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REVIEW ARTICLE

How Should We Know?

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Cathy Gere, *Pain, Pleasure and the Common Good: From the Panopticon to the Skinner Box and Beyond* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), $30, ISBN 978-0-226-50185-7

Zeynep Çelik Alexander, *Kinaesthetic Knowing: Aesthetics, Epistemology, Modern Design* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), $55, ISBN 978-0-226-48520-1

Stefanos Geroulanos, *Transparency in Postwar France: A Critical History of the Present* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017), $29.95, ISBN 978-1-5036-0495-9

Ethan Kleinberg, *Haunting History: For a Deconstructive Approach to the Past* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017), $24.95, ISBN 978-1-5036-0338-7

Can we ever really know what happens in the past? Is history a matter of fact, interpretation or something in between? How do we distinguish between who we are and what we know – or who we've been and what we've known? Such questions are cringeworthy when posed by undergraduates, but they are, for better or worse, central to the study of history. And not just the history of ideas, but cultural, political and social history, too. In my experience students most often turn to these questions, which easily sound like arm-chair philosophy, as an escape from answering to the 'messy side' of historical inquiry: the instability of historical time and the incompleteness of archival sources; the role of contingency and causality; 'alternative' ways of knowing via aesthetics, sense or embodiment. These are all issues of concern to historians, whether or not we explicitly acknowledge them.

With all due fairness to my students, they are at their most brilliant when they pose these very questions. This happens when they ask them unknowingly – when they plunge into a source, a debate or an event and, in their struggle to understand them, find no comfort in their assumptions about the nature of knowledge. Is there a difference between what we 'know' with our bodies and what we 'know' with our minds? How does our knowledge of the natural world, society or politics naturalise a particular kind of self, equipped with particular kinds of abilities, sensibilities or values? Are there limits to knowledge – in the present, in the past? If so, how might we account for them? In these moments my students remind me that even the most basic questions about the nature of knowledge are ones that we should never tire of asking.

The works under review, which offer a glimpse into new directions in the scholarship of the history of ideas, all offer their own answers to these irresolvable questions about the relationship between knowledge and history. In different ways they all challenge conventional assumptions about the legibility and stability of knowledge, as well as the relationship of theory – and theorising – to historical evidence and the construction of historical narrative. With varying, and at times overlapping, methods and topics of inquiry, these authors show how epistemological

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confidence, endemic to both historical actors and contemporary historians, is a facade in need of excavation.

For historians concerned with issues related to modernity, modernism and 'the modern', these gestures raise a further question about the historical grounds of specifically modern knowledge. Framed as a variation on a theme articulated by Carl Schorske, in what ways, perhaps in spite of everything we are trained to do, do we conceive of knowledge 'not *out* of the past, indeed scarcely *against* the past, but in independence of the past'?[1] While no historian would admit to working or thinking entirely 'in independence of the past', such a move may be unavoidable. As these works show, it may also be at times necessary. Such a project is framed well by architectural historian Anthony Vidler, cited by Stefanos Geroulanos, whose book, *Transparency in Postwar France*, is discussed here. Vidler characterises the simultaneous unease and idealism of what – and how – the modern self knows: caught in a swirl of motion and appearances, s/he is 'haunted by a myth of transparency: transparency of the self to nature, of the self to the other, of all selves to society, and all this represented, if not constructed, from Jeremy Bentham to Le Corbusier, by a universal transparency of building materials, spatial penetration, and the ubiquitous flow of air, light, and physical movement'.[2] Vidler's passage introduces many of the themes – haunting, transparency, the body and aesthetics – that these authors use to interrogate the nature of knowledge, its historical consequences and its broader implications for the theory and practices of history. It also reminds us of our own fascination with the past as a source of endless motion, potential and possibility. As historians we may not be on a quest to excavate from the past timeless or definitive truths, yet the writing of history may, in some instances, help us to dance around the epistemological aporias that so often trip us up.

