Beyond disciplinarity: humanities and supercomplexity

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The 'New Humanities' has called for new ways of engaging with Humanities texts; the European Science Foundation is just one major research funder to demand that the Humanities contribute to interdisciplinary collaborations. Meanwhile, traditionally trained disciplinary academics have resisted bringing traditional texts into interdisciplinary courses as 'dumbing down the curriculum'. This article analyses briefly the different epistemological, narratological and disciplinary genres in one text: Herodotus' *Histories* or *Enquiries*. It concludes that Humanities study must include such texts, not only as disciplinary but also as supra-disciplinary exemplary ways of knowing. It sketches a New Humanities curriculum based on such a text that could fit the twenty-first century student to live in a super-complex, multi-paradigmatic and radically interdisciplinary world.

Keywords: disciplinarity; interdisciplinarity; New Humanities; genre; complex narrative; supercomplexity

Introduction: a more humane curriculum?

The European Science Foundation has just agreed major funding to investigate and develop the role of universities in the new Europe of 2010 and after (European Higher Education and Social Change 2008). In an inaugural and ideas-generating symposium, the President of the European Universities Association called on the Humanities to contribute to a research programme thus far entirely planned by Social Science researchers, to embed 'Humane' methodologies and outcomes in plans for the European Higher Education Research Area.

The nature of the Humanities' contribution is, it seems, contested: UK Funding Councils have stipulated that any UK contribution to the research project should focus on employability skills, while the Arts and Humanities Research Council's interest is in developing a demonstrable and defensible European metric for excellence in Humanities research. These reflect standard ways of valuing the Humanities higher education curricula in the UK: as trainers in economically useful skills and as the breeding ground for producing research and the next generation of researchers for internationally renowned discipline communities.

There are broader conceptions of the values of a Humanities education, some of which contributed to the European Commission's working party on Future Priorities for Humanities Research (Parker 2007, 2008). Several Directors of US Humanities Research Centers have called for a revaluing of the Humanities as pillars of an increasingly marginalised liberal education curriculum. In South Africa, the Nelson Mandela Professor of Politics has analysed the displacement of the once-unifying Humanities from curricula in the new market-oriented South Africa (Vale 2008).

Against this clamorous background – that the Humanities provide the new Europe with humane values, the USA with liberal intercultural values, the new South Africa with globally

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marketable skills and the UK with employability skills and disciplinary research excellence – came a very small storm in a sub-disciplinary teacup. The UK examination board charged with accrediting the university entrance A level in Ancient History decided to withdraw it as a separate qualification. One would have thought that this was a small matter of interest only to the few school teachers who offer the course and the larger number of Classical Civilisation teachers who would be asked to cover the material in their Ancient History modules. However, traditional Humanities disciplinary academics came into the media (http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/6511747.stm) to talk of fearing the 'dumbing down of the curriculum'.

What made national headlines was the perception that this move was symptomatic of a policy to devalue Humanities disciplinary training and A levels as access courses to high-calibre, discrete, disciplinary university degrees. The debate seemed to be one not of 'humane' but of elite values. 'Dumbing down' was the word that came up again and again, on the lips of prominent politicians such as the new Mayor of London, Boris Johnson ('Boris Joins the Toga Party for Cause of Ancient History', http://education.guardian.co.uk/alevels/story/0,,2079395,00.html).

It happens that one of the 'core discipline' texts that under this proposal was seen to be 'at risk' has a newly prominent reputation and enlarged popular readership. Herodotus' *Histories* of the East–West conflict of his time is currently the subject of both academic and political debate as the source text of an (in)famous film on the subject, *300*, Zack Snyder's filmic realisation of Frank Miller's graphic novel about Thermopylae (Miller 1999).

So for both these reasons – disciplinary importance as the 'Father of History' and the contemporary relevance of portraying East versus West – it seemed timely to ask what role the study of this text might play in a newly broadly conceived 'Humane' curriculum, the sort of curriculum that might meet the European Science Foundation's wish to produce a new generation of interdisciplinary researchers. There is a third reason: the academic debate over the study of Herodotus and other foundational Ancient History texts was concerned with the different epistemological traditions of Oxford 'historiographic' versus Cambridge 'cultural-economic' classical study. What was at stake, it was felt, was an important grounding in the defining traditions of Classical History. So the loss of a gateway course was seen as an attack on an elite discipline community.

