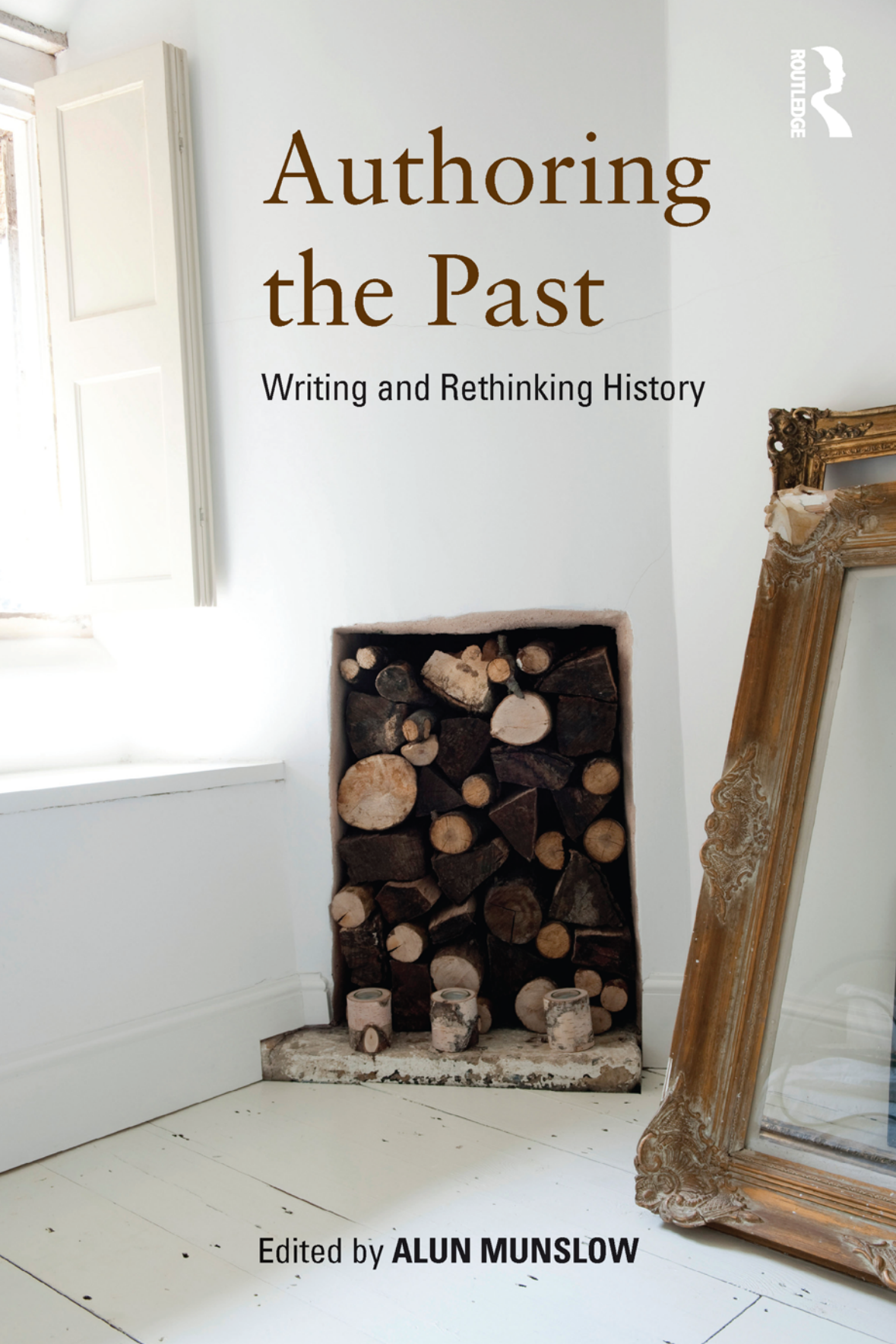
ROUTLEDGE
Authoring the Past
Writing and Rethinking History
Edited by ALUN MUNSLOW

AUTHORING THE PAST

Why do you think about and write history as you do?

Collecting together the responses to this question from fifteen of the world's foremost historians and theorists, *Authoring the Past* represents a powerful reflection on and intervention in the historiographical field.

Edited by Alun Munslow and presented in concise digestible essays, the collection covers a broad range of contemporary interests and ideas and offers a rich set of reasoned alternative thoughts on our cultural engagement with times gone by. Emerging from an intensely fertile period of historical thought and practice, *Authoring the Past* examines the variety of approaches to the discipline that have taken shape during this time and suggests possible future ways of thinking about and interacting with the past. It provides a unique insight into recent debates on the nature and purpose of history and demonstrates that when diverse metaphysical and aesthetic choices are made, the nature of the representation of the past becomes a matter of legitimate dispute. Students, scholars and practitioners of history will find it a stimulating and invaluable resource.

Alun Munslow is a founding and UK editor of *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice*. His recent publications include *Narrative and History* (2007) and *The Future of History* (2010).

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INTRODUCTION

Alun Munslow

This book is a collection of short essays by practitioner historians and historical theorists (although this distinction is somewhat arbitrary) who answered the call of the editors of *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice* to explain why they think about and write history as they do. The first Invitation was made in 1998 and since then the editors have published on average one each year. While we have a variety of Invitations which defy easy classification, what seems clear is that all the invitees made eclectic authorial decisions about how they view the connection between the content of the past and how they think about the historical form they give to it.

In this Introduction I shall not try to evaluate what each invitee has written. I offer a very brief description for each Invitation but you will have to read them for yourself and make of them what you will. However, what I want to do now is offer some sort of broad conceptual framework for the essays. The title of this collection should indicate its nature and that what is basic to each Invitation is that 'doing history' is an authorial activity. This seems to suggest that the past is always authored as history. I believe it is.

So, unlike most other texts that deal with what historians think and do, this collection does not constitute a handbook of historical methods because the most basic principle of 'historying' is that it is an authorial activity. So there is, as one might expect, much discussion among contributors on the nature of their individual authorial engagements with the time before now and why they became historians. However, I do not believe that it is possible to build some sort of collective *ego-histoire* understanding out of these Invitations in regard to any collective agreement on the nature of history.

But, leaving their egos aside (which in practice is of course not possible), I think all the invitees took the Invitation as an opportunity to explain why they are engaged with the time before now and of what kind of understanding they have about the nature of their engagement with the time before now. Although the act of 'doing history' can tell us much about the past, of course, it is still rare for historians to claim

to be able to seize its reality in their histories. As invitee and co-founder of the journal *Rethinking History*, Robert A. Rosenstone, said elsewhere, historians

> know too much about framing images and stories, too much about narrative, too much about the problematics of causality, too much about the subjectivity of perception, too much about our own cultural imperatives and biases, too much about the disjuncture between language and the world it purports to describe to believe we can actually capture the world of the past on the page.[1]

So, there is no programmatic structure to this book. It simply comprises the thoughts of fifteen historians who have answered the request in their own words.

According to conventional custom and practice historians interpret their sources by comparing and contrasting them and then locating and explaining the most likely meaning that is presumed to exist in them. This meaning is widely understood as being the most likely narrative that is presumed to exist in the series of the causally connected past events that are examined. This ambition is achieved through the mechanisms of empiricism, inference and representation. However, the intention in issuing these Invitations was that the invitees might explain what *they* do with and how *they* think about the past and why this classic empirical, analytical and representationalist procedure may or may not be followed.

As you will read, few of the invitees addressed why they wanted to know what happened in the past. At first blush this might seem odd. But is it? Becoming a historian is probably not to be summarized as merely wanting to know what happened in the past and – as we shall see – not necessarily to explain its meaning by deploying precisely that empirical, analytical and representationalist procedure. Moreover, from my reading of these fifteen Invitations I do not see any attempt to valorize the discovery of the nature of human destiny by learning the lessons of the past. There is, in summary, little evidence of a desire to generate 'insights' that might help us avoid the 'mistakes of the past'. Doing history is all rather more complex than that.

And perhaps it might seem surprising that there is little effort to defend social science historying as such. Only three of the invitees actually use the term social science – the philosopher of history C. Behan McCullagh; Richard Price uses it in passing to describe a phase in his graduate training; and Steven Riess, who is the only invitee to note social science historying as a phase he passed through (I would also describe my own engagement with such a practice of history – a phase before moving on). Of course this might have something to do with the period in which the Invitations were issued and to whom. It must be acknowledged that these fifteen years were probably the high tide of the postmodern or multi-sceptical insurrection and social science historying was not on the journal's intellectual agenda and hence the Invitations.

So, what criteria prompted an Invitation? The majority of Invitations were issued by me although two were made by guest editors of a themed issue, as in the case of Alice Kessler-Harris and Steven A. Riess. Over the years I found that these criteria were never fixed as they tended to reflect my own writing and other intellectual interests at the time of the Invitation. This goes some way to explaining what a few

readers may find to be the idiosyncrasy of the selection of invitees. I should say only two historians declined an Invitation. In one case it was pressure of time because of their writing obligations and the other was a professional commitment, viz., being President of the American Historical Association. I hope that Invitation – which remains open – will be taken up sooner rather than later.

If we insist on having a rationale for the Invitations (and this collection) it probably has at least four elements. The first is that the past fifteen years have been among the most intellectually fertile periods in historical thinking and practice. The Invitations were intended to offer an intellectual space to reflect upon and mediate an intensely fruitful period of historical thinking and practice which was primarily the product of the rise of social science historying since the 1960s/1970s, the intellectual insurrection of Hayden White, and the work of other narrativist theorists of history like Maurice Mandelbaum, W. H. Dray, David Carr, W. B. Gallie, Andrew P. Norman, David Carr, Louis Mink, Noël Carroll and of course Frank R. Ankersmit. The latter's acceptance of an Invitation in the journal is very significant because of his centrality to the debates on the nature of history since the early 1980s.

And this leads to the second reason for this collection. It is intended to be a contribution to and a reflection on the force and passion of the recent debates in rethinking history in terms of theory, practice and understanding the cultural purposes of both upper and lower-case H/history. It seems opportune to offer such a collection as this in the hope that it will fall into the hands and thereby influence the thinking of historians who would not usually read a journal, the aim of which is not to publish history understood as the epistemologically and representationalist inspired pursuit of the past. This collection is intended to demonstrate that history is a highly complex process of authorial insight, invention and experimentation that is not in thrall to the exclusivity of the understanding that history is wholly an empirical, analytical and representationalist undertaking.

So, and connectedly, the third reason for publishing this collection is the practical one of bringing to a wider audience the reflections of a range of significant historical thinkers and practitioners who have variously examined the process of 'doing history' during a period of intense professional self-analysis. Each of the fifteen contributors reflects carefully on how they and how other historians might engage with the time before now. But what I find particularly interesting is the varied and shared use of the concept of 'story'.

While in all the Invitations there is a strong and highly self-conscious sense of the complexities in the processes of authoring of 'the-past-*as*-history' all of the invitees have argued directly that they are creating stories about the time before now. Frank Ankersmit describes his Invitation as a story. Peter Burke acknowledges that he has tried to tell 'the story' of his intellectual development. Greg Dening is constantly aware that he is creating a story. Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth refers directly to her story while asking what her true story is and concludes there isn't one – all we have is writing. Richard Price evaluates authorialism. Patrick Joyce refers to his story. Alice Kessler-Harris refers to her story. Alexander Lyon Macfie refers to the story of the past. C. Behan McCullagh acknowledges he is telling – storying – history. Peter Munz has

'story' in the title of his Invitation which turns out to be something of a discourse on the concept. Jeremy D. Popkin limits his story to the autobiography of the early years of his life. Richard Price notes the concept in his experimentation with narrative form. Robert A. Rosenstone acknowledges he is writing a story. Beverley Southgate explains how stories are created and used. Riess's Invitation is his story of his histories. And Keith Jenkins talks about nothing else but stories.

And because they talk about what elsewhere I have called 'historying', all the invitees, though some more obliquely than others, address possible future ways of thinking about and historying the past. Of course in the case of Keith Jenkins, upper-case professionalized empirical-analytical-representationalist history has had its time. On the first page of his Invitation he declares

> For perhaps we are now at a postmodern moment when we can forget history completely. Perhaps we are now in conditions where we can live our lives within new ways of timing time which have no reference to a past tense articulated in a discourse which has become, as it were, 'historically familiar to us', and start to formulate new moralities without recourse to moribund ethical systems.

In my reading of these Invitations no author endorses a position that questions the unknowability of the past. Equally no invitee recommends a 'what you will' historical interpretation just because they understand that the nature of history is that of a narrative construction. And of course all invitees seem – at least in my reading – to acknowledge that 'doing history' is not to be evaluated in any simplistic knee-jerk insistence that the past can be known pretty much for what it must have meant, or that it can be explained entirely out of its and our present context. And none seem to suggest that any understanding of the poetics of history must (and merely) descend into a politics of history or that a consciousness of the fictive and fabricated nature of any narrative necessitates a suicidal discourse of self-destruction and anything goes.

So, I am not going to interpret these Invitations for you the reader. You will have to do that for yourself. Understanding what is said in this collection is as much your responsibility as it is the responsibility of the authors of these Invitations. Presumably as a reader you will read differentially and so there is no single story in this collection that can be 'found' – just as there is not in this Introduction? But what I think this collection does is to make substantial demands on you as a reader. It requires you to think about how the invitees have responded to the simple request to write briefly on why they write and think about history as they do.

What I read into this collection – and why it is published – is that despite the differences in responses to the same Invitation, the ways in which each author-historian makes sense of the past is always open to critical evaluation. Of course, as it has long been argued, histories cannot be read as unequivocal re-presentations of the events they narrate. It is well known if not always well understood that histories are fictively construed and fabricated expressive structures composed of extended figures, emplotments, arguments, concepts, ideological and ethical preferences as well as

factualist statements of justified belief and (hopefully shrewd) inferences about the probable/possible meaning of what happened in the past.

While most histories (although experimental histories are the exception of course) collectively refer to the past as it most likely was in empirical terms, their status as narratives means they can only explain past events by deploying literary forms and narrative techniques.[2] Unless one subscribes to what I take to be the rather bizarre judgement that there is something so special about history that it is not actually a form of literature, then we need to start our understanding of history by engaging with its authors and examining what, why and how they write. But even if we choose to elevate it to a privileged status of knowledge production because it is in part factualist and inferential, then we still have a duty to be discontented with what history does and thus explore its boundaries and limitations.

Of course nothing is straightforward in thinking and rethinking 'the-past-*as*-history'. If we choose to believe along with Jenkins and Ermarth (and most famous philosophers of art like Nelson Goodman) that science and art are only distinguishable by virtue of how we view the functioning of linguistic symbols and representationalism, then we must moderate how we understand the function of truth in our histories. This suggests to me that the individual items in this collection of Invitations only have one thing in common even if one or two of them do not seem self-conscious of it. It is the complexity of the relationship between narrative making and epistemology. If we think that the world past and present is explicable in and as narrative it is because narrative is the only vehicle we have for explaining how and why things happened. So, historians always ask why an event is significant. But far too many still do not ask how significance is generated as a function of creating (hi)stories.

So, if I am right and historical understanding comes through both the narrative form of the history as well as its content then it has to be recognized that past events are highly unlikely to have their own 'given' much less discoverable for 'what it was' story. Dear reader, ask yourself this: do you think your life has its own unfolding plot that a future historian will figure out? If this seems implausible it might be that historical meanings and explanations are and can only be constituted in their representation. This does no injury to the importance of empiricism. I want to think that this collection demonstrates this situation. All of the invitees have addressed this issue directly. At least that is my reading of them. You can judge for yourself. Some of the invitees are self-consciously story makers although some are more inclined to narrative theory, while others move towards a more empirically inspired understanding of historical practice. Whatever the individual author-historian decides, the historical narrative they create is also open to the reception of you, the reader.

Apart from the complexities of reader reception, I would argue that a specifically historical inquiry is always a narrative fabrication. This is a practical viewpoint despite the desire to determine that certain events occurred as and when, and what such events might mean for the author-historian and any given audience. As I have said, our invitees do not deny justified belief but they all rethink its role in creating a history. Anyway, I think that I have now come to the end of my narrative. So, while there is an unavoidable *ego-histoire* dimension to all historying, each invitee has

answered the Invitation differently. I hope you will read them now with a willingness to understand not just what is being said, but how these historians created their own histories.

Notes

1 Robert A. Rosenstone, 'Space for the Bird to Fly' in *Manifestos for History*, edited by Keith Jenkins, Sue Morgan and Alun Munslow (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2007) 12.
2 Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987) 91.

1

WRITING, REWRITING THE BEACH

An Essay

Greg Dening

Renowned for his anthropological, cross-cultural and experimental 'historying' (which as far as I know is a term he coined), Greg Dening (1931–2008) illustrates with his Invitation his belief that history is always a performance (see also his book *Performances*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996). So, in his Invitation Dening challenges the notion of autobiography through the mechanism of a fictive 'performance' of his own. As he says at one point, his understanding of history is not 'so much to understand the world as to change it. If my history by story and reflection disturbs the moral lethargy of the living to change in their present the consequences of their past, then it fulfils a need. I have not silenced any voice by adding mine.' As he acknowledges, the history we write is a vicarious experience of the past.

Calcutta 1811. *The rich travelled on the shoulders of the poor in Calcutta in 1811. Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, in his palanquin, bobbed along above the heads of the coolies and beggars in Tank Square. He did not see the short man with a sailor's gait and a scarred, near-toothless face. But Edward Robarts saw him. Seeing Raffles gave Robarts hope. For ten months on this, the harshest of his beaches, Robarts had been on the slide. Calcutta was a Company town, an East India Company town. A white man without Company connections, or without a trade that the Company valued, had nothing to sell but his poverty. In an empire city, there was no space between the empowered rich and the disciplined native population who did their work for them. The relentless pressure on the poor white man was downward. A man never went up in the rounds of begging a few rupees from vestrymen's wives and daughters. There was only the trading of one disrespectful gaze for another degrading judgement.*

Just a year before, Robarts had reached the highest rung on his social ladder. But this had been in Penang. He had been butler and cook to Sir Thomas Raffles's sister. There had been soirees and parties aplenty, enough anyway to delude his sense of social status. Death, however, rode the shoulders of rich and poor alike in the East. Raffles and his family fled Penang. Robarts had to find another beach in Calcutta.

Robarts came to Calcutta with what he thought of as his two greatest capitals in life – his 'royal bride' and his story of 'a long and singular career of an enterprizeing and unfortuneate life'. His wife was Enaoata, daughter of 'King' Keatonui of Nukuhiva in the Marquesas. She came to Calcutta with their three children and pregnant with the fourth. Hers was the unfortunate life, we have to think. She had left her native islands with Robarts, first for Tahiti. There she tried to hang herself as she faced Robarts's violence. He brewed rum for the convict colony at Botany Bay and succumbed to it as well. Whenever we meet her on all the beaches of her life, she is in tears. It is hard not to think that with a language none could speak, except her husband, and he haltingly, she was wrapped in a terrible silence. In Calcutta, she could endure only a couple of years in the makeshift compounds behind the godowns of Taretta Bazaar where they lived. Her children survived not much longer.

Robarts always saw himself as 'enterprizeing' in the face of harsh circumstances. 'Bumptious' would probably be the word others would have used. If only half the stories of how he rescued people and ships were true, he would have been a hard man to live with. But anyone who has a story that he believes others will want to read probably is to be seen as bumptious. Robarts had already begun to write his story when he went looking for Raffles. He had no trouble discovering him. 'A Great man everyone knows,' he wrote later, 'but a poor man sits in his corner unnoticed'. When he knocked on Raffles's door, it was opened by a Malay servant who recognized Robarts from Penang. He was taken immediately to Sir Thomas.

'Why, Robarts,' Raffles said. 'We've been looking for you.'

At Raffles's side was a bespectacled man with an air of great learning. It was 'that morning star of Literature, the Immortal' Dr John Caspar Leyden – linguist, theologian, poet, medical practictioner, Freemason, professor of Hindustani, judge of the Twenty-Four Pergunnahs and Commissioner of the Court of Request. Leyden was a collector of stories and languages. He had acquired thirty-four of the latter and thought that through Robarts he might acquire another.

He asked Robarts what he had been doing in Calcutta.

'Looking for employment and writing my Narrative of what I had gone through since I left London.'

'What? You have turned author!'

'Yes, Sir! Anything to raise the wind for an honest morsel.'

'What? Raise the wind!' Leyden laughed at the sailor's metaphor.

'Yes, Sir! I have been lying becalmed these ten months, and if a breeze does not spring up, my unfortunate Bark will founder on the rocks of adversity.'

'Is your wife from the islands with you? Bring her with you and let me see your narrative, and then I shall be better judge of your abilities.'

So Robarts returned in a few days, with a few pages of his 'Vocabalry of the Marqueasas Language'. Enaoata came with him to pronounce the words. The rooms of Leyden's house were filled with Persian scholars transcribing texts. Leyden offered Robarts a desk and forty rupees a month to tell his story. Robarts received only January's first stipend. Leyden had gone with Lord Minto and Raffles on an expedition to annex Java. Searching for manuscripts in Batavia, he caught a fever and died, learned and young.

Robarts's story, written in a neat, small hand, breathlessly without stop, comma or paragraph for 171 pages, is not signed as completed until 24 July 1824. By then he has many, many

more vicissitudes to tell of. But in January 1811, sharing a desk with a Persian scholar, he had begun:

In November 1797 I saild from Blackwall on board the ship Euphrates, bound round Cape Horn in search of sperm whales. …

Gauguin's advice: Melville's example

Voices from the beach can be hard to hear. They can be snatched from the lips by the wind or drowned in the white noise of the waves. There are beaches, too, on which voices are hard to hear because they are lost in a silence that clings like scented tropical air. It is the silence of vast spaces, of grand canyons, of cathedral apses. It is also the cold silence of death.

'Be mysterious' was Paul Gauguin's advice on translating such silences. *'Soyez mystérieuses',* he had carved on the lintel of his *Maison du Plaisir,* his 'House of Orgasm' at Atuona on the island of Hiva Oa in the Marquesas. It was his last residence in the South Seas.

'Mystery', 'mysterious' are words layered with thousands of years of meaning. At the heart of these meanings is an understanding that a mystery is the most complicated truth, the deepest silence, clothed in story or play or sacramental sign. Being mysterious means that there is work to be done, not just by the story-teller, not just by the author, not just by the priest, but by the audience, the reader, the faithful. There is no closure to mystery, only another translation, another story.

'I am not a painter who copies nature – today less than before. With me everything happens in my crazy imagination.' Colour, Gauguin was saying in his letters, was the instrument of his imagination. Colour itself was a language, 'a profound, mysterious language, a language of the dream'. The ideas of a painting did not need words. Colour, with much the same vibrations as music, activated the more general meanings in what was being represented. It pulled out the interior force of things.

'I am not a historian who replicates the past', I can say with Gauguin. Forty years ago I discovered that my main historical ambition was to fill a certain sort of silence. It was the silence of those who for one reason or another had no voice, or whose voice was never their own but always someone else's. That is not an extraordinary ambition among those who claim to belong to something they call the humanities. The humanities are the great unsilencing art.

In the humanities, we are forever trying to imagine what the silences mean – those silences that come from the skewing processes of preservation in archives and memory, those silences of the powerless – whether they are powerless for reasons of class, gender or race; those silences of the inexpressible – grief and happiness, love and hatred, catastrophe and exultation; those silences of everyday ordinariness; those silences that in the end belong to the inaccessible person or individual.

The tricks for breaking these silences are infinite in number. But I have always drawn comfort from Paul Valéry's understanding of silence. Silence, he wrote, is the active presence of absent things. Silence isn't empty soundlessness. Silence is always a relationship. Silence always has a presence in something else. Silence is contingent on something we experience in another way.

We catch the contingency of silence in our imagination. Not our fantasies. Our imagination. Imagination is the ability to see those fine-lined and faint webs of significance. Imagination is hearing the silence because we have heard some of the sounds. Imagination is seeing the absent things because we have seen so much else. That is its dream-like quality. It is built on rearranged experience.

For all my academic life I have taught my students history by fine-tuning their imaginations. I have taught them the past by first requiring them to describe their present. This has not been a presentist gimmick, nor some rejection of the 'relevance' of history. On the contrary, they soon discovered how difficult it is to describe the present. They soon learned that everything they discovered was the subject of reflective discourse by somebody else. The more they claimed the novelty of their experience, the more they had to plumb the plagiarisms of their thinking. They soon learned that cultural living in its bare bones is talk. To describe it we have to catch what Wittgenstein called the fictions of our languaging. As with the present, so with the past. The past has its anthropology as much as its history.

For all these years teaching creative imagination, I had a photograph over my desk. It was of Herman Melville.

I long had a smart-alecky relationship with Melville. I had long known the beach experiences of Edward Robarts. I knew how his experiences and others' had seeped into Melville's account of his beachcombing in the Marquesas in his novel, *Typee*. Their many years' experience had enlarged his three weeks' experience. It happened as a sort of cultural osmosis as Melville read accounts of Pacific explorers and visitors to the Marquesas who had met Robarts and others there, or who had had access to their manuscripts. 'Wink, wink', I used to say to my photograph of Melville. 'I know from what real experiences you made the fictions of your own.'

But over the years I grew in awe of Melville. His four years in the Pacific, in the Marquesas, Tahiti, Hawai'i and on whaling ships and US naval vessels were the non-fiction of his life that he transformed into the fictions of his writings. In the end I used to say to my friends that I kept Melville's photograph over my desk to keep me humble. What else was he using but his creative imagination? What else was he doing but describing his present so that he might hear the silences of the past? What else was he being but mysterious?

Being mysterious cost Melville, of course. Melville had 'gone native'. 'Going native' was originally a derisive term of the British Raj. Anybody touched by the cultural relativism that was required to 'go native' was letting the empire down. There are many empires for the 'civilized'. Melville seemed shameless to them all – for the things he didn't say and the things he only half said. He allowed other ways, not just 'native' ways, but other 'civilized' ways, to stand in their difference.

The anger at Melville in many matters of homo and heterosexuality, and of alternate moralities, was directed at his equivocal stances. He refused to protest the grotesqueries of his experience. On his beach, he let the natives be who they were. To fundamentalists of all descriptions, the natives should have been changed into something else. But perhaps the greatest scandal of Melville was what Wendy Steiner has called *The Scandal of Pleasure* (1995). He liberated his readers to go where they might. That sort of freedom is a fearful thing.

Valenciennes 1822. *It took a long hard day and a harder night for Joseph Kabris to die on his hospital bed at Valenciennes, 22–23 September 1822. Gangrene poison took him slowly and painfully. There was no family beside him, save in his feverish mind as he mourned for his 'princess' wife and his daughters 10,000 miles away on Nukuhiva.*

There was a stranger from Geneva there, though. He had come looking for Kabris, found him dying and stayed to the end. Not really a stranger. Ferdinand Denis was the publisher of a fourteen-page pamphlet, 'A True and Accurate Account of the Residence of Joseph Kabris, native of Bordeaux, in the Islands of Mendoca, located in the Pacific Ocean at 10 degrees latitude and 240 degrees longitude'.

There was no great self-interestedness in Denis's visit and stay. He admired Kabris and he knew that the true pain in his dying was not the gangrene but the humiliations of his perceived freakishness. And there was another reason for his staying. In the corridors of the hospital lurked more than one purveyor of curiosities. The ghouls had half a hope that they might skin Kabris when he died. Joseph Kabris had his beach written on his skin in his tattoos.

Kabris was 'imprinted with nobility', a certain David Porter had written. Porter had seen Kabris in Moscow at the court of Emperor Alexander I, soon after the Russian explorer, Adam von Krusenstern, had taken Kabris accidentally from the Marquesas Islands in 1804. It was an accident for which Kabris never forgave Krusenstern. He had lived his Marquesan life to its exuberant and bloody fullest. He forever mourned his being snatched away from it.

In those first years of his return to Europe, royal courts – at least those of Russia, France and Prussia – had wanted to see him. Porter thought that Kabris's tattoos were like a 'beautiful damask pattern'. They were 'in forms not inferior to the finest Etruscan borders'. 'To me', he mused, 'there is something very admirable in the idea of a fine male figure without any other covering than these beautiful enamellings.' 'Like a savage god.' He reminded his readers that when the president of the British Royal Academy first saw the Apollo Belvedere in Rome, he had said: 'What a fine Mohawk warrior!'

For Porter there was something achingly beautiful in Kabris's ideal civilized body with its savage markings. Porter could hardly take his eyes off him as Kabris told how he had killed a cannibal 'with the horrid morsel still in his mouth'. Porter just knew that, if this naked hero in a savage uniform had only been allowed to stay, a 'rude civilization' would have grown among the natives.

Ten years in Russia was enough for Kabris. He spent them teaching the Royal Marines at Cronstadt another savage skill he had learned in the islands, swimming. After the chaos of Napoleon's Grande Armée defeat, he joined the packs of escaping French prisoners and walked back to France.

Back in Bordeaux, he was no longer an 'ideal beauty'. He did a stint in a Cabinet des Illusions exhibiting his 'enamellings' and performing savage dances and wild sacrificial rituals. It only ended in his own disillusion. He wandered the provincial fairs – Le Havre, Rouen, Grenoble, Orléans – making theatre of himself. He shared the stage with a 400-pound 'fat lady' and a three-headed cow. His moment of despair came in Orléans where posters of Kabris Le Tatoué were pasted side by side with posters of Munito Le Chien Savant. Everything he thought himself to be because of his beach experiences was mocked in that. He came to Valenciennes to die.

Who knows whether he knew in those last moments what the skulkers in the hospital corridors were planning to do? Perhaps he asked Ferdinand Denis as a last charity to protect him.

Anyway, Denis oversaw a burial that would destroy the tattoos forever. Corpses weren't scarce in the hospital at Valenciennes. Kabris was buried without a coffin sandwiched between the bodies of two paupers. However, there may have been some recognition of where he lay. A contemporary Promenade au Cimetière de Valenciennes described a stroll past the graves of a 'goddess of reason', a Jesuit, an English colonel killed at Waterloo, a freemason, a comic artiste – 'et Kabris le Tatoué'.

Denis, looking down on these 'damask patterns' on the skin of the lifeless Kabris, could not have known what they meant or what stories were written into them. Perhaps he recognized the clay pipe imprinted on Kabris's stomach. But he would not have known, anymore than we do, whether this was some native tattooist's joke, or Kabris's signature of his own difference on a native beach. He certainly could not have known that that diagonal line across Kabris's forehead was called pi'e'e, 'running shit', and that patch over his eye, mata epo, 'shitty eyes', that line across his mouth, kutu epo, 'shitty snout'. Those marks were probably his first tattooings. They gave him his 'rubbish names', titles that showed him to be at the beginnings of his initiations and at his most degraded point, the 'shit' of gods and chiefs. That chaos of calabash coils, crab eyes and turtle shells on his skin – the pahu tiki, the 'wrapping in images' – these would have been very different signs, not of degradation but of triumph and honour for the occasions when he pulled himself out of the shit by killing a man, winning a battle, doing some famous deed. Kabris, we have to think, was reborn in a social sense with this new wrapping of his skin. It protected him as an armour. It clothed him with family and kin. It joined him to a mythic understanding of who he was. It gave narrative to his life.

Kabris had another narrative of his life. It was the small pamphlet which he sold at the entrance to the theatre of his exhibitions and his dances. It was full of his conviction that the story told by his tattoos was true. Perhaps Denis picked it up from among the small collection of Kabris's things beside his bed and opened it. Perhaps he didn't. If he had, he would have read:

Six months after the unfortunate Quiberan affair I boarded an English vessel leaving for a whaling expedition to the Pacific Ocean. …

Flying to the Land

We were flying over an immense ocean. That small part of it beneath our northeast flight over the 1,500 kilometres separating Tahiti from the Marquesas was the northern tip of the Tuamotu Archipelago, known in older sailing days as the Low or Dangerous Archipelago. Its seventy-eight atolls and innumerable hidden reefs fan a 2,000-kilometre arc across the eastern approaches to the Central Pacific. Although it was my first time among them, my mind's eye had scanned them many, many times. I had mapped them in all sorts of ways – for the variety of their flora and fauna, for the variety of their cultural forms, for their populations and the relics of their populations, for the canoe voyaging among them.

Forty years ago, my first images of the Pacific came to me through the endless texts that innumerable intruders into this vast ocean had made of their experiences. I have never recovered from the historian's first excited discovery that most of history comes from unpublished sources – from letters, diaries, logs – imprinted as much with tears, sweat, blood and the dirt of time as by ink and pencil. I have always

counted it the great privilege of an historian's life to finger these pages, sometimes for the first time after they were made. I have always felt as well that because so much of living is lost in the writing of it down the historian's obligation is to saturate her- or himself in all there is. So history writing is as much a pilgrimage to all the places where these unique and disparate remnants of the past are to be found as it is a culling from books on library shelves. In the way of things, the history of strangers coming into the Pacific is to be found where they came from – London, Boston, Paris, Rome, Nantucket – rather than the places they came to. But here in a Twin Otter 20,000 feet above the sea, I am making a pilgrimage the other way round. I am flying to the Land.

At that time, December 1974, I would not have called the islands I was flying to The Land, Te Henua. Nor would I have called the people who lived there the Natives, Te Enata. I would have called them by the name Spanish outsiders had given them 400 years earlier, the Marquesas, the Marquesans. But crossing their beach would be my learning experience. I would get the confidence and the courage to call them what they called themselves.

I was apprehensive. The Land and its Natives had changed my life. But I had been to the Land and met its Natives only in libraries and archives. I knew that I was stranger to them, and I knew the cost of every stranger's intrusion. The sadness of their story had affected me ever since I began to learn it. But inevitably I came with a sense of trespass. Their terrible story and my knowledge of it has been the capital of my life. The rewards of twenty years' study of them to this time had been great. I brought to them in my luggage the pride of my academic life to this time, my first book about them, *The Marquesan Journal of Edward Robarts* (1974). I knew all my shortcuts in that book. I knew all its tricks of camouflage for my ignorance.

Early in my studies of Te Henua, I had read Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). It had shaken me to my core. In a world of victims, he wrote, there are no innocents. No one can write two-sided history who in some way benefits from the power of the victors. No one can mediate between the disempowered living and the voiceless dead. All of us writing in a history so terrible as that of the Pacific – or of the Americas or of Africa for that matter – have had to resolve that dilemma for ourselves. No doubt we all do it differently. For me, giving the dead a voice has been reason enough for my history. I am with Karl Marx, too. The function of my history is not so much to understand the world as to change it. If my history by story and reflection disturbs the moral lethargy of the living to change in their present the consequences of their past, then it fulfils a need. I have not silenced any voice by adding mine.

Back in 1974, I had failed rather badly in the photography classes I had taken in preparation for my visit to Te Henua. I had been too timid to enter the private space of those 'interesting' faces of the poor and old and eccentric my teachers wanted me to invade. Now as the pilots began to tap their compass and reach for their binoculars, I found my timidities were returning.

Still, I had my camera in my hand as we approached the Land, and my face pressed against the cabin porthole. Suddenly, through a gap in the clouds, I realized I was

looking down on the one place in all the Land I had wanted to see, Vaitahu on the island of Tahuata. At Vaitahu, the sad history of the Land had begun. Madre de Dios, the Spaniards had christened it with blood in 1595. Less bloodily, but bloodily just the same, James Cook had renamed it Resolution Bay in 1744.

Seeing Vaitahu did not mean that I was there. We landed on Hiva Oa, the neighbouring island to Tahuata. The landing-strip looked as long and wide as an aircraft carrier. It was on the top of a ridge behind Atuona.

On the black sand beach at Atuona, Paul Gauguin had painted 'Riders on the Beach'. Two hooded riders – death on horseback – lead the other horsemen to an endless horizon. There is nothing 'real' in the painting, no black sand, no dark tumbling rocks, no closed bay. Differences are sponged out in his consuming effort to make mythic and universal this art by the last savage of the last savages. Gauguin doesn't write his beach. He paints it out of his crazy imagination, filled with his own native myths, shaped by all the art history that flows through his fingers.

Our first ambition was to walk the black sand beach at Atuona. Death had been frequent on that beach. The bay was called Traitors' Bay, from the boat crews that had been cut-off there. But death had come more usually for Enata from canoes of their enemies as they came 'fishing' for victims. In times of social crisis or in celebration of some sacred moment in their lives, Enata went fishing *(e ika)* for victims, *heana*. They would go raiding other islands, other valleys. They snatched their victims where they could, off the shore, from their houses. These *heana* were brought back, sometimes alive, sometimes dead, but always in the fashion in which fishermen brought back a catch of their most *tapu* fish. They were strung on poles, with large hooks in their mouths, baskets of bait attached to their limbs. When the victims had been killed, their corpses were mocked and played with and parts of bodies were ceremonially eaten. Then they were strung up with other sacrifices in the *me'ae,* the sacred spaces of the gods.

Back from the beach – over Gauguin's shoulders as he painted – we walked the dusty roads and up the trails among the silent stone remains. Here and there a *tiki* head had been incorporated into a fence. The massive statues had long gone from this valley. You can see them in the museums of the world staring wide-eyed and meaningless at the bored crowds. I liked the *tiki* in the fences better than all the *tiki* in the exhibition halls. The *tiki* in the fences had a modest dignity. Shadows and flowers gave them a life that spotlights and pedestals took away.

Everywhere in the valley of Atuona are empty stone remains. They were stone platforms on which houses once stood, or stone stages on which people had once danced and feasted, or stone altars in sacred places where sacrifices had been placed. They were scattered among the trees, overgrown and silent, all through the valley. They were relics of populations wiped out in the few short years of their encounter with Euro-American strangers. Diseases for which the people had no immunity killed most; but they died more horribly than that. In a cultural paroxysm in the 1860s, they killed themselves. When they had no explanation of why they were dying in such horrific numbers, they turned to killing one another for the machinations and sorcery they presumed was among them.

The missionaries, early in the nineteenth century, hopeless in their efforts at conversion, had focused on destruction of the *tapu* system which they believed was the key to native heathenism. They promised that the native dying would stop if the evil of the *tapu* was broken. They evolved a series of rituals by which the native gods were challenged to punish broken *tapu*. Men were asked to walk under women's most intimate clothing. Women were asked to walk over the most sacred objects. The effect was not so much change as emptiness and listless hopelessness. Enata were numb for a while, with liquor as much as cultural anomie.

Then in the 1860s, here in the valley of Atuona, there was a terrible revival of an old *tapu* custom, *e ika,* fishing for victims. In the cultural hopelessness of the 1860s, any rebirth of custom would be bastard. The revival of *e ika* was monstrous. Whatever balancing principles there had been to the death and violence of the old ways were now gone. This time, the killings had no ritual. They were not across islands and valleys. They were internecine, familial even, and orgiastic. In a population depleted in fifty years to 3,000 from 100,000 they now killed one another by the hundreds.

The death throes of this valley of Atuona were awful. It was and is today a place of extraordinary beauty, the sort of wild beauty that Gauguin ached to find. The peak of Temetiu dominates it. The wide sweeping southern arm of its bay bends out into the straits towards the neighbouring island of Tahuata. Its black sand beach collects the waves coming in on the southeast winds. Its river sparkles over a bed of stones. But its silence clings.

Among the silent stones, Gauguin's imagination does not seem so crazy, and his admonition to 'be mysterious' not so irresponsible. His cowled riders of death have a monkish feel, enough to remind us how much death those who preached eternal life had brought. The wash of his colours reminds us that any re-presentation of the past will have a dream-like quality. The past has its own silences that never will be voiced.

We paid Gauguin honour, of course. We walked up the hill of Hueakihi to the cemetery. His grave is easily seen. Amid white cement tombs open to the sun, his is of reddish rocks and shaded by a frangipani tree. Seventy-five years after his death one of Gauguin's final wishes was granted. The cast of a favourite work, a ceramic sculpture he had called *Oviri*, was placed on his grave. *Oviri* was a favourite of Picasso, too, and inspired him. Gauguin had sculpted *Oviri* in Brittany on his return to France after his first trip to Tahiti, just before that terrible brawl that left him with a wounded leg for life. Gauguin thought it his finest work of art. He knew it was enigmatic, mysterious. 'Oviri' in Tahitian means 'wild', 'savage'. The woman of the statue is indeed wild, a mixture of incompatible lore. She has the head of a mummified Marquesan skull. She crushes a wolf under her feet, just as those most unwild statues of the Virgin crush a serpent. Gauguin put his customary signature on the statue, 'PGO'. That reads as 'pego'. It is sailors' slang for 'prick'. *Oviri's* wildness creates a disturbing restlessness over the grave. One cannot think that Gauguin's bones rest in peace.

It took us several days to reach Vaitahu, and then only after dramatic rescues from a drifting, powerless boat we had boarded at Atuona. In the end we came to Vaitahu as the Spaniards had come 400 years ago, and James Cook 200 years ago. Like them

we could not see the bay, hidden as it was behind the high bluff at its northeast point. But I knew it was there because I could see the effect of the blast of wind that tunnelled down from the mountains. Every ship that anchored there felt that wind, and needed a double anchor on the sandy sloping floor of the bay to stay there. I don't know how many times I have put on a card or a page of paper a note from a log, a journal or a letter about the wind. Just seeing it on the waters outside Vaitahu was a thrill. I was nearly there where 10,000 times I had been in my mind.

We crossed the beach at Vaitahu in total disarray. Our experiences on the water had unsettled us. We needed an aggression for negotiating accommodation and transport that we did not have. Our softness bred distrust. But an old man, Teifitu Umu, took us in hand. He had rheumy eyes and feet swollen with elephantiasis. He is dead now, by a few months, as I write. With a shuffling walk he took us up the path beside the stream that flowed down the valley. From somewhere in my reading I remembered that this stream had become a flooded torrent in 1797 and had carried houses and their inhabitants into the bay.

Teifitu was a widower. Our appreciation of his kindness did not displace our dismay at the conditions of his house. From the moment of our arrival a gaggle of children had adopted us and watched our social gaucheries with great amusement. The adults were more distant, but friendly.

After a sparse supper, Teifitu came to talk. In the growing dark, we sat at his table. I brought out my copy of *Edward Robarts*. I will never forget that evening as we bent over it and I tried to convey in my poor French and poorer Marquesan what its English said. He was clearly excited to talk with somebody with an interest in the island. He wrote his name in my diary, Teifitu Gregoire Umu, and then the line of his genealogy that took him back to Iotete, the *haka'iki* (chief) of Vaitahu, whose story I am about to tell. And to Iotete's father, Tainai, who had welcomed Robarts, Kabris and Crook. And to Tainai's father, Honu, who had welcomed James Cook. He wrote down, too, the names of all the families still on the island. I have these pages still. I hold them precious, not so much for their information, but because they told me how much I didn't know and reminded me of my obligations in regard to silences that were not mine to break.

Things of the past – all those artefacts we call cultural – come into the present as 'cargo' across the beaches of island cultures. Their encapsulated meanings – status in a colour, cosmology in a shape, gender in a texture – are transformed in the new environment of the present into other meanings – of heritage, of evidence, of art, of loot, of souvenirs. The history of things will have to enfold the meanings of the present in which they were made and all the meanings of their successive presents.

It is the same with places. The history in places, especially in places of cross-cultural encounters, will take as much imagination as science to see. Blood and ashes are blown away with the dirt. Shouts and songs die on the wind. Pain and happiness are as evanescent as memory. To catch the lost passions in places, history will have to be a little more artful than being a 'non-fiction'. It will have to have, among other graces, a trust in and a sense of the continuities of living through different times, despite all the transformations and translations that masquerade as discontinuities.

Teifitu walked us round the sights and sites of the valley. Behind the beach of rolling stones in a cleared area, a breadfruit tree stands. Somewhere nearby the Spaniards said Mass and killed those among Enata who jostled during it. Somewhere nearby they set up three stakes for three bodies. Who knows in what theatre or for what purpose, a soldier pierced the side of the body on the central stake with a spear. No word of whether water ran from the wound.

Deep in the valley at the end of a line of trees is a monument to three French soldiers killed in ambuscade by Enata in 1843. Teifitu showed us where and how the deaths occurred. When I asked him where the monument was for Enata dead, he shrugged his shoulders. No, there were no monuments, but there is memory and there will be history.

Make no doubt about that. There will be history. I won't be there to read it. Perhaps not you either nor your children's children. But these dead will be heroes for their resistance. If there is one thing we have learned in the Pacific, it is that if the Fatal Impact of the Euro-Americans killed hundreds of thousands of lives, it did not kill memories. These memories will undoubtedly serve their successive presents. These memories will be debated, revised. No doubt someday someone will start an archaeological dig around these monuments or the French fort. They will collect the musket balls and the sling stones, make their histories, build their museums.

The 'French presence' began on 1 May 1842, the name day of Louis-Philippe, France's uncomfortable monarch. In this improbable place, a backwater in the vast Pacific Ocean, Admiral Abel Dupetit-Thouars established an imperial presence for France with an occupation force of several hundred troops.

The Admiral took possession of Vaitahu with all the appropriate proprieties. He set up a flagpole. He beat the soil with his sword three times. He had the band play *Domine Salvum* for the king and the *Marseillaise* for his changed kingdom. After Solemn High Mass, he had the local chiefs sign the cession of their land. The *Ministre de Marine* insisted that the documents be signed in triplicate. You can see the spidery scrawls and crosses still in the National Archives, Paris.

Taking possession of the Marquesas was easier than knowing what to do with them once they were possessed. The whole French caper was largely Dupetit-Thouars's idea. The French public knew nothing of it and were to be enraged when they discovered that they were saddled with the expense and tedium of their useless empire.

