



Between the Past and the Present
History and Theory at the divide between old and
new philosophies of history
2006-2011

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Contents

Introduction. A journal in transition	1
1. History and Theory today	4
2. Structure and Sections	9
3. The Question of Themes.....	11
4. Trending topics and the search for new insights	15
Conclusion	18
Appendix: Graphs and Figures	19



Introduction. A journal in transition

Celebrating the past by thinking about the future

In December 2010 the international quarterly *History and Theory* celebrated its 50th birthday. Different than could have been expected from a journal that is foremost on the philosophy of history, it resisted the temptation of celebrating the glories of the *past*. Instead, it requested innovative authors on the philosophy of history to write papers that would reflect on the *future*: on the upcoming fifty years, that is. Historians usually treat these kind of predictions with the utmost suspicion, and the editors of *H&T* were well aware of this:

“Of course, since as good historical theorists the editors knew that historical prediction is fraught with insuperable conceptual as well as practical problems, and therefore typically consists of extrapolating from the current situation, the editors intended the task set before the essay writers to take the pulse of our current historiographical moment.”¹

Looking at the articles that were included in the celebration issue, one can conclude that the task was perhaps a bit too much to ask from some of the historians and philosophers that contributed articles. Just two out of the eight authors wrote articles specifically on the future of the discipline, whereas others just advocated their sub-discipline or only made some small remarks on the ‘next fifty years’.²

In this respect then, most scholars that contribute to *History and Theory* today have a lot in common with ‘normal’ historians that shy away from drawing universal conclusions from their work, and that do not like social scientific modes of thought. In fact, hardly any of the authors advocate closer collaboration with sociology, economics or other disciplines with a more ‘scientific’ character.³ This begs the question, what ‘theory’ means in “*History and Theory*”?

As it turns out, the meaning of the word has changed a great deal over the past half century – something that would not amaze any historian, I think. Despite the editors’ best intentions, I therefore must say that an issue on the *past* fifty years could have been far more instructive, perhaps even so for finding clues as to where the discipline might be heading.

¹ B. Fay, ‘History and Theory. The next fifty years’, *History and Theory* no.4 49(2010)1-5; 1.

² *History and Theory* no.4 49(2010) 1-166. Respectively Aviezer Tucker and Ann Rigney, William Sewell and David Christian, and Carolyn Dean and Eelco Runia.

³ Sewell and Christian are notable exceptions in the December issue of 2010, since they argue for respectively a return to ‘scientific’ economic history and a new and even absolute and objective world history.

This paper is not in the position to give a complete overview of the past fifty years, it will focus on *History and Theory* in its current form. Before clarifying how this analyses will be done, I will however devote just some brief paragraphs to these past fifty years. Before studying a thing, it is good to know what that thing is, and as the historicists put it: if you want to know what something is, you have to know its history.

From Hempel to Hayden

When George Nadel founded *History and Theory* in 1960, the epistemological debate in the philosophy of history was all about the relation between history and the exact sciences. Peter Hempels “Covering Law Model” (CLM) was omnipresent, and the common goal of most of these philosophers was to make clear once and for all how the different disciplines related. The deductive nomological way of reasoning that was ascribed to the exact sciences had to be adapted for, integrated in or imposed on (depending which viewpoint one takes) the historical sciences. In practice this meant that historiography had to mirror itself to the social sciences. It is not difficult to see how, in this debate, ‘theory’ was something valuable: not only epistemological theory (which is actually philosophy) but also theory understood as the first step towards social laws.⁴

To say that things changed, is an understatement. In the decennia that followed, philosophical milestones like *Les mots et les choses* by Michel Foucault (1966) and *Metahistory* by Hayden White (1973) shot all the hopes that history was ever going to be a ‘science’ to pieces. Discourse was inevitably corrupting our knowledge, and historiography turned out to be a lot more like writing fiction than like doing scientific research. Meanwhile the CLM itself was under heavy attack from philosophers like William Dray, who showed that the ‘Covering Law’ would either be just a definition, or too vague to be useful, or would simply never exist – assertions that were all the more unsettling considering the amount of successful covering laws that thus far had been discovered: none.

The lost illusions came with renewed pride as well, for many historians now concluded that the social sciences that had claimed to be the example of what science should be, were even more speculative and unscientific than historiography. The statement that “the social sciences can learn more from history than history from the social sciences”, made by

⁴ B. Fay, ‘History and Theory. The next fifty years’, *History and Theory* no.4 49(2010)1-5; 1-2.

Frank Ankersmit in 1983, shows how matters had been turned upside down in twenty years' time.⁵

The young journal *History and Theory* went along with these developments. It started to pay more attention to subjects like representation and interpretation, and became the leading journal on the philosophy of history. The word “theory” in the title remained, although the social scientific kind of theory that was originally advocated in the journal hardly appeared anymore – and thus the journal's title became a bit of an anachronism.

The relevance of studying a journal on the philosophy of history

Since the upheavals in the seventies and eighties, developments in the philosophy of history have not ended. They have however, been slowed down. Completely new positions in the great debates on for example the nature of historical knowledge, historical representation and explanation have hardly been taken, and if so, they did not trigger any great discussions. The fact that the anniversary issue of *History and Theory* is on the future of the field strongly suggests that there is a sense of urgency among the editors to stimulate new insights.

