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Becoming Historical

The historical consciousness that emerged from the revolutionary break with tradition at the turn of the nineteenth century shaped the development of new forms of personal and collective identity. This book examines the stages and conflicts in this process of "becoming historical" through the works of prominent Prussian artists and intellectuals (Karl Friedrich Schinkel, Felix Mendelssohn, Jacob Grimm, Friedrich Karl von Savigny, Leopold von Ranke) who attached their personal visions to the reformist agenda of the Prussian regime that took power in 1840. The historical account of the evolution of analogous and interrelated commitments to a cultural reformation that would create communal solidarity through subjective identification with public memory is framed by the philosophical perspectives on historical selfhood provided by both the spokesperson for Prussian cultural politics – F. W. J. Schelling – and his radical critics – Karl Marx and Soren Kierkegaard – thus drawing this story of building selves and communities in early nineteenth-century Berlin into current debates about historically determined and contingently constructed identities.

John Edward Toews is Professor of History at the University of Washington. He is the author of *Hegelianism: The Path Toward Dialectical Humanism, 1805–1841* (Cambridge: 1981) as well as numerous articles in scholarly journals. He also is the editor of *The Communist Manifesto: By Karl Marx and Frederick Engels with Related Documents* (New York: 1999).

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BECOMING HISTORICAL

Cultural Reformation and Public Memory in Early Nineteenth-Century Berlin

JOHN EDWARD TOEWS
University of Washington

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For Julia and Jonathan

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Preface

This book originated in a vague curiosity about the cultural significance and consequences of what appeared to be a minor historical event – the death of Frederick William III of Prussia and the accession to the throne of his son Frederick William IV, in June 1840. From my earlier investigations into the various contexts that shaped the evolution of Hegelianism and especially the Prussian Hegelian School, I was aware that the Prussian dynastic change had instigated a "new course" in academic politics. The new king, who fancied himself something of an intellectual and artist, was aligned with the academic opponents of Hegelianism and quickly used his powers of appointment to give his antipathies and sympathies public visibility and public force. Friedrich Karl von Savigny, the founder of the Historical School of Law, was appointed to a cabinet post as minister of justice in charge of preparing new legislative proposals, Leopold Ranke became the official Prussian state historiographer, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm were invited to pursue their national project of compiling an historical German dictionary at the Prussian Academy of Sciences, and Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling was lured from Munich to Berlin as the publicly anointed philosophical spokesman for the metaphysical faith that animated the cultural program of the new regime. Frederick William IV began his reign with an agenda for a cultural "reformation" that would negate the threat of political "revolution." At the core of this agenda was what he and his intellectual allies described as the "historical principle," the implications of which resonated far beyond the squabbles between members of the Hegelian School and the Historical School at the university. The new course in Prussian cultural politics represented a programmatic attempt to redefine membership in various communities – religious, ethnic, ethical, and political – as historical identifications, that is, in terms of the subjective identification of individuals with a shared past or public memory.

My curiosity intensified and focused as I tried to clarify to myself the meaning of this cultural project of creating community through historical identification. One could clearly argue that the Prussian "new course" after 1840 was a minor incident in Prussian and German history. The reform agenda turned out to be rife with internal contradictions, and most of the cultural celebrities that were called together to give it intellectual and aesthetic substance had either died or retreated in disillusionment from their public commitments by 1845–46. For many of the individuals drawn to

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Berlin to participate in the cultural politics of the new regime, the dynastic change of 1840 and its aftermath was more of an episode than a turning point. Yet this brief historical moment, in which so many important proponents of the historical principle in a diversity of cultural fields and disciplines were gathered together under the aegis of the programmatic vision of Prussia's political leadership, does provide an illuminating focal point for an examination of the cultural and historical meaning of that principle itself, and especially for the complex relationship between the cultivation of historical consciousness, or historical mindedness, and the construction of personal and communal identities. What were the affinities in historical and cultural viewpoint that produced this affiliation among such a diverse group of intellectuals, scholars, and artists? What were the perspectives and motivations that led the new king and some of his advisors to seek out these particular individuals and imagine them as the appropriate spokespersons for their cultural agenda? How did the brief affiliation of the 1840s reveal and transform the apparent affinities that had promoted and encouraged its creation? Was it merely a coincidence that two path-breaking, historically resonant, and prophetic conceptions of what it meant to live human existence in the form of historical selfhood – those of Marx and Kierkegaard – emerged, at least in part, as critical responses to this wide-ranging attempt to construct a cultural politics for historicizing identity in Berlin during the early 1840s?

