A DEBATE ON COMPARATIVE HISTORICITIES

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Let us agree on this immediately: anyone intending to engage in a comparative analysis of systems of historicity implicitly rejects all those who would accept, to whatever extent, on no matter how small a scale, the evidence of an initial division between societies endowed with a 'historical consciousness' and societies devoid of it. As much as it seems impossible to distance ourselves from our own historiographical system, to that extent it seems to us urgent to analyse its components, to be suspicious of its apparent uniformity and to question its presuppositions, so as to observe as clearly as we can the details in the consciousness of itself adopted by any society, through its construction of time or perception of the past. According to the project for a comparative survey by anthropologists and historians proposed by François Hartog and Gérard Lenclud,[1] it would be

> to put in perspective, without any immediate typological preoccupation, models for writing history by following closely their structures, their structuring logic, their practices, their internal crises, the significant discrepancies that they therefore show between themselves, as well as their circulation, their encounters, their ups and downs.

In 1983, Claude Lévi-Strauss,[2] in a Conference that gave him the opportunity to take up again the old History-Ethnology debate, presented a paradox that will help us introduce a comparative reflection: 'All societies are historical in the same way, but some frankly admit it, while others find it objectionable and prefer to ignore it.' This is a sentence that Lévi-Strauss has repeated as a firm belief: primitive

1. François Hartog and Gérard Lenclud, 'Régimes d'historicité, modèles de temporalité' (Document préparatoire au Colloque MRT, Anthropologie contemporaine et anthropologie historique, 1992, unpublished).

2. Claude Lévi-Strauss, 'Histoire et ethnologie', *Annales E.S.C.* (1983), pp. 1217-31.

societies are distrustful of history, they do not like it, they put up with it. Such a conviction does not commit anthropology at all, any more than the denial of physical time—the time of astronomy or of geology—by Heidegger, disposing of 'vulgar time', leads philosophers to admit that time belongs to a 'metaphysical conceptualization'. The Lévi-Straussian paradox is directed to an audience of historians, and more broadly to all those who understand the double meaning of 'historical': on the one hand, belonging to natural time just like all living things; or on the other hand, being aware that the human race, in its present state, possesses a history and that it makes it or at least works as hard at it as it can. I have concentrated my attention on this system of an anthropologist—so lucid, moreover, on so many pertinent questions, in this very area—because it puts on a show of believing that the choice is simple and free: either to admit frankly one's historicity or instead to pretend not to notice it. This is a supreme generosity towards societies called, just yesterday, archaic and endowed with mythical thinking, liking to think of itself, delighting in travelling its conceptual mazes to the point that, when the day has come, of preferring 'to withdraw' in favour of a philosophy, that emerges as the prior condition for scientific research.

It is not necessary to be a historian of history, as one knowing little about our culture, to know that thinking of the past as something else, if not as something radically cut off from the present appears, in the West at least, to be a long and difficult undertaking. Just as the objective calculation of time in the mathematical and scientific measurement of physical time as the foundation of dating and of the calendar are recent knowledge acquisitions of astronomers and mathematicians, at least in our culture. In order to have a society admit that it is historical, it is perhaps not necessary that it construct a model of linear time or that it give greater importance to a representation of the event as unforeseeable and never exactly repeating itself in the same way, nor any longer, doubtless, that it discovers the dynamism specific to the history of human actions.

In the perspective of comparative and experimental linguistics that we adopt with Hartog and Lenclud, our investigation will focus on the 'systems of historicity' and on their components, convinced that to speak of a 'system of historicity', at first, makes it possible, as Hartog and Lenclud write,

> to take up, in a comparative way in the field of anthropology...the various forms of historical awareness, of a semantic experience of history, of a conceptual construction of human time, without for all that postulating besides its necessary coherence, nor, as a result, making the assumption of a close correlation between a culture and a historical system.

