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Depth and Death: On History, Humanitarianism, and Mortuary Culture

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Abstract:

The present article proposes a re-reading of what “inclusion” into the sphere of the historical actually means in modern European historical discourse. It argues that this re-reading permits challenging a powerful, but problematic norm of ontological homogeneity as something to be achieved in and by historical discourse. At least some of the more conceptually profound challenges that accounts of “deep history”—of very distant pasts—pose to historical discourse have to do with pursuits of this norm. Historical theory has the potential of responding to some of these challenges and actually reverting them back at the practice of accounting for deep times in historical writing. The argument proceeds, in a first step, by analyzing the ties between modern European mortuary cultures and historical writing. In a second step, the history of humanitarian moralities is brought to bear on the analysis, in order to make visible, thirdly, the fractured presences of deep time in modern-era and contemporary historical writing. The fractures in question emerge, the article argues, from the ontological heterogeneity of historical knowledge. So in the end, a position beyond ontological homogeneity is adumbrated.

Keywords: deep time, mortuary culture, humanitarianism, theory of history

The Deep Time Challenge

The rise of “deep time” in historical writing has to do with a particular constellation of discontent that targets older distinctions of history and pre-history and their conceptual foundations. The notion of a deep time in the “human past” appears to claim, in a rather straightforward manner, a territory among the “facts” of history. Since “depth” is premised not merely on chronological extension, but also on a stabilization of the experience of time, the

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notion in question also asserts the facticity of a successful tradition of experiential knowledge about events in very distant pasts. A key motive is to overcome the exclusion of those whom modern western history writing had, for some two hundred years, deemed to be "without history," indigenous peoples in the contemporary world, and those in the past of humanity who had lived before "history" ever began (Smail 2008; Shryock, Smail 2011). A proper reappraisal of indigenous traditions would evince their antiquity and, according to a widespread line of argument, demonstrate their ability to serve as sources for understanding certain events and structures of the very distant past.[1] The list of examples would comprise knowledge about long-past patterns of human mobility, interactions of peoples, extraordinary natural events, tools for communicating tradition, and ways of sustaining ecological balances. The most prominent attempt, in twentieth-century historical writing, to deepen historical time, Fernand Braudel's model of pluralized temporalities in the layering of different *durées*, fails to account for such indigenous histories that comprise memories of deep-past change and thus disrupt the distinction of social and natural times that is essential for the model (Griffiths 2000).

Nonetheless, the new deep-past perspective also creates difficulties since the project of reconciling historical and physical time is likely to fail (Riggs 2015; Smail 2015 acknowledges the problem). Different cultural temporalities continue to operate. The envisaged fusion of different bodies of knowledge remains elusive. In its crudest conceivable form, the deep time model runs the risk of recycling the nineteenth-century trope that sought to analyze the "mythological" oral traditions of long-past cultures and of "primitive peoples" as imperfect explanations of natural events, as for instance when deities are explained as personifications of thunder and lightning. Numerous contemporary approaches to indigenous traditions regarding distant pasts appear to return to this pattern. Stories about floods refer to past flooding events, and so on (examples in McGrath, Rademaker, Silverstein *forthcoming*). There is then a tendency toward assuming that the discourse of deep history is unproblematically referential, that is to say, it is meaningful because it speaks about facts from the very distant past. With

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novel scientific methods, *better*—more precise, more detailed, less assailable—knowledge can be attained than was possible within, say, the ambit of "merely" oral traditions and their reliance on the toolkit of fiction to remember fact.

Homogeneity and Inclusion into Historicity

In historical theory, the once-acrimonious confrontation of fact and fiction appears to have abated to some extent. The exclusivity with which dominant notions of historicity in the modern era have been founded on facticity is, among other things, testimony to the efforts invested into homogenizing the sphere of permissible objects of historical knowledge. All of these objects were supposed to share the property of being fully factual, not dependent on any apparatuses of fiction or any other form of alienating construction. The language of historical discourse would be exclusively based on past reality, if only in a partial, selective, and incomplete manner, yet nonetheless endowed with a target of ever-closer approximation. The counter-argument, hotly debated for many years, accords no factual status to historical writing, which it relegates instead to the status of a particular genre of literary text.[2] In this contest both sides share the norm of homogeneity as imposed on the world—the universe of objects—that the historical text discusses. The idea of history as a scientific endeavor appears to hinge on the norm of ontological homogeneity, no matter whether history is taken to be about the facts and only the facts, or about self-reflexive fictions. Concepts of "temporality" tend to be bound up with ontological homogeneity: if some event is located in a different temporality than another event, they belong to different ontologies, or diegeses, in the terminology of Genette's theory of narration (1980). Hence it is no surprise that attempts to recover deep history have complied with the norm of homogeneity.

Historicization—understood, from a theoretical point of view, as the process of "making things historical"—consists at least in part of an act of inclusion into an ontology of history. One of the conditions of such an act usually is compliance with the norm of

homogeneity. Historicization targets matters from the past. There are thresholds of admission; things can be too big or too small, for instance continental drift, or the neuronal processes in my body as I am typing these lines. In part, the “deep history” argument proposes precisely to radically lower such thresholds. Invariably, however, the “historicity” that is constituted by any given practice of historicization hinges on drawing a distinction between the past *tout court* and a processed segment of the past called history. Andrew Shryock and Daniel Smail (2013), for instance, seem to embrace the notion that history is the entirety of the *human* past, thus still a distinct segment of the overall past. The case for recuperating the deep human past might then appear as just another case for the inclusion of something so far unjustly excluded from the quality of being historical.

A pattern of the correction of blatant omissions is very much part of the tradition of modern European historical writing that subsequently came to include many diverse groups formerly regarded as *per se* “unhistorical.” If in certain premodern traditions of European historical writing, only the ruling classes were accorded the status of historicity, even the inclusion of the middle classes was an emancipatory accomplishment, later on extended to the working class, women, racial, religious, ethnic, and sexual minorities, children, and disabled people, always at the cost of fitting the included “Other” into the established framework, often in a position of perpetuated marginality. The problem of whether the “inside” requires an “outside,” whether inclusion presupposes exclusion, always remains, as does the concomitant question of how inclusion relates to homogenization. Yet for practical purposes, these problems are often sidelined. Contemporary historical writing operates with a near-ubiquitous notion of expanding inclusivity. So does deep history.

One might argue that history could just be pluralized. This would amount to positing a heterogeneous ontology—or a plurality of homogeneous ontologies. Instead of history and historicity, one would have histories and historicities, and different “regimes” (Hartog 2003) of the latter, i.e. different rules that determine what portions of the past are admitted into the

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narrower domain of the historical. The most workable account of such a condition is perhaps Dipesh Chakrabarty's in *Provincializing Europe* (2000), which focuses on practical forms of establishing counter-historicities that are the product of colonial confrontations with a modern European sense of progressive, secular, unified historicity. The latter is relentlessly expansive, whereas the former is not. By way of Chakrabarty's argument, colonial counter-historicities become integrated into an account of colonial history that belongs in, or at least cannot fully break with, the modern scholarly European regime of historicity. Chakrabarty opts for sustaining rather than resolving the tension: interdependence without inclusion, as it were. Thus, modern-era historicity would always be organized in protagonist and antagonist historicities. But that also means that counter-historicities cannot be *antagonists* before the emergence of the modern protagonist (see Rao, Shulman, Subrahmanyam 2001).