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Cathy Gere begins *Pain, Pleasure, and the Common Good* with a series of episodes central to the history of modern medical ethics: a 1973 United States Senate subcommittee hearing on the 'Tuskegee Study', in which hundreds of black American men were recruited into a decades-long study of late-stage syphilis that systematically denied them available medical treatment; the 1947 Nuremburg Medical Trial that, in the wake of Nazi medical atrocities, introduced informed consent as the guiding principle for international research with human subjects; and the 1999 exposure of research practices by a Liverpool hospital of archiving organs and tissue samples of deceased patients, prompting public controversy and government inquiry (of which Gere was a part) into the legal and ethical grounds for human experimentation.

Such grounds lay in the legacy of philosophical utilitarianism and its historical relationship to the history of medicine (especially psychology). Examining utilitarian ideas in the context of nineteenth- and twentieth-century medical discourses on individual agency and rights, Gere charts how ideas about individual autonomy, freedom and liberty – 'that patients have the right to decide what happens to them' (11) – rose to become the dominant principle of medical ethics by 1947. But the triumph of informed consent was not so clear cut. Gere shows that utilitarian thinking about the self, developed in theories of biological, psychological and physiological mechanism, as well as in behaviourism and 'greater-good' arguments about society, persisted throughout the twentieth century and into the present day, when 'unvarnished utility calculations still underpin many aspects of modern medicine, from medical resource allocation and emergency medicine, to responses to epidemics, global health initiatives, and most domestic public health measures' (11).

[1] Carl Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), xvii.

[2] Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992). Cited in Stefanos Geroulanos, *Transparency in Postwar France: A Critical History of the Present* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017), 16.

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Showing how 'utilitarianism and scientific medicine are deeply intertwined, interdependent, and to a great extent inseparable' (12), Gere looks at how modern medical subjects have been shaped by two competing value-systems: a liberal view championing individual rights, freedom and the notion of bodies as private property; and a utilitarian one that considers ends over means and human beings as brute battlegrounds for the clash between what in 1789 Jeremy Bentham, father of utilitarianism, described as human nature's 'two sovereign masters, *pain* and *pleasure*' (64). In Chapter 1 Gere introduces a series of experiments after the Nuremburg Trials that, despite the pronouncement of informed consent as the basis for medical ethics, reveal the rule of utilitarian thinking in practice. Her examples include American-led experiments in 1950s testing the effects of penicillin on sexually transmitted diseases among prisoners in Guatemala, the distribution of thalidomide to women by American pharmaceutical companies and doctors in the 1960s and medical trials in the early 1970s on the contraceptive Depo-Provera. In each case ethical treatment of human subjects – who, not coincidentally, all belonged to social minorities or marginalised populations – was clearly subordinated to greater good arguments. Chapters 2 and 3 provide the historical origins of utilitarian thinking about human nature and social order articulated first by Thomas Hobbes, himself not a 'utilitarian' but an important influence on the movement, and later figures such as Jeremy Bentham and Thomas Malthus. Offering close reading of texts in their historical contexts to pull out the politics of their knowledge claims, Gere tips her hat to the fields of the Sociology of Scientific Knowledge (SSK) and the Cambridge School of Intellectual History.[3]

Subsequent chapters trace the shadow of utilitarianism during the mid- to late nineteenth-centuries in ideas about political liberalism by John Stuart Mill, for example, and human agency by experimental psychologist Alexander Bain. Bain's theories of the human nervous system and stimulus response were put into practice by his protégé David Ferrier in the 1870s at Yorkshire's West Riding Pauper Lunatic Asylum, modelled after Bentham's Panopticon. These experiments naturalised Bentham's 'sovereign masters' of pain and pleasure into scientific and social discourse, becoming a guiding light for medical researchers after the turn of the century. In Chapter 5 Gere turns to utilitarianism's impact across the Atlantic between 1910 and the 1950s in the work of psychological behaviourists, such as Edward Thorndike and B.F. Skinner, and their critics, notably Noam Chomsky. Chapter 6 considers the resurgence of utilitarian thinking in the 1980s and 1990s, in debates during the AIDS epidemic about the use of experimental drugs and pharmaceutical deregulation, as well as in recent decades in discourses on neuro- and behavioural economics by psychologists Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman, economist Richard Thaler and legal scholar Cass Sunstein.

