Sam Griffiths 2021. *Writing the Materialities of the Past Cities and the Architectural Topography of Historical Imagination*. Routledge. Chapter 1, pp.27--48
PART I Contingency in the historiographies of the English Reformation, French Revolution and period of the Industrial Revolution in England

# CHAPTER 1

## Contingency and artifice

### I Definitions

This chapter explores the qualities of *contingency* and *artifice* in architectural topographic descriptions in the narratives of contrasting events from different epochs of English and French history. The historiographical survey reveals how widely different levels of investment in architectural topographic description are associated with different approaches to historical writing. These approaches do not simply reflect stylistic choices but different ideas about the nature of historical knowledge. The historian's imaginative response to the problem of representing the specificity of when-where events as a coherent narrative succession is architectural topographically encoded, allowing scope for the play of divergent possibilities and unknowns in the light of sparse and ambiguous source material. The artefactual domain does not give unlimited scope to contingency in the sense that 'anything's possible' but expresses the time-space figurational constraints of a specific historical reality in terms of its contingent possibilities for movement, bodily co-presence and encounter.

In developing this argument I distinguish three kinds of historical contingency in architectural topographic description: *chance*, *programmatic* and *figurational*. *Contingency as chance* (e.g. an overheard conversation or the taking of a wrong turning) refers to social actions that are essentially unpredictable and least susceptible to contextual or deterministic explanation as to when and where they took place. These may be trivial in themselves or 'one-off' events, but that is not to say they do not have important, though quite possibly unintended, consequences. *Contingency of programme* (e.g. a dance or procession) refers to social actions that are highly codified in advance and which may recur in similar formats at different times and locations. Here the contingent element is relatively constrained but arises from the particular situation of the ritual, namely when-where it actually happened. *Figurational contingency* (examples might equally include a riot or a process of scientific discovery) refers to the pattern of movement, bodily co-presence and encounter in the architectural topographic field that extends beyond the localized resolution of social action to define a specific higher-order historical event dynamically, in relation to other, lower-order events. These three kinds of contingency are far from being mutually exclusive. In narrative terms both chance actions and programmatic actions constitute relatively localized figurational descriptions that serve to differentiate the apparently random element (contingency as chance) and element of flux in an otherwise predictable pattern (contingency of programme) from the prefigured architectural topographic field of quotidian, and therefore largely generic or routine, past social action. In historiographical terms architectural topographic description can be used to define different kinds of contingency that express the particular figuration of an historical event at contrasting resolutions of time-space.

The historical imagination draws on architectural topographic description to express contingencies and resolve uncertainties in the process of consolidating the discretely located when-where actions of people in the past as nameable historical events. This is historical understanding in narrative mode but it does not necessarily lead to the writing of narrative history. It is the chronotopical quality of narrative in expressing the contingent figuration of historical events that explains its appeal to popular historians, historical novelists and their readers. I distinguish between *artifice*, where figurational

contingency is exploited to assert possible relations between specific when-where actions that would be considered improbable on other grounds, and *embellishment* where figurational contingency is exploited for scene setting, the addition of period details for contextual or literary effect rather than narrative purpose – quite possibly (though not necessarily) without any evidential basis.1 If the architectural topographic dimension enables these fictionalizing tropes in historical writing, however, it equally reveals itself as an important source of authenticity in historical writing. This is because architectural topographic description is integral to how the historical imagination figures 'messy' patterns of socialized action into narratable historical events. The scholarly practice of history however, cannot stop there. It must critically engage architectural topographic intuitions of when-where relationality with archive evidence and competing historical accounts, such that the contingency admitted by the narration of events is used constructively to extend rather than distort the interpretative field.

These propositions are developed in this chapter through an historiographical analysis of six key events in the histories of the English Reformation in the sixteenth century, the French Revolution of the late eighteenth century and the nineteenth-century phase of the Industrial Revolution associated with rapid urbanization of Britain. The events that have been selected are widely referenced in most histories of these paradigmatic episodes of social change, making it possible to compare the architectural topographic descriptions of a range of different historians. The contrast between historical periods and events helps to identify different architectural topographic dimensions of the historical imagination. It was also intended that the selected events, whenever possible, should be those relatively likely to be familiar to the reader, in order to make the theoretical argument more accessible.

## II Events of the English Reformation

The marriage of King Henry VIII of England (1491–1547) and his second wife Anne Boleyn (1501-36) is a key episode in any account of English national history. Henry's desire that his first marriage to the Spanish Catherine of Aragon (1485–1526) should be nullified in order to allow him to marry Anne, eventually led to the separation of the English church from the Roman Catholic church, and the establishment of the Church of England. Two examples from the narrative of their relationship will be used to illustrate how event contingency is expressed through its architectural topographic description. First, the possible initial meeting of Henry and Anne in June 1520 during the diplomatic spectacle known as the Field of Cloth of Gold, offers an example of contingency as chance.2 Secondly, Henry and Anne's dance at Greenwich Palace in December 1526 that marked the beginning of their serious courtship, offers an example of contingency of programme. Given its pivotal role as a catalyst of the English Reformation, a major turning point in national history, the circumstances of Henry and Anne's liaison before their courtship was formally established from the late 1520s are not only of interest to royal biographers but carry broad historical significance.

Historians have long wondered whether the first meeting of Henry and Anne occurred at the extravagant Field of Cloth of Gold pageant in June 1520 when the courts of Henry VIII and Francis I, King of France, met at a site not far from Calais to compete in diplomacy, sports and conspicuous displays of wealth. Elaborate and highly choreographed occasions such as royal pageants lend themselves to a synchronic description as a kind of visual *tableau*, replete with details of luxurious residences, sartorial magnificence and excessive consumption, the claret flowing from fountains.

Their contemporary renown means that royal spectaculars such as the Field of the Cloth of Gold are likely to be relatively well-documented events. To the cultural historian they offer an almost hyper-real snapshot of a period: its hierarchies, fashions, tastes and neuroses, but in narrative terms they can appear more recessive as it is less clear what significance they hold as events. This is exemplified by a scholarly review of a major academic study of the Field of the Cloth of Gold published in 1969 by historian Joycelyne Russell. The reviewer accused Russell's work of being "simply antiquarian" on the basis that it offered insufficient interpretation of the significance of the event in the broader political and diplomatic contexts of early sixteenth-century English history (Epperson 1970, 194). Whether or not this is fair criticism of Russell is less important here than how it reveals the difficulty of accommodating the density of impressionistic, material and visual description of an event such as the Field of the Cloth of Gold in the compressed narratives of traditional political history. The choice seems to be between 'thick' anthropological description on the one hand and reductive linear narrative on the other.