To engage in a comparative reflection, we need general formulations and specific arguments, in other words, problematic main lines and one or several areas in order to enquire into the local configurations, to put them to the test of undergoing questioning, and in this way to move forward the formulation of the one or the other 'comparison'. Certainly, we ourselves will be led to give greater importance to the field of ancient Greece, but by referring to the comparative analyses already laid out in the collective volume *Transcrire les mythologies.*[3] Three approaches have held our attention: general reflections on memory and its relation to historical thought. Next, the analysis of what is change: the representations, the different models more specifically deployed in archaic Greece. Finally, the past, the ways of speaking of it, of thinking of it, of constructing it, and the difficulties in doing so. Here again, there will be more on Greece, so often credited with the invention of 'historical knowledge'.

Memory and Historical Thought

In the history of the human race, the memory and its development have played an important role. This acknowledgment in no way leads us to believe nor to repeat that memory spontaneously creates representations of the past; no longer should certain historians in search of a new mission be allowed to write that 'true' memory is lost or is on the way to being lost, as if there was an authentic memory reserved to societies that are fortunate and without histories or a historical consciousness. The philosophers and the historians of mnemonic activity are more attentive than the laboratory cognitive scientists to what can be called the management of the memory, not as a spatial control of a supply of information, but as an apprehension in the old days of a distance of self to self.

3. M. Detienne (ed.), *Transcrire les mythologies: Tradition, écriture, historicité* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1994).

It has often been noted that one of the most important moments in this construction of the mnemonic took place in the fourth century CE when, in Book XI of the *Confessions*, Augustine set out to reflect on the anxieties in the experience of time. As others have done, but with a new scope, Paul Ricoeur has recently shown the complexity of the thought processes carried out by Augustine.[4] I will retain just two points: on the one hand, the development of three forms of the present; on the other hand, the spatialization of the soul as a place of distension. Three modes of the present: the present torn between narrative-memory of past things that still exist; the future with that which is already, in waiting; and the present-present in its punctuality. Three modes that are situated and experienced in the soul, a soul racked by the work of that distance of self to self that opens up a temporal space and involves the construction of a human time, critical for western ideas of history. For Augustine, all this labour is done in contrast with and in opposition to eternity and to the creation of time by the Word. Tension, rifts and expectation are actually marks of the finite, of the creature facing the eternity of the Creator. From the scepticism about time between Aristotle and Augustine, and without reducing the peculiarity of this completely western approach, we should at least remember by what long developments that distance of self to self has been discovered and progressively integrated into a certain architectonic of time. In comparison, and to invoke without waiting a culture so indifferent to our historian indicators, it would be highly heuristic to analyze the memory techniques implemented by societies like Vedic and Hindu India, since we know how much they valued the mnemonic function and its immense resources. As I. Meyerson has theorized, memory as the function of the individual past of the person seems essential to the accession of a common and collective memory without which there could not be in human groups the portrayal of a common past.[5] A hypothesis that has not been accorded much attention by anthropologists, all in all not well informed about reflection carried out under the sign of a 'historical and

4. Paul Ricoeur, *Temps et récit.* I. *L'intrigue et le récit historique* (Paris: Seuil, 1983).

5. I. Meyerson, 'Le temps, la mémoire, l'histoire', *Journal de Psychologie* (1956), pp. 333-54 [republished in *Ecrits 1920–83: pour une psychologie historique* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1987), pp. 264-80].

comparative psychology', fond of calling itself between 48 and the 80s, 'the only truly marxist psychology'.[6] From this we would retain today as something experimental the idea that, though he would have thought like a historian and one historiographically aware 'it is necessary that the distance of the group's present in regard to the events of groups other than those present become clearer'. In other words, no less hypothetical, when there begins the organization of that 'present absence' that is the past of the group, when the need becomes imperative to make present some prior events of a group lacking memory, it is then, perhaps, that there would be an awareness and an activity of a historian.