Throughout the book Gere identifies a recurrent tension between utilitarianism as a conceptual abstraction and its practical application. Malthus, with his theory of population surplus, may have sought to promote the greatest good to the greatest number, yet the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act and the 'workhouse test' it inspired effected unimaginable suffering. Gere effectively demonstrates the urgent bearing of historical inquiry that bridges the study of ideas with the record of lived, bodily experience. 'The demotion of utilitarianism from first to second place in the ethical hierarchy of modern medicine offers a golden opportunity to understand how, and to what extent, greater-good reasoning fails as a guide to action. We can theorize about such matters, but the history of medicine offers a wealth of data about how such moral abstractions play out in real life' (11–2).

Gere concludes with the provocative suggestion that a response to the contemporary resurgence of utilitarian thinking in the social and natural sciences lies in a renewed attention to 'our unquenchable drive for aesthetic delight [that] contains within it the seeds of its own sustainability' (237). Put differently, the way to a more just treatment of others and the environment is

[3] In particular, Steve Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air Pump* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985); Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics: Hobbes and Civil Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

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through pleasure: the sensible appreciation of the world that is a uniquely human capacity not reducible to mechanism. Gere offers a forceful counter argument to theoretical schools within environmental studies, including ecopoetics, object-oriented ontology and new materialisms, which seek to bridge the human/non-human divide, eliminating forms of hierarchy through a kind of ontological flattening.[4] For many, including my students, these arguments against human exceptionalism offer a persuasive – and at times, seductive – solution to the intractability of modern politics, knowledge and environmental degradation. However, Gere stops short of making this challenge herself and instead only gestures in the book's final pages to the connections between human pleasure and the study of nature, climate and the environment. Consequently, the reader puts her book down frustratingly tantalised, wishing for something more elaborated and precisely situated.

The intersection between knowledge and aesthetics forms the point of departure for Zeynep Çelik Alexander in *Kinaesthetic Knowing: Aesthetics, Epistemology, Modern Design*, a history of modern design pedagogy in the German-speaking lands during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It traces the emergence of what Alexander labels 'kinaesthetic knowing', 'the ratiocination associated with kinesis, the movement of the body' (11). Like Gere, Alexander borrows from methods in SSK, and her work contributes to secondary literatures in the history of science and art, historical epistemology and, in her words, 'the history of an alternative mode of Western rationality in which the lines between experience and experiment as well as those between knowledge and know-how become blurry' (11).[5] Gere's second book, *Knossos and the Prophets of Modernism* (2009) examined the convergence between scientific knowledge and aesthetic modernism; similarly, Alexander engages a historiography on concepts of European modernism and 'modernity' by showing the historical relationship between modern design and visual expression with developments in psychology, psychophysics, physiology, pedagogical theory, instruction and technique.[6]

Linking the history of ideas to the history of practice, Alexander shows us the 'ultimate inseparability of concept from technique' (22). She does this by focusing on knowledge oriented around human sense perception, embodied and muscular feeling and the emotions. Taking cues from one of her historical actors, nineteenth-century epistemologist and psychologist Herman von Helmholtz, the subject of Chapter 1, Alexander distinguishes this type of non-propositional, descriptive and bodily knowing, '*Kennen*', from its rational, propositional counterpart, '*Wissen*', oriented towards causal and teleological explanation. Both terms loosely translate into English as

[4] See, for example, Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Graham Harman, *Immaterialism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2016); Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota University Press, 2013); Morton, *Realist Magic: Objects, Ontology, Causality (New Metaphysics)* (n.p.: Open Humanities Press, 2013). For a useful response to Morton addressing the relationship of human sense perception to issues concerning environmental scale, see Deborah R. Coen, 'Big is a Thing of the Past: Climate Change and Methodology in the History of Ideas', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 77, 2 (2016).

[5] See, for example, Matthew C. Hunter, *Wicked Intelligence: Visual Art and the Science of Experiment in Restoration London* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2013); Joan Scott, 'The Evidence of Experience', in James Chandler, Arnold I. Davidson and Harry Harootunian, eds., *Questions of Evidence: Proof, Practice, and Persuasion Across the Disciplines* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Heinz Otto Sibum, 'Working Experiments: A History of Gestural Knowledge', *Cambridge Review*, 116, 225 (1995); Pamela Smith, *The Body of the Artisan: Art and Experience in the Scientific Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