The potential significance of Henry and Anne's first mutual encounter taking place at the Field of the Cloth of Gold problematizes this academic division of labour by drawing the historian into a detailed consideration of the architectural topographic specificity of an event narrative that the majority of Tudor historians view as a colourful, static tableau of marginal significance in political and diplomatic terms. In any case, it is far from certain that Anne Boleyn herself *was then-there* at the Field of the Cloth of Gold. It is the particularity of a unique occasion that begs the question; the evidence is at best circumstantial. The consensus of Anne's biographers is that she probably *was* present in attendance on Francis I's wife Queen Claude and hoping to see her sister Mary Boleyn and father Thomas Boleyn, both of whom who attended as members of the English court. Perhaps more to the point for Tudor historians though is it simply *does not matter enough* to the broader narrative of the English Reformation whether Henry and Anne were introduced in 1520 or not. The possibility of a chance meeting at the Field of the Cloth of Gold can be safely localized because they had many other opportunities to encounter one another as participants in the rituals of court life after Anne returned to live in England in 1525.

Having said this, *if* Henry and Anne had become mutually acquainted in June 1520 and *if* this had been a factor in seeding their subsequent relationship, it would be highly significant given the role of their eventual marriage in precipitating the English Reformation. As the Tudor historian C.S.L Davies (1988, 13) noted, it would be "absurd to underestimate the importance of chance" in the unfolding of historical events, for all the influence of socio-economic and cultural determinants. And for the popular historian or novelist, would not the Field of the Cloth of Gold be the perfect dramatic setting for such an encounter? But if there is a theatrical backdrop and a genuine possibility of bodily co-presence on the site, what is the credible narrative of any possible encounter? Russell states the historian's dilemma as follows:

> [Anne in 1520] would have been about 19, and it may be that her dark but striking beauty was noticed by Henry of England. We have no evidence, but inevitably speculation is rife. (Russell 1969, 126)

In the absence of any certainty all the historical imagination has to work with is the architectural topographic description of the Field of the Cloth of Gold, a temporary settlement at which the two protagonists may have been bodily co-present. The English and French encampments sharing a central ceremonial space, the arrangement of the royal apartments, the ceremonials of access to their residences describe a dynamic encounter field that readily translates into particular narrative figures

that makes the unlikely meeting between Henry and Anne a coherent proposition in imaginative terms; an event that *could have happened*. It necessitates a research process involving cross referencing such contextual evidence as is available to evaluate the likelihood that it *actually did*.

Russell's study traces 'speculation' as to Henry and Anne's encounter to the nineteenth-century French historian Jules Michelet (1798–1874). For Michelet it was a meeting "fraught with significance", on the basis that it would precipitate the English separation from Rome – a development for which as a protestant, he had some sympathy (Russell 1969, 126). Michelet viewed the contingent circumstances of their first meeting less as chance so much as divine providence. Of the occasion when Henry went to dine with Queen Claude, Michelet writes:

> This prince […] found her in the middle of that beautiful crowd of ladies and damsels. Was he so blind that he did not see the youngest and the most charming? Has the queen forgotten to point out to him that a child of fourteen3, beautiful, witty, graceful, advanced, and well educated, was one of her subjects? It seems unlikely to me. (Michelet 1876, 219, author's translation from the French)

The Victorian archivist and popular historian Alexander Ewald (1842–1891) subsequently speculated as to Anne's presence "under canvas" in the tents belonging to the French court on the slopes outside the abandoned town of Arde where the main ceremonial would take place (Ewald 1883, 445).

> On arriving at the lodgings of the Queen of France, he was met at the entrance by the most beautiful of the ladies of the household dressed in cloth of gold. The weakness of Henry for the sex did not permit him to hurry over this part of the ceremony; he passed slowly along the line of fair dames—was Ann Boleyn among them? —and amused himself by critically inspecting its ranks. […] At the end of the corridor he was met by the mother of Francis "dressed as a widow," who did him reverence and led him to the apartments of her daughter-in-law. (450-51)

Simon Schama in *A History of Britain* presents the reader with an evocative sketch of the Field of the Cloth of Gold *tableau* before continuing that "somewhere in the middle of this over-dressed mêlée was the young woman who would bring down […] quite inconceivably, the Roman Church in England" (Schama 2000, 244). Schama is understandably equivocal about whether the two actually met at the Field of the Cloth of Gold. He allows the possibility they were introduced while declaring that more likely Henry's attention was "engaged elsewhere" at this time.

Historians who admit the possibility of Henry and Anne's meeting at the Field of the Cloth of Gold use architectural topographic description of the occasion to shift from largely synchronic, illustrative accounts of the pageant to descriptions of the routines and rituals of movement, bodily co-presence and encounter that co-opt Anne herself into the narrative of English history at a definable point in time and space. For Michelet (1876, 215) Henry "found" Anne in Queen Claude's accommodation. For Ewald, Henry observed her in a line of women as he moved along a corridor towards the threshold of Queen Claude's apartments. Schama, with less precision, imagines Anne emerging from the inchoate noise of the "mêlée" to position herself at the centre of the action. Of course each of these historians is alluding to an almost intangible occurrence. It could never be established for sure, even in so well a documented event as the Field of the Cloth of Gold, whether one human being (Henry) noticed another human being (Anne) so as to differentiate her from any number of other females of the French court. However attractive this narrative is in literary or historiographical terms, the architectural topographic field in itself can only *prefigure* narrative possibilities in the historical imagination. It is not enough to rely on establishing the probability of mutual co-awareness of Henry and Anne in the

absence of specific evidence – still less without considering what any co-awareness may have meant personally to these individuals at this time. But if architectural topographic description cannot tell us exactly what *did* happen, it is essential to the imagining of the what *might* have happened were the evidence there to confirm or deny it, and also what *could not* have happened. For where the shape of the encounter field precludes the bodily co-presence of two people then it follows that any attempt to imagine and thereby narrate such a meeting must be logically incoherent as history.

