

***Pompeii***

*The Living City*

and

***The World That Never Was***

*A True Story of Dreamers, Schemers,  
Anarchists and Secret Agents*

Narrative History in a Digital Age

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## INTRODUCTION

This thesis is concerned with two books of narrative history, *The World That Never Was: A True Story of Dreamers, Schemers, Anarchists and Secret Agents* and *Pompeii: The Living City*, both written by me during the 2000s, the latter co-authored with Ray Laurence. *Pompeii* (2005) explores life in the Colonia Veneria Pompeiana, a provincial Italian city, in the middle of the first century CE, during the period prior to the eruption of Vesuvius in 69 CE. *The World That Never Was* (2009) offers an account of the Anarchist movement and its complex relationship with the police and intelligence services across an international diaspora during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, beginning with the Paris Commune of 1871.

Both books are deeply researched works of historical synthesis that draw on my extensive study of secondary sources, alongside significant original research, to propose new interpretations of their respective subjects. Research in archives across Europe and America for *The World That Never Was* revealed unrecognized patterns of political association and police provocation, for example; in *Pompeii*, a reconsideration of neglected archaeological records in the context of new excavations suggested novel insights into social mobility in the first century CE. However, I shall consider the original intellectual contribution made by the books only quite briefly. The approach I have adopted in this critical consideration of the books rests rather on my assertion that they offer an equal contribution to knowledge through their innovative approach to the process of constructing historical narratives.

The subjects of the two books are ostensibly very different, divided by eighteen hundred years and by a conceptual boundary between the ancient and modern world. Yet as works of narrative history they share much in common, not least in their interest in networks: social and political in one case, ideological and conspiratorial in the other. Both also had to address the particular challenges of working with highly fragmentary sources at the limits of the historical record. Furthermore, the selection of subjects and their treatment in the books reflect my work with interactive digital media, which

preceded and directly informed the writing of the books and has continued since their publication.

My aim in this thesis is to propose a theoretical framework for my practice as an author of historical narrative across digital and analogue forms, and certain principles that may guide future work in this field. To this end, I have chosen to focus primarily on the broad context in which the books were conceived, the process of synthesis and narrative construction involved, and the techniques that I used to realise my particular aims. The change in the roles of author and reader suggested by interactive forms, and how this may be accommodated in an analogue text, is of particular interest. The co-supervision of the thesis by representatives from Creative Writing and History departments reflects both the nature of the books and my application of theoretical approaches from literary study to the role of narrative in the making of history.

The thesis falls into three parts. In the first chapter I consider the background to my choice of subjects, and the challenges that these subjects presented. In the second, I propose a theoretical contextualisation of the work, through a speculative exploration of the possibilities of digital narrative historiography. In the third I reflect on certain of the key principles and techniques that I applied in the books, and assess their effectiveness in relation to the critical reception. Reference is made throughout to Bakhtin's theory of the chronotope, to the theory of 'Possible Worlds', and to the genre of 'historiographical metafiction' with which I had engaged in preceding work.<sup>1</sup> Readers unfamiliar with these concepts may wish to first read the Appendix, where key aspects of that work are surveyed. Indeed, the Appendix, excluded to meet restrictions on thesis length, is where I would initially direct all readers.

## 1 THE ORIGINS OF THE BOOKS AND THEIR CHALLENGES

I first began to explore possible subjects for a work of narrative history while actively involved with digital research into interactive narrative in the late 1990s. However, it was in the early 2000s that I conceived and started to research and plan *The World That Never Was* and *Pompeii*. My immediate motivation to write the books arose from intellectual curiosity and artistic ambition, although by this time I also wanted to return to an analogue medium in order to secure greater control over the production of the texts in which I was invested. I had relished the creative collaboration with technical colleagues in experimental digital work but my dependence on them had stymied my sense of expressive satisfaction.

My interest in the genre of historiographical metafiction, explored in my early novel writing (see Appendix, p.59), had by this point segued into an interest in narrative history.<sup>1</sup> Work that engaged with questions of fictionality and evidential uncertainty, and which allowed an emotional and intellectual engagement with the subjective experience of the past, remained of particular fascination. In this, I was inspired by the microhistorical work of Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, Natalie Zemon Davis, Robert Darnton and Carlo Ginzburg.<sup>2</sup> Roger Chartier has observed of Ginzburg's *The Cheese and the Worms* how 'it is on this reduced scale, and probably only on this scale, that we can understand, without deterministic reduction, the relationship between systems of belief, of values and representations on one side, and social affiliations on the other'.<sup>3</sup> The attraction of recovering the experience of the past through the study of marginal individuals resonated with me. Furthermore, the theoretical framework offered by microhistorians to explain their work also addressed questions of authority and narrative construction that recollected my concerns in my digital work.

It was the experience of developing and producing drama-documentaries, in parallel with the digital projects, that most immediately influenced the choice of subject for *Pompeii*, the first of my books to be published. An 'Inhabited Television' research project, on which I worked as virtual world dramaturge, had involved Channel 4 as the

broadcast partner.<sup>4</sup> One proposal for the final deliverable was a participatory history series, on the model of the recent *The 1900 House*, which would be filmed in a virtual-world model of Pompeii. As with much of the research I was involved in at the time, its ambitions were some years in advance of the technology.<sup>5</sup> The commissioning editors at Channel 4 recognised this, but instead wanted a Pompeii programme that took advantage of the new affordability of Computer Generated Imagery.<sup>6</sup> The result was an 80-minute drama-documentary called *The Private Lives of Pompeii*, which I researched, wrote and associate-produced.<sup>7</sup> The programme was an account of the social history of the city, which interspersed expert interviews with scenes that dramatised the interwoven stories of fictional characters who represented a cross-section of that society. It was unconventional both in its overt fictionalisation, and in its use of two voiceover narrators. One of these narrators was the familiar authoritative guide, the other a fictionalised and unreliable diagetic voice from the past, which was, at the end of the documentary, revealed as belonging to a survivor of the Vesuvian eruption.

While researching the television film, I became aware of the extraordinary wealth of recent academic research that had not yet been synthesised into a form accessible to a wide readership. Compared to the worlds of Montaillou, Menocchio and Martin Guerre, explored in the work of Le Roy Ladurie, Ginzburg and Davis, the first-century town of Pompeii offers a similar if not greater abundance of evidence concerning its society and its inhabitants.<sup>8</sup> However, the evidence is highly fragmentary and atomised. It is also primarily material rather than textual, and where it is textual it is unverifiable by comparison with other texts of sufficient detail. In all cases it demands to be interpreted in relation to its complex physical context.

In so far as Microhistory seeks to set typical events and characters against a carefully described social background, such an approach to ancient Pompeii faced challenges far greater than the seminal works of the genre, which deal with the medieval or early modern periods. Even Davis's *Return of Martin Guerre* is embroidered around two independent and near contemporary records of the historical events: Coras's *Arrest Memorable* and Le Sueur's *Historia*. Moreover, in Davis's aim of recreating 'the hidden world of peasant sentiment and aspiration', she uses the Coras as a point of departure for research that draws on sources including notarial contracts and registers of Parliamentary

sentences, both of which afford her exemplary insights into the habits and *mentalité* of members of the local society. Although the only literary sources of the period for peasant life are from the comic theatre, which Davis regrets ‘is limited in its psychological register and in the range of situations in which villagers are placed’, these comedies nevertheless yield insights when considered alongside and against other records. Davis’s work, however, is rendered contentious for academic historians, and more accessible for other readers, by her decision that where she cannot find her ‘individual man or woman’ in the archives, the account offered would be ‘part my invention, but held tightly in check by the voices of the past’.<sup>9</sup>

I had recruited Ray Laurence as historical consultant for the television documentary. In the course of our work together, he and I began to discuss collaboration on a book that would be of far greater scope than the programme. It was apparent, however, that the most significant challenges in writing such a book lay not only in the breadth of evidential detail that would need to be organised into narrative form, but in how we would animate the stories of individuals from the fragmentary remains of Pompeii. We came to the view that the checks on invention might have to be looser, the contract with the reader rather different, and that relationship handled with unusual sensitivity.

Although the unique preservation of Pompeii was due to a single cataclysmic event, the notion that the site represents a moment fixed in time is illusory and misleading. There is certainly a rich ‘archaeology of catastrophe’: skeletons of citizens caught fleeing with their belongings, trapped in the voids left in the compacted lapilli by their decayed corpses into which resin or plaster can be cast; or the carbonised loaves in the baker’s oven.<sup>10</sup> However, the seemingly pristine site that was exposed on its original excavation has been lost through careless preservation. Moreover, documentation from the excavations is now widely dispersed, making the provenance of much of the material evidence uncertain. The hand-written daybooks containing the excavation records, or even the vast record of three thousand inscriptions from the walls of the city, require a process of forensic textual excavation and interpretation to reveal their significance.

To my mind, it is the longitudinal insights that are most revealing of Pompeian society.<sup>11</sup> Of particular interest to me, in these terms, were the social and political networks of family, trade and patronage, and how they interwove across time. James

Franklin's then newly published work *Pompeis Difficile Est*, which attentively reconstructed candidatures in Pompeian elections, would provide essential groundwork.<sup>12</sup> Yet only a few accurately datable events unique to the city are known, in relation to which any speculative chronology of others must be tentatively organised. Determining even a basic sequence within which events and durations of activity within the social and political networks could be organised was hugely complex. An early idea mooted by Ray was to organise the account as a typical 'Year in Pompeii', which was attractive in its simplicity but risked excluding too much fascinating information. The narrative would need to be framed within a longer time period and address the multiple temporalities of the city.

An equal challenge related to space and scale, not least because it was in space-time that networks existed in embodied form, and in space that their constitutive events left legible evidence. The location of a graffito in which a lowly client asserted their support for a named elite political candidate was far more meaningful if understood in relation to the position in the city of houses or businesses with which each could be associated, even more so in relation to the house of the candidate's father who had manumitted the client from slavery a decade earlier. At times the textual and the material evidence coincided in space: an amphora bearing a merchant's stamp found near a wall painting by the same hand as one in another building. At others, the telling information was material alone: the degree of damage suffered by a family's house in the earthquake; the quality of the brickwork repair that indicated poverty, or haste, or delay; alterations in the water supply infrastructure that suggested shifting social status.<sup>13</sup>

One literary account of life in the area has survived, Petronius's *Satyricon*, but its satirical register and quite possibly propagandist intent, lacking any comparison to anchor it, make it as unreliable as the classical histories of Cassius Dio, Suetonius and Tacitus, written with political agendas whose nuance is lost. And yet, to the informed ear, everywhere in the ruined city voices break through from the past – out of the fine grain of evidence found in the graffiti, and the crumbling walls of the houses themselves – amounting to a clamour. Since the written evidence is often informal in character, and decay does not differentiate by social standing, whispers of the 'voices from below' can be discerned too: women and slaves.

It was only through intricate speculative reconstruction of relationships between time, place, person and event that I could begin to imaginatively repopulate the huge and detailed map of the Pompeii excavations, extracting impressions of the individual from the prosopographical record.<sup>14</sup> Over the course of two years' research, my mental map overlays became ever denser with information about lives that might be animated, but also about the constraints imposed on this process by the evidence. Each instance of an event on this populated map bore, in my mind and in my notes, the data relating to its provenance and metadata regarding its reliability; every concatenation of data was similarly accorded a place on the spectrum of speculation, from near certainty to fictionality.

Research by Andrew Wallace-Hadrill into the domestic spaces of Pompeii and Herculaneum as encodings of social practice and power had been revelatory to me during the research for the documentary.<sup>15</sup> As a contribution to microhistorical study it seemed to offer new ways to recover the qualia of ancient lives which might at least give better grounds for speculation concerning the emotional, sentimental, psychological, even cognitive worlds of the past – the ‘possible worlds’ of its inhabitants (see Appendix p.66). It is hard not to feel for the clients crowded in a small anteroom waiting to be summoned into the presence of a patron who commands the lofty spaces of an atrium, framed within the square of the *tablinum* and with his private garden behind, or for the slave emerging at speed from concealed passages and turning corners where the masonry was rounded to enable inconspicuous flow. But approached out of my preceding work with the dynamic shaping of storyworld spaces in a virtual world, Wallace-Hadrill's discussion of social space as scenographic, a stage for the performance of power relations even at a domestic level, also afforded insights into new principles by which a narrative experience of history might be constructed.

Another area that would be a challenge when writing a ‘life of Pompeii’ involved managing the variability of scale in the book’s narrative of space-time. Pompeii was a small town in provincial Italy on the periphery of the vacation resorts in the Bay of Naples frequented by rich Romans. The Roman world of the first century CE, however, was both centralised and integrated, with trade flowing in and out of Pompeii from its immediate environs, its regional neighbours, from Rome but also from the great littoral

cities of the Mediterranean and, beyond them, along trade routes into Africa and Asia. A marginal provincial city was not isolated from events at the national and imperial level. A narrative history of such a place must relate the micro to the macro, yet in the case of Pompeii those connections are tenuous, the density of data found locally being hugely disproportionate to that from the rest of the Empire. To speculate at such a large scale carries inherent risks of overstatement, and the relationship of narrative and evidence must be especially carefully managed.

Although *Pompeii* was the first of the two books that I wrote and published, having been commissioned in 2002 to capitalise both on interest raised by the television programme and the working relationship that Ray Laurence and I had established, I was at the time already researching and planning *The World That Never Was*. I had earlier explored ideas for possible books about the radical tradition in England, the history of utopianism, and *Belle Époque* Paris, but had not found a narrative approach to any of these that seemed sufficiently interesting. Similarly, I had probed but dismissed the possibility of a book about the individual experience of the national anxieties manifest in late nineteenth-century British fiction around foreign infiltration and invasion plans, suggested by memories of an essay by Norman Sherry on the origins of Conrad's *The Secret Agent*.<sup>16</sup> These ideas coalesced, quite suddenly, in the autumn of 2001, in response to two very different external stimuli: my reading of an advance copy of Jenny Uglow's *The Lunar Men* and the attack on the World Trade Centre.<sup>17</sup>

Coincidentally, earlier that year I had begun to research the recent history of international terrorism, notably the work of Walter Laquer and papers by Richard Bach Jensen, for another possible project.<sup>18</sup> The events of September 2001 suggested a possible reframing of the early history of anarchism that considered the terroristic violence promulgated by some of its proponents in relation to the ideology's utopian aims. The intention would be to understand the human factors that determined how anarchism had come to be perceived by posterity, distinguishing the historical movement from the reputation it acquired. Uglow's book, which I found thrilling for its exploration of the history of ideas and of technology through a group biography of collaborators, celebrated a Society of influential scientists and inventors centred on the English Midlands.

‘Together they nudge their whole society over the threshold of the modern,’ Uglow had written of their appeal, ‘tilting it irrevocably away from old patterns of life towards the world we know today.’<sup>19</sup> I would take a larger canvas than Uglow but would survey a panorama of epic failure, in which the new world never dawned.

The structure I conceived for *The World That Never Was* would support a character-based, narrative account of an international radical movement as its members converged in particular configurations and dispersed. It would be a group biography that ebbed and flowed, in which certain periods in certain places might allow something approximating microhistorical study. I envisaged a study of subversion and surveillance, of interwoven networks of revolutionary activism and its policing, that would attempt to unpick the tapestry of fictionalisation that had been cast over the events of the period. In so doing, it would seek to reveal a history of the anarchist movement. It would relate the microcosm of interpersonal relationships in particular episodes of its development; the sparser meso-networks that spanned larger spatial, temporal and sociometric divides, and whose effects could be discerned at the aggregated level of group action; and the macrocosmic perspective on the influence and perception of the movement on wider society. Part group biography and part microhistory, implicating cultural history and the study of the imaginary, it would allow me to fulfill my ambitions as a writer of narrative history in a particular mode.

As with *Pompeii*, the most immediate challenges concerned scope and scale. By the end of the nineteenth century, the anarchist movement was a global phenomenon which, whilst unevenly distributed, was also sustained through exile and dispersal in the face of persecution. It had ideological roots that some have traced back to the Anabaptists of the sixteenth century, and it fizzled throughout the twentieth century without decisive moments of rupture or a clear point of resolution. Associated challenges included what framework and principles I should apply in constructing the narrative, again without the guidance of any conventionally recognised through-line of, for example, an individual life, or any meta-narrative other than one that simplistically demonised or celebrated the anarchist movement. Which were the nodes in the network – people, places, occurrences – in relation to which the myriad possible strands of activity might be filtered, and around which they might be most revealingly organised?

I planned *TWTNW*, as I had *Pompeii*, in extreme detail. The process of researching and shaping the book, up to the moment when writing began, involved constant iteration between the multiple elements that had to be accommodated in the construction of its narrative: durations of time, locations, characters, occurrences, and ideas. First the time-span was determined, approximating the adulthood of the generation of anarchist thinkers and activists who were the heirs of Bakunin (whose international profile and influence made him a conspicuous point of departure). Next, the main protagonists began to emerge from a network model of the relationships between the human actors: strong connectors, weak connectors, bridges, and significant but surprising outliers. Henri Rochefort, for example, though anomalous in any conventional account of anarchism, recurred across the period as a weak bridge between intriguingly diverse figures. Moving outwards from these to associated nodes suggested possible secondary figures for exploration, who were of particular interest when, as in the case of *agent provocateurs*, they intersected otherwise distinct networks.