[6] For the former, see Christian G. Allesch, *Einführung in die psychologischen Ästhetik* (Vienna: WUV, 2006); Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990); Mark Jarzombek, *The Psychologizing of Modernity: Art, Architecture, and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Micahel Podoro, *The Manifold in Perception: Theories of Art from Kant to Hildebrand* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972). For examples of the latter, and in particular, histories of the concept of *Bildung*, see Suzanne Marchand, *Down from Olympus: Archaeology and Philhellenism in Germany 1750–1950* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); Fritz Ringer, '*Bildung* and its Implications in the German Tradition, 1890–1930', in Fritz K. Ringer, *Toward a Social History of Knowledge: Collected Essays* (New York: Berghahn, 2000).

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'knowing', but, as Alexander shows, they entail different processes and bodies of knowledge. Shortly after German unification in 1870–1871 scientists and philosophers, including psychologist Wilhelm Wundt, experimental psychophysicist Theodor Fechner and phenomenologist, historian and psychology enthusiast Wilhelm Dilthey, advocated forms of *Kennen* as the basis for the disciplinary study of human nature and society. However, despite their efforts, *Wissen,* based upon its 'neo-Kantian logic – that is, with a strict differentiation between the methods of the human sciences and those of the natural sciences' won out as the 'foundational epistemological principle' of academic research and education (21).

Yet the life of *Kennen* was not so short. Alexander demonstrates how it took new and surprising root in a range of humanistic and scientific fields as a series of body- and sense-based practical techniques – 'looking, affecting, drawing, and designing' – which organise the book's subsequent chapters. Chapter 2, on comparative looking, 'in which the eye was believed to draw its own conclusions independently as if sense perception had the structure of a syllogism' (21), examines how art historian Heinrich Wölfflin, one of the first to use slide projector technology in the German academy, envisioned 'comparativism as a means to counterbalance experiential knowledge's inherent instability: if there existed a legitimate mode of knowledge that was predicated on fickle feelings, sensations, and impressions without recourse to higher cognitive faculties, the comparative method guaranteed that these sensations would not stray from a rigorous logic' (22). Chapter 3, 'affecting', shows how August Endell, architect and founder of the Berlin-based School for Form Art (*Schule für Formkunst*), activated psychophysical ideas about human response to stimulus and played earlier scientific ideas about aesthetic perception 'into the modernist assumption about the immediacy of form and affect' (22).

Significantly, practices of kinaesthetic knowing were deeply political. At the fin-de-siècle the *Kulturkampf* between Protestants and Catholics still resonated in Munich, where architect and pedagogical reformer Hermann Obrist developed new ideas about art education. Chapter 4 shows how Obrist, together with painter Wilhelm von Debschitz, infused their early ideas about design pedagogy with mysticism and 'the spirituality of the senses' (136), which they subsequently put into practice in classes at the Debschitz School, one of the first institutions for modern design with a student body comprised of those traditionally excluded from academic institutions.

> Unlike the male, Protestant subject that was the ideal of *Bildung* [in German: 'education' or 'cultivation'] throughout the nineteenth century, this amalgam of marginal subjects [e.g. mystics, Catholics, women and the masses] was assumed to be better suited to kinaesthetic rather than propositional knowledge. Propaedeutic techniques such as drawing were considered crucial to both unleashing the potential hidden in the subject's psyche and keeping it in check. In other words, the epistemological program of the Debschitz School entailed more than training artists: in the meaning of *Gestaltung* as design merged with the meaning of *Gestaltung* as the formation of the modern subject (139).

Education through kinaesthetic knowing was a political as much as an aesthetic or cultural project. It was often the case that *Kennen,* via kinaesthetic knowing, 'which despite its resistance to language, concepts, propositions, or representations, was nonetheless understood to guide correctly the fingers of a violinist, the voice of an opera singer, or the hand of an artist' (32). *Kennen* offered more than a frame for knowing; it also reconciled contradictory knowledge claims and harnessed them to particular explanatory ends. 'The political expediency of this accommodation proved crucial to the success of kinaesthetic knowing: for such debates did not only purport to explain the order of the universe theoretically but also sought to dictate the order of the world here and now' (32).