I have used the event or (more likely) non-event of Henry and Anne's meeting at the field as an example of 'contingency as chance' because an unscheduled encounter between two people producing mutual co-awareness is essentially an unpredictable event. It follows that it is the most likely of my three categories of contingency to stimulate the sceptical question 'would history have been written differently if it were possible to establish whether this encounter had/ had not taken place'? I have already explained how the historiography of the relationship of Henry and Anne establishes that any meeting at the Field of the Cloth of Gold can be consigned to localized significance; they were probably introduced to each other at a later date. On the other hand, the possible presence of Anne at the pageant in 1520 is not a possibility that more recent biographies, both of Anne (Bernard 2010) and her sister Mary (Weir 2011), are willing to ignore. Whatever historians ultimately know or do not know about the first meeting of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, there was certainly nothing inevitable about their relationship. Henry's feelings towards Anne are often described in terms of an infatuation. From Henry's perspective at least it was not an arranged or diplomatic marriage – in contrast to his youthful betrothal to Catherine – but an affair of the heart and of the eye. Any chance meeting in advance of their formal courtship in the late 1520s could have had an influence on a course of events that took an increasingly dramatic turn as Henry struggled to release himself from his marriage to Catherine.

Time-space figuration constructs events in relation to what happened before and after, yet the Field of the Cloth of Gold can seem to exist in splendid isolation, suspended in almost fairy-tale world. The insurmountable difficulties of evidence to definitively confirm or rule out the meeting of Henry and Anne in 1520, combined with its relatively limited capacity to disrupt the principal narrative of the English Reformation either way, means that inclusion of the Field of the Cloth of Gold episode might be considered a mere *embellishment* of the Reformation narrative, a beautiful 'aside', wonderful for the detail required of popular histories but easily omitted without consequence. Embellishment uses architectural topographic description to support the accretion of period detail that sustains the visual impact of the scene depicted but has little narrative or explanatory value in its own right.

Similarly, the architectural topographic description of the first meeting of Henry and Anne when taken in isolation from the broader historical contexts is not simply a question of antiquarian embellishment but is also a means of historical *artifice.* Here, imaginative speculation can be given free rein to actions that occurred tangentially, as it were, to those constituting the principal narrative arc, where the sequence of events is more firmly established and the relation of possibility to evidence more closely scrutinized. In this sense, the awareness of mutual attraction 'across a crowded room' of the royal prince and the ambitious younger daughter of minor nobility has the potential to escape historical narration altogether as an *archetypal* figure of courtship and romance. This is certainly how Michelet tells it. For him Henry was the "unwary" viewer of Anne whose "heart is unexpectedly wounded by an innocent flash of the eyes". He continues,

> But how was it from that day when this child of the two nations [Anne] had to reveal to him [Henry] the French grace? A smile from the little girl was able to make the salvation of Europe. (Michelet 1876, 219 – author's translation from the French)

Michelet's is less a historical verdict as a philosophical 'happy ever after' in vindication of Anne's Protestantism - though of course Michelet is only too aware of Anne's later execution for high treason in 1536. Artifice of a slightly different kind is present in Schama's use of the Field of the Cloth of Gold to begin the pivot of his narrative away from the early phase of Henry's reign associated with Henry's Lord Chancellor Cardinal Wolsey (the mastermind of the Field of the Cloth of Gold pageant) and towards the main phase of the English Reformation with Anne, Henry and Thomas Cromwell, (Wolsey's replacement as Henry's principal advisor), as its main protagonists. The mention of a possible meeting between Henry and Anne in this context is unimportant other than to signal this change in narrative direction. This is not a question of a misuse of sources – though for all their footnotes neither Michelet nor Ewald are specific about the basis for their claims. There is certainly no basis for them in the principal English language source Edward Hall's *Chronicle* (1809 [1548]). Anne's "smile" for Henry as described by Michelet and even her position in the "middle" of Schama's "over-dressed mêlée" go beyond what can be firmly established in terms of evidence. Such examples of embellishment and artifice are apparently credible is because they are consistent with architectural topographic descriptions of the Field of the Cloth of Gold as a specific when-where encounter field.

Contemporary academic historians would, of course, never allow themselves the kind of literary license Michelet employs but the contingency of the meeting of Henry and Anne remains implicit in histories of the English Reformation. As sober an historian as Wormald (2010, 238) argues that but for specific events there would have been a reformation of one kind or another in Britain, although it would have been "later" and "different". She is considering the possibility of Henry's first wife, Catherine of Aragon, bearing a son or agreeing to the annulment of her marriage. The same 'what if' logic applies to the question 'what if Henry had not met and/or been attracted to Anne?', even if the consequences are less obvious. The chance of this introduction happening at the Field of the Cloth of Gold in 1520 – over five years before they were known to be courting – is indeed small, and its ultimate significance for the broader narrative of the English Reformation, marginal. Yet the reason why it exists at all as a possibility in the historical imagination is because the strong architectural topographic specificity of the Field of the Cloth of Gold as an encounter field gives expresses it as a *concrete* possibility.

In Collingwoodian terms the imaginative exercise serves to link the disembodied interior thought-to-action 'what was Henry's thought that inspired his interest in courting Anne?' to the embodied thought-to-action that encodes the architectural topographic description of the encounter field in the question: 'what was Henry's thought that inspired his interest in courting Anne *there and then*?' Perhaps only Michelet completely embodies the thought-to-action in his text, for him the answer was Anne's smile of "French grace"; for Ewald (more obliquely) it was the sight of Anne at the entrance to Queen Claude's residence, for Russell and Schama (more obliquely still) it was how she stood out from the crowd. More typically though, the architectural topographic description is entirely repressed in historical accounts on the basis of insufficient evidence. This does not change the fact that acknowledgement of contingency as chance, arising from unpredictable patterns of movement, bodily co-presence and encounter in the past, depends upon the architectural topographic exercise of the historical imagination in prefiguring the encounter field of complex when-where situations and conceiving alternative narrative possibilities on this basis.