Studying *History and Theory* at this point in time then, is particularly interesting and useful. In this paper a quantitative analyses of the last five volumes of the journal (2006-2011) will be combined with a qualitative assessment. In this way formal and structural aspects of *H&T* (such as the way every issue is organized, the institutional background of the journal etc.) will be linked to current debates. With regard to the history and recent developments in the philosophy of history, the most important question that should be tackled is: How is *History and Theory* dealing with stagnation within the discipline? Is it a journal in transition searching for a new kind of philosophy? Or is it perhaps a rather conservative medium that will be unable to revive old debates? Quantitative data on for example the institutional background of the authors can be very useful to study these questions. At the same time, a qualitative approach is indispensable for properly appreciating developments in the content of the journal.

⁵ F.R. Ankersmit, *Narrative Logic* (The Hague, London, Boston 1983)3.



1. History and Theory today

Mission and Scope

The self-justifications scientific publications usually produce are mostly quite vague and hardly ever very passionate, and the mission statement *History and Theory* provides us with is no different. Apart from a great number of possible subjects covered in the journal, it only tells us that its contributors are ‘prominent’, a commonplace in these kind of statements:

“History and Theory leads the way in exploring the nature of history. Prominent international thinkers contribute their reflections in the following areas: critical philosophy of history, speculative philosophy of history, historiography, history of historiography, historical methodology, critical theory, and time and culture. Related disciplines are also covered within the journal, including interactions between history and the natural and social sciences, the humanities, and psychology.⁶

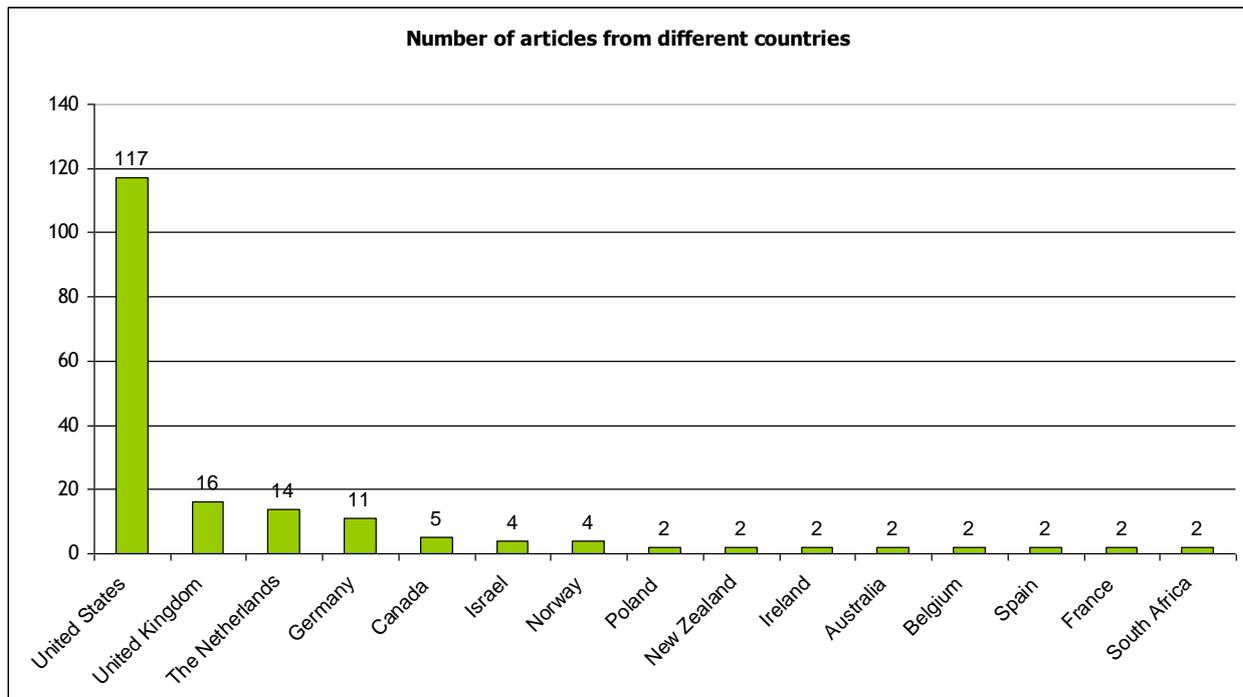
Explicit goals or even an intended audience are not mentioned, so objectives and scope can only be (re-)constructed by looking at the journal’s institutional background and by examining its content. In this section the position *History and Theory* takes within the discipline of the philosophy of history will be explicated by looking at some formal and informal features of the journal, like the institutional background of the members of the editorial board, links the journal has to universities and other aspects.

An American get together?

History and Theory is published at Wesleyan University, a small private liberal arts college in Connecticut, USA. The journal’s executive editor, Brian Fay, is a professor of philosophy at this university, and the three (male) associate editors are holding chairs in history at this college as well. Scholars from Wesleyan University contribute a great number of articles to the journal, especially review articles. Intellectual history is an official major program at Wesleyan University, and a lot of scholars from this university that contribute to the journal, teach in this major.

⁶ [http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/\(ISSN\)1468-2303/homepage/ProductInformation.html](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/(ISSN)1468-2303/homepage/ProductInformation.html). In fact, the mission statement is not even mentioned at the official webpage of *History and Theory*, it can only be found via the *Wiley online library*.