As Dupetit-Thouars saw it, there was nowhere else for the French to go in the Pacific. The British had narrowly beaten them to New Zealand. The Russians were developing Alaska and Kamchatka. The Americans were pioneering the Rocky Mountains and were the main influence in Hawai'i. On a map of mercator projection, or in some model in a global strategist's head, the Marquesas were in the centre of the Pacific. They were on the cross-roads between Panama and Sydney, Cape Horn and Shanghai. The British, Dupetit-Thouars said, would need a passport to traverse the Pacific.

But winds and currents and Great Circle navigation don't work like global strategists' models. The Marquesas remained as unstrategic as they ever were. There is an almost pathetic letter from Dupetit-Thouars to his *Ministre de Marine* as he arrived in

Te Henua explaining that now he was there there were some questions he would like to ask. There were ten islands in the *îles des Marquises* and dozens of inhabited valleys, he reported. He would probably need about a thousand troops to control them. And, incidentally, what about laws? What systems of justice would there be? Who had power over life and death? Who owned the land? Should there be intermarriage? …

Those the French said they owned did not feel owned. In the Land, resistance was savage. At Vaitahu, the French made Iotete 'king'. They gave him a pasteboard crown decorated with glass beads and colossal feathers. They dressed him in a red shag coat with enormous gold epaulette in the style of Louis XV. Someone among the officers said he looked like a Bourbon, if one forgot the tattoos. They had given him a flag, too, of red and white squares. It was the French naval signal flag for evening mess. They laughed and laughed at this joke on a cannibal king.

It did not take long for Iotete to realize that whatever greatness had been thrust upon him, he was greatly diminished. The French left 200 troops in his valley. Only 200 of his people had survived the 'ecological imperialism' that had come across their beaches in the form of diseases for which they had no immunity. The French soldiers made servants of them all and prostitutes of the women. The soldiers' hygiene was appalling, too. Iotete's people began quickly to die of dysentery. So Iotete took them out of the valley and retired to the mountains.

The sudden silence and loneliness of Vaitahu was disturbing to the French. This was not what empires were made of. They brought in enemies of Iotete and made one of them 'king' and decided to expel Iotete altogether from his island. Their military effort was singularly unsuccessful. Two of the soldiers, including a lieutenant, were killed. Then there was a siege of the soldiers' encampment, but the dysentery was killing the Marquesans more quickly than the muskets. Iotete's people literally melted away with the flux.

So the French left Vaitahu. There are no Solemn High Masses for retreats as there are for possessions. There is no accounting for the costs of vicious absurdity, either. Perhaps it is the banality of their evil that should disturb us, not the scope of it. It is their bad faith in suggesting that it could not be otherwise. It is the immorality of doing to native peoples what their civilization, their religion and their laws said they could not do to each other.

In this Silent Land, my memory is of sounds – of generators in the morning, of cocks crowing, of children playing, of coconuts falling, of the eternal rolling of pebbles in the waves on the shore. The silence, if I would be true to myself, was really in myself. The beach is always a mirror to oneself. On a beach the reflections of self are as if in a crazy mirror, distorted, caricatured. Someone called me recently from Cape Town, South Africa. They had seen words of mine on a banner over the entrance to the South African National Gallery. If they were not written here at Vaitahu, they were certainly learned here:

There is now no Native past without the Stranger, no Stranger without the Native. No one can hope to be mediator or interlocutor in that opposition of Native and Stranger, because no one is gazing at it untouched by the power that is in it. Nor can anyone speak just for the one just for the other. There is no escape from the

politics of our knowledge, but that politics is not in the past. That politics is in the present.

Newport Pagnell 1799. *The forty-mile carriage ride up the Great North Road from London to Newport Pagnell was hard and long. There were many stares at his sunburnt, weathered face which was almost as dark as the native boy's sitting beside him. His outdoor look did not fit the indoor appearance of his sombre near-clerical clothing. His talk was pious and godly, but he did not have the posture or voice of a minister of the church. He looked different and out of place.*

Different and out of place was how he felt, too. The stares would not have worried him. He was more frightened by the thought of the gaze he would be subject to at Newport Pagnell. He was the Mission Society's first failure, though there were others they did not yet know of. He was the first to come back to England those 10,000 miles from the Pacific mission. His conscience was clear. The fervour of his beliefs had not cooled, though his soul had been raked like no other man's. He had seen scenes too obscene to describe, too terrible to understand. There had not been a minute in all the death around him that he had not thought that he too would die uselessly – mocked and taunted on his beach for his difference.

He knew that the directors would have been disturbed by the only letter they had received from him before he turned up unannounced on the whaling ship Butterworth. 'I desire to blush and be confounded before the Lord forever', he had written in that letter. 'Temptation has been violent and of such strange sort that I persuaded it would be the greatest presumption in anyone knowing them to encounter.'

Now that he was approaching Newport Pagnell, he remembered his boldness in that letter. Who was he, nineteen years young, and without any other certainty than that God had called him, to tell these great men that they had got it wrong? The Duff had left him alone on the beach at Tahuata with a bible, some seeds and tools, some paper and ink. The heathens had laughed at his poverty and ignorance. He reminded the directors that he had attached himself wrongly to the opinion of 'some respectable members of your body' against the true founder of the Mission Society, Dr Thomas Haweis. Haweis had thought that there was only one way to convert the heathen, and that was by establishing a community of believers whose shining example of good living would give meaning to their words.

Dr Haweis was right, the young whitesmith-cum-missionary now knew, because language was such a barren thing in itself 'God', 'sin', 'redemption', 'resurrection', 'eternity' – what use were words when there was no experience of what they meant? What story of salvation was there to tell, when the heathens mocked the weakness of a god who couldn't give his servant food or skills to obtain it. Language and its translation was the key. But there was not true translation without experience of a language's meaning.

So here he was with a native boy who had followed him all those miles. The boy was tattooed with a diagonal line from his left temple to his right cheek. He had been initiated into the band of dancers, ka'io'i, whose moral deprivations were without end. The boy, attracting so much attention, was doomed. He was dying now of cold. How could he have eternal life, bewildered as he was? There would be not much time to extract all that there was in his mind. And he himself had a story no one else could tell. In this place where everybody looked at him with a knowing, cynical look, even his own story was disappearing from his mind. He needed the boy like a mirror to see himself in a different place.

The servants at Newport Pagnell took Crook and Temouteitei through the mansion to a book-lined study. This was to be his, Crook's, new beach. He saw the books of the Pacific – Cook, Bligh, Bougainville, Hawkesworth, Forster – almost before he saw the sickly figure of the great Dr Samuel Greethead. He lay on the couch beside them.

'Ah! Mr William Pascoe Crook, I am very glad to see you,' the good doctor said. 'And this is Temouteitei? Kaoha! Welcome.'

Dr Greethead was the Sir Joseph Banks of the Mission Society, a great scavenger of knowledge and collector of stories. He had created a vocabulary and grammar of the Tahitian language out of the memories of the Bounty mutineers when they were dragged back for trial and execution. Out of secret manuscripts describing the mutineers' experiences at Tahiti, out of all the other published literature of the Pacific, out of interviews with captains of whaling and trading ships he had formulated a description of Tahitian society.

The missionaries on the Duff had it to learn on their way out and to help them in their strategies of conversion. Now he had the most exciting possibility of his intellectual life. The Pacific had come to him in the person of Temouteitei and of the young, intelligent, questioning Crook.

'Do you know,' Greethead said to Crook, 'I persuaded the Directors that two guineas was not too much to spend to get you here. I know you are disappointed that you missed the Duff on her return voyage. But God works in strange ways. If you were with them, you would be now prisoner of the French. Work with me now on the language of the South Seas. It is in the cause of Christ.'

So they turned to conversations that lasted months over several visits. They culled the books on Greethead's shelves, traced Temouteitei's network of kin, evoking stories from him as they went. Now equipped with a frame of Te Henua's physical, biological and botanical environment, a dramatis personae of individuals, a list of institutions, a day-by-day narrative of happenings, they wrung Crook's memory for details. That way, they wrote a 280-page 'Account of the Marquesas Islands' and 'An Essay toward a Dictionary and Grammar of the lesser-Australian language, According to the Dialect used in the Marquesas'.

That part which belongs to Crook's living narrative began:

On the 6th June, 1797, the Duff arrived in Resolution Bay …

Taipi

We had not finished with the Land. We flew to Ua Huka and joined an old Second World War landing craft for the five-hour voyage to Nukuhiva. We approached Nukuhiva from its southeast corner, and could see its north and south coast stretching away. All was abrupt cliff in the blue haze of the sea.

As we moved along the south coast, I began to recognize bays. Taipivai came first. Taipivai was the valley which Herman Melville experienced as 'Typee'. He had run with Tobias Greene from the *Acushnet* in July 1842 and made his three weeks' beachcombing into a *Narrative of Four Months Residence Among the Natives of a Valley in the Marquesas Islands* (1846).

Typee was a brave book. It roused much anger for its immorality, but more because it challenged commonly held prejudices. Melville saw the beach as a tawdry place where nothing came across in beauty or fullness, where everything was a

misanthropic, half-pointless, tattered remnant. He saw Enata in the rags of civilization and saw the rags as a parable of the larger cultural dump the Land was becoming. To those who saw everything of civilization as good and everything of savages evil, Melville's perception that the good could be evil and the evil good was uncomfortable. The reading public denounced it as deceiving fiction.

For me, it was a moment of tension to turn into the narrow entrance of Taiohae bay and to be engulfed by the massive caldera ridges all around. We were in some giant's maw, and there in front of us, like an uvula, was the small mound of Fort Collet.

For forces with cannon and artillery, Fort Collet was of strategic importance in the bay. It commanded every part of the valley. Fort Collet was its French name. Lieutenant David Porter USN had called it Fort Madison in 1814. Porter had entered the Pacific in the *Essex* in order to harass British whalers in the war of 1812. Within months he brought a ragged fleet of captured vessels turned into prison ships to Taiohae. He set up a town called Madisonville on the shores of the bay. Three hundred strangers in such a small space inevitably strained resources to the limit. Porter was dragged into the politics of the island to get his supplies. When the Taipi (Melville's 'Typee'), the enemy of the Teii people of Taiohae, refused to cooperate – indeed when the Taipi standing on the ridges above Madisonville 'mooned' Porter's marines and claimed that 'the Americans were the posteriors to the Ten's privates' – Porter chose to see the action as an affront against the American flag.

An unsuccessful punitive raid only made things worse. Porter staged a 'search and destroy' rampage through the whole valley of Taipivai. He was vague on the 'body count', but intimated that it was large. Enata, he decided, had a 'republican spirit'. 'They had requested to be admitted into the great American family whose pure republican polity approaches so near their own.' Porter took it upon himself to admit them to the United States and to assure them that 'our chief will be their chief'. The 'chief', President James Madison, was not so enthusiastic and was reported as saying that he had enough Indians of his own already. So the USA's first excursion into empire was snuffed.

We landed at the jetty near Fort Collet. There was a great crowd on the jetty to welcome, not us, but a third passenger on our landing craft who was coming to inspect the mission schools. He kindly introduced us to the bishop. Recognition is not something I have come to expect, not then, not now. So let me record, not for the boast of it, but for the pleasure of it, that the bishop when he heard my name said: 'Not *the* Greg Dening'. *Edward Robarts* had come before me.

We ended that remarkable day on the porch of the accommodation provided for us. It looked out over the calm of the bay and through the narrow entrance to open seas stirred by the trades and the south wind. I was surprised that throughout Te Henua sight of the sea was always so blinkered. It meant that a ship or boat or canoe came suddenly into sight. Whatever the purposes of strangers, whether they came 'from beyond the horizon' or more nearly from another island, first sight of them would always hold a moment's apprehension.

At the water's edge before us were the ruins of a stone house platform. I knew immediately that it was Butahaie's, a powerful woman of Robarts's and Crook's days.

With her range of *pekio,* or secondary husbands, with the network of the marriages of her children, with her many properties, she was a formidable force at Taiohae and through the whole island. There can be no ethnography of Enata, no story of how they managed rules and reality without Butahaie. She only has a life, though, in the writings of the beaches of Robarts and Crook.

Our nearest neighbours were the dead. 'Royal tombs' nestled in the knoll beside us. We were settled on the lands of 'kings' and 'queens'. When Admiral Dupetit-Thouars left Vaitahu, he came to Taiohae. He came with 1,700 sailors and 400 soldiers. Where David Porter built Madisonville, Dupetit-Thouars built Saumerville. The troubles the French had experienced at Tahuata spurred them on to build their town and fort quickly. They made space, near where we were staying, for a 'palace' for the 'king', Temoana.

Temoana's name meant 'The Immense Sea'. His life had been a pilgrimage across many oceans. He had been to New Zealand and Sydney. He had even visited Napoleon's tomb at St Helena. London had been his shame. In later years drink would make him remember with rage the exhibitions his tattoos made and the curiosity he became. By 1845 with the aid of the French he had built a cottage by the sea. It had a flagstaff and *tricolore* outside. Inside, he began to fill it with stools, bedsteads, spy glasses, fowling pieces and empty champagne bottles. The French bought their land from him for a pittance and paid him off with a pension. They made liquor available to anyone among Enata who wanted it.

Inevitably, some Enata, seeing the destruction of their way of life, distanced themselves from Temoana. One of them was a *haka'iki* who had made his way up from the lower *kikino* classes. Pakoko was his name. The valley of Taiohae was divided. The French found themselves confronted by what seemed to be a cultural revival of Enata ways led by Pakoko. They saw in this signs of resistance to their order. There were jailings and other punishments. Then six soldiers wandered where they were forbidden to go, near a *tohua* or ceremonial dancing and feasting ground. Pakoko's men surrounded them, killed them, and took them off like a catch of 'fish' to the sacrificial altars. The French retaliated with mortar and artillery and burned down all they could reach. They sent an expeditionary force over the passes towards Taipivai looking for Pakoko. The memory of Porter's 'search and destroy' thirty years before was still strong among the Taipi. Pakoko surrendered to save his people's property and lives.

The French commander, Lieutenant Amalric, created a court martial with punctilious legal formalities, none of them valid as it turned out. Pakoko was found guilty and condemned to death. He was given a choice of a hanging or a firing squad, and chose to be shot. They marched him to a ditch behind a blockhouse on a knoll against the mountain. Hundreds of his people stood on the ridges around and looked down at his killing. Pakoko refused, the French said, a bandage around his eyes. He stood erect and proud, his long white beard flowing over a chest covered with tattoos, his *haka'iki* fan in his hand. He indicated to his judges – or so they said – that it was proper for him to die. Executioners are always eager for these sorts of submissions.

When they had killed him, his people on the ridges wailed. The women danced naked and tore at their skins until cannon fire drove them away. For years afterwards, Enata when they were drunk would turn to the French and say: 'You have killed Pakoko.'

A strange thing. The French killed Pakoko at 3.00 p.m. on Good Friday.

Just two days before Pakoko's slaying there had been another killing. In these days Enata were dying in their hundreds because of dysentery and other mysterious diseases. Having no explanations, Enata turned to their mythic understanding of how it happened and looked to a sorcerer, Oko, as its cause. Lieutenant Amalric, to soften the pain of Pakoko's killing, had Oko taken unceremoniously to a place on the mountains where all the people could be observers. He had him killed with a pistol shot to the head.

Amalric lost his command for this improper death. He even lost the Legion of Honour that he had won for capturing Pakoko.

We made a pilgrimage to the mountains where Pakoko died. We inspected the ruins of the penal settlement for political prisoners that the Land for a time had become. We saw the foundations of a cathedral that was never built. I worked in the archives and small museum of the mission. I confess that the archives were a more comfortable beach for me. I should have known that the dead are easier to talk to than the living.

Rethinking history

Rethinking history presents no problem to me. I have rethought history all my life. Discourse is a changing thing. A sentence in any conversation is shaped by the sentences that have gone before and shapes the sentences that come after. For forty years I have tried to write cross-cultural history. Names for what I do have come and gone. 'Ethnohistory', 'culture-contact', 'zero-point history' – the names come and go as their usage discovers their limitations. I suppose that what has never changed – at least in my own understanding of myself – has been the resolve not to treat either side of a cultural encounter differently. I cannot cope with an anthropology of natives and a history of strangers. I have ambitions to do an anthrohistory of them both. I have a passionate belief as well that I am a story-teller. Story is my theatre. Story is my art. I have two ambitions as a story-teller. The one is that my readers enjoy what Susan Sontag and Roland Barthes might have called the erotics of reading, the sensation that what they are reading of mine is what they were themselves about to say. The other ambition is to liberate my readers, to let them go where I have never been. I have never been possessive of either my students or my readers. I fulfil my ambitions by making theatre of my history. My readers will never learn the meaning of my stories by my telling them what those meanings are. My readers must be theatre critics of my stories. They must go out into the theatre foyer and argue what they mean. Out of all the trivialities of my story, out of all the reality effects with which I pepper it, out of its thousands of words, my readers must reduce it to a sentence or two and say what it means. With a little craft, it will be what I had in mind. Theory will never add to the realism of my theatre. Reflection will.

A note on beachcombing texts

Edward Robarts spent seven years in Te Henua. He deserted from the whaler *New Euphrates* at Vaitahu in December 1798. He found in a deserted hut a bible, some letters and a journal that mystified him. He realized that they had belonged to a pious young man, William Pascoe Crook. But he did not know what had become of him. Actually, Crook was picked up by the same *New Euphrates* at Nukuhiva and taken back to England. He had been landed at Vaitahu by the mission ship *Duff* in July 1797. His missionary companion had refused to stay but Crook agreed to remain alone. Harsh circumstances forced him to move to Nukuhiva. Joseph Kabris deserted from the *London* some time in 1799. He was a fierce rival to Robarts.

Crook's story was publicized in the official history of the voyage of the *Duff* (Wilson 1799), but his 'Account of the Marquesas Islands' and 'Dictionary and Grammar of the Marquesan Language, written with the aid of Dr Samuel Greethead and Temouteitei', has remained in manuscript form in the Mitchell Library, Sydney, NSW. The bicentenary of these events will see its publication in French and English in 1998 (Crook 1998). Robarts's journal, the property of the National Library of Scotland, was published in 1974 (Dening 1974). One version of Joseph Kabris's pamphlet is available in translation, together with a detailed account of his life, in Terrell (1982).

Dening (1980) contextualizes these writings of the beach in an anthrohistory of Te Henua. Thomas (1990) applies them towards an anthropology of Enata. Herbert (1980) provides a literary critique of Euro-American writings on the beach of Te Henua.

Most of the history we write is a vicarious experience of the past. In writing history, we are really rewriting somebody else's histories. These other histories – as raw as a birth certificate, as latent as a ship's log, as full as an intimate diary – each has its own narrative forms and is subject to our critical reading. To see what these eyes on the beach saw, we need a sense of the cultural filters through which they caught a glimpse of otherness. The value of Crook's, Robarts's and Kabris's writings of the beach lie not so much in their formal descriptions of Te Henua as in their accounts of daily occurrences – conflicts, feasts, births, deaths, wars, voyages. The formal descriptions are subject to templates of all sorts. The narratives of their personal experiences give some slight entry into the way in which cultural living actually occurred.

The eye and its gaze has become an object of analysis in cross-cultural research these past twenty-five years. Not just in cross-cultural research, of course. In gender studies, in art history, in museum studies, wherever the product of the gaze is a representation of some sort, wherever the gaze is more than focused vision and is a social relationship as well, an empowering or disempowering force.

I don't think the eyes have it altogether, however. I think they sometimes see things they did not expect to see. I think we can sometimes see through them to something else. I do not think we live forever in a hall of crazy mirrors.

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2

'AFTER' HISTORY

Keith Jenkins

Writing shortly after completing his book *Why History?* in July 1998, in his Invitation Jenkins insists that postmodern thinking possibly signals the end of history as a meta-narrative and as an academic form but of traditional ethics as well. And the rest of his Invitation was a discourse on these three claims. Letting go of H/history and moribund ethics meant replacing both with 'current imaginaries' and 'self-reflexive' and 'non-historical imaginaries'. In so doing we can, as he concluded, 'wave goodbye to history'. His training as a philosopher turned historian he said confirmed his suspicion about H/history's 'myopic, ideological location in our culture'. It was, as he says, his discovery of Hayden White and Richard Rorty that pushed him to write *Rethinking History* (1991). The rest as they say is history? Or as Keith might prefer it, should not be history.

Earlier this month – July 1998 – I delivered to Routledge the typescript of a new book provisionally entitled *Why History? Considerations on the Possible End of History and Ethics Under the Impact of the Postmodern*. In it I argued – not least through a series of 'case studies' of Derrida *et al.* – that postmodern ways of thinking possibly signal not only the end of history in its modernist upper-case (meta-narrative) and lower-case (professional/academic) forms but, thanks to its celebration of the moral *aporia* (of the radical 'undecidability of the decision'), of traditional ethics as well. And that, as a consequence, this *desirable* collapse of history and ethics carries with it not only a reconsideration of the discursive phenomena which have lived under such signs, but also raises the much more fundamental question of whether or not we still need to reconsider them at all. For perhaps we are now at a postmodern moment when we can forget history completely. Perhaps we are now in conditions where we can live our lives within new ways of timing time which have no reference to a past tense articulated in a discourse which has become, as it were, 'historically familiar to us', and start to formulate new moralities without recourse to moribund ethical systems.

And I argued that we can think of letting history and ethics go because we now have, in the rich imaginaries provided by postmodern-type thinking – a postmodernism shorn of all historical and ethical back-ups – all the intellectual resources we need to think in future-orientated, emancipatory and democratizing ways.

Now, I suppose it will be obvious from what I have just said, that this is a positioned text designed to provoke discussion; in it I make no claim for some sort of 'disinterested objectivity'. When I came to think about the writing of the book, I started off with the question in mind as to what we might now need in terms of imaginaries such that the possibility of emancipation could be re-thought after the Enlightenment, modernist projects (after those projects to bring about in bourgeois and proletarian forms 'human rights communities') had arguably failed on their own terms. I took it initially as a plausible hypothesis and then as an axiom, that the phenomena of postmodernity and postmodernism can best be thought of as coming *after* modernity, and that 'postist' thought can be profitably construed as representing not least a kind of *retrospective* of it in such a way as to at least raise the question of what, *vis-à-vis* emancipations, we are to do now and what, if anything, do we need from the past appropriated through modernist (and other) historicizations to help us to do it. In posing these questions I originally came up with a positive response, not least because I had long had in mind – to the extent that it almost seemed to be common sense – George Steiner's observation that it is not the literal past that determines our present or our future save, possibly, in a genetic sense, but 'images of the past', images which, as selective as any other myth, give each 'new era' its sense of identity, of regress and of new achievements such that the 'echoes by which a society seeks to determine the reach, the logic and the authority of its own voice, come from the rear' (Steiner 1972). But I am no longer so sure about this. For postmodern theorizing may well have made us appreciate that the 'myths' that may take us from the present into the future might best be *of* the present and *of* the future. That perhaps we not only do not need – and maybe never have needed – to measure 'changes' against always highly selective appropriations of the past, but that such practices are also positively damaging in their restrictive cloyingness. That there is no reason why we cannot now gather the strength to unburden ourselves of the historicized past (and traditional ethics) and construct measurements of radical emancipation from current imaginaries and, more particularly, from postmodern ones which, articulated in the future anterior tense, we recognize will always 'not have been good enough'.

This is not exactly the kind of argument I have much run before. One of the reasons why I have previously gone along with postmodern-type ideas, is because their anti-foundational deconstruction of modernist upper and lower-case histories at least opens up the chance for radical historians to legitimately 'produce' the past in more generous and different media and genres (post-feminist, post-structuralist, post-colonial, post-Marxist, etc.), the result being the construction of potentially reflexive histories which, openly partisan, signal their (sometime confessional) standpoints; these are, if you like, 'histories which have come out'. And I have thought, and still think, of such reflexive histories as advances over previous modernist ones which claimed – in varying degrees – not so much to be *creating* histories of the past but of

finding histories in it, it being histories of this reflexive type which I tried to advocate as appropriately as I could in *Rethinking History* (1991), *On 'What is History?'* (1995) and in *The Postmodern History Reader* (1997). But as I have said, for a range of reasons I consider in *Why History?,* I no longer feel that this position faces up to the further challenges issuing from postmodernism, challenges which should not now be resisted but exploited.

This realization – that thanks to the 'non-historical imaginaries' that can be gleaned from postmodernism we can now wave goodbye to history – came to me most vividly when I got to thinking seriously about the insistent demand made particularly by traditional historians, of all stripes, for postmodernists to explain 'what exactly would a postmodern history look like?' You can see the thinking behind such a request. So strong have (modernist) histories been in the formation of our culture, so central their place in the bourgeois and proletarian 'experiments of modernity', that it appears as if history *per se* is a natural phenomenon; I mean, there is always a past so what could be more natural than that there should always be historicizations of it? Accordingly, it is this (in fact 'naturalistic fallacy') which arguably explains both why it is still very much an expectation (an expectation some postmodernists share) that, after the end of modernity (and modernity-styled histories), we might well expect to see as a constituent of postmodernism, postmodern-type histories, and why the perceived 'threat' of such histories superseding modernist ones makes defenders of them rush to the barricades as such 'new histories' situate themselves in the spaces created by the now withering hegemonic bulk of the old, modernist genres.

But history is not a natural phenomenon and there is nothing eternal about it. By definition, in a culture nothing cultural 'is of a natural kind'; consequently, no discourse being anything other than a fabricated, contingent phenomenon, there is no reason to think that 'time' need necessarily be expressed historically. Although we apparently live in time (and time in us), timings of time have been (and are) articulated historically only in very specific kinds of social formation. It is tautological to say so, but it is perhaps worth stressing, that we have obviously never seen anything like nineteenth and twentieth-century, Western upper and lower-case genres ('histories as we have known them') at any other time or place. That there has never existed, on any other part of the earth, at any other time, ways of historicizing time *like that*. Rather than being natural, then, such histories are both unique (historians like telling people that history is made up of unique events) and ephemeral (they are even better at telling them that everything is temporary/temporal), and there is no reason to exclude modernist histories from these broad – but true – commonplaces. Consequently, there is no reason why, in 'postist' social formations beyond modernity, postmodernism need drag modernity's very particular and peculiar habits of historicizing time with it, or the way such habits have been (*vis-à-vis* the European nation-state, for example) used. For despite the current postmodern meltdown, so radioactive with old modernist connotations is history, that to think radically new ('to make up rules in the absence of rules' *après* Lyotard), it is arguably a distinct handicap to still think through *passé* categories. Accordingly, if a postmodern politics is to begin to set the agenda, to now cast any part of it in familiar historical genres, is both unnecessary and undesirable.

For as I read it, there are still two sorts of recognizable and 'together' histories in (albeit moribund) existence: the old upper and lower cases. But the old upper-case meta-narratives are now too decrepit and discredited to be wheeled out again (surely nobody believes in such teleological fantasies any more). On the other hand, whilst lower-case history once had – as befitted its sometime articulation of 'advancing' bourgeois ideology – limited emancipatory ambitions (as expressed in Whig and progressivist narratives), it has long been politically conservative; has long (ostensibly/officially) withdrawn from the world and become studiously 'own-sakist'; studiously 'academic'. Thus, broadly speaking, nothing much in the way of an emancipatory discourse/politics can be reasonably expected of it. And so it is for this reason that, as I have said, it has looked (and looks) to some, as if postmodernism will have to invent its own type of history given the uselessness of the other two – and hence the anxious queries as to what it will look like. But why need it look like anything? Why need it exist? If postmodern critiques have shown that the past will go with anybody (if it will obey any reading); if it will thus support everything in general and nothing in particular, if, moreover, the status of all historical knowledge beyond the statement and the chronicle has been fatally undercut and problematized (history is *not* an epistemology) (Ankersmit 1994) by postmodern scepticism, relativism and neo-pragmatism anyway, then not only is the question indeed raised as to what would a *viable* postmodern history look like, but the question with why bother with one seems positively compelling. From the point of view of emancipatory discourse, what possible use is such a flawed discourse any more; why hitch your wagon to that flogged old horse?

Thus it is my *current* argument that we can now plausibly forget history and the past and live amidst the ample and agreeable imaginaries provided by postmodern-type theorists (say, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Gayatri Spivak, Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, Chantel Mouffe, Sande Cohen, Richard Rorty, Elizabeth Ermarth … I mean, these are just some of the better-known 'names'), theorists who can generate enough by way of emancipatory rhetorics such that we no longer need any kind of foundational – or non-foundational – past. To be sure, such theorizing may need to refer on occasion to what one might call 'philosophy of history', but such theorizing need not be derived from, be parasitical on, nor predicated upon (any more than it is now) the kind of historical accounts provided by traditional/empiricist historians. Besides, it is counter-intuitive to argue that, 'despite everything', we will always need a history to place ourselves in the present, to think the future and (and this is the sometime position of some postmodernists) for articulating, say, notions of identity 'essential' for solidarity. For such arguments are counter-intuitive in the simple sense that postmodern-type theorists just do do very well indeed without either modernist or postmodern histories; some of the most brilliant thinkers of our current condition – for example most of those listed above – just are able to write book after book and article after article without being historians in any 'acceptable' sense. Accordingly, my argument is that if Derrida and Rorty *et al.* can do without history – and especially modernist ones – then we all can. Of course, traditional historians working in either case – and postmodernists working reflexively in a differently

conceived history genre which suits them – can obviously carry on doing so relative to their own lights. But in terms of emancipatory theory and practice (praxis) – the light I am using – such work is, I suspect, no longer much to the point in a culture that is now too late still to be modern; in a culture that is so radically post-historical in its postmodernity. Postmodern theorization thus comes of age and stands on its own rhetorical feet here then; here a *posthistoire* future that is not a mere replication or further instalment of the old, looks inviting.

Now, I mention all this – for what it's worth – because when Alun Munslow asked me to write about how I *now* think about history and how and why I have reached my current position, I was somewhat at a loss to know what to do. In a way it was flattering to be asked to recall how I have come to see history as I do, but in the scheme of things I don't much rate my importance and my relative insignificance makes the writing of a piece about myself a somewhat embarrassing and certainly an 'uneasy' exercise. But as something of a guinea pig for *Rethinking History's* 'new slot' (namely, the 'Invitation to Historians' feature in which, to quote from the Editorial of Vol. 1, No. 1, 'colleagues will be given the opportunity to explain why they write history the way they do'), I have bitten the bullet for the good of the cause. I have also taken the invitation fairly literally and written a kind of professional autobiography. What follows now, then, is a brief résumé of some of the reasons why I have got to thinking about (rather than 'doing') history as I do (as outlined, say, in the above paragraphs), a résumé which, if my memory isn't failing too much – or being too selective or censorious – I would put as follows.

When I entered Higher Education in the mid-1960s via a circuitous route (I had left school at fifteen, had had a variety of manual jobs, had hitch-hiked abroad for a couple of years …) I really knew nothing about the past. But for reasons I cannot honestly pin down, by my early twenties I had somehow developed an interest in it, and I trusted that the study of history that I was then embarking on would give me such knowledge and give it to me straight. In those early days I thought getting historical knowledge was getting together a lot of facts and information about what really happened in the past (and why), and I remember being disorientated in the extreme by my first sustained contact with varieties of historical interpretation through reading various volumes in the *Problems of European Civilization Series* published by D. C. Heath (the 'Heath Series').[1] This series, which ran into dozens of volumes arranged in, as the blurb put it, 'approximate chronological order' running from (in 1962) 'Monotheism and Moses: the Genesis of Judaism' to 'Totalitarianism: Temporary Madness or Permanent Danger?' problematicized, by bringing together in each volume some dozen or so historians all offering different interpretations of the topic in question, not just the topic but, for me, the very civilization the series was all about and my own position in 'it'. I mean – my thinking went at the time – there was only one past, so why couldn't 'expert' historians all agree as to what it had been (truly) like? Yet, again looking back, I think this is when I first became significantly aware that 'the past' and history (i.e. historizations of it) were totally different things and that the past *per se,* which only came to exist historically in historians' readings, could clearly not entail such reading in any reductionist way. And this was initially so

disturbing because when I say that I couldn't really understand why historians couldn't all agree on one interpretation (truth), I think I felt that I couldn't understand why they couldn't all agree with mine – at that point in time a very embryonic and 'certaintist' Marxism.

Now, I am aware that there is no necessary connection (more's the pity) between being working class and being on the political left. But there was such a connection for me. When I first read (or tried to read) E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* in the mid-1960s as part of a course I was taking, I thought this was a way of understanding the past which surely all 'human' beings could agree with. That they didn't – and the dawning realization that they *couldn't* given the way class/ideology broadly governed readings – thus brought home to me the positioned nature of all readings – including my own – and the ideological preferences that constituted them. Henceforth – though this had to be developed – I never really felt the power that 'academic' historians *gave* to *'the* facts' or to what 'really' or 'objectively' happened; I never really felt the urgency that they put behind their insistence that we should all study the past for 'its own sake', seeing the meanings and lessons 'they' allegedly found in the past as being ones they had themselves pretty much put there for their own interests. Henceforth – and put tautologically – I gleaned that *we* are the semantic *source* of whatever the past might be historicized as; that the historicized past is just us – back there. And so I began to make more complex connections than I had previously made between putative historical knowledge (and knowledge *per se*) and power, and between power/knowledge and class in ways *not* still privileging my own 'contingent' position. I was still on the political left, I still (and still do) *like* Marxist (now post-Marxist) ways of thinking about things best, but from around this time I never thought this preference could be written as 'truth', and I never thought again that 'truth' and 'history' went together. For I began to realize that all historical readings (appropriations) were in the end like mine, i.e., preferences, and that my 'political readings' were thus not something to hide or disavow as though they constituted some kind of imperfection or unsightly blemish, but something to bring out into the open so that at least my own position wasn't 'mystified'. All this may appear both idealistic (for I had in mind the possibility of all historians wearing their hearts on their sleeves; of a universal demystification) and crudely reductionist. And in a sense reductionist it is. But it needn't be too crude, nor need we flinch from insisting upon such points in spite of arguments to the opposite effect.

Of course, I think the intention behind the Heath Series was not exactly what I took from it. Its intention, I think, was much more of a 'Cold War' type, with its 'interpretive undecidability' subverting totalizing and totalitarian thought/practices. But what I got from it was, above all else, a heavy scepticism about any definitive reading (including my own and Marxist ones unfortunately) and a realization that every historical reading beyond the statement or the chronicle (and history is *always* beyond the statement and the chronicle) is 'inexpungeably relativistic' … so maybe it did work after all!

But, what I'm saying is that, certainly by the late 1960s (and by then in my mid/late twenties – I was born in 1943), I think I was developing a position that was a sort

of postmodernist one in embryo; a postmodernism before the letter as it were – or at least before the letter had reached me. For in the 1960s, of course, the ideas that were to constitute postmodernism were little more than a glint in the eye of the 'odd' intellectual. But when it came on strong – in the 1980s and 1990s – I think I was prepared for it, not least for the reasons I have been recalling. But there was also something else that was, as I see it now – pushing me towards a receptiveness to the kinds of thinking I associate with postmodern ideas, the beginning of which I can pinpoint pretty much to a time and place; to an 'event' I am still working out of …

Though nowhere near Damascus – actually I was on a bus travelling from Derby to Matlock in the English Peak District on a Saturday evening – and not at all religious, I still remember the shock of seeing the words 'The Death of God' on the pages of the book I had bought earlier in the day, Albert Camus's *The Rebel* (1951). It was, as the phrase goes, a seminal moment; after it, things no longer looked the same. For what Camus's text did, almost overnight, was to transport me into an intellectual world I had never even dreamed existed. This was a world of ideas – of history, of revolution, of rebellion, of literature, of existentialism, of the absurd, of the sublime – written with an intensity, a commitment, and a range of reference I really hadn't a clue about. Who were, and what did Sade, Saint-Just, de Maistre, Max Stirner, Baudelaire, Lacenaire, Turgenev and, above all, Nietzsche, say? And then there was that blurb on the back cover of the paperback:

> Slave camps under the flag of freedom, massacres justified by philanthropy or the taste for the superhuman, cripple judgement. On the day when crime puts on the apparel of innocence … it is innocence that is called on to justify itself. The purpose of this essay is to accept and study that strange challenge;

I just hadn't considered things in this way before. And what did sections with titles like 'The Sons of Cain', 'The Dandy's Rebellion', 'The Fastidious Assassins', 'The Path of Chigalev', 'Nihilistic Murder', 'History and Murder', 'Rebellion and Style' and 'Thought at the Meridian', mean? Though it may seem sad and melodramatic to say so, I felt I had to find out, and this put me onto a track I have not really left since. And I also quite suddenly felt that I didn't any longer want to be a 'proper' or even a 'Marxist' historian – an historian of past events of an empirical kind even with 'abstractions' – but an historian of ideas and, more particularly, political ideas. The then aim – I can see it clearly now – was to be a 'political theorist'. And I suppose – to end with a more private footnote – that this direction was confirmed when, in December 1966 and fairly recently married, my wife bought me for my 'special' Christmas present – can you believe it – John Plamenatz's two-volume *Man and Society: A Critical Examination of Some Important Social and Political Theories from Machiavelli to Marx* (1964).

But all this 'excitement' and new-found direction caused a problem. At the time of my deciding I wanted to be a political theorist I was at a college of education training to be a history teacher. But there was no political theory taught in schools. Consequently, since the only place I could think of where I would have the time and the freedom

to think – and teach – political theory was in Higher Education, then Higher Education was where I had to be. Thus, on leaving college in 1968 and having gone on to teach in schools for a year, in 1969 I went to the University of Nottingham to read Medieval and Modern History. In some ways it was the wrong place to go for the sort of 'theory' I was interested in, but three things happened to me there which I can now see as being important to the way things have worked out.

First, I certainly learned quite a lot of history, and I certainly began to experience that 'historical training', 'proper' history style. And, ironically, this turned out to be for the good: it confirmed my suspicion about such history's myopic, ideological location in our culture. Second, my undergraduate years gave me the time I wanted to pursue the sort of reading that I had embarked upon since my first encounter with Camus. By the early 1970s I had read all Camus's texts I could find; I now knew who Saint-Just, de Maistre and Turgenev were; I read as much as I could in existential texts (especially Sartre and Heidegger), and above all, I read Nietzsche. I was also able – in a sort of 'flanking movement' – to start benefiting from that tremendous effort by New Left Books (now Verso), under the influence of Perry Anderson in particular, to import into England what it had arguably never had, an intellectuality of a Marxist kind. It was thanks to Anderson (himself to be disillusioned as early as 1976 as to the extent and success of this 'import business' if his *Considerations on Western Marxism* is anything to go by) (Anderson 1976) and the kick-start he gave to other left-wing publishing houses, that I was now able to read especially those Western Marxists who, in their sometime scepticism and pessimism inadvertently, I suppose, helped further prepare me for the 'end' of Marxism and a readiness to take on board various 'postist'-type thoughts (which Anderson, of course, effectively rejected). But all this as it may be, my bookshelves began to be filled with texts by Lukács, Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse, Benjamin, Korsch, Gramsci, Timpanaro, Althusser, Della Volpe, Colletti *et al.*, and with various English and American Marxists of, pretty well, the *New Left Review* variety. And finally, third, in choosing to take as my 'subsidiary subject' Politics to run alongside my history courses, I met for the first time the sole lecturer in political theory at Nottingham, John McClelland.

McClelland (whose 800-page *A History of Western Political Thought* was published by Routledge in 1996) was, in the early 1970s, a newly-appointed lecturer from Cambridge where, under the supervision of George Steiner, he had just finished his Doctorate on political theories of mass psychology in the works of Taine, Le Bon and Freud. He was much more than I had bargained for both in terms of his intellectual and his general arrogance. A brilliant political theorist, I suffered his intellectually intimidating Special Subject on Marxism and, in 1972, on finishing my degree, transferred to the Politics Department to read for a Ph.D. under his supervision, choosing as my subject a combination that allowed me to keep two of my then main interests – in existentialism and Marxism – together, submitting my thesis ('Ideology and Science in the Political Thought of Nietzsche, Freud and Sorel') in 1975. In one sense, then, so far so good. I was now at least something of a political theorist, all I had to do was to find a job.

This was not to be; or, at least, what was to be was not exactly what I had had in mind. The number of political theory posts I could apply for in the mid-1970s

seemed to be running at maybe one or two a year, so I spent the period from 1975 to 1978 teaching on a part-time and/or temporary basis across the educational system from schools to university until, in 1978, I took up a post at the then West Sussex and the now Chichester Institute – where I remain.

In terms of how I currently think about history, the years I have spent in Sussex have pushed me in certain directions I had not really envisaged when I first arrived there. I don't want to make too much of this, but twenty years of being in one job is a long time, and my place of work has actually been important not least in helping determine the sorts of things I have written and my attitude towards history and postmodernism. Here, then, two things strike me as being important, both of which I lightly unpack.

First, although I went to Sussex to lecture in Modern European History, my sometime experience in schools saw me also put in charge, around 1981, of the Secondary History Post Graduate Certificate in Education course. This experience – which occasionally took me into schools where I concentrated on work with sixth forms – and which brought me into contact with postgraduate historians drawn (over the years) from practically every higher education institution in Britain, concentrated my mind on things pedagogic and on the ways the students I taught thought about 'their subject' – history. I mean, what was history, why should it be taught, what, if anything, was the point of the historicized past, and how could it be considered in ways facilitating the furthering of one's 'position' *vis-à-vis* such questions? And here what struck me most was how 'underdeveloped' any systematic thinking – least of all any theoretical thinking – was in these areas. With the exception of the pioneering, methodologically-led Associated Examining Board's A-Level Paper – the 'AEB 673' – most advanced history was stuck in the mire of an ingrained empiricism Geoffrey Elton would have been proud of. Little attempt was made to problematicize the discourse of history beyond the occasional nod to tried and tested, semi-ritualized 'controversies', whilst the postgraduate historians who I taught in the Institute – all of whom had good history degrees and often higher degrees too – displayed (with notable exceptions) not only a lack of interest in 'theory' but often an intense hostility towards it. Most of them had clearly managed to gain a degree in a 'discipline' whose metaphysical, ontological, epistemological, methodological and moral/ideological constituents remained not only a mystery but one they still had little interest in probing: what was the point of thinking about history; why couldn't one 'just do it'. Yet it seemed to me that this unreflexive attitude – which to my mind is a tremendous indictment of 'our' history degrees – was plain unacceptable. It seemed to me that if these were people who were going to spend years of their lives teaching other people history, then on the basis that an unexamined history discourse was not – any more than an unexamined life was not – much worth having, then things had to change. Consequently, the courses that I taught increasingly drew on historical theorizing and the philosophy of history in ways heavily influenced by my own interests – overtly flagged to my students – and, in particular, my interest in the works of Hayden White.

I had first read White's *Metahistory* in the mid-1970s and didn't really understand it. I'm ashamed to admit that other reading priorities meant that I neglected White until, in the mid-1980s, I picked up a copy of his *Tropics of Discourse* (1978). By then

my reading in the philosophy of history – which I had begun to take to in place of political theory given the nature of the work I'm describing – had resulted only in frustration. From the dizzy heights of existentialism and Marxism – which seemed to me to be so vital in their informing of 'life' – the descent into the relatively arid wastes of covering law theory, causal analysis, description, explanation and conceptual analysis pretty much at the level of the statement and almost never at the more important level of historical 'meaning' – the text – was a sobering experience. Even the foremost theoretical history journal in the world – *History and Theory* – was in those days dull, myopic fare compared to what I thought was at stake. Nor were the standard introductory texts on the nature of history then available and dominant much relief either: Bloch, Geyl, Stern, Elton, Carr, Marwick, were so unexciting. Consequently, my 'rediscovery' of White – my re-reading of White's *Metahistory* through the essays in *Tropics of Discourse* (and, after its publication in 1987, through *The Content of the Form*) was a godsend. Considering what was predominantly on offer at this time, White's brilliant texts enabled me to think about the past and its historicizations in ways which linked back to my previous work and forward towards literary and cultural theory and, with my 'discovery' of Richard Rorty at about the same time, to anti-foundational philosophy neo-pragmatist style. Accordingly, it was this experience which provided the basis for a series of articles published through the 1980s and which I drew upon for the writing of *Rethinking History* in 1991. Designed to be a short, cheap and cheerful introduction, it was deliberately opposed to the kinds of thinking it seemed sixth-formers and undergraduates were overwhelmingly exposed to on their courses, thinking which by no means came from nowhere; thinking which came, in fact, from the 'professionally informed' positions of Elton *et al*. In *Rethinking History* I thus tried to blend together at an elementary, hopefully accessible level, the ideas of White and theorists by then becoming increasingly identified by the prefix 'post' – post-structuralists, post-Marxists, post-feminists, etc. – all of whom were arguably capable of being located under the umbrella of postmodernism, a term which I have always used in a heuristic way and through which I hope I have not implied any homogenization of the considerable 'differences' living under that useful but always potentially reductive and stifling sign.

For although I was, and am, aware of the capitalist/commodifying 'nature' of postmodernism – of course – from the start postmodern ways of thinking seemed to me to be at least potentially capable of being turned towards that radical political agenda I had just about always held, a potential it seemed important to stress given, by the late 1980s and 1990s, the relative disarray of global communism, the theoretical stagnation 'Marxism' seemed to be in, and the politics of the Thatchers and the Reagans. Though it was – and is – an admittedly poor second (or third) best choice, postmodernism – when constituted by the mongrel-mixture of post-structuralism, deconstruction, post-Marxism, post-feminism and neo-pragmatic anti-foundationalism – seemed, and still seems, to be one of the ways in which, at the end of the twentieth century (the most murderous yet most 'innocent' century on record *après* Camus), a little bit of radical, emancipatory newness might be entering the world. And above all

it was White's humanistic, existentialist, idiosyncratically Marxist and, actually, highly modernist 'take' on the nature of history – best defined in White's formal definition as a 'narrative prose discourse the content of which is as much invented/imagined as found' – which offered me the theoretical space to try and blend together postmodern ideas and historical discourse in ways which, in some small degree, hadn't much been done before and which, when done, hadn't really been aimed at advanced and undergraduate students as opposed to 'fellow travellers already "up to speed"'. Thus, in 1995, I tried to further pull together some of these ideas for undergraduates in particular in *On 'What is History?' From Carr and Elton to Rorty and White* and, in 1997, in *The Postmodern History Reader*.