Herodotus himself called his work an 'enquiry' (*historia* in Greek); he *is* the founder of the discipline of History but it is his successors who have deemed what he did 'history'. This is a time when the nature and purpose of knowledge constructed in the university and its relationship to the knowledge needed in the real world is firmly on university funders' agendas. Therefore, it seems important to consider to what kinds of knowledges – disciplinary, interdisciplinary, supra-disciplinary or other, as the case may be – the study of this foundational text could give rise.

Father of intellectual enquiry

> This is the display of the enquiry of Herodotus of Halicarnassus, so that things done by men not be forgotten in time, and that great and marvellous deeds, some displayed by the Greeks, some by the barbarians, not lose their reputation, including among others what was the cause of their waging war on each other. (Bk 1.1)

Herodotus' fifth-century BCE encyclopaedic *Historia* encompassed an analysis of the development of the Persian and other contemporary empires and the causes and course of the still-iconic East versus West conflict known as the Persian Wars. Under a series of kings such as Cyrus and the imperious Darius, Persia in the sixth and fifth centuries BCE was engaged on a project of world domination. Various city states of mainland Greece, despite the pro-Persian sympathies of some aristocratic families, consistently resisted. Their resistance of what would

today be called a superpower culminated in the heroic battles of Marathon, Thermopylae and Salamis. Herodotus describes the twists and turns of these now iconic battles, each argued by modern historians to be turning points in human history. His narrative is compelling, unforgettable and has current currency: the 'marathon runner' expiring after bringing the plea to Sparta to mobilise; the holding of the Thermopylae pass by the three hundred Spartans, combing their long hair preparing to die to hold up the vast Persian army; the seacraft and strategy of the Athenian fleet trapping and destroying the Persian navy at Salamis.

These David versus Goliath scenarios are brought out by many vivid anecdotes and scene paintings by Herodotus. There is no triumphalism though; the only sustained study of the emotional impact of the conflict was, rather, in a Greek tragedy, Aeschylus' *Persians*. Here the mother of the young, overweening Persian king Xerxes is brought to understand the loss and destruction that the attempted conquest has brought. Because of the depiction of the dawning understanding of the number of bodybags that was the only result of the attempted conquest and the references to Xerxes' father who had originally planned the conquest, this play was performed in a chain across the world as a protest at the younger Bush's invasion of Iraq. This is tragic drama; Herodotus' account is *historia*.

First though, come five books concerned with ethnography and cultural history. His work as an ethnographer was to collect stories and build a narrative about origins, cultural differences, individuals' and individual states' rise and fall. For the task of tracing the origins and causes of the final East versus West conflict, he sought to involve the evolution of the constituents and idea of 'east' and 'west'. He described not a military but a cultural clash.

Herodotus' significance today can be argued as being both in content and method. His content was used and abused in such representations of East–West culture clash as *300*. (For the political use of contemporary popular versions of the Greek–Persian conflict see Jenkins 2007.) Such post-Iraq invasion versions have a very different purpose from that of Herodotus' to investigate, understand and record even-handedly the deeds of both Eastern and Western civilisations.

The outgoing Prime Minister Tony Blair was accused on the BBC radio *Today* programme of being Manichean, especially in his attitude towards the Iraq war. Blair chose to answer that he had 'manically' promoted the cause of Western freedom and democracy against terrorists. This was indeed a complete answer: Manichean is popularly taken to denote a world view where good and evil are always in conflict and are as distinct and easily distinguishable as black and white. Herodotus never takes such an easy line: in contrast to the hero versus perverted beast scenario of *300*'s Spartans versus Persians, he gathers, describes and – most importantly – discriminates with non-judgmental fascination as many markers of cultural difference as he could.