I return to a proposition that must be subjected to rigorous testing: a group gifted with memory does not spontaneously develop the mind of a historian. The Vedic memory—Vedic scholars remind us—fabricates neither India's past nor knowledge of history, although they speak today, and already yesterday, of Indian historians with pure intentions. The religious memory of Israel, emphasized by the 'remember', formed by the 'remember the privileged relationship to Yahweh', can certainly amass genealogies, lineal descendance and compare among them the great ancestral models, Jacob and Abraham. This memory does not lead immediately to the institution of a historiographical discourse whose object would be the past in itself. The problem was formerly set out by Yerusalmi; it is now taken up again by the research of Françoise Smyth and her Swiss colleagues.

And So to the Question of Change

How does one begin to think like a historian? A double foundation: distance of self from self, critical space within a culture. Probably such critical space can manifest itself in other ways than by what we call the techniques of writing, the intellectual techniques of the written. Crude writing will not do for evidence. It would still be necessary to see if and how cultures made it available or made or make radical arrangements of it.

Let us extend the hypothesis in the direction indicated by Meyerson: besides the distance of self to self, the advent of critical space, would a

6. J.P. Vernant, *L'individu, la mort, l'amour: Soi-même et l'autre en Grèce ancienne* (Paris: Gallimard, 1989).

decisive element in the collective life not be 'a great and long experience of changes'? Experience, and, perhaps, an awareness of changes? So many societies, at first sight, seem to have undergone upheavals and radical changes without them being recognized, thought and theorized about.

One of the dimensions of the first Greek city with its freedom to create itself under the form of a radical commencement, is to put into circulation the idea, so deplorable for moralists, that virtually all political configurations are possible. The domain of the politics becomes the privileged area for the desired reforms, deliberated with a statement of the reasons for change. What we are dealing with here would be practices and theories of change. In a parallel way, in philosophical thinking, among the Presocratics, changes play an essential role in the composition of the living, taken in a chain that goes, so far in the *Timaeus* of Plato, as to link together the plant to the god, the one and the other forming part of what the Greeks call *zôa*, the living, as are as also the birds, or quadrupeds and human beings.

Medical thought, in its turn, enhanced the value of change, first, in the discovery of ways of living, the development of technical skill and, in the actual learning of doctors, the force of new theories. But, in the hippocratic tradition, change, *metabolē*, is likewise a category that plays a part in defining sickness and therapy: sickness is presented as a change in the body, itself most often coming either from a change in the seasons, or a sudden disruption in the diet. Vice versa, adequate therapy can require change, a change 'at the same time opposed to and proportioned' to that causing the illness. This is in Greek *antimetaballein*, responding to change with change. Thucydides, who wrote the history of the greatest turbulence ever experienced in the Greek cities shows himself to be very attentive to models of change. Nicole Loraaux has rightly pointed out that the most suitable time for the disclosure of that which Thucydides calls 'human nature'—*phusis anthrōpōn*, that is to say that which the historian of the present intends to discover—is that of revolutions of situations (*metabolai tōn ksuntuchiōn*). Times of turmoil and of passions still more perverse as they change, Thucydides writes in this same text (3.82.2-3), 'up to the usual meaning of the words in relation to the acts in the justifications that they would give'. For the analyst of human nature, the extreme turbulences of a war, without common measure with all that preceded, offer conditions for experimentation that justify in Thucydides the feeling that he towers

above all his contemporaries in the field of 'history'. If it is a matter of understanding, there is no room for doubt. As for the ways of thinking about the very object of historical knowledge, all reservations are indispensable.

Imperceptibly, in following the advances of Thucydides in regard to the faces of change, we would be led to make him the first theorist of progress. There is certainly no other model of programs ad infinitum before the works of Condorcet. Change, as it was thought about and experienced in the different sectors of knowledge, did not in the least give rise in Greece to the idea of a dynamism of history like that which the twentieth century has produced (history, before long, with its speeding up, its fuel-injection motor and double or even triple carburettor). When the contemporary historian refers to change as the indelible mark of history, he understands it in its relation to absolute chronology, to linear and irreversible time as well as to the unpredictable, singular and purely contingent event. Event, change and time are closely linked up in our thinking as historians Modern since the eighteenth century and its philosophers have made it credible that the knowledge of the past in *itself* was the object of historical knowledge.