Then space and time filters were applied, to reveal physical proximity of significant individuals, whether in a city where a terrorist attack took place, or at a conference that lasted a period of days, or during an exile of years or decades. With dispersal, and in an age of rapid technological advances and infrastructural developments, the vectors of communication inevitably became of greater significance, so they too had to be mapped for how they could collapse time and space, whether by means of a sled ride, or an electric telegram, or a ‘go-back’ day-return ticket from England to Belgium. Wherever and whenever meaningful activity was identified in the network, the environment in which it occurred was explored in more detail. Sometimes this prompted a revised understanding that then flowed backwards, causing adjustments as it ramified through the model. Occasionally it threw up events or characters, such as the hoaxter Jogand-Pagès, also known as Léo Taxil, whose co-location with and thematic relevance suggested their strategic inclusion.<sup>20</sup> During the five years of research, however, the multi-dimensional network model remained, taxingly, a mental one. Today, tools for visualising network analysis, similar to specialised software such as Palentir that is used for tracking criminal networks, might alleviate that particular burden.<sup>21</sup>

Beyond the challenges involved in structuring the work, however, it was apparent

from early in the research process that the challenges of engaging with the historical evidence in narrative form required a treatment that would invoke questions of interpretive authority and reader agency. The world of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and of its great cities, London and Paris above all, is abundantly documented. As with Pompeii, however, the evidence required for a detailed understanding of the specific, often self-contained anarchist subculture, and that of the police services with which it became enmeshed, was unexpectedly fragmentary and dispersed, and difficult or impossible to access and verify. In many cases, the evidential problems testified to a different kind of marginality and historical muting than that of slaves whose lives were deemed unworthy of record. Rather it was those who actively sought to remain invisible or elusive through concealment and pseudonyms, or whose transgressions of social norms encouraged their misrepresentation, or else whose activities were suppressed in the historical record or erased from it by those in positions of power with interests to protect. This elusiveness applied equally to the police and spies of different nations as to the revolutionaries, often more so.

The unreliability of the data, even when it was profuse and accessible, is epitomised by the reports dispatched back to Paris from the French anarchist emigré communities in London in the 1890s which are now held in the archives of the Préfecture de Police in Paris.<sup>22</sup> Where a particular police service had an interest in an anarchist cell, it would attempt to place or recruit at least two spies, so that each might corroborate or inform on the other. The archival cartons in the Préfecture are crammed with crumbling telegrams, but so different are the double accounts of any meeting that they are difficult even to reconcile, let alone decipher for anything approaching a reliable version. Informants constantly vied for position and preferment, exaggerating, inventing, passing on rumour as fact, second-guessing, acting as provocateurs and quite probably sharing false intelligence under the guidance of paymasters from other national services. The British and Russian often had informants in the same groups as the French police, perhaps sometimes the same person.<sup>23</sup>

Contemporary published accounts of anarchism, its milieu and policing are wildly unreliable too, by dint of their intended purpose, which was often propagandist. Anarchism is a utopian creed that believes the perfectibility of human nature to be

thwarted only by the oppressive social institutions in which power has been accumulated, and that heaven on earth will arrive with their overthrow. As such, it appeals to those inclined to dramatic Romanticism, who can imagine the impossible and are prepared to demand it. Their memoirs offer self-dramatising accounts of their own lives, and highly partial accounts of others. The prism of possible worlds – past, present and future – through which they perceive the actual world is at extreme variance to more conventional apprehensions of it, however enticing may be the dream of hope that is promised. Conversely, the conspiratorial versions of reality purveyed by their antagonists in the police and intelligence services similarly aim to conjure the possibility of terrible hidden presents and fantastical futures, while speaking to the fears of the public rather than its hopes. With little or no objective reportage of anarchism at the time, the terrain for historical research is dangerously slippery.

Despite warning signs in my extensive reading of secondary sources, I had supposed that deep archival research would provide some stable grounding for the microhistorical study. However, this was rarely the case. Files, whose contents senior archivists in Moscow had suggested would provide key insights, were delivered, insouciantly, empty; the high tide of *glasnost* was receding. In Brussels, documents that I had laboriously tracked down for the crucial links they promised had long ago been replaced by slips indicating the destruction of the original ‘By Order of the Cabinet’. A four-year-long Freedom of Information battle over relevant Special Branch ledgers gained me access, finally, to several hundred pages in which every name and detail that was considered sensitive, amounting to probably nine words in every ten, had been redacted. The protection of informants’ names in perpetuity was the justification given by the Special Branch and, avoiding conspiratorial conclusions, specific national security concerns may be adduced to explain other limitations on access too. The overall impression, however, was that the history that I was excavating had been buried in lime by state authorities, in the past but also the present, who were determined that the truth about certain activities should be unrecoverable.<sup>24</sup>

To attempt to reconstruct that history in narrative form, as I intended, would require a strategy towards the unreliable nature of the evidence, and the identifiable lacunae in it, that was more sophisticated than that required in reconstructing Pompeian society, since

it was apparently more accessible. Once again, therefore, questions of textual authority and reader agency were of practical as well as theoretical concern. A fine-grain narrative history of anarchism and its policing which took the reader into the sensibility of the time would inevitably entail authorial speculation and surmise, to the point where the book became, in part, a history of the imaginary. Finding a way for the text to signal its own unreliability, inviting sceptical agency on the part of the reader, would therefore be essential. This invitation to scepticism seemed an appropriate response to the overabundance of certainty characterising the new ‘War on Terror’ that provided the background to the writing of the book.

A book about anarchism would prompt its readers, when confronted with incompatible narratives or dissonant registers, to interrogate their own judgment and conscience. And if the past did not illuminate the present, then perhaps a contemporary consciousness could cast light in the other direction. This was Le Roy Ladurie’s hope in 1979, on publishing *Carnival*, his microhistory of the massacre in Romans during the Dauphine revolt. At that time it had been the Iranian Revolution that he thought might inform readings of *Carnival*, towards a better understanding of ‘how four centuries ago, in the France of 1580, reactionary Catholicism and the revolutionary spirit formed their odd couple’.<sup>25</sup>

I regarded both books, from the beginning, as affording an opportunity for me to gain insight, at scale, into the authorial processes involved in constructing narrative history: insight of the kind needed for the design of digital systems to mediate historical narrative construction. As I have said, the choice of their subject matter, and the approach I took in planning their narratives, was informed both intentionally and inadvertently by my prior work in interactive narrative, most particularly by my design of a story engine for a project called *Gnosis* (see Appendix p.63). As discussed, the idea for *Pompeii* derived indirectly from plans for an unrealised digital project. In the case of *The World That Never Was*, I hoped the book might become the centrepiece of a collaborative online experiment that would allow readers to construct narratives through the data space that it surveyed. This too is yet to be realised.

At no point did I envisage either book as an immersive, emergent, systemically

managed narrative experience of the sort that *Gnosis* might have produced. Although the books may hint at speculative design possibilities, they reflect my preceding digital work more through the sense of the malleability of narrative data, and the potential of user agency, that I had assimilated to my authorial practice, along with my awareness of the risks and responsibilities these entail. It is clear to me in retrospect, however, that while wrestling with the challenges and responsibilities of writing narrative history at the margins of evidential reliability, I also employed some of the principles of narrative construction that I had conceived for a digital form. Today, when digital methods of historical enquiry are approaching a point where the digital *representation* of the products of such enquiry becomes of greater concern, reflection on these principles may be illuminating.

In the following chapter I therefore essay a theoretical context for my work on the books in relation to the potential I see in interactive digital media for new forms of historiography, and the poetics that might support it.

## 2. HISTORIOGRAPHY AND NARRATIVE

The ideal objective of historical study is to recover the truth about the past, though the best we can perhaps hope to achieve, as Peter Laslett suggests, is ‘understanding ourselves in time’.<sup>1</sup> Historical truth is elusive and perhaps even illusory, at least as something that can be reliably known. A fact may be apprehended by an immediate percipient, insofar as sense impressions and their cognitive interpretation are epistemologically trustworthy. For a fact to constitute an historical fact, however, it must at least have made a recorded impression. *A tool striking wood creates a dent; a balance of account shows a payment made.* Insofar as we understand the logic of the world in question, on the basis of each recorded fact, deductions may be made. Where other facts too are available that may be related to them, those deductions may be elaborated. Comparison between facts is possible, terms of association may be proposed, patterns identified. Every step in this process, however, is an act of semiological interpretation that is fallible, and with each step the potential for error accumulates in likelihood and scope.

Early in this process, raw data is synthesised into the deduction of an event. Historical events may be envisioned as virtual enactments that emulate the operations of personal memory. However, convention and experience prime and govern the images summoned, rendering arbitrary the relationship between signifier and signified. The images that come to my mind, at this moment, are of *a hammer falling in slow motion, cracking a lacquered tabletop*; of *loose change in a metal saucer*. The first approximates cinematic montage (whilst montage theory itself consciously emulated the operation of perception); both supply detail, with assumed contexts ready to rush in and embellish.<sup>2</sup> Additional factual information would cause those mental constructions of the events to be revisited and refined. However, latent bias is impossible to eradicate. So too is the instinct to make events intelligible through narrative.

An historical fact or event must be communicated. Once it is represented, it immediately forms a semantic construction – a drawing, a verbal phrase, an RDF triple (the base structure of semantic data) – which employs specific vocabulary and grammar

towards the objective of being most accurately understood. *The axe fell (on the block).* *The bill was settled (by the merchant).* Already the expressions are inflected and pressing towards elaboration. Just a few steps further, with a few more prepositions to introduce sequence and causality, and the historical fact will be caught up in a narrative. *The axe fell on the block and the king's head tumbled.* *The merchant settled the bill in return for the goods.* Such simple historical narratives demand explanation and expansion, forward and backwards in time; to be situated in a wider flow of events and context. The nature and likely frequency of the core events imply methods by which that context might be recovered, as well as the nature of additional facts that may most usefully be constellated to that end. Were it a peasant chopping wood who wielded the axe, then the depth and number of the notches in the block might afford the only available facts to be adduced, as François Furet would suggest.<sup>3</sup> A craftsman would use a finer tool and leave finer marks.

Facts are facts, historical or otherwise. By definition, they did happen and, indeed, happened in a certain sequence involving cause and effect, in time and space, to which a narrative is implicit. However, a single fact does not belong to only one sequence and narrative, but exists in a network of relationships of a complexity that is beyond feasible recording, recovery or representation. Every historical narrative is a conjectural version of the past, a hypothesis built out of other hypotheses, each of which represent a trace through a vast, dimly lit database of potential knowledge. It is an attempt to express historical truth that rests on what its author, at a particular moment and for a particular purpose, considers significant. Making the selection and the trace is a creative process that entails personal judgments that balance multiple considerations, made in the context of existing knowledge and expertise.

Cumulatively, these traces may describe larger phenomena such as historical processes. These in turn may be located within totalising meta-narratives that emphasise certain of their features. Viewed only from the perspective of the temporal organisation of that sequence, as Claude Levi-Strauss observed, ‘there are as many chronologies as there are culture-specific ways of representing the passage of time’.<sup>4</sup> A linear story of diachronic process, for example, already imposes conventions. An account in which human agency dominates prioritises an anthropocentrism to the neglect of impersonal forces. One that favours environmental factors, such as Ferdinand Braudel’s *longue durée*,

may spurn narrative as an inappropriate mode but will veer back towards it when human agency enters its purview.<sup>5</sup> These impositions of cultural-historical constructions are expressed as narrative emplotment: the story that is told about causes and their effects.

The degree to which any individual reader accepts an historical narrative is finally a matter of trust in that selection and organisation of the facts. This trust depends on many factors, some of which may be intentionally encoded in the text while others are extrinsically encoded. The former could range from explicit authorial analysis of the facts and their verifiability, to the coherence of the narrative offered. An example of the latter might be the social and professional status of the author, which may be seen to carry validation by a more or less identifiable collective, in which the status and expertise of its individual members is implicated. Trust may also be established through conventions that span the intrinsic and extrinsic, such as adherence to certain principles of interpretation that have recognised currency, from accepted scholarly method to ideological affiliation. Meta-narratives imply the discoverability in the past of the processes of which they are a prior configuration, which may lend credibility to accounts that share their structure, to the extent that they themselves are believed.<sup>6</sup>

The terms in which an historical narrative invites that trust may be variously signalled within and beyond the text. Its narrative can position itself through the use of recognisable signifiers of genre. The citation of extrinsic authority in the analysis of factual verifiability, for example, would indicate the genre of ‘scholarly authority’. Other texts might use distinct configurations of space and time, comprising ‘chronotopes’ of the kind that Bakhtinian theory proposes as the defining feature of genre.<sup>7</sup> For example, transitions in space and time might be arranged to present an historical narrative in which suspense is deployed as a narrative strategy of factual discovery. ‘A sequence of events can be narrated as a tragedy or as satire (farce) or romance (etc.),’ Hayden White argued, ‘and there is no way of proving that one of these is the right way of narrating it.’<sup>8</sup>

Genre and other kinds of affiliation may be signified by paratextual elements too, as Gérard Genette has described.<sup>9</sup> A title and cover design are examples inherent to the book in codex form, though others, such as illustrations and critical apparatus, are common. Different readers will decode the complex interplay of signifying elements in and around an historical narrative variously, bringing their own biases, preconceptions and

expectations to the task. For most, the foremost proof of a narrative's validity as a vehicle of historical truth will be its perceived accuracy, meaning its adherence to verifiable fact. Many, however, will recognise that factual truth is not absolute, since not always achievable, and that the limitations it imposes are therefore actually detrimental to most historical narratives. These already often embrace an epistemology in which, to some degree, a subjective conception of truth is also valid and useful. In writing narrative history, verifiable factual accuracy is one of various imperatives, alongside the aesthetic and ethical. The effectiveness and value of the work of narrative history therefore depends on a synthesis of all three.

In bringing what Alan Munslow has described as 'deconstructionist consciousness' to my practice as an author of narrative historical texts, I apply a habit of creative thinking rooted in the pragmatic imperatives of my particular practice.<sup>10</sup> This was eclectically informed, above all, by the narrative theories of Umberto Eco, Tsvetlan Todorov, Roland Barthes and Paul Ricoeur, among others. However, despite the deconstructionist and semiological character of my theoretical position, it is not defined by any ideological adherence to what Richard Evans has diagnosed as a 'hyper-relativism and scepticism about history's validity as an intellectual enterprise'.<sup>11</sup> Rather, the origins of my approach to writing history are to be found in my previous work with computationally mediated forms of interactive narrative. Where expertise is invested in a computer system with the intention of generating narrative outcomes, effective human authorship requires the highest level of self-consciousness when designing the data model and the algorithms used to engage with it. This sort of transparent self-consciousness is implicit to Herman Paul's proposal of a 'performative turn' in historical practice, 'focusing upon what historians actually do as opposed to looking at the finished product'.<sup>12</sup> In this context, the usefulness of a 'deconstructionist consciousness' lies in exposing the operations of the human practitioner in order for them to be externalised and codified, in the greatest possible detail and diversity. Ideally, the aim should be towards systematising the generic rather than the prescriptive: to capture not one version of narrative historical method but the principles that, applied variously and in a different combinations, may produce the widest range of outputs.

Nevertheless, there is a more radical agenda involved in the design of such systems that is implicit in my approach to the writing of narrative history. Rather than the intellectual validity of historiographical practice per se, this agenda does involve ‘hyper-relativism and scepticism’ but in relation to the questions of agency and authority inherent to dynamic and emergent narratives. Indeed, transparency about the rules by which knowledge is constituted being Pierre Machery’s criterion of scientific acceptance, I would argue that the ultimate effect of such an approach will be to preserve the validity of that enterprise by making historical method more transparent and accessible.<sup>13</sup> By these means, the formation of historical knowledge can be rehearsed and owned by the public, in an age when digital technology is rendering ‘take it or leave it’ performances of authority, of all kinds, ever more problematic and unsustainable.

Such an approach to ‘open knowledge’ is already gaining traction in parts of the academic community where Digital Humanities have made inroads.<sup>14</sup> In the historical field, this currently applies primarily to the accessibility of data and of the design of tools of digital enquiry and analysis, rather than to the narrative construction, whose challenges involve an additional level of complexity. However, the cognitive processes involved in making history, which begin with and iterate through the formulation of questions, the marshalling of evidence, and the investigation of the patterns in that evidence, do not end there. In analogue forms, it is through their narrative expression that the version of historical truth produced by these processes becomes manifest and amenable to dialogical testing. And yet the construction of narrative is not distinct from those processes that appear to precede it. Rather, they are involved through iterations that are usually opaque to the reader and perhaps to the authors themselves.

Digital forms hold the potential for dialogical testing and negotiation across the full spectrum of those processes. The level of detail and of conceptual sophistication at which this takes place, the degree of scepticism and relativism supported and the constraints imposed may conform dynamically to the reader/user’s needs and preferences. In such a dynamic conception of narrative history, the particular subject of historical enquiry remains at the core of the text produced. Recognising that the subject contains no latent, definitive version of itself that can be rendered as narrative, an ideal system of this kind will allow a multiplicity of readers as co-constructors. This may include a reader who

pursues a strategy in their interactive ‘reading’ that evokes Robin Collingwood’s belief in a narrative discoverable through informed empathy with the past, another who interrogates the correlation of historical processes to a hypothecated selection of data and builds a narrative from their conclusions, a third who seeks a phenomenological perspective that constellates the subjectivities that can be recovered from a historical moment whilst preserving their indeterminacy.<sup>15</sup> Or indeed, a single reader who compares and relates all three, and more, swooping from the microcosm to the macrocosmic view, relating the individual to society to larger historical trends, in and across time.

Historiography is a discipline that may lead towards self-knowledge of the mind, as well as knowledge of the temporal world. This is most likely to occur, however, if the activity of history-making is undertaken with the sceptical openness and self-reflexivity of the ideal scholar. Magisterially authored historical narratives in analogue form inherently discourage such habits of mind when reading, despite the validating effect of an active hermeneutic within historical discourse. In these terms, it is the conventions of the form, primarily, which restrict and inhibit the agency of the reader, and through which the author imposes their own limitations on reading strategies. Analogue forms are less flexible than those that digital makes possible, since any formal fluidity is constrained by their material fixity, their texts amenable only to mental rather than actual manipulation. Nevertheless, fictional writing has, through its constant experimentation, consistently demonstrated the potential even of the analogue to expose and accommodate diverse hermeneutic habits in order to reveal changing perceptions of human nature and society.

Is it possible for historical narratives that embrace the spirit of literary experimentation to help recover a multiplicity of truths about the past, without losing the integrity of the historical method? What is the role of overt analysis and interpretation in such experimentation, and how can the disputative mode be integrated with the narrative? And how does the adoption of new narrative forms, such as the digital medium affords, create new possibilities for historical knowledge? *Pompeii: The Living City and The World That Never Was* remain, in most respects, within the contemporary conventions of narrative history, though with certain unusual features that lightly probe the possible

application of more experimental forms. To understand how these deviations point forward, however, it is helpful to look back to past narrative conventions in historical writing and the concepts that shaped them.