Herodotus' narrative of wonders and strangenesses has elicited responses from contemporary writers, notably Ondaatje (1992), whose 'English patient' carried with him an annotated text of the *Histories*. Herodotus' writing is also the basis of a new kind of historiography, including experiential data and sensuous writing (e.g. Cornell historian Barry Strauss' bestselling *The Battle of Salamis*, 2004).

The disciplinary argument

In what sense is Herodotus a historian? This article wishes to propose him, rather or in addition, as the Father of ethnography, of geo-climatic anthropology, of eye-witnessed and evaluated socially constructed knowledge, of plural and addressed narrative explanation, of analysis of culture clash and definition of self and others… of liberal Humanities enquiry.

What seemed to be at issue in the argument about keeping the study of Ancient History at A level was not the potential loss of the critical reading and teaching of texts such as Herodotus.

These would continue in Area Study and multidisciplinary modular Classical Studies courses. The loss was feared to be of the textual and hermeneutic practices associated with, applied to and inculcated by them. Re-reading Herodotus, however, as a *Humanities* text for a paper for an international genre conference, raised questions about the extent to which any discipline should appropriate and retain its foundational texts as being of purely disciplinary concern.

Going back to Herodotus for such a purpose also raised questions about the teaching of disciplinary and interdisciplinary Humanities; about what kind of disciplinary and supra-disciplinary author he is, what kind of Classic is his text. Such questions seem timely, when the content and purposes of the learning of History at school and universities are again currently under debate (following books such as *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past*, Wineburg 2001). It would seem from a corpus- and socio-linguistic perspective, that the A level debate entailed different understandings, and conflation of different understandings, of the definition of the disciplinary genre of an Ancient History text.

This is a question with wider resonances; at a time when History pedagogy, of all the Humanities currently the most reflective and disciplinary-epistemology driven, has brought the formation of a worldwide coalition of historians. Just as Comparative Literature academics in the USA regretted the transfer of their texts to Area Studies courses on the grounds that the students would no longer be taught a traditional (linguistic and literary) skill base, the discussion of Ancient History versus Classics or Classical Studies is one of traditional, perhaps elite, disciplinary skills outcomes versus more general multidisciplinary outcomes.

Comparative Literature and Classics academics would say their texts change when losing disciplinary framing in a multifaceted modular or thematic course. But the debate raises issues about what it means for a text to be a 'disciplinary' one. It raises again the question inspiringly posed by the great French historian François Hartog about the 'Father of History': 'what genre of History is represented by *The Histories*?' (1988, xxiv). Not only genre in the Humanities sense: narratology can account for and hold up in wonder Herodotus' structuring of 'tales', told to him and carefully gathered, into a complex structured explanation of the landscape and coordinates of 'Us and Them'. Hermeneutic research can likewise show his manifold disciplinary methods of collecting and structuring data, his historiography and ethnography. But genre as construed by sociolinguistics is what is being argued about, it seems. That is to say, genre as the recursive construction of disciplinary methodology, the way a discipline's epistemology is inscribed in and derived from its written texts, both primary and secondary, and the hermeneutic traditions that form and inform the disciplinary community of, specifically, 'Ancient Historians'. For under the reviled proposal, the Ancient History texts would still be studied but differently: perhaps as 'Classics' texts, certainly as Historical texts and as sources for the study of the Classical world.

So the loss would have been of Herodotus as specifically a disciplinary text, one inculcating the textual and social practices of the distinct disciplinary discourse and practice community. Such textual practices can be identified and distinguished by markers indicating disciplinary texts' surface and deep argumentative structures (Hyland 1999). Such markers, which form different disciplinary languages, can be identified as inscribing and inscribed by the texts accorded authority within the disciplinary discourse community (Coffin 2002). Educational anthropologists such as David Mills and Mary Huber, meanwhile, can trace disciplinary discourse 'trading zones' between traditional disciplines when they come together in multidisciplinary encounters (Mills and Huber 2005). The argument from traditionally trained academics is that students need to be 'disciplined', to, in Mills and Huber's apt analogy, possess securely one language before entering the polyglot trading zone.

