœur is amused to see, or by extension ventures to read, the myth of the origins of history, precisely to the extent that what is at issue is the destiny of memory. Here at the outset, therefore, history is seized by memory. It starts with it and is connected to it. With, *Plato oblige*, living, authentic, real memory being threatened by the drug of writing, which Theuth presents as the *pharmakon* of memory and *sophia* (naturally, Plato makes absolutely no mention of history). To which the king replies by opposing (simple) memorization (*hupomnêsis*), enabled by the crutch of writing, to recollection

7. Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 184.

8. Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 156

9. Paul Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2004), xv.

10. Ricœur, *Memory*, 139.

(*anamnêsis*), a lively and animated discourse, which is written in the soul (276a). It is unusual, indeed, unique to my knowledge, for history to enter the scene in this way, devalued at the outset because it follows passively in the footsteps of memory, which it freezes and betrays. Of course, if one reads *Phaedrus* to the end, Ricœur reminds us, writing is cautiously rehabilitated, which in Ricœur's transposition of the myth might correspond to a state, and I quote, "where, on the one hand, an educated memory, illuminated by historiography, perfectly overlaps with scholarly history capable of reanimating a fading memory and thereby, in Collingwood's terms, of 'reactualizing [*sic*],' 'reliving' the past." Whether this is certain or only possible, it remains true that "the suspicion would have to be exorcized that history remains a hindrance to memory" whether it is remedy, poison, or both.¹¹

I am not going to take a step by step approach to Theuth's configuring myth in my analysis of memory and history any more than I did in the case of *Time and Narrative*, where the configuring power of *Poetics* accompanied, nourished, and informed the whole reflection. I will simply recall these points: testimony taken to mean transmitting the energy of explicit memory (the witness's "I was there") to history; and the repeated assertion of memory taken as the "matrix of history" given that it is the "guardian ... of the relation between the 'no longer' and 'the having been'." Conversely, when testimony becomes archive and source, when it is transmuted into writing, it is taken up by the "external marks" of *grammata* (275a) whereupon it comes, so to speak, under the control of the evidential paradigm. Subsequently, the gap between memory and history will continue to grow wider throughout the explanatory phase of history until it reaches the point of the recent situation in which, in the name of a history of memory, memory in fact finds itself reduced to a mere object of history. Proceeding thus, Ricœur repeats, history blinds itself to itself and succumbs to *hubris*. Once the professional historian has been duly reminded of this, however, "the uncanniness of history [which sees the impossibility of resolving on the gnoseological plane] the competition between memory's vow of fidelity and the search for the truth in history" remains intact. For deciding which one's ambition takes priority is and can only be impossible,¹² so much so that responsibility for this decision ultimately devolves to the person to whom the historical text is addressed. It is for the latter, who is also "the educated citizen," "to determine ... the balance between history and memory."¹³ This somewhat reduces the claims to authority that are sometimes harbored by historians. They may study history, but they are not laying down its law.

11. Ricœur, *Memory*, 145.

12. Ricœur, *Memory*, 500.

13. Ricœur, *Memory*, 499.

The Last Echoes

After distinguishing, *via* Plato, a disturbing strangeness that is fundamental rather than fortuitous, Ricœur identifies its revivals and reformulations. These include Nietzsche's attacks on the abuses of historical culture in the *Second Untimely Meditation*. Closer to our own day, he detects a "final echo" in the testimonies of some "prominent historians:"¹⁴ Nora, Yerushalmi, but also Halbwachs, although the latter is not, in fact, a historian! Why disturbing strangeness, when it goes without saying that none of them refers to Plato? All of them do, however, whether starting from memory or from history, come up against the problem of the encounter and how it can or cannot be articulated. Several versions of the *quid pro quo* may be understood here: who speaks for whom, who in whose place?

Why open this sequence with Maurice Halbwachs? It is because he has become the modern father of memory studies.¹⁵ In what way, to Ricœur's ear, is he like a distant echo of Plato's disturbing strangeness, of which he appears to offer a modern version? Because he starts with memory and in a certain sense never leaves it. When someone becomes part of the collective memory, which, today as yesterday continues to move from the individual to the multiple groups through which transmission occurs, they simply have no more need of history. There is a *hiatus* between collective memory and history, which is inevitably an exteriority. Once it has been established that remembering requires others, once it has been accepted that each individual memory is a take on the collective memory,¹⁶ we come to what is called "historical memory," to which Halbwachs devotes an entire chapter. Its status will turn out, all in all, to be uncertain. Indeed, either historical memory for the group indicates a (still) living part of history, whereupon it merges into collective memory, or this is no longer the case, whereupon it is no more than an empty frame. It blends into an entirely external history that has been reduced to paltry chronology. We think of the witness who immediately becomes a historian described with humor by Péguy in *Clio*. You go to see an old man to ask him about his youth and he starts talking like a book: like a historian.