In 1967, Barthes wrote of ‘this narrative style of history, which draws its “truth” from the careful attention to narrative, the architecture of articulations and the abundance of expended elements (known, in this case, as “concrete details”).’<sup>16</sup> The model of historiography to which he referred, dominant to the exclusion of almost all others, was the century-old realist novel, which Hegel had described as ‘the epic of the middle-class world’.<sup>17</sup> Emphasising ‘mimesis with an epistemological dominant’, as described by Brian McHale, the core intent of the realist novel was closely identical with that of historical method: to offer an accurate representation of the world, in which features are emphasised only to accentuate the truthfulness of the narrative.<sup>18</sup> ‘So the circle of paradox is complete,’ Barthes had continued. ‘Narrative structure, which was originally developed within the cauldron of fiction (in myths and the first epics) becomes at once the sign and the proof of reality.’<sup>19</sup> Frank Ankersmit even catalogued the stylistic attributes of the realist novel for the purposes of historiography, concluding, ‘Time exposition is extremely well-documented and informative, and demonstrates a painful awareness of the writer’s subjectivity; a judicious rationing of facts is strived for, the mentality is skeptical; the plot is even-paced and non-dramatic; a dry and direct, transparent style is used, resulting in a “hurried” prose that has no patience with superfluous matter, and, lastly, the intentions are didactic’.<sup>20</sup>

This mode of historiographical account was not necessarily exclusive, even when Barthes wrote the *Discourse of History*. Indeed, it might be argued that the realist novel itself was constantly in flux and various enough to accommodate considerable latitude as a model for the writing of history. Nevertheless, the model of the realist novel was dominant and remains so, half a century on, despite the developments in historiographical theory that have eroded its foundations. These critiques gained purchase during the 1970s through a number of seminal works, including Paul Veyne’s *Comment on écrit l’histoire* (1971), Hayden White’s *Metahistory* (1973), and Michel de Certeau’s *L’écriture de l’histoire* (1975), which inform much of my work in representing the past. For Veyne,

history ‘remains fundamentally an account, and what is called explanation is nothing but the way in which the account is arranged in a comprehensible plot’, while White considered that what historians ‘actually wrote was less a report of what they found in their research than of what they had imagined the object of their original interest to consist of’.<sup>21</sup> That concern with historical bias would be pursued further by Jacques Rancière in *The Names of History: On the Poetics of Knowledge*, praised by White for its ‘very original attempt … to disclose “the unconscious” of historical discourse, everything that had to be repressed in order to make possible the specific kinds of historical discourse met with in our culture in our age’.<sup>22</sup>

Some of the myriad presumptions underpinning those discourses are more fundamental than others, especially concerning time. As Stefan Tanaka points out in *Pasts in a Digital Age*, modern conceptions of history did not arise until the late eighteenth century, when people began writing about the past in a linear, chronological structure, that went beyond the sequential chronicle to elaborate social causation.<sup>23</sup> Reinhart Koselleck traces this formation of the chronotope of ‘historical time’ to 1800 (a ‘watershed’ or *sattelzeit* moment in intellectual history) and its problematisation to Jean-François Lyotard’s *La condition post-modern*.<sup>24</sup> As Carlyle had written, in 1840: one ‘can observe, still more can record, only the *series* of impressions … while the things done were often *simultaneous*: the things done were not a series but a group.’<sup>25</sup> A century on, the historians of the Annales school challenged assumptions of ‘uniform time as the medium through which historical phenomena have their existence’, arguing that it ‘imposes a continuity and homogeneity on diverse phenomena’.<sup>26</sup> Other rhythms, ‘slow but perceptible’ or even appearing ‘almost changeless’, had to be set alongside and above Levi-Strauss’s ‘history of historians’, which was preoccupied with individual lives and overvalued elite agency.<sup>27</sup> These rhythms demanded a new historiography that was not located within ‘a supposedly even and objective flow of time’.<sup>28</sup>

Even these abstract conceptions of time, however, betray culturally specific expectations of chronology. For de Certeau the two are not synonymous. ‘Recast in the mold of a taxonomic ordering of things,’ he wrote, ‘chronology becomes the alibi of time, a way of making use of time without reflecting on it.’<sup>29</sup> Agricultural societies perceive time as cyclical, aligned with the rhythm of the seasons. The ritual of holy days

modulates the emotional intensity of these rhythms, as Mircea Eliade, for example, observes, although for him ‘the one is an evanescent duration, the other a “succession of eternities” … the periodical tune of the calendar flows in a closed circle’.<sup>30</sup> Émile Durkheim, however, had already suggested that the interpolation of intervals of sacred time into the continuities of profane event time arose from the need of religions to differentiate the two spheres.<sup>31</sup> Industrialised societies implemented the differentiation of time in other terms, through the strict division of work and leisure, which formalised time as a social property and one that was unevenly distributed. ‘To be master of one’s own time, to control the time of others,’ Chartier wrote, paraphrasing Pierre Bourdieu, ‘to have no control over time and thus leave it to games of chance: all are incorporated modalities of the relation to time that express the power of the dominant and the vulnerability of the dominated.’<sup>32</sup>

This industrial conception of time was enculturated through the ‘clock time’ that began to regulate social practices, while the advent of the railway timetable promoted temporal homogeneity across technological societies by the turn of the twentieth century. Clock time abstracts the human experience of the temporal, rendering it sequential, quantifiable, accountable, endlessly but meaninglessly renewable.<sup>33</sup> It is an understanding of time different in kind and purpose to an earlier ‘spatialized’ conception of time that is dependent on space and environment, of which Aron Gurevich writes that, ‘Ancient man saw past and present stretching round him, in mutual penetration and clarification of each other’.<sup>34</sup> Kevin Lynch writes of how, ‘The sense of the past, which has the original function of informing present action by experience, grows up out of the mental retention of very recent past actions, building up then to the recollection of fragmentary sequences tied together by internal associations, as well as to more playful and continuous fables, and finally to a sense of history as causally connected and temporally coordinated.’<sup>35</sup>

The methods proposed by Henri Lefebvre in *Rhythmanalysis* attempted to capture that complex experience at the most intimate level, and to codify it in terms of the interplay of the multiple rhythms of human existence, biological and contextual, in constantly shifting permutations of consonance and dissonance. Only through the analysis of this process, in a state of endless becoming, he argues, can we apprehend the human sense of ‘presence’ in time.<sup>36</sup> That apprehension is expanded by Edward Soja,

who argues for an understanding of ‘spatiality as simultaneously … a social product (or outcome) and a shaping force (or medium) in social life’.<sup>37</sup> It is at least forty years since such ideas began to permeate the social sciences and latterly the humanities. The application of GIS technologies to historical study, Ann Kelly Knowles has demonstrated, contributed to that interest and has accelerated it.<sup>38</sup> The ‘spatial turn’ in historical studies saw increased attention paid to the encoding of power relations in landscape and urban space, a new scholarly interest in real and imagined landscapes, and in the relationships between what Jo Guldi has described as ‘the microcosms of everyday life and the macrocosms of global flows’.<sup>39</sup>

In his seminal work *The Historical Novel*, György Lukacs offers a Marxist interpretation of how the realist novel evolved, in the context of a capitalist economy, into a form that, by representing ‘the concrete (i.e. historical) significance of time and place, to social conditions, and so on … created this spatio-temporal (i.e. historical) character of people and places’.<sup>40</sup> Yet Michel Foucault fundamentally reframed even the notion of an ‘event’ as something that occurs in complex, dynamic relationships of space and time.<sup>41</sup> It becomes, ‘not a decision, a treaty, a reign, or a battle, but the reversal of a relationship of forces, the usurpation of power, the appropriation of a vocabulary turned against those who had once used it, a feeble domination that poisons itself as it grows lax, the entry of a masked “other”’.<sup>42</sup> Can Lukacs’ notion of historicity still effectively determine the narrative form in which the past is to be represented, then, when the significance of time and place to social and cultural circumstances is so differently understood?

Even the superficial survey of selected revisionist theories of time and space offered in the preceding few paragraphs indicates the many mutually illuminating configurations into which these can be arranged, all the more so when treating the two principles of time and space at a wide range of scales. As Ricoeur observed, ‘at each scale one sees things that one does not see at another scale and … each vision has its own legitimate end.’<sup>43</sup> How, though, to reconcile multiple scales in narrative form? How does a historian write of a ‘reversal of a relationship of forces’ at a political level through an individual’s experience of changed contextual rhythms in their urban environment, for example, or else how might they narrate their discovery of the former in an investigation of the latter?

Is such an undertaking possible, or does it multiply the complex causation around events beyond the point of viable retrieval or narration, in the way that Furet believed that narrative became an invalid vehicle for an historical account because the temporality it represented was ‘made up of a series of discontinuities described in the mode of the continuous’?<sup>44</sup>

One answer may be suggested, at a local level, by the task of the military historian who must avoid the temptation to ‘shine too bright a light through the fog of war’, as Timothy Synder wrote in a review of Antony Beevor’s *Ardennes 1944*.<sup>45</sup> ‘Beevor,’ he wrote, ‘has the art of preserving the individual perspective on the battlefield while placing it among the perspectives of platoon, regiment, division, commanders, politicians and civilians. The pointillist whole that emerges is convincing as a portrait of war and startling in its detail.’ Might such impressionistic license be granted to non-military historians, too, who similarly seek to allow readers to ‘re-experience the social and human motives which led men to think, feel and act just as they did in historical reality,’ and evoke ‘the poetic awakening of the people who figured in those events,’ such as Lukacs argues that the historical novel should?<sup>46</sup>

Ginzburg saw this hope expressed in the ‘cognitive wager’ that the (predominantly) factual genre of ‘Italian microhistory’ offered its readers, through its ‘accentuation of the constructive moment inherent in the research … combined with an explicit rejection of the skeptical implications (postmodernist, if you will) so largely present in European and American historiography of the 1980s and early 1990s’. Its self-consciousness concerned, ‘the identification of the object and its importance; the elaboration of the categories through which it is analyzed; the criteria of proof; the stylistic and narrative forms by which the results are transmitted to the reader’.<sup>47</sup>

For Giovanni Levi, Ginzburg’s colleague in the microhistorical project, its primary purpose was ideological: to respond to the crisis of the ‘great Marxist and functionalist systems’ that shaped much historiography of the time.<sup>48</sup> Ginzburg, writing in reflective mode, recollects how the alternative, personal inspiration for the endeavour lay in the example of two very different literary innovators, one (the nouveau romancier Raymond Queneau) subverting, the other, Leo Tolstoy, extending the realist model of the novel. ‘Tolstoy’s grand and intrinsically unrealizable project,’ wrote Ginzburg, was ‘the

reconstruction of the numerous relationships that linked Napoleon's headcold before the battle of Borodino, the disposition of the troops, and the lives of all the participants in the battle, including the most humble soldier. In Tolstoy's novel the private world (peace) and the public (war) first run along parallel lines, now they intersect ...'<sup>49</sup> Ginzburg is aware that the narrative assimilation of disparate, fragmentary data was how Tolstoy 'communicate[s] to the reader the physical, palpable certainty of reality' that can only take place 'in the realm of invention' that is precluded to the historian. Yet in Ginzburg's aspiration to write comprehensive history, he is not deterred by any incompatibility of method. Rather, he seeks a form in which the 'lacunae or misrepresentations' encountered in the research process become integral to the account, accepting 'the limitations while exploring the gnoseological implications and transforming them into a narrative element'.<sup>50</sup>

To address the narrative challenges raised by the incompatibilities of Tolstoyan ambition and historiographical rectitude, Ginzburg suggests that historians seek alternatives to the certainties implicit in omniscient, authorial narration in the work of 'Marcel Proust, Virginia Woolf, and Robert Musil'.<sup>51</sup> However, it was in the historical musings of film theorist Siegfried Kracauer, posthumously published as *History: The Last Things before the Last*, that Ginzburg discovered 'the best introduction to microhistory,' expressed through the grammar of another medium entirely. For Kracauer, in Ginzburg's paraphrase, the solution was to be found in cinematic grammar: 'a constant back-and-forth between micro- and macrohistory, between close-ups and extreme long shots, so as to continually thrust back into discussion the comprehensive vision of the historical process through apparent exceptions and cases of brief duration'.<sup>52</sup>

In a recent lecture, 'Big Data, Small Data and Meaning', Tim Hitchcock surveyed the current state of activity and discussion around the notion of the Macroscope, currently a design fiction of an ideal instrument of historical investigation.<sup>53</sup> Such a tool promises, he noted, quoting Katy Börner, 'a visualisation tool that allows a single data point to be both visualised at scale in the context of a billion other data points, and drilled down to its smallest compass' that will 'let us observe what is at once too great, slow, or complex for the human eye and mind to notice and comprehend'.<sup>54</sup> This raises concerns, however, for what might be overlooked: 'the tiny fragments of everyday life – the narratives of

'everyday experience' that have been used by Bourdieu and de Certeau, among others 'to build a compelling framework illustrating the currents and sub-structures of power'; the 'closely described lives, built from fragments and details, made emotionally compelling by being woven into ever more precise fabrics of explanation.'<sup>55</sup> These are important concerns that recognise how knowledge formation is shaped by models of historiographical process that may be hard-wired into the tools of enquiry. They demand an approach to computational history that addresses the design of the systems through which these models will be deployed, considering user needs across a spectrum of scale and from a multiplicity of perspectives.

Absent even from this discussion of historical process, however, is the question of the narrative forms through which historiographical research is likely to be communicated. The language of 'building' historical understanding invokes a constructionist method that is shared with narrative historiography, while an evidential method must remain fundamental to both processes. Just as the design of the Macroscope should encompass the needs of a wide range of researchers, therefore, so too it should be defined with a view to the specifically digital forms that the narrative construction of their research might assume. Ultimately, those forms will incorporate a reproducible performance of the research methods by which the historical knowledge that they represent is constituted, and ideally this form will appeal a wide range of users. As demonstrated by the inspiration that Ginzburg found in Tolstoy, narrative innovation may illuminate new historical practice and new kinds of knowledge formation, while imposing rigorous demands on how the solutions to the challenges it raises are refined. The design of a tool for historiographical work should be a tunnel dug from both ends: investigatory method and narrative construction.

The current fascination among historians with networks and their visualisation suggests where such a tool might be beneficial. This interest echoes the contemporary experience of online communication and society, of which Foucault wrote, presciently, 'We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein'.<sup>56</sup> It also reflects the increasing availability of historical data in high volume, onto which network visualisation provides a gratifying window, representing

myriad associations that would be infinitely laborious to trace without such tools. Anyone who has been asked to appreciate a sprawling spider diagram will recognise the bewilderment that often ensues, but network analysis using visualisation techniques is becoming ever more sophisticated in identifying significance in the graph. However, such methods remain of limited efficacy in tracing and recording sequences of causation, for example, or as means to expose narrative or emplotment in the information they display.

Guidance may be suggested by pioneering literary studies that are beginning to uncover how narratological approaches could illuminate the complex networks of spatial, temporal and other forms that shape societies and their narrative representation. As well as offering a variable scale, the Macroscope must also allow relationships to be traced within and between forms. It must embrace an understanding of ‘network society’ such as that proposed by Manuel Castells, which sees the ‘space of places’ transformed into a ‘space of flows’, and in which space-time relationships turn, in Wolfgang Schmale’s words, into ‘flowing, unbounded categories’.<sup>57</sup>

In her recent book *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network*, Caroline Levine theorises how a multiplicity of forms, in different configurations and with varying affordances – interdependent, overlapping and colliding – afford a common basis for new analytical models across social and literary studies. She cites the drama series *The Wire* as a possible ‘new model for literary and cultural studies scholarship’ in that it ‘conceptualises social life as both structured and rendered radically unpredictable by large numbers of social forms, including bounded wholes, rhythms, hierarchies, and networks. Dependent on a narrative logic that traces the effects of each formal encounter on the next, it refuses to posit a deep, prior, metaphysical model of causality to explain the world. By tracking vast numbers of social patterns as they meet, reroute, and disrupt one another, *The Wire* examines the world that results from a plurality of forms at work.’<sup>58</sup> Levine also rehearses a new analysis of Dickens’s *Bleak House* that casts ‘narrative persons less as powerful and symbolic agents in their own right than as moments in which complex and invisible social forces cross’ while observing that ‘in order to represent a world of networks, the text must refuse totality’.<sup>59</sup> The webs of interconnectedness may be glimpsed and hinted at but cannot ever be more than partial.

Intellectual methods and software tools used to discover and articulate the narratives

latent in the ever more complex and ‘deeply’ interwoven networks that shape the present may also illuminate those in historical data. Consequently, the past will become redeemable with ever greater immediacy yet be ever more elusive of certainty. The ground-level subjectivities of historical experience will be tantalising close but out of reach, the sense of historicity more fragile and more intense. The challenges posed to narrative construction by the ‘lacunae and misrepresentations’ that Ginzburg identified as stemming from his Tolstoyan ambitions for historiography will assume sharper relief as data becomes more abundant. Greater ingenuity will be required to devise responsive forms into which the uncertainty and partiality of historical knowledge can be folded, that both allow for the subjectivities of historical experience and ensure narrative coherence.

When the film theorist Kracauer used the language of close-ups and long shots to evoke his ideal of a historical work that bridged the micro and macro scales, the example he had in mind was the Annaliste historian Marc Bloch’s great history of *Feudal Society*, published in 1939.<sup>60</sup> In aiming to reconstitute what has been described as “‘a total social ambiance” of complex structures of collective consciousness and action’ Bloch had nevertheless eschewed any narrative imperative in favour of the topical arrangement of case studies. In the imagination of a film theorist, cinematic language was deployed conceptually to shape a ‘fundamentally discontinuous and heterogeneous’ reality into a textual form that could be readily apprehended as narrative.<sup>61</sup> It is a helpful insight, I think, when considering the poetics of digital historiography, which suggests a need for new grammars and conventions of interactivity.