To discover the exoticism of this project—I was going to say of this belief—it suffices to travel to China, China ancient and modern, the country of History and Historiography as far as the eye can see and in serried ranks. But what history? And what historiographers? The work of Vandermeersch has stressed the major effects of the practice of seers, in the sacrificial area in China. These are the seers who administered the assessment of signs produced by the sacrificial devices and directly recorded on the divinatory pieces—tortoise shells and shoulder blades of bovids. These seer-scribes will be the authors of the records of everything that belongs in the ritual. Called 'seers', the first annalists descend in direct line from the 'scribe of divinations'. Divided between historians of the right hand and historians of the left hand, the annalists are personages very early inseparable from each seigniorial house and from every principality. Later, as government officials of the imperial house, the compilers of annals will devote themselves to the meticulous notation, day by day, of the doings of the lord and of the prince, and of their declarations as well as all the 'events' that occurred in the course of the reign.

The analytical history of the Chinese is and will remain until the twentieth century an affair of state. While the historians, heirs of the

scribes-seers, tend, like their predecessors, to formulate the events in a writing making readable their *hidden meaning*. In this system of historicity encompassing an immense production over more than two millennia, the task of the historian-government officials remains constant: 'It was a matter of establishing what each *event* could reveal about the meaning of the general evolution of the world and what sense the general evolution of the world gives to each event'. According to one of the great historians of ancient China, Sima Qian (145–86 BCE)—who was however a traveler and a great searcher for texts across the whole Chinese world of that period—the investigations of history are intended 'to clarify the meeting point of Heaven and humanity across all that which has *changed* from Antiquity to the contemporary epoch'. The writing of history aims at describing events, and, eventually, the changes according to their *true meaning*, hidden under appearances. Chinese time does not dread anything unpredictable. Emphasized by the virtues, it unfolds in the order of the cosmos that shows in a perfectly clear manner the adherence of human nature to the universal nature. In such a thought system, how could the model of a past analyzed *in itself* be extricated? The scribe-seers who underlie the model of the historians can really be astronomers and experts in calendars, the temporality that is theirs remains a stranger to the very idea of linear time, and, through it even, to the concept of the event as something unforeseeable and unique.

Rome and its annalists are just as indifferent to the analysis of the changes in the knowledge of a past radically cut off from the present. From a distance, Roman time constructed by the pontiffs and their activities seems promising, and more open to the thorough study of human action. 'Pontifical' time takes shape in religious practices: at the beginning of each month, on the Capitol, the pontiffs announced the 'nones' (the ninth day before the ides) publicly in a loud voice. Each official announcement set in motion the intervention of the *Rex sacrorum*, a second religious personage in the Roman hierarchy: his role was to make known on the 'nones' all the religious events of the month. To this mastery of the time that comes and that begins, the pontiffs added a competence over past time. These are the ones who preserve the memory of certain facts or events that occurred: military expeditions, successes, defeats, exemplary sacrifices, marvels of all kinds, signs sent by the gods. When the end of the year arrived, the Pontifex maximus seems to have got into the habit of posting the outstanding events of the year on a tablet fastened to the wall of his dwelling. It was a sort of

report, a bulletin about the health of the state of affairs between the gods and humans. In this way, the pontiff can decide the vows and the most adequate expiatory ceremonies to 'inaugurate' the year well. It definitely amounts to a mastery of time allotted to a personage who was at the same time priestly and official but endowed—Dumézil has insisted on this—with 'liberty, initiative, *movement*'. In the succession of these links between two 'civil' years, the writing of the first annalists, then of historians like Livy was going to begin. A historiographical operation with a fine future: to recount the great events of a nation, for better or for worse. Events, it must be added, that make sense in the organization of the year and of its place in the life of Rome and its 'twelve hundred years'. Rome seems like a society that has not ceased to be joined to its birth place and to be intoxicated with future prospects offered it by the progressive gradation of a series of twelve—12 days, 12 months, 12 years, 12 decades, 12 centuries. A time that expands and thus suggests for the city become capital of an empire a long duration like a destiny but without the help of any linear time. History, in the Roman style, is more a memory than a survey: *memoria*, it has been observed, in the sense of an 'awareness of the past' that establishes the present and implies a certain kind of behaviour inherited from the *majores*, from the ancestors. A past heavily present, that is authoritative but also knows how to open up in the direction of the future, that of a nation sure of itself, and for long centuries.