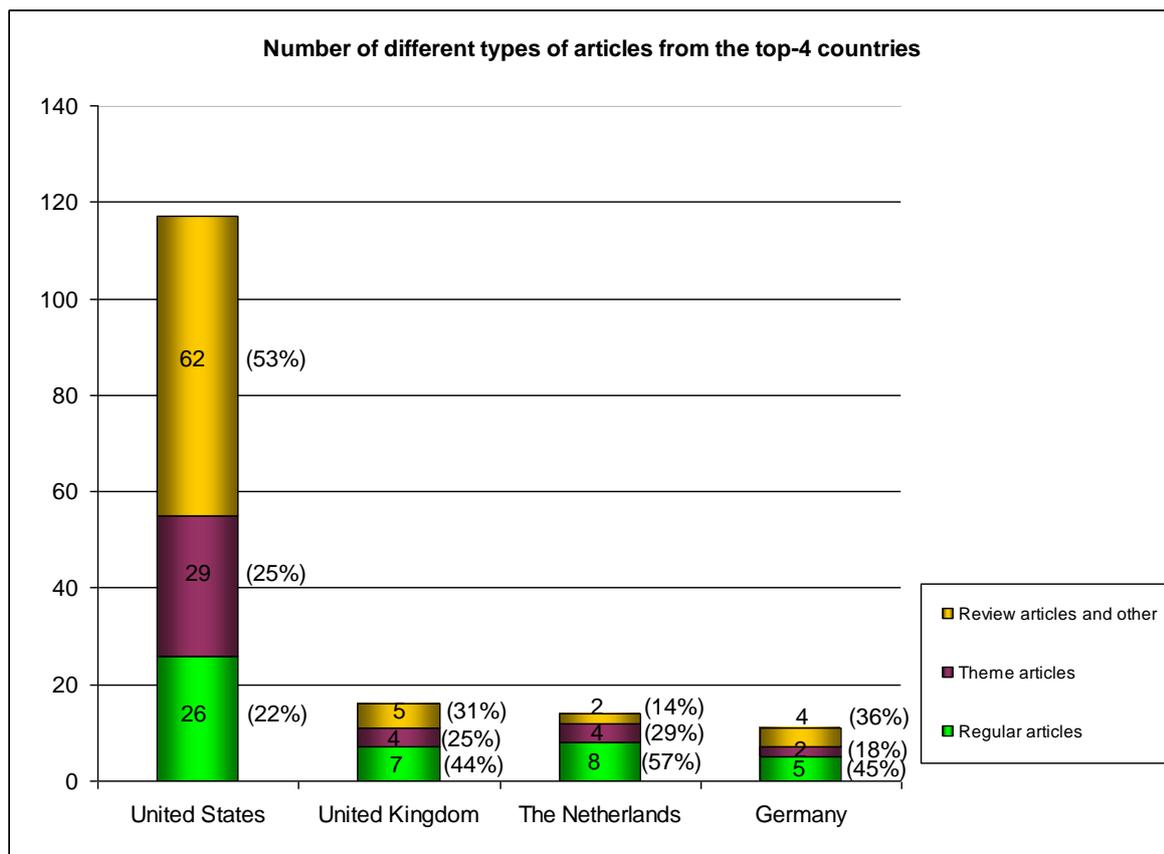
Considering that the publisher of *H&T* is Wiley-Blackwell, a large American publishing house with nearly 1,500 peer-reviewed journals⁷, one might conclude that the journal is a purely American enterprise. A first glimpse on a graph of contributing authors (2006-2011) seems to confirm this suspicion.



As shown in the graph above⁸, between 2006 and 2011, out of 197 articles in total, a staggering 117 (59%) were written by authors stationed in the United States. Other countries that often contributed were the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Germany, but with 16, 14 and 11 articles they were absolutely no match for the amount of articles from the US. A closer look is required however, for the sheer amount of articles is not all there is to it.

⁷ <http://www.wesleyan.edu/histjrn/>, with a subscription fee of €61 for a personal subscription Wiley charges a quite regular price: similar journals of the same (and other) publishers are usually about as expensive. The discount given to students (who have to pay €36) is rather generous.

⁸ Only countries with two or more articles are included in the graph. From Argentina, Bulgaria, China, Italy, Finland, Japan, South Korea, Sweden Taiwan and the Czech Republic there was only one article. In the graph, the countries are sorted by amount of articles and by type of article (review articles being less important than regular articles).



This second graph shows that, although the United States contributed a lot of articles indeed, over half of them (53%) were review articles which – as will be explained later on in this paper – are somewhat less important than articles in theme issues (25% of the articles from the US) and regular articles (the latter being the most important in the journal). Comparing the four most contributing countries on the basis of the amount of regular articles they supplied, slightly transforms the image. The United States are still the largest providers with 26 articles, but the difference has diminished. Surprisingly second are the authors from the Netherlands with 8 regular articles, just ahead of contributors from the UK (7) and Germany (5). Looking on a continental scale the differences are even smaller, since authors from North America have contributed exactly as many regular articles as authors from Europe: 28.

The fact remains however, that the US are by all means the largest contributor to the journal, although executive editor Brian Fay tries to present things in a different way.⁹ In fact his statement that “today, about 57% of the journal’s library subscriptions and 72% of its readership are from outside the United States”, only makes it all the more typical that most of its authors should be from within the US.