This is the first way in which my 'Sussex experience' has led me to think about history in the way I do; the second is, very briefly, as follows.

Although I didn't realize it in 1978, working in an institution outside of the university sector strictly speaking put me in a position where I was, in a way, 'forced to be free' *vis-à-vis* the kind of history I had to keep 'developing'. Since I have worked there, Institute degrees have been 'awarded' by either neighbouring universities or the Council for National Academic Awards and, because it has several times changed its validating bodies (and was required by them all to undergo quinquennial revalidations) then this has meant that constant course development and redevelopment has become a way of life. Consequently, as my research interests changed from political theory to theorizations of history and 'postist' philosophy utilizable by history, so the courses I have taught have been able to be changed to keep abreast with my 'reading habits'. Consequently, although in a fairly conventional history department for much of the last twenty years – though a department thankfully now more open than it has ever been towards theory – the necessity of course innovation has both helped legitimate my interests in postmodernism and allowed me to experiment with ideas directly pertinent to my writing. There is perhaps no need to list the theorists who I have tried to read and teach over the last ten years or so, but they stand behind the kind of thinking I have tried to write about on occasion and some of them (Derrida, Baudrillard, Lyotard, White, Ankersmit, Elizabeth Ermath and David Harlan) are discussed in the book I have just completed and with which I began this piece – *Why History?* Which just about brings me full circle and thus, to end, to two quick comments organized around two quotations.

In preparing for this exercise in recollection, I read – as if down memory lane – John McClelland's A *History of Western Political Thought*. In his last chapter – 'Thinking About Thinking, and the Lapse into Discourses' – McClelland, on his own insistence now an 'old-fashioned' political theorist and, I'm afraid, one not enamoured with postmodernism, writes as follows:

> Every history has to come to an end. These ends can be either symbolic or chronological … symbolically, my history of political thought ends with Nietzsche, some time in the 1880s, and chronologically, with the supposed European bankruptcy of Marxism, some time in the 1980s. This takes some explaining. What it means is that Nietzsche's work already contains all the

> equipment necessary to a thorough-going, piece by piece dismantling of the whole enterprise of political theorising [and history] as traditionally conceived. However … it took nearly another century for truths to be generally recognised which Nietzsche almost alone recognised in his own time.

I think McClelland is right, and right in ways I can relate to here. One of the things historians don't seem to have been able to do is to easily take on board post-modernism. Yet, to me, it has seemed to be the most obvious thing in the world. And this has all to do with the way my work on Nietzsche prepared me positively for what was to come; there are, as it is widely recognized, few things in postmodernism which are not already in Nietzsche. This is not to at all embrace, by the way, Nietzschean politics; quite the reverse. But it is to be able to see how Nietzsche did indeed, as McClelland says, already contain 'all the equipment necessary to a thorough-going, piece by piece dismantling of the whole enterprise of political theorising as traditionally conceived' and, I would add, history too. And it is that dismantling that I have tried to look at in *Why History?*

The second quote comes from Lyotard and, within the context established by the first, encapsulates in a phrase an attitude I have at least *tried* to adopt not just towards postmodernism but towards theory as such. Looking back, I suppose that my overriding teaching and writing intentions have been, and are, to put onto the agenda for students of history, popularly-pitched, introductory theorizations which can perhaps open up and sustain a certain kind of critical thought after modernity. Again, for what it's worth, through the work which I do, I would like to help make postmodern-type thinking a commonplace in everyday discussions of history, time, ethics, morality and politics, steered towards emancipation and democratization. This is not to say – and I am definitely *not* saying – that such theorizing should be uncritically accepted, least of all by those who find virtue in it. But I hope that there is, in a world much lacking in virtue, a potential that may, perhaps, point to better things to come, and that we don't give up or renounce, as Derrida keeps insisting we mustn't give up or renounce, 'the discourse of emancipation'. In his book, *The Inhuman,* Lyotard thus argues that, in terms of our openness towards newness, *being prepared to receive what thought is not prepared to think is what deserves the name of thinking* (Lyotard 1991: 73). Postmodernist ways of thinking do not have a general credo, but if they were ever to want one, then Lyotard's generous and forward-probing gesture could be it. Of course, one is never completely open and prepared to take on 'anything'; one is never not 'always already positioned'; we are, again as Derrida puts it, no matter where we start from, always 'in a text already'. Nevertheless, without being too stupidly sentimental, I would like to think that, within the general direction of emancipation, Lyotard's point is one I could fully subscribe to and, on one of my very occasional better days, maybe even begin to live up to too.

Note

1 *Problems in European Civilization,* Lexington, D. C. Heath.

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3

HISTORY IS PUBLIC OR NOTHING

Alice Kessler-Harris

Alice Kessler-Harris specializes in the history of American labour, women and gender and although published as an Invitation this contribution began as a conference paper. She produces a narrative about the power of connecting autobiography and history as an avenue to the past and the present. Her narrative is a vivid insight into how the past and the present connect in the mind, life and writing of the historian. Her analysis of labour history and the emergence of the women's movement both influenced her life and directed her modes of historical analysis. As she says – and why and how she says it is fascinating – 'every history is an autobiography'.

I trace my lineage in American Studies back to no traditional training. I did not sit at the feet of one of the inspiring practitioners in one of the great programmes at Yale or Minnesota. And though I am, somewhat inadvertently, the grandchild of one of the masters, my intellectual roots and passion for our discipline came initially from outside the mainstream of American Studies – from exploring the history of labour and of women and gender. Both have been contested arenas within American history partly because of their propensity towards interdisciplinarity and partly because each is bound to a political trajectory or movement. Both have found comfortable homes in American Studies, participating in the successful efforts of a generation of scholars to alter the meaning of 'American culture' or 'culture studies' to reflect subjective and vernacular experience as well as artistic and literary commentary on it. The lineage I trace draws on the politics and the insights of three decades of flux in American Studies. But it also reflects the intersection of politics with the life of the mind that has simultaneously tormented and inspired a generation of Americanists who work within the USA.

My story, then, is perhaps as useful for what it reveals about a changing and contested field as for what it says about one idiosyncratic journey. Still, I focus here on that journey. It starts when I was a graduate student in the 1960s. I sought out Rutgers as a

place to do graduate work for reasons not unfamiliar to women of my generation. Already married I needed an institution within commuting radius of New York. In the early 1960s Rutgers had a reputation for exciting social history and it was not tainted by the just-emerging hints of involvement in the cold war that coloured the images of other institutions.

Within a semester I had encountered one of the transformative minds of his generation, Warren Susman. Warren – himself a student of Merle Curti and a participant in Curti's efforts to use numbers to assess the reciprocal impact of social change on the lives of ordinary people – persuaded his students that particular kinds of historical consciousness could and did participate in constructing culture. In a field still resolutely anti-theoretical, he used to torment and bully his students into efforts to comprehend what we would now call our subjective positions as narrators. 'Every history', he insisted, 'is an autobiography.' He put it somewhat more fulsomely in the 1984 preface to his excruciatingly compiled volume of essays, *Culture as History*. 'The writing of history is as personal an act as the writing of fiction,' he said there. 'As the historian attempts to understand the past, he is at the same time, knowingly or not, seeking to understand his own cultural situation and himself' (Susman 1984: xii).

Susman believed that such an understanding transcended the search for individual identity. 'Attitudes towards the past', he argued, 'frequently become facts of profound consequence for the culture itself' (Susman 1984: 7). In a ground-breaking 1964 *American Quarterly* essay he laid out his theory about the relationship of myth to history. For him, myth proposed 'fundamental goals' of society, while history 'defines and illuminates basic processes involved in achieving those goals'. The tension between using history to affirm myth and evoking it in a more traditional ideological way produced culture. Historical interpretation thus formed the underpinnings of any generation's understanding of its own culture. It was, thought Susman, most readily identified by intellectuals and artists who, in turn, helped to perpetuate particular interpretive stances. Eighteenth-century ministers, early nineteenth-century writers and late nineteenth-century artists were among those who believed they could offer 'a vision of … history that would be more meaningful for culture'. Warren had great hopes that by the early 1960s, intellectuals who had emerged from the cold war would be among those whose re-writing of history would produce a fuller and more profound understanding of cultural development and thus help to change the world around them.

This was 1962: Kennedy's election and the optimistic rhetoric that surrounded it had opened promises around civil liberties and expanding democracy that no-one was prepared to fulfil. An increasingly militant civil rights movement began to provoke confrontation around voting rights and public accommodations. Within a few short years, branches of the labour movement rallied in active support of Martin Luther King's anti-poverty crusade. Other branches carefully shepherded medical care for the aged through Congress. Vietnam was in the air, challenging cold war platitudes about dominoes and begging questions about the authority of governments. A generation bred in comfort discovered huge pockets of poverty that defied illusions of affluence.

It was beyond imagination that my generation of graduate students would continue to read the past through the rosy lenses of a shared consensus, or that we could

stand by while change happened around us. Events seemed to challenge us to develop an 'engaged' history, one that would alter the shape of American culture to come. The standard explanatory frameworks lacked resonance for the challenges of the moment. Discontented with the brilliant expositions of sociologists like William Allen White and David Riesman, whose descriptive analysis offered little hope for change, we turned to the new sociology of knowledge (Whyte 1956; Riesman 1950). We sought the roots of what Peter Berger later called 'the social construction of reality' in investigations of psyche and personality, looking to the likes of Norman O. Brown to find the connecting links between identity and social action and joining a stream of young scholars like John Higham, Daniel Bell, Leo Marx and Richard Hofstadter who already agreed with Susman that culture was rooted in visions of the past. We discovered Karl Mannheim's argument that no human was immune to the ideological influence of social context. As 'ideology' (which Mannheim euphemistically transformed into 'wish dreams') crept back into the historical vocabulary, it reaffirmed the possibility that ideas could be engines of change (Mannheim 1936).

We dipped into a deeply tainted Marxism, cherishing our rediscoveries of a dialectical historical process and the explanatory power of theories of labour value. Yet we resisted the idea that materialism was all, or, as the British historian E. P. Thompson (of whom no-one in America had yet heard) put it later, that human relationships could be entirely defined by the economic (Thompson 1983: 22). Instead, we found in the early Marx the electrifying notion of false consciousness. The historical Marx put teeth into our new history, enabling us to believe that our work could unearth the roots of consciousness in order, to paraphrase only a little, to enable people to shake off the chains of illusion and 'cull the living flowers' (Marx 1844: 263). We learned that if the historian's task was 'to establish the truth of this world', the student of American culture had a wider obligation: to discover the meaning of that truth and to disseminate it. The 'New Left' for us was not simply a utopian dream; it had roots in the history we were creating.

For help in that quest we looked beyond American borders. The British theorist, Richard Hoggart, had already published *The Uses of Literacy,* which linked the worlds of economic and media culture to the construction of expectation and aspirations and jolted us out of the benign assumption that individuals could control their own wishes (Hoggart 1961). Then came Herbert Marcuse, bringing even the laggards back to Marx (Marcuse 1964). Antonio Gramsci swam into view, affirming the political force of ideology (Gramsci 1992). By the mid 1960s, we had the beginning of a new vocabulary and a way of understanding the world. It was a world where questions emerged from political and social circumstance and where 'culture' had become the source of interpretative authority as well as the object of study. It was a world where culture and politics were reciprocally empowered; where history was the engine of change in both arenas.

Susman's brand of cultural history provided a crucial set of hooks, resisting without rejecting fundamental notions of the dialectical process of history, and offering culture as an access route to comprehending whole social systems. His notion of 'ideologies as systems that account for everything' demanded that we place ourselves within, not

outside the process of collecting and evaluating data, and take responsibility for our use of words. In retrospect his effort to re-think notions of culture resonate with those of other historians. Natalie Davis, for example, had already discovered that she could use anthropology to look for 'whole relationships.' Herbert Gutman was busily developing a labour history within which culture constituted a 'lived experience.' His conception begged for explorations of leisure, which inspired some new directions (Ehrenberg 1981; Peiss 1986; Rosenzweig 1983).

For his students, what was special was Warren's excitement about defining culture with us in it. Our sources expanded to incorporate the 'naive'. We read fiction convinced that it promised access to the world-views or historical frames of the authors who had touched American lives. Thompson was later to claim that much of his work had come from teaching literature. We added up numbers for the same reason: they seemed such unproblematic signals to behaviours that reflected belief systems. We hunted for ethnography everywhere, inventing the term oral history to legitimize our complete absence of method. Though Warren himself focused on the visible and the iconic, his willingness to think about 'culture' as a synonym for experience nurtured alternative possibilities. As he used the term, it embraced a politics of human behaviour that interrogated the dualisms of self and object within every artefact of analysis: strikes and mentalities; consumption and production; photography and the photographer. It freed us to think about how ordinary actors – African-Americans, workers, immigrants – created culture as they engaged with their worlds both high and low. No, there was as yet no thought of women but, in retrospect, I believe the groundwork had been laid.

In this context, the dissertation topic I chose – on Jewish immigrant workers in New York City in the 1890s – seems to have been overdetermined. Labour history at the time existed largely as a subset of economic history. Generally located in economics departments, it was infused by little conception of culture. It drew its theoretical parameters from an institutional economics that respected the boundaries of enterprises, trade unions and government policy without exploring anything of the lives, experiences or voices of workers, male or female, black or white. Notions of individual agency tended to disappear into conflated categories like class or business or regions. Immigrants occupied a marginal place in the consciousness of students of American culture. Lumped together in groups like 'Southern European' or 'Nordic', their history was characterized by words like assimilation and adaptation. This world smacked little of culture, a word for which Matthew Arnold provided the boundaries, and whose narrow and explicit meaning encompassed nothing of ordinary life.

And yet exploring the relationship of poor people, especially those of working-class Jews on New York's Lower East Side, to the reformers who tried to ease the path to Americanization, would allow both a continuing rebellion against established notions of culture and the freedom to locate the conflicts that fuelled illusions about the future. I intended to explore the American dream enacted in the life of the mind of immigrant workers. This seemed pretty brave to me. At a moment when the distinguished colonialist Carl Bridenbaugh publicly bewailed the admission to the profession of children of immigrants who threatened its destruction, I, a child of refugees, not

once but twice an immigrant, firmly believed that I had crept into graduate school by the back door. I neither intended nor wanted to battle with the establishment. But I did want to write a history that reflected something of my own lost culture. Who, then, was writing about workers, or Jews, or poor people and their connection to politics? John Hope Franklin was hardly a name to be reckoned with. Herbert Gutman was tucked away at Fairleigh Dickinson College – an unknown assistant professor, fearful that his own radical past would be uncovered. Joe Huthmacher had just published a piece that connected labour and politics. But the Rutgers department offered the kind of atmosphere available perhaps nowhere else on the East Coast. My dissertation would test the radical potential of the field. A double redemption, and a double subversion. Every history, Warren had said, is an autobiography. In the end, I lacked the courage to reify experience, and the dissertation, completed in 1968, fell far short of its unspoken goals. Not only did I skirt the 'real' experience of immigrants, but I also left women out of it completely.

Perhaps this was inevitable for while I had opened up one piece of a culture, I had neglected the relationship of history to politics and experience that was a key piece of Susman's maxim. In the late 1960s, my work began to draw new inspiration from an active engagement with the labour movement and with feminism. As I began to understand that my own notion of culture participated in how I conceived working-class history, and that I would need to engage with trade unionism to fully interpret its history, I sought to infuse my work with a more active commitment. Once again my timing was off, for by the late 1960s, the American labour movement had largely rejected the idea of intellectuals as partners; left-intellectuals, in turn, had become disillusioned with the possibilities of labour's transformative influence. They shared a view of labour history that reified myths of its institutional isolation.

To be sure intellectuals, many of them factory workers, and others university-trained idealists, had involved themselves in every phase of the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century American labour movement. But by the 1960s, the purges of the McCarthy period had turned whatever relationships continued into largely passive alliances. Conflicts over the war in Vietnam produced active hostility. For many years the trade union had embodied intellectuals' hopes for a transformed society. Generations of socialist and communist thinkers had dreamed of using the trade union movement as the vehicle of economic and social change. Radicals of all kinds had chronicled their successes along with the lessons of their failures. Brookwood, a pioneer school for union leaders and workers, and other labour education centres had employed intellectuals to construct socially conscious agendas. Yet the record revealed an enormous disparity between what most American union members and leaders believed and the agendas of their putative instructors. For the most part American unionists mistrusted left-wing ideas that did not advance the immediate economic self-interest of union members. They rejected actions that threatened their ability to negotiate with the capitalists who wielded power.

Labour historians had for decades affirmed the vision of contest that permeated the history of unions. Their history functioned as both a description of the labour movement's continuing resistance to broadening its agendas and a warning notice to

aspiring academics like me. Most began with Selig Perlman's conviction that 'scarcity of opportunity' must guide trade union actions: his urgent calls for a limited trade union programme responsive to the psyche of workers; his fear that a utopian intellectual agenda would undermine dynamic job consciousness and therefore had no place in the world of unions (Perlman 1928). Perlman's eloquent appeals offer a prescription that could justify the Congress of Industrial Organization's leadership's exclusion of communists who had contributed to its strength, their willingness to turn the idea of the intellectual into a code for communist.

A different kind of labour history threatened to undermine the union movement. At a moment when the trade union movement was still sore from its battles with intellectuals, the American Labour Historian, Philip Taft, penned an impassioned plea against the idea that labour had gained anything at all from the intellectuals in its midst. Union members, he argued, had not objected to Communists, as long as they had salted their ideas with hard-edged gains. In Taft's view, visionary unions of the past – including miners, machinists, brewers, garment workers and many more – 'were not superior in most respects, to others'. Pointing to the labour movement's 'practical idealism', he extolled its leaders' ability to 'protect their members' interests' (Taft 1952: 31, 35, 37). By that standard the labour movement would judge itself. I recall Douglas Fraser, UAW president in the late 1970s and 1980s, commenting in 1990 that trade union leaders could never move too far beyond rank and file members. And by that standard the labour movement was, in Taft's mind, an unmitigated success.

At the time Taft wrote, many intellectuals would have preferred labour to take a different route – not the socialist extreme, but one that more closely resembled the social unionism of some European trade unions. C. Wright Mills, who entered the post-war period optimistically predicting the movement's turn to social unionism, thought that no longer possible by the mid-1950s (Mills 1959). And in that 'golden age of capitalism' social democrats like Daniel Bell questioned union willingness to trade off increased productivity for higher wages, arguing that unions, eager to provide economic security, were already beginning to lose their force for social change. Such economistic goals, he thought, would limit the latent potential of the unions to lead a social movement. Bell at one point hoped leaders like Walter Reuther (to whose visions of social justice Taft gave such short shrift) might constitute a repository of that movement – for his championship of issues like better housing, more schools, adequate medical care, and the creation of a more humanistic work atmosphere in the factory (Bell 1960: 226). But, rightly as it turned out, Bell predicted that the labour movement as a whole would never fully trust that direction.

Still, I had to try. In the early 1970s, I abandoned traditional academic teaching to help create a school for workers that started classes in 1976. District 65 was a small, maverick kind of catchall union, formed by left intellectuals during the depression. For a while it floated in and out of the CIO finally ending its years as a United Auto Workers local. District 65 was a very good union by almost every imaginable standard, and one that tried to translate transformative notions into day-to-day practice. This was a union whose slogan was 'organize the unorganizable' before that was popular; that sponsored hootenannies before anyone knew what the word meant;

that refused the check-off on the grounds that members ought to re-affirm their support frequently. It was a union that, in the 1950s, traded off seniority rights for racial equality. Its president, the late David Livingston, who marched at Martin Luther King Jr's right hand in 1963, was an outspoken opponent of the war in Vietnam. But District 65 was something of an outcast in the labour movement, bouncing from the CIO to independence and back again. And Livingston so feared the loss of his power and influence that he had never allowed a second generation of leadership to develop. When our programme began to develop those leaders we ran into trouble.

What I did not then understand was that in the memory of even the most progressive and open-minded labour movement leaders, the history of practical accomplishment overwhelms and underlines any campaign for larger goals. The culture they sought, and perhaps still seek, to resurrect is a culture of accomplishment. John Sweeney captured pride in that history when he reminded a 1997 audience of labour and academics of the continuing validity of Gompers' request for 'more'. For him, the 1950s were golden years, precisely because labour leaders avoided larger agendas. Working people in that decade knew that 'if we got up every morning and did our jobs, then we could earn a better life for ourselves and a better chance for our children' (Sweeney 1997: 35).

With some significant exceptions, most elements of the American labour movement have neither wished nor intended to transform society, even as they have participated in doing so. On the whole, American trade unions have built themselves on an interpretation of the past that agrees that workers have struggled to achieve such things as an 'American standard of living'; justice in the workplace; and dignity in poor jobs. They have sought to develop and use the power generated by numbers to bargain with employers, to speak for their members and their needs, and sometimes to curtail corporate greed and irresponsibility. To the extent that these noble goals have been achieved, they helped many workers to reach Gompers' goal of 'more': More comfortable family lives, more education for kids, more leisure time for everyone.

The women's movement in those years, though less suspicious of larger goals, was equally locked into a past that continued to shape women's expectations. It aimed to open economic opportunity, political access and reproductive freedom to more and wider groups of women. But to do this required a new way of seeing how gender functioned as an ideological system in all its class and racially rooted complexity. For historians like me, questions of ideology and consciousness were inevitably rooted in issues of evidence and interpretation. If ideologies were 'systems that accounted for everything' then gender was a piece of the whole. If every history was an auto-biography, the multiple sources of one's own identity surely deserved exploration. What piece of my collective self (our collective selves) was I omitting when I ignored gender? What understandings of class and race were restricted by omissions of women and of the relationships of men to women within racialized class contexts? Trained by Susman and schooled by the 1960s to reconcile experience with illusion, was I to be an accomplice in perpetuating the idea that gender did not matter? Yet when I turned towards the histories of wage-earning women that became my life's work,

Warren shook his head in despair. 'When are you going to do something serious?' he would ask, in a voice that implied that I had yet to learn what it meant to be a historian.

But I had been well trained. Once immersed in the women's movement, I could see that Warren was wrong. Herbert Gutman helped to confirm my intellectual direction. I met him shortly after I defended the dissertation in the spring of 1968. In a long afternoon of conversation, he offered me his own take on how to historicize issues of class and race, leading me finally to position myself as a new-style labour historian. In American history, it was Gutman who released a generation of young people to write histories of workers in and outside trade unions and led them to examine the meaning of community and of non-work lives. For many of us, the approach illuminated ways of melding women, including both working women and the families of working men, into analyses of social change. It opened to question the difference between a culturally based labour history and a celebratory history of women and begged a notion of class that could successfully accommodate women. This would be my contribution to lifting the veil of illusion: surely a project serious enough even for Susman. I set to work.

Like many of my generation, I turned first to Marxist-Feminism. My study group saw this as both a theoretical tool for understanding how women participated in processes of production and reproduction, and a practical instrument for furthering the socialism that we remained convinced was just over the horizon. But the tensions between them remained palpable. We used to joke about them: 'What does it mean to be a Marxist-Feminist?' we asked, the answer: 'Twice as many meetings'. A curious intersection of cultures helped to resolve the problem.

I discovered Raymond Williams in the effort to find a definition of culture and ideology that could encompass the lived experience of working people at about the same time that I discovered Allen Ginsberg. This might appear a rather improbable combination. Williams was by then already a distinguished socialist theorist and Cambridge don. His deep respect for the power of historical interpretation contrasted sharply with the irreverent and a-historical stance of Ginsberg, the beat poet. Yet the two shared something that I, too, cherished: a tiny piece of Wales called the Wye Valley where Raymond Williams grew up, Allen Ginsberg drew inspiration, and I found some of my most precious escapes as a child. This valley, as I remember it, and as Ginsberg describes it, is one of the most beautiful places on earth. In his eyes, its gentle, grassy hills are without menace. They contain neither craggy peaks nor dangerous precipices. All year round, they remain a comforting cheerful green, dotted only with clumps of ash and birch and spotted with wandering sheep. When Ginsberg discovered it, he fell to his knees, seeing before him 'a solid mass of Heaven, mist-infused'. There was, he thought 'no imperfection in the budded mountain'. There, 'valleys breathe, heaven and earth move together. … ' Only erotic metaphors adequately describe Ginsberg's ecstasy. He lay down, he tells us, 'mixing my beard with the wet hair of the mountainside' (Ginsberg 1968: 140–1). I could go on to quote more of the sheep, the flowers, the dancing horses that persuaded him that in these hills he was seeing 'the myriad-formed soul' of Buddha, but I stop here to

remark only that the poem is twice dated. One date line reads 3 August 1967, London; the second, 27 July 1967, LSD.

Raymond Williams (born and raised in those valleys) and I (who grew up just south of them) knew, as Allen Ginsberg could not have (in or outside of his acid-laden trance), that the country he perceived was an illusion, hiding under its gentle hills and green valleys the seams of the coal mines, sources of the contradictions that have long made the Welsh a desperately poor and fiercely proud people. By the mid-nineteenth century, at a time when the majority of the English still lived off the land, more than half the Welsh earned their livings in and around the mines. Fully a third of the men and boys worked underground. But the real contradiction (which Ginsberg could easily have seen had he peered just over the next mountain) was what the mines had done to the shape of the land. A century and a half's worth of coal leavings had thrown up literally thousands of ugly slag heaps whose grey shapes competed with the green of the hills and often dwarfed them.

Let me try to bring home the starkness of the contrast. In the autumn of 1966, just a few months before Ginsberg put his gossamer illusions into words, and less than 10 miles from where he prostrated himself on the grass, one of those slag heaps began to move. Sliding at first slowly down, then bursting into a frenzied pace, it produced an avalanche of gritty, grey, dusty waste, coming to rest on top of the tiny schoolhouse in the village of Aberfan where it buried 116 children and their 28 teachers alive.

I wish I could say that the slag heap was the end of my illusions; that, after this, I saw them beside every rolling hill. I cannot. Like Ginsberg, I repeatedly returned to those valleys for solace. But the contrast between its thundering power and the gentle valleys of Ginsberg's imagination and my youth, created an urgent need for reconciliation that paralleled and informed a growing sense of myself as a labour historian. Soon after I discovered Raymond Williams.

From where I had lived in Gabalfa, Aberfan was 'up the valley', one among dozens of mining villages, each of them a row of terraced miners' houses, headed by a church and a schoolhouse. The villages lay just south and west of the site of Raymond Williams' childhood. To be honest, I have to say that I discovered Williams before I knew he was Welsh. It was 1973, the 'New Left' had already disintegrated into its ignominious end. What remained was focused on finally ending the Vietnam War. I was still in a Marxist-Feminist Study Group. We had read all three volumes of *Capital* with increasing scepticism and a diffuse anger towards a Marxian theory that could not accommodate our growing conviction of the power of social and biological reproduction. Then I came upon 'Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory' (Williams 1973). 'Base and superstructure' refused the old dichotomy between the material and the ideological, suggesting the ultimate futility of conversations around economic determinism and invoking both the power of culture and the necessity of exploring it as an analytic entity. It awakened me to the central importance and complicated mechanisms of deeply rooted cultural identity in human consciousness and behaviour, opening new ways to see gender (ethnicity and race) within the framework of a dialectical process. The piece led me in search of Williams' other work, but it was only later that I came to believe that without my experience – our

shared experience of Welsh history and culture – he could not have written as he did.

That insight came when, in my efforts to follow Williams' efforts to locate culture as the central trope of human experience, I encountered his essay on the Welsh industrial novel. For the Welsh miner, wrote Williams, the pastoral remained a visible presence, 'not as an ideal contrast, but as the slope, the skyline, seen immediately from the streets and from the pit-tops', tangible in the 'sheep on the hills' that often strayed down into the streets of the settlements. The shape of the mines and the hills, wrote Williams, trying to explain the tenor of the Welsh imagination, accounted 'not only for a consciousness of history, but for a consciousness of alternatives that shaped the miner's persona and framed his aspirations and possibilities'. That consciousness came, as he put it, from the contrast between 'darkness and light, of being trapped and of getting clear … here on the ground in the most specific ways' (Williams 1980: 223).

Turning from efforts to describe how past and present (pastoral and industrial) continuously confront each other, Williams proposed instead that we engage the contrasts – live with them and feel them. Exploring the meaning of contrast became for me a new way to view the historical process. Williams' autobiographical novel, *Border Country,* articulates the play between elusive dissimilarities and underlines their central importance to those who lived with them. In his fictional persona as a historian returned from his university post to the Welsh village of his childhood, Williams stumbles over his failure to complete a book on Welsh population movements during the industrial revolution: 'I've lost heart, I suppose,' the protagonist tells his father's friend. For I saw suddenly that it wasn't a piece of research, but an emotional pattern. Emotional patterns are all very well, but they're our own business: 'History is public or nothing' (Williams 1962: 284).

In our lifetimes as historians and students of American culture, we have come to understand, as Williams eventually did, that 'emotional patterns' are not our own business at all, but the stuff of which history is made – the living texture out of which people make decisions. Williams' theoretical work contributed as much to that as anyone's, providing for me a conception of culture deeply embedded in class *and* place, in work *and* community. Yet as much as those emotional patterns (cultures, if you will) have been integrated into our research, we resist them in our politics – they remain unspoken sources of the tensions we face as we grapple with the real world, always there and always mocking our efforts to rethink the past with us in it.

Not long after my encounter with the Welsh industrial novel, I went to visit my friend Nora who still lives where the coal mines once existed. Nora's father-in-law is a retired collier (pit man) who arranged for a friend to take us down into one of the now-closed pits. Our guide had followed his father into the colliery as a 14 year-old in 1936. Now he was old, ill and somewhat bitter. As we shared the dank, cold and dark, miners' lamps strapped to our heads, he walked us, bent-headed, through to the low seams where he tried to evoke the feeling of being eternally trapped. He described how the new seams were extended by miners who lay flat on their backs in 18" high openings, chipping above them. Often rats ran over a man's body. Tiny rivulets of water dripped down, soaking the miner to his skin. I listened to his voice,

feeling the gnawing sharp teeth and shivering with the wet in my bones. Commiseration overwhelmed analysis as I burbled sympathy about this surely being one of the hardest jobs of work. 'You'll never understand it,' he said, a bit of contempt creeping in, 'you'll never understand it till you understand about the smell. That was the worst.' Then he elaborated: until electrification began in the early 1950s, the coal was pulled out by pit ponies. Because they balked at going from sun to dark, the ponies were kept underground, usually for a year at a time. They were fed there, and there they eliminated their waste. The residue not only accounted for the rats, but for what was by his account a stench so unbearable that many miners could literally not stomach it. I leave the rest to your imaginations.

Is it only an illusion to imagine that as historians we can capture a culture that will reflect the heart-beat of working people as they earned their livings and lived out their dreams, not ours? Is it hubris to believe that as intellectuals our work can produce patterns and pictures that honour labour for what it did rather than for what we wish it had done? Raymond Williams and Allen Ginsberg give me comfort.

When I think of the seams of coal running under the poet's heavenly mountains; of the miners' life shaped by light as well as dark; of the sheep that ran in the streets where the pit heads spewed their grit; of the miner in his proud masculinity daily meeting the humiliating stench – I think as well of how the historical process moves forward because these experiences cannot be reconciled but must be lived in all their oppositional intensity. The contrasts persist everywhere we look: the skilled trade unionist lives in a world in which the job is his only turf and seniority protects it. Yet 'fairness' demands that he give up his claims and share his rights to work with others. The working mothers' days contain the desire to be with her children and to leave them in order to earn the money that will give them a better future. The idea of social justice (translated into issues like set-aside programmes, job-related affirmative action and welfare stipends without work) appears as blatant injustice to working people on the margins. Preferential admission of alumnae children to the best universities draws no comparable protest.

My explorations of culture, like those of many of my generation who have come to understand the relationship of history to culture, continuously confronts the complicated tensions exposed by simultaneously existing, yet potentially conflicting goals. The generation of scholars that grew up rejecting the idea that the histories of workers and unions were coterminous, sees workers in multiple ways, and remains cognizant of the contradictions embedded in their lives. Workers are producers, consumers and citizens; they are family members and wage earners; white and 'raced'; they make products and produce offspring. We begin to understand that skill at work can be the source of self-esteem – the glue that cements families – and the foundation of discrimination as well. We watch how games, like baseball, that were once 'play' become big business, generating unions for players and leisure for observers. We understand people who identify as 'men' or 'women' find their activism enhanced and inhibited under different circumstances; that an immigrant mentality affirms and negates racism; that radicals can be sexist even while espousing the woman question.

On one level American cultural historians have accepted the effort to more fully understand the multiple consciousnesses of most people. At another we want to write histories in which social movements embody only our best and most precious aspirations. The US labour movement, with all its flaws, serves as a metaphor even as it provided a touchstone for me for so many years. Many intellectuals (and perhaps most of those who, like me, came of age in the 1960s) wanted from the labour movement more than it could provide. Persuaded of the need for a trade union movement that would serve as a vehicle for social justice, if not for some future transformation, we have wanted to write histories in which it carried the banners of equality, justice and freedom. We have wanted it to stand for racial and, more recently, gendered, fairness; to speak for and on behalf of a community of interests of all workers. As the distinguished economist Albert Hirschman might put it, we have wanted an institution that could function as a voice for them; that could pave the way for a non-racialized, gender-encompassing workplace. In short, there are those among us who have wanted it to represent a spiritual and moral vision, even at the cost of the gritty realities that surround most people's lives and lead them to seek narrower social and economic goals. Like Ginsberg's view of the Welsh mountains, our own fog of metaphorical LSD obscures some critical illusions. And yet, it has served me well as a lesson in comprehending the meaning of cultures.

Susman's sense that social order is justified and sustained by theories of history mediated by cultural interpretation has remained a permanent legacy, exemplified by our own experience. The broader goals of social justice and equality, and the more specific ones of economic security have both receded in our time. Myths of the free market abide. The rising tide of the 1950s, along with its skilled craftsmen, mass production workers and seemingly endless productivity gains, is a thing of the past. As the tide turns, it carries with it not only any immediate possibility of social democratic consensus, or socialist dreams, but it tosses aside more limited goals like good jobs, public housing, health-care and education as well. The social unionism of the American past that once appeared a modest goal to intellectuals, has become, in John Sweeney's energetic hands, the agent for new coalition. Yet it seems inadequate even to defend past gains, much less to achieve new ones. The global market stifles the most generous visions of the old social unionism, preventing even the best-intentioned governments with strong union movements from sustaining the most benign welfare system. It also releases corporations from responsibility for polluting and destroying the environment, for job training and for the quality of community life. The upshot is a world of contrast: great wealth and great opportunity for some along with stark and growing poverty and enhanced racial/ethnic division.

The global market exacerbates contrasts. On the one hand it produces a work/family dynamic that calls for greater attention to the world outside of work, including the consumption patterns and leisure lives of workers. On the other, the family and work become oppositional categories forcing a re-evaluation of the meaning of women in the workforce and in the labour movement, and provoking scepticism about the meaning of families. Class re-emerges as a pivotal force in understanding the ideology of workers' lives, and women become a key dimension in its definitions.

Suddenly my own efforts to understand the complicated culture of work move to centre stage, and I want to say thanks to Warren Susman for introducing me to the notion of an engaged history. At the same time I can't resist the temptation to declare victory: women's history is more 'serious' than we ever imagined.

These lessons were brought home to me sharply a few years ago. I had agreed to introduce my husband (who had never been to my part of Wales) to some of the memories of my childhood. We drove from the Cotswolds, through Hereford and the Wye Valley, stopping at some of the scenes of Ginsberg's raptures, to smell the grass and to watch the sheep. He was as taken with my captivating valleys as Ginsberg had been. I urged him impatiently forward. Come on, I said, it's not like this, wait till you see the slag heaps. It's all grey where I come from. Five more miles, then ten, and still green, a country I did not recognize. Through Abergavenny and down from Merthyr into Pontypridd; I was in my valley, and still it was green. Then the dawning recognition came: the slag heaps were covered with grass: the last of what had once been upwards of 3,000 coal mines had been closed, and the European Economic Community had paid to turn what had been grey into green. The new hills marked the end of one set of contrasts forever obscuring the world that had fostered in Williams such clear vision. But they reminded this student of American culture that the search for historically specific cultural explanations is not always easy; that truth can be hidden by beauty as well as slag.

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4

I AM NOT A BASEBALL HISTORIAN

Steven A. Riess

Riess's Invitation, entitled *I Am Not a Baseball Historian*, reveals how the past is studied through and because of the interests of historians. His history of his history interests suggests that historians engage with the past for many reasons both personal and professional. The rise of social and social science history in the 1960s and 1970s was the context for his professional interests. His early structural-functionalist and anthropological-orientated Geertzian-inspired approach reflected and mediated how historians both then and now construct the past as history. Through this constructionist intellectual imperative the historian engages with social myth and ideology, as well as economic, political, social, gender and ethno-cultural structures. But these are personal choices which become the mechanisms for creating histories for the past.

When I started graduate school in 1968, I had no grand plan to study the history of sport. Yet two years later I was writing a dissertation proposal on baseball. I did that to make my mark, maybe blaze a new trail and, hopefully, catch someone's attention and get a teaching position. However, when I came on the job market in the early 1970s, history departments did not know what to make of a historian of sport – they certainly did not advertise any such position, nor have they since.

I had always been interested in history, but I started out as a political science major at New York University in 1964. Following an unhappy experience in the introductory class, I switched to history. I spent much of my senior year writing an honours thesis on American economic and social involvement in Mexico prior to our intervention. I also took two graduate courses, including one in urban history with Bayrd Still. History then remained a very popular major at liberal arts colleges; several of my fellow history majors then went on to graduate school and got PhDs in history, and others became attorneys and even physicians. Our days were full of concern – about the war in Vietnam and we in the Class of '68 saw ourselves as prime cannon fodder. Fortunately, few of us served. A history of migraines disqualified me for the service.

I went on to the University of Chicago in the Fall of 1968, largely funded by a New York State Regents' Fellowship that stipulated I teach in New York after completing my studies. I had just turned 21 when I started classes with such luminaries as John Hope Franklin, Arthur Mann, Daniel Boorstin and Richard Wade. I substituted a seminar in urban history for the traditional introductory historiography class and wrote a paper on the social mobility and career patterns of Chicago police sergeants and other ranking officers in the early 1900s. I found through probate records, that these Irishmen were financially far better off than most Irishmen, and some actually amassed considerable wealth through their political and criminal connections. This project encouraged me to study the history of occupations systematically, and in my second year, I took fields in the sociology of occupations, nineteenth-century European social history with Joan Scott, and American social history with Neil Harris. I also took Harris's seminar that studied the Civil War as a cataclysmic event. My paper examined the war's contribution to the professionalization of medicine.

This background prepared me to write a dissertation on some aspect of work: but what? Like most every young American male, I was very interested in sports, mainly as a fan, having never distinguished myself as a participant. Ken Chern, a fellow graduate student in history, suggested I combine my interests in sport and the history of work by examining baseball as an occupation. This piqued my interest. I found there had been very little scholarly work on sport history. There existed just a few books, including Dulles' *America Learns to Play: A History of Popular Recreation* (1940), and Schlesinger had briefly discussed sport in his classic work *The Rise of the City, 1878–1898* (1933) in the American Nation Series. On the negative side, I didn't know if any sport historian other than Harold Seymour and John R. Betts at Boston College were teaching history.

Why hadn't historians written about sports? In part, because sport was a part of mass culture that seemed to be beneath the measure of professional historians. Scholars studied the formation of nation-states, revolution, national, state and local politics, economics and great ideas. They were not interested in what most of the people did while they worked, what they did during their leisure time or what they thought about sport. This was not merely a result of professional judgement, but also a reflection of intellectual snobbery. Scholars presumed that sport was a frivolous topic, or that it was so familiar and understood by the public that there was no need for academics to examine sport. Its internal history was not considered important and no one saw how anyone could get a better understanding of broader historical issues by studying sport. Another reason historians avoided the subject was careerist. Younger scholars were afraid they would never get a job if they wrote dissertations on sport. Well-established historians like Marshall Smelser, the noted Jeffersonian scholar at the University of Notre Dame, were worried their colleagues would consider them frivolous if they wrote about sports. It was only in 1973 at the end of Smelser's career that he wrote his biography of Babe Ruth, *The Life that Ruth Built.*

Once I decided, unlike prior scholars, that the study of sport did indeed have legitimacy, it seemed that a study of baseball was my best option. Harold Seymour and David Voigt had each already written valuable scholarly books on nineteenth-century

baseball, which provided a sound background for my work, and then in 1971, while I was already starting on my dissertation, they both extended their studies with their second volumes. Baseball also represented an attractive subject because lots of readily available research materials existed, including daily newspapers, sporting weeklies and articles in popular magazines, plus a great archival collection at the Baseball Hall of Fame Library, in Cooperstown, New York.

At the University of Chicago, with its long tradition of innovative research, my professors supported my interest in sport. This was not the case at other universities where some graduate students, even today, are discouraged from this subject. Already, Robin Lester had begun writing a dissertation on football at the University under the direction of Daniel Boorstin. My first thoughts, heavily influenced by Thernstrom's work on social mobility, were to examine baseball as a vehicle of social mobility. However, after preliminary discussions with Professor Richard Wade, I decided to broaden my conceptualization and examine professional baseball as an urban institution. Since Wade was leaving Chicago for City University, I ended up working with Neil Harris, a scholar renowned for his eclectic interests.

Important changes took place in the academy during my graduate training in the late 1960s and early 1970s that opened up new areas of scholarship. Novel ways of looking at American history were emerging, influenced by such factors as the democratization of the historical profession, student demands in the late 1960s for a more relevant curriculum, the rise of social history as a major discipline, and the growing importance of interdisciplinary approaches to the study of history, especially influenced by cultural anthropology. Historians in the early 1970s were becoming quite aware that the analysis of mass institutions in their own right and the study of how mass culture interacts with the broader society help to elucidate central themes of American history and the history of subcommunities based on class, ethnicity, race and gender. Nonetheless, friends, especially people outside of the academy, often made me the butt of good-natured ribbing as 'the baseball historian'. Fortunately, I discovered a cohort of scholars interested in the serious study of sport, primarily physical educators who specialized in sport history. I attended the first meeting of the North American Society for Sport History in 1973 in Columbus, Ohio, and found a nurturing community that respected what I was doing. I served as editor of the society's publication, the *Journal of Sport History,* from 1985 to 1992.

I decided to focus my study of professional baseball on the Progressive Era when the game completely dominated the American sporting scene. Long considered the 'national pastime,' baseball drew large crowds, gained extensive media coverage and produced heroes like pitcher Christy Mathewson who were role models. Furthermore, baseball, unlike either horse racing or boxing, was the major professional sport not widely banned in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries because of gambling or other moral issues.

I employed a structural functionalist approach (now long out of vogue) to understand the meaning of baseball as a social institution. I was influenced by the work of cultural anthropologists who believe that a culture's components reflect the society's fundamental characteristics. They study man's myths, rituals and symbols, which are

seen as expressions of implicit or explicit sets of values. I was especially influenced by Geertz's analysis of Balinese cockfights (1973), in which he analysed these matches as highly ritualized spectatorial contests that were intense social dramas reflective of Balinese social structure. Furthermore, the events represented how Balinese perceived social reality. Colonial historian Timothy Breen employed Geertz's perspective in his 1977 study of gambling in colonial Virginia. Breen felt that 'specific, patterned form of behavior, such as gambling, does not become popular in a society or among the members of a subgroup of that society unless the activity reflects or expresses values indigenous to that culture'. Following that perspective, I presumed that professional baseball's prominence at the turn of the century was not merely a result of its entertainment function, but also resulted from how it expressed key American values. The prevailing baseball ideology developed by baseball writers and other journalists made the sport appear to be directly relevant to the needs and aspirations of middle-class white America. Baseball was portrayed in such a way that it supplied some of the symbols, myths and legends society needed to bind Americans together.

My research design was to compare professional baseball in Chicago, New York and Atlanta, three regionally representative cities. The first two were the homes of five of the 16 major league teams, while Atlanta was a minor league city. I also chose these cities because they had already been the subjects of considerable scholarly research, and their newspapers were readily accessible. I examined three aspects of baseball in these sites – the owners of teams, the fans and the ballplayers. My goal was to examine the myths and realities of professional baseball during the Progressive Era to evaluate how the sport influenced and, at the same time, mirrored the broader society. The ultimate aim focused on gaining better understanding of the nature of American society in the early twentieth century. I concluded that the baseball creed comprised myths that sharply differed from reality. The creed was a cultural fiction that shaped public attitudes and behaviour. I categorized these false ideas as agrarian, democratic or integrative myths. The agrarian and democratic myths were important ideals of those nostalgic native-born Americans who looked back to an idealized, pristine past and worried about the future of their society, while the integrative myth suggested a way to secure that future. However, although most of the ideology's basic elements were false, fans accepted its veracity, and that perception helped shape their attitudes and behaviour.

The popular acceptance of the democratic myth of baseball suggested the sport epitomized all that seemed best in American society, and was a potential vehicle for acculturating newcomers into the core culture. It would supposedly indoctrinate youngsters into the traditional value system. Baseball's ideology demonstrated to Americans the apparent relevance of traditional values and beliefs in an increasingly modern, industrial and urban age. Baseball purportedly did this through the rituals of spectatorship and by being transformed into a moral equivalent of the frontier that provided heroes and role models for its young fans.