The Colours of the Past

Not long ago, the philosopher and historian Huizinga suggested a definition of history in these terms: 'It is the intellectual form in which a civilization becomes aware by itself of its own past'. It is a seemingly simple definition but involves several complex operations, as a genealogical investigation shows.

1. The 'rendering of an account', that refers to this work of *self to self* that is already involved in the activity of the memory ('that distance in time of self to self').
2. To become aware: is it a simple representation or, rather, a more or less complex architectonic construction?
3. Finally, the *past*. How to imagine it? Where does it begin? It is not at all easy to conceive that the past *is* at the same time that it *has been*. It is a long road to arrive at the notion that the past

> of a group is something other than the present of this group, something different than an evident part of the group that refers to it, speaks of it, and derives examples or authority from it. Few societies, it seems, come to think that the past is of interest as such—to have been and to be—as past, in that which is the same and that which is *other*.

In order for the *other* to appear, it is necessary that the past should have begun to be separated from the present that constitutes it and seems to justify it. Death and the dead often lead historians to propose a scenario that even seems easily observable. About 30 years ago, a reputable Turkish scholar wrote an article setting out to recognize the first forms of historiography in the ancient Turkish world. He marked out these forms of beginnings in the ritual of funeral eulogies, pronounced on the occasion of the death of princes and warriors. In a condensed form, the eulogy for the dead person was engraved on a stela. First written documents, the stele of this type constitute the most ancient written documentation for the modern, that is to say contemporary, historian of Turkey. Writing of the dead, is this written eulogy a first discourse on the past? There is no indication that it is, there is no other distance than the death so near, no reflection on what there is of the other and even in the past dealt with in a ritual.

A little later, an African ethnologist studying the production of historical writing in a contemporary Mossi country indicated, for his part, the role played by the 'masters of the word', by the storytellers (*griots*), given the responsibility professionally at the time of the king's funeral to recount in detail the acts and exploits of the deceased. But it is in no way the epiphany, in this funeral scene, of a past that *is* at the same time that it *has been*. If the writing of history seems here to be turned into the eulogy of the dead by the masters of the word, it is because in Mossi country, yesterday and today, individuals practising a sort of half-memorial, half-narrative function were and are the most qualified to take the new position of historian according to the more or less prestigious model of the white conquerors who came with their writing and a duty to do history as the foundation of the identity of a group. Elsewhere, for example, in the North and South American Indian world there appeared at the beginning of the twentieth century a history turned into myth, with the mythology being progressively historicized and becoming a narrative 'in a mythical way' of contemporary events since

the arrival of the whites up to those lived by the author personally, half-spoken, half-written.[7]

Between Turkish and African ethnology, there is something like a primitive scene of the beginning of historicity or of a 'making of history' that a Hellenist might be tempted to read in turn in the epic tradition of Homer. Recently, Vernant has suggested seeing a sort of complementarity between the funerals meant to transform a warrior into a hero dying a good death, and on the other hand, the epic song, inscribing the praise of the heroic exploits in the time of the *kléos*, that is to say of immortalizing glory. There were therefore, in ancient Greece, two 'institutions' making it possible to *integrate death culturally*. On the one hand, the funerals (for example of Patroclus or of Hector) come to mark the passage with a memorizing more objective than the simple regret, an institutionalized memory round the body, the weapons and the tomb, a signifying marked by the Greek word *sèma*, with everything being organized according to the social code of a heroic culture. On the other hand, the epic song, produced and displayed by the bards—who are practically the *griots* of Greece—comes to transform an individual who has lost his life into a dead person whose presence as dead is definitively inscribed in the memory of the group.