If the question of whether Henry's will to annul his marriage to Catherine of Aragon was caused by his attraction to Anne Boleyn "will never be certainly known" it is more straightforward to track the progress of their courtship through its later, better documented, stages as it gradually became public knowledge (Marshall 2018, 164). The second historiographical example, the dance of Henry and Anne at a grand reception thrown for the French Ambassadors at Greenwich Palace on 5 May 1527, occurred just before this public phase of their relationship. The interpretative focus here is less on contingency as *chance* in the sense of unpredictable events that 'need not (indeed *may* not) have actually happened' as they did, so much as on contingency of *programme.* This implies the deviation of what actually happened from the prescripted patterns of movement, bodily co-presence and encounter associated with the performance of particular ritual or situation. The Greenwich reception was a highly formal occasion in which Anne's participation was carefully planned. The Victorian historian John Lingard describes the reception at Greenwich in the following manner.

> Before their departure Henry gave to the ambassadors a magnificent entertainment at Greenwich. Three hundred lances were broken before supper; in the evening the company withdrew to the ballroom, where they were entertained with an oration and songs, a fight at barriers, and the dancing of maskers. About midnight the king and [the French Ambassador and viscount] Turenne retired with six others, disguised themselves as Venetian noblemen, and returning took out ladies to dance. The reader will not be surprised to learn that Henry's partner was Anne Boleyn. (Lingard 1874, 237)

By May 1527 the courtship of Henry and Anne had been underway for a little over a year. It was not long before the ambassadorial reception, in April 1527, that Henry had first consulted his advisors about the possibility of annulling his marriage to Catherine of Aragon. This may, therefore, have been the first time the two had danced together with Henry thinking about marriage (Ives 1986, 83-4). One of Anne's biographers Warnicke (1989, 56-7) draws on a contemporary account of this entertainment in a French manuscript to describe how the French ambassadors spoke with Anne and were impressed by her knowledge of France and French. The interest of the ambassadors may have encouraged Henry who, now satisfied his marriage to Catherine of Aragon was invalid, "surely had begun to observe the ladies around him in a new light, that is, from the perspective of an unmarried man" (57). It is perhaps not a coincidence that it was from the summer of 1527 that Henry's relationship with Anne became public knowledge. While King Henry danced with Anne Boleyn, the ambassador De Turenne danced with the Princess Mary, daughter of Catherine. In a popular history of Henry's six marriages, David Starkey describes the reception in the following terms:

> It took place in a specially constructed banqueting house and theatre: the decorations of the theatre were painted by Holbein, while the banqueting house was hung with Henry's most precious tapestries and stacked with his finest gold and silver plate. The festivities culminated in the evening entertainments of 5 May, when, by the King's command, [De Turenne danced with the Princess Mary and the King with Anne Boleyn] (Starkey 2003, 284)

In both Lingard and Starkey's accounts, it is notable how architectural topographic description is deployed to bring particular historical actors into embodied relation with one another in a specific situation. Lingard's description foregrounds the choreography of the event in time and space, whereas Starkey prioritizes the *embellishment* of architectural description with slightly exaggerated period details (i.e. tapestries are the 'most precious', the gold and silver plate is the 'finest' and 'stacked'), which must be regarded as impressionistic. In both cases the architectural topographic dimension frames a contingency in the narrative of Henry and Anne's relationship. For Lingard the appeal to the

reader who "will not be surprised" inserts Anne Boleyn as the dynamic element in what otherwise would have been a conventional, if extravagant, royal masque – precisely because Anne's dance with Henry may well have been 'surprising', certainly notable, to the other guests. Starkey also uses the occasion to invite the reader to reflect with him on a contingent circumstance, namely, the proximity of Catherine of Aragon's twenty-one-year-old daughter, the Princess Mary, to Anne, her mother's future nemesis. "What the two women thought of each other during this encounter we can only guess", notes Starkey, before pointing out that Mary "probably noticed nothing" (Starkey 2003, 285). The proposition is an interesting one, but it is also an example of artifice in prioritizing an expression of the historical imagination over the existence of source material that could lend it scholarly credence.

The progress of Henry and Anne's evolving relationship did not depend on their dance at the Greenwich reception. The ritual formalities of aristocratic social life could – and did – bring them together at other times and locations. As a narrative figure, therefore, the significance of this event's choreography remains localized to the extent that it is regarded as peripheral detailing to the central narrative of Anne becoming Henry's consort and, from 1533, his Queen. Yet a dogmatic insistence on this argument serves to repress the contingencies of when-where specificity that is the stuff of historical understanding, in preference for declarative statements of historical fact abstracted from the time-space through which historical events unfolded. While it is notable how the Greenwich Palace reception of May 1527 is sporadically acknowledged in both scholarly as well as popular biographies, it is scarcely mentioned in the major national histories of Tudor England or the English Reformation. Marshall's accessible but scholarly *Heretics and Believers* (2018, 167) goes further than most in stating that in May 1527 "Anne appeared in public with Henry for the first time, at a Greenwich reception for the French ambassador". While it clearly matters in narrative terms to establish the chronology of their intimate relationship becoming public, the absence of architectural topographic description in Marshall's text confers on it a misleading sense of inevitability. There is, for example, no sense how things may have hung in the balance if Anne had performed her part badly in front of the French dignitaries or if Mary had attempted some kind of desperate intervention on her mother's behalf. While it is the historian's primary task to establish to what *did* happen rather than what *might have* happened, his or her ability to pursue the former task is premised on the facility to imagine the latter in terms of the competing credibility of narrative possibilities, such that the contingencies of the architectural topographic encounter field are not repressed.

It matters historically then that the dance of Henry and Anne *did* in fact occur on 5 May 1527 at the diplomatic reception at Greenwich Palace. The fact that it took place then and there was not a matter of contingency as chance – on the contrary the dance was a highly scripted event – but historians' investment in the architectural topographic description of the entertainments reveals how the narration of the relatively generic figure of the aristocratic masque is necessarily contingent on its site-specific performance by particular people at a particular time and location. This is an example of architectural topographic description affording contingency of programme. The critical juncture that Henry and Anne's relationship had reached by May 1527, the reaction of the French Ambassadors to Anne, the proximity of Anne and Mary and what that may have meant to either party – these were not repeatable elements. The architectural topographic description of the generic figure of the formal entertainment frees the historian to imagine what may have been different in the unfolding of this particular when-where event realized as the figuration of a specific social action.

