

the proviso that history is inaccessible to us except in textual form, or in other words, that it can be approached only by way of prior (re-)textualization” (*The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* [Cornell UP, 1981; print; 82]). Indeed it is Jameson, and not I, who marks history as a limit to the queer playfulness of phantasmic investments, in his famous statement “History is what hurts, it is what refuses desire and sets inexorable limits to individual as well as collective praxis” (102). It would seem that Traub agrees, and yet she also wants history to be a domain of potential queer play (no quarrel here).

Let me take a moment to summarize for readers what my argument actually was in “Undoing the Histories of Homosexuality,” the chapter in *Queer/Early/Modern* that criticizes David Halperin’s *How to Do the History of Homosexuality*, because I believe it was respectful, careful, and historical—though not only historical, since I also take seriously the literariness or “counterfactual” status of texts we call fiction (Duke UP, 2006; print; 31–50). My critique involved a short story by Boccaccio that has been richly analyzed by a number of younger scholars, such as Susan Gaylard, in “The Crisis of Word and Deed in *Decameron* V 10” (*The Italian Novella*, ed. Gloria Allaire [Routledge, 2003; 33–48; print]), and Martin G. Eisner and Marc D. Schachter, in “*Libido Sciendi*: Apuleius, Boccaccio, and the Study of the History of Sexuality” (*PMLA* 124.3 [2009]: 817–37; print). Whereas Halperin was using the text to deduce a protohomosexual identity in fourteenth-century Italy, I wanted to cast doubt on the empirical and historical status of a description located in a text that flamboyantly showcases its counterfactual nature. I also extended Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s critique of an earlier work by Halperin, primarily concerning not universalizing and minoritizing models but rather narratives of supersession: to taxonomize identities as pre- or protohomosexual presumes something called “modern homosexuality” and potentially

relegates to the past the modalities of same-sex desire that do not adhere to that model, while simultaneously homogenizing and globalizing a “modern” homosexual identity. So what I was offering was a critique less of historicizing than of promoting progressivist and potentially Eurocentric models of historical change and identity—not because they are historical, as Traub asserts, but because they are ideological.

Traub concludes, as she begins, by invoking another specter, one who “bequeath[s]” a copia and generates a legacy, and she worries that that legacy will become diluted (36). Is this the specter of the essay’s opening paragraph, the one who is both an insubstantial shade and a vision of the future? Is it the specter of *Hamlet*? And if time is out of joint, must someone set it right? Traub’s essay is itself, it seems to me, a work of mourning enjoining readers to honor the past; it thus has its own kind of queer temporality. But—or and—the queerest thing is that the storm keeps blowing us backward . . . into the future.

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TO THE EDITOR:

In response to Valerie Traub’s essay “The New Unhistoricism in Queer Studies,” I would like to propose ten theses on queer (un)historicism:

1. With so much to learn from dialogue and debate, with so much to be gained by taking the challenges to both historicism and unhistoricism seriously, as Traub proposes to do, it is disappointing that her essay remains so firmly entrenched in oppositionality. Traub’s work on the confluence of psychoanalysis and historicism—two supposedly warring methodologies—has been important for queer Renaissance work, so it is particularly distressing to see camps being created where none need exist.
2. Positing unhistoricism as the opposite of historicism merely repeats the binary logic

that has long plagued both historicism and sexuality. Rather than create a battle between the two, we need to accept that ongoing theorization and critique of dominant concepts is a necessary intellectual enterprise. A dialectical understanding of historicism is crucial, not as a means of arriving at a synthesis but as a way to put pressure on fault lines that habit allows us to gloss over. That the historicist methodology might resemble the very thing it seeks to critique, that its emphasis on difference might elide the question of sameness, that its insistence on historical sequence might make short work of inconsequence: such are the challenges of unhistoricism.

3. By pushing against the entrenched boundaries that have been erected around scholarly work, unhistoricism points also to the larger stakes involved in what we do. If queerness is to be not just a sexual identity but also a critical praxis, queering dominant paradigms of methodology must be at the core of its work.
4. To see a critique of historicism judged invalid because it is not historical enough is perplexing. To read that metaphor should be ranked as the master trope above other modes of analysis is disturbing. And to hear both that unhistoricism has nothing to teach historicism *and* that unhistoricism's insights have already been anticipated by historicism is baffling.
5. There is no one historicism just as there is no one form of queerness. That is why a critique of historicism has always dwelt on its dominant aspects, of which teleology is paramount. My work on queering teleology has been undertaken in conversation with the work of a historian—Dipesh Chakrabarty—whose *Provincializing Europe* critiques historicism for separating the not yet from the here already. The not yet are teleologically condemned to the waiting room of history while the here already are allowed full identity and presence. This trend of teleological hierarchization runs

across religions, geographies, policies, and sexualities. Traub is aware of this post-colonial critique of teleology, but, strangely, she does not allow its insights to interrupt our work on queering the Renaissance.