The question such studies pose to disciplinary academics is: what does disciplinarity mean for us? We can distinguish and communicate to students what 'content knowledge', 'argument', 'textuality' and 'contextualisation' mean in each of the disciplines. With those entering and inside

the Academy, we can discuss and question those sociolinguistic 'markers' to do with disciplinary epistemology: the way our different disciplines operate in terms of adding to a knowledge base continuous with and building on our predecessors' work. To those in the specifically hermeneutic disciplines, questions are posed such as what, if any, truth claim is made for each interpretation; whether we offer readings as authoritative, exemplary, dialogic, paradigmatic or as provisional; whether as adding to or subverting the disciplinary base. The markers presented back to us by sociolinguists and those who research disciplinary writing, assessment and meaning-making processes (such as those in New Literacy Studies [Lea 2004][1]) are much more significant than merely markers of conversation and convention. Rather, they denote the discipline's epistemological processes of making and communicating knowledge, sense and meaning.

For a sociolinguist, in addition, the text is the site of wider textual practices: reading, writing, interpreting, teaching and learning. So an Ancient History text such as Herodotus becomes the text as taught, as studied, as written about, as discussed in conferences, tea and virtual chat rooms. With the loss of the A level, Herodotus would still be studied, but divorced from the distinctive disciplinary meaning-making conversations of the discipline as a community of academic practice.

But to look at the text in all its Humanistic genres, literary as well as analytic, at its complex meaning-making and schema drawing, at its narrative inscriptions of method, may restore such a text to a foundational place in the Humanities syllabus at A level and beyond. This would be to claim for this exemplary Humanities text a place in the purest hermeneutic study of the inscription of ideas and system of ideas in the Humanities and so in the intellectual study of humanity.

Herodotus as a supra-disciplinary text?

The divisions between Classics, Ancient History and Classical Civilisation are discussed in terms of disciplinary epistemological traditions.

There is another possible line of argument, though, which is that any Classic text of any period, while *giving rise to* and demanding the most sophisticated disciplinary skills, is by definition only *afterwards* disciplinary: they form the texts on which university disciplinary thinking is built, broken and refreshed. They are rather 'Classic', that is, a complex and extraordinary cultural exemplum, necessarily giving rise to *supra*-disciplinary, humanistic, epistemological processes.

So, in the spirit that all History consists of footnotes to Herodotus, this article wishes to reconsider Herodotus' generic structure, to ask what Herodotus as an exemplar of the Humanities may perhaps be said to offer. That is, what the Father of Enquiry (*historia*) rather than just of Ancient History has to offer, in terms of Humanities method and narrative.

Method and narrative: of what is the Father of *historia* the father?

It seems that Herodotus' *Histories* can be studied as laying the foundations of at least two critical, data-evaluating, narrative-based disciplines: history and ethnographic anthropology. His method of recording, evaluating and ordering into narrative different kinds of evidence is exemplary both for history and also for the whole groundbreaking delimiting of ethnographic method, that of 'writing culture' (Clifford and Marcus 1986). Herodotus reports with fascination two anthropological experiments: one where two children were brought up ferally so their first words would signify 'natural' language. The second was the Persian King Darius' exemplary comparative ethnographic experiment into burial customs: 'How much gold would persuade you to burn the dead body of your father?' a group of Indians was asked. And, of Greeks, how

much to eat his dead body? Both rejected with revulsion the other's cultural practice, so showing, says Herodotus, that *nomos*, cultural convention (not nature or any absolute ethical or religious code), is paramount.

But he is the Father of Ethnography also in privileging, self-witnessed, self-validated accounts (things seen by the writer, cf. 'this is the record of John, And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true' [John 19: 35]). Although scholars argue about whether he can have seen all that he records, his method of gathering and weighing oral accounts in order to build up a complex narrative of cultural difference adumbrates what we call the social construction of knowledge.

In fact, it seems that Herodotus' project – to map the peoples with whom Persia came into contact, map their cultural otherness, the extraordinary and determining features of their land and their history, at least as it informs the current contact with Persia – makes him the father of most of Humanities and Social Science disciplinary *enquiry*. He provides both the foundation text of the disciplinary process and point of the enquiry of our modern disciplines. One can take any given section and point to disciplinary method: of military and ethnic history, anthropology, Milesian enquiries about social, natural and climatic geography… To take just one example, in his mapping of Scythia and the Danube he gives a cultural geographic description (he discusses the extent to which Scythians are 'liminal' nomads or have 'central places') as well as a climatic and geographic one and brings all into a discussion of the effect of climate on cultural difference.