⁹ B. Fay, “International journal abstracts”, *History and Theory* 50;1 (2011) 129-142: 133.

All this means that *History and Theory* is not a platform for authors from just anywhere. There are for example, very few contributions from non-Western countries (from both China and Taiwan there is one regular article). As will be discussed later, this does concern the editorial board, but changing this will probably take a while, and will involve fundamental debates on the nature of history itself. In the mean time, the conclusion that can be justified is that *History and Theory* focuses on the Western world and provides a platform for scholars from North America and Europe, with an accent on the former when it comes to the less weighty sections of the journal. An interesting statistic to add is the ‘gender balance’: the amount of male/female authors. In science, there are still a lot more men than women, and this journal is no different: 80% of the authors of *History and Theory* in the past five years were male.¹⁰

Grading a Journal

After considering the mission statement of the journal, the origins of authors and the background of the editors, the question how all this is received by the scientific community manifests itself. Somewhat contrary to the confession of subjectivity in such matters that scholars make without exception, there is an ever increasing tendency to ‘objectify’ differences in quality between publications. The want for a yardstick to measure journals has led to the rise of so-called citation indexes. Although there is much to say about these indexes – especially about whether these indexes are really signifiers of quality or rather just signifiers of popularity – they can at least serve as means to obtain insight in the relative attention a publication receives.

The results for *History and Theory* are interesting: the journal is relatively often cited¹¹, having an average citation rate of 0.84 citations per item. The graph below shows, that in recent years citations have risen strongly. This may have something to do with the appearance of several articles that seek to posit new directions in the philosophy of history that appeared in these years, as will be discussed below. In the rankings of the European

¹⁰ See appendix of statistics.

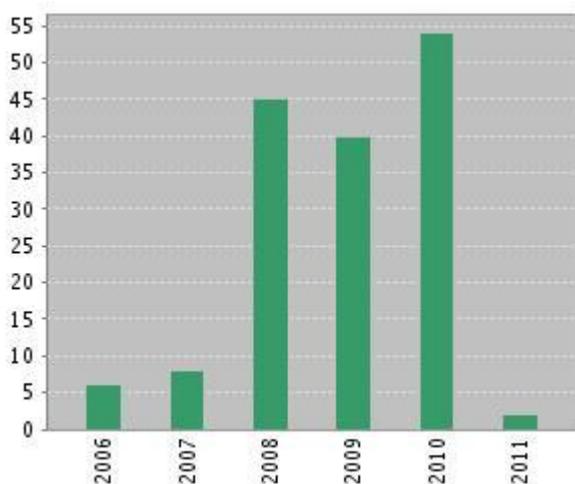
¹¹ Citation report derived from www.webofknowledge.com. Complete URL:
http://apps.webofknowledge.com/CitationReport.do?product=UA&search_mode=CitationReport&SID=V2a1E7EiiNai8NIHmAG&page=1&cr_pqid=8&viewType=summary

Science Foundation *History and Theory* was ranked “A”, in the Australian ERA-project “A*”. Over the period under discussion here, the h-index of the journal was 6.¹²

Citations in Each Year¹³

Eminences grises

There are other clues that suggest that *History and Theory* is a leading journal in its discipline. Apart from the editorial staff that is associated with the Wesleyan University (see above) and that deals with the daily practices like selecting peer-reviewers and editing articles, *History and Theory* also has an editorial committee, that plays an advisory role. The impressive list of names of this board underlines the prominent place *History and Theory* takes within the field of the philosophy of history. On it are, among others, Arthur Danto, Haydn White, William



Dray, Frank Ankersmit and David Carr, who are without a doubt some of the most eminent philosophers of history of the past fifty years. They were at the frontline of the debates in the seventies and eighties mentioned in the introduction, and they (most of them at least) took the postmodern or narrativist stance that came to dominate the philosophy of history until now.

In a way this editorial committee represents the position *History and Theory* is in. There is a kind of heritage that is both glorious and burdensome. Of course, hosting such renowned names is an honor and good for the journal’s reputation. On the other hand, most of these scholars are in their seventies or eighties, and – their early days of fame often dating back some thirty or forty odd years – they will probably not be the ones to commence the new philosophy of history that is so much wanted. Some might argue that their philosophies are in fact in the way of such new initiatives.

¹² The h-index seeks to discount some disproportionate factors in ranking: “The h-index is indicated by an orange horizontal line. The number of items above this line, which is “h” have at least “h” citations. For example, an h-index of 20 means there are 20 items that have 20 citations or more. This metric is useful because it discounts the disproportionate weight of highly cited papers or papers that have not yet been cited.” http://images.isiknowledge.com/WOKRS52B10/help/WOK/hp_citation_report_hindex.html

¹³ Idem.