However, I found that spectators were not equally drawn from all social groups. People at the ballparks were mainly men who could afford the cost of tickets, had time to attend afternoon games that were often not played on Sundays, and had access to ballparks located in middle-class localities or the outskirts of town. Immigrants and

others on the bottom of the social ladder were underrepresented at the ballpark, while the better paid municipal employees and white-collar workers were overrepresented.

Team owners were commonly described in the contemporary press as civic-minded individuals, but they were actually entrepreneurs trying to make money through baseball. Owners were generally politically connected men on the make, often members of urban machine politics, who used political clout to advance their investment in baseball. Clout helped keep out interlopers, secure special treatment from the municipality, and protection against new taxes and fees. Politically connected owners got inside information about property values and transportation plans that helped them select new ballpark sites.

The ballplayers were supposedly small town Americans with little education who owners hired based solely on merit, who after retirement from the diamond ended up back in their hometowns as saloonkeepers or in some blue-collar jobs. To test these generalizations, I made a detailed study of the major league ballplayers based on a sample of nearly 600 players who played at least a year in New York or Chicago. I discovered that players were mostly urban born and reared, and of White Anglo-Saxon Protestant, Irish or German American heritage. Over two-fifths came from white-collar backgrounds compared to just one-third who were from blue-collar backgrounds. They were much better educated than most Americans since about one-fourth had attended college compared to 5 per cent of their peers. Retired players experienced a hard time securing a good job and only about four-fifths secured white-collar jobs, but only 14 per cent ended up in a blue-collar job. Their future occupations were mainly correlated with education, not their fame.

I had a difficult time, like most historians in the mid-1970s, finding a teaching position. I was fortunate to get a one-year replacement job at the State University College, Brockport (New York). It has a very large physical education programme, and its history department was looking for a visiting professor to teach classes in sport history and the history of leisure in their new Leisure Studies programme. The following year I taught social sciences at the Weekend College of Wayne State University (Detroit) where I introduced a unit on Leisure. Then in 1976 I got my present position at Northeastern Illinois University in Chicago where the department was looking to complement its strong offerings in popular culture.

It took me six years to get the dissertation published by Greenwood Press. While the manuscript needed polishing up, the bigger problem was that publishers then were not interested in academic studies of sport. Such scholarship editors deemed insufficiently marketable for commercial presses, and not sufficiently 'academic' for university presses. The book got excellent reviews, and the University of Illinois Press has recently republished it in a revised and expanded version. The antipathy to sport history disappeared by the mid-1980s as presses became more enlightened, and more bright people moved into the field (coming out of history, sports studies, American Studies and physical education), and the result was many outstanding publications in sport history. Virtually every academic press today publishes sports scholarship, and several, including Illinois, Minnesota, State University of New York and Syracuse (which I edit), have a series on sport.

A number of important books appeared at the end of the 1970s and the start of the 1980s that shaped my future research. The first major work that influenced me was Guttmann's *From Ritual to Record* (1978), a seminal study that examined the nature of modern sport. His thesis is that the development of sport was a product of modernization. Shortly after this work appeared Rader's *American Sports: From the Age of Folk Games to the Age of Television* (1983), now in its fourth edition. This essential synthesis explained how and why informal games evolved into modern spectator sports. Rader focuses on how industrial capitalism in combination with the evolution of nineteenth-century American urban society and culture shaped the rise of commercialized spectator sport. Three monographs also heavily influenced me. Hardy's *How Boston Played: Sport, Recreation and Community, 1865–1915* (1982) and Adelman's *A Sporting Time: New York City and the Rise of Modern Athletics, 1820–1870* (1986) confirmed for me the central importance of urbanization on the shaping of American sport history. Gorn's *The Manly Art: Bare-Knuckle Prize Fighting in America* (1986) brilliantly analysed the cultural meaning of pugilism in nineteenth-century male society.

My most important book was *City Games: The Evolution of American Urban Society and the Rise of Sports* (1989), supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities, in which I examined the interplay between sport and urbanization. I argued that urbanization was the crucial factor in shaping the emergence and development of sport, both organized and recreational. It was in cities that modern sport first emerged with its institutions, rules, facilities and participants. However, the city served as more than a site for the emergence of modern sport or a catalyst for change. The main elements of the process of urbanization (physical structures, social organizations, and belief and behaviour systems) themselves strongly influenced the evolution of American sport. Furthermore, the emerging cities were themselves influenced by sporting institutions.

I argued that the impact of urbanization on sport began in colonial America when only about 5 per cent of the people lived in cities. The first cities were small centres of concentrated populations that provided potential players and spectators who lived in proximity to sporting sites ranging from fields and streams to taverns and city streets. Tavern owners were the first sports promoters and their businesses were subject to municipal regulation. Urbanization's impact on sport dramatically expanded in the mid-nineteenth century, the era of the most dynamic city building in American history. The small walking city of this period typically had ample empty space and uncrowded streets available for play. However, living conditions in many walking cities were abominable. Immigrants from Western Europe and the rural hinterlands were overcrowding eastern cities. These towns were extremely dangerous because of frequent epidemics and widespread criminality. They lacked sewer systems, adequate water supplies and police or fire departments. Residents, especially anonymous young men, did as they pleased, forming the cornerstone of the male bachelor subculture that enjoyed gambling, watching sports, drinking and chasing after women. The great reform movements of the 1830s and 1840s emerged, in part, as responses to the vile conditions of antebellum urban life. These movements were motivated by the religious fervour of the Second Great Awakening that sought a more perfect world to prepare

for the Second Coming. Secular reformers like physicians, journalists and health faddists also propelled the reform spirit, as did scientists who wanted to alleviate contemporary social problems, especially in the cities. For example, the public health movement emerged in response to growing urban problems. Public health proponents advocated temperance, physical fitness and public parks to promote individual wellbeing. Reformers recommended rational recreation for young male urbanites in the guise of 'muscular Christianity'. They championed a fresh sports ideology that identified participation in the new clean and moral games, especially baseball, as the means to raise morality, build character and improve health. In addition, German, English and Scottish immigrants brought with them a tradition of physical culture and sport that promoted a sense of community, ethnic pride, morality and health. The new sports creed, the positive experience of immigrant sporting cultures and the development of clean sports like baseball paved the way for a big boom in sport after the Civil War.

The core of *City Games* was an examination of the relationship between sport and the industrial radial city in the period 1870–1960. By 1920, most Americans lived in large heterogeneous cities serviced by mass transit, which had specialized land uses and industrial-based economies. Industrial cities were the locus of powerful political machines, impoverished slums and ethnic villages. The residents were mainly immigrants or children of immigrants whose values and behaviour threatened traditional small town Americans. Their large concentrated urban populations provided potential audiences for commercialized spectator sports that facilitated the rise of sport. On the other hand, vacant public spaces formerly used for play were built up for residential, commercial or industrial use, or, like city streets, were dangerous places for youth to play.

Sport boomed in this era because it was fun, because the positive ideology of sport became widely accepted by all classes, and because of the impact of urbanization and the industrial revolution. Participation in sport was largely tied to social class. Inner city residents were limited in their options by their low incomes, and limited leisure time, the costs of public transportation to large public parks and the admission fees to professional sports. These lower-class men preferred inexpensive, accessible sports that offered a chance to bet, and fit in with their environment. Hence the popularity of bowling, billiards and boxing, the latter particularly useful for self-protection on the mean streets. The new immigrants from eastern and southern Europe did not bring a sporting tradition to America, but their sons became ardent sportsmen to gain respect from their peers and became 'real Americans'. The white middle class, on the other hand, became ardent sportsmen, influenced by the new sports creed. They benefited from industrial capitalism by achieving a higher standard of living that provided discretionary income and more leisure time. They saw participation in sports as a way to improve themselves, gain status and a sense of self-worth that they were losing as their jobs became less independent and more bureaucratized. The middle class enjoyed clean sports, both as players and members of sports clubs, and as spectators. They lived near suburban parks where they played baseball and tennis, and could afford the price of professional baseball tickets. The elite, who possessed the most free time and

discretionary income, became even more sports minded. They turned to voluntary sports clubs like downtown athletic clubs to separate themselves out from lesser sorts, and to country clubs to provide an escape from the city. The middle and upper classes both relied on sports like baseball, and especially football, to define and demonstrate their manliness at a time when critics of urban life believed society was becoming feminized.

Progressive reformers, schoolteachers and settlement house workers used sport to acculturate and integrate inner city youths into the core society's values. They promoted the small parks and playground movements at the turn of the century to get municipalities to build field houses, diamonds and other inner city athletic facilities in the neighbourhoods where poor people lived. Supervised recreation, reformers believed, would provide a moral alternative to vile amusements, by using games like basketball to teach teamwork and co-operation. However, reformers were less successful in remaking inner city youth than they anticipated. For example, small parks became important sites of violence, especially when located between neighbourhoods of rival ethnic groups.

Urbanization had a large impact on the rise of professional sports. Entrepreneurs emerged to establish downtown indoor arenas like Madison Square Garden for boxing and long distance races, racetracks for thoroughbred horses and ballparks for baseball. These businessmen employed the improved railroad systems to travel from city to city, and their fans reached the ballparks by electric streetcars. These entrepreneurs usually possessed significant political connections to protect their interests and to secure favourable treatment from local governments. Horse racing, which was widely banned, needed protection against interference by the authorities because of the gambling nexus. Beginning in Chicago in the 1870s with Mike McDonald, organized crime was already closely connected to the racing industry, primarily to protect illegal off-track bookmakers and poolrooms. Then in the late 1920s underworld figures became heavily involved in running racetracks, which helped them fix races and launder ill-gotten gains. Prize fighting was totally prohibited until the 1890s, and remained illegal in nearly all states until the 1920s. Such conditions made it necessary for top fighters to work under politically connected managers so they could get fights. Virtually all the main promoters and operators of arenas had political pull to prevent matches from being halted. By the 1920s, when the sport was legalized in New York, managers were increasingly tied to organized crime syndicates that helped arrange good fights and sometimes prearranged outcomes.

While the literature on sport history was focused on the crucial late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, I extended my analysis of urban sport into the second half of the twentieth century. I argued that the relationship between city and sport changed in the post-World War II suburban era of urbanization. By 1970, more people lived in suburbs than in central cities. I focused on professional team sports, which by then had become national enterprises. The main leagues had expanded to all parts of the country, made possible by air travel. Many franchises also moved from their original playing site, leaving decaying facilities in declining neighbourhoods to other parts of town, to the suburbs and even to a new city. This became a big public

policy issue, the kind of inquiry historians have usually left to social scientists (see also Riess 2000). There were several franchise shifts in pro football, including the migration of the Cleveland Rams to Los Angeles, and pro basketball after the war, but their leagues had been very unstable for years. Geographic movement was much more novel in baseball where no team had moved since 1903. Then in 1953, the Braves/Boston, the second most popular team in St. Louis, moved to Milwaukee. Other migrations soon followed, most notably the Giants and Dodgers from metropolitan New York to the West Coast. The movement was connected to team demands for new municipally constructed ballparks as, except for Cleveland's Municipal Stadium (built in 1932 but seldom used until 1946) previously parks had been privately owned. Since the construction of Dodger Stadium in 1962, none have been privately constructed. The situation is similar in football, hockey and basketball. Politicians in cities without big league teams like Houston, Minneapolis and San Antonio sought sports franchises to promote economic development, build community pride and boost the city's image.

I continued my analysis of American sport history with a slender book I was invited to write, entitled *Sport in Industrial America, 1850–1920* (1995), a volume in Harlan Davidson's 'The American History Series'. This is an important series edited by John Hope Franklin and A.S. Eisenstadt that provides readers, primarily advanced college history students, surveys of major topics in American history by prominent experts like Remini's *The Jacksonian Era,* Conkin's *The New Deal,* and Arthur S. Link and Richard McCormick's *Progressivism*. That Davidson sought to include a book on sport history in its list was a strong indication that publishers had become very interested in the subject and that it was being taught in college classrooms, both as separate specific classes and as major subjects in traditional historical courses.

My purpose in writing *Sport in Industrial America* was to explain how American sport developed from a morally suspect pre-modern entertainment in 1850 shunned by most Americans, into a respectable, modernized national obsession by the 1920s. I gave more attention to the impact of the industrial revolution and examined less urban bound variables than I had in *City Games*.

I discussed how the industrial revolution yielded both positive and negative consequences for sport. On the plus side technological developments in transportation (railroads and electric streetcars), communication (telegraphy, telephony, photography and the penny press) and mass production of cheaper sporting goods made sports more accessible. In addition, inventors created new products that improved performances like the safety bicycle, sliding sculls and incandescent bulbs. On the other hand, the shift from an agrarian and commercial economy into an industrial economy dramatically reshaped the urban social structure and traditional leisure patterns. The wealth generated by industrial capitalism went disproportionately to the rich who conspicuously displayed their success through their exclusive sports. However, factory imposed timework discipline and low wages, limited free time and the loss of traditional playing areas due to urbanization significantly hindered blue-collar sportsmen.

Women's participation in sport was not considered in *City Games* because I did not see anything particularly 'urban' in their experience, and because back in the late

1980s the literature on women's sport history was pretty sparse. This has since changed with works like Cahn's *Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth Century Women's Sport* (1994) and Cayleff, *Babe: The Life and Legend of Babe Didrikson Zaharias* (1995). In *Sport in Industrial America,* I examined the late nineteenth-century debate over women's participation in physical culture that male doctors, female physical educators and others aired in general interest periodicals. Physical educators supported physical training to prove that education did not cause reproductive and nervous disorders, and to improve their students' health, attractiveness and strength, and better prepare them for motherhood, but did not support competitive sports. The conventional wisdom remained that white middle- and upper-class educated women could not be athletic and feminine, that sport taught qualities appropriate for business, not the home, and that female athletes tended to be single, and when married have fewer children. Activities that were not competitive and engaged in moderation were suitable, along with recreational co-ed sports. Upper- and middle-class women, the primary participants, felt secure in their femininity and had sufficient status not to be threatened by criticism. Furthermore, they had access to athletic facilities at some colleges and country clubs. Lower-class girls, however, found very little opportunity because of restrictive social norms among the lower class and the lack of access to facilities.

City Games also neglected the emergence of intercollegiate sport, a topic not directly connected to urbanization, but this subject received considerable attention in *Sport in Industrial America.* American intercollegiate sports, originally based on the Oxford and Cambridge model, provided middle- and upper-class college men with a chance to demonstrate their manliness, and gave male and female students an opportunity to display their prowess, organize their own extracurricular activities and promote school spirit. Intercollegiate sport emerged primarily at elite eastern institutions, and other colleges across the nation copied this extracurricular activity by the late nineteenth century. While preceded by baseball and crew, football became the highly commercialized 'big game'. The demand for winning teams led to the rise of the professional football coach who often violated the ethics of sportsmanship, recruiting top athletes with financial incentives, regardless of academic standing.

In addition to these three books, other interests have included some dabbling in comparative sport history in the Anglo-American world, taking advantage of the substantial literature on British, Canadian and Australian sport to analyse the role of social class on sport in these three nations and the USA (Riess 1994). I also returned to my early interests in sport and social mobility, and Jewish-American sport. My early concern with sport and social mobility was rekindled in the late 1980s by sociologists and social activists like Arthur Ashe who were warning African American youth of the pitfalls of putting all their eggs into the wrong basket. These social critics pointed out, for instance, that the chances of a high school basketball player making the NBA were one in ten thousand. In 'Professional Sports as an Avenue of Social Mobility in America: Some Myths and Realities' (which won the 1989 Webb-Smith Essay Competition sponsored by the University of Texas, Arlington, in conjunction with the annual Walter Prescott Webb Memorial Lectures), I collected and analysed data on the social origins and subsequent careers of professional athletes in baseball, football

and boxing. I found that former boxers ended up economically hardly better than when they had started out. In addition, they were typically at least mildly punch drunk. The early pro basketball players were poor Irish, German and Jewish youths who went straight from settlement houses to the professional leagues. They did not make much money, although a handful of exceptions existed like Barney Sedran, who in the early 1910s made $12,000 a year. More significantly, by the 1920s, three-fourths of a sample of pro players had attended college, usually on some sort of financial aid. Their education provided them with an excellent foundation for their future since nearly all the men in my sample acquired white-collar jobs, mostly as professional workers. I undertook a more detailed sample of pro-players, mainly men active in the predominantly white National Basketball Association (NBA) in the 1950s. Players were still mainly from metropolitan areas, and about 80 per cent were from blue-collar families. Yet, all but one had attended college where they had gained the skills necessary for the pro game. Salaries were still modest, but in the end 98 per cent ended up with white-collar jobs, one-third high white collar. By the 1980s, the proportion of NBA players who graduate college declined to about half, and it's even lower today, but now they average salaries in the millions.

I found that in the case of football many of the first professionals in the early 1900s were industrial workers employed by companies that sponsored the first squads. When the American Professional Football Association (forerunner of the National Football League) formed in 1920, professionals had little status and were poorly paid, often earning about $100 a game. Nearly one-fifth of the players in the early 1920s had not attended college. However, this soon changed because of the impact of University of Illinois star Red Grange, who left college to play in the mid-1920s for the Chicago Bears. Another huge factor was the coming of the Depression when college stars were glad to get any job they could. They were paid to play pro football, and often assisted in getting a 'real' job, such as a schoolteacher. Between 1932 and 1945, 98 per cent of the players had attended college. However, unlike contemporary basketball players, the gridiron stars came mostly from white-collar backgrounds (57.8 per cent). Just 33.3 per cent had blue-collar fathers. This pattern shifted after World War II, and by the 1950s, the majority was blue collar, yet still virtually all college men, and about 85 per cent had college degrees. Salaries in the early 1950s averaged less than $10,000, but retired players succeeded in securing white-collar jobs. Salaries have gone up since the rise of the American Football League in 1960, but educational attainments have gone down. In 1982, for instance, just 31.5 per cent of NFL players had a degree.

In the case of baseball, I expanded my prior research beyond 1920. I found that in the 1920s and 1930s the proportion of blue-collar big leaguers (30 per cent) had declined. The recruitment pattern changed dramatically in the 1940s because of the notable presence of second-generation new immigrants, and then African Americans in the 1950s. However, this trend was reversed in the 1960s, primarily because the new white major leaguers were more middle class than prior cohorts.

My work on Jewish Americans culminated in a book I edited, *Sports and the American Jew* (1998). It was my third book to win *Choice*'s 'Outstanding Book Award'. My

colleagues in history and American Studies – including Linda Borish and Gerald Gems – and I examined the contributions Jewish men and women made to the American sporting scene and the social functions that sport played in the Jewish-American community. The volume primarily focused on second-generation Eastern European Jewish males who used sport to become acculturated, escape inner city poverty, gain self-esteem, earn praise from their own community and respect from the broader society, counter negative stereotypes and fight anti-Semitism.

There was little inherently anti-athletic in Jewish culture and theology as long as physical culture did not take one away from study and piety. Immigrant German Jews participated alongside other Germans in turnvereins by the 1850s, and their sons later gained success at such quintessential American sports as baseball and football. However, in the 1880s they encountered severe discrimination at athletic clubs, jockey clubs and, especially, country clubs. They responded by forming their own sports clubs that, ironically, separated them from lower status Jews. German Jews also became successful sports capitalists, owning baseball teams and manufacturing sports goods, which reflected their entrepreneurial heritage.

The newcomers from Eastern Europe came from a pre-modern, non-sporting world. They discouraged their sons from participating in sport because that could distract them from study and/or work or encourage assimilation, which was what their sons wanted. Jewish youth became most successful in sports that fit in with the poverty and tough environment in the inner city slums. These children became particularly successful at boxing, basketball and track. Neighbourhood boxing clubs, local settlement houses or Jewish athletic organizations like the Young Men's Hebrew Association, set up by German Jewish philanthropists to sustain Jewish identity, provided some sporting opportunities. Second-generation Jews were less successful at sports that required a lot of space, and thus most Jewish major leaguers did not come from New York's Lower East Side, but from Atlanta, Georgia and Hamburg, Arkansas. Those Jews who became professionals at the turn of the century encountered a lot of anti-Semitism from their peers. Bigots like Henry Ford exacerbated this prejudice in the early 1920s after it was revealed that eight Chicago White Sox (known as the Black Sox) had fixed the 1919 World Series against the Cincinnati Reds, presumably arranged by the infamous Jewish gambler Arnold Rothstein.

When Carl Becker spoke of 'Everyman His Own Historian', I don't think he envisioned the day of every subject, its own historian. My own 30-year journey with Clio has taught me that there are no small topics, although there are certainly small analyses of small or large subjects. In the twentieth century sport emerged as a significant pastime, but of course was hardly as consequential in human affairs as such events as the Depression, the Atom Bomb or the Holocaust. Nonetheless, there is room in our highly specialized craft for researchers to follow their own muse, as long as their scholarship illuminates some aspect of the human condition. I have spent my career studying how sporting institutions have evolved, how they have shaped society and how society has in turn shaped the nature of sport. And I would like to believe that my research into the sporting world has illuminated the behaviour, values and attitudes of urban Americans in the modern age. I suppose the time has come to

'fess up'. I still would not identify myself as a baseball historian, but I am a sport historian – and proud to be one.

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5

BEYOND HISTORY

Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth

A literary and historical theorist, Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth begins her Invitation with a short discourse on the nature of what she describes as 'the cultural inheritance' of history through the alternative to history offered by postmodernity. She expresses and assesses in a rigorous and vigorous way her malcontent with how history is understood as a realist explicatory undertaking. She then describes her phenomenological turn that promoted a range of 'beyond history' ideas that constitute her critique of the culture of representation and that presaged what was to become her notion of history as a version of Renaissance painting. See her critique of history in the discursive condition which continues in her appropriately entitled 2011 book *History in the Discursive Condition*.

When *Rethinking History* invited me to write this essay using the mode of personal history, I was delighted. Having been neglected all these years by David Frost and Oprah Winfrey, at last comes my opportunity to tell my story to a candid world. But almost immediately a problem arises from the disparity I find between what is personal, which in that never-to-be-had TV interview could be mere gossip, and what might be 'history' in the sense that term ordinarily implies. That is, 'history' as a universal sequence of events motivated by causalities so efficient that, even when individuals do not perceive them, they operate anyway, rather like the ineffable rules of that related, often dysfunctional fiction, The Market. History was a format congenial to the revolutionary new ideas of, among others, the Enlightenment philosophers who, building on the achievements of three centuries, theorized a new politics for a common 'human' world of rights, equality and progress: a world accessible to all and sustained by all; a world literally held in common, incompatible with secretive privilege which extinguishes candour, consensus and mutuality, which forecloses on democratic institutions and substitutes for them a shadow realm of coded recognitions and secret handshakes. Historical conventions uphold this candid world but, at the turn of the twenty-first century, that unified vision seems almost a dream and its

founding subject largely a myth. The personal history of intellectual development turns out to be more problematic than first appears.

My long-term investment in historical conventions has been largely involuntary in the sense that it is largely a cultural inheritance. I grew up believing in that candid world of common denominators which historical thinking has done so much to inscribe, and I grew up mistrusting the secret worlds that, despite the occasional nice people in them, still function invisibly outside most 'history' and put the lie to its claims to universality. At the same time, however, I have become interested by the postmodern critique of the cultural disposition that supports history, the candid world of common denominators, and 'human' values. This critique forecloses on some old opportunities certainly, but it also offers new ones, some of which help to illuminate what has seemed mysterious to Enlightenment assumptions: for example, why the cultures that believe in and promote 'human rights' continue to produce so many atrocities; what alternative to history postmodernity offers and what its costs might be. Over several decades and in many publications, especially two books, *Realism and Consensus* (1998a, 1983) and *Sequel to History* (1992), I have explored the powers and the limitations of two competing and at least partially contradictory systems of cultural values, perhaps even two cultural paradigms, which can be named by the terms 'modernity' and 'postmodernity'. I have pursued this agenda because I think so much is at stake for western Eurocentric societies and democracies, and because I think the way to deal with an established and non-trivial challenge is to look it in the eye, not put your head in the sand.

Explaining these explorations autobiographically is tempting but it would not be adequate. That is because individuals do not produce ideas or cultural systems; ideas and systems are there already and individuals, including myself, get born into them just as they are born into a language and into an entire set of assumptions about identity, conduct and How Things Work. No doubt I developed my interest in the arts, history and the candid world because of family influences, encouragements, inhibitions. I learned to listen to all kinds of music and to try all kinds of sport. I was blessed with an unproblematic genetic inheritance and challenging siblings. I learned the value of multiple perspectives by having to adopt different ones from a fairly early age; after that perhaps it was just a question of waiting for the right theory to reach me. But how to trace the causal trajectory of a single life, even my own, from the mess of discursive networks that conditions every reflex? Do I mention the one or two really fine college teachers and the mass of fairly conventional class work at several well known educational institutions? Perhaps I recount how, in at least one of them, I actually learned how to learn, and got support and encouragement to boot (thank you, Owen Jenkins). Perhaps I could summarize how much I learned on my own, from different friendships and academic jobs that introduced me to important books and experiences: phenomenology, the classical texts of ancient Greece from Hesiod to Plato (these in a Humanities course where Plato was to be taught as Truth and where Athenian slavery and misogyny were never to be mentioned); the experimental texts and practices of the 1960s; the women's movement of the 1970s (not to be confused with its academic shadows); fashion magazines and advertising images; the

misogyny of the insecure regardless of sex; the ambitious, encouraging, hit-and-run essays from France collectible (more or less) by the term 'post-structuralism'; the travelling; the living abroad; the repeated visits to art museums and galleries in Europe and the USA; the experience of different cultures. But how does any of this explain the capillary actions that fed a single person's course, or the blockages and deflections that deformed it, or the chance encounters and omissions that sent developing forms down this track instead of that? History claims these pathways are traceable. I wonder. And when we are done tracing them, what then? What interests me most, historically, is not the activity on the tracks, clickety clack, clickety clack, but the thresholds at which whole systems of tracking mechanisms of uncertain origin, whole paradigmatic commitments, can undergo mysterious mutation into something else, and without much of the difficulty that history, with its ancient roots and protracted causalities would lead one to expect. At such points, it is not so much a matter of mediation and transitions, but of choices, and that is not usually a quantitative matter.

In order to explain my views and interests historically, I would have to begin asking questions like 'how?' and 'why?' How did I come to this? Why did my thoughts develop in these directions? History is unavoidable. Try to write without it. In any discussion that raises the question, 'why?' – whether the subject is personal life, international monetary influences or the history of theatre – no sooner do you raise the question, 'Why?' then you embark upon history. 'Why? Well, you see, there was this guy. … ' There is no escape from history and to anyone who thinks there is, I defy you to spend a single 24 hour period without using the terms 'develop', 'result', 'plan', 'implement', 'destination', 'because', 'just like', or 'fairness' – to name only a few of the terms made resonant by history. It is difficult to avoid the temptation to explain phenomena by treating them as historical results, to tell their 'story'. Why did the child die brutally? Why is the Middle East hostage to tribal warfare? Why did Concorde explode? What are the actual practical results of intervention by the IMF and the World Bank? Why did X get elected and Y sent to jail? There is no end to the continuities of history; we may reach outside it now and again, but not often and not easily because it has become instrumental.

And yet, it was not adequate for me. History was an explanatory mechanism that had been assumed, not explained, and I left school feeling the need of some theory or new explanatory mechanism that would be adequate to the full range of my experience and values. I was not satisfied at the prospect of simply choosing one – say Marx or Freud – and then wielding it for all it was worth: an activity that would only be more of the same and that would end, not by providing a way to open doors and create something new, but only by confirming Marx and Freud in much the same way using historical conventions confirms the validity of history.

I learned all this slowly, by following a pathway of recognitions and researches that was prompted by who knows what predispositions. For example, as a student I was weaned on *Middlemarch*, John Stuart Mill, national history and all kinds of related humanist and realist narratives though I didn't think of them that way at the time. I enjoyed reading them because they provided certain confirmations and recognitions. Yet when I read anti-humanists and anti-realists, especially the narratives that flout

history, even though I did not understand them at first – probably because I was still seeking the confirmations of *Middlemarch* – I found them to be equally interesting and enjoyable: it was more like listening to music than reading history. I liked the rhythm, the risk-taking, the lack of conventional piety, the experimental and analytic edge. I began to notice, as I read narratives by writers like Robbe-Grillet, Borges, Duras, Nabokov and Calvino that the narrative medium of historical time had virtually disappeared in their work, in much the same way as the space of traditional realism had virtually disappeared from the best early twentieth-century painting, and as the symphonic resolutions of nineteenth-century music had virtually disappeared in the newest composition of the twentieth. My own experience as a musician had taught me to appreciate the lack of symphonic resolution in the still half polyphonic music of the early Renaissance. Some of the experimental writers of the twentieth century even referred back to medieval art as a more congenial precedent for contemporary experiments than subsequent great work in the long representational tradition from the Renaissance.

This sorting process took place under many influences. One constituent of my experience came through the weird employment rituals of academia – on both sides of the Atlantic – in which I became responsible at different times for teaching the major texts of ancient Greece from Hesiod and Aeschylus to Plato and Euripides, and the major texts of the English tradition beginning with Tudor history. At the same time I developed, where possible, an interest in the cinema of Bergman, Godard, Bresson, Truffaut and the rest of the French New Wave. Another constituent was the women's movement which got underway about the time I began my academic employment in the early 1970s and which made a lasting difference in how I see all practices, including and especially my own. Two other factors, minor but professionally significant, have been, first, the total lack of academic mentoring with which I entered my career – my innocence on that point now seems to me staggering – and secondly, the world of academic publishing, where it is so often Amateur Night and where conventionality reigns – especially at Princeton University Press, a particular problem that I am not the first to mention in print. Name names, I say. (In this vein I want to express thanks for the late Jean-François Lyotard's published complaint on the subject of publishers. If any publisher reading this wants to take a chance with me, I'd consider a book on the subject, so powerful an influence are the commissions and omissions of publishers on the health and longevity of the demos. Do I digress?) Also, lest I sound like I have spent most of my life reading books, I should mention my long-term interest in singing, women's solidarity, continental travel, dancing, conversation, skiing, solitude, the condition of democratic institutions, political marches, having a good time, family, the landscape of the western United States, the details of a frozen garden, the 'minims' of nature. The range and variety of possibility encourages me still and has always sponsored my intellectual adventures.

As my interest in anti-realists grew, so did my recognition that, in their oppositional zeal, they used realism as a straw man and provided no serious, certainly no generous analysis of what realism actually was or what it accomplished. If we are to give it up, what is at stake? I had decided to write a book about anti-realism, but in order to do

so, it seemed essential first to establish what the term 'realism' might mean. Nothing I read from Auerbach onward seemed even to approach the dimensions of the problem, and many seemed tendentious or tended to assume the very things that needed proof. My tendency seems to be to step back, to get a bigger picture or prior explanatory grid. Historian at work.

In this case, the step back took six years and resulted in *Realism and Consensus* (1998a, 1983), a book that might better have been called 'The Modern Condition'. It traces a not-so brief history of history, framing its development by comparison with classical and medieval precedents and connecting its rise to the emergence of representation (mimesis) in politics and empiricism in science. The book on anti-realism, *Sequel to History* (1992), took another ten years. *Sequel* sketches out my understanding of the mutation of historical conventions in postmodernity, a term I now prefer to 'postmodernism' because it suggests a chronologically inescapable condition and does not sound so much like the dogmatic slumber of 'ism's. With the help of interdisciplinary resources from post-structuralism, postmodern narrative and arts generally, and feminist theory I explore the postmodern reconfiguration of identity and sequence that has such profound implications for history. *Realism and Consensus* and *Sequel to History* constitute a two-volume study of modernity and postmodernity. Several spin-offs have developed further some implications of the central arguments for identity, agency and our use of the past (Ermarth 2000), for our conception of time (Ermarth 1995) and neutrality (Ermarth 1998b), and for democratic institutions ('Democracy and Postmodernity: The Problem', part of a collection called *Rewriting Democracy* currently seeking a publisher). Presently I am exploring further the alternatives to historical writing that I touch on briefly at the end of this essay.

My intellectual 'development' has really been an exfoliation under influences from a motley lot of interdisciplinary and practical sources: art of all kinds especially contemporary and experimental art in drama, dance, theatre, architecture and above all in language; democratic politics in theory and in practice; science from empiricism and Newton to relativity and quantum theory; the galvanizing argument about social justice collected under the term 'feminism'; philosophy from Plato – may he rest in peace – to phenomenology and post-structuralism. A handful of texts have been seminal for me but my tastes may be idiosyncratic and not easily transferrable. Foucault has been a substantial influence even though I probably would not sign on to most of the particular statements he made; the same could be said for Derrida, and for feminist theory: all especially useful because they were relentlessly interdisciplinary and operated beyond the same old same old. Hayden White's willingness to think beyond the confines of academic history has been a perpetual sign of possibility. Two delightful little books on art history inspired the early and formative stages of my thinking about history, *Art and Geometry* (1964) and *The Rationalization of Sight* (1973) by the late William Ivins, Jr, a curator of pots at the Metropolitan Museum during the mid-twentieth century who occupied hours of Aegean crossings by making notes on interdisciplinary cultural history. His books still seem to me the epitome of simplicity and elegance. But what was seminal for me might not be for others, and anyway my so-called 'secondary' reading always took place in tandem with other reading, of

narratives, or artworks and buildings and cities, of social relationships and of other discursive writing without words. In all this reading, history has been the troublesome, enabling language for threading together some possible thoughts about personal and cultural meaning and value. Even the finding of interdisciplinary similitude is the gesture of an historian. And still, it was not enough.

When I first turned away from unquestioning use of the historical conventions with which my education had been saturated, it was through my discovery as a postgraduate student of phenomenology, which questions the distinction between subject and object, and thus the possibility of 'objectification' that, as I was later to explain to myself and in print, was the main business of representational conventions, chief among them history. So I pursued it, through the work of Bachelard, Merleau-Ponty (Heidegger came later) and Hillis Miller, and I wrote my dissertation on George Eliot using it as a methodology. This deeply offended the reigning narrative theorists at the University of Chicago where I had (I now think stupidly) transferred from Berkeley after my first marriage. My effort was dismissed; 'Too much influenced by Hillis Miller' was the comment reported to me. Thus was the aspiration represented by phenomenology reduced to one more small-minded, internecine, academic conflict.

But when did the connections between all these sources kick in, and what accounts in the first place for my apparently constitutional inclination away from methodological business as usual or for my sense that the available maps didn't account for what was obviously there in my peripheral vision? Like many in my time, I was aware that the political and ecological catastrophes of the twentieth century suggested the presence of unacknowledged limitations on the long-standing assumption that knowledge of the past can improve the future. Like many I recognized that even the physical description of nature had changed so that different 'inertial systems' could be recognized where once only a single system had been. Like many I recognized that Picasso and Braque, Bergman and Godard represented encouraging, generous new departures in method and ideas. Like many I was, as I continue to be deeply influenced by feminism. In an era of professional feminists, I should also say that I am a professional and a feminist, so that my grasp of the civil rights issues that animate the women's movement among others, has played a significant role in my choice of formulation. My long-standing feminist commitments have not been left at the office, nor trotted out for rallies, nor used as a template for measuring others, but instead factored in as part of a wider intellectual adventure. (The term 'feminism' means entirely different things in the UK and the USA, so I have no doubt this brief comment will leave everyone dissatisfied, but then, what formulation would not when it comes to matters of social equality?) Did my particular use of all this have anything to do with my valiant mother's lifelong effort to maintain independence, or her professional attachment to music, or her assumption of universal social equality? Did it have something to do with my father's genius for diagnosis, his ability to go far beyond the usual explanations, or with his talent with the trumpet? Did it have to do with their lack of reverence for the Big Bow Wow? Did my shyness or my strength have anything to do with their long unhappy contest, or with my own experience with the institutionalized smugness of

provincial 1950s social cliques, or with the relative freedom and privilege of my early childhood where I learned what it was possible to expect?

But here I must pause because this is threatening to become a history and there was more to it than that. The 'more to it' cannot be explained through personal history. In order to explain this impasse, I revert to the more theoretical explorations which, it seems to me, are necessary guides to personal definition and even conduct: theoretical explorations that are intimately important, but not intimate. What resulted from my dual interest in history and its discontents was a lot of writing and lecturing, but in particular the two books and related articles written over two decades that represent my central arguments concerning what is at stake between modernity and postmodernity, and between history and whatever lies beyond history. In them I confront an entire shift in Eurocentric societies across the range of practice, away from classical and medieval paradigms to modernity, and then again, away from modernity to whatever is 'post' modernity. In this frame the term 'modernism' applies to a profound but relatively local event at the turn of the twentieth century, a phoenix fire of modernity, and 'modern' applies to a much longer epoch. The theoretical arguments involve revision of long-standing and deeply personal beliefs about identity and about sequence, and thus about what actually constitutes the 'personal' and 'history' in the first place.

Realism and Consensus outlines the emergence and mutation of what I later began calling 'the culture of representation': that is, the culture that succeeded the middle ages in Europe and that developed across the range of practice some powerful new formulations and values that produced representation in art and in politics, that produced empirical science, and that eventually resulted in the development and dissemination of the idea of history, the social form of representation. *Realism and Consensus* explores the way the Renaissance objectified and unified the world. We can call this the One World Hypothesis (Ermarth 1998b; 2000). That hypothesis posits a world of agreement, not about this or that idea but about the formal possibility of agreement itself: about the possibility of a world held in common, a common or 'candid' world. Such a world first appears fully fledged and disseminated in the spatial neutrality achieved by Renaissance painting and architecture; their production of single, potentially unanimous arenas undivided by Manichean contests and unsusceptible to pluralizing discursive systems. The spatial neutrality of those Renaissance artefacts – encapsulated in the grammar of single-point perspective – announces and validates the power to make mutually informative measurements among widely separated instances: a power available only within a single comprehensive system of universally applicable measurements. It is not too much to say that without this production of conditions favourable to mutually informative measurement, modern science and technology would have been impossible and, as Ivins says, *was* impossible to the middle ages.

In writing this first book I taught myself how to use disparate materials in ways that were not superficial but not timid either. This methodological effort was essential for locating the central motivating cultural values that would otherwise remain invisible to narrower disciplinary vision. I have the greatest respect for discipline, but

I also know that it is a preliminary, not an end in itself: especially if I want to get anywhere close to the springs of practice. For example, the formal assertions of potential union discoverable in Renaissance perspective systems produce the value of neutrality, a value most crucial to representational conventions not only in art, but in politics and science and history as well; neutral space is the main product of the formal consensus of Renaissance perspective systems. A similar formal consensus appears after the Enlightenment, when history came into its own; neutral time is the main product of the formal consensus produced by modern historical writing. History, in other words, is a version of the perspective grammar of Renaissance painting. But to see this connection at all, it was necessary to go outside disciplinary bounds. Temporal neutrality acts in narrative just as spatial neutrality does in painting: as a common-denominator medium, infinite and unconfigured, containing all culture, all theory, all physical events across the potential range from a supernova to a ringing telephone. While the neutral time of history only became fully deployed and disseminated in nineteenth-century narrative, it had already been codified by seventeenth-century empirical science, politics and philosophy.

These related forms of perspective grammar were widely separated in time but shared a primary agenda: nothing less than the objectification of the world. The perspective grammar of realism – in painting or in history – transformed the physical cosmos from one riven by competition between good and evil and divided hierarchically and qualitatively to one unified as a single arena of explanation and measurement. Once the world is a single, thus objective arena of possibility, mutually informative measurement becomes possible. And because these enabling realist conventions are nothing if not circular, the reverse is also true: because mutually informative measurement is possible, the world is a single, thus objective arena of possibility.

The nineteenth-century neutralization of time and its antecedents back to the Renaissance neutralization of space, seem to me to belong to the most astonishing accomplishment of the culture of representation as it has existed over five centuries. I am still pursuing its implications and I certainly have used its methods in making mutually informative comparisons among widely separated instances in order to discover the emergent forms of history. This complex, extensive cultural event reflects a rationalization of faculties that belongs to modernity: it stems from the late-medieval, early Renaissance and Reformation roots of modern Eurocentric societies, and it is much older than the Enlightenment though not as old as Plato, notwithstanding the claims made in some recent French analyses. It is a cultural achievement born from the late middle ages and one with an importance that is difficult to overestimate. It has supported such common-denominator projects in the culture of representation as empirical science, realist art, democratic politics and even, to an extent, capitalism and socialism; it still vastly influences our most fundamental conceptions of identity and sequence. We are well beyond 'master narratives' here, to the very structures of experience, the tools of thought, the discursive sets that make and foreclose possibilities.

This objectifying effort contains a hubris that can lead to colonial atrocities; but it is a hubris that also has inspired much of what Eurocentric societies value. It is the hubris of the explorers who sought the Orient and the cartographers who supported

them, the architects of representational government, the international peacemakers, the champions of 'human' rights, the scientists mapping the human genome, the historians charting the obscure course of cultural change. And if there is hubris, there is also charity in the One World Hypothesis that history maintains: a kind of potential generosity that Meyer Schapiro once called 'the immense, historically developed capacity to keep the world in mind' (1937: 85).

Such capacity cannot belong to individuals, however. Instead, it thrives only as a complex function of collective agreements, most of them tacit and inexplicit. Too often the power to keep the world in mind has been mistaken for an individual achievement and has become the enabling 'optical illusion', as Herbert Butterfield once put it, for a certain class and culture (1963). How these issues produced their political and social implications in nineteenth-century England I have taken up in an interdisciplinary book on the use of 'history' in that era as the primary form of social narrative (Ermarth 1997). History came into its own rather suddenly after 1848 in Britain, changing almost overnight from a marginal practice to a universally disseminated narrative format to be found in the work of the brilliant and original Sir Walter Scott and his many heirs (e.g. George Eliot, Trollope, Virginia Woolf), in Darwinian biology and in earth sciences, in cultural and social histories, and in the stalwart three-decker novel which most broadly disseminated a new kind of narrative for a revolutionary age. By the 1860s history in England has become the ruling convention of a particular social order. Dissemination of this idea of time was the work of the nineteenth century right down to the synchronization of clock time for the railroads that was a symptom and consequence, not a cause, of the temporal neutralization produced by history.

The fact that historical conventions exist primarily to establish neutrality is a thought that can be difficult to keep in focus, precisely because it goes to the heart of so many enterprises. Nevertheless, what distinguishes historical time from either mythic or postmodern constructions of temporality is its neutrality. Not its linearity – all sequences are linear, even circular or zig-zag ones. Not its chronology – the Anglo Saxon Chronicle is chronological, sort of, but it is not a modern history. But its neutrality. In other words history – by virtue of a certain perspective grammar or consensus apparatus that I analyse as a temporal instance of realism – claims universality for one kind of time: the neutral, infinitely receding, universal medium 'in' which everything exists, a kind of metaphysical ether that justifies mutually informative measurement between 'now' and 'then' over a vast range of comparison. 'History' is the inscription of that temporal medium. All details – this battle that marriage – are secondary carriers of this main feat, just as the pictorial details of the Madonna or saints were secondary carriers of a similar feat in the Renaissance production of neutral space.

From scientific to cultural narrative, and backed up by more than three centuries of preparation, this unprecedented idea of time took hold after 1800 and remains for most of us an almost automatic pilot. This kind of time has become the only conceivable kind: homogeneous, infinite, unproblematic, unconfigured by exotic influences like furies, or gods or wormholes in space. And the key to this kind of time is its

neutrality as produced by the particular perspective grammar of history that aligns 'then' and 'now' into a single system of explanation and measurement. To establish the optical illusion of history, narrative must formulate events so that they require mediation. Hence the fascination with chronological indicators which in themselves are insignificant carriers of the main discursive event. The fundamental narrative strategy, familiar across the narrative range from histories of war and culture to popular romances and detective novels, involves mediations, crossings from place to place, and from time to time, that literally establish and maintain the neutral time 'in' which alone objectivity is possible and mobility can be productive.

And productive it has been. Historical narrative works through the apparently simple gesture that says 'once upon a time' and then makes time produce: produce results, explanations, knowledge, capital. In fact, production is a necessity, and a way of reconciling us to present lack for the sake of future completion. The horizon of history is maintained by 'the future'; even the remote 'pre-historic' past can contribute; nothing escapes. The more we dig back then, the more we reinforce now the value of 'the future' and its enforced deferrals and deflections, the more we sustain the hope, even the expectation maintained by historical conventions that such inadequacy is only incompletion. Implicitly present losses, failures or separations are only temporary stages on the way to 'the future' toward which we can proceed in reasonable hope and expectation of eventual recovery, success, reunion.

The problem with all this, including my own comparative historical methodology, is that, along with the entire culture of representation including empiricism and presumably representational (democratic) political institutions, history is having to face its own historicity. My early and continuing exploration of the postmodern challenges to modernity convinced me that the challenges to its 'objectivity' are too many simply to dismiss or ignore. The emergent causalities of history do not allow for the operation of chance or luck, even though those forces manifestly operate in ordinary affairs. The description of nature's laws has modified those established by Newton. It has been nearly a century since neutrality all but disappeared from time and space in art; and more recently neutrality has stood by in blue berets helpless to prevent bloodbaths in Europe and the Middle East. In 'A Brief History of History' (1998) I explore ways in which the search for causes, along with other historical usages, may themselves have become part of the problem in the difficult effort to understand exactly what it is we are doing culturally, now that the lights have changed and the possible explanations are multiplying. In general a multitude of symptoms across the range of cultural practice reveal that the founding assumptions of history have reached a point of mutation or reformation – a liminal condition that requires us to recognize the historicity of history. It, too, is a cultural production, a discursive function. Some recognize these symptoms of cultural change with delight; others are brought kicking and screaming to the work that reveals incontrovertibly the symptomatic evidence that history belongs to what (improving on Lyotard) I call 'the discursive condition' (Ermarth 2000: 408). Some seem to find this recognition excessively trying and can be seen running away in an opposite direction, as, for example, with the tiny souls who write on the postmodern for the *Times Literary*

Supplement. But wishing it away will not make it so, and Mr Podsnap has been gone these 150 years.