In the Greek context, a similar scene, more archaic than primitive, is only a reconstruction. In the *Iliad* and in the *Odyssey*, the epic poets already seem no longer to have direct contact with the ritual of funerals, and we do not know if they would have therefore acted as a 'social memory' for the group in the eighth or seventh century. Certainly, in reading the epic, we can get the impression that the bard by his song 'separates' the past and the present and that, thanks to the account of the mighty deeds of men of former times, the dead become men of the past. But, in the word lists, the people of bygone days alone are called *proteroi*, 'anteriors', coming before, without any word designating the past as that which has been and can be known as *other*. The Ancestors and the Ancients, indeed even the tears of Ulysses discovering, as François Hartog suggests,[8] 'the non-coincidence of self to self', are not enough, it seems to me, to establish a *first form of the past*. Very far from being the witness to a first discovery of the 'separation' between

7. Cf. C. Lévi-Strauss, *Paroles données* (Paris: Plon, 1984).

8. François Hartog, 'Temps et histoire "Comment écrire l'histoire de France?" ', *Annales E.S.C.* (1995), pp. 1219-36.

past and present, Homer and the epic can be considered as one of the most formidable obstacles in Greece even to thinking of the past 'as that which has been and represents something else than the present'. A continual obstacle on the scale of the fulfilment that the Homeric epic brings in archaic if not classical culture.

Fulfilment, why? Since the seventh century BCE Homer has belonged to Greek culture, he has been part of it and, very quickly, he has represented the cultural learning of the Greeks. They learned to read and write with Homer. He meant the tradition. He was the reference, and the one who gave the measure of the disparity, of the perceptible distances. In joining the heroic past to the continuous present of archaic if not classical Greece, Homer as tradition and *paideia* reinforced the feeling that the memory of the past was alive and that the vocation of the first genealogical and historiographical writers was to take over from the poets of which he was the first.

What proofs can be given of this obstacle set up by Homer in the face of the coming of an 'autonomous thought of the past'? I will retain two. The one, drawn from Thucydides; the other, provided by Herodotus, the two most outstanding exponents of fifth-century historiography. First, Thucydides, the most innovative in the area of the writing of what we call 'history'. At the time when he began to compose the accounts of the Peloponnesian War, Thucydides, as an opening, chose to use the Homeric poems to construct the model of a condition of civilization prior to the present time. It is what he calls 'Archaiologia', 'A History of Ancient Times', that is to say, that reconstruction of the 'past', of ancient times, starting from indications (*tekmèria*), from signs that make it possible to recognize and to foresee. Homer is a witness in Thucydides' eyes to a past present in the memory and before the very eyes of his contemporaries. A past that allows the historian of the present to compare and assess the greatness of today's events compared to those of yesterday.

This archaeology serves as a prologue to a 'history' entirely turned toward the present, and without any other link with 'the past' except through the comparison with the respective greatnesses. For Thucydides, the past, the *archaiologia*, is neither interesting nor significant. It is a sort of preamble, a prelude to this present that is so new and so rich. The present is actually the basis for the understanding of the 'past', if we really wish to speak of it by referring it to the poetic memory of Homer, who offers in the second half of the fifth century the recol-

lection and the most convincing testimony, for him and for his contemporaries. Obviously, Thucydides is in no way interested in the past, in the past as such. And Homer does not lead us in any way to separate 'that which has been' from 'that which is'.