## III Events of the French Revolution

I now shift chronological and geographical registers to the history of the French Revolution to examine the architectural topographic dimension of two well-known events: the Tennis Court Oath (20 June 1789) and the Champ de Mars Massacre (17 July 1791) The first is principally an example of contingency of programme, the second principally of figurational contingency. The first example, the Tennis Court Oath, was a highly symbolic event in the birth of the French Republic. The Oath committed the oath-takers to the autonomy of the new French National Assembly as the single sovereign body of the French nation, freed from the royal prerogative. In so doing it began the parallel process of dissolving the monarchical institutions of the French *ancien regime*. The Tennis Court Oath offers a strong contrast to the previous historiographical examples from the history of the English Reformation in that it justifies a mention in almost all histories of the French Revolution; in that sense it belongs to the core narrative of that history, no matter how abbreviated its inclusion may be. If the occasion of the Tennis Court Oath had not occurred then something very much like it, liberating deputies to gather as a National Assembly without royal sanction, would have been required for the revolutionary events to unfold more or less as they did.

That said, it would be a mistake to view the taking of the Tennis Court Oath as an historic inevitability. The localized patterns of movement, bodily co-presence and encounter that ultimately led the deputies from the Royal Palace of Versailles to the tennis court nearby could not have been predicted. The immediate cause of their necessity lay in King Louis XVI's decision to deny entry to the debating chamber to all deputies of the 3rd Estate. These were representatives of the common people of France as distinct from the aristocratic 1st Estate and ecclesiastical 2nd Estate, who were permitted to enter. Louis' decision led to some 600 deputies of the 3rd Estate wandering about in frustration on the road between Versailles and Paris before one of their number (Dr Guillotin, no less) managed to procure the nearby tennis court of a friend off the Rue de Vieux Versailles as a temporary home; a small number of deputies belonging to the 1st and 2nd Estates would also join them. The weather was not good. In driving rain, the capacious interior of the tennis court was the "nearest large building that offered shelter" (Cobban 1972, 145). Had it not rained so hard on the Paris road and had the tennis-court building not been conveniently available to Dr Guillotin at such short notice, it is conceivable that the revolutionary moment may at least have been postponed.

The directing of some 600 emotional and soaking wet men and their excited supporters away from the Palace of Versailles and towards an un-known tennis court, albeit over a relatively short distance (less than a mile), cannot have been a straightforward operation. Architectural topographic description identifies contingency as chance in the improvised re-orientation of the exiled deputies of the National Assembly towards their new, temporary, accommodation. In the unscripted hiatus following their failure to enter Versailles, there lay sufficient scope for confusion, dissent and dissipation to prevent the deputies from effectively reconvening in the tennis court. Michelet puts it like this:

> Behold our new kings [the deputies], put out, kept out of doors, like unruly scholars. Behold them wandering about in the rain, among the people, on Paris avenue. All agree about the necessity of holding the meeting and of assembling. Some shout, Let us go to the Place d'Armes! Others to Marly! Another to Paris! (Michelet 1967 [1847], 120)

Michelet's evidence for these claims is uncertain, but they clearly express the architectural topographic operation of the historical imagination in revealing the contingencies that relate to when-where events. Neither is this a trivial exercise. That the most practical venue of choice, a nearby

(indoor) tennis court, was agreed by the 'wandering' deputies over the alternative suggestions is as critical a part of the revolutionary narrative as the two symbolically significant and politically separate sites that bracket the beginning and eventual destination of the deputies' march.

Once the deputies were inside the tennis court with the avowed purpose of using it to pledge loyalty to the newly sovereign National Assembly the architectural topography encounter field came under greater control; it now resembles a comparable example of contingency of programme to the Greenwich Palace reception of Henry VIII. In generic terms a debate, like a masque, is a highly scripted procedure that can, in principle, take place in any room of sufficient size. (Indeed, this was the point the deputies of the National Assembly were making on 20 June 1789 in taking their oath in a tennis court rather than a royally designated building.) Of course, if a tennis court could *only* be used for playing tennis one could say its 'form follows its function' – in other words that its immaterial socio-cultural determinants entirely dictate what happens *there.* But the debate of the deputies and the taking of the oath of loyalty to the sovereign National Assembly shows such a functionalist view misunderstands the potential of architectural topographic arrangements to generate alternative situational possibilities, even in their most localized descriptions. It was precisely the architectural qualities of tennis court as a reasonably large, interior space with well-defined, defensible, boundaries and good visual accessibility from peripheral galleries that made it possible to repurpose it as a debating chamber *ad hoc* with minimum modification.

In legislative debates social interaction takes place between a select set of individuals who represent different interests according to a set of proscriptive rules that govern occupation of the debating chamber itself and its decision-making procedure. Yet relatively generic codes of debate do not undermine the when-where specificity of its performance. The performance of the debate was affected by the material conditions *fabricated* for this purpose: the makeshift desk installed for the president, the lack of proper seating for deputies, the over-crowded spectator area. Interestingly these architectural topographic descriptions of the tennis court/debating chamber by historians even suggest a parallel between one rule-based activity (tennis) and another (debating). For Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881) the tennis court was:

> […] four walls; naked, except aloft some poor wooden penthouse, or spectators'-gallery […] on the floor not now an idle teeheeing, a snapping of balls and rackets; but the bellowing din of an indignant National Representation, scandalously exiled hither! (Carlyle 1837, 371)

Schama, in similar vein to Carlyle, puts it this way in *Citizens*:

> the naked, echoing court was the perfect opposite of the profusely decorated palace from where they had come […] There was nothing but their bodies, their voices bounding off the pitched interior roofs from which tennis balls usually rebounded. (Schama 1989, 359)

There is metaphorical artifice in the association of the sound of tennis balls being replaced by the voices of the deputies of the National Assembly. For Carlyle and Schama this sound is amplified by the echoing "naked" space of the tennis court. For Michelet (1967, 122) it was a "miserable building, entirely modern, bare, and unfurnished" where the "pure spirit of Reason and Justice" might reign – but Schama's metaphor seems less extravagant. The rebounding of voices is a reminder that the deputies' voices were not simply being projected onto the blank canvas of history but into a very real and dynamic situation. Yet the effective use of language is, of course, paramount in debating. Schama notes that it was the particular achievement of the Tennis Court Oath to forge something highly abstract – the idea of French nation – represented in its National Assembly that was no longer defined

by a particular building gifted by the crown but by the simple fact of the deputies meeting (Schama 1989, 359). This abstract idea is the supreme symbolism of the Tennis Court Oath made famous in the drawing of Jacques-Louis David in which all but one of the deputies raises their hand in taking the oath. Yet language, no matter how universal its ambition, is also grounded in the material context of its production. The oath crafted by Mounier contained a commitment that the deputies were "never to be separated" until their work of making an "equitable Constitution" was done (359). It is hard not to read this in more concrete terms as a reaction to the real danger of the deputies' collective will dissipating in light of their exile from Versailles.