But he could also be said to be the progenitor of grand as well as grounded theory. From the discrete data of cultures north and south, east and west, he draws a model of homological difference: the Danube and Nile flow oppositely, the cold and the hot lands affect equally and oppositely the customs and nature of their peoples. He builds a typology of cultures based on marriage, warfare, food, settlement customs and contrasting conceptions of the private and the public and of male and female (perhaps the first to lay out the social construction of gender?). This is all drawn up as a set of likenesses from the unknown to the known (a is to b as Corinth is to Attica) and mirrors (the Persian army is formed of heavy-armed squadrons when distinguished from light-armed skirmishing Scythians but is seen as the mirror opposite of Athenian hoplites when fighting against Greece).

Taken as discrete case studies, the disciplinary methodologies may perhaps seem naïve: there is certainly Herodotus as the tale-telling recorder of 'wonders' and the epic teller of mighty deeds, both seemingly at odds with the analytic mindset for objective data recording. Yet in a century where a positivist epistemology seems both methodologically flawed and inadequate to comprehending complex and messy knowledge, Herodotus may be read as a prequel to John Law's *After Method* (Law 2004). That is to say, as a textbook, rather, in inventing method to deal with complex, multifaceted and messy data. For his practice of what we would now call grounded theorising – the deriving of categories from the observed and experienced data which are then taken critically and reflectively back to the data (Strauss and Corbin 1998) – is achieved by a complex narrative of *enquiry*.

Narrative

The implications for the discipline of history are perhaps the most complexly inscribed, indicating multiple genres and complex narratives in which history may be written. Now is a time when different forms of History writing seem to be more agonised and contested than ever, when academics can be condemned as writing 'popular' though acknowledgedly scholarship-based narratives but where biography and 'what if' narratives are allowed as validly 'history'.

Even the barest definition of the content of the *Histories* in Herodotus' preface 'to show why the two peoples fought each other' is immediately preceded by the epic claim of recording the fame (heroic *kleos*), that they might not be forgotten. And before the accounts of the

Greek–Persian conflict come the travellers' tales of Scythia, Egypt and others. This is narrative worthy of the great storyteller Odysseus himself. Odysseus' epic attribute is to be *poikilos*: shimmering differently in different lights, reflecting differently to different viewers (the same word used of the iridescence of oil or a peacock's feathers). His tales of self and adventure are variegated, sophisticatedly and sophistically complex; such a comparison suggests Herodotus' historical method at its most textured. There are mixed genres to be disentangled, or perhaps one hybrid genre to be delineated. Father of narrative history Herodotus is, therefore: he is hailed as a maker of *logoi* – significance-highlighting, meaning-making narrative of accounts and data gathered, evaluated and ordered by the history writer himself. But, as Hartog says, to give an account of Herodotus is to 'pos[e] again the question of the effects produced by a historical text or, indeed, that of the historical genre as a whole' (1988, xxiv).

Herodotus, that is to say, asks the very current question: to what extent history is or should be an epic – commemorative, identity-forming – genre. Herodotus' declared aim of writing 'so that deeds, whether Greek or Persian may not be without glory' is a continuation of the recording of the heroes' fame, the name on the lips of later generations and in oral tradition, of Homer's *Iliad*. To keep Herodotus' record within an avowedly even-handed epic framework is to distinguish it from history as written by and indeed for the victors.

Homeric epic has an absolute duty to objectively record: the opening words of the *Iliad* ask the recording Muse to tell what she has seen. Herodotus replaces the epic poet's duty to pass down the Muse-validated record by a historian's taking of personal responsibility to validate and evaluate what he records. (Successfully? Cartledge [2007b].) 'Subjectivity' is always a difficult term for historians, wanting to stand apart from their data. Yet, Herodotus challenges those aiming at objective reporting and analysis to take personal responsibility for the narrative, for what it is that they are presenting. It is intriguing that the challenge of producing a self-authorising narrative, once the hallmark of a great historian, is now seen as a mark of popularising. For all his inclusion of checking of sources, his evaluating of alternative accounts, in binding all into a narrative, Herodotus challenges modern historians to re-evaluate the question of authorial, validating 'voice'.