Questions like this quickly led me to foreground what had been background and direct my attention beyond an examination of a particular stage in the evolution of the internal structure and external relations of a narrowly defined academic historicism. The texts and contexts of Ranke and Savigny, two individuals always prominently included in discussions of German historicism, were my first objects of analysis, but they were soon connected to a broader synchronic examination of the ways in which questions of historical self-consciousness and historical identity were addressed and represented across a variety of cultural areas and "languages." I became more interested, for example, in how Ranke's conception of human existence as essentially historical was related to representations of human historicity in the architecture of Schinkel, the musical compositions of Mendelssohn, and the linguistic–ethnographic studies of Jacob Grimm, than in how his epistemological arguments and historical narratives helped produce and nurture specific forms of historical research, understanding, and representation within the disciplinary discourse and academic institutions of a peculiarly German tradition of historical scholarship. This is not to say that the latter issues do not interest me or that I completely ignore them in my analysis, but simply that I tend to subordinate them to questions about the nature and implications of conceiving human existence as historical existence, questions that Ranke shared with individuals like Schinkel, Mendelssohn, and Grimm, who were working in different disciplines, disciplinary languages, and cultural media. I do not perceive the patterns of argument and representation

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that developed in architecture and music as simply a reflection of arguments and representations developed in the textually oriented academic disciplines of jurisprudence, history, and philology. Instead, I assume that spatial and tonal representations of what it means, personally and collectively, to be and to become historical entered into this "conversation" among Prussian historicizers as independent interventions with their own messages to purvey. Within the framework of this study, inclusion in the conversation about "becoming historical" simply requires belief that human existence is essentially historical and that questions about personal, communal, and religious identity must be addressed within this ontological framework.[1]

The inclusion of extended sections on Schinkel and Mendelssohn within this study was a bit of a professional stretch for me and added years to the project. It became clear as I began to examine the perspectives of the major political instigators of the Prussian program for cultural reformation according to the "historical principle" that architecture and music played critical roles in their conceptions of historical identity. Frederick William IV actually preferred to think through and articulate his vision of cultural reform in architectural terms. Even though Schinkel died during the first months of his reign, the king's close personal association with Schinkel and with Schinkel's various public projects between 1815 and 1840 was an important factor in shaping the cultural politics of the regime after 1840. I selected Christian Bunsen, the king's close personal advisor and cultural consultant, for extended treatment because the development of Bunsen's own perspectives ranged across the areas of historical scholarship, archaeology, linguistics, music, and architecture and suggested some of the ways in which these various cultural dimensions might fit together in a program of cultural reformation. Both the king and Bunsen were in full agreement in pursuing a state appointment for Mendelssohn after 1840 that would place him in the charge not only of ecclesiastical music but also of musical education and public musical performance in Prussia. In many ways the shaping of historical consciousness through spatial organization and musical performance was more influential in the broader spheres of public life, in terms of both cultural representation and ethical and cultural education, than the production of scholarly texts and academic lectures. Certainly I found that devoting so much attention to Schinkel and Mendelssohn enriched my own conceptions of the meaning of historicism and the project of becoming historical.

[1] For the most influential account of historicism as the theory and method of historical knowledge and historical writing within the disciplinary matrix of the German academic tradition, see Georg G. Iggers, *The German Conception of History: The National Tradition of Historical Thought from Herder to the Present* (rev. ed.; Middletown, CT, 1983), but also Joern Ruesen, *Konfigurationen des Historismus: Studien zur deutsche Wissenschaftskultur* (Frankfurt: 1993); Annette Wittkau, *Historismus: Zur Geschichte des Begriffs und des Problems* (Goettingen: 1992); and Friedrich Jaeger and Joern Ruesen, *Geschichte des Historismus: Eine Einfuehrung* (Munich: 1992).