Why do you want ... him, as he stands at the still moving point of his lifespan, which he has reached in his advanced old age, to plunge, to sink inwardly into his memory ... until he comes to the distant years of his youth?¹⁷

14. Thus, as early as 1978, Nora was suggesting that "collective memory be made to play for contemporary history the role that the so-called history of mentalities played in modern history." "Mémoire collective," in *La Nouvelle Histoire*, eds. J. Le Goff, R. Chartier, and J. Revel (Paris: Retz, 1978), 401.

15. Ricœur, *Memory*, 120.

16. Ricœur, *Memory*, 120.

17. Charles Péguy, *Clio. Dialogue de l'histoire et de l'âme païenne. Œuvres en prose complètes*, vol. 3 (Paris: Gallimard, coll. "Bibliothèque de La Pléiade," 1992), 1, 191.

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For Halbwachs, then, the expression historical memory is “not well chosen.”¹⁸ One is either in memory or in history. And history, viewed from memory, can only be an exteriority. Its practitioners, moreover, have established that it starts where memory stops. Halbwachs does not say anything different, but he insists on the hiatus that separates them. Collective memory values resemblances. History, proceeding by short-cuts, highlights differences. It “picks changes out of the flow of time.” Memory lies in continuity. After crises, it seeks “to revive the thread of continuity,” and even if the “illusion” does not last, for some time at least, “we imagine that nothing has changed.”¹⁹ To a certain extent, for the historian who does not see things from “the point of view of any real and living groups,” history naturally inclines toward universal history: in the end there is nothing but universal history.

At this point, Halbwachs introduces a curious touch by making Polyhymnia the muse of history, something she never was! Traditionally, she presided over lyric poetry and eloquence. Why the confusion? He probably understands the name Polyhymnia as meaning *she of the many songs, who gathers them together*. For he adds the following gloss:

History can present itself as the universal memory of humankind. But there is no universal memory. Every shared memory is held up by a group restricted in space and time.²⁰

Each group has “its own duration,” and there is no “universal and single time.”²¹ At which point, *exit* history. (Halbwachs thus sets aside the *Annales* intellectual project, with which he was nevertheless well acquainted. Of course, its founders were not talking about memory, but, by deliberately linking past and present to make them the springboard of renewed inquiry, they put the historian back into history, and thereby rejected the idea that the historian was necessarily in a position of exteriority).

While Ricœur notes Halbwachs’s reservations and reluctance “on the boundaries of the historical discipline,” he concludes that “on the horizon stands out the wish for an integral memory that holds together individual memory, collective memory, and historical memory.”²² What for Halbwachs is (at the very least) a wish is in any case stated by the conception of memory put forward by Ricœur. Indeed, for Ricœur, there is “continuity and the reciprocal relation between individual memory and collective memory, itself established as historical memory in Halbwachs’s

18. Maurice Halbwachs, *La Mémoire collective*, new corrected and expanded edition (Paris: Albin Michel, 1997), 130. Jean-Pierre Vernant spoke of individual, social, and historian memory: *La Traversée des frontières* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2004), 127–32.

19. Halbwachs, *La Mémoire*, 166, 134.

20. Halbwachs, *La Mémoire*, 137.

21. Halbwachs, *La Mémoire*, 189.

22. Ricœur, *Memory*, 396.

sense.”²³ Or should one say: in the sense of Ricœur, reader of Halbwachs? At the same time, however, Ricœur in no way wants to abandon history whose “architectures of meaning . . . exceed the resources of even collective memory.”²⁴ While he wants neither impotent nor omnipotent history, he is resolutely opposed to memory being reduced to an historical object, whereas its “power of attestation” that the past has been means it must be unswervingly held to be the “matrix” of history.

One reader of Halbwachs, Yosef Yerushalmi, opens the contemporary phase of disturbing strangeness. In a clear allusion to Freud, he calls the last chapter of his *Zakhor* (of which the French translation was published in 1984) “Historiography and its Discontents.” From this he concludes that contemporary Jewish historiography will never replace Jewish memory, while stressing also that no one knows whether the vast enterprise that historical research has become today will prove durable, or whether, in accordance to the words engraved in King Solomon’s ring, we should consider that “This too shall pass.”²⁵ Modern Jewish history, contemporary with *Wissenschaft* and assimilation, and beyond that, modern history, or history as science (as it was conceived in the nineteenth century and as it is so often reformulated in the twentieth century), are not in the least abjured, but rather put into perspective. As there have long been other methods of organizing the collective past, there is no reason to deem this form “the ultimate triumph of historical progress.”²⁶ Having been a professional historian, Yerushalmi does not dismiss history, but nor does he abandon memory. In other words, he would like to be able to be on the side of both memory and history, thereby asking a basic question of every historical study while wondering about history’s “backlash” against memory.