The epic root of Herodotus' *Histories* lies in the *Odyssey* as well as the glory- apportioning *Iliad*. For Odyssean epic also deals in tall tales of exotic others – of 'wonders' and of narrative accounts of why things happened and in what order. These, rooted in Odyssean re-telling of identity-forming, identity-claiming experiences, re-narrated 'to give pleasure on dark winter nights' (*Od.* 15 399–401) are developed by the rationalist Herodotos into logic, *logoi* – in both senses of 'voiced accounts' and 'rationalised arguments, descriptive analyses'.

Such 'identity-forming, identity-claiming' narratives may seem antithetical to the study of history. Yet modern American Studies, like The New Humanities, wishing to re-connect the study of the Humanities with identity formation, has designed curricula to do just that (Coventry 2008). Indeed, a Latina/o Studies teacher has gone so far as to see theorising for/from the self in oral history as the 'signature pedagogy' of American Studies (Benmayor 2008). Until the student can see herself (or himself) as both defined by and resisting definition in her immediate culture, the argument goes, she cannot undertake historical research into the origins of family, neighbourhood and constituent cultures. She does not have an identity and so cannot have an identity as an historian; until she can theorise – in the Greek sense of give a comprehensive view from outside – herself, she cannot theorise others. The resulting American Studies research into ethnicity – at once, an immediate, multimedia patchwork of cultural experience and stories – reads as a *historia* in Herodotus' sense.

For Herodotus, love of 'wonders', his delight in story, have a deeper structure: as Hartog seminally showed, Herodotus has an *Odyssean* cultural schema. Tales of cultures that are inversions of Greek (in what they eat, grow, harvest; in the way they host, dine, marry, procreate

(Goldhill 1990)) are in the *Histories* built into a complex of homology and antinomies. ([Of the Nile] 'To argue by analogy, from the known [the Danube] to the unknown…' (Bk 2 33); [of the mountains above the Nile at Memphis, cf. the country around Troy and the Meander] 'if I may compare small things with great' (Bk 2 10). [And of Egypt] 'I shall have a great deal to relate both because of the number of remarkable things … The Egyptians themselves in their manners and customs seem to have reversed the ordinary practices of mankind' : women go to market and work while men stay at home; weaving, carrying loads, urinating, priestly duties, supporting parents, growing bodily hair, corn, dough kneading, circumcision, reefing ships, direction of writing and calculating … all are done in exactly the opposite fashion in Egypt (Bk 2 35–6). The result is a taxonomy of similarity and difference which applies differently, and gives different results, depending on the oppositions studied. The schema of definition by inversion – explanation of the exact opposite to the 'home' culture combined with complex analogy of unknown to known, 'x is to y as Athens is to the Peloponnese' – is a way of rendering comprehensible the unknown. A rendering comprehensible to the home audience while not losing the curiosity about and wondering at the otherness of the other; a rendering comprehensible that does not translate the other into the self-same, the *même* (Levinas 1969, 150)).

But, more, as Hartog (1988) and Cartledge (2002) suggest, the tales serve a further purpose: accounts of cultural and geographic diversity and historical events, presents and pasts are built into a complex schema of explanation, serving to hold up a complex mirror whereby the Greeks can see their own cultural and geographic identity, their identity as formed and demonstrated in present and past, culminating in and providing a fair-minded, freely enquiring, epic and historically based explanatory framework for the Greek–Persian conflict. In a world where Intercultural Studies departments in US universities have been targeted as promoting unAmerican activities, Herodotus can be seen indeed as an exemplary 'Antidote to Fundamentalism' (Cartledge 2007a, 243–56).