‘After the novel, and subsequently cinema, privileged narrative as the key form of cultural expression of the modern age, the computer age introduces its correlate – the database,’ the media theorist Lev Manovich claimed in his 1999 article *Database as Symbolic Form*.<sup>62</sup> He boldly asserted that the database was itself a medium immanent with potential, which ‘represents the world as a list of items’, and is in direct conflict with narrative, which merely produces ‘a cause-and-effect trajectory of seemingly unordered items (events)’. It was through the interfaces to a database that the digital text became manifest but, for Manovich, the design conventions of the time were too enslaved to the sequential conventions of cinema, ‘the dominant semiological order of the twentieth

century'. The result was a linear, linked text, stepping from one screen (or 'scripton') to the next, through links. It was, Manovich argued, referencing semiological theory, a syntagmatic form masquerading as paradigmatic: the explicit narrative statement discovered in the database was prioritised over the implicit, imagined possibility of narrative.<sup>63</sup>

In an act of media archaeology *avant la lettre*, undertaken at around the same time that I was researching the value of Eisenstein's theory of montage as a principle of 'associative' interaction, Manovich discovered in the early Russian film documentarist Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* his ideal cinematic expression of an approach that reversed the hierarchy of paradigm and syntagm. It 'traverses its database in a particular order to construct an argument. Records drawn from a database and arranged in a particular order become a picture of modern life – but simultaneously an argument about this life, an interpretation of what these images, which we encounter every day, every second, actually mean.' Its 'banal, mechanical catalog of subjects which one can expect to find' in the city of the 1920s were rendered into 'anything but a banal experience' through the 'most amazing catalog of the film techniques contained within it'. That is, the static database becomes 'dynamic and subjective' since the 'process of discovery is the film's main narrative and it is told through a catalog of discoveries being made'.<sup>64</sup>

Might such techniques be applied to historiography, or else what alternative techniques and strategies could achieve similar effects? One of the most striking attempts in recent decades at a new kind of (text-based) historiography founded on principles similar to the paradigmatic database is Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's *In 1926: Living on the Edge of Time*, published the year before Manovich's essay. Gumbrecht believed that a new 'configuration of time' was replacing the mode of 'historical thinking' that had persisted since the nineteenth century, but that our knowledge of the past remained constrained by the discredited narrative forms of historical writing. The chronotope of 'historical time', in which time was the 'absolute agent of change', was obsolete since 'the presence with its synchronicities grow[s] ever wider'. In response, Gumbrecht set out to restore an appropriate sense of 'presence' to historicity, a quality of being-in-the-world that he considered to have been lost in the humanities' focus on interpretation.<sup>65</sup>

The fascinating result was a work of fifty-one chapters arranged into three sections: ‘Arrays’ (eg. ‘Engineers’, ‘Gramophones’, ‘Ocean Liners’), ‘Codes’ (binaries such as ‘Authenticity vs Artificiality’) and ‘Codes Collapsed’ (eg. ‘Individual = Collectivity (Leader)'). ‘Each entry,’ Gumbrecht explained, ‘is supposed to reach maximum surface-focus and concreteness … the style and the structure of the entries … determined by the individual phenomena that each of them thematizes.’<sup>66</sup> The reader is invited to begin anywhere, follow cross-references, and end anywhere. It is an ingenious work of analogue hypertext and, to my mind, remarkably successful in its aims: its ‘scriptons’ offer a model of composing multivalent knowledge, their individual meanings variously amplified by whichever the reader arrives at next, the whole producing a sense of historical immersion.<sup>67</sup> However, Gumbrecht admits in the accompanying ‘User’s Guide’ that its synchronic and hypertextual form eschews not only unilinearity but coherence and, with it, closure. In this, arising from its lack of emplotment, *1926* is an historiographical anti-narrative of the sort that White states, with reference to modernist texts, ‘would be in Ricoeur’s estimation a contradiction in terms’.<sup>68</sup>

My reading of Ricoeur’s *Time and Narrative* had both influenced my aspirations as a writer of historiographical metafiction and my subsequent dissatisfaction with hypertext, and determination to develop other principles of digital narrative. From the perspective of historiographical practice, rather than fictional experimentation, Ricoeur’s ideas similarly suggest the need for a poetics of digital history that ensures that certain narrative criteria are met as a fundamental requirement of its validity. Temporality is, for Ricoeur, ‘the structure of existence that reaches language in narrativity’, while narrativity is ‘the language structure that has temporality as its ultimate referent’.<sup>69</sup> It is, therefore, through narrative and emplotment that historical events find their equivalent structure and can become part of the general discourse. As White explains: ‘By emplotment, a sequence of events is “configured” (“grasped together”) in such a way as to represent “symbolically” what would otherwise be unutterable in language, namely, the ineluctable “aporetic” nature of the human experience of time.’<sup>70</sup>

It had been a principle of my earlier work with digital media that computational systems invested with ‘authorial expertise’ could shape the dynamic construction of narrative traces through data space in a manner that ensured an experience of both

coherence and closure: two key elements of a satisfying story. In these terms, the interactive medium therefore holds the potential to both preserve that correspondence between emplotment and the deep structures of temporality, as Ricoeur understands it, and, simultaneously, expose for negotiation that aporia: the doubt and uncertainty about the status of the correspondence, and whether the preferred narrative is the most truthful historical account. As a rhetorical device, implicit in Ricoeur's use of the term, aporia implies an appeal to an audience for confirmation or reassurance. In the case of an interactive medium, user and system become one another's audience, engaged in a dialogic process whose aim is to constellate the elements of the narrative – including, in Levine's terms, the multiple forms that underlie it – into the preferred narrative arrangement, while simultaneously recognising the possibility of alternatives. The static narrative text becomes one in process. The process is playful and ironic, since it requires the reader or user to hold in mind more than one idea or possible world, which may be contradictory and are certainly ambiguous.

In this process, theories of the 'storyworld', the 'chronotope' and of 'possible worlds' on which I drew in my earlier work with fictional narratives in analogue and digital form (see Appendix, pp.64, 65, 66), seem to me highly pertinent. Ludomir Dolozel has addressed the application of possible worlds theory, writing that, 'Historical texts, constrained by the requirement of truth-valuation, construct historical worlds which are models of the actual world's past. One and the same historical event or sequence of events (historical period, life, and so on) can be modelled by various historical worlds. In a critical testing, these worlds are assessed as more or less adequate to the actual past'.<sup>71</sup> Two 'semantically unhomogeneous' worlds (Dolozel's words) can, Joaquín Lorente explains, 'be postulated to explain the different opinions and reactions of two individuals concerning the same section of the action'.<sup>72</sup> These 'transuniverse relations', Ryan writes, 'serve as a theoretical backdrop to explain the different ways in which a reader detects and makes sense of narrative unreliability'.<sup>73</sup>

Each of these historical worlds, comprising distinct but overlapping and cognate 'ontological landscapes', has as its ultimate referent the temporality of the 'actual world's past'.<sup>74</sup> The perceived identity of the two, or the discrepancy between them, allows the reader to assess the reliability of a narrative account. However, as a strategy to establish

that identity, the narrated path through the storyworld (as hypothetically complete ontological model) may encompass multiple possible worlds. This equates to the heteroglossic method which Bakhtin defines as ‘another’s speech in another’s language, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way’ and in which, for him, the power of the novel originates and resides.<sup>75</sup> However, a work of narrative history – unable, for example, to ventriloquise imagined characters – is constrained in the means and material available to express this heteroglossia, and has an obligation to be cautious and transparent in its handling of them. The chronotopic organisation of time and space (and their subsidiary elements and affordances) and the management of transitions between chronotopes in the historical narrative afford, I would argue, the most powerful and versatile mechanism to achieve a multi-perspectival narrative.

Karl Schlögel’s *Moscow 1937*, published in German at around the same time as *The World That Never Was*, is an extraordinary history of an extraordinary moment, one that was variously characterised by contemporaries as ‘the whirlpool of history’, ‘the maelstrom’, ‘the Witches’ Sabbath’, ‘the machinery of terror’.<sup>76</sup> It was a year, he writes, in which ‘no one can say exactly where reality ceases and the imagination begins’. In the Introduction, Schlögel articulates his aspirations for the book, the tensions between them, and the limitations of what the linear analogue form available to him can contain. ‘A history that is tied to a particular time or space implicitly acknowledges the synchronicity of the non-synchronous, the coexistence and co-presence of the disparate. The location guarantees complexity. The stereoscope all-round view is designed to bring events together; it is better suited to the disparate nature of the world than is a strenuous, concentrated tunnel vision. ... An all-round view sensitive to time and space sets relationships in motion that are paralysed by a more concentrated method which focuses on particular points.’<sup>77</sup>

A comprehensive poetics of digital narrative history would allow, through a dialogic and constructionist process, an order to be imposed on that stereoscopic maelstrom that, at the same, contains its own provisionality, memorialising Ginzburg’s conjectural paradigm of historical method by which clues and traces are followed towards a production of knowledge that is ‘indirect, presumptive, conjectural’.<sup>78</sup> It would embrace a performative understanding of history-making, if only performed for an audience of one.

This recalls the ‘performative turn’ for which Paul has argued, that focuses on the process of what historians do as opposed to the finished product.<sup>79</sup> Its mode and register would be variable. At one extreme it would approximate Chartier’s scholarly ‘theatre of erudition’ which ‘does not guarantee the possibility that history can produce adequate knowledge of the past’, but in which, according to Norman Klein, ‘scholarly evidence operates as special effects’ and where ‘the honest scholar should try to keep those fictional tracks right on the surface’.<sup>80</sup> At the other, fictional license would allow speculation to bleed out, beyond the lacunae that micro historians would legitimately allow it to fill.

Counterfactual interpretations could be rehearsed on a stage on which evidential actors jostled, each item of evidence equipped, like an improvisational actor, with semantic self-awareness, knowledge of its past roles, and a loose scenario for how it might figure in the currently emerging narrative.

In the analogue work of narrative history, in which the performance is fixed and scripted, similar strategies may still be useful but they require delicate sequencing and nuanced signalling. Eco likens reading to one’s passage through a wooded landscape, in which the ‘first-level’ Model Reader will attend only to the natural chronology of events, the story or fabula, in a headlong and credulous rush, while the ‘second-level’ Model Reader will focus on the plot and narrative chronology, ‘and enjoy time spent in the textual forest’.<sup>81</sup> Where questions of reliability and uncertainty, of the contingent and provisional, are allowed to enter the historiographical narrative, the reader must become attuned to this. She must be encouraged to adopt the consciousness of Eco’s ‘second-level’ model reader.

This tuning of the reader may be achieved by various means, including some borrowed from postmodern fiction. Irony, ambiguity, ostensible tensions between fact and fiction, and narratorial unreliability can all be deployed, with Stephan Jaeger asserting the benefit of the latter in ‘exposing the performative process of making history and its infinite and incomplete nature’. Deft management of the chronotopes in the text, too, might serve this additional purpose: the genres that they constitute may be juxtaposed or blurred, encoding a signal of narrative instability for decipherment by the attentive reader. Such an effect is inherent, for example, in the genre of the fantastic, whose author, according to Edmund Little, breaches the contract with the reader by

creating what he terms a Tertiary World, whose relationship to the actual world is less certain than that of the Secondary Worlds that all creative writers describe.<sup>82</sup> The effect produced is, for Amaryll Chanady, one of antinomy, the simultaneous presence of two conflicting codes in the text.<sup>83</sup> For Todorov, it is ‘hesitation’ on the part of the reader, as they waver momentarily between a preternatural or ‘marvellous’ explanation of narrative events.<sup>84</sup>

That hesitation, that instant of scepticism, is fundamental to the responsible practice of narrative historiography, and essential to introduce where the limits of evidential reliability are transgressed, for example when the subjectivities of the past are recounted, and the reader is invited to adopt greater agency in discerning the historical truth. Take this sentence: *The axe fell on the block and the king’s head tumbled, in the forest at full moon.* The time and place, while possible in a non-fictional world, are more appropriate to fairytale than political history. The chronotope and the genre implied immediately puts the reader of an ostensibly historical narrative on their guard.

### **3. THE BOOKS: COMPOSITIONAL AND READING STRATEGIES**

In this concluding section, I shall consider how *Pompeii: The Living City* and *The World That Never Was [TWTNW]* manifest certain of the key principles that I have proposed for a possible poetics of digital historiography. These fall into three main categories: chronotopic construction; narrative, analysis and fictionality; signalling unreliability. The specific application of the principles varies between the two books, and the categories are not discrete: an approach adopted in one category can impact another. For example, the management of chronotopic organisation in *Pompeii* maintains an explicit distinction between fictional narrative and analysis, while in *TWTNW* I aimed to integrate the two, defining a narrative mode in which analysis was implicit. This distinction, in turn, required different strategies of signalling the status and reliability of the accounts presented.

The critical assessment of reader response is apposite in the case of two books that set out to effect slight but significant shifts in the expectations of readers regarding authoritative historical narrative. Based on my quite comprehensive survey of the published reader response to the books, printed and online, the reviews for both books were predominantly approving, approximately a ratio of 7:3, positive to negative. They were, though, also polarised, with many tending towards extremes of opinion. I have interpreted this polarisation of response as reflecting the individual reader's acceptance or rejection of the books' innovations in the three categories I am assessing. The reviews in question usefully elucidate how successfully I managed to signal to the reader that she should adopt particular sceptical and critical reading strategies, even though the reviewers rarely articulate their criticism explicitly in these terms.

#### **1) Chronotopic Construction**

The textual structure of *Pompeii* rests on a foundational 'thick' mapping of the town's networks and infrastructural systems, as they can be deciphered from the archaeology of the Pompeian ruins and the prosopographical evidence they contain. From this I

compiled a multi-layered graph that cross-referenced place, time, person, object and event with the networks that organised them within a functioning society. The method approximates that recently described by Todd Presner in *Hypercities*, addressing ‘the multiplicity, heterogeneity, and ambiguity of the cultural record of places’ in order to accommodate ‘an employment of many narratives and voices at once’.<sup>1</sup> Presner references anthropologist Clifford Geertz’s notion of ‘thick description’ as connoting ‘a kind of cultural analysis trained on the ... stratificatory and contextual realities in which human beings act and create’, which combines ‘micro and macro analyses’.<sup>2</sup>

To make the complexity of this ‘mapping’ intelligible to the reader, I devised a narrative framework for *Pompeii* that correlated and harmonised multiple temporalities. Chapters alternated local Pompeian history and wider imperial Roman history, the former designated by Arabic numerals, the latter by Roman. The ‘local’ chapters were assigned (along with their Arabic numerals) titles whose opaque allusion to the chapter’s theme created a tension that opened space for interpretation. Each of these chapters described a single, dated month set within the sequence of the ‘imperial’, Roman-numbered chapters, with a porosity of event between the two. The overall arrangement of the chapters followed a linear chronology, but within both chapter types the background to the people, events and places to which they referred could be explored.

*Pompeii* was an agrarian, trading society, with religious and ritual practices that integrated widely varied traditions; ‘fasti’, or days when public activity was sanctioned, were mixed with ‘nefasti’. Structuralist analysis tells us that each society produces its own temporality, with cross-rhythms that resist a purely chronological presentation.<sup>3</sup> To evoke the alien particularity of the storyworld, and render it empathetically knowable, but preserve its historicity, these ritual and cyclical rhythms needed to be integral to the narrative. Each ‘local’ chapter was, therefore, shaped around recurring events of the given month and its season – farming, trading, civic, ritual, etc – as well as the singular chronicle events with which they coincided.

The central theme and the associated events of the particular month in each chapter determined, in turn, the social functions that particular individuals might perform within it: candidature for magisterial election, for example, or celebration of an ancestor feast, or the manufacture of perfume for sale at gladiatorial games. These instantiations of roles

were variously fixed in time, set within parameters, or sequentially relational. For example: an imperial visitor in a particular year; an *aedile* whose age meant that his dates of election to office must fall within certain years; records known from layered, palimpsestic graffiti, that must follow the order in which the graffiti was painted.

*Pompeii*'s chapters were intended to individually foreground each calendar month but it became necessary to repeat a month (March): chapters two and four originally comprised a single chapter, with March both the month of elections and the earliest date in the season when a merchant ship could arrive safely from Egypt, but this single chapter was split before the writing process began. Individuals and their patronage networks were tied to a particular election year but a 'trade' chapter was needed earlier to establish Pompeii as a port and mercantile economy.

Constructing a text that integrates multiple, integrating strands of narrative across different scales of historical enquiry requires the meticulous planning of when information is seeded and elaborated. The reader must accumulate knowledge in order to understand new ideas when they are introduced, without that process becoming congested. An understanding of the structures of trade between Pompeii, its hinterland, the East and Rome, for example, is gradually developed over multiple chapters.

Similarly, the institutions of social control are explained in Chapter 5, allowing the premonitory note at the end of the subsequent 'imperial' Chapter V concerning Neronian decadence, that 'it would not have taken much for the rules that had shaped society for centuries to come tumbling down'.

Whereas in *Pompeii* I had prioritised time and event as the anchors for the chronotopic construction of narrative, in *TWTNW* the greater richness of the historical record allowed an organisation of the material that placed emphasis on place and character. The narrative that I discerned and chose to represent was biographically focused, but interpreted the individual in relation to their role within the diasporic networks of revolutionary ideology and activism. These networks had a near global reach but became more or less concentrated at particular moments across time.

The processes of contraction and dilation were both geographical and intellectual, each mapping variably onto the other, and often expressed through events: revolutions,

congresses, imprisonment, terrorist conspiracies. Often they centred on key locations: Paris, St Petersburg, London, Geneva and the Jura, to a lesser extent Chicago, Moscow, Belgium. Individuals were the primary vectors that carried ideas and the capacity for activating local network development, and so catalysed moments of change or reversal. However, their mobilities could be augmented or surrogated through the technologies of transport and communication – railways and telephony – rendering space and time elastic.<sup>4</sup>

Almost inevitably, points of concentration in the activities of the revolutionary world were mirrored by the attention of the secret police of different countries, who surveilled them but also became entangled with them as a result of infiltration and provocation. Certain zones of different networks elided through the agency of ‘bridge’ figures in ways that were often difficult to discern clearly, and my exploration of these liminal areas of exchange generated another structural layer within the narrative. I had, as Peter Preston remarked in his review, ‘to put the terror of decades into a frame of understanding that even those in the thick of it couldn’t always discern’.<sup>5</sup>

The lineaments of the ‘actual’ world were obscured even for participants by the miasma of ‘possible worlds’ that abounded, whose promulgation as alternative, achievable or threatening realities was an important objective of the diverse protagonists. Sustaining these ‘possible worlds’ were the twin drivers of revolutionary socialist teleology and its mirror image in conspiracy theories. However, while both imaginaries were directed towards a final moment – of catastrophe and/or utopia – my concern was to understand the role of contingent factors in the lives, relationships and communities that generated them.