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Although the overall structure of this study is synchronic, its chapters share a common narrative structure. My aim was to re-create the paths that led individuals operating in different areas of culture to the particular perspective they possessed in 1840 and which made their affiliation in a common project possible, even though this affiliation may have been ephemeral and in some cases grounded at least partially in misrecognition. In crude preliminary outline, this meta-story, or ideal–typical narrative that informs the particular stories of the individual chapters, proceeds as follows. The starting point for the development of the historical consciousness of this generation was a belief that human identity was defined by participation in a spontaneously evolving, unique, ethno-cultural organism whose unifying and dynamic core was a particular life principle, "genius," or "idea" that articulated its presence as an incommensurable individuality in the production of language, ritual, myth, and customary patterns of social interaction. The purposive tendency in this development was from unconscious "natural" ethnic identity to self-conscious voluntary "ethical" identification. Religious and political institutions nurtured and cultivated cultural identity as a consciously chosen, self-imposed identification, but developed, unless artificially blocked in some fashion, from the archaic unity embodied in the "idea" in its preconscious form. The constitution of this belief, or the revelation of this historical reality, occurred for many literate and educated Germans in the twenty or so years between the beginnings of the French occupation of the Rhineland in the mid 1790s and the wars of liberation against the Napoleonic hegemony in 1813–15.[2] In particular, the national enthusiasm that accompanied the campaigns of 1813 was imagined as a critical, transformative moment of self-recognition, when Germans sloughed off the blinders of ahistorical consciousness and finally recognized themselves as members of a shared and uniquely individual German culture whose

[2] During the 1980s, there was extensive scholarly debate about the continuities and discontinuities between conceptions of historical existence and historical knowledge in the German Enlightenment, or even earlier periods, and the construction of Romantic historicism around the turn of the century. Most of the major participants in this debate are represented in the conference anthology: *Aufklaerung und Geschichte: Studien zur deutschen Geschichtswissenschaft im 18. Jahrhundert*, eds., Hans Erich Boedeker, Georg G. Iggers, Jonathan B. Knudson, and Peter H. Reill (Goettingen: 1986); but see also Horst Walter Blanke and Joern Ruesen, *Von der Aufklaerung zum Historismus: zum Strukturwandel des historischen Denkens* (Paderborn: 1984). The German discussion echoed debates about the relations between the peculiarly German form of Romantic historicism that was tied to the nationalist tradition prior to 1945 and the critical, social-scientific paradigms that emerged in the 1960s. In the mid 1990s Frank Ankersmit and Iggers debated this issue in a forum of the journal *History and Theory*, in the context of discussions about the philosophical and cultural implications of the "new historicism" that had emerged in Anglo-American academe in the 1980s: "The Meaning of Historicism and Its Relevance for Contemporary Theory," *History and Theory* 34 (1995): 143–73. My own work investigates the meaning of historicism less through its origins than through its fate after 1815 and focuses on the development of a stereoscopic vision of historical identity which, I believe, speaks in more interesting ways to the concerns of the present than the Romantic historicism of the turn of the century.

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history revealed and actualized its essence. The production of historical representations was meant to nurture and maintain this historical consciousness that had emerged in the German "awakening." I will refer to this model of historical identification through the shorthand of Romantic historicism at various points in the text.