When I considered historical conventions as historically finite, it was easier to see the full extent to which they appear elusively paradoxical. The very act of moving attention, of creating gaps to be mediated, actually constructs the very neutrality that supposedly enables the mediation in the first place. The mediation is what causes neutrality to materialize. And that mediation is implicitly saturated with consciousness which does raise questions such as 'whose consciousness?' But historical narrative makes a point of masking its mechanisms; that is the irresistible appeal of its 'objectivity' – it masks the fact that it is an 'objectification'. Perhaps my interest in unmasking its mechanisms comes from some dim awareness that, as Borges likes to demonstrate in his stories, inattention to the mechanism can be fatal. In any case, historical mediation literally produces neutral time; that is above all what history 'represents', its 'objects' functioning only as markers or carriers for the larger project of objectification, just as the 'objects' of Raphael or Piero were only carriers for the more powerful generalization about space and the objectifiable world.

In historical narrative, quantitative distance-markers are especially conspicuous; they are easy to visualize in terms of pictorial representation, thanks to our deep cultural familiarity with the perspective grammar that Renaissance architects, painters and theorists have disseminated. In temporality, the most obvious distance-markers are chronological indicators; these are especially familiar in academic contexts where 'periods' and 'centuries' seem almost to constitute the building blocks of intellectual life. We teach courses and read books with titles such as 'Twentieth-Century History' and *The Novels of the 1840s*. Scholarly attention respectfully stops at chronological 'period' boundaries. Publishers, libraries and universities reinforce these tendencies and collude in the elision, even suppression of work undertaken in broader discursive horizons that do not fit the existing categories, the preservation of which seems to have become a sacred duty.

When history has to face its own historicity, recognitions are involved that are potentially threatening, so recoil from the critique is understandable. Still, it is ironic that history, once an emancipatory and anti-dogmatic device, has nearly reversed its function when academic institutions and publishers reinforce history *as* dogma. Furthermore, its central value of 'neutrality' has become increasingly suspect in an era of intractable tribal conflict where its consensus mechanism can be seen as a 'terrorist apparatus' (Lyotard 1984: 63–5) because it can only suppress what does not formally agree. There are other problems. The 'future' does not appear to live up to its promises, sometimes not even when that future is only the next quarterly report; rationality does not seem to govern events; outcomes often do not justify sacrifice. There simply is too much that cannot be explained historically and that yet has value. And there is too much repetition of the same old historical stories – the romantic, the patriotic, the righteous – that too often function only as alibis. My students have always understood that instantly and implicitly. The worthy dreams of reason and of the *demos,* as the Greeks knew, involve the repression of certain powers that only perpetuate themselves negatively, haunting and hampering it. History is having to face its repressions.

My study of modernity and of history as a consensus apparatus comparable to Renaissance painting was guided from the outset by my awareness of postmodernity in the margins. My agenda has always been to discover what modernity was capable of so that I might better understand the competition. Throughout I have been aware that the postmodern challenge to historical conventions offers more than mere negatives, but instead, openings for new, possibly even more enabling definitions of identity and sequence, for new kinds of relationship with the past, and above all for a new politics, possibly even a renewed politics. Activating such opportunities, however, requires a willingness to move beyond the nostalgia evident in so much discussion of the 'postmodern'. Just as modernity succeeded the medieval, bringing paradigm shifts with it, so postmodernity has succeeded modernity bringing paradigm shifts with it. It is merely movement, and not movement that can be denied. Even if representational conventions are to be defended against the postmodern challenge, and there are good reasons to attempt it, the defence will be weak that has no grip on the opposition. Basic codes have changed across the range of cultural practice, in science, in art, in politics. It is time to stop flinging epithets and start considering, in as much consensual spirit as we can muster, the immense practical implications of those changes.

My exploration of this broadly implicit critique of modernity, present from the beginning of my research, finally found its way into print as *Sequel to History* (1992), 17 years after I starting thinking about the challenges of postmodernity and after I had published a promised book on one of the most widely and wilfully misunderstood radicals of the nineteenth century, *George Eliot* (1985). *Sequel* approaches the subject of time in the postmodern condition just as *Realism and Consensus* took up time in modernity. *Sequel* explores what postmodernity is capable of, especially with regard to the deformation of modernity in general and its historical and representational values in particular. What is at stake in this transition is definitely personal, but what, exactly, is at stake?

Once across the threshold of postmodernity – and most of us already have crossed it here and there whether we like it or not – history in its traditional sense, along with its founding unitary subject, are no longer possible simply because the postmodern world is not one system but many. 'The discursive condition' is not congenial to the One World Hypothesis, nor to the assumed value of neutrality, nor to the project of objectification with its emphasis on individual viewpoint and emergent form. With this recognition of postmodern complexities, neutrality and the rest of the values associated with history do not necessarily become lost, but neither can they remain universally applicable and, therefore, immune from choice or rejection. They are properties of some systems and not others, and the choices between them are vexed and difficult ones.

The threshold of postmodernity has no simple location any more than the Renaissance did. Eurocentric societies have been tipping away from modernity for nearly two centuries. Non-Euclidean geometry was invented before the mid-1800s, and the linguistic model for knowledge was invoked in England before 1870; Freud and Marx circumvented the idea of irreducible entities, be they personal or social; and the entire nineteenth century in France, according to André Breton, denounced the

'ridiculous illusion of happiness and understanding' that the Enlightenment had bequeathed it. By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, phenomenology had sought to override the distinction between subject and object, painters and writers had abandoned the neutrality in space and time upon which representation and history rested, Saussure had redefined language as a differential system, and Einstein had published the Special Theory of Relativity. By 2001 nobody but Mr Podsnap would attempt to disregard all that. Like the Renaissance or the Reformation, postmodernity belongs to a cultural event of such magnitude that to insist on assigning it a simple chronological location is to render it almost entirely invisible. Recognition or denial, however, are not my business here. I am addressing readers of *Rethinking History* who certainly will have recognized already that something has happened to the conventions of historical writing. The question now is, what becomes of the past? And what becomes of the founding subject of history, that individual viewpoint and recollection that I am supposed to be tracing here and that, taken collectively with all others, has sustained the One World Hypothesis and its productions for centuries of European achievement including its adventures in the new world?

In order to answer the central question about new relationships with the past, I turned to narratives that depart from the historical understanding derived from the Renaissance: from the understanding that the past is past and different from us and thus, for that very reason, a basis for mediation. That understanding, now seemingly so simple and obvious, was not obvious before the Renaissance and was crucial to the Renaissance birth of history. Erwin Panofsky's formulation of this thought remains one of the best because it includes both full respect for, and also the grain of critique of, the birth of abstraction that arose from the newly invented historical relation to the past:

> The Middle Ages had left antiquity unburied and alternately galvanized and exorcised its corpse. The Renaissance stood weeping at its grave and tried to resurrect its soul. And in one fatally auspicious moment it succeeded. This is why the medieval concept of the Antique was so concrete and at the same time so incomplete and distorted; whereas the modern one, gradually developed during the last three or four hundred years, is comprehensive and consistent but, if I may say so, abstract. And this is why the medieval renascences were transitory; whereas the Renaissance was permanent.
>
> *(Panofsky 1960: 113)*

The distanced abstraction required by historical conventions of description and explanation always puts particulars into a systematic and rational horizon, the generalizations of which are more important than the particulars which are only stepping stones to them. Take, for example, the generalization that classifies whales as mammals despite their obvious similarities to fish. Because the culture of representation does not allow for diversity in identification – something that prior modes of identification did allow – the creature must be either a mammal or a fish, and so the poor fish becomes one of us. History and associated representational conventions all dissolve particulars with abstraction – for good reasons but with sometimes fatiguing effect. When all

particulars exist mainly as evidence, that is, as instances of developing forms and conditions that are abstract and accessible only through a sequence of cases, there is little savour left for the moment, unless it is snatched ahistorically from this relentless 'reality'.

Postmodernity reintroduces diversity, even contradiction, back into the process of identification; it lets inflection back into sequence. Postmodern identities consist of multilevel and sequential inflections that produce pattern without consensus, and sequential linkages liberated from the fatal forward motion of historical causality. This renewed inflection, formerly suppressed by scientistic hankerings for mere accuracy, renews emphasis on the slack, the 'play' available in the discursive element that allows for more than one kind of practice. Poets have always understood this. Poetry can be defined as precisely the demonstration of that play in language that interferes with productive mechanisms, that makes room for imagination, that contains contradiction without irritable, trivializing insistence on resolution. Postmodernity encourages recovery of that amplitude in the discursive element. This is partly why postmodernity brings back to the centre the artistic practices that modernity marginalized: because, as Bill Paulson (1988) has argued, literature is the 'noise of culture', its medium of possibility.

The 'discursive condition' contrasts utterly with (I may as well call it) 'the modern condition' because the postmodern medium is never neutral, always 'semiotic' in the sense empowered by Saussure. In order to understand the role of 'the past' in postmodernity I rely on Saussure's most suggestive ideas about language. First, that languages function reflexively, not referentially (this is obvious to anyone who knows two languages). Second, that languages generate meaning negatively through recognition of their differential internal functions (this is considerably less obvious). And third, that verbal languages represent only one kind of semiotic system and that we 'speak' in many different sign systems that function as verbal language does, reflexively and differentially, but that are not verbal – for example, body language, garment language, the sign systems for traffic or fashion, the sign systems implicit in tea ceremonies or the world of wrestling, on the soccer field, in the boardroom, at the club, and so on. The term for such a system has come to be 'discourse' because the term 'language' tends to invoke verbal systems. The term 'discourse' lies behind my phrase, 'the discursive condition'. Saussure's ideas, presented in University lectures at Geneva c. 1906–11 and after his premature death published from notes as *Cours de linguistique générale* (1915) and translated into English in 1959, inspired his students at Geneva and have inspired creative thinking ever since.

Saussure's ideas have radical implications for the possibility of 'doing' history, personal or otherwise, and also for the definition of individual practice. For example, instead of thinking of myself as an individual agent picking up signifying tools in a neutral space, Saussure and his heirs invite me to think of myself as a moving site of discursive specification, a subject position or, more accurately, a simultaneous plurality of subject positions because I inhabit semiotic systems in multiples simultaneously, not one at a time; I am indistinguishably teacher, thinker, musician, colleague, parent, scholar, friend, driver, voter and so on. Instead of thinking that language is only

language and the world is 'real', I am invited to recognize that everything is language at every moment: a text, a readability, a writing, an inscription. Instead of thinking of myself as 'individual' (i.e. non-divisible entity) engaged in a consensus apparatus that obliges me to discard much of my knowledge and sensibility, I am invited instead to recognize the obligation for constant negotiation among the many semiotic systems or discourses that constitute my context of meaning and value as a sort of environmental possibility. In such ideas the semiotic complexity of my day begins to find an intellectual model adequate to it.

There are costs. I must sacrifice my idea of romantic individuality and of heroic, world historical action to which the infinities of modern space and time invited me, and instead I must confine 'my' subjectivity to that moving nexus where I can make this or that particular specification of whatever semiotic systems are available to me. 'The past' is a function of a present discursive opportunity, not a launching stage well lost. In the 'discursive condition' the production of meaning and value does not 'originate' with individual agency, human or divine, but instead occurs in between potential and practice: between the not-speakable general powers of a semiotic system (Saussure's *langue*) and the finite specifications of it (Saussure's *paroles*). In the indefinite gap between that potential and its specification lies the arena of freedom and the opportunity of 'the past'. Personal identity can be construed only in terms of the complex trajectory of such specifications, what Nabokov calls 'the unique and unrepeatable poetry of an individual life'. The 'discursive condition' *is* this linguistic in-between. There is no outside to it; we are born into it and into the codes that have been made available to us, either by effort or by default, and that were present long before we were and will survive us. Individuality consists of that trajectory of specifications by which one selects from the range of available semiotic systems and (necessarily) excludes the rest of the vast range of possibility as momentarily useless and thus mere 'noise' – although, as information theorists explain, 'noise' is just someone else's message. In short, each of us performs a continuous daily semiotic juggling miracle just so that we can communicate about the simplest things, stay on the functional side of the road, and generally stay out of harm and earn a living. It is not nothing. However, the intellectual models of modernity, particularly those of history, have told us it was nothing.

Postmodernity reconfigures individuality and agency; it certainly does not do away with them. But beyond the few indications already given I do not want to repeat here arguments made elsewhere about individual agency (Ermarth 2000: 405–13). I will concentrate instead on the postmodern reconfiguration of time and thus of temporal sequence and our relationship to the past. Postmodernity does not do away with the past either, but neither does it use the past to sustain the universal claims, among them Truth claims, implicitly made by modern historical writing through its objectifying agendas.

Time in the discursive condition is never the neutral medium produced by historical conventions. Like discursive subjectivity, discursive time is a function of sequences, all of which are finite specifications of finite systems of potential. What is realizable are particular specifications of systemic potential, not the system itself which is never and can never be specified any more than 'English' can. It is thus not possible in the discursive condition to speak, as history does, of 'time'. Discursive times are finite.

They are periodic. They come to an end and know nothing of the infinite horizons and heroic potentials of modernity and history's neutrality.

While it has always been obvious to most grown-ups that personal time comes to an end, modernity makes it easy, perhaps seductively easy, to lose sight of that determining fact within the infinities and neutralities of historical conventions. In the discursive condition time is a dimension of events not a containing medium for them: hence the impossibility for a neutral time acting as a common denominator for collective events at the level of history. History implies a totalized collectivity including all and everyone and it suggests that whatever does not participate in the collective sums, does not exist. We see this implication played out daily in the Middle East, and on less dramatic scales nearer to home. Furthermore, modern history goes on forever, whereas discursive times are only as long as the given finite sequences of specification of particular potentials by a particular agent.

What then are the possibilities for writing histories once the consensus apparatus supporting modernity has been dismantled? This is the question currently engaging me and, while I attempt no simple answer, I can say that I find promising opportunities in the anthematic ambits of experimental narrative sequences that now are familiar from all kinds of fictions, films, even internet jokes that disrupt the explanatory machinery of history. This new narrative sequence has nothing to do with getting rid of so-called 'facts'; postmodernists are not loonies unable to kick a stone. In 'fact' postmodernity is much more respectful of detail than was modernity, in something like the same way quantum theory is more precise just as it becomes less secure in the familiar empiricist terms. But postmodernity does involve a key move away from objectivity to construct where the past has new functions. Such new relations for 'the past' can be sought in the experimental sequences 'written' in words or steel or sound or stone: in the narratives of the nouveau roman or Nabokov, in Frank Gehry's buildings, in Steve Reich's music, or in the ribbon of stone in Washington, DC bearing the names of Vietnam War dead. Such work demonstrates in practical terms precisely the power to turn convention aside, to reform the act of attention, to ground and limit the very formulation that is prior to any discussion at all whether practical or philosophical. Most important of all such work allows for a plurality of possible even contradictory 'readings' and 'meaning'. Artistic creations, so often marginalized by the objectifications of modernity, are nevertheless the most highly achieved cases of the kind of discursive specification that I engage in every day. They provide a range beyond what is conventionally imaginable. Language that emphasizes its own associative volatility – for example, poetry from Shakespeare to Stoppard – has its counterparts in the street and perhaps even, one hopes, in the boardroom where 'writing' takes place just as surely as on the poet's or novelist's desk or in the painter's studio.

New temporal habitations have been explored more by artists than by theorists despite the latter's use of the term 'time'. Early examples can be found in Dada, Kafka or absurd theatre. A later, British example is Virginia Woolf's *The Waves:*

> Time lets fall its drop [says Bernard]. … Time tapers to a point; it is not one life that I look back upon; I am not one person; I am many people; I do not

> altogether know who I am. … How tired I am of stories, how tired I am of phrases that come down beautifully with all their feet on the ground!. … I begin to long for some little language such as lovers use, broken words, inarticulate words, like the shuffling of feet on the pavement. … What delights me then is the confusion, the height, the indifference … Of story, of design, I do not see a trace … Which is the true story? That I do not know. Hence I keep my phrases hung like clothes in a cupboard, waiting for someone to wear them.
>
> *(1931: 184, 277, 238–9, 218)*

The thread of meaning breaks, but (scandal!) without catastrophe. Half a world away Julio Cortázar, another genius of the revisionary sequence, especially admired *The Waves* for daring to stick its hand outside of history. Later still, the narrator of Marguerite Duras's *The Lover* recapitulates the theme:

> The story of my life doesn't exist. Does not exist. There's never any center to it. No path, no line. There are great spaces where you pretend there used to be someone, but it's not true, there was no one.
>
> *(1985: 8)*

In place of 'the story' is 'writing' which Duras describes as either the most powerful adventure – it is either 'all contraries confounded, a quest for vanity and void' – or else it is nothing more than 'advertising'. These few writers testify, from different parts of the twentieth century and from different cultures and continents, to the presences of a new kind of sequence in which the past has intense value but history does not, and where temporality belongs to a digressive and paratactic order, not an historical one.

Such sequences depend on digression, or 'a formality of sustained interruption' (Ermarth 1992: 145): a digressive formality foreign to the emergent forms of historical conventions but completely at home in contemporary films such as *Pulp Fiction, The Double Life of Veronique* or *The Big Lebowski*. Instead of producing history and meaning, they exfoliate, digress, embedding any meanings in patterns of repetition and variation that mutate in the course of the sequence and often stop arbitrarily. The volatility of association takes precedence over the production of historical causality. We get a sequence defined by its peripheral visions as much as by its forward motion: a sequence by comparison with which conventional historical sequence, moving like a good Aristotelian plot toward its increasingly inevitable end, seems to have blinkers on. Modern history may be plot-like and form-like, but in 2001 it is not life-like.

The past is not past in postmodern narrative sequences, but a present reiteration, a constitutive element of the series. Such a 'past' does not resemble the collective formalities of history. Instead the elements of memory are part of a continuing, personally marked recognition – 'anthematic recognition' after the 'anthemion' or interlaced narrative pattern described and practiced by Nabokov among many others (Ermarth 1992: 198; 2000: 415). Whereas history has been weeping at the grave of the past for five centuries and attempting to resurrect it, postmodernity simply refuses

to declare it dead and thus dispenses with the necessity for burying it. Instead the past is ever-present in the contested patterns of linguistic and discursive recognition. And these patterns always belong to finite individual sequences that replace the grand rationalizations of history. The unique and unrepeatable poetry of an individual text or life does not serve as a basis for the commanding consensus that established the conditions of history and of so much else. What is gained for the sequence is amplitude and infection, even quality perhaps. What is lost is the power of generalization that unifies absolutely everything according to the terms of a single system of measurement. The objectified universe has lost its (Newtonian) certitude and finality; but then, as George Eliot long ago remarked, finality is but another name for bewilderment and defeat.

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6

PRACTICES OF HISTORICAL NARRATIVE[1]

Richard Price

Although published as an Invitation this contribution began as a conference paper. As a renowned anthropologist and historian, Price reflects on the construction of historical narration in his work. He begins by noting how authorial viewpoint was conventionally off the radar when he began in the 1960s as a social science historian. He comments on how he (and other anthropologist-historians like Greg Dening) acknowledged the 'literary turn'. This, he says, was part of the change in status of the subjects and the political and moral context of writing in terms of narrative experiments. These experiments were in both the timing of the text (usually by dislocating events from chronology) and the deployment of an interventionist authorial voice.

Good evening. I am delighted to be here. Programme Chair Barbara Hanawalt first suggested the impossible task of talking about how anthropologists, as a discipline, use history in creating narratives. Mercifully, AHA President Eric Foner later reduced this charge to the somewhat more manageable one of 'reflecting on the construction of historical narration in my own work'. V. S. Naipaul was certainly correct when he said that an author's least reliable critic is himself, but I am pleased to be here nevertheless and honoured by the invitation.

During the next 20 minutes, you will notice a series of some forty images projected without commentary and in no particular order. They represent Romare Bearden's vision of the inner lives of Caribbean *obeah* practitioners – specially gifted men and women who, in the artist's words, are sufficiently arrogant to actually believe they have the power to make the sun come up in the morning. These images relate to the talk I decided *not* to give this evening. Enjoy them, and I will come back to them briefly at the end.

For a long time anthropologists did not think much about narrative. By the time I came along to graduate school in the mid 1960s, the anthropological monograph had for decades adhered to a fairly uniform and apparently natural format (despite minor

differences between the British and American versions). Jim Boon has described it thus: there was a strong 'stylistic taboo on authorial viewpoint. … Its order of contents was physical surroundings [and history] firmly first, religion vaguely last, kinship and social organization determiningly at the core' (Boon 1982: 14). At the tail end of the period that George Stocking (1992: 357) calls 'the classical period of Anthropology', which he locates between c.1925 and c.1965, my grad school buddies and I were still being trained to do Social Science, and narrative was pretty much off everyone's radar screen.

For reasons that remain in part mysterious, a number of us went off for a couple of years to what anthropologists still called 'the field' (usually deepest, darkest somewhere-or-other), returned to the academy and discovered, apparently independently, that the kind of encyclopaedic social science monograph we had been trained to write was no longer possible. So each of us – Renato Rosaldo, Paul Rabinow, Greg Dening, Mick Taussig and a host of others – began writing books that from a literary perspective did not look at all like the monographs we had grown up with.

The 1970s and early 1980s witnessed a sea change in ethnographic writing, which was marked in a symbolic sense by the appearance in 1986 of the collective work *Writing Culture* (Clifford and Marcus 1986), in which a group of anthropologists of my generation took stock and boldly declared that anthropology had not only a politics but also a poetics. What came to be called 'the literary turn' was in full swing.

Our collective godfather Clifford Geertz aptly summed up the new challenges of the 1980s, which came both from within and beyond the discipline: there has been a 'transformation', he wrote, 'of the people anthropologists mostly write about, from colonial subject to sovereign citizens', which has 'altered entirely the moral context in which the ethnographical act takes place' and which perforce 'leaves contemporary anthropologists in some uncertainty as to rhetorical aim'. 'Who', Geertz asked, 'is now to be persuaded? Africanists or Africans? Americanists or American Indians? Japan-ologists or Japanese? And of what: factual accuracy? Theoretical sweep? Imaginative grasp? Moral depth?' And he continued, 'It is easy enough to answer "All of the above". It is not quite so easy to produce a text that thus responds' (1988: 132–3). But at the same time as the moral foundations of ethnography had been shaken, its epistemological foundations, Geertz noted, had also been cracked by general questions raised in other disciplines about the nature of representation. To the anthropologists' worry about 'Is it decent?', there was now added 'Is it possible?' – a concern, Geertz claimed, 'with which they are even less well prepared to deal' (1988: 135). Geertz concluded his overview arguing that what we needed was effective *art:* 'If there is any way to counter the conception of ethnography as an iniquitous act or an unplayable game', he wrote, 'it would seem to involve owning up to the fact that, like quantum mechanics or the Italian opera, it is a work of the imagination' (1988: 149).

In the late 1960s and 1970s, I was reading a good bit of contemporary Latin American literature – I was particularly attracted to Vargas Llosa's narrative experiments with time (for example, in *The Green House*) and with voice (for example, in *Conversation in the Cathedral*). A lifetime of movie going had also undoubtedly imprinted numerous non-linear narrative techniques on my mind. And I was of the

last academic generation to have achieved tenure early and relatively effortlessly. So, by the mid 1970s, it seemed quite natural for me to begin experimenting with narrative, to try to match theoretical concerns about the politics of representation with practical solutions involving the poetics of representation. I began to argue that different historical or ethnographic situations lend themselves to different literary forms (and vice-versa), and that the ethnographer or historian should now face each society or period – or for that matter each potential book – in a new and newly problematic way, searching out or even inventing a literary form that does not come pre-selected or ready-made, in order to effectively evoke that particular society, or that particular historical moment. At about the same time, Renato Rosaldo gave his own assessment of 'the discipline's new project', arguing that it clearly demanded 'a wider array of rhetorical forms than had been used during the classic period' (1989: 231). (As Clifford Geertz, looking backward, wrote more recently: 'There *is* apparently something to the idea of Zeitgeist, or at least to that of mental contagion. One thinks one is setting bravely off in an unprecedented direction and then looks up to find all sorts of people one has never even heard of headed the same way,' 2000: 16.)

I would be at something of a loss to know how best to give a brief overview of my own experiments with narrative form in writing about the past. But not long ago Anil Ramdas, a hip cultural studies journalist for the biggest newspaper in the Netherlands, travelled to Martinique to interview Sally Price and me for a long weekend about just this subject. He had formed the rather bizarre idea that our own books, laid end to end, could be used as a metonym for the trajectory of the social sciences during the past thirty years. And he didn't find it a pretty sight. I had started, he claimed, as a social scientist incarnate, publishing in classic anthropological monograph form. (And indeed, my published dissertation did fit this bill.) He claimed that I next moved through textual experimentations with page layout and typefaces, in an attempt to disperse my ethnographic authority and share it with the voices of the previously underrepresented. To this, too, I plead guilty – my *First-Time* (1983) was very much concerned with representing 'partial truths' and with presenting alternative narratives and multiple historical voices which, in Natalie Davis's words, 'allow one to imagine new possibilities for both history and memory' (1999: 26). And my *Alabi's World* (1990), though more linear in form than the previous work, used four different typefaces to emphasize the inevitable perspectivality of my various historical sources. Anil Ramdas then took note of how the co-authored books that Sally and I next began writing took on a fragmentary form, mixing diary, memoir and line drawings. (One – *Two Evenings in Saramaka* (1991) – was written in the form of a screenplay, with designated voice and stage directions. Another – *Equatoria* (1992) – was in the form of a diary set off against excerpts and fragments from other people's writings, combined with Sally's pen and ink sketches, the whole taking on the form of a collage or montage.) Finally, Ramdas noted, we had cast our ethnographic research in the form of a novel – *Enigma Variations* (1995) – in which characters named Rich and Sally were the antiheroes and where the authors shamelessly played with fiction and reality and with notions of verisimilitude and authenticity, and in which they even staged a seminar in the Princeton Art History Department where

professors and students debated Carlo Ginzburg's analysis of Freud's discussion of Morelli and Sherlock Holmes and prehistoric hunters – the whole nine yards – all in connection with that famous (fictional) severed ear that was mailed to a demure maiden lady in a cardboard box. For this Dutch journalist, the Prices' lifework represented a cautionary tale of gradual but inevitable decline, from modernist scientific certainties to postmodernist confusion and disillusionment. As we watched the sunset over the Caribbean on our last evening together, he decided to call his piece 'De avondrood van antropologie' ('The Twilight [or "Afterglow"] of Anthropology').[2]

Whether it is, in fact, sunset or sunrise for anthropology (or for history), it should be clear that the trajectory Ramdas described is hardly unique – from Natalie Davis, Bob Darnton, David William Cohen, or Jonathan Spence to Simon Schama, Robert Rosenstone and Laurel Ulrich (to name only a few), a number of leading historians have spent the past couple of decades probing the constructedness of the stories people tell about themselves and the rhetorical means they use to persuade others, and narrative experiments that push the boundaries of historical truth and fiction have by now become commonplace. Yet I for one truly believe we are very much the richer for this expanded awareness of the possibilities of narrative experimentation in anthropological and historical writing. On balance, the literary turn has been both challenging and liberating.

Not long after Anil Ramdas's 'twilight' visit, I finished the book that represents my most complex experimentation with narrative form. It concerns, among a number of other things, the shape of time as experienced by Martiniquans, and by me, over a thirty-five-year period. It is called *The Convict and the Colonel* (to which the paperback marketeers recently added the subtitle: 'A Story of Colonialism and Resistance in the Caribbean'). Since many of you may not be familiar with this 1998 book, I thought I would say just a few words about it, as I consider it to be my single most significant work, for historians as well as anthropologists. (I am aware that what I am about to do is at once arrogant, narcissistic, and – remember Naipaul's warning – almost certainly unreliable.[3])

One of the few reviews I've seen to date (in the *American Anthropologist*) provides an entree, claiming that *The Convict and the Colonel* 'raises provocative questions: How best to get at the complicated relationship of fact to fiction, truth to fantasy, past to present, and fieldwork to memory in our ethnographic accounts, while simultaneously remaining committed to those about whom we write? How to productively engage and expose our own desires and nostalgia for the past, as well as residual belief in such constructs as "authentic" culture, even after they are exposed as complicitous in the very power relations we might wish to disrupt?' This book, the reviewer goes on, 'is one of the best examples of how such theoretical questioning can inform ethnographic [or historical] practice. Indeed it is all that the "new ethnography", with its call for self-reflexivity, situatedness, experimental writing, and ethical and political engagement, is supposed to be. It … reads like a novel [and manages] at once a recovery of the past, rumination on it, and documentation of the process by which history is made' (Mascia-Lees 1999: 217). What this kind reviewer – a feminist critic – does not discuss, except in passing, is narrative. One of the book's 'blurbers',

Lucy Lippard, came closer to my intent in that regard by saying that the book is 'a wonderfully readable fusion of anthropology and memoir about culture, colonialism, and madness in the Caribbean'. 'Price', she says, 'practices what a lot of post-modernists preach, [with] the book's graceful writing and innovative form tossing the reader back and forth in time and space.' So, at last we come back to Vargas Llosa and perhaps the cinema.

Near the outset of the book, I claim that 'Time, or rather the experience of it we call memory, is like an old-fashioned Martiniquan concertina – alternately being squeezed and pulled apart, compressing some things, stretching out others, and in the process making music.' And I implicitly suggest that the rest of the book will consist of expanding that instrument, reopening those folds, and playing those 'old-time' *mazouks* and *biguines,* rife with clarinet riffs. Derek Walcott, in his poem *Omeros,* wrote of a wannabe, failed historian who 'had no idea how time could be reworded, / which is the historian's task' (1990: 95). *The Convict and the Colonel,* more than any of my other books, takes up that challenge, trying in complex ways to reword time – both my own and that of my Martiniquan subjects. It is filled with temporal shunts, flash-backs and cuts forward, a wide range of photos that punctuate the text and accentuate rhythms. There is a certain amount of unusual page layout: for example, one long section that consists of parallel columns labelled *la gauche* and *la droite,* drawing on socialist and rightist sources, respectively, in order to emphasize these two distinct perspectives on a single historical event (literally turning the upper-half-of-page/lower-half-of-page organization of *First-Time* ninety degrees). Another section consists of fragments from love letters I wrote (and accompanying period snapshots) from the scene of the crime as a wide-eyed 20-year-old.

The Convict and the Colonel is a history of twentieth-century Martinique written from a wildly eccentric perspective, focusing on marginal incidents and marginal characters – including myself – to tell the larger story. Without a master narrative, and not neat or tidy enough to qualify as conventional 'microhistory', its focus on colonial madness, on the process of modernization, and on the postcarding of the past make it frustratingly difficult to gloss. So, when the talk show host asks for a sound bite 'what is your book about?' the author is consistently tongue-tied (which might explain the book's sales record).

I wrote *The Convict* with at least two distinct audiences in mind: American academics and our neighbours in Martinique (the book appeared in French just a year ago). Not surprisingly, perhaps, Americans and Martiniquans have read the book in completely different ways. While American readers seem interested in matters of style, theory and method, Martiniquans go straight for the content. Despite the book's narratological twists and turns and its insistence on the production of history, Martiniquans read it as a straightforward chronicle of what really happened, a bottoms-up history of resistance that provides an alternative to the colonial histories they were forced to ingest in school. That these different sets of readers manage to find such different satisfactions in the narrative has been a real gratification to me.

Last week our daughter – who is on the Harvard English faculty – was visiting in Martinique. When I told her what I was asked to speak about tonight, she patiently

explained to me that, from a narratological perspective, the differences between *First-Time* or *Alabi's World* and *The Convict and the Colonel* could not be clearer. Classic structuralist narratology, she said, mapped texts along axes of voice and time. *First-Time* and *Alabi's World* are structured largely by an alternation of voices – different narrative perspectives are juxtaposed and therefore highlighted. *The Convict and the Colonel,* though it deploys a similar confrontation of narrative voices in some sections, is structured overall by its play with time. And with a self-consciousness rare in historical writing, she claimed, the order in which events are narrated is strategically dislocated from the order in which they occurred, which tends to bring ruptures and discontinuities very much to the fore. So says our daughter the literary theorist.

In any case, I think it is my best shot to date at writing history with an innovative narrative strategy, and I'd be delighted if those of you who have read *First-Time* or *Alabi's World* (both of which were written in the 1980s) had a look at *The Convict and the Colonel,* the fruit of an additional decade's reflections about narrative strategies and writing history.

Now, briefly, to the pictures. What do these striking images – the slides – have to do with my use of narrative? The short answer is that I am currently writing a book with Sally Price about Romare Bearden (the great American artist of Mecklenburg County North Carolina and New York City Harlem fame), who lived for much of his last two decades on the island of St Martin, where he painted hundreds of watercolours inspired by his Caribbean sojourns. Further down the road, my own next solo project is a book about what Bearden liked to call 'the prevalence of ritual' in Afro-America – the existence of a shared symbolic language across the Americas (from southern Brazil up through the Caribbean and on to such northern outposts as Toronto), and the ways that those shared understandings developed historically during the past five centuries. The narrative challenges posed by that second book, which focuses on the magical aspects of African American experience, have not yet been fully developed. But I do know that I want to evoke some of the hallucinatory, aqueous quality that Bearden expressed in his watercolours of St Martin *obeah* specialists – that other-worldly reality, that inky liquidness, the acid stains that run over the figures, enveloping them in hypnotic fumes – and I intend to juxtapose a number of these images with similarly hallucinatory texts spoken by gods whom I have chatted with over the past couple of years – *obeahs* in possession – in order to build a larger picture of these mysterious, powerful and partially hidden creolized worlds. In 1984, when he was painting his *obeah* images, Bearden said: 'I find a great deal of energy in the Caribbean … it's like a volcano there; there's something underneath that still smolders. People still *believe.'* He added that 'When you stop believing in the gods, they pack their bags and go someplace else!' (Schwartzman 1990: 243). Like Bearden, I believe that those gods are still very much with us in the Caribbean – hiding behind the skirts of modernity. (After all, as Clifford Geertz insisted recently, anthropologists continue to be 'merchants of astonishment.'[4])

Bearden wrote of this final watercolour, which he called the Obeah's Dawn, 'An obeah woman once told me she took in the moon before dawn and held it as a locket on her breast and then threw a rooster out in the sky who spun himself in the rising sun' (1985).

My challenge now, which I accept with the usual mixture of anticipation and trepidation, is to figure out innovative, honest ways of writing about all that.

Notes

1 Text prepared for the Opening Plenary, AHA, Boston, 4 January 2001, and presented here pretty much as delivered, with all its glibness. For publication, I have added date/page citations and a list of references cited. Because of copyright restrictions, I have not been able to include any of the forty Romare Bearden watercolours that, in the form of slides, accompanied the AHA talk. I am grateful to Sally Price and Leah Price for their comments as I was preparing the piece; they are responsible for none of its excesses.

2 The editors in the Netherlands later changed his title to the more lurid 'Verraad in de jungle' (Ramdas 1996)

3 Novelist Margaret Atwood got it right (though she was speaking of fiction writers) in saying: 'About all they really know anything about is the writing of their latest book, and they're usually not even sure how they managed that, having done it in a sort of stupor; and if they do know, they aren't about to tell, any more than a magician will hasten to reveal exactly how he made the pigeon come out of your ear' (1998: 1503).

4 In preparing this text for publication, I find myself unable to locate the page in Geertz (2000) whence I extracted this phrase, though I know it is in there somewhere.

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7

MORE SECONDARY MODERN THAN POSTMODERN

Patrick Joyce

Fully aware that historians exist in a universe of narrative, Patrick Joyce acknowledges the deep complexities that exist in writing history and the nature and necessity of the historian's access to truth. Beginning with the archive and its relationship to history and historians, Joyce centres on the concept of power and the social and cultural situation of the historian. He views himself as an outsider given his being born in England and also being aware of his Irish cultural heritage, as well as his intellectual choices that in part resulted from his experience of the power of class and education in Britain in the mid-twentieth century. He addresses these issues through his understanding of postmodernism and the linguistic turn but ends with a defence of history as reconstitution.

> Beath an Staraidhe firenne
>
> *('Irish Proverbs', compiled by John O'Donovan,* The Dublin Penny Journal, *1833, translated as, 'The historian's food is truth')*

To someone, like most academics, who has been used to addressing an audience through the medium of scholarly work, the invitation to talk about myself as a historian is a novelty and a challenge. One does not need the postmodernist dictum of the death of the author to acknowledge that one's work has a life of its own, outside one's control. Similarly, to talk about my formation as a historian involves an account which I am well aware is not only partial, but also blind to a good deal of what has shaped this formation, as well as the work itself. As a student of 'social narrative', I have some understanding of the significance of narrative in giving structure to our experience. The kind of narrative I have chosen should not be understood as leaving out of the account the community of scholars, at all levels and especially historians, who along with the other influences I discuss have formed me, no doubt in equally unknown ways. If not always explicit in the account that follows (my narrative could

have been concerned more with the history of the history discipline) this community is certainly implicit, in my interest in the nature of what it practises. However, as a student of narrative I am also aware that our narratives choose us rather more than we choose them, and recognizing the way in which all history writing is situated in space and time, something is hopefully to be gained by situating myself as best I can in this manner, by presenting a narrative that seems to have chosen me. Such an exercise recognizes that the historian is no longer simply a mirror to the past but now himself or herself actively a 'site of memory', as Pierre Nora has put it (Nora 1996: 13).

If the historian is a site of memory so too is the archive, in which historians encounter the 'sources' or 'traces' from which they write histories. As sites of *public* memory, both are implicated in power. Archives themselves are a means by which societies organized their pasts. So-called postmodernism has brought this once again to the attention of historians. If the sites of memory that the writing of history occupies are complicit in power, where does the truth of history lie? Is truth possible when all truth has a history, and that history is inseparable from power? I return to the Irish language quotation with which I opened, which translates in the sense of truth being the sustenance or the lifeblood of the historian.[1] I think this is so, but how is one to talk about truth? Clearly not now in the same way that O'Donovan recorded then.

One way of talking about it is to think about how history creates its own 'credibility', how it makes its particular claims on truth. These seem to be closely related to the archive. I am thinking about the archive here at a conceptual level, rather than simply a literal one. As Thomas Osborne observes, 'Just as for the anthropologist the notion of fieldwork represents both a form of truth and knowledge and a certain ethical authority, a certain right to speak, so the archive confers similar rights on those – whoever they are – who seek to generate credibility on its basis' (Osborne 1999: 54). Talking about the truth of history in this way involves talking about the ethics as well as the politics of the archive and of history: responsibilities are incurred as a consequence of this 'right to speak'. This authorization that the archive gives can be understood as a gift as well as a responsibility, indeed the responsibility can be seen to lie in paying back the debt incurred by the gift of the archive.

In epistemological terms the sense of the archive as a gift to the future has been understood as involving a debt repaid by the historian in terms of a very close, scrupulous and critical attention to the traces of the past, in particular to the *singularity* of such traces. In moral terms, the obligation of debt is met by a sort of duty to doubt. Doubt about the innocence of the archive is therefore axiomatic to historical method as a form of *criticism* (Osborne 2001). It is because historians doubt that they must criticize. Therefore, history can be said to be generically a critical discipline. Ricoeur has drawn attention to this critical aspect of history as a *vocation,* an ethical matter of obligation to real people in the past (Ricoeur 1988: 117–19). It is about enlarging the scope of collective memory as a means of paying its debt to the past. Understanding the nature of history in this way, attempting to realize its potential in this manner, involves practising history as a criticism of power, the power contained in archives, in historians and in the historical narratives they help produce.

I make these opening remarks because power and truth in history do not seem to me to be incompatible. Nonetheless, this compatibility seems possible only at the price of a degree of tension between the two. These remarks help me situate something of what I want to say, in a more autobiographical vein, in what follows. For example, as a historian formed in the way I have been I have often felt this tension strongly. History means something to me insofar as it is an exploration and therefore a criticism of power. In my case this preoccupation with power extends from thinking about archives and historians as sites of memory, and therefore of power, to the central interests of my work as a historian. There is therefore a close connection between the practice and the subject matter of history in my work. Thinking about the power involved in the discipline, and in other disciplines, is inseparable from thinking about power as it has operated in the historical pasts I have engaged with. Something of my own past will I hope illuminate this connection, one which involves a sense of history as the practice of a form of truth which is about repaying a debt to the past, and indeed about securing restitution for this past.

I

Writing about the ways in which I feel this to be so begins with a feeling I have about my work that it is outside clearly defined boundaries, and is constantly dissatisfied with boundaries, even the boundaries I erect myself. It is a bit restless and out of step perhaps. Obviously I am not alone in this, but in considering how this got to be so in my case of the future social historian I think I have been shaped by a sense of being an outsider from my early life onwards. An outsider who was also an insider. I was born into the community of Irish immigrants in London, and raised in this community in the 1940s and 1950s. At our Paddington flat, we had no English callers, no English friends or relatives, and departed England most summers for the life of rural Ireland. Irishness was almost inseparable from Roman Catholicism, that of the world of women and children especially (men had their community in the Irish pubs of Paddington, Kilburn and all points north west). We were twice removed from the English therefore (of the British we had little conception). As well as being English, those who surrounded us were also, usually in a half humorous way, considered in their Protestantism to be 'heathens'. There was, however, little that was funny about the accounts we heard about the prejudice directed against the Irish at that time, and earlier in the employment practices of pre-war Britain. When I went to school, first at primary, and then secondary modern level, it was to Roman Catholic schools, and that meant Irish schools, so that almost all my compatriots had the same background as me.[2]

But we English-born Irish were outsiders who were also insiders, versed in the ways of London and moving in the city like fish through water. 'London Irish' has therefore always seemed the only credible description, all the other adjectives seeming risible. Some sort of adjective, however, seems necessary because of this experience of growing up as an outsider on the inside. In the London of the 1950s the Irish, if political in the English ways, were resolutely Labour in sympathy, and the rhetoric

I heard was that to do with 'the labouring man' – it was the *Daily Mirror* in its old Labour form that first gave me a sense of there being a political world outside. I grew up when the welfare state was coming into being, when it responded to the needs of people like my parents, to some extent releasing them from the difficulties of life in a foreign land. My father was an 'ordinary' labourer, my mother a housewife who before marriage had worked in the homes of the wealthy pre-war middle class. He was from the Irish-speaking *Gaeltacht* of Connemara and Joyce Country (the latter *Duiche Sheoigheach* in Irish), she from the rebel county of Wexford.

He had come to England for the first time in 1929 at the age of twenty-one, and for some time after this lived the semi-itinerant life of the Irish dominated building trades, like so many before him and since. After his relatively early death, in my adolescence I began in repeated visits to his birthplace to appreciate more completely the profound sense of difference from what was around me in England evident in the old Gaelic culture of the rural west of Ireland. My family there, and here in England, were still a living part of this culture, one that was about the survival and fortitude of the powerless. I think the recognition of difference in these forms did much to draw me into trying to understand the past, also that it shaped the particular forms this concern has taken. On my mother's side – she was one of fourteen brothers and sisters – there was the clanship of family, something quite central to being Irish, and again something seeming to mark out differences with the surrounding English. There was also the awareness of a rebel past.

However, it was in England that I experienced what was for me, alongside Irishness, the second force sundering me from so much of British society. This was the awareness of class, the subject I have so much written about in my work. The surrounding English may have been 'heathens' but they were 'working people' like us as well. Us children were all children of the welfare state. It was England, where I have lived almost all my life, that shaped this experience of class. Learning the social geography of rich and poor London in the late 1950s and early 1960s as an adolescent wanderer in the city was an important way in which the experience began to be accompanied by a sense that there was a politics to all this. Class, for me, probably took different forms from those who went on from similar backgrounds into academic life. Unlike them, I was not a grammar school boy, but a secondary modern one – I passed the 11 plus class examination (which in those days decided the future of most who took it in a particularly brutal way), but there was for my parents no question of my going to a non-Catholic school, places at Catholic grammar schools being few.

I treasure the memory of this school, the Cardinal Manning Secondary Modern School for Boys, in North Kensington, seeing as time has passed how it has enabled a blessed release from the class condescension and pressures to conform suffered by so many working-class grammar school children,[3] but also a release from a grammar school education itself, or at least from some tendencies within it. From what I know of the results of that profoundly influential educational expression of British cultural identity – including those evident in some of the older generation of the discipline of history – it seems to me to have produced a certain technical excellence alongside a marked intellectual provincialism – in the form of a narrow, intensely specialized

approach to learning, one hostile to speculation and 'theory'. At that time, as I later found out, the public schools were academically little more than expensive secondary moderns, with the crucial difference that they imparted the essential ingredient of self-confidence, as the grammar schools attempted to do in their own way. However, at my school we were undoubtedly secondary, even if we were an expression of modernity, albeit the very odd and archaic British form. At least we were secondary in the general scheme of things, as I found out when I left school and started work at the age of sixteen, for the teaching in the school itself was dedicated, the discipline strong and effective, and the learning often enjoyable.

Partly as a result of this experience of school, itself one of class in another sense (I was in the top class, permitted to do GCE 'Ordinary Level' examinations), I had a strong sense that class distinctions within classes are as strong as those between them, something that I think has been reflected in my work. This perhaps owed more to my experience of working-class 'respectability', in its perhaps not so familiar Irish Catholic form (peasant Irish Catholicism was very hard on the morals of the heathen English). I think one of the formative experiences of my early life was walking to school every day for five years down North Kensington's Southam Street, which Brendan Behan described as the centre of the worst slum in Europe, and Roger Mayne has immortalized in his remarkable street photography. Any tendency to romanticize the working class was lost at a very early age and I think this awareness of the 'rough' working class perhaps also removes me from some of my compatriots in the community of social history.