My authorial intention can be described by reference to Bart Keunen’s theory of the ‘dialogic chronotope’, which describes a narrative that is ‘not directed towards a final moment, to a “telos”, but rather consists of a network of conflicting situations and junctions that communicate with one another’.<sup>6</sup> He proposes three sub-categories, the tragic, comic and tragicomic, in which, respectively: ‘conflict characters’ or ‘balanced characters’ dominate, or where there are no dominating characters. *TWTNW* seeks to disrupt the readers’ sense of both historical and narrative stability through frequent shifts between these and other subsidiary chronotopes, including that of the ‘fantastic’, within

the broader framework of the chapters.

Each chapter is roughly sequential but chronologically overlapping, constructed around one or two key characters, whose individual story advances that of the diaspora more widely. It reflects their experience at that moment in the development of ideas and influences: ‘waxing, waning, splitting constantly, spread around the globe for decades’.<sup>7</sup> Through their movement and activities, these characters frequently configure new perspectives on familiar aspects of the storyworld, allowing the narrative to shift scale. The chapters may also serve thematic ends, as for example with the excursions into stories of marginal, self-sustaining experiments in communal living.

Lucy Hughes-Hallett understood that, ‘In a condition of anarchy there are no leaders. Butterworth, accordingly, has no single hero’.<sup>8</sup> However, US readers in particular were divided about the effectiveness of the approach: ‘Bozo McGinty’ was not alone in finding it ‘a rambling mess’; on the other hand, ‘Clary’ was representative too in commending how the book takes an ‘immensely complicated subject and traces it across the world and through scores of actors to tell a story that is as entertaining as it is informative’.<sup>9</sup> However, in seeking to capture the subjectivities and contingencies of what Preston called ‘one of history’s great cul de sacs’, it seemed appropriate to me to use a mode that incorporated diverse elements, including the shaggy dog story and the picaresque.<sup>10</sup>

## 2) Narrative, Analysis and Fictionality

To render the microhistory of Pompeian society accessible as narrative, the analytical synthesis of evidence was be focalised through human experience. The drama-documentary *The Private Lives of Pompeii* had stretched the conventions of the format by including fifteen fictionalised scenes that sketched a drama of interwoven Pompeian lives.<sup>11</sup> The book took the approach further, establishing a coherent fictional storyworld over a larger canvas and across two generations. This storyworld was glimpsed through vignettes, three in each chapter, whose fictional status was distinguished by the italicisation of the text. These evoked moments of imagined history grounded in well-researched evidence, providing the reader with recognisable human points of identification. I used fictional strategies, such as suspense and access to the interior world

of the characters, to generate narrative momentum and empathy.

This entailed the additional structural consideration of character development, requiring information to be seeded about named individuals. The mechanisms for this spanned the italicised vignettes and the non-italicised analytical sections. The relationship between the imagined focalisation and the factual analysis was complex: the latter pivoted on the vignettes, establishing and critiquing the evidence on which they were based and tacitly prompting the reader to question the relationship of the analysis to the fiction.

While Mary Beard mocked the possibility of this kind of concatenated deductive reconstruction ('you don't need to know much about archaeology to realise that a signet ring lost behind a cupboard need not necessarily belong to the house's owner'), other classicists and historians appreciated the method.<sup>12</sup> Peter Jones noted how 'the authors carve out their path, intercutting historical developments with topics and snapshots to cast light on a vast range of subjects.' Jeremy Paterson appreciated how 'the lives of individual Pompeians are reconstructed from inscriptions, graffiti, memorials, houses and decoration, and the clutter of everyday living that they left behind them.'<sup>13</sup>

I would frame the relationship between the two distinct textures of each 'local' chapter in chronotopic terms: that notion of time-space relationships that curdle into tangible genres of narrative.<sup>14</sup> In the overtly fictional vignettes, time and space crystallise briefly, incarnating specific figures that otherwise exist only as speculatively assembled 'point clouds' of fragmentary data.<sup>15</sup> By contrast, the non-italicised sections hold in suspension the specific configurations of time and space that define event. Intermittently the constituents of this chronotope thicken too with the disputative text to reveal generic events that offer exemplary insights into the world, before rapidly deliquescing.

The narrative development through character occurs primarily in the moments of incarnation that take place in the vignettes, but also through the analytical assessment of the data from which these moments are constructed. For example, Aulus Pumpinius Magonianus first appears incidentally in a Chapter 7 vignette, and is then foregrounded in a Chapter 8 vignette. However, he is more fully realised in the non-italicised, discursive sections of that chapter where the reader is: told of his home's proximity to the temple of Aesculapius, the healer deity; shown the medical instruments found there and the plaster

casts of the roots of medicinal herbs from his garden; and given a survey of the medical history that relates to them.<sup>16</sup>

Chapter 12, set in 75 CE, is the last to follow the established pattern of vignettes and analysis. Several years after the upheaval of the earthquake and the civil war, the city is seen settling into a new order: the chapter concludes with a vignette in which an official observes the last moments of a gladiatorial combat. In Chapter XII, as the book's conclusion approaches, the conventions break down. The 'imperial' chapter here comprises only two pages of inscriptions and programmata from the walls of Pompeii: the fragmentary voices by which its inhabitants would speak to the future.

Chapter 13 dispenses with vignettes. Fact and fiction finally collapse into one another, the reader confronting the pathos and terror of the Vesuvian eruption. Characters who the reader has come to know are presented, in their last non-italicised moments, unencumbered with conditionality about their factual status, before resolving into the skeletal remains on which they have been based. 'It is the great achievement of this book that we feel we know these people, and their tragedy moves us,' wrote Jane Stevenson, while Alan Quinlan felt that the use of the vignettes contributed to a reading experience that was 'visceral ... graphic, ambitious and compelling'.<sup>17</sup>

Reviewing *TWTNW*, John Gray qualified his enthusiasm by noting that, 'Butterworth has opted to present the anarchists in a mode that emphasizes narrative over analysis ... One cannot help wishing there were more extended analysis, however, for when Butterworth does offer broader observations, they are exceptionally astute.'<sup>18</sup> Other reviews too, though by no means all, regretted a lack of 'analysis' and of 'intellectual context'.<sup>19</sup>

A number of considerations influenced my decision to adopt this approach, both intrinsic and extrinsic to the historical material with which I had chosen to work. I had a strong desire, as an author, to explore the possibilities of writing a narrative history that was novelistic in its capacity to evoke individual experience and contingency, while relating ideas and behaviour across different scales of observed society. This derived, in part, from the interesting possibilities for narrative innovation suggested by my digital work, but also from a sense that *Pompeii* had been compromised by the self-imposed strictures of a formal distinction between narrative and analysis.

I felt that to embrace a more analytical or disputative mode risked either imposing too definitive an authorial interpretation on a subject that was naturally nebulous – the quest for a perfect world, and the fears this provoked – or else amplifying the uncertainties and ambiguities that characterised the historical record to the point where narrative coherence broke down. Preston thought it ‘no wonder ... that historians haven’t lingered too long over some of the stars of this dotty saga’.<sup>20</sup> The reductive or indulgent accounts of the subject that have often shaped popular understanding seemed to derive precisely from a complacency in finding forms that could address that paradox.

My solution, although imperfect, demonstrated an alternative approach, in which a prismatic, even kaleidoscopic account of the period aimed to produce unexpected consonances, juxtapositions and counterpoints that revealed potential tensions and ironies in a conventional reading of the narratives. The slippage between ‘possible worlds’ and chronotopes, the subtle sliding of genre, the interplay of forms (in Levine’s terms) and shifting of scales would, I hoped, prompt a heightened creative and critical agency on the part of the reader: Ricoeur’s ‘aporia’.<sup>21</sup>

The response of readers leads me to think that, while this was highly effective for some, for others it was not at all. As with *Pompeii*, this balance of response was broadly satisfactory, except that I suspect that the book did not change minds, but instead confirmed established inclinations to open or closed patterns of thought. Unfortunately, I received no response from Karl Rove to my email asking for his response to the book, which he had included on his ‘summer reading’ list in 2010.<sup>22</sup>

The one opinion that I found chastening was that offered by Sheila Rowbotham. ‘What drove the dreamers to risk their lives for a better world that they no longer would experience?’ she asked, identifying shortcomings of which I was half-aware.<sup>23</sup> While I had been striving to maintain the narrative structure and momentum of ‘an exhilarating gallop’ (Francis Wheen) across a ‘bewildering, almost panoramic canvas where devotees and the damned intermingle’ (Preston), the context of suffering and injustice had diminished in view as the book progressed.<sup>24</sup> This is, in retrospect, a significant weakness in a book that, in other ways, tries to glimpse the mental world of its subjects.

### 3) Signalling Unreliability

The critical discourse around *Pompeii* centred on the value and legitimacy of the approach taken to fictionalising the past, the factual accuracy of its discursive account, and the handling of the distinction between the two. Paterson saw that ‘it takes a real act of imagination to recreate the life that once filled the city’s streets’ and to present ‘an almost Dickensian parade of diverse humanity’, while Bettany Hughes thought that we had ‘met head on the problem of a sensational, real story whose historical evidence is fragmentary. Rather than falling into the trap of alighting on colourful secondary sources and regurgitating them as historical fact, separate sections are driven by creative prose and by archaeology respectively.’<sup>25</sup>

Roger Ling, though, suggested that the book belonged ‘to a new category, half fiction, half “faction”’, intending faint praise, at best. Meanwhile Beard suggested that ‘if any reader is lulled … into thinking that there is much real history in this book, they should beware’. Peter Wiseman contrasted our ‘rash conjectures’ to the ‘sober, judicious … genuinely authoritative’ work of Ling.<sup>26</sup> Might the typographical assertion of an absolute distinction (italic/non-italic) between registers while these registers are, at the same time, intentionally blurred be especially disquieting for scholars whose professional work cannot cross that line?

A review in *The Journal of Classics Teaching* wrestled with the question from a pedagogical perspective, was excited that the work ‘marries historical imagination and fiction in a daring and inventive way’ but concerned for the bad habits that students might learn if exposed to its ‘embellish[ment of] the facts with fictional passages’ while pretending to ‘objective truth’.<sup>27</sup> By contrast, Paterson remarked that our ‘scrupulous highlighting’ of the distinction is a ‘slightly spurious and unnecessary practice’, since ‘the whole book is an example of the disciplined use of imagination, which all historians worth their salt have to employ all the time’.<sup>28</sup>

Whilst *Pompeii* relied substantially on the management of the different textures of writing to signal degrees of evidential reliability, to encourage imaginative and critical

agency, other strategies too were used. In *TWTNW*, where the text appeared unitary and consistent, similar and additional strategies were more fundamental in realising these aims. One of these was the use of analepsis.

The manipulation of chronology in narrative is a common feature of modernist fiction and, in postmodernist form, or ‘historiographical metafiction’, in which, as McHale explains, there is a shift from epistemological questions of ‘How am I to understand the world?’ to the ontological question of ‘Which world is this? What is to be done in it?’<sup>29</sup> However, such manipulation is unusual in factual historical narratives. Although little remarked on by reviewers, both *Pompeii* and *TWTNW* manipulate linear chronology in both subtle and overt ways. Take, for example, their analeptic prologues where they predict events that will fall later in the main narrative, or beyond its frame, boldly signalling the need for reading strategies that acknowledge the unconventionality of their narratives.

The *Pompeii* Prologue precedes the Introduction, presenting the reader with an italicised vignette. Written in a self-conscious and unrestrained mode of historical fiction – ‘he had travelled far’, ‘the land that thirsts’, ‘without cease’ – it narrates a moment of exotic orientalism. A Roman Prefect sits beneath the mysterious ‘singing statue’ of Memnon at dawn, recollecting the Pompeii he once visited, as the volcanic dust from the Vesuvian eruption falls in desert. The Prologue ends by leaving a question hanging: ‘Could anyone from Pompeii possibly have survived?’<sup>30</sup>

Unlike subsequent vignettes, the italicised Prologue is isolated from explanation, analysis or provenance. Only at some future point, after the reader has developed an emotional engagement with the characters, will the Prefect’s question finally be answered. The interim, between the book’s opening and closing pages, is framed by the literary artifice of a rhetorical manipulation of time: what Bal terms an ‘embedded’ or ‘hypo narrative’.<sup>31</sup> The intended effect is a fundamental destabilisation of the authority of the narrating voice expected in conventional historical writing.

The effect is compounded by the Introduction, which throws the reader forward seventeen centuries to the first excavation of the buried city, before exploring the process by which the city has been recovered, and the challenges presented by the material record, as well as outlining the intention of the book and its method, offering both explicit and

implicit caveats. Only on the last page of the Introduction do we return to Egypt, to discover that the Prefect's visit to Memnon shortly after the destruction of Pompeii is not only factually verifiable but, improbably, is literally written in stone: the Prefect had, like many visitors, carved his name in the base of the statue.<sup>32</sup>

To reinforce the earlier monitory temporal destabilisation, the first 'local' chapter opens with an ending, a death that marks the chronological start of the narrative; the following 'imperial chapter' offers a further temporal jolt, first rewinding two millennia, then fast-forwarding back to the 'present' of 54 CE, from which point the temporal scheme settles into a more regular modulation.

*TWTNW* also makes use of analepsis. The opening chapter analeptically foregrounds the meeting, in Paris in 1908, at which Evno Azef, the anarchist mastermind, is exposed as a double agent and *provocateur*. Later in the book, in its correct chronological position, this will be the moment when the many tangled narratives converge. 'When they imagined they were mounting a challenge to state power,' Gray writes in his review, 'the anarchists were wandering in a hall of mirrors.'<sup>33</sup> In fathoming Azef, an undeniable avatar of terroristic violence, the more thoughtful leaders of the movement, who have invested their hope in his promises, are forced to confront their own reflection.

The opening chapter concludes with the focus on Kropotkin who, prompted by the disorientating revelations about Azef, recollects his friend Elisée Reclus. Through a double narrative sleight of hand (using the fictional device of free indirect discourse), the reader is taken back half a century to the beginning of the story in 1870, and Reclus' point of view of Paris under siege.<sup>34</sup> 'Had his cerebral, reticent old friend really been one of those fearless men who floated aloft in balloons, braving the Prussian sharpshooters?' Kropotkin muses. 'It mattered so much from where you saw things, and what you wanted to see. For fiction could so easily be confused with truth, and truth relegated to the realm of fiction.'<sup>35</sup> It is an explicit statement of the book's philosophy, articulated as the insight of one its main protagonists, and as such is itself a clue to other strategies that the book will adopt to achieve its objectives.

This opening chapter establishes Paris as a space that exists across time, the fulcrum of anarchist ambitions since the Commune of 1871, memories of which lie suppressed beneath the glittering but unstable ground of the Belle Époque. It also identifies a number

of key individuals who the reader will next encounter in their earlier youth then follow through life, and maps the relationships that will develop between them. Like *Pompeii*, though, it leaves hanging at its end a crucial question. In this case: just how did thwarted plans render hope into something so tenuous that it was close to despair?

The opening Azef chapter is followed, immediately, by two other chapters located in Paris and set during the siege and Commune: the events that Kropotkin has been pondering. The movement in time and space, the shift in their chronotopic configuration between chapters, is mediated by the implied interiority of an individual historical figure. It is a principle of narrative focalisation through the subjectivities of character that these two chapters will elaborate, most notably with the aim of further highlighting themes of perspective, communication and the imaginary, and the risk of their subversion and manipulation.

Considered in the light of Bakhtinian theory, on which I drew more or less consciously throughout the planning and writing of *TWTNW*, the book's narrative may be thought of as structured around a series of actual, imagined or projected chronotopic crises. Both the siege of Paris in 1870 and the Commune of early 1871 conform to this notion through their spatial inversions: power surrounding, in the form of a besieging army, rather than within; the dispossessed poor of the urban margins reoccupying the elite spaces of the centre in a moment that was both revolutionary and carnivalesque.<sup>36</sup>

The Commune is, too, the origin of multiple spatio-temporal crises, at varied scale, individual and collective, that will haunt the following decades. These are experienced most frequently in the lives of people deracinated through exile, flight or imprisonment, obliged to reformulate the chronotopes of their everyday existence, but also in terms of the lost heterotopia of the Commune that they aspire to recover.<sup>37</sup> The explosive rupture of time and space through the 'propaganda by deed' of terroristic bombs appears to offer the means to achieve the overthrow of institutions to which anarchism aspires.

One of the most crucial moments of chronotopic crisis in the book (and the one at the origins of its conception) is the attempted bombing in 1894 of the Greenwich Meridian, the space from where time is controlled, at a moment when the control of working time is a point of intense political contention.<sup>38</sup> That failed act of violence, examined in the

context of others that were near contemporaneous, appears likely to have been a consequence of dissimulation, as was its reception: a misreading of signal and noise, a failure to separate the actual from the fictional.

It is a recurrent theme, first established through the metaphorical account of signal stations, balloonists and ‘sympathetic snails’ by which those besieged in Paris sought to communicate with those outside the city in 1870. Through the use of cinematic effect, of rapid cuts and crash-zooms that Kracauer might have appreciated, my account of those events itself seeks to prime the reader to the book's frequent shifts in perspective and scale, eliding the personal, microcosmic and macrocosmic.<sup>39</sup>

*Pompeii* too had been structured around a focal moment of chronotopic crisis, one that is more literal than that of envisaged anarchist catastrophe, and whose spatial disruption is more persistent than that wrought by the Commune. The devastating earthquake probably struck in 62 CE (possibly a year later) but its precise moment in ritual time and space is inscribed on an altar frieze that depicts toppling temples and alarmed sacrificial animals: the festival of Augustus on 5<sup>th</sup> February. Chapter 7 concentrates the fractured experience of these events in time and space through two vignettes, separated by little more than a page.