It is important to recognize that the historicism of 1840 was not synonymous with the Romantic historicism I have just described. In fact, between 1815 and 1840, the original paradigm of ethno-cultural historical identity had revealed its inner tensions and begun to break apart. This process was marked first of all by experiences of disillusionment concerning the spontaneous evolution of a shared ethno-cultural essence into freely and self-consciously affirmed membership in an ethical community. The rejection of any necessary development of ethnic identity into ethical-political identity by the Congress of Vienna in 1814–15, the repression of the national movement in 1819–24, the apparent evolution of the ethnic "people" into an anarchic mass of individual egos as revealed by the social disturbances and political unrest of the early 1830s, all operated as moments, experienced with various weight in the lives of different individuals, in this fragmentation of the cultural paradigm of Romantic historicism. The result was that the transition from ethnicity to ethical life became a problem and a task that demanded specific and contingent action, rather than simply an immanent, necessary self-determination of the "idea." The spheres of politics and religion were no longer imagined as sites for the self-conscious expression of a prior, unconscious, primal identity, but as autonomous sites with transcendent foundations where acts of historical transformation through cultural reformation could find motivational support. To recognize oneself as historical, both as an individual and as a member of a group, now gained an added dimension. To recognize oneself as historical was to understand and live both personal identity and collective identity as historically constituted, as produced in and by the process of history itself. But the constituted historical self was itself a product of cultural institutions and relations that had been constructed by the acts of individuals operating in obedience to self-imposed transcendent determinations. To become historical in the sense of recognizing that personal and communal identity were historically constituted was also to take upon oneself the obligation of constituting oneself, personally and collectively, in historical action. In this sense Marx's *German Ideology* and Kierkegaard's *Unscientific Postscript* (both written in 1845–46) cut to the quick of the historicist project of the 1840s and provide an appropriate conclusion to its implicit narrative structure.

Two dimensions of this framing narrative emerged as especially striking and important and are highlighted in the synchronic stories of the individual chapters. The first is the transformation of the shape of religious belief from a predominantly "pantheistic" form of faith in the immanent workings of divine purpose within the patterns of historical evolution to a predominantly

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"personalistic" belief in a transcendent divinity, a belief that could function as the source of historical actions that might intervene in the immanent development of the ethno-cultural subject, or "idea," and change its historical trajectory. The complex shift from immanent to transcendent models of religious and philosophical faith, combined with concurrent changes in ways of conceiving relations between church and state, and between religious piety and national identification, play a role in my analysis that I had not expected as I began this project. Second, I became increasingly aware that this shift away from the Romantic model of becoming historical during the 1820s and 1830s was also marked by a change in interpreting sociopolitical relations that could be crudely described as a move from a fraternal to a patriarchal model. Processes of group formation were conceived less as reciprocal identification among group members themselves (a band of brothers) and more as identification with the father as the internalized historical essence of the group. It took me a long time to grasp, or perhaps accept, what now seems to me to be almost too obvious to mention: that the transition toward what we conventionally refer to as "Victorian" piety and patriarchy was not simply a conservative historical "regression" to "throne and altar" traditions, but a central element in the complex development of the consciousness of what it meant to be historical in the middle decades of the nineteenth century (and thus of great theoretical importance in the attempt to understand "historicism" and the project of becoming historical).

The chapters that follow were not written in their current order and because of the synchronic rather than diachronic organization of the book need not be read in sequence. However, there is logic to the book's organization, and an implicit conceptual narrative in its structure. The "Philosophical Prologue" opens the book with a discussion of historical ontology, examining the claim that the essential nature of human existence, and in fact all "being," is historical through a presentation of the programmatic public lectures Schelling delivered in Berlin in the fall of 1841. This introduces the main theme of the book in its most abstract philosophical form. Part I contains two chapters that follow the paths taken by Frederick William IV and his advisor Christian Bunsen toward formulation of a vision of cultural reformation according to historicist principles, a vision they would attempt to actualize in the cultural politics of the Prussian regime after 1840 and which informed their attempts to gather Germany's historicist luminaries around the court at Berlin. Part II takes up the question of historical identity as it was given public shape in architecture, urban planning, musical composition, and musical performance, and analyzes the problematic character of the relationship of Schinkel and Mendelssohn to the program of 1840. Part III focuses on three scholar–theorists who are conventionally tagged as founding members of the Historical School – Savigny, Jacob Grimm, and Ranke – and examines the ways in which their

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affiliation with the Prussian regime in 1840 revealed the nature of their evolution as scholars of history and proponents of historical identity. Each of these chapters examines the problematic development from ethnic (historically constituted) to ethical (historically self-constituting) models of identity and the role played by transcendent religious principles in this development. The "Antiphilosophical Epilogue" draws out some of the implications of the project of becoming historical as given classic and historically prophetic form by Marx and Kierkegaard in 1840–46.