If one constructs the case of the history of the deep human past along the lines of sustained tension, as an antagonist to modern historicity, then the prospect for recuperating deep time is undermined. The cultural traditions that co-constitute any meaningful "deep history" would have to be regarded as insurmountably at least in part a product of, say, the colonial situation, and thus no deeper than that. Hence, a pluralism of temporalities, as long as there is meant to be any kind of coherence, appears to impose limits on "depth." It is probably for this reason that claims about deep-time traditions have not bothered much with pluralism and have preferred to aim for outright inclusion in a homogeneous framework of historicity.

So then, a more interesting theoretical question than the one about singular-plural relations is what the notion of an "inclusion" into historicity actually means, on a theoretical level. Since I have so far offered to explain homogeneity by means of this concept of inclusion, homogeneity is not going to do the trick. Any honest account, in my opinion, must start by admitting that, unlike what is the case for social groups within larger social groups, inclusion, when it comes to something as abstract as historicity, is first of all a theory metaphor. It cannot be spelled out in terms of participation and communication, as would be the case in social

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groups. There is no non-metaphorical understanding of historicity as a "set" that would be able to include new members. Neither is historicity a text, or some other series of signs, that could simply be expanded (Trüper 2019a). So in order to understand the ways in which the new deep history intervenes in the theoretical underpinnings of what I will call "modern European historical writing" (in full recognition of the inexactitude of this phrase) one will need to pursue the meanings of the metaphor in question.

One starting point for this pursuit is to treat "inclusion" as a metaphorical stand-in for a process of re-description: already familiar things, persons, situations, events, and collectives are re-described in novel terms that now include what they previously excluded. Often, this has to do with the reframing of the concrete in more abstract terms. Such reframing arguably aims to make the individual disappear, by explaining it as representable through general categories. One of the most obvious restrictions on deep history is that it cannot fit into a mold of historical writing that highlights named individuals. The deep past is a condition of insurmountable anonymity. Only a few "mythological" names can even in theory be applied, and practitioners of deep history have renounced treating these as properly referential. So the approach aligns with those modes of historical writing that already tend toward abandoning names for the anonymity of more abstract categories of social collectives, structures, shared spaces, and epochs. Yet, the relationship between name-based (onomastic) and name-suppressing (anonymous) approaches in modern European historical writing is intricate. "Inclusion" into historicity cannot be straightforwardly located in the medium of anonymous history, because there is no such thing as a stable medium of this kind. Historicization includes both onomastic and anonymous procedures. So deep history's understanding of what history is appears *prima facie* somewhat one-sided.

Throughout European history, as soon as the naming of names, or their silencing, becomes involved, one enters a territory that does not merely belong to historicization. Instead, in most epochs of European history since antiquity, onomastic language games are the territory

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of the baptismal sacrament and, even more fundamentally, of the commemoration of the dead, that is to say, of cultural practices that make far more of names than mere historical writing does. The rules that constitute the language games in place are rich, and more importantly, they belong to diverse sign systems (Lévi-Strauss 1962: chap. 7). History is not the same as mortuary culture; to the extent that both are referential fields—they assume that their meanings are constituted by some relation to past reality—they therefore do not coincide. The world, or underworld, of the dead is not the same as the historical world.

One of the most astounding lacunae of the theory of history is the unwillingness of the field to think in multilateral terms, to acknowledge the interrelations between history and other cultural forms. While these interrelations are themselves contingent and thus accessible to historical analysis, the structural feature of interrelatedness may well be thought of as necessary. The problem of deep history is important not least because it requires a *multilateral exploration* that goes beyond what historical theory is usually prepared to accept.

Another remarkable feature of deep history is what I will call its symmetric use of temporal depth. Modern European historical discourse—and, as I will argue—mortuary culture share their reliance on curtailing the extension of the past while leaving the future unlimitedly open. So while in their understanding the past does not extend into unfathomable depths, the future, in principle, does. In deep history, this understanding of the future is left in place while the curtailment of the past is removed. The importance of the asymmetry about temporal depth that is shared between modern European history and mortuary culture, however, is that it is the product, or so I will argue, of their bilateral bond (and its multilateral extensions). Deep history, in a way, intrudes into these arrangements unilaterally, without taking history's coalition partners into account.

So then, in order to understand what "homogeneity" and "inclusion into historicity" mean—and in what ways they constitute challenges for deep history and vice versa—an exploration of the multilateralism of historicity is necessary. In fact, the significance of the deep

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time problematic is that it forces historical theory to render explicit some otherwise extremely well-concealed tacit knowledge, precisely with regard to this multilateralism. It is also not accidental that this problematic emerges in the present moment, for, it is, or so I will argue, partly premised on some major shifts in the current "western" regime of historicity.

Mortuary Voluntarism

In the Great Church of the town of Monnickendam in North Holland, one can visit the imposing epitaph for Jan Nieuwenhuyzen (1724-1806), founding figure of one of the oldest and most prominent philanthropic societies of the Netherlands, the *Maatschappij tot Nut van't Algemeen* (Society for Public Welfare) of 1784, generally known by the moniker *Het Nut*. [Figure 1. Caption: Epitaph and commemorative medal for Jan Nieuwenhuyzen, etching by Noach van der Meer, jr., 1806-7, from the collection of Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.] The epitaph for Nieuwenhuyzen, a Mennonite minister, was ordered and made in 1806-7 by the sculptors Charles and Jean François Sigault (father and son), after a design by the artist Jacques Kuyper, at the behest of the Society. For *Het Nut*, spelling out the exact meaning of the general character of its moral and political mission was a lasting source of struggle. Eventually they settled on supplying nationwide primary education as the best shot at translating into practice what "public welfare" or "common good" actually signified. In a context where denominational symbolism was a source of contention, philanthropic and humanitarian generality strove to be above the divisions. The epitaph for the Mennonite Nieuwenhuyzen, on the wall of a Calvinist church, was contiguous with such a pursuit. The design opted for a classicist symbolism throughout that carries general Christian content: the *ouroboros* for eternity, the butterfly for the soul's shedding of the body and transition into the eternal life, the olive and palm branches as symbols of peace and the victory over evil respectively, burning and extinguished torches as symbols of life and death. One of the most striking features is the large urn that sits atop the epitaph, marked as a receptacle of the dead by a black-seamed marble shroud draped around it. This is where

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the classicist design surpasses the bounds of Christian iconography and custom. It is hardly the case that Nieuwenhuyzen had actually been cremated. Indeed, outside of certain punitive and, later on, quarantine regimes, there had not been a common practice of cremation in Christian Europe for many centuries. Why the urn on the monument of a deeply Christian man?

The urn is the sign of a momentous shift in the funerary culture of Northwestern Europe. The culture, one might say, had begun to think about alternatives to the rather unquestioning practice of the interment of the dead (or the storage of their remains in crypts or ossuaries). In fact, the re-emergence of the idea of cremation was tied up with classicism. In 1849, Jacob Grimm spelled out the linkage head-on when he advocated the embrace of cremation by quoting the closing verse of Goethe's 1797 poem "The Bride of Corinth," in which the burning of the dead is equated with "soaring toward the ancient gods" ("Eilen wir den alten Göttern zu") (Grimm 1865: 211-13; see also Laqueur 2015: 525). The idea of cremation only took a practical turn after technical solutions became more available from the 1870s onward. At this point, cremation also became bound up with opposition to the Catholic Church, in particular in Southern Europe—liberal, i.e. anti-clerical Italians were among its first propagators. In this manner, the practice became linked to modernism, hygiene, and other progressive pursuits. This connection has persuaded many historians that what was actually at stake was simply another dimension of the political struggle between progressives and conservatives, thus the business-as-usual of nineteenth-century modernization (Prothero 2001; Jupp 2006; for Germany Fischer 1996). This analysis has the flaw of reducing cremation to a marker of collective identity—of progressives—and downplays an element that was arguably crucial, the emergence of a cultural framework that offers funerary options, thus personal choice, over the *basic procedure* of processing one's own dead body, as opposed to the world of choices that had consistently been available in Europe, since antiquity, for erecting commemorative *signs* for the dead (Petrucci 1998). I will refer to this framework as "mortuary voluntarism."