These differences recede however before the great span of distance from the educational and social worlds of what is still the great majority of academics – the number who share this experience of the secondary modern school is infinitesimal.[4] I think that I am perhaps more secondary modern than postmodern. So, encouraged by the experience of a secondary modern education, I left school at sixteen years old, combining work with an autodidact longing for something different that set in pretty quickly. This came, by pure accident, in the form of university. I was of the Robbins generation of working-class children going to university for the first time in their family's history, and especially to the 'new', inter-disciplinary universities (I went to Keele University, motto: 'Thanke God for All'). If muted by this more egalitarian environment, university was also part of an education in class, as was my experience of postgraduate work at Oxford (postgraduate Balliol muted my disgust at the privilege on display elsewhere in Oxford). At Keele, if not inter-disciplinary, the experience was a multidisciplinary one, and something I am greatly indebted to.

Like others of my generation, though I think with the sharper sense produced by my particular experience of difference and separation, academic work, and in particular the writing of history, became in a very marked way a means of self-definition, of being in the world, so that the historian now is still, in many respects, the bright boy in his secondary modern class. As a means of being in the world, the history one produces is written out of the strengths, weaknesses and contradictions of the being from which it grows. This is no doubt so for everyone else, but the relationship between the public world of history, a world of power and the early world of my

experience is different, because that world was one of the powerless. This returns me to my opening remarks on history and the archive.

There I spoke about how an engagement with the truth of history conferred a right to speak, but thereby also a responsibility in speaking. History can be said to involve a gift of the past to the present, and therefore a debt that must be paid. Like other historians, particularly ones of the social stripe, this debt is repaid by a history that is about class, power, the powerful and the powerless, though it is a debt I articulate here in the terms of a somewhat Foucauldian politics of truth, rather than Marxism or an explicitly political commitment, both of which I am uncomfortable with. Nonetheless, the political commitment of the scholar is I believe not far to find in my work, in its attempt not to reduce the complexity and dignity of the experience of people in the past, especially poor people, a reduction I felt Marxism sometimes responsible for. The radical, if also sceptical, democratic thrust to my work has I believe sometimes been misunderstood.

However, it is not merely the content of one's work that is at issue, but this matter of being a historian, or of experiencing one's being as a historian. I return again to my opening remarks, on the tension between truth and power evident in the practice of truth in an archive that one knows to be a political institution. In western societies, the archive has historically been closely related to politics that is liberal. I am here thinking about 'liberalism' not only in terms of political ideas or political practice, but also in the sense of the active deployment of freedom as a means of governing people, an understanding I am developing in my current work on freedom and the city in the nineteenth century.[5] This deployment of freedom is necessary only in virtue of what resists or provokes it, which is perhaps freedom in another sense, or in this case history as a criticism of power. The archive and history writing invokes ideas of ethical and intellectual detachment and neutrality, and in depending upon the idea of a public which is free to interpret the archive a certain idea of this public is in turn corroborated. Both the idea of intellectual detachment and the notion of a free public have been closely associated with liberalism, however one understands this term. Therefore, one might in this sense talk about a politics of the liberal archive.[6] This relates to what I earlier talked about in terms of the obligation to doubt incurred by the gift, an obligation that means nothing unless embedded in the recognition that the archive is inseparable from the operations of power, and from history writing as a criticism of power. One could think about the politics of the contemporary archive, if I can put it like that, in terms, then, of the exercise of criticism upon the forms of freedom that in large measure still license the historian's voice in the contemporary academy.

Rightly or wrongly, I have at times criticized the history discipline for its lack of attention to the always political nature of its formation, the way in which it is inscribed in power, not least the very idea of ethical and intellectual neutrality itself. This is all the more the case at an institutional level, so that the most powerful levels of the institutional hierarchy of the discipline, which in Britain still means Oxford and Cambridge, have the greatest debt to pay in criticizing power. Concerned as I have been with the nature of power in disciplines, this is why the postmodernist critique has

been of particular importance to me, as another way of thinking about the relationship between the truth and power of history. I should say that in terms of postmodernism it has always been an interest in the condition of contemporary society, as well as in postmodernist/poststructuralist thought, that drew me: it is Zygmunt Bauman's deeply serious engagement with both postmodernism and the condition of society known as postmodernity that has been a particular influence on me.

This being so, it seems to me that there is a strong connection between anxieties about postmodern 'relativism' in history, the onset of postmodernity and the displacements of former centres of power brought about by postmodernity. These centres include the nation state itself, and the centres of academic power and authority that have been closely associated with the evolution of the nation state, not least in the discipline of history itself.[7] Former certainties are now called in question, certainties that were, and to some extent still are, a source of what is a liberal avowal of historical truth. What another sort of avowal of truth might be is something I broach here, though only briefly. Whether one calls this postmodern or not is of no great significance. In what sense it might be non- or post-liberal is perhaps of greater significance. For I am only too well aware that as more 'relativist' and 'constructivist' accounts of historical knowledge gain ground (see, for instance, Jordanova 2001) – far from seeing the end of 'postmodernism', as is now sometimes claimed, we see still its beginnings – then these notions themselves gradually become embedded in new dispensations of power. So much seems evident in the growth of 'reflexivity' in the institutional politics of history, at least in Britain. This is apparent not only in accounts of historical method, but in the organization of history teaching itself, and in the managerial ethos that now dominates academic life. Whether 'liberal' or not, and 'reflexivity' may clearly be a mode of governing through freedom, the new 'post-modern' direction of history carries its own political charge, its own version of the tension between truth and power. The 'postmodern' drift in history, call it by what name one will, is simply one more revolution in the wheel of power.

However, this, perhaps, is what awaits, and the tension of which I speak has been more apparent in older, more clearly liberal notions of history and of the academy. As I say, somebody with my background experiences this tension in a particular way, in that it is felt in terms of one's *being* as a historian, not just in the writing of history but in the everyday experience of being in the political institution of the academy. What comes strongly to mind here is Jonathan Cobb and Richard Sennett's book *The Hidden Injuries of Class* (1973), which considers the experience of education in the American context. The injuries they deal with are the hidden injuries inflicted on unprivileged people by modern liberal democratic notions of meritocracy, notions based upon the idea of the equality of individual abilities. Living in this meritocratic world as an academic, and coming from the world of the powerless (the realities of which continue to mock the liberal fiction of freedom present in the idea of meritocracy, for all the lip service paid to real equality), is to encounter in the institutional experience of history, as of any other discipline, something parallel in everyday life to the intellectual experience of relating truth to power in the practice of history. I am at once an exemplification of meritocracy and a witness to its perniciousness.

Part of what is pernicious is, precisely, the hiddenness of the injuries it inflicts, especially the sense of the unsayability of so much, to oneself but also to others. There is an incommensurability of experiences of class that so often defies articulation, leaving one with the feeling they would not know what you meant even if you knew what to say and could say it. To paraphrase Samuel Beckett, life without words, as it is written. My way of saying it, of not being able to say it, has mostly been as a practising historian, and it is to this I will turn.

II

I began academic work at the postgraduate level as a student in the Oxford of the early 1970s, though I was largely outside the networks of intellectual influence and power that surrounded me. I sought as a supervisor someone who was outside Oxford, namely John Vincent at Bristol. He seems to me, at least in his early work, to have been perhaps the most brilliant and penetrating political historian of his generation. Coming from the political right, in the form of the Maurice Cowling-influenced Christian and Tory history of Peterhouse, Cambridge, he had a wonderful sense of the social psychological dimensions of politics, the underlying workings and hidden drives of political conduct. This attracted me as a budding social historian, by giving me a certain picture of what the social might be. Essentially, I think my work has been about power and in this sense the political, but I have always attempted to understand power in terms of its involvement in the relationships between people, groups, and things. This sense of the interconnectedness of things, of the social for want of a better word, does, I believe, owe a considerable amount to my feelings about being an outsider looking on, fascinated by the things that hold people together, without them for the most part being aware of what these are and often indeed that they are there at all.

My experience of Catholicism is relevant here: this gave me a sense of what it was like to live in a structure of meaning which embraced almost everything, and then moving beyond this embrace I could see quite clearly the inter-connectedness of faith and life. Similarly, moving within the British social system, together with the displacements of being English-born Irish, enhanced this interest in how social integration worked, and in what the social was. Intellectually, what also shaped my first book, *Work, Society and Politics,* was an early encounter with Marxism, in the form of John Foster's remarkable *Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution* (1974). The impact of the thoroughgoing deterministic Marxism of the book at that time cannot be overestimated. Its systematic and theoretical nature challenged many to think seriously about the historical nature of society. At the time, social history was rapidly rising to the prominence it achieved internationally, and the influences on it were many, extending far beyond the Marxism that was particularly influential in Britain, so that the 'new history' which Le Goff describes in the 1970s was enriched by many sources, not least the *Annales* itself. It was the *Annales* idea of 'total history' that also formed my imagination of the social at this time (Le Goff 1992).

My book was shaped by my doctoral thesis on working-class Conservatism in nineteenth-century industrial England, and in turn this subject emerged initially out

of an interest in British responses to the immigrant Irish, but above all interest in the roots of consent, in how power often does not seem to operate through coercion so much as through the production of consent. My interest, then, was in how deference – the respect of the powerless and exploited for those who were powerful – came to exist in the industrial communities I studied. I was also drawn to this by another reaction against Marxist history, and social history more widely, namely what I took to be at the time a certain romanticization of the working class, and in this I would include the great E. P. Thompson's work. Anyway, the Tory working class was more like my working class, in the sense of the working class of Southam Street, the hedonistic, 'rough', foreigner-hating, populist working class which the Marxists and the other social historians didn't seem to know a lot about at that time (though of course Thompson did acknowledge this working class). I had a strong sense, too strong in retrospect of course, of the social as a kind of totality, in which work and politics were made into a sort of unity in the realm of community.

I am aware that my account so far may perhaps give the impression that pleasure is something of secondary importance in writing history. On the contrary, if a certain underlying drive to do it was not accompanied by the pleasure of doing it, then it would not get done, at least by me. These pleasures are intrinsic not incidental to the enterprise. There is the deep pleasure of actually being in archives and libraries, scribbling furiously in a kind of conversation with the dead, attempting to work out the micro-strategies of operating with the traces of the past so as to recognize both the presence and the limits of their alterity. A serious game seems to go on, as a means of being sensitive to how what surrounds one in archives but also in everyday life can give off what Marc Bloch called the 'charge' of the past, the electricity of its difference. For me the physical environment is an archive too. Realizing it as a place in which the present is composed of the fragments of different times, so that the past constantly surfaces in the present, is a kind of trick of the imagination, a trick for making the historian a 'site of memory' in fact. With me, I think this trickery is especially concerned with the sense of place that seems to mark my work.

In my first book this is evident in the place that intellectually first engaged my visual, historical imagination, namely the old factory districts of the North of England. Recently, in my new book, it has been London and Manchester where I consider the two cities, the ones I personally know best, as arenas in which the visual and spatial dimensions of liberal power were apparent. As a means of visually inciting the past, I confess an addiction to the practice of historical flaneurship in the form of the urban perambulation, especially the nocturnal perambulation when the imagination better cuts loose. I have always been particularly drawn to geography, especially the wonderful new cultural geographies that have done so much to enlarge historical inquiry. As well as for his engagement with power, I have been attracted to the work of Foucault because of his interest in power as visuality.

It may be the case that I also treat ideas in a somewhat similar way, at least in part, as a means of provoking the past into discharging its electricity, constantly worrying away at ideas (deference, the social and freedom for example) so that they will reveal the ways in which the traces of the past may say new things. The community of

historians is involved here of course, including students who, in my case, have been absolutely critical in this business of provoking the past by ideas. Carlo Ginzburg has spoken of the excitement in historical work of finding out you have the answer before you know the question, in the sense that the archive's revelation of the otherness of the past suddenly illuminates new and unexpected realms of darkness. Getting to this position is a result of the kind of stratagems I describe, not the wonder of the *ingenue* before the mystery of the archive, or perhaps indeed this, but bought with a good deal of ingenuity. Above all, and to this I will return, a diasporic Irish identity seems to have been a kind of master stratagem for inciting the past into being, the source of the other stratagems. However, to describe the abiding sense of separation and return that is involved as a stratagem probably overestimates the conscious nature of what goes on. At some deeper level, the tidal swell of separation and return seems to mimic the actions of the historian in the archive, forever separated from and returned to the past.

The pleasures of history were muted in the 1980s by the experience of Thatcherism, and her creation of what seemed to be a mass, populist social constituency, which deepened my older interest in the sources of consent, and the nature of populism. This resulted in the publication in 1991 of my *Visions of the People*. Before this I had produced an edited book of essays, called *The Historical Meanings of Work,* which was an early reflection of what came to be called the linguistic, or cultural, turn. I had also produced a long essay on the history of work and the labour process, which contributed at another level to that of meaning and culture to the rethinking of what had up to then been the central category of not only social history but a good deal of British history beyond this, namely class. Poststructuralism, or postmodernism as it later and somewhat confusingly came to be called in the arguments that went on in history, presented me with a particularly pointed set of questions about the sorts of ideas of the social, especially the kind of totalizing idea of the social, that I had previously worked with. They also presented Marxism and mainstream social history, indeed history in general, with these questions, and it is pretty clear that large elements within social history and outside did not feel disposed to answer them. When I tried, I was met with the sound and the fury of a resistance I still feel slightly puzzled by.

One explanation I provide myself concerns the very English (and British) nature of social history in general, and the British Marxist historians in particular. Again, the view of an outsider makes me aware of this, especially the extraordinary concern with freedom and agency, the corresponding angst about 'structure', and the panic over the corrupting nature of theory. This is evident in the responses not only to my work, but also to the structuralism and Althusserian Marxism of the 1970s and the poststructuralism that followed it. Empirical, anti-theoretical, humanistic, these familiar responses as well as being resolutely British also seem to me to be quasi-religious, representing a faith – in many ways a liberal faith – in history, one that extends far beyond social history into the heart of history in Britain. Within the social history camp, perhaps outside it as well, this faith may have something to do with what seems to be the root of many British radical traditions in the moralism of Protestant

religion, especially the non-conformist variant. This perhaps goes some way to explain the anguish about human agency. A lapsed Catholic sees it differently.

While I put an English and British complexion upon my account here, it is clear that a lot of what I say about the nature of responses to so-called postmodernism cuts across national intellectual boundaries. In considering this wider compass what I term the quasi-religious nature of belief in history seems relevant too, this belief going hand in hand with a modernist faith in reason that often applies equally to liberal and leftist positions. But perhaps us social historians are all rather a (post-) religious bunch anyway, all concerned to bear witness in some way. This includes the generous, ecumenical Marxism of Raphael Samuel, someone who it was my delight and privilege to know at first hand, and someone who was the very opposite of British parochialism (though I thought sometimes he loved history too well, with an immoderate passion, something in fact perhaps rather British in itself).

In *Visions of the People* I wanted to consider consent and dissent within the same social and cultural formations, seeing in populism points of popular inclusion within dominant structures of power, but also points of negotiation and resistance. Basically, I was, I think, further deepening my interest in the social imaginaries which underpinned modern liberal democracy. Class was only one of these, but it had become a master category, and my feeling was that it was necessary to get behind class to cognitive patterns that seemed to underlie it – this concern with the epistemological foundation of categories of social identity is continuing very powerfully in my new work, shortly to be published, *The Rule of Freedom: Liberalism and the City*. In *Visions of the People,* because I still was pulled towards a reading that emphasized how embedded power might be, I recognize the criticisms directed at that book for emphasizing less conflictual dimensions. For a work beginning to be influenced by poststructuralist thought, it read meanings in too static a way. I tried to make the book that in part came out of this, *Democratic Subjects,* more in line with these criticisms.

In particular, I was interested in pressing on with the linguistic turn in terms of the relationship between the social and narrative, at the levels of individual and collective identity. Of course, this resulted in more criticism, for 'linguistic determinism', and for too strong an emphasis on meaning. However, I regarded these books then, and even more now, as only first steps in a contribution to the renovation of socio-historical inquiry, one concerned with meaning and culture, in which the dimension of material things and processes, and their interaction with meanings, was left to another day. The *Oxford Reader* on class that I did in the mid-1990s was also conceived in this light. Certainly, there is no disputing the value, but also the limitations, of the model of language and the concentration on culture in understanding social relations and historical change as these were worked out in this phase of the cultural turn.

In the large book I have been working on through the 1990s, I have been interested in the epistemological foundations of liberalism, in the sense taken up by those who have developed Foucault's notion of governmentality. I am interested therefore in things like maps and statistics, as ways of identifying and thinking about subjects and objects of rule, and the constituents of what might be called forms of political reason. I am also interested in the 'political technologies' which implement these forms of

reason, in short in the practices of social imaginaries of power, but I am also interested in the many other social imaginaries that interact with dominant forms, complementing and instituting, but also resisting and subverting these. Along with this, I am trying to develop a better understanding of the material dimensions of power, how material things have, as it were, their own kind of agency. This has led me to consider science studies, including the work of Latour and others on the material dimensions of how scientific truth is produced, but especially on the place of things in the constitution of society. It is also led me to look at colonial governmentality and Indian cities. Postcolonial history and theory have in fact in recent times represented for me something very congenial, a view from the outside, as it were, which parallels something of my own experience. In time, as my next project, this work is leading in the direction of a systematic study of the state, conceiving of it in ways that come out of some combination of what might be called the cultural and material turns.

This work has developed alongside a systematic attention to the concept of the social itself, which is evident in an edited book currently in press called *The Social in Question*. In part, for me, it represents a sort of postpostmodern step or at least a drawing of lessons from 'postmodernism', and movement towards a fresh set of questions in the new and constructive intellectual climate that seems to be emerging after the cultural turn. In a way, if a new departure in the book, I also come full circle in my interest in the social. In particular, as a historian, I am greatly interested in the first section of this book, on the history of the social, which I think is an extraordinarily complex task developed in the book in only a few of the many ways possible. As something more than a historian, someone who has been greatly drawn to sociology and social theory in particular, I am equally engaged by the second section, which considers the theory, and the methodological and disciplinary consequences, of rethinking the social.

I want to end, however, with this reference to coming full circle, by talking about other kinds of return, and about restitution. Irish identity is diasporic identity, in its nature about separation but also about the possibility of return, and often the possibility of restitution. I married a woman who was Irish, in the troubled form of the British state in its location of the border country of the North. The diasporic is intensified therefore. As I say, this particular diasporic concern with loss, return, and restitution has always shaped my historical imagination. There is another sort of imagination at work in the extraordinary literary work of Timothy O'Grady and Stephen Pyke, *I Could Read the Sky,* a combination of words and photographic images. This summons up the lost, almost entirely unrecorded, world of my parents' generation as immigrants to England. It has given rise to an equally remarkable film by Nichola Bruce, which combines words, moving images, and in particular the traditional music of Ireland. Something of the sense of dislocation, loss and connection of this experience is contained in the list of what the narrator in the novel could not do in England (this narrator is an older man looking back on his life in England):

> Eat a meal lacking potatoes. Trust banks. Wear a watch. Ask a woman to go for a walk. Work with drains or objects smaller than a nail. Drive a motor car.

> Eat tomatoes. Remember the routes of buses. Wear a collar in comfort. Win at cards. Acknowledged the Queen. Abide loud voices. Perform the manners of greeting and leaving. Save money. Take pleasure in work carried out in a factory. Drink coffee. Look into a wound. Follow cricket. Understand the speech of a man from west Kerry. Wear shoes or boots made from rubber. Best P.J. in an argument. Speak with men wearing collars. Stay afloat in water. Understand their jokes. Face the dentist. Kill a Sunday. Stop remembering.
>
> *(O'Grady and Pyke 1997: 71)*

The point about this is its reconstitution of the everyday, its dependence for its effect upon presenting that world out of a sense of the intimate details of the everyday, the competencies and inner knowledge available only to those who experience them directly. This is reflected in the book as a whole, and in the film, in their delicate capacity to suggest a world out of the resources of that world, its patterns of speech, its music, as well as the instinctive knowledge of everyday life. Of course, this is an illusion, the illusions of art operating in ways beyond the experience of that world, but then this is the gift of writing that is not the same as the gift of history. Nonetheless, the gift of history may aspire to this condition of art by repaying its debt to the past in attempting to recreate worlds out of their own resources. It can offer a kind of parallel witness, another way of saying what is said as a form of restitution in the book:

> 'We are the immortals' says P.J. He has a few jars on him. 'We are one name and we have one body. We are always in our prime and we are always fit for work. We dig the tunnels, lay the rails and build the roads and buildings. But we leave no other sign behind us. We are unknown and unrecorded. We have many names and none are our own. Whenever the stiffness and pain comes in and the work gets harder, as it does for Roscoe, we change again into our younger selves. On and on we go. We are like the bottle that never empties. We are immortal.'
>
> *(O'Grady and Pyke 1997: 69)*

Notes

1 I thank Niall O'Coisann of the History Department, Galway University, for his advice about this translation.

2 Secondary modern schools, instituted as a consequence of the Education Act of 1944, reflected and reproduced educationally the class distinctions of Britain at that time. They provided an education primarily designed for future manual workers (we did woodwork but not languages). The grammar schools provided for those who might and mostly could aspire to something better.

3 See the social historian Peter Bailey's account of how the grammar school made him 'petit bourgeois', in *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998: 5–6). His account of his own formation describes himself as being in 'uneasy dialogue' with the 'larger generational story' of social historians, whose social history, he says, was about class because it was the product of class. As someone who has tried to displace class from its historiographical eminence in social

history, I would see my own formation as very much at a tangent to this general story also, though inevitably there are similarities. However, I think that Bailey's account of this generational story is unnecessarily defensive.

4 It is interesting that numbered among the few that to my knowledge do share this experience are the editor of this journal, Alun Munslow, and a contributor in the series of invitations to historians of which this present article is one, Keith Jenkins. Both are exponents of postmodernism in history, though less reservedly than me I think.

5 On liberal governmentality, see Nikolas Rose, *Powers of Freedom* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999).

6 For some historical aspects of this, see Patrick Joyce, 'The politics of the liberal archive', *History of the Human Sciences* 12, 1999.

7 Patrick Joyce, 'The return of history: postmodernism and the politics of academic history in Britain', *Past and Present* 158, 1998.

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8

RETHINKING HISTORY

Frank R. Ankersmit

Beginning with a short discourse on his prejudices, rational beliefs and the necessity for balancing them, Ankersmit elegantly asks what history theorists are doing when history has seemingly become such an irrelevance to our contemporary society. Ankersmit defends history by a short examination of the 'urgent question of how we came to where we currently are'. His judgement is that we need an 'authentic and immediate' contact with the world. In pursuing this, Ankersmit rejects Derrida by offering his (admittedly prejudiced) analysis of history, aesthetics and politics which is rooted by asking how language hooks on to the world. He concludes with his thoughts on 'trauma' and the 'sublime' historical experience that 'will not fit into the epistemological and psychological categories we have for making sense of the world'. He concludes with his thoughts on Hayden White and historicism.

> What is boring has become interesting, because what is interesting has become boring.[1]

1 Getting to the bar

When Alun Munslow invited me to write an autobiographical essay for *Rethinking History*, I most happily and gladly decided to accept the invitation. I felt much honoured by it; moreover, I regard Alun highly as founder and editor of this journal, admire him as a historical theorist and respect him as a friend. So, understandably, I had no hesitations. But now that the moment has come to sit down and write the essay, I am beginning to have my doubts about the wisdom of my decision. I mean, many if not most of the readers of this journal will not be familiar with my writings: so why should they be interested at all in an account of my intellectual biography (Domanska 1998) and in how I arrived at what I have written in the course of the past two decades?

When thinking of how to negotiate this awkward problem I opted for the following compromise. Suppose you participate at a conference and meet a colleague at the bar after one of the sessions. While sipping a glass of whisky you get to talk with each other about your work, your interests, what you wrote in the past and what more or less ambitious hopes you still cherish for the future. You will then try to convey to the other something of the nature of your interests, about why you think certain things to be more important than others and so on. In short, you will present your interlocutor with a catalogue of your *prejudices,* insofar as these prejudices have inspired most of what you have been doing over the years. Are not our prejudices the matrix within which all our plans, beliefs, certainties and ambitions originate? Are they not the truest mirror of our mind? So, this kind of discussion at the bar, familiar to all of us, will be my guide here; so, what I shall do is, essentially, to give you a list of my prejudices – though, unfortunately, this essay will have the character more of a monologue than of a real exchange. I apologize for this; but obviously there is no remedy.

2 Prejudice

Before embarking on this task, a few comments on the notion of prejudice are in order. Even though Gadamer has been remarkably successful in undoing some of the damage, the notion has had a poor reputation since the Enlightenment.[2] For is prejudice, if only we think of its etymology, not simply ill-considered opinion, the kind of misguided opinion we may have on an issue, if, out of intellectual laziness, conservatism or sheer stupidity, we did not spend on the issue in question the mental effort it demands? And, admittedly, this is certainly true of many of our prejudices, social, political – and, moreover, even in the field of scholarly research.

But not of all of our prejudices. For as we know since Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* and his *On Certainty,* even in the most responsible and painstaking research you always and inevitably reach a point where you stop. I shall not consider here the question whether or not the decision to stop is consciously made; it will probably, in practice, often be a strange and paradoxical mixture of both. But whatever the case, we will reach, under such circumstances, the level of what Collingwood once described as our 'absolute presuppositions' and which he defined as follows: 'an absolute presupposition is one which stands, relatively to all questions to which it is related, as a presupposition, never as an answer'.[3] Indeed, prejudices must be very similar to Collingwood's absolute presuppositions, insofar as prejudices share with absolute presuppositions the property of being points of departure for further thought and whose own truth or viability remains unquestioned. But there is a difference as well. For, in contrast to Collingwood's absolute presuppositions, prejudice determines endings no less than beginnings. For example, if our argument has led us to a certain conclusion, it may well happen that we nevertheless reject the conclusion (and hence the whole argument itself) because it is at odds with one or more of our prejudices.

This is where prejudice resembles Kuhn's paradigms, insofar as a paradigm may also prevent us from accepting a certain theory, even though it has its support in empirical fact. But here a difference emerges as well. For the interaction between prejudice and

the surface of our beliefs is different from that between the paradigm and the scientific theory. We continuously rearrange and adapt our prejudices and are far more pragmatic about this than ever could be the case with paradigms because of the logic of the latter notion. The explanation is that the rearrangement of prejudices is guided by our wish to maintain or achieve a certain balance among these prejudices themselves, whereas such a wish would be a very strange one in the case of paradigms. You accept this paradigm or another, but looking for a 'balance' between them simply makes no sense.[4] Perhaps one might consider the issue of a balance between the paradigms presently obtaining in physics, chemistry, biology and so on (the utopia for the advocate of a unified science, perhaps?). But even this untoward construction would be of little help. For such a balance would have its ultimate basis and support in what best agrees with the facts about the world – and this is the direction into which one would have to look for such a balance. Whereas the balance of prejudices is determined only at the level of these prejudices themselves and not at that of what the world is like – and this requires us to look in the opposite direction.

But as such it is absolutely indispensable. For mental sanity is possible only if a certain amount of coherence of our prejudices is carefully maintained.[5] Put differently, the relevant part of the mechanism of our mind has not just two layers – that of our rational beliefs and that of our prejudices – but three. For apart from these two, there is a still deeper third level of where we negotiate the most satisfactory balance of our prejudices. None of these three levels is decisive, but no account of the working of this aspect of our mind is satisfactory that fails to consider the rules determining this regime of our prejudices at this third level.

So, this may give an idea of what I intend to do when presenting to the reader, as candidly and as honestly as I can, the web of my prejudices.

3 What are we doing and what are we doing it for?

When trying to execute my enterprise, I think I had best start with the two questions mentioned in the title of this section. Hence, what is it like to write history and historical theory, and what is the use of these disciplines? Since the days of Thucydides, Cicero, Machiavelli and Nietzsche many eloquent and perceptive answers have been given to these questions. Nevertheless, these questions never quite ceased to be slightly embarrassing to historians: they have always been most painfully aware that you cannot build bridges or cure diseases with historical knowledge. So, what is the use of disciplines such as the writing of history and of historical theory – why should they be more than simply some atavistic excrescence of the dismal reign of the priest and the monk in the no-nonsense world of the beginning of the twenty-first century? And right now there is even more reason for embarrassment than ever before. For until some two to three decades ago, when the ideological battle still raged between West and East, when politics still mattered, when ambitious plans were still developed for achieving what one saw as the assignment of history, nobody could doubt the relevance of history. History gave us our collective fate – and who could be indifferent to this?

But this is quite different now. Recall the paradox of Saint Simon (not the diarist, but the utopian socialist) according to which it would make not the slightest difference to the well-being of France if the King and all the heirs of the Kingdom would be killed overnight, whereas chaos would immediately result if all the engineers and businessmen were to die. Now, think of what the sudden death of all the Thierrys, Michelets, Rankes, Droysens, Treitschkes would have meant to nineteenth-century France and Germany – these nations would truly have felt politically and culturally decapitated. But what would happen if next year some virus emerged which, for some strange reason, attacked historians only but was fatal in all recorded cases? Surely, the newspapers would not fail to mention this on their front pages, one would deplore the loss of cultural capital and lament the personal tragedy of these historians and of their families. But nobody would regard the fate of the historical trade and of its practitioners as particularly serious, and society would quietly go on with its business as it had always done. A repetition of 11 September, though probably killing far less people, would unanimously be considered incomparably worse. Which leaves us with the question why history has become so much of an irrelevancy in our contemporary society.

There are many obvious answers to this question. For example, one might argue that the forces of globalization, the triumph of communication technology, of economic rationality and so on have effected an unparalleled break with the legacies of the past. As a result, the past's grasp on the present will become ever more tenuous to the point of actually disappearing, with the inevitable result that the past will, in the end, wholly lose its meaning for the present. So, this is how and why history came to be reduced to the lowly status of a colourful curiosity without any real significance for the present and the future.

But whatever variants of this apparently so plausible argument one might devise, they will all fail for the same reason. For far from reducing history to irrelevance, these new social and technological forces should be expected to do exactly the reverse and to extol history to the status of the most meaningful, or rather supremely 'meaning-giving', discipline. For observe that these forces create a distance between ourselves and what the world used to be like, and hence give birth to the past as a potential object of investigation. Without these forces there simply could be no past at all and, the stronger they are, the more history do we have. Only in the completely static society, a society without any social, technological and political change, would history cease to be of any relevance. But whatever claim one might wish to make about the contemporary world, one could impossibly maintain that it should be static. So, in fact, never have circumstances been more favourable to the historian than now. Moreover, the argument is squarely at odds with the facts about the history of historical consciousness. For the great periods in the history of our discipline have, indeed, been precisely those periods where history went faster than ever before. Think of how in the hands of historians such as Machiavelli and Guicciardini modern Western historical consciousness emerged and of how it was born from the awareness of a radical break with the medieval past. Or think of how the French revolutionaries actually attempted to abolish the past in the most literal sense of the word. But the

net effect of their effort was, instead, an unprecedented explosion of history, the birth of historicism and the coming into being of the intellectual matrix within which we still experience the past. So, as these two examples suggest, it is precisely the reverse: history loses its cultural relevance when the pace of history slows down, and its cultural role and value is greatly enhanced in periods in which the present emancipates itself from a now obsolete past.

But precisely considerations like these must make our problem all the more urgent: how is it possible that there is, on the one hand, more history than ever before in the sense that our society simply secretes history through all its pores thanks to its unparalleled changeableness, whereas, on the other hand, history as a discipline has almost completely marginalized itself?

When attempting to deal with this question, one conspicuous difference between the Machiavellis, the Guicciardinis, those great nineteenth-century German and French historians on the one hand, and their present descendants on the other, cannot fail to strike us. For the historians I mentioned above shared an acute sense of urgency; they were deeply aware of the challenges of the present, challenges provoked by the loss of the past and of all that used to be natural, obvious and self-evident. They were all convinced that the map they would draw of the labyrinthine course of history from the past to the present would show their contemporaries how to orient themselves in the present and that from the resonance of the past in their minds the future would be born. Like their contemporaries they felt displaced into a new, unknown, strange and often even hostile world – and history was to them the only instrument at their disposal to make sense of the threatening complexities of the present. They had internalized the great conflicts and tragedies of their time in their own mind, they had wrestled with them and had experienced them as if they were their own, most personal problems.

4 The discontents of contemporary culture

Now, this sense of urgency is wholly absent from the writings of contemporary historians. I would not know of any contemporary historian who still has the pretension to provide us with such a map for our collective future; the attempt to do so would be considered a ridiculous overestimation of the historian's cultural assignment and, even worse, as an abnegation of the historian's duties towards the cause of objectivity and of scientific truth. Contemporary historians no longer recognize that relevance and truth (as they understand it) cannot live in the presence of the other. They have thus allowed to come into being a deep and gaping abyss between the present and a past about which they most eagerly and assiduously collect a mass of data all having in common that they have little or no bearing on the most urgent question of how we came to where we currently are. The present is an incomprehensible miracle against the background of what historians have said up until now about its antecedents, a little like the Goddess Athena spontaneously arising from the head of Zeus.[6] In this way, their whole effort seems to aim not at the overcoming of the immense distance between past and present but rather at collaborating with all those forces increasing it

as much as possible. No contemporary historian experiences any longer any urgency about this paramountly 'urgent' problem of how our past and our boisterous and so dangerously improvident present are related. The contrast with the historians I mentioned above, or for that matter, the Bodins, the Hobbess, the Kants, the Hegels and the Marxs of the past, could not be greater. Perhaps the last historian to recognize this reponsibility of the historian towards the present and the future has been Foucault – which might make us forgive him his sometimes outrageous blunders.

The obvious question is: How could this happen? Since this is an autobiographical essay I may be forgiven when recounting at this stage of my argument a recent experience of mine. A few months ago I spoke at a conference in Berlin dealing with the theme of 'Aesthetics and politics'. My own paper was, essentially, a plea for the rehabilitation of the notion of (aesthetic) unity in politics: in it I expressed my worries about the fragmentation of the contemporary political domain and argued that nowadays we can no longer distinguish between the important and the unimportant and that we will remain unable to bring any order to our list of (political) priorities as long as we have no conception of this unity. For only against the background of such a unity can we compare and order our social and political desiderata. We have all heard about the death of politics, about the incapacity of politics to address the big issues of the present and of our collective future, and my argument was that we can only breathe new life into politics again if we abandon our distrust of the notion of (aesthetic) unity. Now, this surely is a big theme for a paper and I shall be the first to recognize its many weaknesses, so I was prepared for the flak I anticipated from the audience. However, much to my bewilderment and even disgust, I discovered that nobody really cared about the main aim of my paper and that discussion of it immediately turned into a debate of the more abstruse aspects of Derridian deconstruction. I must confess that I could not quite hide my irritation and anger about what I could only see as a sad abortion of a, for me, absolutely crucial and most 'urgent' issue.

For me the experience was paradigmatic of much of what I resent in contemporary culture. To put it into one sentence, it is this lack of a sense of urgency that I so deeply deplore in contemporary culture and that manifests itself primarily in our habit to move almost automatically from a discussion of problem x to what has been written on problem x, or, worse still, to the problem of the writing about the problem x, or, even worse, to the problem of what others have written about the problem of writing about the problem x. This is what I find so absolutely suffocating about contemporary culture: it has become utterly incapable of any authentic and immediate contact with the world, it finds its centre of gravity exclusively in itself, and no longer in the realities that it should consider, it feels no other urge than to exclusively contemplate its own navel and to act on the narcissistic belief that one's navel is the centre of the world. It is as if a cabinet-maker would think that the secret of his craft lies in lofty speculations about the metaphysical status of his instruments, his hammer, his saw and his chisels. Now, if this has become the state of affairs in our discipline, who would not feel asphyxiated, who would not feel a desperate urge to throw open

the windows of this narrow and stuffy room we are living in and to breathe the fresh air of the outside world itself?

Undoubtedly many readers will now exclaim that this is an odd kind of lamentation for a historical theorist. For is not the Wittgensteinian preoccupation with the instruments we use for understanding the world instead of with the world itself, precisely what we have theory for? Is theory not necessarily and essentially a second-order activity? In order to deal with this I would like to turn to a marvellous passage in Thomas Mann's novel *Doktor Faustus*. As the reader will recall, Mann offers his readers the biography of the fictitious Adrian Leverkühn, living from 1885 to 1940 and arguably the greatest composer of his time (in all likelihood Mann had Schönberg in mind when he wrote the novel). The book's title is meant to suggest that Leverkühn could only achieve artistic genius after having signed, like Faust, a contract with the devil: for such was the state of music at the time that now new and revolutionary discoveries could be made in music only with the help of the devil. Music has moved outside the reach of ordinary human beings; it had made its pact with the devil, its fate was to become inhuman, in a way. It is here that the book is partly intended to be a parable of Germany's fate in the first half of the previous century. In what is probably the most interesting passage in the book, Leverkühn's Mephistopheles[7] comments on the desperate stage in which music and literature (for the book is also partly Mann's autobiography) find themselves now that all that is naïve, natural and self-evident has been tried – and found wanting. Listen to Mephistopheles' bleak account about music in the age of Arnold Schönberg – for doing so truly is as if one is looking into a mirror:

> what has been produced and still deserves to be taken seriously bears the traces of its painful birth and of outright aversion. … Composing itself has become an arduous task, desperately arduous even. If the act of creation has become incompatible with authenticity, how can one work? But this is how it is, my friend, the masterpiece, the work of art having its centre in itself, belongs to traditional art; modern, emancipated art rejects it Each superior composer has firmly in his mind the canon of what is forbidden, of what has been, and must be overcome, and this comprises all the means of tonality, hence all of traditional music. What has become inappropriate, a mere spent cliché, is determined by the canon. … Technique has become all-decisive, this is the only challenge the composer has to meet, and technique has become the only source of creative truth. Composing has been reduced to the status of merely being the solution of technical problems. Art has become critique – a most honorable occupation, who would deny this! So there is much disobedience in the strictest obedience; courage and a proud independence are part of this. But the threat of the uncreative, – what do you think? Is that still merely a threat, or has it become the bleak truth about art and music? … The dialectics of the history of music has killed the autonomous work of art. It has shrunk in time, it scorns temporal extension that is so much essential to the musical work of art, and thus empties it of meaning. Not out of impotence, not because of an incapacity of artistic

> composition. But because of the inexorable demand of density and compactness, a demand despising all that is superfluous, which ignores all rhetoric, destroys ornament, and which eliminates temporal extension, the life-form of all becoming. The work of art, time and appearance, are all abandoned to the critique.[8]

I apologize for this excessively long quote, but is this not an uncannily correct picture of our contemporary predicament? Is this not an apt summary of the glories, and especially of the miseries, of contemporary 'theory'? In short, is this not … us? Is it not true of contemporary theory that it bears the marks of its difficult and painful birth – and that it came into being without pleasure, without joy, without hope for the future, without the triumph of having opened up new vistas? Does it not bear all over its surface the indelible marks of its own helplessness and ultimate futility? Does it not seem as if we have now completely exhausted the treasure-house of cultural meaning we have inherited from Antiquity, from the Christian Middle Ages and the Enlightenment? Has not all authenticity gone from the fruits of our effort – and is not this precisely the price we have to pay for our unparalleled sophistication, for our continuous awareness of the presence of our intellectual ancestors, of the canon? The canon that we feel continuously compelled to escape from, that we must overcome and transcend, is precisely because of this so overwhelmingly present that even the most revolutionary effort invariably becomes one more sacrifice to the Gods of the reaction. 'There is much disobedience in the strictest obedience', indeed!, we obey when seeming, or hoping and trying to disobey, we are caught in the magic circle of our illustrious ancestors, and the more we try to break loose from them, the more we ultimately prove to be their docile predial slaves. Who has succeeded in saying anything really new and interesting in our field since, let us say, Habermas, Foucault, Pocock, Rorty or White; who still writes a large, coherent and ambitious *oeuvre,* inspired by a compelling master idea, in the way these authors still succeeded in doing? We are a generation of epigones condemned to repeat and to vary the work of our great predecessors, not because we do not work hard enough, not because we are less intelligent and less daring than them – perhaps we even work too hard and have become too intelligent – no, it is simply because for some perverse reason truly original work has become impossible. One desperately tries to discover some still untrodden path – only to find that somebody has been there already before us. Perhaps there are just too many of us, so that we all push each other out of business. So, perhaps, the bug killing historians only would not be such a bad idea, after all.

At this stage no present theorist[9] is of more interest than Derrida. What reader of his immense *oeuvre* will not be deeply impressed by the profundity of his insights, by his truly perplexing erudition, by his capacity to give a decisive twist to all previous discussions of the many authors he deals with? Indeed, after Derrida has read the work of an author, a poet or a philosopher, nothing remains to be said any more. We are then literally left speechless, without words. Derrida truly brings us to a farthest point beyond which we cannot go. This is where his work is truly revolutionary and why he rightly earned his name in the history of philosophy.

In a brilliant essay on Derrida, Richard Rorty argued that we should see Derrida 'as the latest development in the non-Kantian, dialectical tradition – the latest attempt of the dialecticians to shatter the Kantians' ingenuous image of themselves as accurately representing how things really are' (Rorty 1982: 93). Although I agree with the statement as it stands, I would wish to add that it perhaps does not yet go far enough. I mean, in Rorty's picture Derrida is still just one more *phase* in the 2000-year history of philosophical thought; within this picture he may be seen as inviting a new and still more sophisticated variant of 'Kantian' philosophy that we may expect for the future, suggesting in this way a position 'beyond Derrida'. But I believe Derrida to be more revolutionary than this, that his position is not a mere *phase* in that history, that, in this way, there is *no* 'beyond Derrida', and that no new variant of 'Kantianism' can be born from his stance. Here everything truly comes to a grinding halt. So his true achievement is to continuously get philosophy in an impasse, into a position where it becomes irreparably stuck and can no longer move on to a new phase. The whole dialectical impetus of the history of philosophy is then inadequate for moving beyond the impasse – and having found out about how to win this victory over the history of philosophy has been Derrida's immense and unprecedented achievement and why he has done something that was never done before. And that could also never be done *again*. In this way Derrida is like the French revolutionaries of 1789: the only real revolution is the first, the 'naïve' revolution, i.e. the French Revolution; all later revolutions could be mere imitations of *this* revolution and therefore no longer a revolution in the true sense of the word (recall Trotsky always asking himself what 'chapter' of the French Revolution he now was in with his own, Russian Revolution). So, people imitating Derrida (including Derrida himself insofar as he continuously imitates himself) have, in my view, not understood what Derrida's philosophy is all about. You cannot transform a revolution into a tradition and a tradition is never revolutionary.

This is where Derrida is the Adrian Leverkühn of contemporary culture, and where the impasse of Leverkühn, of Schönberg and of modern music, so strikingly resembles the impasse of Derridian deconstruction. In both cases, in that of Leverkühn and of Derrida, the whole weight of the tradition unleashes, on the one hand, a tremendous force, a force just as irresistible as the inertia of a huge satellite circling the Earth, whereas, on the other, the satellite is also subject to an equally strong gravitational pull from which no escape is possible. And, in both of these cases, these two tremendous forces seem to cancel each other out, and the result is stasis, a fixed orbit, an invincible impasse. We must continue, though we know that the journey leads nowhere – or, rather, to the confirmation over and over again *that* it leads nowhere, and that we got stuck forever in the same cultural orbit. 'What is boring has become interesting, because what is interesting has become boring',[10] as Mephistopheles most acutely and perceptively comments on the melancholic predicament of modern music. We became bored by what was done in traditional music, of philosophy, and precisely this made boredom (i.e. the impasse of the Leverkühns, the Schönbergs and the Derridas) so supremely interesting to us. To which I should add that from the philosopher's perspective no human mood is so interesting as boredom,

since in boredom and ennui the world may show itself to us in its naked, quasi-noumenal quality.[11] This is where boredom and trauma come quite close to each other – though from entirely different directions and where both have the sublime as their shared basis. I shall return to this issue of trauma and boredom below.

5 History, aesthetics and politics

I must now recall to mind what was said above about prejudice, namely that prejudice may make us reject an argument even though nothing seems to be wrong with the argument. And, indeed, this is what is at stake here. As I said in the previous section, I can well understand why some hidden but inexorable dialectical logic of Western culture since the Enlightenment has made us end up with the Leverkühns, the Schönbergs and the Derridas of the present – but from whatever angle I look at it, this is a position giving me neither pleasure nor satisfaction. Let me put it in the following, admittedly rather simplistic, way. Why do we read at all the books written by our eminent colleagues, why do we listen to music and why do we visit picture galleries? For me this is in order to get a message that is 'new' to me and that might somehow change my intellectual constitution (for the better, as I would hope). For only such corrective changes can give me the conviction to be in touch with the world in some way or other. But the endlessly repeated message of the Leverkühns and the Derridas is that 'newness' is an illusion; and the truly unprecedented intellectual effort of the whole of our culture has shrunk into making this point over and over again (as Mann put it so eloquently in the passage I quoted in the previous section). The message always is that we are caught up in some ultimate catch-22 that history has prepared for us and that we will be out of touch with things forever. But if this is the case, why should we listen to modern music any more, why should we read philosophy, literature, why should we be interested in the fruits of modern culture if all that we can expect from the (strenuous) effort of digesting them is having this bleak message repeated to us again and again? What could we possibly gain from this over-laborious nihilist masquerade? I cannot help feeling that somehow, something must have gone terribly wrong.