This book does not contain a formal bibliography. The historical and critical literature on the individual figures treated is vast and often distinguished, and I have tried to indicate my debts and disagreements in the footnotes. My general perspective on the emergence of the historical principle as a dominant cultural form during the watershed period of the early nineteenth century has been shaped in part by the comments on various historical forms of conceiving time in Reinhart Koselleck's *Futures Past*,[3] but especially by the enigmatic comments of Michel Foucault about the emergence of the modern discourse of historicist humanism as an inwardly conflicted "analytic of finitude" in which human identity was figured as both constituted by the "positivities" of historical culture and constitutive of the historical worlds in which it was constituted.[4] The more recent writings of Stephen Bann, James Chandler, and Susan Crane[5] have been especially useful in helping me to think about Romantic historicism as both a form of historical consciousness differentiating past and present and a complex set of strategies for the production of historical representations that extended far beyond the confines of the narrative texts of historians. The burgeoning scholarly literature on the historical production of national identity and cultural memory has only added to my belief that historicism is more than a form of historiography, a particular type of historical representation. My own contribution to this scholarly conversation has been to emphasize the wide-ranging transformation of Romantic historicism in the late 1820s and 1830s and draw out some of its implications, especially regarding problems of historical agency, identity construction, and ethical choice, which were

[3] Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, transl. Keith Tribe (Cambridge, Mass.: 1985).

[4] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: 1971), pp. 217–21, 312–22, 367–73.

[5] Stephen Bann, *Romanticism and the Rise of History* (New York: 1995); James Chandler, *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism* (Chicago: 1998); Susan Crane, *Collecting and Historical Consciousness in Early Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Ithaca: 2000). The literature on the construction of cultural memory also deals extensively with the broader cultural production of historical consciousness and the attempt to deal with historical discontinuities through the self-conscious production of historical identities. For a recent intelligent survey of the literature, see Peter Fritzsche, "The Case of Modern Memory," *Journal of Modern History* 73 (March 2001): 87–117, and Peter Fritzsche, Specters of History: On Nostalgia, Exile, and Modernity," *American Historical Review* 106, no. 5 (December 2001): 1587–1618.

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so decisive in producing the affiliations among proponents of the historical principle in Berlin in 1840.

Throughout the writing of this historical study, I have also found myself persistently turning to problems of historical consciousness and historical identity within the frame of current academic and cultural debates.[6] The "new" historicism of the last decades of the twentieth century seemed to share more than simply a name with the old historicisms of the early nineteenth century. However, I hope this study does not simply project contemporary concerns into its representation of the past. Like the historicists of the early nineteenth century, I have tried to conjure up a specific cultural world of the past in its historical difference – to allow my subjects to speak within the contexts of their own concerns. There are easier ways to look in a mirror or produce an echo than writing an historical study. I am convinced that it is precisely in their cultural and temporal difference, as voices from another place and time, that my subjects claim our attention as conversational partners and expand our horizons as we struggle to grasp the tensions and dilemmas of living our lives as both products and producers of history, and thus pursue our own version of the adventure of "becoming historical."

[6] My own attempts to articulate and clarify the relations between cultural identity and ethical action, between historical consciousness and narrative meaning, between constituted and constituting historical selfhood, within the frame of current academic and cultural discussions are presented in: "The Historian in the Labyrinth of Signs: Reconstructing Cultures and Reading Texts in the Practice of Intellectual History," *Semiotica* 83 (winter 1991): 352–84; "A New Philosophy of History? Reflections on Postmodern Historicizing," *History and Theory* 36 (1997): 236–48; "Historiography as Exorcism: Conjuring Up 'Foreign' Worlds and Historicizing Subjects in the Context of the Multi-Culturalism Debate," *Theory and Society* 27 (1998): 535–64; "Salvaging Truth and Ethical Obligation from the Historicist Tide: Thomas Haskell's Moderate Historicism," *History and Theory* 38 (1999): 348–64; and "Linguistic Turn and Discourse Analysis in History," *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, eds. Neil J. Smelser and Paul B. Baltes (26 vols.; Oxford: 2001), vol. 13, 8916–22.