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In Roman antiquity, as Erwin Panofsky pointed out, a wealth of choices existed for disposing of the dead body that in some regards bears resemblance to the diversity of present-day funerary customs (Panofsky 1964: chap. 2-3). Christianity, though, had eventually done away with this plurality. So classicism, as in the Nieuwenhuyzen epitaph, functioned, first, as a ploy that effortlessly allowed shifting out of the Christian, and denominational, norm systems, which permitted no such choice. And second, classicism quite literally proposed a recuperation of lost pluralism. Cremation became the key element of this diversification. The political allegiances of cremation, however, proved fickle: first championed by liberals, it was later taken over by fascists and communists alike—the Soviet Union aggressively promoted cremation. In Germany, the breakthrough of cremation was part, not merely of the rejection of clericalism, but also of the history of *völkisch* (ethno-)nationalism. Around 1900, cremation became fully re-associated with supposedly "Germanic" custom, a connection that Grimm's academy lecture had already struck and that fit the "philhellenic" bill of associating Germanness with Greek at the expense of Roman antiquity.

On the whole, in the twentieth century the shift toward fire burial prevailed, even though the history of cremation also contained an older meaning of punitive violence against corpses, the burning at the stake of heretics and "witches." The most extensive modern recuperation of such meanings was doubtless the German reliance on cremation in the Shoah, which was not merely a matter of genocidal expedience. The majority of victims were not cremated immediately after their murder, but interred. As is well known, during the retreat of the German Eastern front, Jewish prisoners were then forced to exhume these mass-buried dead from earlier in the war and cremate them. The rationale is usually given as one of destroying evidence of the crime. But it should probably also be understood, not only as a novel form of cruelty added to the sufferings of the still living, but as a continuation of the violence into the dominion of the dead, in a symbolic act that is perhaps best described as "overkilling." One might have thought that this appalling history would have affected the symbolic meaning of

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cremation somehow. Yet, the peacetime everyday practice of cremation has only continued to grow in Europe after 1945, impervious to negative connotations. In Germany, today, roughly two thirds of the dead are cremated; in the United Kingdom this number rises to three quarters.[3]

Peacetime cremation, then, clearly carries a symbolic value of its own, entirely separate from wartime practice. This value is, it seems to me, vested in the emergence of a voluntarist pattern of processing the dead. The reason the practice of cremation has expanded, in Europe, without discernible interruption by its atrocious wartime uses is presumably its indispensable role in upholding the possibility of mortuary voluntarism. The genocidal use of cremation was utterly contrary to the offering of funerary choice; and perhaps this is the reason why there is no perceived connection. A recent *Encyclopaedia of Cremation*, at any rate, contains no separate entry on the Shoah and makes mention of it only in passing, in an entry on "War" in general (Mates, Davies, eds. 2005).

On account of voluntarism, the distinction of group identities as a function of funerary practice—of which the genocidal use of cremation is the most extreme case—appears to have become, on the whole, less prominent. The traditional "political cult of the dead," as Michael Jeismann and Reinhart Koselleck (1994) once labeled it, may well seem to have been continuously expanding over the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In recent years, the rise of DNA technology has boosted initiatives for reuniting the anonymous remains of victims of violence with names; and this in turn has prompted discussion of a "forensic turn," in a manner unimaginable until recently (Anstett, Dreyfus 2015; see further Wailoo, Nelson, Lee, eds. 2012; M'charek 2018). Yet this development might also be regarded as the after-effect of an increasing separation of peacetime and wartime funerary cultures. The simultaneous expansion of funerary voluntarism and the political commemoration of the dead of war and genocide might have to do precisely with the need to protect voluntarism from being overwhelmed by the set of practices that pertained to the extreme violence of twentieth-century warfare.

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Jacques Derrida (2011), in his final set of seminars, addressed the basic problem of mortuary voluntarism with great clarity: the emergence of burial options places a burden on individuals to make decisions about what will happen to their body post-mortem. Such decisions then are carried over to other individuals. It is an impossible decision-target. In the first instance, it lies beyond the scope of intentionality; and in further instances it requires decisions on behalf of the former bodies of former individuals. None of this concerns, say, the legal fiction of the dead-person-as-subject whose "last will" has normative force *post mortem*, but the bodily, phenomenal subject. Arguably, one traditional criterion for understanding the meaning of "culture" is that it unburdens the individual from making certain basic funerary choices, in particular those to do with the physical body. Non-negotiable practices for processing the dead body are the standard, no matter how much variation is introduced in the appendage of commemorative signs to mark status and power. Even in pluralist societies, as composed of many diverse communities, individual groups sustain and reproduce themselves by—as Thomas Laqueur has it—making the dead do the work (Laqueur 2015).[4] The dead are marked as "ours" by funerary practice (family, local community, religious community, etc.). They mark "us" as "theirs" by staying in place (which is not a trivial requirement, see Rév 2005).

The commemorative aspect of European funerary culture displays cognate traits. The rise, in the thirteenth century or so, of the named burial site was an early classicist trend, much in imitation of ancient Roman custom, which had all but disappeared in the passage into the Middle Ages, only to be slowly recovered over the centuries, in a movement of the trickling down of status from the very top of political-clerical society (Petrucci 1998; also Park 1995). In the nineteenth century, the universal preservation of the names of the dead became an ideal related to civic equality, and realized perhaps only around the enormous efforts to commemorate the names of the dead of war and genocide in the twentieth century (Prost 1977; Winter 1995).

Yet, in recent decades, it is not named but rather anonymous burial (i.e. without a named sign at the site of interment) that has been on the rise. Philippe Ariès (1974: chap. 4), Zygmunt Bauman (1992), and others have argued that a postmodern trend has emerged to unburden society from any care for the dead as much as possible. Hans Ruin stresses that Heidegger held similar views about a purported modern obliviousness toward death (Ruin 2018). At the endpoint of such a development, the dead body would be just as disposable as garbage; or, instead, it would be deployed as a useful resource. Adumbrations of this result can actually be observed in some contemporary forms of "tree burial"—not to be confused with the custom in some societies, of laying the dead to rest in trees or on scaffolds—in which the ability of cremated bodies to act as fertilizer is stressed.[5] This would then mean removing the symbolic markers by which useless things that are nonetheless valuable are distinguished from useless things that are also valueless. So far, these markers have remained essential for historicization as much as for funerary culture. Much is then at stake if the diagnosis of escalating obliviousness toward death and the dead turns out to be accurate.

By contrast, I would suggest that we need to understand the contemporary trend toward anonymous burial as *of a piece* with the rise of onomastic burial since both can be explained in accordance with the logic of mortuary voluntarism, which must not be mistaken for obliviousness of any kind.[6] The inscribed headstone or funerary slab was once designed as a projection of memory into a deep future, that is, for as long as the material would hold up, a deliberate manipulation of geological time. In many places, however, the voluntarist funerary culture has done away with this projection. Starting in the late eighteenth century, especially urban cemeteries became disposable as ground for construction, a process that was accelerated by urban growth, which rendered old burial spaces too small.[7] In the contemporary system, headstones are placed, but then after a while they are removed and graves declared "empty." That is, unless there is the option for someone to decide (and, usually, to pay) in order to keep the funerary signs in place. This pattern is a continuation of voluntarism, since it merely

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introduces a new layer of decision about whether or not the signs are projected into a deep future. Projection into such a future becomes conditional on voluntarism. This constitutes a hypostatization of deliberation: decisions about funerary commemoration are required not merely once, but again and again, and not merely on the part of the deceased, but of their survivors, too.