The earthquake devastated the city. Recent archaeological surveys have revealed the extent of its effects by tracing rebuilding, change of building use and ownership, or abandonment. The years of recovery coincided with wider social turbulence, during the latter years of Nero's reign, when personal cults of the emperor and nepotism disrupted the social order. There was then a year of civil war and the seizure of the imperial throne by the Flavian dynasty.

My diachronic modelling of the Pompeian storyworld, from which the fictionalized narrative was derived, included the hypothesis that the earthquake weakened the traditional power structures in the city and amplified the potential for social fluidity in its aftermath. The functions of civic buildings were radically altered; prestige properties, markers of wealth and influence, changed hands between the magisterial and freedman classes; damaged infrastructure reshaped the urban topography.

During this prolonged chronotopic crisis, the established order of space-time relationships became friable, both physically and narratively. The impact of the

earthquake was reflected in the responses to it of the characters, the changes in their fortunes and relationships observed in the vignettes.

The question of the authenticity or reliability of the text in *Pompeii* became most contentious as a result of my decision that the relationship between speculation and analysis, encoded in the different textures of the chapters, should itself evolve over the course of the book, with the chronotopic crisis of the earthquake as a point of transformation.

Outright speculation in the vignettes had begun to bleed into the discursive sections from early on, establishing useful talking points for analysis, as with the stated assumptions about the modesty of Julius Polybius's house already in Chapter 3: 'Polybius himself was content to project a more steady and civic-minded persona', which occurs in non-italicised text, based on the historical figure's discernible profile.<sup>40</sup> Within the scheme established within the book, I believe that this was legitimate and effective for some readers in deepening critical imaginative engagement.

By the book's mid-point, I was confident that readers would have internalised the book's principle of speculative construction, and they would have been transformed into Eco's ideal 'second level' model reader, critically attuned to the textual forest that they were navigating.<sup>41</sup> Following the earthquake chapter, I therefore allowed the authorial voice to become less tentative, and the distinction drawn between modes of narrative more porous. The syntax of the text consciously shifted too, with less conditionality, more assertion.

However, in describing a possible visit to the city by Nero, I failed to find the appropriate strategy for presenting this element of the narrative as intriguing conjecture rather than established fact.<sup>42</sup> Invested as I was in the speculative logic of the storyworld, persuaded by certain recent discoveries of circumstantial evidence, eager for a scenario that would allow the exploration of certain thematic issues, I surmised a high probability that such a visit occurred. I justified this incaution to myself on the basis that the *damnatio memoriae* pronounced on Nero after his fall, which saw the official erasure of any record of his rule, would have removed the evidence.

This decision offered a hostage to fortune. Despite lambasting the book for its

credulity of the imperial historical sources, Beard saw further error in this deviation from their record.<sup>43</sup> Her review, the first published, appeared a point of reference for later reviewers, such as Ben Jarman who wrote, ‘The problem is, according to some historians, that there is no firm evidence that Nero ever visited Pompeii’.<sup>44</sup> Others seemed to see the Beard review as requiring redress, with Jones explaining how the postulated visit enabled the book to interrogate the configurations of behaviour that it would have engendered.<sup>45</sup>

Jones wrote of Ray Laurence and my speculation regarding the feast that may have been staged for Nero, had he visited Pompeii: ‘They do so on the reasonable assumption that anyone entertaining an emperor would want to know his tastes. So they present the possible evidence for that – violent sex on the one hand, high Greek culture on the other – and prompt us to make our own judgement.’<sup>46</sup> The last point is key. The mode is generous and non-didactic. However, in this case I had clumsily overstepped the negotiable line between fact and imagination that I had so carefully established.

The paratextual or epitextual aspects of the books – titles, covers, illustrations, apparatus – may prime and enable appropriate reader strategies. This is particularly important in the case of books such as these, which pursue innovative or unfamiliar approaches to their subject matter but within forms that appear superficially conventional. The reader’s response to the paratextual signals may have a profound influence on their experience of the text and, where this experienced is shared through epitextual mechanisms, can establish expectations more broadly.<sup>47</sup>

The title *Pompeii: The Living City* clearly signalled the book’s focus on a period before the eruption, implying some level of reconstruction. More problematically ambiguous was the cover design commissioned by the publisher for the UK hardback. Its style was unexpected to me, and not entirely welcome, but the image made sense as a creative response to the brief. A central scene of *triclinium* dining was posed in direct emulation of the Roman wall painting behind it, itself taken from the House of the Chaste Lovers in Pompeii. It encoded both allusion to how the book drew on the material evidence of the ruins to recreate everyday life, and the double coding with which it challenges readers. The requirement to decipher the image, however, may have been misjudged.

For some reviewers it simply carried unfortunate genre associations, with Nick West suggesting that something ‘less Massimo Manfredi [author of ‘swords and sandals’ genre fiction] and more Robert Graves would do greater justice to the quality of the work by the authors’.<sup>48</sup> For Beard, however, it offered ‘worrying signs from the outset’ in its depiction of ‘of an implausibly luxurious Pompeian dinner party that is obviously soon to degenerate into a bone fide orgy.’<sup>49</sup> For a scholar of classical art, familiar with Pompeii, this was a curiously obtuse misreading but provided a convenient foundation for her subsequent attacks on the plausibility of the work as a whole.

Choosing to ignore every signal of the distinct mode of historical representation that the book proposed, in the cover and elsewhere, Beard’s review rehearsed in full an assessment of it as a straightforward scholarly study and included specific criticisms that were valid in these terms (and a couple more generally). It implicitly invoked academic seniority to debunk well-grounded speculative interpretations, for being speculative. That few others made this error may suggest some effective paratextual priming of those readers with more open minds.

In the case of the later book, the main title, *The World That Never Was*, encapsulated three ideas at the heart of the book, whose interplay the reader was invited to consider. It alluded to the utopian future world to which the anarchist revolutionaries aspired (the earlier planned title was *The Map of Utopia*), the imagined world of global conspiracies that the political police sought to promulgate to alarmist effect, and the vast model of the globe that Reclus planned to build to encourage a sense of international brotherhood in those who visited it. This was intended to answer a constant problem of definition posed by the book, since the obvious hook of ‘anarchism’ allowed too easy and erroneous a categorisation.<sup>50</sup>

I chose the subtitle *A True Story of Dreamers, Schemers, Anarchists and Secret Agents* with care, aware that it must clarify the cryptic main title. However, like the *Pompeii* cover, its intended effect was occasionally, and frustratingly, misunderstood or ignored.<sup>51</sup> The listing of four categories of protagonist both indicated that it was a biographically-based history, and subverted the notion of a straightforward survey of anarchism. The ‘anarchists’ in the account would be placed in relationship with other groups characterised by their unreliability or heightened subjectivity. The ironic over-

insistence that it was a ‘true story’, which consciously echoed the subtitles of the proto-novels of exploration into *terra incognita* (more legible when the main title was *The Map of Utopia*), should also have triggered a cognitive dissonance between notions of ‘truth’ and dreaming, scheming, secrecy, and indeed ‘story’.<sup>52</sup>

No reviewer remarked on the main title, but the subtitle of the book was regularly misread, as by the *Boston Globe*’s assumption that it was ‘a fun title it doesn’t deserve’, invented by a ‘marketing wizard’ to disguise an ‘exhaustive history of the international anarchist movement’.<sup>53</sup> Others, more generously, thought it ‘doesn’t begin to round up the sprawling cast of characters’ or was ‘too modest for the monumental work’. Without my knowledge, the Dutch publisher replaced the subtitle with ‘A History of Anarchism’, allowing Hans Muys to surmise that this was ‘what Alex Butterworth wanted to write’, before dismissing the book’s actual intentions as a distraction from that task.<sup>54</sup>

Nevertheless, several anglophone reviewers, predominantly in the United States, criticised the book for its shortcomings as an encyclopedic history of anarchism, seemingly oblivious to the paratextual signalling. Although disappointing, this was, perhaps, inevitable. Anarchism is a central concern for few books written for trade publication, yet not long after *TWTNW*’s publication, ‘anarchism’ was the second most edited entry on Wikipedia.<sup>55</sup> Frustrated adherents wanted fuller acknowledgement of individuals with whom they were preoccupied, however marginal they were to the imperatives of the book’s scope.<sup>56</sup>

Wendy Smith, in a review that celebrated the book’s actual aims, pointed readers who wanted simply ‘a comprehensive history of anarchism’ towards Joll’s earlier and excellent book *The Anarchists*.<sup>57</sup> Stuart Christie saw the ‘main story’ as ‘the penetration of these groups of often naïve utopians by the sinister functionaries of the secret state’. The *Kansas City Star* read it as a ‘timely tale of a vicious cycle in which ... innocence, idealism and justice are the victims’, while Laura Miller recognised the ‘manipulating’ central ‘role of puppetmaster’ played by Rachkovsky in an account of ‘subterranean intrigues’.<sup>58</sup> That the majority of reviewers addressed the book largely on its own terms suggests that, as with *Pompeii*, the paratextual elements may have helped frame their reading strategies.

#### **4) Overview of Reception**

Whilst acknowledging other factors that influenced the more negative reviews – including occasional unease about factual accuracy in *Pompeii*, and writing style in *TWTNW* – the extremes of opinion seem to me to reflect a more fundamental distinction between readers. Those most sympathetic and responsive to the aims of the books to engage readers in a more dialogic than authoritative mode were written either by general readers, or by writers who had themselves grappled with the challenges of distilling complex ideas into accessible narrative form. In the case of *Pompeii*, these included educators and novelists; for *The World That Never Was*, political essayists, journalists and biographers.

Examples are: Gray's consideration of *TWTNW* as 'one of the most absorbing depictions of the dark underside of radical politics in many years' that succeeds in being 'exceptionally astute' while offering a 'riveting account'; Hughes-Hallett's insightful observations that the 'ingenious narrative is not a line but a net ... there are myriad intersections, cords going off across continents or into the past', Miller's that 'as the author of political history, Butterworth strikes a rare balance; he doesn't flinch from moral judgement, but he's not about to succumb to the propagandizing instinct himself', or Preston's who saw that it 'set the reader free to think for himself'.<sup>59</sup> Jones, Jane Gardam, Hughes, Paterson, and Stevenson, among others, similarly appreciated *Pompeii*, each informatively but with different emphases.<sup>60</sup>

The more negative reviews often entailed mistaken assumptions about the fixed persona of the author-narrator. Whereas Miller had recognised that the author of *TWTNW* 'wasn't an idealist himself and has a taste for gossipy details', Leo McKinstry was not alone in perceiving an authorial ideologue whose book had a great 'failing: the moral viewpoint'; the *International Socialist Review* too read ventriloquism as endorsement, the book itself being 'overtly hostile to Marxism and Leninism ... rehashing the trite misrepresentation of their debates'.<sup>61</sup> By contrast, in noting that the author 'reckons' that 'Dostoevsky's alarmist representation of *The Possessed* ... provided insidious encouragement to Tsarist repression', I would like to think that Hughes-Hallett suspected that such a reductive reading of a masterpiece of literary polyphony was, in the context of

the book's own approach, an ironic impersonation of partisanship.<sup>62</sup>

Many of these assumptions suggest that, for some readers, expectations of literalism, authority and stability within a text of historical narrative – of the ‘magisterial authority’ that publishers often demand that ‘trade’ historians impersonate – had been insufficiently disrupted. Hostility to *TWTNW* was greatest from those with a confirmed ideological stance of their own, whether from left or right (in the US, anarchist and libertarian views were sometimes hard to differentiate). The greatest criticisms of *Pompeii* came from classical historians and archaeologists with an academic background, although these were balanced by the enthusiasm of others with a similar position. In the two most notable cases of hostility, Beard and Ling, the reviewers had either recently published or were preparing books on the same subject, had expert knowledge but may have felt some emotional and intellectual ownership. Their rejection of my strategies in *Pompeii* nevertheless illuminated our divergent approaches to the challenges presented.

Wiseman, in his review, accepted that ‘we need the novelist’s imagination, but also the scholarly caution that recognises how fragile our inferences are. New evidence usually brings new puzzles, to remind us that we always know less than we think’.<sup>63</sup> This paraphrased my statement of caution in the book’s ‘Introduction’, yet he concluded that, as authors, Ray Lawrence and I ‘did not aspire to the sophisticated irony with which Keith Hopkins conveyed how provisional all knowledge about the distant past must be’ in his *A World Full of Gods*.<sup>64</sup> Hopkins had used the device of two time-travelling students to the ancient city who were confronted with the unknowable nature of its ancient culture, with the author scolded for the foolishness of his fanciful experimentation in a letter from ‘Mary Beard’, an imagined version of a Cambridge colleague.<sup>65</sup> Hopkins’ work explored the conventions within which some academic historians require historical authority to be performed, in written form, and their reluctance to entertain the validity of a more open and speculative mode of enquiry, with selectivity inevitably causing distortion.

I had intended that *Pompeii* and *TWTNW* should successfully advance a *more* sophisticated way of addressing provisional and partial knowledge, eschewing the obvious irony of an overtly postmodern form such as that used by Hopkins in favour of other, more nuanced strategies. Rather than tell readers that the historical record was

unreliable, and rendered more so through the fact of its written presentation, the books would rehearse that inevitable unreliability for them, through examples of possible narrative construction. They would present ‘open texts’ where the critical imagination of the reader met that of the author, and where it was trusted and enabled, not to passively assimilate knowledge or reach any ‘correct’ conclusion but to exercise itself on uncertainty. The published response of readers leads me to conclude that, in this, the books were partially successful for a significant proportion of readers, but that others require at least a backstop of certainty.

It is tempting to imagine that a presentation of the content of either book in a dynamic digital form would obviate their concerns. The books self-consciously inhabit a space full of possible narratives, but can only lead the reader on a single trace through that reconfigurable matrix. ‘*Caveat Lector*’ was how Beard concluded her review: ‘reader beware’.<sup>66</sup> In doing so she inadvertently articulated the warning implicit throughout both texts: beware that there are other ways that this account might be presented, whether as a more compelling story that took far greater license, or through a more exclusive focus on cautiously balanced analysis.

A digital rendering might provide the means to verify facts, retrace the author’s steps, cross-reference, test ‘rash conjectures’, and explore alternatives.<sup>67</sup> Degrees of reliability and conditional qualifiers can be assigned to contemporary accounts, the many possible interpretations of an artefact or inscription could be constellated in relation to contextual data. In this ideal medium and form, compelling immersion in historical narrative would inculcate scholarly scepticism. It would also allow mnemonic aids for readers who struggled with the proliferation of names, with an illustrated and summarized Dramatis Personae and multi-dimensional timelines constantly accessible.<sup>68</sup>

The most satisfying, and reassuring, response to *Pompeii* that I have encountered among readers has been from doctoral and postdoctoral classicists and archaeologists, for two of whom it was their first book-length encounter with the ancient world. Each of them, interestingly, is now specialising in digital methods of spatial and temporal investigation. Perhaps one day soon, if I do not, one of them will create a system that will allow users to explore alternative explanations for how the signet ring fell behind the cupboard, and conjure the other narratives that the answers might suggest.

Already, personalised web content and its erosion of the possibilities of serendipitous discovery are disquieting. In the near future, procedurally generated, responsive narratives will raise even more urgent questions about the information and ideas they serve us or deny us. The question of whose agenda is served by the mediated storyworlds in which we are immersed will become a pressing concern. Our sense of algorithmically augmented agency – of owning the elaborate narratives that we inhabit – will carry a persuasive charge, but will it lead to an experience of the world that is sceptical and self-reflexive, or credulous and delusional?

The writing of history, including those narratives woven out of the Big Now enabled by the instantaneity of access to vastly broad and deep data, may become a key area of contention. By embracing the challenges of narrative, Digital History, with its deep lineage in radical and communitarian social engagement, may find a relevance that extends far beyond the academy.

## APPENDIX

### Background: Early Digital and Analogue Work

I was fortunate to spend my later twenties on the edges of the avant-garde world of telematic culture, the dawning era of digital art and narrative, personally exploring or observing at close hand some of the most exciting innovations of the period. The years after I graduated from the Royal College of Art with a Master's degree in Design for Interactive Multimedia in 1996 were, in retrospect, a golden age of intellectual openness for digital media, when its potential could be discerned, but before the colonisation by commercial forces. 'The first phase of web culture, one must admit, carried a revolutionary impulse; call it the Saint-Just to today's imperial era,' media philosopher Alexander Galloway has written. 'Walls were coming down, hierarchies were crumbling, the old brick and mortar society was giving way to the new digital universe.'<sup>1</sup> However, my own concern was, as it remains, primarily with the design and authoring of discrete, unitary interactive experiences of narrative.

As an undergraduate studying English Language and Literature my engagement with postmodernism and deconstructionism had, at first, been reluctant, but a desire to approach literature through its historical context had led me to the New Historicism, whose touchstone text was Stephen Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*.<sup>2</sup> My reading in this area attuned me to the complex relationships between culture and the processes of social formation, and the 'discontinuities underlying any construction of reality' that it identified in early seventeenth-century drama. After graduating in 1992, alongside work as a stage dramatist and studies in screenwriting, I began work on a novel called *Merciless*. The influence of Michel Foucault and Paul Ricoeur on my writing was strong, as was that of the postmodernist sub-genre of 'historiographical metafiction' that was then in its heyday.

Linda Hutcheon has described how works of 'historiographical metafiction' blur the line between objectivity and subjectivity by means of polyphonic accounts and unreliable narration.<sup>3</sup> They elide time to challenge our expectations of historicity and employ

playful intertextuality to hint at or expose additional dimensions to their narrative. The novels of Italo Calvino, John Fowles, Carlos Fuentes, Thomas Pynchon, and Jeanette Winterson, Dennis Potter's television plays, and Peter Greenaway's films, for example, all appealed to me, at the time, for their exploration of temporal instability and affinities across time, and for how they engaged the reader in a more active kind of narrative decryption. My novel *Merciless* assembled a prismatic narrative, constructed around an Edwardian archaeologist's erroneous idealisation of the lost Minoan civilization, and the devastating impact on contemporary and future lives that resulted. It interwove six time frames, across three thousand years, and explored echoes of Edwardian geopolitics in the late twentieth century, specifically around internecine war in the Balkans, tracing parallels that resonated through a complex system of motifs. However, in my naive ambition to test and stretch the possibilities that historiographical metafiction afforded, I soon ran up against what seemed to me the limits of the sub-genre, at least in analogue form. This prompted me to begin my exploration of interactive narrative.