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Acknowledgments

The publication of this book marks the conclusion of a long, tangled, and often interrupted historical project. This project began in the mid and late 1980s with a very different focus and aim. For years it was placed on hold and almost abandoned as I pursued other interests in the history of psychoanalysis and contemporary historical and historiographical theory. In the mid 1990s my apparently irrepressible interest in the 1840s returned, but from a different angle, enriched (I hope) by my various detours and by a new interest in music and architecture. A more recent detour into the history of Marxism reinforced my conviction that the decade of the 1840s marked a significant turning point in European intellectual history and was particularly important in framing modern and postmodern conceptions of the historical subject and historical identity.

During the years I have worked on various pieces of this project and then labored to weave them together into a single story, I have been sustained by the encouragement and criticism of friends, colleagues, and students. I would like to thank the following colleagues who invited me to present parts of this project at various campuses around the country and thus also introduced me to critics I would not otherwise have encountered: Richard M. Buxbaum, Keith Baker, Michael Steinberg, David Sabean, John McCole, Robert Nye, Anthony La Vopa, William Duvall, and Mark Micale. I would like to extend a special thanks to Carl Schorske and Stephen Bann for sending me encouraging letters (regarding the Mendelssohn chapter) at a time when I was particularly frustrated about the whole project. The three anonymous reviewers from Cambridge University Press helped me make the necessary revisions in the final stages, and Elke Schwichtenberg at the Bildarchiv Preussicher Kulturbesitz was a godsend in smoothing out problems with the illustrations at the last minute. The research and original drafting for the Schinkel and Grimm chapters were completed while I was a Fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences in Palo Alto, California, during the academic year 1996–97. The atmosphere of the center was perfect for healing academic burnout, and I am grateful for the financial support from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation that made that year possible. The Grimm chapter was shaped in part by my conversations with Kveta Benes, who completed her dissertation on the relationship between German academic philology and national identity under my direction during the late 1990s.

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Throughout the writing of this book I have been immersed in the experimental projects of an adventure in undergraduate education (the Comparative History of Ideas program [CHID]) at the University of Washington. My colleagues and students in this program may have taken up time that I could have spent on the research and writing of this project, but I would never have survived, intellectually or morally, without them. Thank you, Jim Clowes, and all the students, staff, and teaching assistants of CHID. The personal friendship of Eleanor Toews, Todd and Judy Coryell, Uta Poiger, Kyriacos Markianos, and Dorothee Wierling kept me sane.

This book is dedicated to my children Julia and Jonathan, whose passion for music, literature, and architecture shaped this project in ways they never imagined. Earlier versions of chapter 5 and of parts of chapters 3 and 4 have been previously published: "The Immanent Genesis and Transcendent Goal of Law: Savigny, Stahl and the Ideology of the Christian State," *The American Journal of Comparative Law* 37 (winter), 1989: 139–69, republished by permission; "Musical Historicism and the Transcendental Foundations of Community: Mendelssohn's *Lobegesang* and the 'Christian-German' Politics of Frederick William IV," in Michael Roth, ed., *Rediscovering History: Culture, Politics and the Psyche* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), pp. 183–201, copyright 1994 by the board of trustees of Leland Stanford University, by permission; and "Building Historical and Cultural Identities in a Modernist Frame: Karl Friedrich Schinkel's Bauakademie in Context," in Mark S. Micale and Robert L. Dietle, eds., *Enlightenment, Passion, Modernity: Historical Essays in European Thought and Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), pp. 167–206; copyright 2000 by the board of trustees of Leland Stanford University, by permission.

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