To Ricœur’s short list, I would like to add Charles Péguy, also notoriously inopportune, and from the present day, the names of Claude Lanzmann and Pierre Vidal-Naquet. With *Shoah* (1985), Lanzmann opted for memory. By putting on display the recollections he brings to the surface, he adheres in one sense very closely to the anamnesis of *Phaedrus*. He has said repeatedly that history by contrast, simply because of its mission to explain, lacks the radicalism of what actually happened. There is little doubt that, for him, the element of poison wins out over remedy.

Taking the opposite approach, Pierre Vidal-Naquet comes at memory through history. Reading *Zakhor* and then discovering *Shoah* (which he regards as a masterpiece of “pure memory”) a few months apart were two experiences that had a great impact on his recognition of memory’s

23. Ricœur, *Memory*, 477.

24. Ricœur, *Memory*, 498.

25. Ricœur, *Memory*, 103.

26. Ricœur, *Memory*, 15.

importance to history. At the risk of being seen as “the historian’s version of Proust,” he invites the historian from then on to “integrate” memory into history. Preaching by example, he soon began writing his own *Mémoires*. It became possible to write about himself in time, something he had put off until then. But first there was the ordeal of revisionism, which at root is the negation of the memories of the dead and of survivors. *Assassins of Memory* was published in 1987. Since he started work as a historian, Vidal-Naquet has wanted to be both historian and witness. He remains so more than ever, but in a rather different sense. In the Audin affair, he is a witness, in the sense of the Latin word *testis*, one who acts as a third party. Now he acknowledges that he is a witness in the sense of the Latin *superstes*, the witness as survivor. In this capacity, it is for him to tell the story of his parents, the one they could tell no one and which broke him. It is for him to find the words to “integrate” memory into history, “to evoke”, “to embody”: to transmit.²⁷

Finally, we come to Pierre Nora and his *Realms of Memory*, published between 1984 and 1992. In what way does Ricœur find them strange? Nora also seeks to integrate memory into history, but in a different way. The issue of realm makes it possible to show first how, on the basis of republican memory, the national narrative has crystallized into history as memory, which Ernest Lavisse both organized and delivered. In his introduction, significantly entitled “*Between Memory and History*,”²⁸ Nora offers a diagnosis of trends, and draws on his analysis to present the notion of a realm of memory that enables his long trek back through the genre of national history to begin. The same movement of thought reveals the initial outline of this instant of memory (its extension still uncertain), it evaluates the shift from one type of memory (the lapsed one of transmission that no longer works) to another (the new one, of deliberate historical reconstruction based on traces left behind), and suggests the *realm of memory* as the instrument of investigation. Nora wanted both to shed light on this moment of change from one memory to another and to use the dynamic of memory to propose a new form of history—at one remove. If the nineteenth century went from memory to history by way of the melting pot of the republic, the end of the twentieth century, after the “dark times” and decolonization, seems to be going in the opposite direction, even as the republic and the nation are tending to lose ground.

But does historical study’s revival of a memory that is itself largely informed by history suffice to clarify the debate and the issues? Does it allow the historian to take back control? The public success of *Realms of Memory* led us to believe so, but its very success took it in a sense beyond

27. François Hartog, *Vidal-Naquet, historien en personne. L’homme-mémoire et le moment-mémoire* (Paris: La Découverte, 2007), 88–90, 116.

28. Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History,” in *Realms of Memory: Conflicts and Divisions Vol I, The Construction of the French Past*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 1–20.

itself, caught up as it was in commemoration. We are seeing heritage hijack the idea of a place of remembrance, Ricœur writes. To describe this new form of memory, Nora spoke of a memory “seized” by history (a “historicized” memory). But do we not have, in reverse, history seized by memory (penetrated by it: a “memorized” history)? The past no longer guarantees the future, which is the main reason for promoting memory as a dynamic field and as the sole promise of continuity.²⁹ There is solidarity between the present and memory. “France as present needed a history. France as identity is merely preparing for the future by deciphering its memory.” *Realms* ultimately ended in the future perfect: it will have corresponded to this moment in memory, a parenthesis that will have closed, as Nora was already saying. History shaken up, its recovery offensive turning on it even as it grants apparent victory: a familiarity shot through with anxiety about this history in the making that already sees itself in the future perfect.