It is arguably an extension of this fact that today, increasingly, commemoration moves into partly pre-designed, partly self-designed spaces online. The personalized page online or in a social network, even for the living, is not so dissimilar to the cemetery "plot" in uniform size where the gardening efforts of the survivors speak of the attainment of Eden by way of labor. Digital "space," too, is not owned by the dead or their heirs, but at most rented. In the case of social networks, there is simply a corporate property claim on the digital remains deposited with them. If, at some point, they decide to grind up these digital bones, as in the case of real-life cemeteries, unless they concede an option to object, there is nothing one will be able to do about it. Admittedly, it might be a consequence of the spread of mortuary voluntarism into the everyday presentation of self that people live their lives increasingly as if they were dead already. This, of course, remains to be seen.

Voluntarism, then, is about enhancing the prestige of deliberation along with the efficacy of specific decisions. In its effort to raise the symbolic value of decision, voluntarism stakes a claim to its own validity as extending into a deep future, while it chooses to sustain itself. It is this aspect of modern European funerary culture that produces the lopsided engagement with temporal depth which then also becomes characteristic of historical writing and sits uneasily with the ambition to include a deep past into historicity.

Historical Writing and the Dead

Striking a connection between modern-era European mortuary culture and historical writing and the regimentation of time may, at first glance, appear challenging. A number of prominent

practitioners and theorists of history have disavowed this type of connection. Marc Bloch, for instance, famously quoted a remark by Henri Pirenne according to which being a historian meant involvement with life and the living, not with the dead (1993: chap. 1.VII). History's service was to the present and the concerns of contemporary humans, not to mourning, death, and memory. Arguably, this stance echoes the one succinctly formulated by Benedetto Croce (1917: 4), according to whom "all true history is contemporary history," since bound to contemporary perspectives and uses. Already earlier Friedrich Nietzsche had weighed the uses and disadvantages of history "for life" and minimized the significance of the dead, of which he was nonetheless aware. For, he recognized them by including them in the category of ancestral piety in "antiquarian" historical writing (Nietzsche 1874: §3). This inclusion, however, aimed for a reduction to a measure at which, supposedly, the dead could no longer be harmful to the life of the living. An entirely contrary tendency emerged in the longstanding debate on the role of collective memory vis-à-vis historical writing, in which the dispassionate discourse of history was often regarded as being dwarfed by the dead and their presence in trauma, mourning, and commemorative rituals (see Assmann 2005; on trauma LaCapra 2001; Fassin, Rechtman 2009). By contrast, the deconstructionist attempt to analyze the category of the historical by way of an "hauntology"—an ontological indeterminacy caused by the pervasion of reality by the absent, past, and dead—seeks to "be with" the dead on a more equal and inclusive footing (Derrida 1993; more recently Kleinberg 2017; Ruin 2018). Yet it does so at the price of generalizing the category of the haunting "specter" and of "spectrality." From the point of view of a cultural history open to diversity in the processing of the dead, ghosts have hardly been the same the world over.

In the longstanding conversation about the nature and purposes of historical writing, then, the dead have remained excluded (Pirenne, Bloch, Croce), minimized (Nietzsche), maximized (memory studies), or sublated into a more abstract synthesis (hauntology). The

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result is a blind spot when it comes to looking at concrete cultural histories of processing the dead and their entwinement with theoretical notions about history and historical writing.

In the case of modern Europe, what is at stake is a nexus between historical discourse and a voluntarist mortuary culture. In order to better understand this nexus, anonymous burial is a particularly helpful phenomenon because it arguably forms an intersection between funerary practice and historical discourse. Anonymous burial requires the assumption that the graveyard is not the privileged abode of the dead or their commemoration. Instead, the burial of the actual corpse is supplemented with an abstract burial in the text of history. Historical writing in its modern form—secular, archival, "historicist" and/or progressivist, critical—tends both towards the recovery and the obliteration of names. It seesaws endlessly between including and omitting names, between onomastic and anonymous approaches. This pattern of discourse emerged and developed over the same period as voluntarist funerary culture. Arguably, there is an interrelation.

It is easy to see that historical writing, when it is emphatically hostile to the anonymity of the dead and retrieves the names of the forgotten many, aligns with the sign system of a commemorative funerary culture. It is less easy to see that anonymizing generalization in historical writing may often fulfill the same function, a point that especially Michel de Certeau (1975: 99-102) hinted at when he insisted that the writing of history always constructs an abode for the dead. A history that knows, for instance, only social classes, but little individual agency, and does not focus on individual persons, supplies, in its generalizing re-descriptions, categories for placing and storing the dead. General social categories, when applied to the past, express the belonging of the dead to certain communities, functions, institutions, and symbolic orders. The spatial side of European funerary culture has come to grant the individual dead their own space in what is basically a necropolis, built on a still-recognizably Roman or even Etruscan pattern. Historical writing provides an abstract set of such spaces. The individual is figuratively buried in general categories that indicate the place where the "remains" of a living person

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"belong." If a person has been granted a place in history, it matters less where and how they are physically buried. Even the way historical writing deals most commonly with temporality is adapted to the needs of the voluntarist matrix: exact placement in chronological time (often tied to onomastic approaches) contrasts with vague placement in broad epochs (often anonymizing).

The once much-debated conflict between history and memory is perhaps, above all, about a choice between onomastic (collective memory) or anonymizing (social history) forms. If so it would not be much of a conflict at all, but part of a unified system that is simply designed to provide alternate choices and to enhance the government of the will, or at least glorify it. The epigraphic projection of funerary monuments into a deep future is mirrored by the way in which historical writing, as writing, is projected into a deep future as well. Most historians working today, of course, will reject the notion that publication is a projection into a deep future equivalent to epigraphy and will prefer to understand their work as aiming only at a short-term future. Yet, this attitude is arguably just an indicator that a voluntarist matrix is brought into play: it becomes a function of authorship, of authorly decision, what type of temporal projection is embraced; and this decision creates a possibility for moral sanction (rewarding, say, modesty over immodesty). Who would actually continue to write history, though, if humankind knew definitively that it would fail to survive the next decade? To be sure, this question actually applies to the entire literary field. Yet this only widens the scope of the alignment of writing and funerary culture. There is a way in which everything written is an epitaph.