2. Structure and Sections

In the previous sections, I have shown how *History and Theory* has come to be a leading journal in the philosophy of history, how it currently functions, what its problems are (the aging of the postmodern and narrativist philosophies of history) and what its reception is. Before finally embarking on an examination of the present *contents* of the journal, one last feature of the journal deserves our attention. It has been mentioned above that the most important section in *History and Theory* consists out of main articles. In this section I will explain what other sections *History and Theory* has and how debates are conducted in the journal, in short: how the journal is structured.¹⁴

Adding all the pages of *H&T* between the second issue of 2006 and the first issue of 2011, amounts to just over 3,000 pages. About half of these pages are devoted to ‘normal’ articles: articles written on a more or less random topic, not intentionally linked to other articles in the same issue. These papers are on average the longest articles the journal publishes, their lengths stretching from about twenty to over thirty pages: thus they cover more than half of the pages of the journal, while only 35,5% of all the articles are ‘regular’ ones.

A type of article that can be discerned within the regular articles are the theme-articles, articles that are published in the (more or less) annual theme-issue. Although the journal grants these theme-issues the somewhat exotic name ‘Beiheft’, they are really just like normal issues, except for the fact that they exist out of theme articles only. Some themes are more successful than others, triggering actual debate rather than just publishing a lot of articles on one topic. Relevant theme-issues from the past years will be discussed in upcoming sections.

In absolute numbers of articles, the biggest section of the journal consists of review articles and review essays (80, i.e. 36% of all the articles). Review essays are usually somewhat shorter than review articles, but their purpose and contents are very similar: these are articles that discuss and value recent literature, without omitting the broader contexts of these works. The authors of the review articles/essays will typically discuss a new book’s connection with similar literature, will say something about the current state of affairs the book is related to, summarize an ongoing debate and criticize the new contribution. These articles can be very instructive, but are not themselves contributions to the debates they describe. They are shorter than regular articles, normally having anything from five to fifteen

¹⁴ The percentages and numbers provided in this section can be studied in their context in the appendix.



pages (or even a bit more). For analyzing the stance *H&T* takes in general, they are of lesser importance.

Apart from books in summary and other very small sections, there is one other type of articles that is of importance in the journal. These are the so-called “Forum”-articles, that are published together in some sort of short written debate. These articles are a bit shorter than regular articles (around or under twenty pages), but are sometimes very inspiring and useful, since they try to stimulate debate and prompt new insights. In the past years forums on such topics as Chinese thought, history writing and religion and historical “presence” were written, which yields extra weight to these topics, and indicates that the editorial board wishes to stimulate debates on them (some of these subjects will return in the next sections). In the past five years there were over thirty articles in forums, covering just under fifteen percent of the journals pages.

3. The Question of Themes

Now that the internal structure of the journal has been laid down, it is time to take a look at the content of the journal. In this section, some interesting data on themes and “turning points” in history will be presented and properly assessed. Since the most important articles in *History and Theory* are regular articles, articles in Forums and theme-articles, in the statistics for this section only these sections are taken into account.

On constructing themes

Discerning different subjects in a journal like *History and Theory* is risky business. A “geography of themes” is difficult if not impossible to make, since the matters discussed are more often than not philosophical questions that at least claim to have universal value. Trying to overcome this difficulty by considering for example the theory of an American scholar as a theory *on* America is completely missing the boat. Likewise, a division into different epochs or ages an article can be on is pointless: in intellectual history it is quite usual to write articles on philosophers from, for example, the eighteenth century, but in *History and Theory* such an account will typically only serve to produce a new thought with current value.

Clearly a quantitative analyses of the content of this journal, if required, has to take into account different criterions. The division I propose below seeks to construct a few general categories that together contain the largest part of the articles in *H&T*. Making these categories is, again, risky business. Not only for the simple reason that a huge number of articles may be on several of them at the same time, but also because making this division means judging the articles involved. Eventually this implies that for constructing a graph like the one below, philosophical or theoretical decisions are required that may demand a lot more attention than can be given in this paper.¹⁵ The categories and the distribution of articles among them are, in other words, somewhat underdetermined. For the sake of this paper however, they will just have to do.

As you can see in the graph on page 12, the division I made is between eight categories. The category with the biggest amount of articles (27, 24%) is “representation of the past”. I labeled articles with this category if they were on the way historians can or should ‘(re-)present’ the things they have found doing research. This category contains articles that

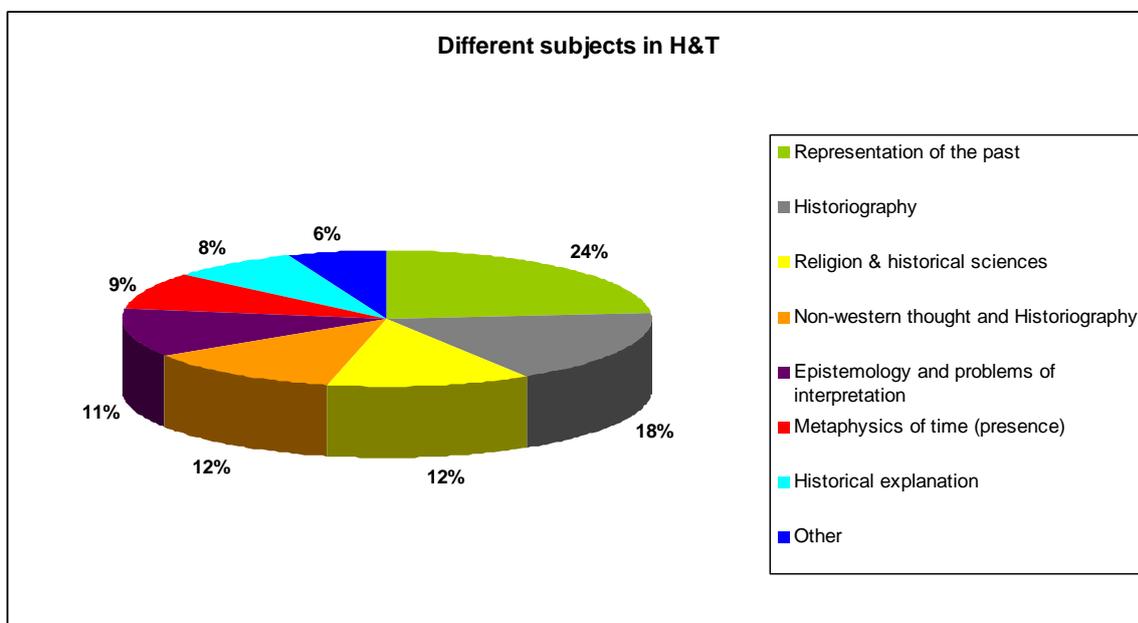
¹⁵ The categories proposed are ‘custom made’ for this journal. This means that, I think, they are the best categories for understanding these five years of this particular journal. But it also means that they are subjective and can be replaced with other categories.