For Michelet in 1846 the echoing tennis court, "that cradle of Liberty" as he described it, was a site of pilgrimage, completing its transformation from a profane recreational space to one of sacred reverence. But visiting it in that year he felt ashamed by what he regarded as his generation's betrayal of the ideals expressed in the oath. He sadly reflects "We felt we were unworthy, and quitted that sacred place," (Michelet 1967, 121). Here Michelet seems to acknowledge how the ideal always struggles to transcend the materiality of its realization. Contingency of programme then has a localized description where the chance element emerges from the tension between the scriptable aspatial rules that govern a given routine or ritual and their embodiment in a specific when-where location where the shape of the encounter field must be adapted for that purpose. By contrast, the third kind of contingency I examine here, *figurational* contingency, is identified in the way in which historians use architectural topographic description to figure the time-space relationality of historical events over sometimes extended scales of time-space

Another core episode in the history of the French Revolution helps to clarify this point. This is the Champ de Mars Massacre of 17 July 1791 that fatally split the ruling constitutionalist party who wanted a reformed monarchy from the more militant republicans. In the early evening the National Guard marched out from Paris to the Champ de Mars, a large space on the edge of the city, to meet a crowd of some 20,000 that had come in mainly peaceful procession to sign a petition against the National Assembly's decision to persist with a constitutional monarchy. When the National Guard opened fire on the crowd some 50 people died and more were injured. Hampson (1974, 107-8) seeks to explain the Champ de Mars Massacre in the context of the emerging conflict between the middle class and popular elements in the revolution, the former seeking an excuse to repress the latter in the name of maintaining public order. By implication then, if not a massacre in the Champ de Mars, *then-there*, it would happen sooner or later, somewhere else, such was the structural inevitability of the factional split. In this sense the explanatory value of contingency of chance (i.e. running into the line of fire) or of contingency as programme (i.e. the assertion of public order on public space) in the day's events is essentially restricted to localized events in Champ de Mars itself. Scholarly interpretations like Hampson's prefer to focus on how the massacre was determined by political divisions that reflected deep and divergent socio-economic interests.

Yet if, as I have maintained, the historical imagination operates as an architectural topographic imagination then it cannot be so localized. The task of understanding *what actually happened* during a given 'then-there' event involves bringing complex distributions of other 'when-where' actions into coherent relation – an architectural topographic exercise in the time-space figuration of events that produces narrative propositions. Such an imaginative exercise can only be extended so far as the historian's knowledge makes this possible, but as the 'raw material' of historical understanding, it is surely anterior to the assertion of synchronic sociological categories on the contingencies of situated events. Interestingly (and no doubt deliberately), Hampson ignores the chance element mentioned in

many popular accounts of the Champ de Mars Massacre. It is that martial law was only declared by the National Assembly following the republican crowd's peremptory lynching of two men found hiding under the wooden structure of Altar of the Fatherland where the petition was to be signed (Lefebvre 1965, 209; Cobban 1972, 183. Hazan 2017, fn 131). These men were presumed to be traitors planning to bomb the event, but as they were unarmed and otherwise unknown individuals it seems unlikely this was the case. Narrative historians of the French Revolution tend to view this incident as an example of the 'butterfly effect' that transformed a relatively localized incident into a major revolutionary event (e.g. Hibbert 1983 and Schama 1989). Carlyle refers to the concealed men as an "Ill-starred pair of individuals!" boring with their gimlet "to see, perhaps 'with lubricity,'" whatever from that point of vision, could be seen. He continues:

> But indeed what stupidest thing may not human Dulness, Pruriency, Lubricity, Chance and the Devil, choosing Two out of Half-a-million idle human heads, tempt them to? (Carlyle 1837, 1061)

Carlyle's method is to meditate briefly on what could have motivated two men to put themselves in such a position at such a fevered moment and to see the world from their point of view, looking out from beneath the altar scaffolding. Rudé (1978), historian of the French revolutionary crowd, does something similar in his description of the incident.

> Unfortunately for the petitioners, before their arrival, a curious incident took place that morning in the Champ de Mars that, in the tense political atmosphere prevailing, provided the authorities with a pretext for intervention. Two individuals who had hidden under the 'autel de la patrie' – possibly with the intention of getting a better view of the ladies' ankles– were pulled out by suspicious bystanders and unceremoniously hanged from a nearby window (89)

A Marxian historian like Rudé would certainly not be intellectually inclined to see key events of the French Revolution as determined by chance – but it is not his particular interpretation that is at issue. The extent to which the two figures beneath the altar of the fatherland *matter* in explaining the Champ de Mars Massacre is a question for specialist historians. Rather I am concerned to reflect on how the process of historical understanding involves imaginative recourse to the architectural topographic encounter field in order to bring the discretely positioned actions of individuals (e.g. the men who hide beneath the altar) and groups (e.g. the crowd that lynch the men) into coherent time-space relation with the pervasive reach of aspatial agencies (e.g. the ideology of republican clubs, the state violence of martial law). These intersections are revealed in the discretely located actions of individual and groups (e.g. that sign the petition or fire on the crowd). This imaginative process forms the basis of intelligible narrative propositions that enables critical reflection on the flow of events, prior to the assertion of any *causal* relation between chronologically sequential actions. It is similarly anterior to interpretation on the basis of synchronic socio-economic or cultural categories such as class, to the extent that these are abstracted from the thoughts-to-actions of the historical actors themselves. Figurational contingency implies that while each actor may have their own point of view, the (interior) thought-to-action of the event embodies the (exterior) social, architectural topographic reality in which actions are realized in ways that are not entirely predictable. It involves acknowledging sources of interpretative ambiguity because almost inevitably the time-space relationality between discrete actions in the past can rarely be established with certainty even when they can be assumed to exist.