6. Indeed, Traub's essay repeatedly misnames the queer theorists of those insights. On one occasion, I am referred to as "Madhavi" rather than "Menon"; "Jasbir Puar" is rendered "Jasbir Paur"; and "Gayatri Gopinath" becomes "Gayatri Gopinah." The seemingly polite surface of the Russian novel, as Freud pointed out, always has an other scene—the unconscious—whose political incorrectness cannot be controlled. I want to insist that I don't mind being misnamed; in fact I find such oddities of language delightful. But it is fascinating that at the moment of trying to fix both historicism and unhistoricism into separate camps, the essay finds itself at the limit of fixity. Something disrupts and interrupts the boundary at which historicism—despite its multiple uses—finds itself.
7. But wait a minute: we have been here before. To my mind what is most interesting and frustrating about Traub's essay is that it reenacts the debate between Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and David Halperin on this very issue: whether or not historicism is useful for queer theory. Traub's dedication of her essay to Halperin only underscores this structural repetition. Even in defending itself, then, historicism is haunted by the kind of nonlinear repetition that unhistoricism theorizes.
8. Taking seriously the unsettling power of repetition, unhistoricism recognizes something queer in interrupting the time lines and teleologically bounded identities of historicism. Here it takes as its cue Lee Edelman's position that queerness "can never define an identity; it can only ever disturb one" (qtd. in Traub 33).
9. History is not always historicist. And queerness can never fully be known. Thus, when Traub notes that despite "areas of

agreement, I remain unconvinced that a teleological imperative is what impedes our understanding of past sexualities,” she gets it exactly wrong (27). The point has *never* been to arrive at a complete understanding of either sexuality or the past. Unhistoricism’s critique lies in its insistence that such knowledge can never be entirely available, that full disclosure is a fantasy whose phantasmic nature is forgotten to our detriment.

10. Especially when the issue is queerness, we need a critique of teleology that can talk back to the dominant modes of historicism. Such a critique not only challenges the freighted hierarchies among peoples and ideas that fuel much of the violence in the world today but also insists that presence is not, and never can be, full. Identities, texts, peoples, ideas register across time, slide backward, crawl forward, repeat themselves. We need an (un)historicalist methodology that is fluid enough to deal with this queer cornucopia.

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Reply:

I am grateful to have the opportunity for further dialogue with Carla Freccero and Madhavi Menon on issues raised in my essay on the new unhistoricism.

Carla Freccero is right: my essay is not a defense of teleology—nor was it intended to be. The specter of teleology I invoke is one that haunts the pages of her work, as well as that of Madhavi Menon—a specter that, I argue, is conjured to enjoin compliance with a particular mode of queering temporality. “Teleology” in their work is an accusation that anchors their assertions of antinormativity; it is not a method of history writing I champion but rather a fulcrum I use to analyze their claims. Because those claims have been heralded as a new method, I tried to unpack the various log-

ics informing it to assess its utility for a range of projects tethered to the past, including the performance of queer affect, textual readings, and history making.

In focusing so intently on the work of three scholars—a move I thought justified by the convergence of many of their ideas and their assertions of alliance—I risked not only conjoining their different projects but also raising the affective stakes for each of us. My hope was that these risks would be offset by the benefits of a more precise articulation of our methodological differences. I could see no way to attain that precision without discussing the details of each scholar’s work. But instead of engaging with the specific terms of my critique or with my own attempt to address problems of periodization and chronology, Freccero and Menon have responded, in the main, by reading my essay symptomatically: as structural repetition compulsion, as evidence of my own bad faith or of my “politically incorrect” unconscious. I leave it to others to judge whether these accusations have merit or, more important, whether my essay is less than a respectful and serious engagement with their work.

Since Menon characterizes my treatment of unhistoricism as disappointingly “entrenched in oppositionality,” it might be useful to indicate the areas in which our views coincide. In addition to the items explicitly listed in my essay (27), as well as my appreciative description of aspects of their work (29–30), my analysis articulates considerable sympathy with queer explorations of temporality that seek, as Freccero puts it, “to find in time a way ‘out,’ or at least another way.” The “mournful and celebratory queer twistings of time” in recent scholarship that she enumerates represent, to my mind, important collective developments (22, 26), in which I would include her own deconstructive and psychoanalytic “spectral . . . historiography” (28). Freccero and I concur that “history itself” has “varying phenomenal temporalities,” that history “presents itself as a reading,” and