discuss this on a very theoretical level (how is the past represented in general, is the past in a way present in the representation, etc) but also on a more practical level (hoe does the representation of a certain influential book ‘work’, and what can be learned from this).

The category that borders on “representation of the past”, is “historiography” (20, 18%). This segment contains articles about (past) ways of writing history that have been influential or interesting, and articles on particular books and papers on history. If a book is discussed on the basis of its representation of the past, it is taken up in “representation of the past”, otherwise it has been placed in “historiography”.

The most ‘classical’ philosophical categories are “historical explanation” and “epistemology” (9, 8% and 13, 11%) discussing respectively the way historical occurrences are explained in historiography (for instance by using Hempel’s CLM or by means of a narratio) and the difficulties in justifying and understanding our knowledge of the past.

The last three categories I discern coincide with current debates in *History and Theory*, namely “religion and historical sciences” (14, 12%), “non-Western thought and historiography (14, 12%) and “metaphysics of time” (10, 9%). These are all topics that are “trending” and especially the last two categories should be seen as articles that seek to create new starts for the philosophy of history and historiography.



Drawing conclusions

So, what do these figures mean? First of all, we can conclude that the narrativist philosophy of history still leaves its tracks in the journal. The emphasis that is put on “representation” springs, I would hold, from a narrativist position that feels that the most important task of a historian is to (re-)present the past in a narratio. This does not mean that all the articles in this category present their readers with narrative philosophies of history. In fact, very few articles between 2006 and 2011 did so (with the notable exception of an article by David Carr¹⁶). Rather, they look at their respective topics from a narrativist perspective (paradigm even, if you will), and ask: how does this narrative function?

Other ‘classic’ categories are relatively underemphasized: the questions of historical explanation and historical knowledge (epistemology) are among the smaller categories, which signals that these debates are at a low, not triggering any new opinions. Since these debates are among the most fundamental within the philosophy of history, their stagnation can only mean bad news for *History and Theory*. Considering that articles on representation (the largest category) ultimately stem out of a position in these debates (namely, a narrativist stance towards historical explanation), I believe that the decline of them could eventually lead to a stagnation of the discipline as a whole. The small amount of articles on historical explanation and epistemology suggests that the transition to a new philosophy of history is by no means complete yet.

But there are more hopeful signs as well. The three “trending” topics have attracted a lot of attention in recent years, and I would say two of them could really change the debates within the disciplines in years to come. In the next section I will elaborate on these two categories, the “metaphysics of time” and the advent of non-Western views on history. Suffice to say right now, that together they comprise over one fifth of the journal, a remarkable achievement. The third of the three, religion and history writing, will probably have less impact on the discipline as a whole, since it is really a debate in itself. Moreover, the articles in this category do not, in my opinion, propose really new viewpoints. They just repeat a debate that, quite frankly, has been the same for over decades.

¹⁶ D. Carr, “Narrative explanation and its malcontents”, *History and Theory* 47;1 (2008) 19-30. Since this article is about explanation rather than representation, it is taken up in the category of “historical explanation”.

Turning points in history

Before going deeper into specific aspects of *History and Theory's* contents, one final statistic will be interesting. It is often argued that philosophy in general, and the philosophy of history in particular was profoundly affected by the impact of the nazi horrors that became apparent after 1945. In this argumentation the relativist philosophies of postmodernism are thought to have been born out of the trauma of the gas chambers that obliterated all that was good, true and beautiful.

Whoever thumbs through the pages of *History and Theory* will conclude that the Holocaust indeed appears in an especially wide range of articles. Of course, a superficial statistic of how many articles contain references to the Holocaust, does not prove the entire Holocaust-postmodernism connection (for instance, not every single article in *H&T* should be considered postmodern). It does however point at the remarkable “presence” of the Holocaust in very diverse writings on the nature of history and history writing. It seems that in almost any topic, the Holocaust is never far from mind. Almost 30% of all articles contain references to it.