A couple of years earlier, I had first encountered the possibilities of hypertext fiction through Detlev Fischer, the author of *Schwamm* ('Sponge'), a prototype graphic novel written in Hypercard to be viewed on the screen of an old Macintosh II.<sup>4</sup> Navigating from card to card, each filled with collages of text and Ascii illustrations, I had found the experience opaque but mesmerising. At around the same time, the author Robert Coover had alerted readers of the *New York Times Book Review* to the transformative potential of hypertext. 'Fluidity, contingency, indeterminacy, plurality, discontinuity are the hypertext buzzwords of the day,' he wrote, 'and they seem to be fast becoming principles, in the same way that relativity not so long ago displaced the falling apple.'<sup>5</sup> The principles of hypertext have since become familiar through the hot linking between pages across the world wide web that subvert boundaries and hierarchies, and have indeed transformed reading culture. However, Coover's epiphanic excitement concerned the potential of hypertext to empower individual creators of narrative rather than as a medium of collective expression.

For Coover, hypertext promised 'a new kind of fiction, and a new kind of reading', while literary and art critic George Landow saw in it 'an almost embarrassingly literal reification or actualisation' of contemporary literary theory.<sup>6</sup> A medium that could

liberate narrative possibilities that analogue media had stunted or contorted was an intoxicating prospect. ‘The form of the text is rhythmic,’ Coover enthused, ‘looping on itself in patterns and layers that gradually accrete meaning, just as the passage of time does in one’s lifetime.’ While working on *Merciless*, I had diagrammed the complex structure of the novel across multiple wall charts. The conception of narrative that this revealed – as a matrix of stories, themes and tropes, all in relationships of consonance with or counterpoint to one another – surely demanded a hypertext form. I drew encouragement for my move towards digital forms from Landow’s claim that, ‘Most poststructuralists write from within the twilight of the wished-for coming day; most writers of hypertext write of many of the same things from within the dawn’.<sup>7</sup>

I was particularly influenced in my early exploration of interactive forms of narrative by two works by Umberto Eco: *The Open Work*, from which I drew a foundational understanding of the hermeneutic relationship, and *The Limits of Interpretation*, which led me towards more intricate theories of narratology, in both cases for how they might be applied to digital forms.<sup>8</sup> I saw Eco’s work as advancing Barthes’ reconceptualisation of the relative importance of author and reader in ‘making a text happen’, by recognising that, ‘a text is a lazy machinery which forces its possible readers to do a part of its textual work, but the modalities of the interpretive operations – albeit multiple, and possibly infinite – are by no means indefinite and must be recognised as imposed by the semiotic strategies displayed by the text’.<sup>9</sup> In other ways, he explicitly posed ‘the more formidable question of the recognition of the reader’s response as a possibility built into the textual strategy’. However, the text Eco envisioned was that of the book (or possibly a film), whose structural complexity, since pre-determined, is ‘necessarily finite’, while the principle of infinite interpretative variation is a function of ‘the artifice of its composition’.<sup>10</sup>

As I began to work with hypertext, I quickly realised that insofar as it reified the hermeneutic *process*, rather than merely structurally mirroring its theorisation, it did so crudely. A user or reader who expresses an interpretive strategy by means of navigating through a network of pages and links, or nodes and edges, may experience a sense of agency. Yet however complex the underlying narrative network, it remains static,

uninflected by their response to the text. The reader's experience is that of the flâneur, at best, though more often of the idle browser who is, necessarily, at least half-blind to the consequences of the choices they make when selecting their route. For where a reader is allowed to preview steps along a possible path, this unavoidably subverts the narrative effects that derive from anticipation and the testing of hypothecations of the consequent narrative logic. The loss of authorial artifice in what has become known as 'ergodic literature' invites certain obvious solutions but these are often inherently problematic.

Espen Aarseth defined 'ergodic' in 1997 according to the criterion that 'nontrivial effort is required to allow the reader to traverse the text', (according to this principle, reading *Finnegan's Wake* is trivial, while link-clicking on web clickbait is not).<sup>11</sup> A more productive understanding of the nature of the interpretative choices that the reader of such work expresses through their navigation of the text is to be found in Marie-Laure Ryan's claim in 2006 that 'external/exploratory interactivity ... promotes a metafictional stance, at the expense of immersion in the virtual world' of the electronic text.<sup>12</sup> This points towards a particular kind of experience in which the 'reader' may take a more active, constructive role that is critical, detached and strategic but also consequential. However, by assuming 'an external perspective on the worlds of the textual universe' the reader not only loses the experience of immersion, but finds themselves in a paradoxical relationship with narratorial authority.<sup>13</sup> As Ruth Aylett and Sandy Louchart explain, 'On the one hand the author seeks control over the direction of a narrative in order to give it a satisfactory structure. On the other hand a participating user demands the autonomy to act and react without explicit authorial constraint.'<sup>14</sup>

Closely related to the challenge of maintaining the immersion of the strategically reflective user in the narrative that they are constructing is the inherent resistance of hypertextual narrative to closure, which Coover had predicted would 'be a major theme for narrative artists of the future'.<sup>15</sup> Far from limiting a reader's interpretive agency, narrative closure is, in fact, a necessary element of any strategy that ensures the openness of the text. Both as a kairotic moment in which the ideal reader's construction of the text is realised and meaning is integrated, and as the point to which her imaginative efforts are directed, it is the keystone of that 'artifice of its composition' which the author has architected.

In this, I rejected demands such as those by Pierre Machery to dethrone assumptions of harmony and totality ‘which imply a theoretical misconception of the literary work’.<sup>16</sup> Rather, I embraced Ricoeur’s vision of narrative and emplotment as the universal expression of human ‘experiences of temporality’.<sup>17</sup> The challenge I then conceived was to devise a narrative form, or system, that maintained immersion and offered a high frequency of interaction and ensured closure, without compromising its literary or other stylistic qualities.

My objective was to materialise Eco’s concept of text as machine through the design of expert systems that emulated the production of authored work, responsive to a revised relationship between reader and author in which they shared agency in the construction of the narrative experience. Such systems would involve ‘calculation in their production of scriptons’ – ‘scriptons’ being the finest grain of content whose organisation has been algorithmically determined. It would, in another Aarseth coinage, be a form of ‘cybertext’.<sup>18</sup> In simple terms, such an approach might, for example, enable an author to track the aggregated decisions made by a reader along the path taken through a hypertext, relate this aggregate to the reader’s accumulated knowledge of the narrative and how it could be interpreted as informing their choices at every point, and dynamically generate or deploy a scripton accordingly. The user would be afforded a persistent sense of both agency and immersion, while subtle effects of irony and narratorial unreliability could also be surfaced, by systemic intervention, in the emergent text. Equally, the reader/user’s direct involvement in the process of narrative construction, through frequent and legibly consequential interventions, would implicate them in the psychological or ethical ramifications of their narrative desires or the interpretive decisions.

Just as such a system changes the role of the reader or user, so it changes that of the author. Authorial intention is here expressed to and through a machine as well as through human readable text. As Katherine Hayles, a prominent early theorist of electronic literature, observed, ‘Language alone is no longer the distinctive characteristic of technologically developed societies; rather, it is language plus code.’<sup>19</sup> To instruct a computer, or indeed a human, how to perform a task entails first understanding in detail how that task is performed. The greater the sophistication and variability of the task, the greater the number of possible combinations and rules governing them, the more detailed

and complex is the initial understanding needed.

In a series of pioneering projects in the years either side of the millenium, I experimented with how authorial expertise might be invested in software systems to generate and manage emergent narrative experiences within digitally mediated environments. These began with *Meantime*, my MA graduation project, a screen-based interactive chamber drama, and included *Ages of Avatar*, for which I explored the dramaturgical use of improvisational scenarios in virtual worlds.<sup>20</sup> The culmination of this phase of my work was the *Gnosis* story engine that I designed for the German company eMedia, as the foundation for a series of planned console games, of which the first, *Extinct*, involved a narrative set in early thirteenth-century Magdeburg. No commercial project using Gnosis was completed or released, and my investigation of the subject was poorly documented, in part because of contractual restraints. However, my work predicted much theoretical discussion of interactive narrative that has been published by others in the decade and a half since (to which, where relevant, I defer).

The narrative experience generated by *Gnosis* does not rest on an underlying text that could be defined in advance in static form, but rather emerges from the interplay of the user's actions and a conceptual model of a world of 'narrativity' in which all elements have an independent, dynamic existence. My design of *Gnosis* was grounded in the concept of the 'storyworld', which Paul Herman has since summarised as 'the overall fictional ontology described within a narrative text'.<sup>21</sup> Herman further explains that, 'Interpreters of narrative do not merely reconstruct a series of events and a set of existents but imaginatively (emotionally, viscerally) inhabit a world.'<sup>22</sup> The creator of narratives for such emergent interactive forms can be thought of as designing the terms on which the user encounters the storyworld, and the way in which it responds to that encounter.

Within the *Gnosis* engine, the constituent elements of this 'storyworld' were described as entities within a complex, relational data structure, which I termed the 'storyworld ontology'. With rules set to govern how these entities interacted with one another, according to their individual affordances, an ecological system of autonomous agents was established. The complex behaviour of these agents then generated events that

provided material for selection and presentation as a narrative, which could be manifest in a range of styles (textual, graphical, isometric, 2D, etc). The participant's role within the storyworld was equivalent to that of another agent, but one with enhanced capabilities and understanding who could intentionally alter the state of the agent-ecology by influencing elements within it. The participant's primary objective, therefore, was to observe and understand the rules and attributes of the storyworld in order to effect the consequences as they wished, and so shape the narrative that emerged. Within this 'playable story' they needed to learn to 'play the system'.

In practice, the emergence demonstrated by a complex system tends to resolve to equilibrium over time. To ensure narrative coherence, sustained activity and meaningful closure it was therefore necessary to impose constraints on the ecology. This was achieved by interposing moments where the state of the ecology could be reviewed, and limits set on which aspects were available for the user to further explore. These points of review and reconfiguration marked, in effect, breaks between episodes or chapters, in which the potential content of the next episode or chapter was determined. For a narrative represented in a three-dimensional virtual environment, such as the console games that the *Gnosis* engine was designed to control, these episodes or 'levels' would take the form of specific, procedurally generated configurations of space-time within the larger world of the story.

In conceiving of this approach, I was influenced by Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the 'chronotope', a highly flexible conceptual tool devised to describe 'the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature'. In this fusion, 'time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history.'<sup>23</sup> For Bakhtin, the chronotope is tantamount to the spatio-temporal construction that underlies every narrative text, 'the place where the knots of narrative are tied and untied' and events become concrete. The particular chronotopic configuration of narrative space-time defines a work's literary genre, and a text is read in relation to the chronotopic expectations it creates. Bakhtin's theory has been very variously interpreted, applied and refined, with many types of chronotope proposed for different purposes. Most relevant to my application of the concept here is what Bart Keunen has recently

termed the ‘dialogical chronotope’: that of a narrative that ‘is not directed towards a final moment, to a “telos”, but rather consists of a network of conflicting situations and junctions that communicate with each other.’<sup>24</sup>

The chronotopic configuration of time, space and associated actors generated by *Gnosis* for each ‘level’ might be imagined as a series of rooms at a certain date and time, according to which the space would be populated by characters and objects with particular needs and propensities, and organised to have certain doors locked and certain others open. As in a Commedia dell’arte scenario, improvisatory actors, both animate and inanimate (a door, here, is an ‘actor’), would be equipped with a loosely defined scenario, behavioural tendencies and stock information according to which they would interact with the participant.<sup>25</sup> The narrative would ‘thicken’, in Bakhtin’s terms, around the participant’s interaction with the space of the storyworld ‘level’ and its contents, through the sequential events enacted until a satisfactory point of provisional closure was reached.

The immediate objective for the player was to learn about, understand and influence the storyworld towards effecting the final condition of its microcosmic society. Through observation of the characters and objects in a ‘level’, the participant might gain information about the storyworld, while judicial interaction with them might achieve small consequences which would ramify through the storyworld, prior to the next point of review and reconfiguration. Insights into the social structure of the storyworld, its hierarchies of power, networks of trade and patronage, domestic and conspiratorial relationships might all be examples of useful knowledge to acquire. However, just as the participant would formulate their understanding of the storyworld and establish objectives within it, so other Non Player Characters (NPCs) would hold their own ‘mental’ model of the storyworld, and plans that they would attempt to fulfill (but about which they might dissimulate).

In order to decide how to influence the NPCs effectively, the player needed to understand their individual subjectivities. In designing a system to manage this, I drew on the theory of Possible Worlds then being developed by Marie-Laure Ryan, Ludomir Dolozel and Thomas Pavel from its origins in formal logic, to provide what Herman has called a ‘conceptual framework for considering the relationship between fictionality and the semantics of narrative’. In Dolozel’s terms, the semantics of narrative concern the

interaction between the real and the possible, between the *actual* or ‘protoworld’ and the constellation of ‘heterocosms’ or *possible* worlds, perceived or projected, around it, each of which constitutes a distinct ‘ontological landscape’.<sup>26</sup> As Ryan has written, ‘The relations among the worlds of the narrative system [e.g. the “knowledge-worlds”, or “obligation-worlds”, or “fantasy-worlds” of characters] are not static, but change from state to state.’<sup>27</sup> One might think of this in terms of the character who dreams of a better future and sees the present through the prism of those hopes, or one whose paranoia lends credence to every suspicion, or a narrator so lacking in self-knowledge that their account of reality is unreliable.

Implicit in the notion of possible worlds, like that of the Bakhtinian chronotope, is the promise of dialogism: the trace of the movement of different possible worlds in relation to one another constitutes plot; the reader or user’s varying perspective on that trace equates to narrative. For Elena Gomel, the theory revolutionises ‘the study of narrative by shifting its focus from mimesis to poesis, the creation of independent ontological domains that may or may not correspond to the cultural reality.’<sup>28</sup> This conception of narrative acknowledges the instability of experience and the constructed nature of realist representation, which can vary according to the normative mentalities of the actual world. The example Pavel offers to illuminate the point is how the ‘actual world is different for authors of medieval miracle plays (speaking Holy Virgin) or modern mystery novels (network of drug dealers).’<sup>29</sup>

Such an approach to emergent narrative rests on the idea that the participant or user is involved in a self-reflexive process of exploration and knowledge formation, through a creative dialogue with the systemically invested author. I conceptualised this in terms of the notion of ‘chorography’, proposed by Gregory Ulmer in his theory of heuretics: a logic of invention by means of artistic thought processes, in which constructing a narrative becomes a method of inquiry.<sup>30</sup> The exploration of possible versions and interpretations of the real world itself constitutes the narrative. Accordingly, my conception of the ‘story engine’ was as a system that controls the generation of a type of interactive narrative of which Ryan would later write, hypothetically, that ‘there is no winning or losing: the purpose of the player is not to beat the game, but to observe the evolution of the storyworld’.<sup>31</sup>

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## ENDNOTES

### Introduction

<sup>1</sup> See, for chronotopes, Bakhtin (1981) Bemong and Borghart (2010) and Keunen (2010); for ‘possible worlds’ theory, Dolozel (2000), Pavel (1975) and Ryan (1991).

### 1. The Origins of the Two Books and their Challenges

<sup>1</sup> Hutcheon (1988) pp.113 introduces the idea of ‘historiographical metafiction’ prefacing her observations with a quotation from Paul de Man, (‘The binary opposition between fiction and fact is no longer relevant: in any differential system, it’s the assertion of the space between the entities that matters’) whose premise she seeks to challenge.

<sup>2</sup> For example, Le Roy Ladurie (1979, 1980), Zemon Davis (1985) and Ginzburg (2012)

<sup>3</sup> Chartier, quoted by Ginzburg (2012) p.203

<sup>4</sup> For information on *Ages of Avatar* and Inhabited Television, Greenhalgh (1999) or Butterworth and Wyver (2002)

<sup>5</sup> See Bibliography, Software/Broadcast for details of *The 1900 House*

<sup>6</sup> Edwards, <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm2284484/>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/06/13/movies/tv-weekend-one-hot-town-that-pompeii.html>

<sup>8</sup> Le Roy Ladurie (1980), Ginzburg (2012)

<sup>9</sup> Zemon Davis (1985) p.xiii

<sup>10</sup> Renfrew (1978)

<sup>11</sup> See Butterworth (2005) pp.329-30

<sup>12</sup> Franklin (2001)

<sup>13</sup> eg. Jansen (1991), Ling (1995), Trevor Hodge (1996) in bibliography of *Pompeii: The Living City*

<sup>14</sup> A full size, A2 photocopy of the Eschebach (1993) survey map was used, with multiple transparency overlays

<sup>15</sup> Wallace-Hadrill (1996)

<sup>16</sup> Sherry (1980) pp.248-337

<sup>17</sup> Uglow (2002)

<sup>18</sup> Lacquer (1999), Jensen (1981)

<sup>19</sup> Uglow (2002) p.xiii

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<sup>20</sup> I first encountered Taxil in *L'apocalypse de notre temps* by Rollin (1939), see bibliography in *TWTNW*, after which I repeatedly noticed him loitering in dark corners of the historical research.

<sup>21</sup> Palentir, see Bibliography, Software/Broadcast

<sup>22</sup> Archives of the Préfecture de Police, Paris

<sup>23</sup> As reported by, for example, Porter (1987) and Bantman (2013), with the latter's research into the French émigrés in London closely paralleling my own.

<sup>24</sup> State Archives of the Russian Federation, Moscow; Archives Generales du Royaume, Brussels; Archives of the Metropolitan Police, London. Final 2009 FOI Tribunal decision to the Information Commissioner's own appeal against the ruling in favour of the Metropolitan Police:

[http://www.informationtribunal.gov.uk/DBFiles/Decision/i301/MPS%20v%20IC%20\(EA-2008-0078\)%20Decision%2030-03-09.pdf](http://www.informationtribunal.gov.uk/DBFiles/Decision/i301/MPS%20v%20IC%20(EA-2008-0078)%20Decision%2030-03-09.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> Le Roy Ladurie (1979) p.xviii

## 2. Historiography and Narrative

<sup>1</sup> Laslett (1983), discussed in Chapter 12, titled 'Understanding Ourselves in Time', where he seeks to reconcile the intrinsic interest in the past with the need for historical knowledge to provide points of contrast in understanding 'ourselves as we are here and now'.

