Giambattista Vico claimed that he struggled for twenty years to grasp the "master key" of his *New Science*. In *Vico's Uncanny Humanism*, Sandra Rudnick Luft uses this claim as her own "master key" to understanding Vico's mature work—an understanding that Luft claims was a twenty-year struggle for her as well (xvii). Unlike traditional readings of Vico which situate him within the humanist tradition and which read the *New Science* in line with Vico's earlier works, Luft argues that Vico's discovery took twenty years precisely because it was too strange to cohere with the humanist tradition or indeed with Vico's own earlier writings. Furthermore, Luft argues, contemporary readers' continued immersion in the humanist tradition prevents their noticing the radical strangeness of the *New Science*. Luft circumvents this difficulty by reading the *New Science* alchemically, that is, in a manner that ignores "the search for historical and eidetic influences or relationships and engage[s] texts interactively, hermeneutically, fragmentarily, as one holds conversations with strangers only to discover shared insights" (ix). This reading permits Luft to explore affinities between Vico and rabbinic and postmodern texts, something that she does with great profit.

Luft shows that reading Vico's *verum-factum* principle in light of the rabbinic tradition transforms it from the "maker's knowledge" epistemological conceit that occurs in Bacon into the ontological claim that words are inseparable from deeds and things, and hence that language itself is originary. In what is probably the best and most engaging section of the book ("The Originary as Language" in Chapter 2), Luft explores Vico's use of the Hebrew term *davar*, a word that has usually been translated as *logos* but which in the original Hebrew denotes not only "word" but "deed" and "thing" (79). In the rabbinic tradition, Luft argues, there is no distinction between God's speaking the world and God's creation of it. Likewise, for Vico's first men, language is radically originary; the first human language literally created the human world. Thus, the human understanding of the world is grounded not in a homology between thought and reality but in their identity. Vico's *verum-factum*, then, is hermeneutic and ontological rather than epistemological, and does not rest on human subjecthood. Thus, on Luft's view, Vico's *New Science* is not a part of the Cartesian tradition but a reaction to it as radical as that of the postmoderns.

The particular postmodern figures whom Luft finds most resonant with the mature Vico are Nietzsche and Heidegger. "Only Vico and
Nietzsche [she writes] attribute divine agency to an ontologically creative language” (198). Only Vico and Nietzsche therefore understand the strangeness of the existential situation of the first humans. For the first humans, it was in a sense the absence and not the presence of a world that both enabled and obliged them to speak, and in so doing to create the historical world. While Heidegger’s approach is less originary and anthropocentric than this, Luft observes that the *praxic, poietic* being of the first humans was the being not of subjects but of “wholly embodied, historically situated beings-in-the-world” (199), that is, of human beings understood not as Cartesian subjects but as Dasein. The possibility and indeterminacy that induced them to speak a new world into being is just Heidegger’s *Lichtung* or “clearing,” the existential space in which the unconcealment of being takes place.

Reading the *New Science* “between” these rabbinic and postmodern texts, Luft argues, reveals that the “master key” Vico discovered is the uncannily poetic-poietic nature of the first humans. For the mature Vico, then, the historical world is an artwork and must be understood hermeneutically rather than epistemologically. In the very act of understanding the world Vico’s poetic first men created it, and created themselves as human beings thereby. Luft’s alchemical approach not only helps the reader to think outside of Cartesian subjecthood, and thereby to encounter the profound strangeness of Vico’s twenty-year discovery; it also affords Luft the opportunity to engage in a wide-ranging consideration of figures and positions ranging from Philo, Cusa, Epicurus and the Stoics through to Marx, Gadamer, and Derrida. Her project is further undergirded by a thorough overview of contemporary Vico scholarship.

While much of this material is useful, and occasionally even revelatory, Luft’s book is too short to accommodate comfortably all the texts and figures that she engages. Indeed, she notes in the preface that space considerations prevent her from including her entire survey of Vico scholarship. She thus directs readers to her website for the portion of the survey excluded from the book. Even with this apparatus, half of her book reads like a literature review in a dissertation rather than as part of a monograph from a senior scholar. This lit review portion is too dense, and reading it is often tedious. When working through it, it is especially infelicitous that there is no bibliography. Thus, the reader is forced to chase the book’s many references back through series of *Ibids* to their sources. According to Luft, the bibliography—like the rest of the literature review—was excluded from the publication for reasons of length. She therefore posts an annotated bibliography for the book on her website. The decision to exclude a bibliography from a book for which one is so obviously necessary reflects poor editorial judgment.
Indeed the editors' cavalier attitude toward the book is further evident in the overall structure of the work. It is apparent that the book was cobbled together from a number of articles Luft has published over the years. While there is no problem with this in principle, in many places the seams between the articles are still showing. The same passages are repeated over and over throughout the book, evidently owing to their having appeared in a number of the articles in which the book originated. Indeed, the patchwork nature of the work is sometimes even apparent in changes in the author's idiom. Most noticeably, Luft throughout uses gender-exclusive language, with repeated references to the "first men" and with "he/him" as the default pronoun. However, one ten-page portion of the third chapter consciously adopts gender-inclusive language, evidently because this was the idiom of that particular article. One of the further effects of Luft's having cobbled articles together with little revision is that where Luft has something new to say in the text—that is, newer than the article that that portion of the text reproduces—she embeds it in long, cumbersome footnotes rather than working it into the text proper. While Continental philosophers are perhaps more than anyone sympathetic to the hors de la texte, Luft often has way too much hors and not enough text. This makes reading difficult, especially given the absence of a bibliography. Proper editorial supervision would have forced a major revision in the whole text, either recasting the book as an article collection or forcing a substantial rewrite to turn it into a real monograph (not an article collection posing as a monograph). With the right edit this could have been a great and important book; as it stands, it is a deeply flawed book with some great and important ideas. Particularly in light of Luft's twenty-year struggle to produce this book, Cornell's editorial indifference is a profound disservice both to her and to her readers.

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The Promise of Memory: History and Politics in Marx, Benjamin, and Derrida
MATTHIAS FRITSCH

Matthias Fritsch has written a dense and provocative book that should prompt a renewed discussion of the Marxian past and the political future of Continental philosophy. Navigating the fragile bark of emancipatory politics into a non-utopian but still better future, argues Fritsch, requires