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A final chapter on 'designing' illustrates how politics infused design pedagogy at the Bauhaus from 1919 to around 1937, in courses taught by Wassily Kandinsky, Josef Albers and Paul Klee (among others), where 'even while informed by the free movements of the body, design was reconfigured at the Bauhaus as a strictly controlled method of introspection' (23). Thus, as students learned a new kind of 'modern' expression based upon kinaesthetic knowledge – and even while such knowledge was envisioned to be freed from the constraints of social convention or artistic academicism – they also learned to become a certain kind of modern subject, with new capacities for self-mastery and examination.

Alexander concludes by posing a series of questions relevant to historians today. 'How do we think about knowledge? Not only worry about knowledge in our own, specialized field, but knowledge at large? How can we think – without subscribing uncritically to Enlightenment dichotomies that inevitably structure our thinking – about contemporary attempts to redraw disciplinary boundaries? What are the ideological implications of the new disciplinary divisions and unions proposed? … to what political ends?' (211) Alexander offers no explicit answers for the present, though her book gives the reader something more: a model for thinking past conventional categories that commonly structure historical epistemological claims, a sensitivity to alternative sites for the production of knowledge – and alternative producers of ways of knowing – and, finally, a sharper attention the logic and mechanism of knowledge systems at work.

In *Transparency in Postwar France: A Critical History of the Present*, Stefanos Geroulanos shares Alexander's concern for epistemology, boundaries and the spectre of 'Enlightenment dichotomies' in the present. In contrast, he offers a distinct set of answers to these questions, both in his own words and those of French intellectuals – philosophers and social scientists mainly affiliated with the political left – from 1945 to the 1980s. Continuing lines of inquiry from his earlier work,[7] he shows how some of the most influential thinkers of second half of the twentieth century (amongst others, Jean Paul Sartre, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Georges Canguilhem, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Claude Lefort) responded to Enlightenment thinking in their contemporary moment. These thinkers more or less rejected the ideal of 'transparency' first articulated by René Descartes and later by Comtean positivists, which encompassed several claims about knowledge, the self and society:

> that the self could be transparent to itself, and that achieving a pure, crystalline self was the very purpose of this; that the mind could know the world and could have an unimpeded encounter with it; that relations between individuals could be pure, not dissimulated – that a 'meeting of the hearts' between two individuals was possible, desirable, ethical; that society could be open, transparent to its members and/or to the state. Such claims were no longer tenable (9).

Interweaving intellectual history with political history, history of science and cultural studies, Geroulanos shows how French intellectuals 'built tool after tool for dismantling' such Cartesian-based claims to society, ethics and politics as coherent, legible and stable entities. Many established new schools of philosophy, theory and critical inquiry – existentialism, structuralism, post-structuralism – that excavated the politics embedded in the claim that knowing the 'other' was possible. Identifying with Marxism, socialism and *gauchisme*, these intellectuals highlighted the ideological implications of disciplinary division and specialisation and developed theory in response to the world around them: government purges of Vichy collaborators, post-war domestic reconstruction, totalitarianism, decolonisation, the student demonstrations of May 1968 and the growing divide between society and the state.

[7] Stefanos Geroulanos, *An Atheism That is Not Humanist Emerges in French Thought* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010).

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Parts I and II cover the immediate post-war period up to the 1950s and demonstrate how intellectuals picked apart a vision of the human subject as cohesive and 'transparent to itself'. Lévi-Strauss, Lacan, Canguilhem and Sartre, for example, rejected Cartesianism, positivism and idealism and suggested ways in which meaning generating forces (e.g. society, language, the unconscious) both structured and fragmented human subjectivity. Sartre, like phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty, pointed out the flaws of an epistemology based upon the ideals of transparency, taking the gap between the material world and the thinking mind as the locus to consider knowledge of the self. States of not knowing and conceptual or material opacity were not obstacles to be overcome but fundamental aspects of the human condition that any philosophy, science or political system needed to consider. Here, Canguilhem, whose work Geroulanos has translated, emerges as a unique voice.[8] In texts such as *The Knowledge of Life* (*La Connaissance de la vie*; 1952), including a 1947 essay on Descartes, Canguilhem proposed that individual organisms experienced and responded to their environments in a singular fashion, a claim that troubled the epistemological horizon established by many biological schools, such as determinism, mechanism or finalism. At the same time as Americans read *Walden Two* (1948) and swallowed Skinner's proposition that humans were programmable entities driven by 'reward-centres' in their brains, Canguilhem suggested something quite different. According to Canguilhem, 'human knowledge and science could never grasp the totality of life in the transparent manner that the Cartesian cogito promised', Geroulanos writes. 'Continued allegiance to mechanistic principles amounted to a misplaced trust in the transparency and inertness of nature and life and turned a blind eye to the inbuilt violence of scientific thought' (80). Glass boxes were not enough.