Rescuing the Dead

It is one thing to observe an interrelation, and another to venture an explanation for it. For the latter purpose, I propose to re-read a passage in the work of Jules Michelet, perhaps the best-known body of texts within the ambit of modern European historical writing in which the care for the dead is invested with ineluctable significance for the work of history. Actually, many subsequent efforts to assert the preponderance of the living over the dead for the writing of

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history may even have been motivated by the embarrassment that Michelet's romantic-era enthusiasm for morbidity provoked. A well-known passage is the following, quoted also in Roland Barthes's analysis of Michelet:

> Yes, each dead man leaves a small property, his memory, and asks that it be cared for. For the one who has no friends, the magistrate must supply one. For the law, for justice is more reliable than all our forgetful affections, our tears so quickly dried.
>
> This magistracy is History. And the dead are, to speak in the fashion of Roman Law, those *miserabiles personae* with whom the magistrate must be concerned.
>
> Never in my career have I lost sight of that duty of the Historian. I have given many of the too-forgotten dead the assistance which I myself shall require.
>
> I have exhumed them for a second life. (Michelet 1872: ii-iii; quoted after Barthes 1954: 101)

The tensions in this quote are exquisite: history is the magistrate that organizes the paupers' burials of those who are indigents in memory. This condition, however, is everybody's, including Michelet's own, because of the forgetfulness of our affections, the frailty and unreliability of human emotions. History writing steadies the unsteadiness of our emotional lives. The preservation of memories is also an act of resurrection that *used* to fall into the domain of divine agency, but has meanwhile been appropriated by historical writing. There is a fantasy of heightened agency involved in historical writing, as a task constitutive of statehood ("This magistracy is History"), a category of generality that will swallow up the individual historian, but also retain him, if perhaps invisibly. So although Michelet seems to talk about commemorating the identified, named individual, he is also indicating the presence of forces of generalizing re-description that cancel the names of individual *miserabiles personae*. The names are sublated into a larger whole. From this point of view, Michelet expresses something

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about the role of historical writing in modern "political theology." The "magistrate" would establish its power on the basis of theological meanings.

There are, however, further meanings to the matter than the narrowly Christian one. The saving of the dead from the second death of forgetting is a way, in modern European culture, of interweaving the cultural understanding of temporality with rather peculiar moral imperatives. This connection helps to explain "inclusion" into historicity through moral meanings. In this regard, inclusion is about the burial owed the dead. Morality is a semantic resource as well as a legitimizing idiom for the re-descriptions on which historical writing builds.

Admittedly, the notion according to which the dead are considered capable of being subject to an act of rescue is at first glance implausible without the background of Christian eschatology. Without a religious promise that the "souls" of the dead will be subject to a decision over their salvation or damnation, one might argue, it would have appeared improbable to maintain the idea that the dead could, or should, be the target of rescue. Michelet's remarks would then seem to corroborate notions about the convergence of historical thought and eschatology that Karl Löwith (1949) discussed, in his argument about how expectations of historical progress were subtly founded in apocalyptic expectations.

This linkage is—seemingly—so obvious that it has rendered another prerequisite of Michelet's idiom nigh-invisible. The kind of rescue at stake in his discussion makes sense only after the advent of humanitarian movements that rely on norms of obligation toward distant suffering strangers (Boltanski 1993). "Rescue," in an emphatic sense, means recovering those whom one would have deemed unrecoverable under ordinary circumstances. To assume that this is the condition of the dead signifies alignment with modern European norms, as emerging since the late eighteenth century, according to which the dead are absent and distant, not near and nearly present (see Oexle 1995). Historical writing was, almost needless to say, associated with certain functions of funerary culture already in pre-modern periods. Yet the notion that

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history can, and is meant to, *rescue* the dead, and that such rescue takes place among humans alone, without participation of the deity, seems genuinely a product of Michelet's period. This is less a change in the practice of historical writing but in the array of divergent resources of meaning with which historical writing entertains relations.

Michelet's image of the magistrate burying the paupers might obscure its humanitarian motivations, seeing as it seems to be limited to the more traditional charitable framework of a single polity. Yet, the point of the image is to establish something non-traditional that has much wider scope, not least in the temporal distance to be traversed: Michelet's dead are not only the recently deceased. Humanitarian imperatives tend to break with pre-given notions about the limits of moral obligations and to go along with reassessments of collective agency. Since late antiquity, funerary customs had tied the charitable funeral meal to a particular role of the poor in the commemoration of the dead person (Oexle 1984).[8] Michelet's image actually has it backward: the *miserabiles personae* were subjects of commemoration, not objects, and they could come close to representing and embodying the dead in ritual practice. Thus, Michelet's manner of writing about history and the dead suggests that a humanitarian discourse of rescue obligations is grafted on the understanding of the relation between the living and the dead.

The relation is reinterpreted as a morally significant type of "distance," a relative quality that pertains, not merely to space, but also to more abstract conditions of absence, such as social inequality. Distance is that of the drowning person almost within arm's reach, but separated by their position in water; that of the shipwrecked one can observe go under from shore; or that of slaves on a different continent that need to be liberated (Haskell 1985). Distance can also be that of individuals from a deprived social stratum one otherwise avoids encountering.

Humanitarian distance, however, is never temporal in kind in the first instance. On the contrary, the humanitarian argument is a forceful synchronizer: the suffering to be alleviated is happening in an emphatic *Now*, and it becomes visible to the humanitarian witness

simultaneously. Rescue action presupposes, but more importantly also *realizes* this synchronicity over distance. Humanitarianism is about *Kairos*, the time of suddenly arising opportunity, rather than about *Chronos*, the monotonous time of duration and slow, regular passage. The writing of history, as it is understood in temporal terms, requires *Kairos* for itself: history—even deep history—is written because the present time "requires" it, "is right" or even "ripe" for it, and so on. Making sure, discursively, that this *Kairos* of writing converges with the synchronicity of humanitarian rescue means that history is written in the mode of a temporality that is at least partially constituted by moral meanings.

According to Helge Jordheim (2017), the representation of synchronicity was a decisive problem in the emergence of modern discourses of history. Only when a solid sense of the synchronicity of distant ancient empires was achieved did it become possible to exit from the strictures of traditional biblical chronology and expand temporal frameworks (Grafton 1994). A unified temporality became attainable within historical writing *before* such unity was imposed on concretely measured present time in the tortuous process of establishing the world time of clocks (Ogle 2015; also Pomian 1984). Historical synchronization in the late eighteenth century, however, coincides with the advent of humanitarian synchronization. The tissue that connects them is precisely the notion expressed by Michelet about the rescue of the dead, which gives a temporal interpretation to the humanitarian imperative: the dead are both of the past (as formerly living people whose lives are to be stored in memory) and of the present (as dead people).

This dual aspect elegantly ties together temporalities of the past-present-future variety and the earlier-later variety—J. M. E. McTaggart's famed "A and B-series" (1908). The first of these presupposes a subjective point of view (the "perspective" of the present), the second does not. Humanitarian synchronicity, as operating with *Kairos*, is marked by perspectival relations, whereas historical synchronicity, at least in its early forms, is about absolute temporal relations of earlier and later—mere *Chronos*—that require no phenomenal subject. The synchronizing

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"tables" drawn up by the pioneering eighteenth-century "universal historian" Johann Christoph Gatterer that Jordheim discusses fail to integrate an A-series of perspectival, subject-bound temporal relations. Certain approaches to "deep history" similarly appear to aim at only a B-series interpretation of "time." Yet for the time of history to permit a full apparatus of temporal relations—never mind that McTaggart considered both series incoherent and therefore illusory—more was required. This is what the Michelet-style romantic-era amalgamation of historical writing with novel features of the mortuary culture achieved: it offered a target for the morality of humanitarian rescue that rendered history accessible to *Kairos*.

Do the normative charges in the relationship of the historical and the dead bear a direct connection to mortuary voluntarism? Yes, insofar as these charges are based on the humanitarian condition of *wanting* to exit from a previously given normative framework. Arguably, humanitarianism relates to everyday moral discourse in the way Bachelard (1938) argued scientific knowledge relates to quotidian knowledge: by deliberate, pre-meditated rupture. In the same way that Bachelard's epistemological rupture produces plural, fragmented bodies of knowledge that always contain a memory of what they broke with, humanitarianism does not actually come in the form of a unified structure that its name and status as an "-ism" might suggest. Rather, it is from the outset a plurality of neighboring issues, projects, and practices that are disconnected from one another. This liberates its normative potential to operate more freely, without recourse to a generalized, abstract, and universal moral law.