**IV Events from the period of the Industrial Revolution in England**

I now make a further shift of historical period and geographical location to examine the themes of contingency and artifice in the historiography of early nineteenth-century England. At this time new industrial cities such as Manchester returned no members to Parliament, leaving large concentrations of middle and working-class populations, most of whom had no right to vote in any case, entirely without political representation. The two historical events that form the focus of the discussion from this period, the Peterloo Massacre of 1819 and the 'Great' Parliamentary Reform Act of 1832 can be understood in this context. There are some parallels between the architectural topographic description of the Champ de Mars Massacre and the massacre of demonstrators for Parliamentary reform at St Peter's Field, but the broader socio-political conditions were very different.

On 16 August 1819, some 60,000 people had gathered in central Manchester to hear Henry 'Orator' Hunt and others make the radical case for, among other things, universal male suffrage. Shortly after Hunt took the hustings the Manchester magistracy took the view that the local constabulary was inadequate to manage the threat to public order and called for military assistance. The yeomanry (militia) soon arrived in St Peter's Field on horseback and wielding sabres, killed some 18 people and injured some 650 in about 20 minutes (Navickas 2016; Poole 2014). At the localized architectural topographic resolution of St Peter's Field, the outcome of a violent armed intervention by soldiers in a dense crowd of demonstrators is predictable as to its general outcome (people are likely to be hurt or killed) but unpredictable as to specifics (who will be hurt or killed). Many of the dead and wounded were trampled by horses and slashed pretty much at random by soldiers, a constable was also killed. The exact movements, bodily co-presence and encounter of individuals in a crowd taken by surprise, including those of the attacking soldiers, could not have been premeditated with any precision under these conditions. While these contingencies of chance might be considered trivial in terms of the historical significance of Peterloo, how it played out will have mattered a good deal to the people present in St Peter's Fields as a matter of death.

Similarly, at this localized resolution, contingency of programme can be identified in historians' speculations about how established social codes of peaceful mass demonstration were put under strain in the period before the yeomanry arrived by the large numbers of people present and the official nervousness around the organization of the meeting. The demonstrators formed a protective barrier around the hustings, preventing the constables from making it easily accessible to magistrates, because of (well-founded) fears that they may wish to arrest the speakers (Reid 1989, 161). The shifting arrangements of bodies in St Peter's Square comprised a dynamic encounter field that the watching magistrates began to feel was moving beyond their control – even while the demonstration itself remained peaceful. However, it is hard to know what 'move' exactly may have tipped the balance in this respect to precipitate the military intervention.

The Manchester magistrate William Hulton was probably in the best position to see and hear how the situation in St Peter's Field was developing, from a first floor window overlooking St Peter's Field. This does not, of course, make his judgment of events objective. The popular historian of Peterloo Robert Reid, 're-enacts' Hulton's reasons for giving the order to the military to intervene. This involves a rehearsal of the "agitated state" of people in the first floor room, where no fewer than 60 local manufacturers had arrived to enquire about what action Hulton was prepared to take against protestors. It must have been a charged atmosphere. Reid comments:

> Flustered and under pressure, [Hulton's] purpose was to try to deal with a crowd which he has been convinced was about to turn to violence. (Reid 1989, 244)

The architectural topographic description of William Hulton's situation enables his encounter with local manufacturers to figure in his narrative of Peterloo. In Reid's account it proposes an imaginative connection between the presence of the manufacturers and the thoughts-to-action of Hulton in requesting military assistance – though assertions as to the effects of Hulton's state of mind in this situation must, to an extent, be regarded as an artifice of historical explanation.

This does not mean that it is possible to localize the responsibility for the Peterloo Massacre in the psychology of a local magistrate who felt himself to be under pressure – quite the contrary. Peterloo, like the killings in the Champ de Mars, is principally an example of figurational contingency in an architectural topographic sense. It describes a highly dynamic encounter field characterized by the movements of large numbers of people including demonstrators, children, speakers and agencies of law and order, approaching St Peter's Field from all directions across a large urbanizing area. Unlike the Champ de Mars Massacre, a considerable amount of advanced official planning had gone into preparing the reaction of state authorities to the demonstrators. The bloody events that unfolded once the soldiers arrived gave concrete realization to the abstract principle of state-sanctioned violence against Manchester's working population. The Home Secretary Lord Sidmouth himself had authorized force if necessary "by the law or the sword", as he put it, before pragmatically recommending caution as the meeting approached (Poole 2006, 276). Even so, the local authorities knew they had the authority to use military force against the demonstrators and had put the yeomanry on standby as a consequence.

Figurational contingency in this case is identified in the conjunction of multiple time-space trajectories of historical actors with pervasive beliefs about public order and Parliamentary reform (to name just two), connecting the particular events in St Peter's Field to broader socio-economic and political developments. It asserts that any claims to an *historical understanding* of Peterloo, as opposed to a moral or political verdict on its outcomes, must be parsed through a consideration of the messy reality of *what actually happened*. It is by reflecting on the figurational contingency of the architectural topographic encounter field that the trajectories of different historical actors can be seen to intersect, and different narrative propositions identified to embody these contrasting perspectives but without excluding others *prima facie*. The generation of such narrative propositions and their resolution (which can never be complete) involves the exercise of the historical imagination to critically engage with possible figures of time-space relationality, that culminated, for example, in Hulton's decision to call in the militia. In an event as multifaceted as an Peterloo, such relations could never be 'found' in the archive but only in the architectural topographic facility of historical thought.

The brutality of the armed intervention in a non-violent demonstration has ensured that Peterloo (its very name includes an unflattering reference to the battle of Waterloo) has become a symbol for the bloody oppression of legitimate working-class political aspiration by the forces of reaction. It is a core element of the emancipatory narrative through which the labouring population of industrial England became aware of itself as an oppressed *class.* The labour historian E.P. Thompson stated as long ago as 1963 that:

> We shall probably never be able to determine with certainty whether or not Liverpool4 and Sidmouth were parties to the decision to disperse the meeting with force. But we can no more understand the significance of Peterloo in terms of the local politics of Manchester than we can

> understand the strategic importance of Waterloo in terms of the field and the orders of the day (Thompson 1991 [1963], 749-50).

In other words, perhaps the contingency of details of who said or did what, exactly where and when, ultimately do not matter because, in an oppressive political system where acquiescence is policed by the threat of force, what else can be expected but bloody repression? Thompson is no doubt right in one sense, but there is a danger in his argument historiographically speaking. Events such as Peterloo (or the Tennis Court Oath) that conduct a high symbolic charge can easily be metaphorized, leading the contingent experiences and points of view of historical actors being repressed as rather trivial distractions from the principal event narrative, which is contested in terms of what it does or does not *represent*. For the historian to lose track of the material contingencies in unfolding events is to open the door to ideologically-driven argument between competing static representations.