Herodotus and supercomplexity

> We live among proliferating and incompatible frameworks, each of which at best can yield only a partial insight into our world. … It is not just a matter of coping with uncertainty, for that formulation is overly passive and reactive. An age of supercomplexity requires the will to go on in a milieu in which there is no security and calls for the courage to make purposive interventions even in the understanding of that lack of security. … The humanities have been in the business of spawning frameworks anew for our self understanding. Their insights, their concepts, their methodologies are inherently reflexive: … these reflexive properties furnish us with a new wherewithal to be, to act and to communicate … In short, the humanities can assist our accommodation to a world of supercomplexity by promoting forms of being appropriate to supercomplexity. A new and wider educational project awaits them, if only they would seize it. (Barnett 2001, 36–7)

Ronald Barnett here accused the Humanities of neglecting an important role. It is commonly acknowledged that we live now in a world where most knowledge is made outside the academy (mode two knowledge: made by business, economically and politically oriented institutions, commissions and think tanks). And in a world where knowledge is made in communication: in conference and collaboration, especially in virtual knowledge sharing and generating environments; and/or is socially constructed in the deregulated autonomous and high-functioning networks of Web 2.0… In this new environment, says Barnett, it is for the Humanities, pre-eminently, to teach how to live and act.[2] Citizens of this world need to learn to read complex narratives – multi-voiced, multi-addressee, multipurpose, multilayered as they may be. They need to discriminate and to understand the levels, purposes and partiality, in both senses, of truth content being conveyed, of the texts that they rely on to make decisions and life choices.

More, the vital point for Barnett (see Barnett 2000, especially Chapter 6) is to understand that there are different, differently structured and incompatible systems of knowledge in play, and to understand *how to act in the teeth of that understanding*. His example of the importance of studying Humanities' complex narratives is the medical professional's daily experience of making decisions when conflicting paradigms inform the data and the value systems on which the decisions have to be made. For the doctor has to understand the many knowledge systems lying behind his/her informing narratives – of clinical excellence, health, medicine; of the body's function, physical, psychological and ethical systems; of the business, economic, academic or political influences on data reporting; of political and professional rhetoric of efficacy…

Many disciplines deal with complex and conflicting explanation, he says, but only the Humanities deal with complexly inflected narrative and only the Humanities teach how to act in the light of them.

Herodotus –before method, after post-structuralism?

Humanities research is increasingly modelled in terms of scientific method, in terms of research questions, acceptable methodology, presentation of 'discoveries' in independently ranked outlets. This comes at a time when the universal applicability and validity of 'scientific method' are questioned. The problems of the intellectually discredited, but still by default dominant, base position of positivism (that data collection and analysis are simply 'scientific and objective') are manifold. The epistemological objection is to the collusion of method and paradigm: the method is designed to collect the data that the paradigm distinguishes as valid. It is this circularity that is problematic: a circularity whereby knowledge is seen to be valid because it is produced by methods that are validated on the grounds that they produce instances of such 'reality' (Law 2004, 8, 9, 19, n. 7 and 'Interlude: Notes on Empiricism and Autonomy', 16–17).

But, says John Law, in *After Method: Mess in Social Science Research* (2004), the poststructuralist answer – that reality is finally unknowable; that all explanation which lies outside Western scientific paradigms is incomprehensibly 'Other'; that all that can be constructed are personal narratives – is an abrogation of responsibility; a responsibility to what Herodotus would call the duty of the historian, the enquirer. Rather, Herodotus seems to be attempting the project that Law calls for as, and in, *After Method* – the enquiring after and reporting of others' structures without either reducing them to the amorphous unknowable category of the Other or translating them appropriatingly into known knowledge structures. And that is while not falling into the trap of infinite, self-relating, relativism: despite his project to preserve 'marvels' and great deeds, be they Greek or Other, his recording is always within an open framework of explanation. He uses an organising principle rather than constructing a rigid epistemological paradigm. Finally, the *Histories* can stand as an example of a non-totalising, non-appropriating, non-colonising *narrative*.