Now, when trusting my prejudices (one's ultimate guide, as I would venture to say) and when asking myself how to avoid the impasses of contemporary culture, how to make history and historical theory interesting and relevant again, I have always had the highest hopes of politics and of aesthetics. The explanation is that history, politics and aesthetics have one shared root – and this is the notion of *representation*. This is also why the notion of representation has been central in my writings over the past twenty years – together with that of experience it does all the work. The function of the notion of representation in aesthetics will need little clarification – for is not aesthetics the domain of artistic representation? But it has always been my wish to free aesthetics and representation from an exclusive association with the arts and to suggest that new light may be shed on many domains of the *condition humaine* with the help of aesthetics and representation. That is to say, my effort is emphatically *not* an aestheticization of these other domains (such as history and politics) but to make us

aware that the intellectual operation of representation is omnipresent in our lives and that much of our lives will therefore remain a mystery to us, if we do not ask ourselves how to make sense of it in terms of representation. For one thing, in this way representation is for me an indispensable complement to epistemology. Epistemology asks the question of how language hooks on to the world; and we know how successful epistemology has been in answering this question for well-defined uses of language such as the singular statement or the scientific theory. But epistemology is utterly helpless if confronted with the types of complex text we may find in novels, in historical writing, in articles in the newspapers, in the kinds of stories that we tell each other daily. And then we must appeal to representation. The statement is epistemological, the text is representational; and whoever tries to understand the text with the means of epistemology is condemned to impotence.

That history offers us 'representations of the past' will meet with little opposition (I shall return to this issue in the next section). With regard to politics, one might argue, first, that our contemporary political systems most often are representative democracies and, in the second place, with Machiavelli, that all politics is representational since politics always requires us to see the world (including ourselves) through the eyes of others and, hence, in terms of the representations *they* have of it. The political domain is a system of mirrors where the representation by one mirror is represented to the next one, and so on *ad infinitum*. But most decisive is the argument that each political decision, and each political action, presupposes an assessment of the relevant part of the social and political domain, and that these assessments obey the same (representationalist) logic as in the writing of history. Hence, history and politics share the same logic since both belong to the realm of representation. Politics is history *in actu;* and history is at the basis of all meaningful politics. No history without politics, and vice versa; I am convinced that little would be left of history if all of its potentially political meanings were taken out of it.[12]

6 Representation

I should add, at this stage, that the nature of (aesthetic) representation as we may find it in the writing of history and in the practice of politics has until now, in my opinion, been insufficiently investigated. What is at stake here is basically this. Most of the contemporary philosophy of language tends to focus on problems occasioned by description – this is where most epistemological discussions on truth, reference and meaning have their origin. One may add that even philosophy of science, for all its unequalled sophistication, is a derivative of the problem of description. Now, the crucial datum here is that description and representation are different things and that each effort to model the one on the other is doomed to failure. The difference is that in the case of description one can always distinguish between reference (subject-term) and predication (predicate-term), whereas in the case of representation no such distinction is possible. Think of a portrait – self-evidently the representation *par excellence*. Here one cannot tell apart those parts of the painting that refer exclusively from those that have an exclusively predicative function. The same is true of historical

representation. Take, for example, a historical representation of the phenomenon known as Enlightened Despotism. You cannot pinpoint certain parts, or aspects of such a text, that refer exclusively to Enlightened Despotism, whereas other parts or aspects attribute certain properties exclusively to the text's alleged object of reference. The distinction between reference and predication is here just as useless and inapplicable a notion as in the case of the portrait. As a consequence, there is always a looseness and indeterminacy in the relationship between language and the world not having its counterpart in the case of description. To put it metaphorically, in description reference (subject-term) and meaning (predicate-term) function as two screws tying language firmly to the world; whereas such reliable screws are lacking in representation. This indeterminacy is not some regrettable feature of (historical) representation that has to be overcome in some way or other (for example, by changing history into a science). On the contrary, all that is of interest in (historical) representation and all progress in representation (and progress there is in historical representation – who could possibly doubt this!) is only possible thanks to this indeterminacy. Similarly, this indeterminacy and the absence of such 'screws' tying language to the world do not in the least justify the inference that there should be no criteria for representational adequacy; and on several occasions I have tried to define the nature of these criteria.[13]

Next, with regard to politics, if representation is the notion I would propose for linking history and politics, the implication is that I would tend to relate politics to the question of how politics can or should implement the desires of the electorate rather than to questions of political morality, of distributive justice, of the moral obligations of the citizen towards his fellow citizens or of the political ideologies arising from such moral considerations. So, within the representationalist matrix the emphasis is above all on the interaction between the citizen (the represented) and the state (representation) and not on moral demands outside this interaction. It suggests therefore a kind of political theory that is mainly practical and attempting to deal with issues of political expediency and of how making governance more responsive to the electorate's wishes, and, more specifically, the issue of what is the matrix within which responsive government should be defined. With regard to the latter question, the beginning of all wisdom is that there is always a difference between a represented and its representation. A portrait is not identical to its sitter. And, as Edmund Burke already pointed out in the letter he wrote in 1774 to his voters in Bristol (Burke 1866: 95, 96), the implication is that the state (or Parliament, or the politician) should always possess a certain autonomy with regard to the electorate or the citizen. If one dislikes this conclusion, one should abandon one's confidence in representative democracy. Several conclusions follow from this. In the first place, that all legitimate political power has its origin in this tension between, or in this not being identical to, the represented (the electorate) and its representation (the state). So, in the first place, legitimate political power is an essentially *aesthetic* phenomenon and, in the second place, legitimate political power originates in the distance between, or difference of, the represented and its representation. So this means the rejection of both theories of popular sovereignty, where the represented electorate is

the source of all legitimate political power and of all variants of despotism locating this source in the divine right of kings, in hereditary monarchy or in ideological revelations (Ankersmit 2002: ch. 4).

Next, since the interaction between the electorate and the state is the heart of representative democracy, the health of a representative democracy is in danger as soon as parts of the political machinery outside this interaction begin to dominate the process of political decision-making. This is not the place for a lengthy and detailed diagnosis of our contemporary democracies, so suffice it to refer here to the phenomenon that has come to be known as 'the displacement of politics', i.e. the fact that the political centre is no longer the place where the political decisions are taken that will determine our collective future. Politics has moved from the centre to the periphery, to Brussels (in the case of EU), to places of contact between the state, the market and civil society (so-called 'co-management') and, above all, to departmental bureaucracies. Two reactions are possible. One can acquiesce in this phenomenon and see it as a perhaps regrettable but inevitable adaptation of democracy to the challenges of the information age – or perhaps even applaud it as giving us a new, higher and more efficient variant of democracy. But one can also see it as a most serious threat to what democracy is and should be, and as a denial of the citizen's right and obligation to decide about his own future. Needless to say, I would opt for the latter, more pessimistic view.

Thus, my main problem, as a political theorist, is how to undo the obfuscation of the people's will because of this displacement of politics. One had best deal with this problem, I believe, by substantially enlarging the scope of the activities of the people's representatives – especially by involving them in the departmental preparation of public decision-making. For departmental bureaucracies are the worst contaminators of the interaction between the public and the state; they effect a corruption of representative democracy in the truest sense of the word unequalled anywhere else in the political domain, and one can only be amazed that nobody cares about this. The constitutional barrier between the executive and legislative powers used to be a guarantee of decent democratic government – but under the circumstances obtaining now it may actually kill it by keeping government bureaucracy outside the reach of Parliament. In sum, we must realize ourselves that a dramatic discrepancy has come into being between the official constitutional façade of our representative democracies and what are the realities of the exercise of political power. For a convinced democrat (such as I am), it is insane to acquiesce in this absurd situation any longer.

Admittedly, these are all fairly practical questions. But I think that in political theory there is an inverse relationship between abstraction and practical utility, and I wholly agree with Tocqueville's *obiter dictum* that in politics 'nothing is more improductive to the human mind than an abstract idea' (Tocqueville 1946: 243). But there is no rule without its exception. If we now have to worry about this displacement of politics and how it may pervert representative democracy, this is because of the fragmentation of the political domain and because there is no longer a centre, or a superior point of view from which these fragments can still be organized, either by political decision or even by merely intellectual effort. A necessary first step for

regaining control of these fragments is to rehabilitate the notion of (aesthetic) unity that was so much discredited by totalitarianism and by too ambitious ideological systems. For without the notions of unity and/or totality, democracy and creative politics are no longer possible; though we should avoid thinking of unity and totality as something that is given to us. This is the kind of unity that inspired totalitarian systems. Instead, we should recognize that each intuition of unity and totality can only be the result of painstaking research into the facts of social and political life, that such unities as we wish to discern can always be questioned, that they are necessarily provisional and that they can always be improved upon. In short, we must think here of how the historian may give us an understanding of the past by discerning a unity in the manifold of historical phenomena. This is the kind of unity that is politically not only innocuous, but is even the condition of all responsible decision-making in a decent democracy.[14]

7 Experience

There is one more issue I would like to discuss. This is the issue of experience – which will be the topic of a book to be published by Stanford University Press in 2004. I hit on the issue of experience after having argued,[15] along the lines suggested above, that coherence and unity are the historian's main instruments for making sense of the past. This view was problematized by the so-called 'micro-stories' that were written some twenty years ago by people such as Ginzburg, Le Roy Ladurie, Zemon-Davis or Medick (but that seem to have since then lost much of their popularity). For these micro-stories always focused on one tiny detail and were wholly unconcerned about unity and coherence. This may explain my fascination for the micro-stories at the time: they seemed to be at odds with all that I had been saying about the nature and purpose of historical writing.

Next, the micro-stories exemplified what one might associate with postmodernist historical writing since they so very clearly were the historiographical counterpart of the fragmentation thesis proposed by Lyotard in his *La Condition Postmoderne* of 1978. However, since I found the diagnosis that the micro-stories give us postmodernist historical writing a little meagre, I wanted a more satisfactory account – an account that would relate them in a meaningful way to traditional historical writing. The result was the idea that whereas traditional historical writing exemplified the triumph of language over the world (since unity is a property of the historian's language and not of the world), the micro-stories gave us an experience of the past (in which language makes itself subservient to how the world presents itself to us). For what these micro-stories seemed to do was to break down momentarily the barriers between the past and the present and to make us feel what it must have been like to live in thirteenth-century Montaillou or in the Friuli at the end of the sixteenth century. In this way the micro-stories could be said to give us an 'experience' of the past.

Although I now feel that I may have been too generous in my interpretation of the micro-stories, that the intellectual import of the micro-stories is negligible and that the fashion was little more than a temporary eccentricity, I retained from it a

fascination for the issue of experience versus language, and, more specifically, for how the issue would present itself in the writing of history. An answer immediately suggesting itself may be found in the cognate notions of trauma and of the sublime. For in both cases we have to do with an experience of the world that will not fit into the epistemological and psychological categories we have for making sense of the world. This endows the sublime and the traumatic experience with its unparalleled authenticity; for here do we experience the world 'as it is' and not as adapted to the categories normally guiding our understanding of the world. This may explain why I expected to find in trauma and in the sublime a link with what had interested me so much in the micro-stories.

The problem was, next, how to relate trauma and the sublime to historical writing. At this stage it may pay to consider a hypothesis suggested by Koselleck in a recent book. The hypothesis is 'that the profoundest insights in the past are to be expected from the vanquished party' (Koselleck 2000: 68). The idea is, roughly, that the representatives of a social and political elite that is about to be superseded by a new one are in the best position to know and to grasp what we stand to lose by our entry into a new world. They used to rule the world as a matter of course – and were believed to possess the knowledge required for doing so – and now they are forced to recognize that this knowledge and understanding is of no use any more. So when they give an account of the world that *they* have lost with the emergence of a new social and political dispensation, they are in the best position to measure the distance between past and present. As Koselleck puts it:

> it is different with the vanquished. Their primary experience is, above all, that it all went different from how things had been planned and expected to go. Hence, if they demand an explanation, it must be all the more difficult and problematic to them to achieve a satisfactory understanding of why things turned out so dramatically different from what they had hoped for. And this will stimulate in them a search for long-term explanations, that will transcend the whims of pure coincidence.[16]

The elites vanquished by the inexorable course of history will be most open to and most fascinated by historical fate as manifesting itself in the guise of long-term developments. This is to such an extent that one may well surmise that the very notion of long-term development is itself the indelible sign of the historical consciousness of a superseded elite. To put it provocatively, the best historian naturally is the *conservative* historian – which does not mean, of course, that all conservatives should be good historians. Far from it. Moreover, it goes without saying that Koselleck's thesis exclusively applies to the 'interesting historians' and in whose writings the drama of history truly resonates, and not to the practitioners of a more modestly antiquarian approach to the past (which is, for that matter, by no means a belittling of the latter's work). One may think here of a Thucydides, a Tacitus or Clarendon. And, especially, as Koselleck points out himself, of Tocqueville (Koselleck 2000: 75ff.). For the aristocrat Tocqueville the new, post-revolutionary democratic order was something of a sublime reality[17] that he rejected spontaneously but nevertheless

was willing to accept because he understood better than any of his contemporaries that it was, for better or for worse, our ineluctable future. Indeed, no bourgeois could ever have been capable of the supreme historical insight as expressed in Tocqueville's historical and political writings. But the historian who fits the bill best is undoubtedly Jakob Burckhardt – as I hope to demonstrate in my forthcoming book on historical experience.

In sum, if we wish to study trauma and the sublime in history we should focus on periods in the history of the West of cataclysmic change and in which the awareness of the loss of the past has taken on the characteristics of the sublime. Two comments are relevant here. In the first place, trauma (and the sublime) are seen here in a context that is quite different from the one we will find in Dominick LaCapra's recent work on trauma (LaCapra 1998). For LaCapra, the subjects of trauma are still individual people, though these people may experience trauma collectively, as was the case in the Holocaust. In my approach, however, Western civilization is the subject of trauma; my question is how Western civilization, *as such,* dealt with its greatest crises. We may think here of the dissolution of the medieval order as recorded in the writings of Machiavelli and Guicciardini (Ankersmit 1998) or of the tragedy of the French Revolution and its aftermath (Ankersmit 2001b). And there is no evidence, as yet, that the Holocaust has been such a traumatic experience in *this* sense – perhaps because the perpetrators of this unprecedented crime were vanquished in the Second World War and because their actions did not and could not become part of our collective future. This is where the Holocaust differs most conspicuously from the Renaissance's rupture with the medieval past or from what Eric Hobsbawm has so famously dubbed 'the Dual Revolution'. For the drama of these crises was the fact that the traumatic event could *not* be discarded, could *not* be neutralized by refusing it to become part of the traumatized subject's present and future identity (in the way that our present civilization could not possibly conceive of the Holocaust as a part of our postwar identity). What Hitler and his henchmen left to posterity is something only to be avoided and that could under no circumstances be a legitimate part of our future. Put provocatively, it would be a moral infamy if the Holocaust would have unleashed a historical trauma, as I understand this notion. For this would prove that we would have accepted Hitler's legacy somehow.

In the second place, the approach proposed here places us squarely in the field of the history of historical writing. For it will need no clarification that traumatic experiences such as these must belong to the most powerful and decisive determinants of historical writing. Indeed, the Renaissance's trauma occasioned by the awareness that our collective fate is in our own hands (and not in those of God) and that we therefore must assume full responsibilty for the disasters of history gave us, with Machiavelli and Guicciardini, an entirely new kind of historical consciousness and a new variant of historical writing. And, as everybody knows, the collective trauma of the French Revolution and of the Napoleonic Wars gave us historicism – hence the historiographical paradigm within which we are still writing history.[18]

Finally, in the foregoing I closely related trauma and the sublime – and one might well say that trauma is the psychological counterpart of the sublime, whereas the

sublime is the epistemological counterpart of trauma. It follows that the issue of historical trauma will also have its spin-off for epistemology. Let me add a few comments to this. Although many definitions of the sublime have been given, the common denominator in all these definitions is that the sublime gives us an experience of the world prior to, or transcending, the kind of experience that is investigated by epistemology (i.e. the philosophical subdiscipline investigating how language and reality are hooked on to each other). Here we experience the world unmediated by our cognitive apparatus and, hence, in its quasi-noumenal nakedness. The sublime experience is thus the most authentic experience of the world that we can think of – and it is a strange and daunting reflection that the world reveals the truth about itself only under the dark and threatening sky of trauma and the terrible.

Now, since dealing with the sublime and collective trauma (again, not in the sense meant by LaCapra, but as understood here) has been so decisive for the formation of our discipline, one cannot doubt that our discipline is a most appropriate background for raising the question of the sublime and of how the sublime may complicate contemporary discussions of the way language relates to the world. Let me put it as follows. Historical writing gives us representations of the past and where I use the term 'representation' in the sense as defined above. Now, many, if not most, historical representations clearly lack the stamp of the sublime: what could possibly be sublime about a history of Greek pottery in the fourth century BC? So, under what circumstances can representation make us enter the domain of the sublime? As will be clear from the foregoing, experience makes all the difference. Without experience, no sublimity. But, similarly, most experience has nothing to do with the sublime. Thus, the question is this: When is (historical) representation the representation of sublime experience?

In a future book I shall deal with this question at length, and I expect that an answer may be found in that most subtle of all ontologies devised in the history of Western philosophy: Leibniz's monadology. This may surprise at first sight since in Leibniz's system experience has no role of any significance to play, let alone that there should be room in it for so dramatic a thing as sublime experience. No historian writing the history of the notion of experience will feel compelled to pay much attention to what Leibniz said on experience; and one need only think of the *Nouveaux essais,* in which Leibniz comments on Locke's empirism, to recognize why. But a quite different story may also be told about Leibniz. For one might also argue that a monad's or a substance's perceptions are, in fact, its *experiences*. But this is only the beginning. For observe that almost all theories of experience distinguish between experience and a subject of experience. Yet in Leibniz's theory monads consist of their perceptions (or experiences) only; or, to put it differently, in his monadology there are no subjects *having* experiences, subjects simply *are* their experiences and nothing beyond this. So, in fact, there is nothing outside experience in Leibniz's monadology. Put differently, Leibniz gives us *experience without a subject of experience* – and this is what we need from the perspective of the sublime, since the weight of a subject of experience preceding experience will inevitably destroy the sublime by forcing it willy-nilly in the history of the subject and by 'domesticating' it as a mere part of this history.

For the historical theorist this is of interest for two reasons. The relationship obtaining between a monad or substance and its perceptions or experience is exactly the same as that between a historical representation and the statements from which it is constructed. This is why Leibniz's intensional logic is the kind of logic we need for understanding historical writing.[19] But in the second place, Leibniz's monadology is mainly an attempt to explain how our conception of the phenomenal world and how our notions of the things it contains arise out of the manifold of the monad's perceptions (or experiences). This is, obviously, exactly the same traject that is at stake in the case of the sublime, insofar as the sublime is also an experience without a subject of experience and an experience preceding our experience of phenomenal reality. Even this is not yet all. Recall that science investigates phenomenal reality and we will then see that Leibniz's monadology reduces us to a stage preceding science, or, more specifically, to a stage preceding the divergence of science and history. As was already emphasized some eighty years ago by Dietrich Mahnke (Mahnke 1925), the implication is that Leibniz's monadology is the ontology that is ideally suited to explaining the logical differences between science and history or the humanities. In addition, though we have been wrestling with this issue for little less than two centuries, we still have no satisfactory answer to this absolutely crucial question. So this is what I hope to devote all my energy to in the future.

8 Finally: historical theory

I wish to end my story with a few comments about the present state of our discipline, i.e. of historical theory. It cannot be doubted that the discipline has a long though chequered history that is most intricately related to the history of historical writing itself. It achieved its greatest successes in the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the hands of the neo-Kantians of the end of the nineteenth century it even became the major preoccupation of all the leading philosophers and intellectuals of the period. At that time the discipline reached the pinnacle of its glory after which an inevitable decline set in. However, a sudden and unexpected upswing took place in the third quarter of the twentieth century, for, whatever one may think of the 'covering law model' debate, it temporarily assigned to the writing of history a most prominent place on the philosopher's agenda. But historical theory soon withdrew again from the main scene of the philosopher's preoccupations because of the renaissance of hermeneutic theories as we may find in the work of theorists such as Dray, Von Wright, Rex Martin, Ricoeur or Carr – whose profundity and intellectual richness I do not doubt for a moment, I hasten to add. The advantage was that historical theory now became a more or less independent discipline; but the price to be paid was that most philosophers soon lost interest in it and that it was no longer involved in the most important debates taking place in the world of contemporary philosophy. Worse still, since then the discipline has commanded little respect (to put it mildly) among philosophers. Arthur Danto once told me that, in his experience, contemporary philosophers tend to look at historical theory in the same way that musicologists tend to look at military music; hence as a noisy and somewhat silly

pastime for less talented amateurs and whose company you should avoid if you wish to be taken seriously by your colleagues.

A new phase began with Hayden White's uniquely influential *Metahistory* (and with Ricoeur's learned and impressive trilogy *Time and Narrative*); and one may well say that White's work was a kind of Eiffel Tower in the discipline by being just as dominating as this amazing structure. Even more so, one may well wonder what would have been left of the discipline without his intervention; in all likelihood the discipline would have quietly dissolved some two decades ago and nobody would have regretted its disappearance – or even noticed it at all. Indeed, in the wake of his writings much important work has and still is being done. On the face of it, the discipline is in good shape. It finds a most powerful support in four excellent journals: *Rethinking History, History and Theory, Clio* and *History and Memory*. Next, a new kind of historiography came into being thanks to White's introduction of literary theory in the field of historical theory. Last but not least, there is a steady output of books and articles on historical theory, and this production is conspicuous for its erudition, originality, scope, and for the profundity of its scholarship.

Nevertheless, not all is well in the world of historical theory. Partly, the discipline suffers from the kind of cultural lassitude I referred to above when commenting on Mann's *Doktor Faustus*. Our discipline also knows this melancholic cult of the boring and this lack of a sense of any urgency about what one is doing; as is the case everywhere else historical theorists also prefer to address each other instead of new and real problems. And, in our discipline this has led, again as elsewhere, to this absurd modern cult of the conference and to the wholly idle expectation that huddling together somewhere in order to discuss an issue could ever help to shed some new light on it. Whereas, I suppose, everybody knows in the depth of his or her own heart that in disciplines such as ours all that really counts happens in the seclusion of our studies. Conferences serve their purpose in the sciences, but in our disciplines they are a waste of time and money. If I may speak for myself, I have never learned a single thing from a conference; though I readily concede that it is nice to meet one's colleagues now and again.

But this is not all, I am afraid. There is, in the first place, the regrettable fact that an open-minded discussion in which argument is decisive has proven to be impossible in our discipline since the days of the 'covering law model' debate. Everybody speaks only for his or her own rank and file; and in the rare cases where different approaches really confront each other, debate never gets beyond the stage of a wholly predictable reiteration of one's own theoretical presuppositions. Because of this, discussion in our discipline is dead before it is even born. Furthermore, as was to be expected, this absence of debate has also invited a penchant for idle speculation and irresponsible argument that one will not often encounter in other fields of philosophical research. There is no longer an effective mechanism to correct patent absurdities. This is what I personally find the most depressing feature of our discipline and the most difficult to live with.

However, the major shortcoming of historical theory since the Second World War is, in my view, that the writing of history was always approached from the perspective

of some cognate discipline. Thus the 'covering law model' debate was provoked by the question of how to fit historical writing into the kinds of explanatory structure we find in the sciences; hermeneutics drew its inspiration from neo-Kantian, or existentialist (Heideggerian) anthropology and, at a third stage, most narrativists (though not all – L. O. Mink[20] being a most notable exception) discovered in literary theory their intellectual arsenal. I would be the last to say that anything is wrong with this, but it cannot be doubted that this seriously handicapped historical theorists in their effort to make sense of the writing of history. More specifically, it may explain why there has been no real progress in our discipline since White. For let us be quite honest and candid about this: we are still doing essentially the same things that White had already put on the agenda some thirty years ago.[21] Progress is only to be expected when some young colleague, still unknown to all of us, will hit upon some hitherto unnoticed field of intellectual endeavour and discover there the tools promising new and important insights into the nature of historical writing.

Finally, since I happen myself not to be a champion of this strategy of borrowing from elsewhere, this may also explain why the *ceterum censeo* in all my writings has always been an adhortation to return to the historicism of Herder, Ranke, Humboldt and so on, and hence to the only variant of history theory having in the practice of historical writing its exclusive source of inspiration. Historicism is *no* import from the outside: it was developed by *historians* with no other purpose than to understand the nature of *historical writing*. For me, historicism is still the alpha and the omega of all wisdom in our discipline. Of course, I would not wish to imply that historicism should be the last word about the nature of historical writing. On the contrary; it is certainly defective in many important respects. But I remain convinced that no theory of history deserves to be taken seriously that has not somehow or somewhere passed the test of historicism. If you read a book on historical theory and it fails to deal with historicism, you may go on to read it for many excellent reasons, but you can also be sure that it will not contribute one iota to your understanding of the nature of historical writing.

And this last claim sums up, in fact, all of my story here.

Notes

1 'Das Langweilige ist interessant geworden, weil das Interessante angefangen hat langweilig zu werden', see Mann 1990 [1947]: 320.
2 For a discussion of the Enlightenment's, of Edmund Burke's and of Gadamer's views on prejudice, see my *Political Representation* (2002: 38–44).
3 Collingwood 1940: 29. For an excellent discussion of Collingwood's theory of absolute presuppositions, see P. Skagestad, *Making Sense of History. The Philosophies of Popper and Collingwood,* Oslo 1975, chs 8 and 9.
4 Think of the duck-rabbit drawing: you see here either a duck or a rabbit, but it is nonsensical to hope for a compromise or balance of these two Gestalts.
5 Perhaps one could explain the difference between the conservative and the progressive mind in terms of the amount of inconstancy that each can sustain in its system of prejudices without collapsing.
6 I admit that I am unable to substantiate this claim and that it is a gut-feeling rather than that I could say: 'We need a book on topic a or b'. It is as if somebody would have had a

vague though strong feeling that something like a socioeconomic explanation of the French Revolution is what was needed, before such explanations came *en vogue* with Thierry, Marx, Matthiez, Aulard and so on. It is as if there is some deeper layer in our relationship to the past that has not yet been identified by historians – which lends to the emergence of our present from the past this unpleasant aura of the miraculous. You feel that something more is needed than what historians presently give you, but you do not know *what* this is, paradoxically because what you miss is something so very fundamental. In history it is far easier to see 'small' things than 'large' and fundamental things. I add that questions like these are, in my view, the really 'urgent' questions of historical theory, namely the familiar question of 'How do historians explain the past?' is infinitely less urgent than the question 'Do historians actually succeed in explaining the past, c.q. the present at all?', that is, 'Do they really strike the layer where we can see how the present evolved out of the past?' With regard to historical explanation, these 'what'-questions are far more interesting than the time-worn 'how'-question.

7 Giving himself here the name of Sammael (the angel of poison). See Mann 1990 [1947]: 306 (my translation).
8 Ibid.: 320–3.
9 Needless to say, I am talking here only of philosophers and theorists dealing with the problems occasioned by the humanities.
10 See the epigraph to this essay.
11 See the last chapter of my *History and Tropology* (1994).
12 This is the argument in the last chapter of my *Historical Representation* (2001a).
13 Most recently in the first two chapters of my *Historical Representation* (2001a).
14 I could send the reader a more detailed statement of the present argument, in case he or she would be interested in it (*f.r.ankersmit@let.rug.nl*).
15 Especially in my *Narrative Logic* (1983).
16 Koselleck 2000: 68.
17 For an exposition of the role of paradox and of the sublime in Tocqueville's political and historical writings, see Ankersmit 1997: ch. 6.
18 For a brilliant exposition of how the trauma of the French Revolution resulted in a new historical consciousness, see Runia (2004).
19 As I have tried to demonstrate in my *Narrative Logic* (1984) and that I still consider to be the best thing I have written on historical theory.
20 Whose work on historical narrative deserves, in my opinion, more attention than it is currently given.
21 In 1986 I published (in Dutch) a 350-page book on what was then the state of the art in historical theory and I have sometimes played with the idea of an English translation. When thinking this over, I always came to the somewhat unsettling conclusion that I would not have to change a great deal in this text of fifteen years ago, because (apart from the memory and the Holocaust issues) nothing much has really happened in our field since then.

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9

CONFESSIONS OF A POSTMODERN (?) HISTORIAN

Robert A. Rosenstone

Co-founder of the journal *Rethinking History*, Robert A. Rosenstone is known for his understanding and interrogation of both literary style and historical thinking and practice. An author and biographer as well as one of the leading analysts of history on film, he admits to his first love being literature, which combined with his openness to postmodernism produced a unique understanding of the possibilities – the experimental possibilities – in creating history. These possibilities were examined in his path-breaking innovative text *Mirror in the Shrine* (1988). In this essay, Rosenstone elegantly explains why histories are not past realities reincarnated. This is what led him to evaluate the relationship between the past and history on or as film, and his judgement that film-makers can be historians, although the rules of engagement between film as a form and the past as content must be different from whatever rules govern written history. However, both forms remain legitimate in their own ways.

I never wanted to be a historian. Not in high school, where I fell in love with Thomas Wolfe and wanted to write novels full of the mournful sound of railroad horns in the great and lonely American night. Not in college where, as a lit major, my passion shifted to the writers of the Lost Generation, and especially Hemingway, who was always facing danger, at the front lines, in jungles or the bullring, calmly reporting on wars and death in the afternoon. Not in the first year of grad school, when I took a Master's Degree in journalism to prepare myself for a life as world traveler, reporter, novelist, lover, and witness to or participant in wars and revolutions.

Only after two years of professional journalism and God knows how many late afternoon martinis and packs of cigarettes and stories written in half an hour and cut from six paragraphs to one by editors incapable of recognizing my great reportorial talents, did I begin to think of history as a possible profession. A friend had already received a PhD in the subject and was teaching at a university. It seemed like a pretty cushy life. Academia could be a kind of refuge for a writer. A place where you could

take time to write books on topics that would let you travel to the sites of social and political upheavals in far-off countries.

I mention all this at the outset because these reasons seem so different from those of other historians who have written about their lives, particularly those who have undertaken the new form of essay of which this is an example, something the French call *ego-histoire*. Since the original collection in France in 1987, *Essais d'ego-histoire,* edited by Pierre Nora, academics from other countries have gotten into the act of describing how their personal lives have impacted the history they have chosen to write. For the most part the authors of such essays are historians well towards the end of long careers. It startles me to read their accounts and learn to what an early age, sometimes to infancy, some of them can trace the roots of their desire to become historians. Often this decision seems tied up with their parents and their heritage, a kind of homage to the glories of a particular region or the larger culture of their native land.

It was never that way with me. At least I never exactly had a single heritage to embrace – other than Judaism, which I was raised pretty much to ignore. Born in Montreal, I was taken to California by my parents at the age of 10. My father was originally from Tetscani, a small town in that part of Romania known as Moldavia, but he had also lived in Moinesti, birthplace of Tristan Tzara, one of the original Zurich Dadaists (Tzara's name, Sami Rosenstock, was close enough to that of my father, Lazar Rotenstein, to always allow me to feel some kindred spirit in Dadaists' antics, and I have wondered for years how one might write a Dada work of history). My mother was born in London, but her father and mother had lived there for only five years; England was a kind of stopover on their way from Hasenpoth, a tiny town in Latvia, to Canada. My paternal grandfather seems to have been born in Odessa (nobody is certain), and his wife somewhere in Poland. My maternal grandfather and grandmother were from small towns in Latvia, but my grandmother always staunchly maintained that her husband was in fact an illegitimate child sired by a member of the Tsar's family.

Such a background could, I suppose, have had the effect of making me into an ardent American historian who clung to a new world identity for security and sang the praises of his adopted land. But in fact it seems to have had the opposite effect, letting me be less attached not only to the idea of values adhering to a particular nation or group, but also to any specific historical tradition. It may also have prepared me to be open to the deconstructive and decentering spirit of postmodernism when they came along some decades later.

Literature was my first love. Truth was the word on the page. In college I enrolled in a single history course, British history, and only because it was required of English majors. For me, literature was history, and history literature. Novels such as *The Sun Also Rises, U.S.A., Light in August, Grapes of Wrath, The Stranger, The Counterfeiters, Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, The Red and the Black, War and Peace, The Conformist, Christ Stopped at Eboli, Zorba the Greek, Bread and Wine, A Tale of Two Cities* – all these not only took place in the past, they seemed truer than any work of history in the sense that they brought the world alive in a way that historical writing never did.

Novels made you care about what happened in the past. They didn't just explain it, they made you feel as if you had been there. That was what I wanted from the past. That was what I believed history should do.

The literature I liked best was that in which lots of stuff happens – wars or strikes are won or lost, revolutions take place, and people triumph or suffer and die but provide hope for others in the future. I cared less about victory than about the good fight. Not for me the introspective works in which people sit around, agonizing over their own psyches and over what should happen, or what has already happened, or maybe what shouldn't have happened even if it did. I was interested not in those at the top, the rulers and generals who imagine they alone are shakers of the world, but in the victims, the strugglers against injustice, those who took unpopular stands, stirred up the masses, showed the victims of history that they need be victims no longer but could take history into their own hands.

My heroes were outsiders and loners, freethinkers and radicals misunderstood by their families, often those who escaped from normal middle-class life. Some were literary characters, some historical. I didn't much differentiate between the two. I was never one for great names like Lenin or Marx. They were too established. Too conservative. My taste ran more to renegades like Leon Trotsky, who could write a history of the Russian Revolution while living it, or Emiliano Zapata, who walked away from the capital in Mexico City to return to his *campesinos* in Morelos, as well as to the unnamed leaders of strikes who stood up to the police on picket lines and all others who voiced unpopular opinions and stood out against the tyranny of groups or governments. Thomas Paine. Eugene V. Debs. Big Bill Haywood of the Industrial Workers of the World. André Malraux. Ignazio Silone. The Communards. Spartacus. The founders of the NAACP. The Populists, but certainly not William Jennings Bryan, who, as H. L. Mencken showed us, was a ridiculous figure.

Given this identification with the underdog, it was natural enough that when it came to choosing a topic for a doctoral dissertation I would want to write a story about heroic losers such as the Lincoln Battalion, the Americans who fought in the Spanish Civil War. My choice may have had as much to do with the wonderful songs of the war as with the history – the ponderous dirges of the German members of the International Brigades, *Die Moorsoldaten* and *Hans Beimler, Komissar,* which seem to say the world is ending, and not a moment too soon; the jaunty American country tunes, sung in the scratchy twang of Woody Guthrie, who could turn *Red River Valley* into a haunting Loyalist lament ('There's a Valley in Spain called Jarama/ It's a place that we all know so well/For it's there that we fought against the fascists/ And saw a peaceful valley turned to hell.'); the Spanish laments, *Quinto Regimiento, Quince Brigada, Frente de Gandesa, Los quatro generales,* touched by the fire of flamenco and the *corrida,* by love and death in the afternoon ('Si mi quieres escribir/tu sabes mi paradero/en el frente de Gandesa/para las lineas del fuego'). Songs of mourning for lost battles that in later years I will, after too much wine, sing at faculty parties while colleagues stare solemnly at their shoes.

I first heard these songs from my traveling companion on a trip to Spain in 1958, a trip during which (I see in retrospect) a shift in my focus from literature to history

began, a shift from words on the page to the events which made those words possible. The journey was made under the sign of Hemingway. My goal was to attend the Fiesta de San Fermin, run in the streets of Pamplona before the bulls, and seek my own Lady Brett Ashley. But a Hollywood version of *The Sun Also Rises* had been released a few months earlier, and the town was so full of American college students that no rooms were available. My only night in Pamplona was spent trying to sleep with my head on the table of an outdoor café. The cold mountain rains arrived about 2 a.m. The *turista* a short time later. Ultimately my fiesta had little to do with bulls. What I remember best are the hours squatting in the public latrine under the main square, adding my foul smells to the noxious odors that already filled the windowless room.

My companion in Spain was a graduate in poli sci. A leftist, and something of an expert on the history of the Civil War, he seemed to have read everything – George Orwell, André Malraux, Arthur Koestler, Herbert Matthews, Franz Borkenau, Gustav Regler. He knew the names of the Loyalist generals (wonderful, romantic names like El Campesino, Vicente Rojo, Commandante Carlos) and provided me with an exciting history of the conflict – from the rising of the four generals against the Republic in July, 1936, through the long siege of Madrid, the bombing of Guernica by Hitler's Condor Legion, and the two-plus years of war during which the Republic, abandoned by the democratic powers and supported fitfully by the Soviet Union (which as payment made off with Spain's entire gold supply), was slowly strangled to death by the right-wing rebels, who were generously supported by Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. Central to his story was the saga of the International Brigades, the workers and leftists who flocked to Spain from all over the world to defend the Republic, and made a dramatic arrival in Madrid in November 1936, just in time to stop Franco's army on the outskirts of town.

Years later, when I first learned of Leon Trotsky's remark, *there is only partisan history,* it struck me as a simple truth. My dissertation and subsequent book, *Crusade of the Left,* on the Lincoln Brigade were certainly partisan (the title says it all), history as a kind of retroactive commitment to a particular cause. Commitment was so much in my consciousness (the International Brigaders were the good guys) that it allowed me to cast a critical eye over many things the Lincolns believed, said, and did without destroying my faith in the overall justice of their actions. In part this came out of my background in literature. Heroes were not at all interesting if they were stainless. The people I admired in literature (and in history) were those who made and kept their focus, despite obstacles, weaknesses, doubts, betrayals, mistakes, and guilt.

Research on the Lincoln Battalion in the early 1960s demanded a certain amount of bravado and cloak-and-dagger stuff. A few senior professors at UCLA thought the topic too radical and urged my adviser to point me towards something more respectable. The leading historian of the American Left answered my request for leads with a nasty letter suggesting the topic was not worth doing because the Lincolns were no more than a bunch of *Communists and liars*. (This is the open mind of the great historian? I wondered then. And still.) To meet members of the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, which then headed the Attorney General's list of

subversive organizations, I had to obtain a kind of left-wing security clearance. In an East Hollywood coffee shop three men questioned me closely on my political associations and beliefs. I almost blew it by saying that the Stalin–Hitler Pact had been wrong. Wrong? What did I mean? It was a brilliant tactical move by Stalin to buy time for his defense buildup. At least I knew enough not to counter with the questions: Why then was Stalin at the same time killing off all his top generals? Why did the Russian front collapse at the outset of the war?

The research trip to Spain in 1964 contained moments of surrealism. A captain in Figueras, a town not far from the Pyrenees, seemed to know nothing about the use of his fortress as a stopping place for International volunteers, but he showed me the spot, and the blood-stains still on the wall, where a certain Colonel Castro had been executed as a guerilla by Napoleon's troops in 1809. At the Hemeroteca, the great newspaper library in Madrid, a clerk told me with a straight face that not a single copy of any Spanish newspaper from the years of the Civil War had been preserved. In a convent in Granada, a young boy guided me to paintings of Christian martyrs flayed by the Romans, and told me they were pictures of what the Reds did to we Spanish during the Civil War. When I pointed out that the dates on the paintings were from the eighteenth century, he only looked puzzled and said: *But that's what the priests told us. Priests don't lie.*

Cast as a kind of drama, my dissertation (and the book it became) began with the arrival of the first International Brigades on November 7, 1936, marching up the Grand Via to take positions in University City and effectively stop Franco's assault on Madrid, and ended with the farewell parade for the Brigades almost two years later: *When the last soldiers tramped through Barcelona in October, 1938, and the cheers of the Spanish people thundered about them, the men of the Lincoln Battalion were marching into an unhappy denouement.* So much color (descriptions of landscape, battles, street fighting) and passion (words that evoke feeling, desire, loss) did it contain, that members of my doctoral committee went through it with a blue pencil to tone down the emotion. Even so, one conservative young scholar wasn't happy. On my orals he demanded to know why this was an important topic. What did it reveal about larger historical questions? I explained that it was a case study in the tradition of American radicalism. He grew red in the face and spluttered: *What tradition of radicalism?*

The date was May, 1964. Four months later the eruption of the Free Speech movement at Berkeley would mark the onset of years of activism that would shred the social bonds of America and add a major chapter to that tradition. But why be harsh with that professor? Academic history can easily blind you to the outside world. Reality seems to be set out neatly on the page. It is over, done with, its problems contained within the covers of the books we read and write. Three years in graduate school, and such attitudes were creeping over me. Call it acculturation into a profession. While writing on and identifying myself with the radicals of the 1930s, I was teaching sections of freshman history based on the old notion of a progressive America, where in time all the downtrodden were welcomed into the national barbecue and all problems solved by a rich and beneficent social order. To a radical student who argued that serious social questions were being ignored and that new, progressive

movements were on the way, I gently scoffed. He was young. Mistaken. Later he would understand. If only he took the time to study more history.

For the next few years, I tried to make history as well as write it. At least that's the way our actions in the late 1960s felt, as if one were connected to larger forces, even in the minor roles of making speeches, marching against the war, and helping a ghetto agency educate black high school dropouts. Radicalism was also fun, the counter-culture flavoring our days by adding sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll (what could be better than marching behind the Grateful Dead in a San Francisco anti-war parade?) to more sober activities like helping to get the Peace and Freedom Party under way. Inevitably, the mood inflected my scholarship. Not only minor forays like an essay on rock music as protest, but my major project, a biography of John Reed, the American poet, journalist, and revolutionary who spent time with Pancho Villa's cavalry, witnessed and played a tiny part in the Russian Revolution, and went on to pen the classic account of the Bolshevik takeover, *Ten Days That Shook the World*. A biography written in the 1930s by a Communist Party member Granville Hicks had emphasized politics and downplayed the vibrant, early twentieth-century counter-culture, centered in Greenwich Village, of which Reed was the so-called Golden Boy. His generation, like the one in which I was living, experimented freely with artforms, lifestyles, sexual activities, and even, I was pleased to learn, drugs (mostly mushrooms). One happy day in the Houghton Library, a photo of Reed's girlfriend, Louise Bryant, lying naked on the dunes of Provincetown, fell out of a 1914 letter. Rather than titillate, this image spoke of the continuity between our generations.

The radicalism of the past brought me into touch with the forces of history in the present as the FBI, the Soviet government (probably the KGB), and Richard Nixon all poked fingers into my research. The Feds by coming to interview (and possibly threaten? it was never clear) me after I spent a couple of hours at the Russian Embassy in DC, where I met the cultural attaché to obtain a visa to do research – and this on the day after the Kent State shootings, a day when hundreds of campuses erupted with demonstrations, some of them violent. The Soviets, first, by having two young diplomats (agents?) inside the embassy grill me about protest in America and rocket research at the school where I taught, the California Institute of Technology. (As if I knew.) And second, by having disappeared the man who invited me to Russia, the head of the American History Section of the Academy of Sciences. This meant I arrived in Moscow in the summer of 1972 with an invitation from someone who, officially, did not exist. Apart from viewing the sites of the revolution, my scholarly contacts were confined to one brief, formal meeting with some historians at the Academy of Science and an afternoon of research in the Lenin Library, where I never was allowed access to the Russian equivalent of xerox machines to make photocopies of material that I found. And, finally, Richard Nixon for having concluded that summer the first wheat deal that sent American grain to the Soviet Union, an action which slightly thawed the Cold War and improved scholarly contacts between the two countries. A few months after my return home, a Soviet scholar sent me xerox copies of thousands of pages from documents in the huge John Reed file from the Institute of Marxism-Leninism, the file I had gone to Russia to

see. I was the first scholar, Russian or otherwise, to use material from this archive in a published work.

The turn to biography was a step towards becoming the novelist I had once dreamed of being. Not that I knew this at the time. But I did understand that biography was seen (by historians) as different from history, perhaps because writing the story of a life has to raise the issue, if only at the edge of consciousness, of the decisive impact of the historian on the historical world. To make sense of the enormous number of details that comprise even a short life (Reed died at the age of 33), and to give that life some sort of meaning, I clearly was making choices that imposed a pattern on his days. The title, *Romantic Revolutionary,* underlined my theme: for this man the desire for self-expression and adventure preceded and led to an embrace of social upheaval; and, by implication, would have outlasted it. While the subtitle, *A Biography of John Reed,* expressed the growth of my understanding of the author's role in the making of the past. Saying not *The* but *A,* I might as well have been saying *My* biography of Reed.

The form I selected – unconsciously? aesthetically? intuitively? – high-lighted the teller as well as the tale. Following a prologue entitled *The Legend,* which consisted entirely of quotations about Reed made over a period of forty years, subsequent chapters were in normal, chronological order. Each began with a quotation from something Reed had written – a story, a poem, a journalistic report – during the period covered by the chapter. The following paragraphs explicated the quotation and underlined its sentiments as the theme or mood of that period of Reed's life, then went on to detail what he did and wrote during that time. A smart device I thought (and still think), though one mentioned by but a single one of more than fifty reviewers of the book. But clearly an artificial and arbitrary way to construct a life, as much the product of an author as of the past.

Published in 1975, *Romantic Revolutionary* was reviewed widely and positively in newspapers, magazines, and scholarly journals. It even won a small literary prize, and this long before it was used (more or less) as the basis of an Academy Award-winning film. One result was that, for the first (and only) time in my career, publishers flooded me with suggestions and proposals for new books. These fell into two categories – a biography of another early twentieth-century radical, say, one of Reed's friends like Max Eastman; or a general history of the Left in America, with a heavy emphasis on Reed's generation and the 1960s. Neither interested me. To do another biography of someone from the same milieu and generation seemed about as interesting as returning to school to retake the same graduate seminars: how would you stay awake? A history of radicalism posed some of the same problems. I had already done two books in the field. What could I learn from doing another one, except more details? My feeling was much like the one expressed by Marcel Duchamp who, when asked why he gave up painting, answered: *Too much filling in*. John Reed saw life as an adventure, a process of seeking to test oneself in new circumstances and forms. I saw the practice of history the same way.