In Part III, 'New Languages of Philosophy', Geroulanos dives deeper into the 1950s to examine how thinkers (e.g. Lacan, Canguilhem, Foucault) developed concepts of 'separation, *the other*, abnormality, and masking' as constitutive features of human experience in contrast to the transparent ideal of knowledge as a 'meeting of two hearts'. Part IV, 'The Road to 1967 and the Rethinking of Modernity', traces the increasing association by Foucault, Jacques Derrida and cybernetic theorists, among others, between ideas about transparency and concepts of modernity. Part V, 'After 1968', looks at a crop of democratic theorists in the early 1970s (e.g. Claude Lefort, François Furet, Pierre Rosanvallon) who, in the wake of student protests and anti-statist sentiment, 'sharpened and institutionalized the critique of transparency and used the term *transparency* … to reference one of the major fictions of totalitarian (and especially contemporary communist) states: a society transparent to itself. More forcefully than in earlier critics, the 'self-transparency' of society appeared in these authors a dangerous fallacy against which democracy had to struggle' (354). After 1968 critiques of transparency shifted from a multi-vocal 'anti-subjectivist and epistemological critique' to a more streamlined discussion focused on the totalitarian threat and 'state-society conflict' (380). From 1981 to 1991 this conflict reached something of a détente during the presidency of François Mitterand, giving transparency renewed purchase through slogans and practices of 'government openness', 'freedom of information' and 'the economics of modernization and austerity' (380).

Just as Gere and Alexander conclude by stating the significance of their studies for the present, Geroulanos ends by musing with Jean-François Lyotard about the need to rethink the legibility, transmission and purchase of knowledge today, when 'the aestheticization of self-exposure has been legitimizing practices of data-mining' under both Obama and Trump presidencies (381). Geroulanos emphasises in an introductory section on method that the idea of transparency remains relevant to a range of academic work spanning political affiliation, from positivistic celebrations of transparency to discourses that trouble fixed notions of social identity, gender,

[8] Georges Canguilhem, *Writings on Medicine,* trans. and intro. Stefanos Geroulanos and Todd Meyers (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012); Georges Canguilhem, *Knowledge of Life*, trans. Stefanos Geroulanos and Daniela Ginsburg (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).

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and the self.[9] Geroulanos takes these contemporary concerns as a frame for doing 'a critical history of the present', the book's subtitle, which

> confronts the recent celebration [of transparency] not with a contrastive alternative but with the dialectic of an evolving conceptual matrix, captured in its historical development. The French articulation of ideas, terms, temporalities, complexities, and futures in the half-century after 1940 allows us to unleash a series of questions related to the contemporary fantasy of transparency from a historical and philosophical perspective. What *is* a transparent life? On what grounds is a morality premised on transparency (of the state as well as the individual) defensible? … Epistemologically, how does knowledge relate to the crevices within it and to the conflicts it creates? (27)

For Ethan Kleinberg, author of *Haunting History: For a Deconstructive Approach to the Past*, a critical history of the present entails the wholescale re-evaluation of the knowledge claims supporting our most basic ideas about history. Like Geroulanos, Kleinberg belongs to a wave of contemporary intellectual historians of modern Europe who take cues from French post-structuralism and post-war thought, as well as historians and literary critics such as Hayden White, Dominic LaCapra and Martin Jay.[10] As the executive editor of the journal *History and Theory* and an organiser with Joan Wallach Scott and Gary Wilder of the 'Wild On Collective' – whose May 2018 manifesto calls for the renewed practice of 'critical history,' namely 'theoretically informed history and historically grounded theory'[11] – Kleinberg takes seriously the consideration of 'knowledge at large' and the ramifications of its disciplinary cross-pollination.