The Holocaust is not the only historical catastrophe that appears regularly in the journal. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, out of every five articles, one will mention the French Revolution at some point.¹⁷ This is a lot, especially taking into account that very few articles actually are on a specific period of history (and if so, they are usually on more recent events). Compared to a recent turning point in history, like the fall of the Berlin wall, the French Revolution is mentioned much more often. This statistic suggests that the philosophy of history is never completely apart from history itself. Some epochs leave a bigger impression than others, however.

French Revolution, Holocaust and Collapse of the Berlin Wall in *History and Theory* articles

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Total	%
French Revolution	6	3	3	4	8	0	24	20,9
Holocaust	3	7	5	14	5	0	34	29,6
Berlin wall 1989	1	2	0	1	3	0	7	6,1
Articles total	22	23	19	27	21	3	115	

¹⁷ Articles that just use the French revolution as a chronological benchmark (“in the decades around the French Revolution, there was a remarkable rise in the number of broken necks in France”) are left out of the statistic.

4. Trending topics and the search for new insights

After taking a broad overview over the contents of *History and Theory*, it is useful to highlight some important debates and topics that have been brought to the fore in the last five years. As mentioned in the introduction, the question that is crucial here, is how *H&T* seeks to overcome the stagnation of the philosophy of history that is looming. To answer this question, we must take a closer look at the categories that I have called “non-Western thought and historiography” and “metaphysics of time”

Looking for history outside the Western world

In the most recent issue of *History and Theory* executive editor Brian Fay pledged his loyalty to the project of involving more non-Western, particularly Asian scholars in the thinking about history, and thereby in *History and Theory*. He took a surprisingly anti-relativist view in this, stating:

“Ideas about history and its study should know no political or social boundaries, any more than do ideas about the nature of gravity or the cause of cancer.”¹⁸

The passionate plea for integration of Asian (Chinese) thought into the philosophy that followed, explained retrospectively why the journal had spent so much attention on non-Western ideas about history lately. As discussed above, between 2006 and 2011, fourteen articles had been devoted to this subject. Fay emphasized this, but also admitted that still very few of the authors were actually (in this case) Chinese. The way Fay revealed himself as an Enlightenment thinker (suggesting at some point that future generations might just judge us for the way we have remained deaf for the insights of other cultures) may seem a bit radical and optimistic, but at least some concrete actions were taken: in 2010, *History and Theory* started conversations with the SSCP: The Social Sciences in China Press. What these contacts will lead to, is yet to become clear.¹⁹

I think it is clear that starting conversations with philosophers and scientists with a completely different background can only be positive. And despite the somewhat impatient words of Fay, I think the journal is doing quite well in this respect, especially compared to other journals that are still often completely neglecting non-Western history. At least *History*

¹⁸ B. Fay, “International journal abstracts”, *History and Theory* 50:1 (2011) 129-142:130.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, 131-133.

and Theory has spent some attention to it. This might well lead to very interesting insights that can spark new debates within the discipline.

There are, however, also some problems. First of all, looking at the articles on non-Western thought of the past five years, Fay words that “Ideas about history and its study should know no political or social boundaries”, seem a bit simple, to say the least. In two very interesting articles in a forum on Chinese thought F.H. Mutschler and Q.E. Wang made significant observations on a Chinese/Confucian way of looking at history²⁰: it considers history as something that provides examples and contains the morale human beings should live by. Sato shows how difficult debate on the nature of history can be in this way of thinking: whereas Western cultures usually have an (absolute) transcendent morale, in Chinese thought the morale is in history, which is absolute itself. This makes transforming the image of history potentially painful. Sato does not go this far, but the question that rises is: if this is the case, is historiography (which is indeed constantly revising history) perhaps something fundamentally *Western*?

I do not propose to abandon all conversation with other cultures, on the contrary. But I would like to warn against naive ideas about these conversations. I am not convinced by Fay’s proposition that Chinese culture as well as Western culture knows its enlightenment: in fact, starting conversations with an Enlightened ideal in mind might well en up being another way of imposing Western ideas on non-Western cultures. So far *History and Theory* has not made this mistake I think, and presumably Fay’s firm words will not change this.

It will take some time, before non-Western thought will really have an impact on the philosophy of history: the clearest sign for this conclusion is that so far all the articles in *History and Theory* on this subject have not yet come past the stage of establishing the terms of speech between the two cultures.

Is the past present?

The second debate that has drawn a lot of attention in (as well as outside of) *History and Theory*, started with an article by the Groninger Historian Eelco Runia in the first issue of 2006. In this article, and in a similar article that served as the kick-off for a forum in the third issue that the same year, Runia posed the thesis that the past is indeed present, but only when

²⁰ F.H. Mutschler, “Sima Qian and his Western colleagues. On possible categories of description”, *History and Theory* 46;2 (2007) 194-200. M. Sato, “the archetype of history in the Confucian ecumene”, *History and Theory* 46;2 (2007) 218-232.

we do not recognize it as the past. When we consider something past, for instance by writing a historical text about it (which typically has the form of a metaphor), we neutralize it and take it up in the huge amount of stories our minds comprise. By doing so, the “pastness” of it – one could say: the reality of it- is lost. The past is only present on a subconscious (but very powerful!) level, manifesting itself in metonymical and implicit language rather than in the conscious accounts we make of it.²¹