It is humanitarianism that supplies a model for charging voluntarism with normative force while leaving its application quite unspecified. Hence, the humanitarian idiom can migrate to history and turn to rescuing the dead. It is only in this way that history becomes fully bound up with mortuary voluntarism. The future-orientation of history is not simply, as Karl Löwith claimed, progress-oriented; and by the same token, it is not simply eschatological. Instead it is rescue-oriented. Rescue is not salvation, *Kairos* is not per se eschatologically significant. By encapsulating the humanitarian rupture with previously sanctioned neglect, the act of rescue

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entails a departure from a given situation and arguably carries a claim of irreversibility. *This* shipwreck at least will never reoccur, and the seafarers pried from it will not undergo the very same calamity, although a similar one may befall them (Trüper 2019b). Humanitarianism, as a pattern of discursive rupture, provides a potent model, not merely of synchronization, but also of historical individuation. The claim that the modern European discourse of history is at rock bottom nothing more than a regurgitation of hidden eschatological promises is perhaps unnecessary. The shifts in moral culture have at least equal, if not superior, explanatory force. For this reason, the notion that "deep history" can be attained by discarding "sacred time" and its secularized revenants that supposedly still haunt the contemporary regime of historicity is problematic (Smail 2008: chap. 1). Nothing much is won by repeating a gesture of secularization that had missed its target the first time around.

Structuralist Multilateralism

Historical writing tends to treat change as a constant without much of an alternative; change is the substance of historical time itself. Against this default assumption, Claude Lévi-Strauss (1962: chap. 8-9) argued that change in societies is not independent from collective attitudes toward it. There is an A- and a B-series aspect to it, and these are intertwined because societies, even while inexorably changing, can nonetheless opt to create social institutions that mitigate, conceal, counter, or otherwise influence such change. What changes in societies is in part within and in part beyond the scope of collective agency. Every cultural record is complex and mixed, and there is always space for dynamic development and cultural innovation. Lévi-Strauss believed that writing cultures in general and modern European ones in particular, tended to be on the extreme end of embracing change. The sustenance of a regime of historicity that seeks to cover ever-increasing portions of the territory of past reality would be, Lévi-Strauss held, part and parcel of such a position on the scale (see on this Agamben 1978). The voluntarist funerary culture, too, might be regarded as one, perhaps even a crucial indicator of this position.

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By contrast, the very fact of a lineage of knowledge transmission over tens of thousands of years—that is, of "deep history," along with the more complex notions of layered, folded, spatialized temporality this actually entails, a sense of temporality in which change is never absolutely disruptive—would seem to indicate proximity to the other end of the scale. The intention Lévi-Strauss pursued was not to bestow the "gift" of inclusion into historicity on those formerly excluded from it, but to identify a structure that comprehended both what was understood as historicity in mid-twentieth-century European scholarship and what was understood by historicity, or past time more generally, elsewhere. Departing from the customary thinking of historical theorists, this structure was to be on the outside of any particular, culturally given notions of temporality. Admittedly, Lévi-Strauss's argument is to some extent afflicted with a structuralist "view from nowhere" ambition, although he was aware that the pursuit of novel, even disruptive knowledge in the ambit of "science" entailed a position on the scale of embracing change. It also ought to be conceded that the terminology of "warm" and "cold" societies he imposed on this intricately constructed scale of differences is less than fortunate since it connotes values he explicitly refused to assign. Nonetheless, his analysis remains one of the most radical thought experiments available in historical theory.

The experiment has the merit of rendering attainable a specific explanatory approach to the multilateral alignment of funerary voluntarism, humanitarian morality, and modern European historicity. This alignment would simply consist in the proximity and overall harmony of the cultural forms in which the social embrace of change takes place. It is important to note that this is not a causal explanation, but a structural one. This is to say, among other things, that the account is not obliged to presuppose ontological homogeneity within *or* among the cultural forms in question. It also does not declare any of the forms involved essential or logically prior to the others. Rather, positionality is defined as a clustering of such forms, which as it were combine to weigh down on a socio-cultural unit and limit—but not prohibit—its mobility on the scale. This process of clustering requires bilateral relations among all the forms

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in question; they stick together through transfers and exchanges. The possibility of describing historicity in terms of interrelated, yet only contingently neighboring discourses and practices is perhaps the decisive tool that Lévi-Strauss's structural analysis offers.

If one keeps going with this line of argument, it becomes possible to give a more precise answer to the question of what it is about deep time that makes it hard to reconcile with the Lévi-Straussian constellation of "warmth" with regard to change. In a nutshell, an argument of the outright inclusion of deep time by expanding the thresholds of historical time is so challenging because the constellation that constitutes Lévi-Straussian "warmth" is a clustering of ontologies the divergence of which is powerful, though well-concealed. If for the situation at hand, historicity, humanitarianism, and mortuary voluntarism are decisive components of the cluster, then "inclusion" would need to be negotiated with all three.

Both modern European historicity and humanitarianism are inadvertently based on discontinuity, both in temporal and spatial terms. In the European framework, history as the "world" of a particular body of knowledge, succeeds pre-history, which is a different body of knowledge in which many types of events, objects, actors, and so on, that are characteristic objects of historical knowledge have no place. In the history of modern European historical writing, the introduction of the category of pre-history meant an enormous unburdening of historical knowledge from questions of origins. This created the license—direly needed during the nineteenth-century deep-time expansion that exploded the chronological framework of Scripture—to write histories starting wherever and whenever. Yet, it is not simply this practical function that renders pre-history important. Rather, the limit between pre-history and history co-constitutes the ability of the overall cultural form of historicity to lay down its own thresholds of access arbitrarily, so that matters from the past can be "too old" for historicity. Humanitarianism, in its privileging of "single issues" and its organizational requirement of triage, is similarly structured: sufferers can be too distant, too unreachable to count. This is a claim to autonomy in deciding about pertinence, one might say.

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If this is the result of the structuralist approach, it exposes itself to a simple riposte: why might the regime of historicity then not simply *decide* to expand in the manner Shryock and Smail propose, and include deep time?

I will suggest that the answer to this question has to do with the bilateral relations between funerary culture and historicity. There is something specific to be observed about the history of the category that Shryock and Smail suggestively label "the Pre." It is hardly accidental that many of the actual issues of deep history writing, also its conflict with indigenous history as a field, have emerged around the treatment of the "archaeological"—in this case meaning temporally *very* distant—mortal remains of non-Europeans, for which cases such as that of the Lake Mungo remains in New South Wales provide the most striking examples (Allbrook, McGrath 2015; see Griffiths 1996: 95-100 on the cognate case of the Kow Swamp skeletons). In Europe, the "pre-historical" remains of humans have usually not been subject to the norm systems that otherwise govern the processing of the dead. Rather, pre-historic remains by default can be treated as mere objects, to be, for instance, displayed in museums and subjected to often at least partially destructive scientific examinations.

On a very general level, being inside or outside the purview of moral norms concerning the treatment of the human corpse was, and is, a forceful condition that governed, for instance, the limits of the permissible commodification of fresh corpses in the context of anatomy (for examples, see Tarlow 2010: 159-70). The "Pre" arguably emerges as part of the exclusionary conditions that existed in European funerary culture *long before* it became voluntarist and aligned with humanitarianism and modern historicity. Next to the bodies of those regarded as too depraved to claim community with the living, there were also dead bodies that were deemed too old for such claims. Given its antecedence, the "Pre" may perhaps be regarded as a category that was transferred from mortuary culture to historicity.