Such circulation, Kleinberg argues, shows how questions about both knowledge and being in the past move from the territory of the shadowy and obscure to the realm of the spectral. With Jacques Derrida as his guide Kleinberg conjures the idea of '*Hauntology*', 'a Derridean term that relies on the sonic affinity between *ontology* and *hauntology* that the concept of hauntology haunts by replacing (when spoken *ontologie* and *hontologie* are indistinguishable in French)' (2). This notion of replacement informs Kleinberg's understanding of the past, which he further defines as an ontologically and epistemologically uncertain terrain that saturates – and is saturated by – the present:

> History is a replacing of this sort where the past event or figure is silently determined by the telling that replaces it. But the telling in the present is haunted by the ghost of the past, which is neither present nor absent, neither here nor gone. This disjunction or disruption at the core of 'history' exposes the ways that origins and grounds are always posited to determine the beginning from the point of view of the end, thus smuggling both a teleology and a rigidity into the account (2).

Kleinberg aims to disrupt work by 'conventional historians', which he alternately describes as 'ontological realists', namely, scholars committed 'to history as an endeavor concerned with

[9] As examples of the former, see D. A. Christie and E. M. Tansey, 'Making the Human Body Transparent: The Impact of Nuclear Magnetic Resonance and Magnetic Resonance Imaging', in E. M. Tansey, D. A Christie and L. A. Reynolds, eds., *Wellcome Witnesses to Twentieth Century Medicine* (London: Wellcome Trust, 1998); Byung-Chul Han, *Tranzparenzgesellschaft* (Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2013). For the latter, see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990); *idem*, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005).

[10] See, for example, Edward Baring, *The Young Derrida and French Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Samuel Moyn, *Origins of the Other* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005); Camille Robcis, *The Law of Kinship: Anthropology, Psychoanalysis, and the Family in France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013); Judith Sirkus, *Sexing the Citizen: Masculinity and Morality in France, 1870–1920* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006). For other recent work in modern European intellectual history, see Darrin M. MacMahon and Sam Moyn, eds., *Rethinking Modern European Intellectual History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[11] Ethan Kleinberg, Joan Wallach Scott and Gary Wilder, 'Theses on Theory and History', May 2018. See http://theoryrevolt.com/ (last visited 16 June 2018).

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events assigned to a specific location in space and time that are in principle observable and as such regarded as fixed and immutable' (1). Combining close readings of texts in philosophy of history (e.g. Frank Ankersmit, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, Eelco Runia), eighteenth- and nineteenth-century German historicism (e.g. Johann Martin Chladenius, Johann Gustav Droysen, Wilhelm Dilthey) and nineteenth century Anglo-American literature (e.g. Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*, Washington Irving's *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*), Kleinberg both surveys and refutes attacks on deconstructionism by 'ontological realists' over the past several decades. In the process, he shows how 'the place where conventional or scientific history breaks down is the place of the ghost – of haunting and hauntology', which in turn reveals both 'the openness and incompleteness of the archive' and assumptions by historical empiricists who 'tend to operate as if the archive were already complete or in the realm of a future completeness to come that sanctions the archive's authority even as they acknowledge its incompleteness in the present' (9).

In *Haunting History,* as well as the Wild On Collective manifesto which echoes many of the claims in the book, Kleinberg draws our attention to the disciplinary – and in his view, disciplin*ing* – practices of history, in contemporary trends in publishing, generational anxieties about digital media's effect on thought and attention and curricula for graduate education. By and large, Kleinberg argues, historians remain faithful believers in *Wissen*, 'the proposition that imagination plays so active a role in the writing of history is unpalatable to a discipline that models itself as a science' (18). Without theory we fail to register the normative and causal claims embedded in our historical narratives; we miss out on manifold opportunities to consider various ways of knowing, and the practical and theoretical (no less political and ideological) implications of our work. Kleinberg concludes his book by gesturing to an alternative method, which he describes as 'working from the inside to expose the limitations and restrictions of the historical practice' (146). Taking Derrida's notion of 'the double gesture (*un double geste*) or double session (*la double séance*)' as a model, Kleinberg explains that a single historical topic, idea or event can be subjected to two parallel yet entwined readings, offering by way of example a short summary of his forthcoming book on Levinas's lectures on the Talmud, given in Paris from 1960 to 1990. Kleinberg ultimately suggests that a history that haunts entails a kind of muscular intellectualism necessary to give it shape. 'Far from implying the death or abdication of the author, deconstruction, for the writing of history, requires a strong and careful historian whose rhetorical style guides the reader along the poros that simultaneously introduces and acknowledges the aporia' (149).