This promising start has instigated some debate in the journal, a debate that centers around what I have summarized as “the metaphysics of time”. Authors like Berber Bevernage and A. Kasabova wish to specify Runia’s theory in order to come to a new metaphysics of time. Interestingly, both authors stress the need to get rid of our current conception of time, which Bevernage describes as “a line consisting of infinite single points”: our discourse sees the present as something absolutely different from the past, as a point in time that is constantly being separated from the former present, now past point in time. Bevernage and Kasabova both argue that this conception of time leaves way to little room for appreciation of the lines of continuity between past and present, and future and present.²²

I have stated in the section devoted to “themes” that I think that the new philosophy of history *History and Theory* “is waiting for”, should pose a new epistemological foundation to elaborate on. The presence-debate is promising in this respect. A new conception of time (pretty much the most fundamental change one can think of, talking about the nature of history) could surely inspire new epistemological debates. The elaborations by Bevernage and Kasabova on Runia’s theory are interesting and necessary follow-ups, but still a lot of questions remain. Both authors relate Runia’s theory to ethics, but the more fundamental questions, for historians at least, are epistemological: Does a different conception of time involve a different understanding of the historian’s work? Does this new idea require historiography to change? What is the use of historical knowledge in this sense? These questions are vital if the metaphysics of time-debate is to be the starting point for future philosophies of history.

²¹ E. Runia, “Presence”, *History and Theory* 45;1 (2006) 1-29. And E. Runia, “Spots of time”, *History and Theory* 45;3 (2006) 305-316.

²² B. Bevernage, “Time, presence and historical injustice”, 47;2 (2008) 149-167. and A. Kasabova, “Memory, memorials and commemoration”, *History and Theory* 47;3 (2008) 331-350.



Conclusion

This paper started with an analysis of the structure and formal aspects of *History and Theory*, to eventually end up at a short discussion on trending topics that will probably turn out to be important for the journal's future. Looking back on both the quantitative data, and the qualitative assessment, several conclusions can be drawn. First of all, *History and Theory* is the leading journal in the philosophy of history (insiders know that it is also one of the very few on this topic), that has earned a great reputation in the fifty years of its existence.

But this position is not safe forever, and closely tied to the fate of the discipline as a whole. Although this paper gives just a very rough overview of the developments in the philosophy of history, it will be clear that with the narrativist philosophy of history in decline, the need for new initiatives is getting ever more urgent. As we have seen, the editors of *History and Theory* are dealing with this problem in different ways. There is the tendency to include non-Western modes of thinking, which is strongly advocated by the executive editor of *H&T*. This development can certainly be interesting, but also has some difficulties. The metaphysics of time-debate is promising, but needs to be developed further to stimulate participation and to lay the foundations for other new philosophies of history.

This journal is, in my opinion, a journal that is not afraid of change, and willing to keep evolving, which is a good and also quite rare thing. Obviously there are biases (authors are usually from Western countries and almost always male), but the editors are not completely unaware of them. To the discipline of the philosophy of history, *History and Theory* remains to be the most important journal. As for me, I will definitely keep track of *H&T* in the years to come, since I am very interested in philosophical debates about the nature of history. The editors of *History and Theory* may have been curious about the next *fifty* years, I have a feeling that the next *fifteen* years alone will prove to be quite interesting enough.

Appendix: Graphs and Figures

Gender balance	male		female		Total	
		%		%		%
Articles, Forums and Discussions	92	81	22	19	114	100
All sections	155	82	34	18	189	100

Amount of articles divided over different sections in History and Theory II 2006- I 2011

Year	Articles	%	Articles in Forums (including 'dialogues')	%	Review Essays & Review articles	%	Books in Summary	%	Other	%	Total	%
2006	14	41,2	6	17,6	11	32,4	2	5,9	1	2,9	34	100
2007	13	29,5	10	22,7	16	36,4	3	6,8	2	4,5	44	100
2008	10	20	9	18	25	50	4	8	2	4	50	100
2009	17	39,5	9	20,9	12	27,9	2	4,7	3	7	43	100
2010	21	52,5	0	0	13	32,5	3	7,5	3	7,5	40	100
2011	3	33,3	0	0	3	33,3	1	11	2	22	9	100
total	78	35,5	34	15,5	80	36,4	15	6,8	13	5,9	220	100

Amount of pages divided over different Sections in History and Theory 2006-2011

year	Articles	%	Forums (including 'dialogues')	%	Review Essays & Review articles	%	Books in Summary	%	Other	%	Total	%
2006	247	54	70	15	127	28	12	2,6	1	0,2	457	100
2007	268	47	115	20	168	29	12	2,1	13	2,3	576	100
2008	212	34	128	20	256	41	18	2,9	13	2,1	627	100
2009	334	55	122	20	118	19	8	1,3	28	4,6	610	100
2010	413	67	0	0	142	23	12	1,9	54	8,7	621	100
2011	70	48	0	0	31	21	4	2,7	41	28	146	100
Total	1544	51	435	14	842	28	66	2,2	150	4,9	3037	100



Themes of articles divided by year

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	total
Representation of the past			1	21	2	3	27
Historiography		9	3	1	7		20
Epistemology and problems of interpretation	2	2	2	3	3	1	13
Religion & historical enterprise	11		3				14
Metaphysics of time (presence)	6	1	2		1		10
Non-Western thought and History		11			3		14
Historical explanation			6	1		2	9
Other	1			2	4		7