

Moved by the Past

Discontinuity and Historical Mutation

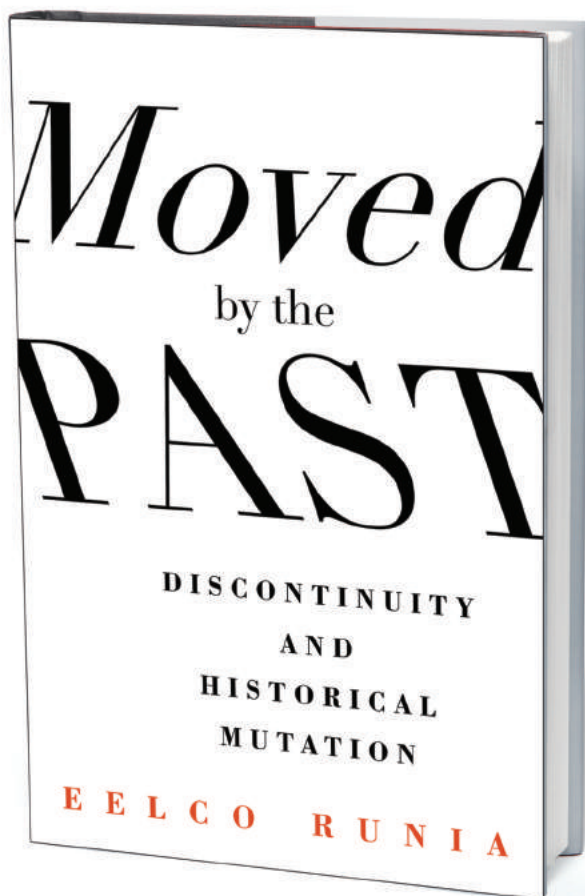
Eelco Runia

“Just when the philosophy of history seems to have lost its zip, along comes Eelco Runia to energize it. In elegant and exhilarating prose, these brilliant discussions of historical discontinuity, the presence of the past, self-invention, and related topics set the field on a new track. The result is essential reading for anyone interested in what history is and can be.”

—Brian Fay, Wesleyan University

Historians go to great lengths to avoid confronting discontinuity, searching for explanations as to why such events as the fall of the Berlin Wall, George W. Bush’s invasion of Iraq, and the introduction of the euro logically develop from what came before. *Moved by the Past* radically breaks with this tradition of predating the past, incites us to fully acknowledge the discontinuous nature of discontinuities, and proposes to use the fact that history is propelled by unforeseeable leaps and bounds as a starting point for a truly evolutionary conception of history.

Integrating research from a variety of disciplines, Eelco Runia identifies two modes of being “moved by the past”: regressive and revolutionary. In the regressive mode, the past may either overwhelm us—as in nostalgia—or provoke us to act out what we believe to be solidly dead. When we are moved by the past in a revolutionary sense, we may be said to embody history: we burn our bridges behind us and create accomplished facts we have no choice but to live up to. In the final thesis of *Moved by the Past*, humans energize their own evolution by habitually creating situations (“catastrophes” or sublime historical events) that put a premium on mutations. This book therefore illuminates how every now and then we chase ourselves away from what we were and force ourselves to become what we are. Proposing a simple yet radical change in perspective, Runia profoundly reorients how we think and theorize about history.



EELCO RUNIA is a novelist and chair of the Centre for Metahistory at Groningen University in the Netherlands. His novels and essayistic work on the making and writing of history address the question of how and why humans habitually disrupt their lives by saddling themselves with accomplished facts of their own making.

\$40.00 / £27.50 · cloth · 978-0-231-16820-5

MAY 2014 264 pages

European Perspectives: A Series in Social Thought and Cultural Criticism



COLUMBIA
UNIVERSITY
PRESS

ORDER ONLINE NOW AND SAVE 30%

WWW.CUP.COLUMBIA.EDU

Enter Code: **MOVRUN** for 30% discount

Regular shipping and handling charges apply.

Customers in the United Kingdom, Europe, Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, and South Africa, please contact our UK distributor WILEY via email: customer@wiley.com.