<sup>2</sup> Deleuze (1996)

<sup>3</sup> Furet (1985)

<sup>4</sup> Lévi-Strauss quoted by White (1987) p.34

<sup>5</sup> Braudel (1958)

<sup>6</sup> Lyotard (1984) p.xxiv 'Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity towards metanarratives.'

<sup>7</sup> Bakhtin (1981) p.84

<sup>8</sup> White and Doran (2010), p 345, quoting White, *Figural Realism*

<sup>9</sup> Genette and MacLean (1991)

<sup>10</sup> Munslow (2006) p.177 'The deconstructionist consciousness accepts history as what might have been rather than what actually was.'

<sup>11</sup> Evans, 'Author's Response to his Critics' website

<sup>12</sup> Paul (2011)

<sup>13</sup> Machery (1978) p.149 'Science does away with ideology, obliterates it; literature challenges ideology by using it ... the work proposes a *reading* of these significations, by combining them as signs.'

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Nawrotzki and Dougherty (2013), chapter 2, concerning crowdsourcing. It was an elaborate vision of open, contributory history that I argued in Butterworth and Wyver (2002) eg. p.95 quoted by Arthur (2006-7) p.201. 'Butterworth and Wyver have a vision of the future where simulation engines drive social change through making people aware of alternative ways of seeing: "at the heart of a virtual environment a simulation engine of such simple perfection that it nurtures a communal narrative, a narrative so vivid and richly focused that inhabitants learn to see their own lives and communities with fresh eyes ... a profound redefinition of public service

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broadcasting, which is truly inclusive and, perhaps, democratic.””

<sup>15</sup> Collingwood (1943), De Groot (2006) considers Collingwood’s argument for re-enactment as a means to understand historical events underlying both participatory television such as *The 1900 House* and some computer games. Carr (2014) offers a sophisticated study of a phenomenological approach.

<sup>16</sup> Barthes (1981) p.121-3

<sup>17</sup> Hegel (1988) p.1062. As well as White (1987), more surprisingly, this is quoted by both Coover (1991) and Landow (1992) in relation to the new modes of narrative made possible by hypertext.

<sup>18</sup> McHale (1987)

<sup>19</sup> Barthes (1981) p.18

<sup>20</sup> Ankermitt (1994) p.142

<sup>21</sup> Veyne (1984) p.88, White (1987) p.45

<sup>22</sup> Rancière (1994) Foreword by Hayden White. p.xix

<sup>23</sup> Tanaka (2013)

<sup>24</sup> Koselleck and McCarthy (1988) The notion of a *sattelzeit* or ‘watershed’ moment.

<sup>25</sup> Carlyle (1969) p.7 He continues: ‘Every single event is the offspring not of one, but of all other events, prior or contemporaneous, and will in its turn combine with all others to give birth to new.’

<sup>26</sup> Brown (1989) p.103

<sup>27</sup> Lévi-Strauss (1961)

<sup>28</sup> Grossman (1978) p.25 paraphrasing Febvre.

<sup>29</sup> De Certeau (1986) p 216

<sup>30</sup> Eliade (1959) p.85 quoted by Zerubavel (1981) p.57

<sup>31</sup> Durkheim (2008) p.312-313 ‘Religious and profane life cannot coexist in the same space ... in the same time.’

<sup>32</sup> Chartier (2011)

<sup>33</sup> See, for example, Kern (1983) p.34 for discussion of Conrad’s dramatisation of tension between authoritative time and the individual through Verloc’s wish, in *The Secret Agent*, to ‘blow up time’ in the form of the Greenwich Meridian.

<sup>34</sup> Gurevich (1985) p.29

<sup>35</sup> Lynch (1972) p.120

<sup>36</sup> Lefebvre (1992) p.47 ‘Presence’ being distinct from the experience of the ‘present’ in its authenticity: ‘The present simulates presence and introduces simulation (the simulacrum) into social practice.’

<sup>37</sup> Soja (1989) p.7

<sup>38</sup> Knowles (2008)

<sup>39</sup> Guldi, ‘What is the Spatial Turn.’

<sup>40</sup> Lukács (1983) p.21

<sup>41</sup> Foucault (2002) ‘The document, then, is no longer for history an inert material through which it tries to reconstitute what men have done or said, the events of which only the trace remains; history is now trying to define within the documentary material itself unities, totalities, series, relations.’

<sup>42</sup> Foucault (1980) p.54

<sup>43</sup> Ricoeur (2004) p.218

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- <sup>44</sup> Furet (1985), p.21
- <sup>45</sup> Synder, *Guardian*, 20<sup>th</sup> May, 2015
- <sup>46</sup> Lukacs (1983) p.42
- <sup>47</sup> Ginzburg (1993) p.212
- <sup>48</sup> Levi (1991) pp.93-4 quoted by Ginzburg (1993)
- <sup>49</sup> Ginzburg (2012) p.205
- <sup>50</sup> Ginzburg (2012) p.209 A note to the page observes, in relation to the lacunar nature of all historical evidence that ‘new research questions create new lacunae.’
- <sup>51</sup> Ginzburg (2012) p.204
- <sup>52</sup> Ginzburg (2012) p.207
- <sup>53</sup> Hitchcock ‘Big Data, Small Data and Meaning.’
- <sup>54</sup> Börner, ‘Plug-and-Play Macroscopes’, quoted by Hitchcock
- <sup>55</sup> Hitchcock, op cit.
- <sup>56</sup> Foucault (1984) p.1
- <sup>57</sup> Castells (2008) Schmale’s work discussed in English on Guido Koller’s website at <http://wethink.hypotheses.org/101>
- <sup>58</sup> Levine (2015) pp.98-11, 122-131
- <sup>59</sup> Levine (2015) p.23, discussed further on pages 132-140
- <sup>60</sup> Kracauer (1969) p.134 referring to Bloch (1939), cited by Ginzburg (2012) p.207
- <sup>61</sup> Ginzburg (2012) p.207
- <sup>62</sup> Manovich (1999)
- <sup>63</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>64</sup> Manovich (2011)
- <sup>65</sup> Gumbrecht (1998)
- <sup>66</sup> *ibid.* pp.ix-xi
- <sup>67</sup> Aarseth (1997) p.62 A ‘scripton’ may be imagined as a nugget of text that may or may not be dynamically composed, defined here as ‘strings [of information] as they appear to the readers in distinction to ‘textons’ which are strings within the scripted text.
- <sup>68</sup> White (1987) p.173
- <sup>69</sup> Ricoeur (1984) p.169
- <sup>70</sup> White (1987) p.173
- <sup>71</sup> Dolozel (2010)
- <sup>72</sup> Lorente (1996) p.2
- <sup>73</sup> Ryan (1991) p.21
- <sup>74</sup> Dolozel (2010) p.42 ‘Historical texts are means of *noesis*, of knowledge acquisition: they construct historical worlds as models of the actual world. Therefore they are constrained by the requirement of truth valuation.’
- <sup>75</sup> Bakhtin (1981) p.295
- <sup>76</sup> Schlögel (2012) p.4
- <sup>77</sup> Schlögel (2012) p.3
- <sup>78</sup> Ginzburg (2012) p 206
- <sup>79</sup> Paul (2011)
- <sup>80</sup> Chartier (2011) Klein (2004) p.13 Klein is concerned with ‘structured plot points inside a scripted space, a contrapuntal form of story’ and how this is encoded in the historical and contemporary baroque. ‘Special effects’, for him, introduce the fictive to the real,

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‘whether walking or clicking through, they emphasise the viewer’s journey, the space *between* rather than the gimmicks on the wall’ and offer important warnings: ‘in our bizarre civilization most of all, fake “objectivity” becomes very dangerous.’

<sup>81</sup> Eco (1998) p.27

<sup>82</sup> Little (1984)

<sup>83</sup> Chanady (1985) p.12 and pp.69-75

<sup>84</sup> Todorov (1973) p.25

### 3. The Books: Compositional and Reading Strategies

<sup>1</sup> Presner (2014) p 7

<sup>2</sup> Presner (2014) p.18

<sup>3</sup> For example De Certeau (1984)

<sup>4</sup> See Kern (1983) pp.214-216

<sup>5</sup> Preston *The Guardian* (review)

<sup>6</sup> Keunen in Bemong (2010), pp.18-19 of chapter.

<sup>7</sup> Preston *op. cit.*

<sup>8</sup> Hughes-Hallett, *Sunday Telegraph* (review)

<sup>9</sup> McGinty, Clary, reviews on Amazon.com

<sup>10</sup> Preston *op. cit.*

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/06/13/movies/tv-weekend-one-hot-town-that-pompeii.html>

<sup>12</sup> Beard, *Sunday Times* (review)

<sup>13</sup> Jones, *Sunday Telegraph* (review), Paterson *Literary Review* (review) Several non-professional reviewers, too, recognised that the ‘speculation’ and ‘assumptions’ were ‘logical’ and consequential. Haines (Amazon.com) approvingly likened the experience to ‘taking a newspaper to a theatre. Read a chapter, then watch actors on a stage acting out plausible background scenes.’

<sup>14</sup> As Emerson and Morson (1990) have observed, ‘[d]ifferent aspects or orders of the universe cannot be supposed to operate with the same chronotope.’

<sup>15</sup> I am using the metaphor here of the ‘Point cloud’ of laser-scanned physical data from an archaeological site, which can be used to generate highly accurate models.

<sup>16</sup> Butterworth (2005) pp.74, 204

<sup>17</sup> Stevenson *Observer*, Quinlan, *Irish Examiner* (reviews)

<sup>18</sup> Gray *New Statesman* (review)

<sup>19</sup> For example, McGinty, Hardy on Amazon.com; Price, *Boston Globe*.

<sup>20</sup> Preston, *op. cit.*

<sup>21</sup> Levine (2015) p.19 ‘The form that best captures the experience of colliding forms is narrative’; Ricoeur (1985) p.49 ‘The pleasure of learning something is the first component of this pleasure of the text … the pleasure the spectator takes in the composition as necessary or probable,’ though he concludes his third volume (1988) by reflecting how construction of time in his own narrative unravels, ‘Time, escaping our will to mastery surges forth on the tide of what … is the true master of meaning.’

<sup>22</sup> [http://www.politico.com/click/stories/1007/karl\\_rovers\\_book\\_club.html](http://www.politico.com/click/stories/1007/karl_rovers_book_club.html)

<sup>23</sup> Rowbotham, *Independent* (review)

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- <sup>24</sup> Wheen *Financial Times* (review), Preston *op. cit.*
- <sup>25</sup> Paterson *op. cit.*, Hughes *BBC History Magazine*
- <sup>26</sup> Ling *British Archaeologist*, Beard *Sunday Times*, Wiseman *Times Literary Supplement*
- <sup>27</sup> Beale, *Journal of Classical Education* (review)
- <sup>28</sup> Paterson *op. cit.*
- <sup>29</sup> McHale (1987) Posed by McHale in slightly different terms in his prefatory 'Part One: Preliminaries' where he sees the cognitive questions, 'How can I interpret this world of which I am a part? And what am I in it?' posed by artists until the mid-twentieth century replaced by those, quoted from Dick Higgins, *A Dialectic of Centuries* (1979): 'What world is this? What is to be done in it? Which of my selves is to do it?'
- <sup>30</sup> Butterworth (2005) p.27
- <sup>31</sup> Bal (1981) p.43
- <sup>32</sup> White (1987) p.6
- <sup>33</sup> Gray *op. cit.*
- <sup>34</sup> Butterworth (2010), pp.6-7
- <sup>35</sup> *ibid* p.7
- <sup>36</sup> Bakhtin (1984) Associates the carnivalesque with lord-of-misrule upheaval, inversion, transgression and negation (pp.397-399), the appearance of hellishness by unengaged observers (p.410) and political revolution (p.425). It is also characterised by a limited period of license, such as that 'allowed' to the Commune by the Versaillais government of Thiers as it regrouped.
- <sup>37</sup> Foucault (1984) p.3 defines 'heterotopias' as 'something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted.'
- <sup>38</sup> Butterworth (2010) Chapter 20, p.329
- <sup>39</sup> Kracauer (1969) p.122, referenced in Ginzburg (2012) p.191 The cinematic nature of this was brought home to me by the disappointing but insightful personal response of one early reader, a highly accomplished writer of fantastical fiction that displays great clarity in its storytelling, who likened my style to that of a tyro film director let loose with a box of technical tricks. A style that he found intolerable.
- <sup>40</sup> Butterworth (2005) p.73
- <sup>41</sup> Well summarised in Eco (1998) p.27 though a concept recurring in his work since the first publication of Eco (1989) in 1962
- <sup>42</sup> Butterworth (2005), Chapter VIII and Chapter 9 ("A Beryl for Venus") pp.195-221
- <sup>43</sup> Beard *op. cit.*
- <sup>44</sup> Jarman *Catholic Times* (review)
- <sup>45</sup> Jones *op. cit.*
- <sup>46</sup> Jones, *ibid.*
- <sup>47</sup> Genette and MacLean (1991) pp.4-8 The epitext being the sum of the paratext and peritext, with the latter being that material that serves a similar function but is situated within or in close relationship to the text: title, preface, etc.
- <sup>48</sup> West *Tribune* (review)
- <sup>49</sup> Beard was already the co-author of Beard and Henderson (2001)
- <sup>50</sup> The planned title, *The Map of Utopia*, referred to Wilde's assertion that 'any map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the

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one country at which Humanity is always landing' but was rejected as too weak by the publisher. This was fortunate since, shortly afterwards, Stoppard's new trilogy of plays dealing with the previous generation of international revolutionaries, including Bakunin, was premiered with the title *The Coast of Utopia*. However, the idea of mapping and exploring might have more effectively triggered the association of 'true story' with unreliable literary precedents.

<sup>51</sup> Its form was meant as a light-hearted response to the unnecessarily extended subtitles with which many non-fiction titles were fashionably overburdened at the time

<sup>52</sup> Foley (1986) p.107 Early novelistic fiction, offering titles such as a 'true and genuine history' or a 'life of', asks 'to be read as one kind of discourse but [encourages] perceptual habits and responses routinely associated with another kind of discourse.'

<sup>53</sup> The response of Price for the *Boston Globe* may have been because the planned integration of additional illustrations to point up the motif scheme was reduced, for reasons of cost, to one 'global' image at the beginning and end of the text.

<sup>54</sup> Butterworth (2011) *Die Wereld, Muys De Morgan* (review)

<sup>55</sup> Yasseri *et al.* wrote the paper (2013) on their research into Wikipedia editing

<sup>56</sup> eg. Braekman, [www.deknack.be](http://www.deknack.be)

<sup>57</sup> Smith *Los Angeles Times* (review), Joll (1965)

<sup>58</sup> Christie *Guardian, Kansas City Star, Miller Salon.com* (all reviews)

<sup>59</sup> Gray, Hughes-Hallett, Miller, Preston *op.cit.*

<sup>60</sup> Jones, Hughes, Paterson, Stevenson, all *op cit.* and Gardam *Spectator* (review), among others

<sup>61</sup> Miller, *op. cit.* McKinstry *The Express*, Kerl *International Socialist Review* (reviews)

<sup>62</sup> Butterworth (2010) p.99-100 Hughes-Hallett *op.cit.* Bakhtin (1981) p.349 'In Dostoevsky's novels, the life experience of the characters and their discourse may be resolved as far as plot is concerned but internally they remain incomplete and unresolved.' They were novels of ideas in which a polyphony of conflicting views challenged unitary authorial vision.

<sup>63</sup> Wiseman *Times Literary Supplement* (review)

<sup>64</sup> Wiseman *ibid.*, Butterworth (2005) p.7

<sup>65</sup> Hopkins (2000) pp.44-45

<sup>66</sup> Beard, *op. cit.*

<sup>67</sup> Wiseman *op. cit.*

<sup>68</sup> And yet as Rowbotham's review of *TWTNW* remarked, the absence online of my own promised endnotes, betrays my own larger intentions. 'Dumping references is like destroying maps and closing public pathways. In a book packed with democrats and featuring, in Reclus and Kropotkin, two radical geographers, this is especially bad news.'

## Appendix

<sup>1</sup> Galloway, (2012) p.1

<sup>2</sup> Greenblatt (1980)

<sup>3</sup> Hutcheon (1988) p.113

<sup>4</sup> Fischer, *Schwamm* (1989)

<sup>5</sup> Coover, *New York Times Book Review* (1992)

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- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* Coover; Landow (2006) p.135
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>8</sup> Umberto Eco (1989 and 1981)
- <sup>9</sup> Barthes (1977)
- <sup>10</sup> Machery (1978) paraphrasing Eco (1989)
- <sup>11</sup> Aarseth (1997) p.179
- <sup>12</sup> Ryan (2006) p.109
- <sup>13</sup> Ryan (2001) p.20
- <sup>14</sup> Aylett and Louchart (2004) p.30
- <sup>15</sup> Coover (1991)
- <sup>16</sup> Machery (1978) p.80
- <sup>17</sup> Ricoeur (1984) p.169
- <sup>18</sup> Aarseth (1997) p.75
- <sup>19</sup> Hayles (2005) p.16
- <sup>20</sup> Butterworth and Wyver (2002)
- <sup>21</sup> Herman (2009) p. 119
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>23</sup> Bakhtin (1981) p.84
- <sup>24</sup> Keunen in Bemong (2010), pp.18-19.
- <sup>25</sup> Commedia (1990) pp.105-151
- <sup>26</sup> Dolozel (2000) p.143
- <sup>27</sup> Ryan (1991) p.120
- <sup>28</sup> Gomel (2014) p.28
- <sup>29</sup> Pavel (1989) p.47
- <sup>30</sup> Ulmer (1994) Part 2
- <sup>31</sup> Ryan (2009) p.46

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## **Software/Broadcast**

Palentir software

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