Far from feeling haunted, one finishes Kleinberg's book productively perplexed. One wonders, for example, whether a return to French post-structuralism is the most generative point of departure for crafting theoretically sophisticated history in our contemporary moment. That, after all, is what Kleinberg and the other authors reviewed here, whether implicitly or explicitly, urge us to do. Yet as these books show, a one-size-theory does not fit all. For example, Alexander eloquently shows that the best way to generate theory is to dive deeper into the archive, the primary sources and the historical chronologies – even though the final product (i.e. the book) can take a more capacious and creative form. Geroulanos gives us a model for doing a kind of Derridean analysis, as he turns over the ideas of multiple thinkers from multiple perspectives and multiple contexts, even framing his own analysis of Derrida in the explicit mode of the *double geste*.

Here, perhaps, we encounter the limits of history driven by its own theoretical sophistication. For all of its dimensionality and rich description, *Transparency in Postwar France* has its weak spots: notably, there is no feminism, no négritude and only glimmers of anti-colonial struggle. Though Geroulanos explicitly addresses this at the outset – 'the book certainly does not claim to cover the postwar waterfront' (23) – his omissions undermine his proposal for using a 'web as a model for conceptual history'. Citing anthropologist Clifford Geetz (citing Max Weber) and his observation that 'man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun', Geroulanos explains that within his historical narrative, 'concepts are the points or knots of this

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web. They are tied to one another. To write their history is to address the way in which they are strung together, pulled, yanked sometimes in one direction, sometimes in another. … I call 'intellectuals' those who engage, create, give new shape to the web or manage, sometimes by themselves, to pull certain points together or force them apart' (24). Yet the strings of any web first entail the work of spinning, a messy, creative activity that only fully happens once we let de Beauvoir, Césaire, Kristeva and Fanon out of the boxes in which they are conventionally kept.

Haunting History, meanwhile, uses sophisticated theorising to challenge the writing of history, yet the imaginative space it carves out remains largely conventional. Kleinberg pulls his body of evidence from canonical theory, canonical history, canonical fiction and increasingly canonised debates among intellectual and cultural historians from previous decades. If Kleinberg's aim is to provoke ontological realists into shedding their fixed notions of the past, it seems likely they will cling more tightly to their views. If his aim, on the other hand, is to provoke historians of ideas to expand or deepen their current modes of thinking, it may come in reaction to, rather than through an embrace of, his curious conservatism.

Taken together, these four works suggest that much is at stake in the distinction between theorising and theory, and their centrality to historical narratives. To theorise is to display logic, order and purpose; it is to create a premise or frame for understanding. To offer theory is to account for action and event; it is to explain, illustrate and represent the world. Can we, as historians, do one without the other? Kleinberg seems to suggest that we cannot, Alexander that we can. And what kind of knowledge – *Kennen, Wissen* or something altogether different – do we rely on? Whether theory generates history, or history generates theory, both reveal our beliefs and assumptions about the nature of knowledge. Although Geertz wrote about the role of theory for the study of culture rather than history, his observations help us keep tabs on our desire, as modern historians, to imagine the past as a sea of endless possibility. In this view, theory, interpretation and knowledge are also in endless supply and circulation. Yet theory, as Geertz notes, 'is not its own master. As it is inseverable from the immediacies thick description presents, its freedom to shape itself in terms of its internal logic is rather limited. What generality it contrives to achieve grows out of the delicacy of its distinctions, not the sweep of its abstractions.'[12]

Revealing the connection between knowledge and the world – here, perhaps, the boundary between history and philosophy comes into view – these authors draw our attention to the political and ethical dimensions of the histories we write. How should we know? This is not simply a question that we carry with us into the archives, the seminar room or our professional debates, but also into the past and the world we inhabit now.

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[12] Clifford Geertz, 'Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture', in Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 25.

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