My second example from this period also shows how the socio-economic reality of early nineteenth-century Britain kept Parliamentary Reform clearly on the agenda. The popular agitation for reform which had received such harsh treatment from the British state in 1819 had amassed sufficient upper- and middle-class support to make it respectable by 1832, when the Great Reform Act was passed into law. Of course, the main beneficiaries of the 1832 Act were not the protestors of 1819 but the urban middle-class of the industrial towns and cities who received the vote and members of Parliament for their new constituencies, an outcome that produced a febrile political atmosphere. The Great Reform Act is a critical juncture in the narrative of British history. It is often represented by historians as the point at which revolution was averted by the timely concessions of a responsible ruling class, responsive to the people’s legitimate calls for representation. The eventual passage of the act was played out over at least two years and three changes of government in countless meetings in the country houses of the aristocracy, their London clubs, Parliamentary offices and committee rooms, and finally the debating chamber of Parliament itself. The advocates and opponents of reform were both sustained by a relentless flow of correspondence and memoranda that form the basis of the historiography.

Although its strong architectural topographic dimension identifies many contingencies in the high politics of this narrative, the apparent inevitability of Parliamentary reform by the early 1830s on the one hand, combined with a scholarly focus on Parliamentary procedures and arithmetic on the other, tends to repress this dynamic field of encounter. Once again to clarify: by drawing attention to figurational contingency I am not seeking grounds for counterfactual argument so much as to insist on the architectural topographic description of events to establish their when-where embeddedness in, rather than abstraction from, complex situational narratives. A specific architectural topographic description mentioned in the history of the 1832 Act is an excellent example. It concerns the Prime Minister Earl Grey’s communication of his decision to ask his strongly reformist son-in-law John Lambton, Lord (Later Earl) Durham to head a committee of four men to draft the (1st) Reform Bill in the weeks following the collapse of the Duke of Wellington’s ministry in late November 1830. According to Butler (1964 [1914], 159), Grey’s request was “casually” made as they were coming down the steps of the House of Lords, an occurrence also noted by Trevelyan (1969, 1–2). Both historians cite the same source which also quotes Grey as saying “Lambton, I wish you would take our Reform Bill in Hand” (although neither of the histories quotes it exactly this way) (Broughton 1910, 178). The drafting committee would take place at Durham’s London House at 13 Cleveland Row, the other participants being Lord John Russell, Sir James Graham and Lord Duncannon.

Of course, Grey's invitation to Durham to draft the Bill would, no doubt, have occurred elsewhere and a different time. In that sense this encounter changed nothing – begging the question why mention it at all other, perhaps, than to embellish the narrative with anecdote? This brings the arguments presented in this chapter full circle. Yet if their meeting of the steps of the Lords is an example of contingency as chance similar to that of Anne Boleyn and Henry at the Field of the Cloth of Gold in 1520, it does not seem inconsequential in historiographical terms, not least be-cause we can be reasonably certain it actually happened, and Durham's appointment to the drafting committee is historically significant. In fact, the significance of the incident stands out as a momentary glimpse - propelled from the diaries and memoirs into the scholarly histories – of the profound intimacy of elite political society in the 1830s – and perhaps (surprisingly given the extent of official and private records available) of their consequent inaccessibility to the typical historian. The historiographical discourse of high politics tends to eschew much in the way of 'scene setting' perhaps because of the restricted circle of protagonists, the relatively well-known locales they frequented and rich documentation that appears to render too much contextual information superfluous. Perhaps because detailed accounts of the life great houses or even the backroom intrigues of Parliament can seem rather trivial next to the great narratives of state – matters for biography or memoir rather than serious history. A characteristic compression of the circumstances of Grey's appointment of Durham is offered by Michael Bentley:

> Four men had originally been deputed to consider [the Reform Bill] issue and report to cabinet with suggestions […]. Grey's choice of Durham as convenor for the little group was natural in a father-in-law who wanted to control radicalism, while Durham's of Graham seemed equally natural in a patron wishing to advance a protégé. (Bentley 1999, 46)

While one gets a feel for the intimate relations of kinship and patronage that characterized aristocratic society in this passage, historical accounts identifying figurational contingency in an architectural topographic sense through chance meetings and encounters are relatively uncommon. The fleeting mention by Butler and Trevelyan of Grey's invitation to Durham *then-there* on the steps of the House of Lords matters in this respect because taking place in a transitional (if hardly public) space within the Palace of Westminster, it reports on the contingent dialogue of a gilded world that usually took place behind closed doors – and one usually out of reach of the archive historian. Butler senses how the dense official record around which the familiar when-where events of the Reform Act is con-structed in fact serves to reveal as much about what is unknown as much as it informs.

> Gladly would we give many letters of the time for a few snatches of the familiar talk of these men among the autumn woods on the windy Northumbrian coast.5 For we may guess that there and then the scope of the coming Reform Bill was first dimly conceived. (Butler 1964, 91)

In this respect the record of Grey and Durham's conversation on the steps of the House of Lords hints at the existence of lacunae in historical knowledge that reveal the smooth surface of political history as an artifice of historical writing. It is the moment when the essential *otherness* of an aristocratic life in early nineteenth-century politics is brought home to the contemporary reader. Ironically, this sense is realized through the un-remarkable nature of a contingent architectural topographic description that serves to anchor the history of this heavily symbolic event in the quotidian reality of the past.

**Notes**

1. Embellishment is a decorative form of 'background' or milieu writing, which I discuss in Chapter Three.
2. The Field of the Cloth of Gold took place in the portion of contemporary France that was under English sovereignty 7–24 June 1520. Henry hosted the nominally diplomatic meeting with the French King Francis I, but the real purpose of the event was to exhibit the splendour and youthful virility of the two monarchs.
3. Even Anne's age is not established though most contemporary historians, with Russell, believe Anne to have been nineteen.
4. Lord Liverpool, British Prime Minister 1812–27.
5. 'These men' refers to the drafting committee of the First Reform Bill. Earl Grey's ancestral seat of Howick Hall is on the Northumbrian Coast.