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Consider, for instance, the case of *mumia aegyptiaca*, a substance that was produced, from the Later Middle Ages onward, by grinding up ancient Egyptian mummies—both human and animal remains—a practice that apparently emanated from a fateful translation mistake from Arabic to Latin: Arabic *mūmiyā*, a Persian loanword, means medicinal bitumen, which also had uses in embalming (Dannenfeldt 1985; Aufderheide 2003: chap. 10; McCouat 2013). *Mumia* was used, among other things, as an ingestible pharmaceutical substance and as a pigment for the production of color in artistic painting. As a medicine, it was in production at least until the 1920s; and as a pigment, for a color called "mummy brown," it was available for purchase even until the 1960s. Pre-history was commonly defined as everything before the advent of writing (Harbsmeier 1989). The topos may find one of its points of origin in Hegel's philosophy of history, especially the treatment of Ancient China (1986: part 1, section 1). The pre-historical dead were exempt from the norm systems of funerary culture since writing—as establishing the ability of the dead to communicate with the living and thereby enter into a community—provided a possible cut-off point. Egyptian mummies, precisely because Egyptian script had remained illegible until the 1820s, were also initially on the outside of historical time. Yet in the late modern era, if slowly, their status changed. Already in the later nineteenth century, some painters rejected and reviled "mummy brown"; McCouat (2013) recounts the anecdote of how the pre-Raphaelite painter Edward Burne-Jones, upon learning about the composition of the pigment, buried his supply of it in his garden. In pharmaceutics, such documents of offence appear to have been scarcer, in spite, or perhaps because, of the manner in which this deployment of corpses turned Europeans into the "cannibals" they were always so keen to identify abroad.

The case of *mumia* illustrates the mobility of the boundary between inclusion and exclusion in funerary culture and the way this mobility intersects with patterns of historicization and humanitarianism. On one hand, even much more recent mummies are often displayed and thus marked as not entirely belonging to a continuing community of the living and the dead (the

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embalmed corpse of Lenin, for instance, is arguably *above* the community). On the other hand, as with social exclusion more generally, there has been a gradual shift toward widening the area of the included, without however abolishing the boundary entirely. The Egyptian dead, too, in this process, became targets of rescue, and on account of their unusual funerary culture, this was even physically the case. The mummy in a museum remains in an ambiguous zone between objectification and "pious" integration into an existing funerary culture, and between exploitation and rescue. The museumification of remains is a compromise solution between the compound of rescue humanitarianism and modern European historicity on the one hand, and mortuary voluntarism on the other. A compromise is necessary because restitutions and repatriations of remains tend to prompt mortuary voluntarism to will itself out of existence: it would need to *decide* to transfer the remains of the (or some) dead out of its normative purview altogether. This is a contradictory requirement if an agency is supposed to continue to exist through the transition (on repatriation debates see Fforde 2004; Stoecker, Schnalke, Winkelmann, eds. 2013; Colwell 2017; Turnbull 2019; in general Sarr, Savoy 2018). Egyptian mummies would have to be restituted into their own mortuary culture—the norms of which were frequently violated by tomb robbers already in their own times—and without a community of the living in place that would uphold the respective practices. There seem to be practical limits in place.

Questions of deep time arise perhaps with greater urgency in cases like that of the Lake Mungo remains, which have been restituted into the care of the community of the traditional owners of the land. This community, embracing a rescue discourse of their own, has adopted the remains into their own system of mortuary norms. Although there is a voluntarist component in this adoption, it is nonetheless not the same set of constituent norms that governs European funerary culture as well as its settler-colonial extension in Australia. For, no matter how it is played out, this constellation retains a memory of cultural boundaries, of imposition, resistance, and escape. This memory constitutes a deviation from the particular voluntarism of modern

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European funerary culture, and this deviation takes the form of recognizing a deep-past normative bind within funerary practice. In a sense, the position of deep time in funerary culture is carved out in opposition to norms of mortuary exclusion still prevalent in European funerary culture. The deep past belongs to the opposing side in this contestation; and this might be one reason why some agents of modern European historicity, dimly, but perhaps increasingly aware of this boundary, feel a sting of alienation from deep pasts.

Nonetheless, cases of the repatriation of "pre-historical" remains, in the sense of their inclusion into a non-western funerary culture, have so far been very rare. Their significance for the sense of historicity in the contemporary world system is perhaps not so heightened that they pose an effective challenge to the project of expanding historicity into the depths of time. It seems to be the case that another, and possibly stronger, tension between deep time ambitions and the modern European regime of historicity arises from the claims to agential and epistemological autonomy vested in this regime itself. Classical philosophies of history were founded on the notion that there was an interrelation between expanding human knowledge and (collective) agency. This was treated as a double bind, but also as a promise. Expanding technological knowledge, for instance, liberated humanity to doing more and more things. Even the increase of knowledge about history was a document of the progressive unfolding of human agency and autonomy in the world, as Kant and Hegel had it. Hence the attraction of investing the pursuit of historical knowledge with as much epistemological autonomy as possible.

Yet, since the 1950s, something rather fascinating, albeit sobering, has happened to this nexus of knowledge and agency. The technological capacities of nuclear destruction have come to embrace human, indeed more or less all, life on earth. The management of nuclear substances requires a projection into the future the dimensions of which surpass all human imagination or experience in terms of the stability of sign systems, political systems, technological systems, and so on. In fact, the actual scientific grasp of deeper times in material objects—especially through radio-carbon dating—also is a child of the nuclear age, as a full

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cultural context (Griffiths 1996: chap 4). Many of the futurist concerns of the present, whether in optimist or pessimist mode—say, artificial (yet super-human) intelligence, state secrecy and surveillance, and the Anthropocene—are firmly rooted in this constellation. As Tom Griffiths pointed out, with reference to Donna Haraway (1992), contemporary concerns about gender, race, humanity, and nature are all based in nuclear culture.

Crucially, the apparatuses of collective agency appear inadequate for thinking about the nuclear in a framework of agential autonomy. The extent to which the nuclear state would in principle force cultural, social, and political entities to stabilize themselves has been responded to by wanton disregard of such principles. The world political system appears to have managed to wriggle its way out of the demand for stability simply by establishing the semblance of a few safeguards and pretending that the nuclear condition no longer applies. The threat of "mutual assured destruction" has all but disappeared from public perception of the political world order. A military confrontation limited to "conventional" weapons systems between, say, the former power blocks of the Cold War, or other nuclear-armed geopolitical agents, appears conceivable again (as a consequence of re-shaped spaces of political agency; see on the problem in general, Masco 2014).

Other sectors of the nuclear age, by contrast, continue to impose less easily shed claims on the stability of decision-making—and incidentally, the situation of climate change unfolds along cognate and genealogically related lines (Masco 2010). In terms of the nuclear condition, waste management comes to mind as a routinely marginalized, yet basically unresolved problem—usually responded to with a bet on geological stability substituting for the stability of cultural institutions. A cognate case is the management of the sites of earlier disasters. Even renewed lateral linkages to funerary culture come to the fore when the still-burning reactor of the Chernobyl nuclear plant is covered in what by now is its second "sarcophagus," expected to last a few decades at least, until further meta-sarcophaguses will have to be constructed. It almost appears that ancient semantic resources of funerary culture are recuperated here—a mere

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"coffin" would not have been enough—in order to make sense of the deep future the still-ongoing nuclear meltdown signifies. The distinction between common detritus and normatively significant remains travels from funerary culture to the nuclear situation. Voluntarism, however, is not available; the sarcophagus of Chernobyl, unlike other sarcophaguses, will not be emptied out and displayed, say, in a museum.