A second proof that Homer in weaving a continuity out of tradition and memory puts obstacles in the way of a new awareness of the past is provided by Herodotus of Halicarnassus. He is, in Greece, the historian who inaugurates writing about a recent past. When it comes to defining this recent past, Herodotus seems to proceed just like Homer, and to want to act as a witness so that the great deeds shall not die out, nor fade away, like the colours of a painting in time losing their radiance. Herodotus wants to recount yesterday's exploits just as Homer sang the great deeds of Achilles and Hector so that they are not deprived of 'glory', of glorious fame. Herodotus, of course, has a very intense feeling that things fade with time, that time can change everything. But, in setting out his plan for inquiries, Herodotus describes it in opposition to Homer and the memorial tradition of the epic. He excludes from his project everything that belongs to the time of the gods and heroes. His inquiry begins with the Medic wars, in the period that is called, Herodotus says (3.122), that of the human generation; the 'time of humans' (*anthrōpèiè geneè*). Herodotus seems to be the first in Greece to separate as clearly as possible the history of the gods and the history of humans. The enquiry on the recent past intends to cut itself off from the heroic past mixed with the stories of the gods, that is to say, from everything that Homer and Hesiod represent for Herodotus. This is explained in 2.53: Homer and Hesiod lived 400 years earlier, and 'These are the ones who, in their poems, have set for the Greeks their theogonies, who attributed to the deities their appropriate titles, distributed among them honours and skills, designed their appearances'. The first recent past is based on a piece cut out; it tries to be established in a distant time with Homer, with the time of the gods and of those heroes that the genealogists of the sixth century, and also the fifth, continue to join presumptuously to their presumed descendants.

Herodotus has much less than Thucydides the feeling of living in a perpetual renewal, in a time when novelty always prevails. But it is with him that the specific object of the first 'history' emerges: a recent past that is not to be confused with the fictional work of the mystical realm. His predecessor Hecataeus of Milet has helped him in this direction: he decided at the very end of the sixth century to 'put into

writing' the stories of the Greeks, discovered that these stories were numerous and set out to write them 'as they seemed to him to be true'.

Before Herodotus, and more particularly with Hecateus, there is therefore, in Greece, 'a critique of the tradition'. It could be objected that there is as it were no society that does not proceed in this way. Gérard Lenclud[9] insists on this in his reflections on tradition, published in the same volume *Transcrire les mythologies*. Are there really, Lenclud wonders, societies without the 'capacity to attend to themselves'? It is to be hoped that anthropologists, outside of any great differences of viewpoint, get down to the observation of the modes of reception of 'traditions' in the societies that have so long held the attention of ethnologists and not of historians. Cultural reflectiveness can express itself in a variety of ways. To do a critique in writing of the different versions of a same story is not a Greek privilege. It is not the same procedure as the debating in the course of a ritual about the connection between two sequences or the responding to the version of an account proposed by neighbours through another version that makes a joke of the first. The context, above all, is perhaps not the same. From earliest Japan—analyzed by François Macé[10]—with the duplicate writing of the Tradition by order of the first Emperor, the so-called 'Chinese' version makes itself conspicuous by the notation and recording of all the variants of the 'accounts of primordial times'. But the compiler does not choose, he does not decide, as did the Greek from Milet, Hecateus by name, to write the account 'as it seemed to him true'. The Chinese of the Japanese eighth century work in the service of the palace administration. These are government servants. Hecateus is a citizen of leisure. Someone else will act differently, as he likes even, without any control by the city, nor even of a social body. Other configurations are there to propose variants, to set out changes, making it possible to see or imagine how the event is transformed or not in relation to the break with the past or the forms of the temporal context. These configurations are offered to us (to the extent of our curiosity) as much by societies said to be without a history as by the series of societies said to be into history as we know it.

9. Gérard Lenclud, 'Qu'est-ce que la tradition?', in Detienne (ed.), *Transcrire les mythologies*, pp. 25-44.

10. François Macé, 'La double écriture des traditions dans le Japon du VIII^{e} siècle: Fondation et refondation, histoire et commencement', in Detienne (ed.), *Transcrire les mythologies*, pp. 77-102.

To compare among themselves several pictures of change, of the event, the many ways of separating, of putting at a distance from the present and from the future, is perhaps a fruitful way to reflect on what would be called historical awareness or a conceptual construction of time between anthropologists and historians.[11]

11. Additional bibliography in J. Scheid, 'Le temps de la cité et l'histoire des prêtres', in Detienne (ed.), *Transcrire les mythologies*, pp. 149-58. J. Bazin, 'Production d'un récit historique,' *Cahiers d'études africaines* 73-76 (1979), XIX, 1-4, pp. 453-83. The latest version of this paper is in Marcel Detienne, *Comparer l'incomparable* (Paris: Seuil, 2000).