Disturbing Strangeness or Disturbing Familiarity

Merely touched on here, this last point will be my conclusion too. While the myth of *Phaedrus* has often been read, abundantly questioned and commented upon, right up to Derrida’s *Plato’s Pharmacy*, I do not believe it has ever been taken as the point of departure for a reflection on history, much less treated as the founding myth of historiography. And if we think of the historian Thucydides (admittedly a little earlier than Plato) comparing the uses of memory and writing, we can see that he places himself without hesitation on the side of *grammata* against memory, which not only forgets and makes mistakes but, always inclined to satisfy its listeners’ expectations, distorts as well. It indulges itself and seeks to indulge. History will always have this suspicion with regard to memory. Unlike Aristotle, therefore, Plato never belongs in any way, or at least not directly, to the cohort of *outsiders*.

Let us return to Aristotle for a moment. Is it not strange that he has counted for so much in inquiries into history, whereas in general he spoke so little about it (a few lines in chapters 9 and 23), and never for the sake of history itself (it occurs as a *vis-à-vis* and foil for tragic poetry)? Let us go one step further. Is there not something strange, or at least not self-evident, in Ricœur’s treatment of *Poetics*? Remember that he sees in them the model for emplotment that he proposes to extend to *all* narrative composition, be it history or fiction. This is his absolute right. But in *Poetics*, Aristotle indicates in the clearest way possible that the history of historians does not stem from *poiesis* or *mimesis*. It is up to the historian to

29. Ricœur, *Memory*, 410.

legein ta genomena, to say what has happened, not to *poiein ta genomena*. He cannot therefore be a master of plots. The division is clear and will remain so throughout antiquity. The only pertinent questions are those of the choice of *genomena* and how to relate them. And so we enter the realm of rhetoric.

Ricœur's progression is completely different. Multiplying *mimesis* in 1, 2, and 3, he pushes the rapprochement between fiction and history to the limit in order to test his initial hypothesis that the only thought time is narrated time. To prove that even recent history, which claims to be non-narrative, is, ultimately, an analysis in terms of quasi-plot, we cannot take Aristotle's initial division between poetry and history as our starting point because it eliminates the question. Let me be clear: this is not an objection to Ricœur, but a comment that adds a little more strangeness to the strangeness and invites us to take another look at Aristotle's text!

If I had the time, I would try to show you that it was Polybius who, with a mixture of audacity and naiveté, attempted to climb up onto Aristotle's shoulders and present himself as a master of plots. To take another look at *Poetics* and turn it around: history is superior to tragedy and has full access to what is general. With Rome's conquest of the Mediterranean, the history of the world effectively set off on a new course, and so a new concept of history was needed to understand and relate it. Aristotle's *mythos*, defined as a plot or "system of actions," allowed him to comprehend this new universal history. But, and here I am simplifying, whoever talks *mythos*, must also talk *mimesis* and *poiesis*. And finally, in conclusion: no, the new historian is not confined to *legein* alone, to what has happened; he must have access to *poiein*, and be able to be a *poietis* of *genomena*. At the time, Polybius, even more aware of the difficulty given that he considered himself a dutiful disciple of Thucydides, would have objected:

Do not in any way believe that I am a *poietis*, Fortune governs everything, she alone is the author of tragedies; I am merely the person who has access to where she sits as I might at the theater. From there, I benefit from her synoptic view. I am her scribe. I see what she sees and I see as she sees.

Was everything therefore resolved? Of course not, because the debate on all these points is still going on today. Polybius's attempt (which went nowhere) is interesting: everything takes place rather as if in his (fairly rough) handling of Aristotle, he had allowed himself to interpret *Poetics* in (somewhat!) the same way as Ricœur.

One last, now famous, figure in disturbing strangeness is the angel of history. For Benjamin, who brought it into play, the storm, which constantly propels the angel into the future to which its back is turned, is progress. At the end of *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Ricœur uses this image and comments:

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What, then, for us is this storm that so paralyzes the angel of history? Isn't it, under the figure of progress which is contested today, the history that human beings make and that comes crashing into the history that historians write?³⁰

I will put it in yet another way: when the figure of progress was not contested, the history historians wrote shed light on the history men made by exposing it. Now, or for the time being, this historiographical regime is over! While history—the modern concept of history, on which Europe has lived for two centuries—is still here and still familiar, it has lost its obviousness and the effectiveness that only a short time ago we acknowledged it possessed (before memory muscled in). Caught in the net of a presentist present, it struggles to recognize the world's new direction: its familiarity is heavy with strangeness—the strange familiarity of history.

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30. Ricœur, *Memory*, 500.