Arguably, this technological development, which minimizes the significance of experienced (A-series) time and the *Kairos* of decision, also undermines the voluntarist matrix. The deep time indicated by technology, however, always tends to be the future, not the past. It thus heightens the asymmetry that was already present in the way voluntarist funerary culture dealt with the signs of commemoration. Taking the decision-element out of the equation, then, reinforces the tensions already present in cultural notions of deep time in modern European cultures anyway. Histories of the deep human past tap into the reservoir of discomfort that has been created first by voluntarism, then by its erosion. Deep-past questions are a reminder of the need to develop forms of stabilization that defy the short cycles of political, economic, social and other collective agencies in which "modern" lives are organized. One might even suspect that much of the anger that is taken out in the contemporary public sphere against the systemic features of democratic—by definition voluntarist—politics has to do with this discomfort with deep time realities and the inadequacy of the available toolset.

The danger of "deep history" as driven by the divorce of technological from human agency, then, is quite clearly that it primarily remains a conversation that the European regime of historicity has with itself, concerning its own premises and inherent tensions, but not listening to anything else. So the challenge of deep time then also becomes one of breaking with the operating procedures of modern European historical writing in some way, in order to avoid this familiar effect of self-enclosure and homogenizing exclusion. Picking up on the implicit historical-theoretical positions vested in, and borrowed from, funerary cultures may however help to pry open some of the restrictive discursive frames available for historical theory.

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Thinking about the theoretical implications of deep time—especially when combined with greater attention to, and openness for, the challenges of indigenous historical thought and writing—doubtless helps with this task.

Beyond Homogeneity

It is plausible that the interpretation of "inclusion" into historicity that the present article has undertaken opens the underlying ontology to heterogeneity. Inclusion can mean: being accounted for in historical text. But it seems that it simultaneously means for the dead to be buried, or reburied, either in generalizing re-descriptions, or in individuating accounts; and it means being within the purview of history as a rescue operation. This multivalent meaning suggests that the ontology that underpins modern European practices of historicization is mixed and follows a pattern of lateral transfers and tensions. The ontology in question comprises the constructions set up and sustained in previous historical writing, and it comprises the dead. These are ontologically distinct bases for referential meaning, namely history (as the "world" of historical knowledge) on one hand, and the past of the dead (as the "world," or the "underworld," that gives meaning to funerary practices). The reality of history is a compound that cannot be separated conceptually from previous knowledge generated about the past. This is not the case for the notion of past reality as such. The widespread conviction that historical knowledge is marked by a condition of total facticity is a phantasm of ontological homogeneity. This phantasm serves to express the expectation that the differential gap between history and past reality is ever-shrinking and will ultimately become insignificant. The strange ways, however, in which the modern European discourse of history draws on mortuary culture and humanitarian morality indicate that this cannot be the case. For, the past of the dead is also not simply identical to past reality, but filtered by criteria of pertinence and ritual practice. And since humanitarianism acts as a force for synchronizing temporality, it also produces an

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ontological framework of its own, which is based on borrowed moral norms and imperatives and thus not identical to the frameworks of mortuary culture or historicity.

That said, both the historical and the mortuary frameworks rely on a body of moral norms that are intertwined with the humanitarian idiom of rescue. This shared corpus of norms is used to constitute, or re-constitute, the ontological bases at hand, historical time and the past of the dead. While it is obvious that funerary culture represents the past in ways that obey to norms, so that its ontology is insurmountably co-shaped by morality, this is arguably less obvious for history. It may well be the relative suppression of explicit normative language in historical writing—a taboo related to the phantasm of homogeneous facticity—that prompts historical discourse to borrow implicit normativity from elsewhere in the first place. The role that can be attributed specifically to the humanitarianism of rescue is that of supplying resources for a temporal constitution of the ontology of history, as a synchronizing and unifying force that is distinct from chronological (B-series) time since it bears the additional weight of *Kairos.*

Drawing on a metaphor Hans Blumenberg (1979) used heavily in his philosophy of myth, it might be useful to recognize a "separation of powers" within the modern European regime of historicity. Critiques of "historicism" have often targeted historicity as a totalizing force, as an absolutist government that subjected "everything" under the condition of being historical. Instead, modern European historicity seems to consist in fragile balances among diverse cultural forms that came together over time and may separate from each other in the future. Paying close attention to the mortuary and humanitarian allegiances of modern European historical discourse makes it easier to understand and accept its internal fissures and tensions, its instability and heterogeneity. This may actually be the only way of casting off the pressures of ontological homogenization and to achieve greater openness to other possibilities of constituting historical times. This may make it easier to take into account other forms of producing knowledge about the past. It is very possible that the challenging tensions that exist between the modern European regime of historicity and notions of deep time cannot be

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resolved. Methodologies in historical writing reach as far as they reach. Yet history is also always already written beyond that reach. The most, and perhaps the only, fruitful way forward for the "inclusion" of deep time in historical time may well be to embrace this condition.

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[1] This is in accordance with the critical reconstruction of the field in McGrath, Rademaker, Silverstein, *forthcoming*. The present article was written in dialogue with this work.

[2] Arguably the homogeneity of textual form as the insurmountable and primary source of meaning for historical discourse is a decisive feature introduced by White (1973), and further developed by Jenkins, Munslow (2003). The opposite position, according to which homogeneous facticity is the sole source of meaning for historical discourse, remains so dominant that it seems futile to provide references.

[3] For Germany, see https://bdb.bestatter.de/meta/news-termine-presse/news-details/?tx_news_pi1%5Bnews%5D=452&tx_news_pi1%5Bcontroller%5D=News&tx_news_pi1%5Baction%5D=detail&cHash=6d57265d62645e502655171c87530445; for the United Kingdom https://www.urnsforashes.co.uk/cremation-statistics/2008-facts/ [October 26, 2019].

[4] It should be added that Laqueur is hesitant about attributing social agency to the dead; for a more straightforward embrace of a cognate notion, see Tarlow 2010: 8-11.

[5] See e.g. https://edition.cnn.com/2017/05/03/world/eco-solutions-capsula-mundi/index.html [last accessed October 19, 2019]. Thanks to Aileen Walsh and Ann McGrath for drawing my attention to this practice.

[6] Without subscribing to the notion—though proposed mostly in order to provoke and reverse the argument of Bauman, Ariès et al.—that death would have become "newly" visible again, as discussed in Macho, Marek, eds. 2007.

[7] This process is particularly well-known in late-enlightenment reformist-era Vienna (shifting of graveyards to the outside of city limits, 1784); and in Paris, where the closing of parish cemeteries led to the disposal of old and recent remains in the "catacombs," underground quarries, from 1785 onward, giving rise to an astoundingly widespread system of non-optional anonymized burial quite atypical in modern European history. This problem of overcrowding remained limited to urban spaces and was resolved administratively before the advent of cremation. Crowdedness seems to have played less of a role after this period, as infrastructural planning resolved the issue.

[8] This article also comprises an important argument against the assumptions made by Franz Cumont, Philippe Ariès and others about a deep disconnection between ancient pagan and Christian funerary customs, and about a pre-Christian prevalence of a "fear" of the dead. The linkage between the sociability of the meal, commemoration, and the poor had already been analyzed by Klauser 1927; see moreover Février 1977. It may be pointed out that Roland Barthes's coupling of Michelet's obsession with the dead with his equally strange

rhetorical habit of "ingesting" history unconsciously seems to recuperate the connection between funeral meal and history.