That is not to sign up Herodotus as any kind of project: post-Enlightenment, post-constructivist and/or post-poststructuralist. (A still current debate, e.g. Irwin and Greenwood 2007.) But it is to say that the *Histories* can be studied as *historia*, investigation: as revealing for the *process* of enquiry and knowledge-making as of outcome. Both his collection and evaluative reporting and his setting out of accounts (explanations, including others' reports) are brought into an informing but not determining framework of self versus other. His project to represent plural othernesses (not, finally, as wondrously 'other' but brought into a net of analogy, homology, inversion, similarity and difference) is likewise deeply as well as openly intercultural. His use of telling illustrations as cultural case studies which suggest and inform is similarly exemplary. These all amount to a narrative method which reflects processes that Law might very well concede to be Before (what he lays out as the constrictions, Euro-American imperialisms and blindly circular constructivisms of) Method.

Herodotus and radical interdisciplinarity

The European Science Foundation's Standing Committee for the Humanities is explicit that Humanities research must be able to contribute to radical interdisciplinary and inter-domain research.

> The SCH strives towards research that can *transcend dichotomies* between the natural and human sciences. Current topics of research include studies of consciousness, human dignity, and culture and sustainability. (http://www.esf.org/research-areas/humanities.html, emphasis in original)

Interdisciplinary working involves stable rooting in one or more disciplines together with an ability to understand and work with others' processes, paradigms, methodologies and enquiry. The task of designing curricula whose learning outcomes include 'able to transcend dichotomies and contribute to complex fields' is a challenging one. It may well be a vital one.

Plato's *Republic* starts with the question, not how can Utopia be realised but what one small achievable step could lead to Utopian consequences. It is for each Humanities discipline to look to its potential contribution to producing students capable of what has been called 'radical interdisciplinarity'. This paper suggests one such small step may be to build curricula round key texts which challenge and transcend, rather than exemplify, disciplinary thinking.

Conclusion

Herodotus' primary importance in a Humanities curriculum lies in his having written not just *Histories*, not just the foundation text of the discipline of Ancient History, but *Historia*. His 'enquiry' resulted in a complex narrative, drawing together the intellectual processes and meaning-making by both author and his diverse sources. The study that we must strive officiously to keep alive is such a study – as it feeds into disciplinary meaning-making but also as supra-disciplinary exemplary ways of knowing. For what better text could there be than Herodotus to enable the twenty-first century student to live in a super-complex, multi-paradigmatic world? Herodotus, embedding as he does scientific, epic, tragic, social, geographic, ethnographic and historiographic structures of explanation, of cause and effect, of sequence of events? Herodotus who created a narrative in which responsibility rests with each agent to order for him/herself diverse and seemingly incomparable information into non-appropriating but responsibility-claiming structures of knowing?

Humanities higher education curricula need to build on core texts: core disciplinary and supra-disciplinary texts. But there is a new demand, that we also design curricula round texts which both inculcate and question disciplinarity, preparing students to work in interdisciplinary collaborations. All discipline communities need to identify suitable texts; this article suggests Herodotus as an exemplar.

We need ways of dealing with supercomplexity, says Barnett. We need to live and take responsibility in a world of 'partial connections' says Strathern (1991). We need 'a more inclusive and more generous approach to method' says Law (2004, 143–7). We need curricula that prepare students to contribute to truly, radical interdisciplinary research, says the European Science Foundation. We need fair-mindedly interested as well as disinterested intercultural enquiry, the modelling of selves and others, especially when then self and other clash.

We need Herodotus to be studied as an inter/multicultural and a inter/superdisciplinary text.

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Notes

1. New Literacy Studies such as Lea's emphasise that the codification of disciplinary knowledge at undergraduate level can mean that students learn not to make disciplinary knowledge but to display correct codes. There are important questions of power relationship here, positing students not as operating within a disciplinary community but instead being assessed on their ability to code-switch. See Lillis (2001).
2. A challenge taken up by contributors to a colloquium, chaired by Barnett and the present author and led by Professor Dame Marilyn Strathern, charged with developing papers for the European Commission's Working Party on 'Future Priorities for Social Science and Humanities Research'. A report was subsequently published as 'What Have the Humanities to Offer 21st Century Europe?' (Parker 2008).

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