I read the proofs for *Romantic Revolutionary* sitting under a *kotatsu* (a low table with a blanket over it and a heat lamp beneath) in a tiny house in Fukuoka, Japan, which

had no other form of heating. Snow was on the ground in my garden. I was here on a Fulbright Fellowship, teaching at Kyushu University. Applying for Japan had been more than a whim. The culture of that country, as transmitted by Beat generation poets and in the Zen writings of D. T. Suzuki, had long fascinated me, and this interest was only sharpened by the fashion for the East, its religions and mystical traditions, that made the 1960s counter-culture a stew comprising Taoism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Tantrism, and Sufism, to name only the most obvious ingredients. Yet as a historian, I understood that those traditions did not belong in one pot, but were mutually exclusive, and had arisen in separate and distinct circumstances. If you wanted to touch and be touched by the non-Western, you had to pick one place to start.

Let me confess that I had the idea of writing a book about Japan even before I went there. The title would be *The Journey East,* and the theme – what Westerners had and could learn from making such journeys. Such a work could seem, even to me, like something of a retreat from the radical movements and commitments which had marked my first decade as a scholar. But I could also look at (and rationalize?) this shift of focus as another way of dealing with social change. One of the strongest themes and legacies of the 1960s was the issue of ethnicity. As an (admittedly unobservant) Jew who identified with the outsider, and had joined the NAACP (considered in the 1950s an almost subversive organization) in my sophomore year, I found the calls for Black Power (dutifully followed by Brown Power and Yellow Power), and the phrase, *Black is Beautiful,* important in bringing to the fore the notion of honoring rather than squelching diversity. Japan belonged to a larger world of diversity. It also belonged to Asia, a civilization that, as America tore itself apart over Vietnam, might have something to teach the West (an old theme, I knew that, but one that each generation must discover for itself).

Mirror in the Shrine (1988) was and was not the book I had foreseen. If the theme remained, it was altered, too, by my own experience of Japan. To describe that experience in a short space is impossible. Let me say only that somehow Japan changed the eyes through which I look out at the world in ways that traveling and living in Europe had never done. This was not at all related to the kind of mystical notions about Zen and Asia that circulated in the counter-culture. Despite a great deal of magic surrounding the shrines of its native religion, Shinto, some with huge breast images where women go to pray for bountiful milk for their children, others with huge phallic shapes (they try to keep tourists away from those) where men go to pray for you know what, Japanese culture seems to focus on the practical, which then gets wrapped in the aesthetic, turning the former into the latter. (A trip to any Japanese candy store or cake shop will show you that the simple and gorgeous wrapping which enfolds every item is as important as whatever is contained within.) Perhaps the changes I underwent were simply the result of living for the first time in a country that was not, at its roots, Judeo-Christian, a culture whose premises and value system were at the most fundamental level so different from those I had lived with all my life.

Returning to the USA after a year in Japan was a shock. To understand the kind of cultural discomfort I experienced in daily life – going into supermarkets or restaurants, meeting with friends or colleagues – and wanting to know why the USA

looked so different to me, so raw, chaotic, confused, rude, brutal, and ugly, I played the historian and turned to accounts written by earlier Western sojourners. A kind of *Aha!* moment came while reading the diary of Townsend Harris, the first American consul to Japan. Confined in 1856 to the remote, seaside town of Shimoda, this good Jacksonian democrat seemed to have had many of the same reactions to the Japanese that entered my own diary 120 years later. How could countries change so much (Japan went from feudalism to industrialism in one generation) and cultures stay the same? This was one of the questions that propelled me towards the book. It was a question I could never answer.

The book took the form of three interlinked biographies of emblematic figures – a missionary, a scientist, and writer – meant to stand for the larger American experience. Four years of research into the lives of hundreds of Westerner sojourners left me feeling that only at the level of the individual life could one understand the micro lessons of Japan. For the macro lessons didn't exist. Japan had Westernized more ferociously than any other non Western country, and even if sushi and small Japanese cars had become the rage in certain parts of the USA, and almost everyone wore *zori* (rubber bath thongs), you could hardly say that America was in any sense Japanized. In trying to assess the *lessons* (if any), I was removing myself from the realm of normal historical discourse, where certain topics and problems are considered to be legitimate. There was no discourse into which to fit a historical work on what people had or could learn from Japan. I was, in a sense, raising a non-issue, one outside the boundaries of the discipline. Yet it was of great interest to me, and to others I came across who had spent extended periods living abroad – and not just in Japan.

Once I had narrowed my focus to the three figures, the research into their papers at various collections was easy enough. But the writing was difficult. After producing some two hundred pages, I had to admit to myself that the straightforward, if colorful, third-person style I had used for two books was not working here. It was not letting me get close enough to my subjects to render their days, the powerful and jarring experiences and encounters, the sights, sounds, smells, and feelings that had so affected their attitudes and lives – as well as mine. Something was missing from my prose, but what? To answer that question took three years of trial and error, a period during which I often thought the book would never be written. What are the models, I must have been asking myself, for conveying the texture of experience on the page? Not the history book. Not even the biography. It is novelists who have come the closest to conveying in words the mixture of the psychic and the material that make up the experience of our day-to-day lives.

Let me emphasize: such thoughts did not at that time reach the level of consciousness. But as a reader of contemporary fiction, an admirer of Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Mario Vargas Llosa, Italo Calvino, and Milan Kundera, I understood there were new ways to render the world on the page, techniques different from the ones normally used by historians. Only after finishing the book did I begin to encounter ideas which provided an intellectual rationale for my innovations. Particularly important was Hayden White's essay, 'The burden of history', with its observation that historians still used the nineteenth-century novel as the model for their own

narrative, and his lament that no one had tried to emulate twentieth-century art by creating Dada or Expressionist or Process history. How important! Not in some theoretical way but as a practical matter. There were so many ways to write the world. By limiting ourselves to one of them, and that an old-fashioned mode, weren't we failing to do justice to the multiplicities and the richness of the past?

Fifteen years later, my innovations may hardly seem revolutionary, but at the time they were difficult enough to achieve. *Mirror in the Shrine* was written largely in the present tense. It was ever so slightly self-reflective, framed with the experiences of the author, who very occasionally used the dreaded *I* word in the narrative. A couple of times a character named *the biographer* shows up to confess his boredom with his subjects, complain that their diaries or letters are awfully distanced and impersonal, and discuss the difficulties he is having with turning such dull sources into an interesting or insightful narrative. Some passages are written in the second person, and you have to pay close attention to tell if this is the author addressing the reader, or talking to himself, or doing both at the same time. There are also occasional jumps in time, flashbacks or flash forwards or flash sideways of a kind that are understood easily enough in fictional writing but are unknown in the world of scholarly prose.

My editor at Knopf was not pleased. *That's not the proper way to write history,* he told me when explaining that the publisher did not care to pick up its option on the manuscript. But a large-minded editor at Harvard, and a historian herself, Aida Donald, thought there could be more than one way to write the past. The oldest press in America became a haven for what may be seen as an avant-garde piece of historical writing. Selected as a monthly choice by the History Book Club, the work was generally well received by the press and even by most scholarly journals, some of which found its innovations to be interesting and useful additions to the vocabulary of historical writing, if occasionally overdone. Literary quarterlies tended to highlight its formal innovations, and a couple of critics provided a label for what I had done by calling *Mirror in the Shrine* a work (one said the first) of postmodern history.

Hard as it is to believe, I had hardly ever encountered the word *postmodern* before those reviews in 1989. Soon enough it would seem no academic conversation could take place without it. Though not a label I much liked, I confess to using the word in the title of a 1993 essay about innovative historical films, a piece which made the claim that, while lots of people talked about postmodern history, only a few offbeat film-makers were creating historical works that fulfilled some of the agenda of postmodern theorists. My own innovations in *Mirror in the Shrine* had, it should be clear, been driven not by contact with postmodern or any other theory, but arose out of the limitations of a traditional form which did not allow me to express the historical experience that my subjects had undergone. After the book was finished I began to read a great deal of theory, in part to understand how *Mirror in the Shrine* fitted into an evolving world of scholarship, in part because I was dipping into the (too?) heavily theorized field of cinema studies as I became interested in understanding the historical film.

Like most *working* historians (as people who produce historical studies like to call themselves), I had not thought much about the epistemological underpinnings of my

profession since a single class in historiography in the first year of graduate school. Sometime in the late 1970s I attempted to read Hayden White's *Metahistory,* but only because I was on a committee looking at candidates for a chair in humanities, and his name had been suggested. About halfway into the first chapter, completely baffled and bored, I stopped. Who needed this? It certainly had nothing to do with history as I knew and practiced it. But after wrestling with the problems of *Mirror in the Shrine,* the works of White, Frank Ankersmit, and a host of other theorists began to seem most relevant to writing the past. Less for suggestions about how to write (for they gave none) than for the way they exposed the limitations on the truth claims of traditional history.

I would not dare to attempt to outline the complex and contradictory theories of history, culture, and society that are the postmodern critique. But I do want to explain how they impinged upon my own work. The general idea that historical narrative was closer to fiction (in the sense of *made*) than to science was easy for me to accept, no doubt due to my longtime belief in the truth of the novel. The notion that historians constructed the stories of the past rather than found them in the data was also congenial, since that had increasingly been my own experience. But more extreme positions that could either be inferred from theorists (often by their opponents), or were sometimes stated outright – that history is no more and no less than fiction, that its referentiality is irrelevant, that it contains no truths, or that we can comfortably do away altogether with reading the past, seemed (and seem) to me to ignore a basic, transcultural and transhistorical human activity: telling stories about the past. Stories crucial to defining people and their cultures. Stories in which the facts of the past may be embedded and not denied – like the reality of a Holocaust, a slave system, a Bill of Rights, the results of an election.

I stipulate my own self-interest here. I like stories. Reading them. Writing them. I believe stories come to us from the world and reflect the world. I believe that some stories are related more closely to the actual world than are others, and that we have a stake in making this distinction, and that this closeness can to some extent be assessed by empirical means, even as it also needs to be assessed by linguistic means, for metaphors are as important as the stuff we call data. Stories tell us who we are and where we have been and where we think we are going. They thrill, comfort, inspire, console, motivate, and excite us, they also make us self-reflective, connect us to other human beings and our inner selves, and let us see our lives and the world in multiple perspectives. To downplay their importance or to deny wholly the relationship of those kinds of stories we put under the rubric of history to actual world, would be like cutting off some important limbs or shooting ourselves – not in the foot but in the head.

Despite their empirical elements, historical stories hardly have a direct or indexical relationship to reality. Precisely, as the theorists argue, because between the raw data (and the choices involved in selection) and the writing fall the shadows of language and genre. Without those two elements, no historical narrative could be written. This is what the opponents of the postmodern theorists fail to acknowledge as, shaken only slightly by recent assaults, they continue to insist that more study in the archives and more analytic rigor will get us ever closer to the past as it really was. But that past

will always be filtered through and inflected by those elements which ensure slippage between the vanished world of the past and our written histories – and even more slippage when those histories are made up of traces from, or are translated into, different languages.

Questions about the truths of history, or about in what sense history can at all be called 'true', and what that word means with regard to historical discourse, have been on my mind since the early 1990s, when I began to study historical films. This scholarly move was in part an outgrowth of my involvement in two very different productions – the big budget, Academy Award-winning drama, *Reds,* partly based on my research on Reed and partly on my role as historical consultant, and the modest but well-made feature-length documentary on the Lincoln Brigade entitled *The Good Fight,* on which I was an adviser and for which I wrote the narration. If those experiences taught me a great deal about the difference between constructing a world in the visual media and on the page, my interest in film as a way of conveying history pre-dated these productions. Attuned to the increasing role of the media in our culture, the fact that the world past and present more and more comes to us in the form of images, I created a film and history course in 1975, some time before my connection to either film project.

My aim in teaching the course, as in my research, has been to try to understand where films are situated with regard to other kinds of historical discourse. To answer the question: Just what, if anything, do historical films convey about the past, and how do they convey it? Not that I would have phrased the issues that way when I began. The first essay I wrote on the topic, a look at *Reds* by someone who was both an insider and an outsider, turned out to be both an appreciation and a critique. But one based on the reactions of a (fairly) traditional historian who tended to focus on details and ignore what later became so obvious to me – that words and images work to express and explain the world in different ways. That a film will never be able to do precisely what a book can do, and vice versa. That history presented in these two different media would ultimately have to be judged by different criteria.

Far more quickly said than done. It took more than a decade to work my way towards this simple insight: film-makers can be and already are historians (some of them), but of necessity the rules of engagement of their works with the stuff of the past are and must be different from whatever rules govern written history. To accept this meant sloughing off even more of the lessons learned in graduate school and reinforced by the gatekeepers of the profession. Not that those rules are clear or fixed for either medium. But film, particularly the dramatic film, makes special demands on the traditional historian in that it goes beyond (as theorists argue all historians do) *constituting* its facts; that is, creating facts by picking out certain traces of the past (people, events, moments) and highlighting them as important and worthy of inclusion, and indulges in *inventing* facts; that is, making up traces of the past which are then highlighted as important and worthy of inclusion.

Not wishing to repeat what I have written about elsewhere, let me suggest only that I think there are two ways of looking at the inventions of characters, dialogue, and incidents that are an inevitable part of the dramatic historical film – and that both

of these are valid. You may see such works in terms not of the details they present but the overall sense of the past they convey, the rich images and visual metaphors they provide to us for thinking about the past. You may also see the historical film as part of a separate realm of representation and discourse, one not meant to provide literal truths about the past (as if our written history can provide literal truths) but metaphoric truths which work, to a large degree, as a kind of commentary on and challenge to traditional historical discourse.

My move to study historical film was not driven solely by ego, though after beginning to admire the work of theorists, I found it delicious to be considered one – especially one who refused to indulge in jargon. A great number of my essays were written in response to calls from conference organizers and journal editors. In the 1990s, history and film was a hot topic in the profession, and most historians tended to approach it in a rather simple-minded, ad hoc way – often trying to assess why a particular film did such violence to a topic without considering the nature of the medium or its possibilities. This meant that my own theoretical moves, my attempts to understand how the visual media convey the past, however fumbling, garnered invitations to lecture and teach in countries on six continents. More than any topic I had previously undertaken, this one had a kind of universal appeal. Historical movies were made everywhere and professors of history everywhere had to learn how to deal with these rivals for authority over the past. Symbolic of the growing interest in the topic, the editor of the *American Historical Review* made an essay of mine (the first the journal ever accepted about film) entitled *History in Image/History in Words* into the centerpiece of a forum that included four other historians, then asked me to create an annual film review section for the journal.

Ultimately, the problem with writing theory is that it's a bit like the old (racist but insightful) Uncle Remus story of the tar baby – once you get stuck it's almost impossible to break free. Theory leads inevitably to more theory and away from the stories about the past that originally got me interested in history. Within the historical profession, it's difficult to strike a balance between theory and practice. Each is all consuming. To me it seems a shame that so few historians step out of their mold to truly come to grips with the other approach. It would be salutary for theorists to spend time trying to describe some actual historical phenomenon (other than earlier theories), or for those who write traditional history to try to meet the theoretical critiques in their work rather than continuing to write in the usual way. Both might find that not Joe Friday in *Dragnet* – *Just the facts, m'am* – but Samuel Beckett may be the new patron saint of historical writing – *I can't go on, I'll go on.* Impossible as it theoretically may be to write history any longer, it's even more impossible to stop writing it.

My own return to narrative in recent years has taken the form of exploring new ways of telling the past – first in a kind of memoire/history of my family, and its three-generation trek from Eastern Europe to Canada to the USA, then in what I call a *fictional biography* of Russian writer Isaac Babel. With these books I may in fact have genuinely worked my way into the title, Postmodern Historian. Though I am still dealing with what has always interested me – stories that show how people have

lived, desired, struggled, achieved, failed, and made meaning out of their days – I am doing so using new rules of engagement with the past. While writing the memoir, for example, it struck me that a family, more than a conglomerate of facts, is actually a field of stories. To faithfully render its experience over time one must blend together rather than separate out the embellished data, prejudice, and invention that give a common identity to its members.

King of Odessa, my *fictional biography,* belongs to a growing genre of works, well researched as traditional biographies, that take license to go beyond the documents and invent characters and incidents as part of a process of imagining the texture, feeling, and lived quality of the subject's hours and days. In the case of my subject there is another rationale. When Babel was arrested by the secret police in 1939 (and later put to death on totally bogus charges as a spy), all his papers were seized, and they have never emerged from Soviet archives. There is, in truth, not enough real data from which to write a traditional biography – only a small number of letters, his own published stories and essays, and incidents of his life as recounted by former friends and lovers. If you want a book-length life of Babel, it has to be invented. But even if we had mountains of data, as we do for other people, I would still make a case for the *fictional biography*. It subverts what we might call *the tyranny of data,* the tendency of so many biographers to report everything known about a figure, the desire to go on telling us what people did, rather than showing who they were. Like the novel, a fictional account of history whose inventions are apposite, has the tools (like the dramatic film) to bring us closer to the lived reality of other lives – an aspect too often slighted in academic works, yet one ultimately as important as (more important than?) drowning us in details.

The desire to expunge all traces of fiction, to create a huge wall between the play of imagination and the facts of history, is something I learned to accept as a young historian trying to make his way in a profession. Today this makes much less sense to me. For now it seems obvious that some major fictions have always been part of history. Cause and effect, for example, is a kind of fiction, something we infer but never actually see. The very creation of a story about a political party, a labor union, a nation, or an individual out of the endless sea of data that confronts us, is another kind of fiction. People, groups, and nations do not live stories with beginnings, middles, and ends; we tell stories about them. If history and biography are to explain and understand human behavior, and to allow us to share in human adventures we have not ourselves experienced, then they must also encompass those elements which don't necessarily leave verbal traces – the unconscious, the unspoken, the small actions and conversations that had to have happened but never left a trace we could later turn into a fact.

Let me be clear: this is not meant as a call against empiricism in historical studies. It is an attempt, rather, to say that important aspects of the past lie outside the empirical circle. The past is vast and multifaceted. Our writing about it should be the same. Personally I can read with pleasure and learn from a traditional work, even if I must keep in mind the limitations on its truth claims. Other limitations on their truth claims have to be kept in mind when seeing a film or reading historical fiction. But

why be limited to a single kind of work about the past? Historians who would confine truth to a single kind of traditional work seem to be those who wish for a world of certainty and control, those who long for a clear understanding of where we have been and what we are. But surely such clarity belongs only to God. Sublunary creatures can only see truths through a glass darkly. Isn't it enough to know that the truths of our historical writing are partial, provisional, like all human truths? That our stories are reasonable propositions about what probably happened? Shouldn't we historians know from the history of History that all our stories – the ones we live and the ones we write – will eventually be outmoded, updated, and rewritten, and different versions take their place?

At the end of an *ego-histoire* such as this, one expects a summing up, a moral, a philosophical reflection, a sense of the new levels of understanding that have been achieved through decades of life and history. But whatever truths my experiences have brought have already been expressed in the books I have written. Like life itself, like the lessons my subjects and I found living in Japan, I fear these are partial, situational, temporary truths that are not easily transferable or teachable. Life and history are, after all, a process. If we are lucky, they are an adventure as well, one that can never be pinned down fully on a page or pictured on a screen, but only investigated, analyzed, suggested, expressed. No doubt such a judgment goes back to my original impulse to travel, see the world, and tell stories. Mentioning the path that took me from that through history to something called postmodernism, I have had to leave out a lot of personal stuff such as the friends and lovers, including those I married, who were very much part of the experiences that went into the books. To have put them in would have been to write a different and much longer essay, one that would have ended up including far less *histoire* than this one does and considerably more *ego*.

10

THE STORY OF MY ENGAGEMENTS WITH THE PAST

Peter Munz

Peter Munz (1921–2006) was a medieval historian who, from about the mid-1970s, devoted more attention to philosophical subjects (especially the philosophies of Popper and Wittgenstein) and the role of narrative in creating history. As he acknowledged, 'all history is narration or story-telling. However, this finding, though incontrovertible, solves nothing.' A student of mythology, he became immersed in the medieval mind and this led him to his analysis of narrative and the failure of the concept of objectivity as commonly understood. This led Munz to Karl Popper and Hayden White and the nature of causal generalization and his book *The Shapes of Time* (1976), in which he examined the distinction between explanation and interpretation. Munz's analysis is both elegant and significant.

The story of my engagement with the past is not so much a story of my engagement with the past as the story of a never-ending series of my different engagements with the past and how, invariably, one kind of engagement led to another kind and, in this way, to another kind of past. The only steady engagement was the conviction that the present comes out of the past or that the past has led to the present – which is like saying that there has been one event leading to another and that history is the story of these causal connections which can be reported and understood only in the form of narratives. As E. M. Forster put it, a mere sequence is not a story; but a causal sequence is. 'The king died; and then the queen died' is not a narrative; but 'The king died and then the queen died of grief' is an intelligible narration because it contains a causal link. It is no good thinking of sequences as *chronological* sequences, because mere temporal succession does not put events into an intelligible sequence. One way or another, therefore, all history is narration or story-telling. However, this finding, though incontrovertible, solves nothing. On the contrary, as far as my engagement with the past is concerned, it proved a door which opened the road from one engagement to the next. But let me begin at the beginning.

I grew up in Italy and had a classical education, and in the beginning there was Plato. Since I was highly critical of Italian fascism, Plato's ideal of justice that everybody did and received what was in accordance with their nature seemed morally impeccable. During the Spanish Civil War, when my family and all our friends were beginning to realise that some form of communism formed the only viable resistance to the ever-growing threats of Italian Fascists and German Nazis who were trying to take over the world, I used Marx to put teeth into Plato's idealism. Marx's maxim that in a just society everybody should contribute according to their ability and receive according to their needs gave a practical twist to Plato. Both Plato and Marx were aware that there were no such ideal societies because in the course of history all societies were subject to relentless vicissitudes which could be tracked. For Plato, deviation from the ideal was governed by the ways power was being enjoyed and exercised so that changes went from timocracy to aristocracy to oligarchy to democracy to tyranny. For Marx, the deviations were determined by changing modes of production and therefore went from primitive communism to slavery to feudalism to bourgeois capitalism and, finally, to the dictatorship of the proletariat. Being politically naïve, I was not aware at that time that neither Plato's philosopher kings nor Marx's proletarian dictators nor, for that matter, anybody else, would have the knowledge required to decide who could contribute what and what was needed to be given to whom. This naïvety was compounded by my lack of knowledge of Lord Acton's famous dictum that power always corrupts and that absolute power (of philosopher kings and proletarian dictators) would corrupt absolutely. It took Karl Popper, under whom I was reading philosophy in New Zealand, to make me understand these fatal flaws in both Plato and Marx. Instead, for the time being, I decided that the most urgent task in hand was to study history as a procession of how modes of production determined social and political structures – not in order to find out whether Marx was right, but in order to understand *that* he was right. This was the reason for my initial engagement with the past.

It so happened that at the Canterbury University in Christchurch (New Zealand) the set course of historical study in the second year was early modern history. And so it came about that I read in quick succession Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* and John Locke's *Second Treatise*. When I discovered the enormous gap between Locke and Burke, I did not give up either Marx or Plato – but my attention began to be deflected. Locke had reasoned that men get together to enter a social contract; and Burke had explained that men are together because of their past and their future and that such togetherness had nothing to do with a contractual, let alone voluntary, agreement. I will never forget how deeply shaken I was by the realisation that two intelligent men could come to such contrary conclusions about human society. I tried a Marxist explanation. Either the one or the other book must have been a case of 'false consciousness' – that is, a make-believe story designed to pull the wool over somebody's eyes. But this explanation did not work. Over whose eyes? Burke was writing after Adam Smith whose political economy reflected a Marxist reality of the coming of bourgeois capitalism and would have conformed to Locke. But Locke had preceded Smith by nearly a century and Burke could hardly be

unaware of the growth of bourgeois capitalism in an age when even the landed aristocracy, by enclosing more and more of their lands, were beginning to act like capitalists. Marxist explanations, I concluded, seemed to have their limitations.

Obviously I had to look in a different direction for the reason for the difference. In reading Locke, I discovered that he often invoked Richard Hooker, an Elizabethan theologian. In order to deepen my understanding of Locke and why he differed from Burke, I started to read Hooker's works and study their context, the Elizabethan Settlement of the second half of the sixteenth century in England. This led to my first historical discovery. I found out that Locke had taken Hooker's name in vain. Hooker was a truly medieval philosopher and thoughts of social or political contracts were foreign to him. Instead, he was using the thoughts of St Thomas Aquinas to justify the religious settlement under Queen Elizabeth I in the late sixteenth century. Aquinas had explained that, since reason and faith are in harmony, church and state must form one single polity which Hooker called an 'Ecclesiastical Polity'. After writing two-thirds of his great work on this topic, it began to dawn on Hooker that the Elizabethan Settlement was a monarchy which dominated the church and that there was no way in which one could say that the two, in Elizabethan England, were living in divinely ordained harmonious cooperation. This insight made him stop writing, and he left the later part of his great work unfinished because he gave up in despair when, honest thinker that he was, he realised that one cannot square a circle and use Thomism in order to justify what was in reality a secular monarchy. I discovered that Hooker had indeed tried very hard to make ends meet by going back to the writings of Marsilius of Padua, a fourteenth-century political thinker who had laid the foundations of secular republicanism. I became convinced that it was his acquaintance with Marsilius which made him realise that the exigencies of the Elizabethan constitution conformed to Marsilius and were therefore incompatible with the philosophy of Aquinas, a philosophy which he believed to be right. Hooker was stopped in his tracks when he understood that while Marsilius was compatible with the Elizabethan Settlement, he was not compatible with Hooker's mentor, St Thomas Aquinas. It was as if Hooker had anticipated all six volumes of G. de Lagarde's *La Naissance de l'Ésprit Laique* of 1948 and proved them right. By the time I had reached this insight I had lost all interest, Marxist or other, in Burke and Locke and why they were so diametrically opposed.

Instead, driven by sheer curiosity, I immersed myself in Hooker's background. I began to acquaint myself not only with the politics and the society and the theology of Thomas Aquinas, but also and above all, I began to read so much medieval philosophy that I started to take it very seriously. To my surprise, I was leaving my preoccupation with Kant and the scientific philosophy of the Vienna Circle behind and starting to wonder instead about the great debates surrounding St Thomas' synthesis of Aristotle and the Bible. In this way I became more and more interested in the Early Middle Ages and also found that, being immersed in the debates surrounding medieval theology and Greek philosophy, I changed my own secular mind and began to take Christian religion in its medieval form very seriously. Having read so much about the incorporeal existence of angels, they became familiar to me

and I began to understand that it was indeed important to wonder how many angels can dance on the point of a needle. I noticed to my own astonishment that medieval debates were raising urgent philosophical questions. St Thomas had espoused Aristotle; but he found an opponent in St Bonaventure who had been inspired via St Augustine by Plato. In the Middle Ages, the great debate between Plato and Aristotle presented itself as a new philosophical problem. For St Thomas, God had created man and endowed him with reason so that man had become God's helper – a view for which there was biblical support in the statement *Dei sumus adiutores*. For St Bonaventure there was no chance of such harmony between God's will and man's reason. Instead he followed St Augustine in maintaining that, however irrationally, man has to rely on God's guidance even for so ordinary a thing as the perception of his everyday surroundings. I was amazed at myself when I found that I was beginning to wonder whose side I ought to be on when, at bottom, I was not even a Christian who believed in God.

As an inhabitant of the twentieth century I was not able to espouse medieval or any other form of Christianity. Instead, I took it to be completely mythological so that I did not have to follow the common twentieth-century habit of dismissing it. Instead I started to take mythology very seriously. This realisation drove me in a new direction. I began to wonder how mythology in general can and ought to be related to the scientific rationalism which had dominated European thought since the times of Galileo and Newton. I could not, after having become somewhat medieval, dismiss Christianity as a myth; but instead tried to understand the nature of mythology. I therefore allowed myself to be distracted from the medieval past, but was always aware that it had been my acquaintance with that past which had stimulated my interest in mythology. Over a number of years I wrote three books on this topic. In the first book I explained how religious thinking was rooted in non-utilitarian and economically wasteful practices. It could be best understood as a conceptual formulation of those practices which preceded religious belief rather than followed from it. The truth of such beliefs was to be found in those practices, not in the mundane everyday world. In the second book I tried to show that our values were derived not from the mundane world as it is in itself but from a world of symbols (i.e. myths) which are a refinement of the ordinary, positive world. And in the third book I argued that myths were a typological refinement of ordinarily experienced events such as birth and death and storms and sunrises. As time went by these symbols, typologically related to natural events, become ever more closely and more narrowly defined typologically. I welcomed this distraction as very much part of my engagement with the past, because I could not share the belief of Gibbon and Voltaire that the medieval people with whom I had become so closely acquainted had been prey to barbarous superstitions which ought to be dismissed.

All along, I did not lose my interest in the Middle Ages and decided to investigate what conventionally is seen as their most formative years, the career of Charlemagne. Following Pirenne, I thought of him as the founder of European medieval Christianity because, as Pirenne had shown, with the closing of the Mediterranean to merchants and their shipping from Europe, Charlemagne had presided over a culture which had

detached itself from both Byzantium and the Mediterranean world. My studies were guided by Fichtenau's German book on the Carolingian Empire, which I had translated into English. According to Fichtenau, Charlemagne had been misunderstood as the founder of a monarchical Empire. In reality, Fichtenau argued, his idea of monarchy was a vision, incapable of realisation due to poor communications and the survival of indelible local structures. The more I studied Charlemagne, the more I went further than Fichtenau who had seen him as nothing more than a visionary. Instead I began to understand that his grand plan of founding a Western monarchy did not founder so much because of the conditions detected by Fichtenau, but because he was being overtaken, without his realising it, by the pressures of growing feudalism, under which a monarch was about to be nothing more than the apex of a hierarchy and a figurehead. Feudalism was becoming the order of the day because people were preferring the safety of a local and tangible feudal relationship to the not-so-long arm of an Emperor, no matter how benevolent. The realisation that he was fighting a losing battle made him especially dear to me. I dwelt lovingly on his famous dream in which the growing misfortune of his Empire was being revealed to him in its stages: he saw a sword on which were inscribed the words 'raht, radoleiba, nasg, ente', which means, translated roughly: at first there was abundance, then there was depletion, followed by real poverty and, finally, 'the end'. It was not clear whether it meant the end of his monarchy or the end of the world. Although this premonition corresponded exactly to my own analysis that his monarchy was being overtaken by the growth of feudalism, it showed that my modern way of sociological understanding differed profoundly from Charlemagne's own purely fatalistic grasp of the decline. With this realisation I was driven into yet a different direction, for it made me grasp that modern explanations are likely to differ from explanations offered by people who were living in the distant medieval past. Who was right? And which explanation should be considered as a true account of what had happened? Was the failure of his monarchy, as he saw it, due to fate, or was it, as we modern observers would have it, caused by social pressures of which Charlemagne himself was not aware?

Any conceivable answer to these questions was for the time being postponed by a problem with the sources about the actual coronation of Charlemagne in Rome, Christmas AD 799. The story is told in a number of different and independent sources in different ways, and ever since historians have wrecked their brains in order to work out how these different stories could be reconciled with one another. I decided on a novel approach. Instead of seeking to make these stories compatible with each other, I took it that each source represented the views of persons or a person whose views were incompatible with all the others. The differences were not due to the fact, as conventional historians were inclined to assume, that some observers were badly informed or careless or biased. I started, on the contrary, from the assumption that the differences in the sources reflected a political debate and a struggle as to what kind of coronation was in order and how it ought to be carried out or whether it ought to take place at all. I spent a couple of years in this pursuit even though it involved me in a kind of close preoccupation with sources I was not usually engaged in.

I also pursued my interest in Charlemagne's failure and in the impossibility of the task he had set himself, in a different direction. The Franks over whom he ruled were a tribe, so called. But in reality they had come to Gaul and settled there not as a unitary tribe, but as a horde of warriors with their families. Charlemagne's predecessors, Merovingian as well as Carolingian, had really been warlords assembling under their rule a conglomerate of people who had become known as Franks – all people who had become detached from their original tribes. The old tribes themselves had vanished. I kept wondering how this process of social erosion could have been started and was fortunate to come across the books of E. A. Thompson who had explained how the disintegration of the small, original tribes in the Rhineland had started. The disintegration was the direct result of the arrival of the Roman conquering legions and the accompanying merchants who had offered entirely new opportunities of gain. The natives had been eager to take up these opportunities and so the corrosion of tribal structures had progressed as a result of Roman imperial advances. I extended Thompson and theorised that eventually more and more people, drifting away from their original tribes, had assembled under warrior leaders into war gangs – falsely identified by Roman observers as kingdoms – and started to invade the older territories of the Roman Empire either as armed gangs nominally in the service of Roman Emperors as the so-called Ostrogoths had done, or as freebooting invaders in their own right, like the Lombards or the Franks. The Roman Empire finally broke up as a result of this social disintegration and the formation of these new war gangs. This development had been caused by the Roman Empire so that the fall of the Empire in Europe had to be seen as self-inflicted and as the direct result of Roman imperialism. Needless to say, my interpretation of the lead given by Thompson was guided by my observation of the fate of the British Empire in Africa. The people who rebelled against British imperial rule were not the indigenous tribes rebelling against British rule in order to preserve their traditional social structure and culture. The traditional structures and cultures had been eroded by colonisation. The rebels consisted of the political and military groupings which had been formed in Ghana, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Uganda and so on under entirely new leaders who were attracting followers who had been alienated from their traditional tribes as a result of the opportunities offered by British colonisation. These thoughts were not the result of a study of the sources of Carolingian history, but were suggested by modern political experiences.

Having pushed back my engagement with the past from the Middle Ages to the last centuries of the Roman Empire, my interest in myth made me take a great step forward into the twelfth century. Aware of the power and enduring importance of mythology I fastened on the Kyffhäuser legend according to which the Emperor Frederick Barbarossa, after his death, was sleeping in a cave on the Kyffhäuser mountain. One day, so the myth ran, the ravens will stop flying around the mountain and then the Emperor will awake and restore the medieval Empire to the glories people imagined it (falsely !) to have had. I then also pursued the myth which Boso, the biographer of Pope Alexander III, Frederick Barbarossa's great opponent, had used in order to present Alexander to posterity. But myth or not, it dawned on me after a close perusal of the extant sources that in real life, Frederick Barbarossa had

been a truly intelligent and critical statesman who had tried one scheme after another and always dropped it when he found that it was becoming counterproductive. A marvellous example to other politicians who remain wedded blindly to one and only one ideology. My picture of Barbarossa's incessant self-criticism was greatly influenced by Karl Popper, my philosophy teacher and friend, who had taught me that the mark of genuine intelligence is not to be dogmatically wedded to one single plan or ideology, but to be able to experiment and drop a course of action or thought when it turned out to be unpractical or destructive. I admit that the source material by itself was not conclusive on this point; but, at the same time, there was nothing in the sources to falsify or contradict the picture of Barbarossa's behaviour I had formed in the image of Popperian philosophy.

I had left my Carolingian researches with doubts about truth. Should one believe what Charlemagne himself had thought about the end of his monarchy or should one prefer my own, modern sociological analysis – something Charlemagne himself could not possibly have come up with. In the case of Frederick Barbarossa I devised a way out. During the twelfth century people had been living in expectation of the Second Coming which, according to religious authority, had to be preceded by the coming of the Antichrist who would wreak havoc all round. I thought of a way in which this twelfth-century self-identification, which is unacceptable to a modern reader because the havoc was said to be caused by the impending arrival of the Antichrist, could be preserved by being modernised typologically. People in the twelfth century had been experiencing genuine havoc. The attribution of this havoc to the impending arrival of the Antichrist was a twelfth-century belief, which, to a modern mind, was superstitious. But there were twelfth-century events which could be seen as a typological extension of the coming of the Antichrist. There was, in that century, an unprecedented growth of population which was indeed wreaking something like havoc, even though people at that time did not understand the havoc to be the result of population growth. The reign of the Antichrist and the disturbance due to population growth were of the same type. In this way the modern understanding of the havoc reflected an indigenous twelfth-century understanding because it was typologically related rather than an arbitrary modern attribution. In adopting this theory I was not brushing twelfth-century opinion aside and substituting a modern opinion. I merely reinterpreted a twelfth-century opinion.

By the time I had spent nearly ten years studying Frederick Barbarossa and his times and had written a large book on the subject, it struck me that my choice of subjects for research always seemed governed by a strange unconscious preference. All the people I had concentrated on – Richard Hooker, Charlemagne and Frederick Barbarossa – had been failures. Valiant failures, but failures none the less. Hooker had tried to explain and justify the Elizabethan Settlement in terms of Aristotelian-Thomistic political philosophy and had had to give up the attempt because that Settlement, to put it simply, could not be explained in the terms dear to him. Charlemagne had tried to transform a barbarian gang of warriors into an orderly, law-governed monarchy and was overtaken by the feudalisation of societies because people preferred the security of feudal submission to the not very long arm of Charlemagne's very distant

good monarchical intentions. And Frederick Barbarossa, convinced like almost everybody else in the twelfth century, that the Second Coming of Christ was near and could be speeded up if the Emperor hung up his sword and shield on the Tree of Life in Jerusalem, had embarked on a crusade to the Holy Land and was drowned on his way in Asia Minor in a river when he tried to cool down on a very hot day.

During all these researches I kept on reading primary sources as well as secondary literature on the subjects I was studying and I noticed that I was slowly but firmly becoming medievalised. That is, I started to have a mind very similar to the minds of the people I kept reading about. The generalisations I was using to interpret the sources and the chronicles were close and ever closer to the generalisations used by the people I was interested in. Eventually it dawned on me that the great historian Gibbon, whom I admired for all sorts of reasons, had been guilty of a mistake. He had written that his military experience as a grenadier in the Hampshire guards had greatly helped him to understand the management and behaviour of Roman legionnaires. I had to concede that my own vision of how the Roman Empire had been brought down by the hordes which its presence had created was based on Gibbon's method, for it had been the experience of the modern British Empire in Africa which had enabled me to see this causal connection. But in all my other engagements with the past I had not only not followed Gibbon's method, but had actually contradicted it. In becoming medievalised, I was leaving my modern mind and its experiences behind, rather than using it in order to understand what had happened in the past. I was beginning to see the medieval past in the way in which medieval people had seen it.

It then occurred to me that the study of history leads to a form of objectivity which is absent from all the natural sciences. If one is studying atoms and rocks, one can ascertain how they appear to other atoms and other rocks – that is how the observer determines they should be studied. But neither an atom nor a rock can make their voice heard and demand to be studied as it is in itself or as it sees or feels itself to be. In other words, when the subjects to be studied cannot speak, there cannot be objectivity. There can only be subjectivity in the sense that one can say how they appear to somebody other than themselves in relation to something else. Although at first this realisation that there was something special about our knowledge of human history which was absent from the study of nature filled me with great pride, it later made me aware that this kind of objectivity was ultimately stultifying.

To give an example. In the Middle Ages it was widely believed that political power resulted from the possession of relics thought to have a magical quality, and as a result people would go to endless lengths in order to secure relics. Eventually a real trade was set up between Rome, where relics were to be found most plentifully, and the rest of Europe. As was to be expected, fraudsters and forgers were setting themselves up in Rome to supply the ever-increasing demand. This was due to the medieval idea that relics were the road to worldly success. Medievalised as I had become, it nevertheless struck me that the idea was actually absurd. I was able to reach objectivity about many people by explaining how they themselves saw their relation to the relics they were eager to get hold of. But at the same time it began to occur to me that

they were actually wrong in believing that the possession of relics is useful. Political power, wherever it does come from, believe it or not, does not come magically from relics. At least this is our modern conviction. I was then faced with a strange choice. If I wanted to be objective about my medieval people, I would have to believe something which they believed but which I, for my modern part, definitely did not believe to be true. If, on the other hand, I wanted to look at the Middle Ages in order to understand them, the only way I could do so – by interpreting them in terms of what I myself, in modern times, believed to be true – I would have to abandon objectivity and look at them from *my* vantage point, that is, look at them subjectively. At first this seemed an odd choice between objectivity and subjectivity. On the face of it it was clear that the former was to be preferred to the latter – at least by all standards of what counts as knowledge. And yet, on second thoughts, it was clear that the subjective, modern interpretation was, in a sense, 'truer' than the medieval objective interpretation. The only way to cope with such a conclusion was to say to myself that the modern way of looking at the origins of political power might, in turn, have to be superseded in a hundred years' time by yet another different way. In other words, there was no chance of finality – only successive interpretations. The only fixed interpretation was the original, objective interpretation because it reflected objectively what medieval people thought about themselves. Such interpretations could claim to be real objective explanations, because they reflected what had gone on in the minds of the people the story was about. This kind of objectivity was what Ranke had dreamt of when he had said that a historian has to find out 'what *really* happened' – as distinct from bias, folklore and propaganda. What he had failed to add was that that kind of objective truth revealed beliefs which we today can often enough not accept as truth and as a convincing explanation of how events used to hang together.

I was well acquainted with the writings of Collingwood on this topic. Collingwood, following Benedetto Croce, explained that when one is studying other people, and especially when one is studying other people of the past, one has to use empathy in order to reach what I called an objective understanding. But the concept of empathy seemed very woolly. One could claim to be empathic when one was doing no more than simply making something up and imagining that one was inside somebody else's mind. The people to be empathised with were all dead and one could therefore never know whether such empathy was genuine or not. Empathy was itself a purely subjective phenomenon which was far beyond the reach of any kind of test. In order to put teeth into Collingwood and Croce, I started to make use of the philosophy of Karl Popper. Popper had explained that the only way to understand people is to provide a causal explanation of their behaviour. By 'cause' he did not mean an absolute, single causal agency. He meant instead that causality is relative to a general law or a generalisation. If one believes that all stones can speak, then one might be led to think of a stone as the cause of the noise. If one does not believe that stones can speak, one will not take a stone to be the cause of the noise. While one can never be sure that one's empathy really gets into the other mind, one can ascertain, with a fair degree of assurance, what kinds of generalisations are used by other

people, even by people in the distant past. One can garner such knowledge either directly from the documents they left behind or infer such knowledge by looking at how they made the facts hang together. And so it was that I started to use Popper's notion of causality to give substance to Collingwood's idea of empathy. Instead of empathising with people who believe that the magic of relics is the cause of political power, I took it that these people had a generalisation about relics and power, and therefore inferred that relics were the cause of political power. But change the generalisation and the causal ascription falls to the ground. Again, in modern times, we might be prone to a generalisation that charisma with or without a large bank account is the cause of political power and in this case will look for the cause of political power enjoyed by medieval people not among their relics, but among the medieval equivalent of a bank account; that is, landed property. It follows then that if one changes the generalisations one is using, one is also changing the way the single facts hang together and, as a result, one will get a different story every time one changes one's generalisation. To put it differently: the single facts always remain the same. There is power, there are relics and there is landed property. These facts are not in doubt. What is in doubt is the way they are made to hang together. According to one generalisation, the relics and the power will stand in a causal relationship; and according to a different generalisation, the landed property and the power will stand in a causal relationship. This means that the facts by themselves do not matter. The three facts are always present. What matters in historical understanding is the generalisations one is using to make them hang together to form a causal relationship, that is, a story which can be told. It is the generalisations one is using which determine which of the three facts is to be left out of the story.

I was then confronted by a strange situation. If I wanted to be objective I would have to use a generalisation about power which was used by the people I was studying. But in our modern times, such a generalisation could not ring true. If one replaced it by a generalisation about power which would seem true in modern times, one would cease to be objective, but – strange though this may sound – have a true understanding of the cause of power. This seemed like a paradox: either one is objective but is telling a story (i.e. putting together a sequence of facts) which is not true; or one is subjective and therefore able to tell a story which is true, or at least appears to be true.

The advent of postmodernism has led to a further confusion. According to postmodern thinking, the only truth there is is the truth as told by the people the story is about. This would mean that the objective story about power in the Middle Ages is also, by definition, the truth about political power. If Foucault, for example, were to write a history of Frederick Barbarossa, he would believe it to be a true history if it was objective, i.e. consisting of a collection of facts which could have been or was assembled by Frederick Barbarossa himself according to the generalisations about causal connections which he believed to be true. I cannot see that such postmodern thinking is helpful. I prefer to stick with my own distinction. An objective story does not seem true to us moderns; and a story which seems true to people in modern times is a subjective story.

As time went by I felt more and more uneasy with such a laconic conclusion. I had to accept that there were many ways of connecting facts causally and that those many ways depended on the many different generalisations people were having in their minds in different ages and different places. I realised then that there must be a meta-narrative, something which used to be called a philosophy of history. A meta-narrative would accept that in different ages and different places people would use different generalisations and thus get different stories. There is no way in which one can explain away those differences by showing that some are due to false generalisations and others are due to true ones. But a *meta-narrative* would be able to explain why at certain times and in certain places people used the generalisations they were using and why, in different places at different times, different generalisations were or are being used. The objective stories put together in terms of the generalisations which were used by the people the stories were about would remain in place. But they would, contrary to the postmodern way of looking at them, not be final but be supplemented by an explanation why in that place at that time those generalisations were in vogue and also explain why, as times and circumstances were changing, different generalisations had been gaining the upper hand. My final insight was greatly stimulated by Hayden White's *Metahistory* which had appeared in 1973. I agreed with its main thrust, but felt that he had not pushed the argument to its logical conclusion. For Hayden White remained satisfied that there is an endless multiplicity of stories and that there is no conceivable meta-narrative which would connect them and, in connecting them, explain why and how each story was related to all the others. My own thoughts on this topic went, I like to think, to put the finishing touches to Hayden White's book. I finally wrote a book about this conclusion which was published in 1976 under the title *The Shapes of Time*. This book explained the difference between explanation (i.e. an objective story which is told in terms the people it is about would have used) and interpretation (i.e. a subjective story which is told so that modern readers can feel comfortable with it). An explanation rarely tells a 'true' story; and an interpretation is more likely to tell a 'true' story; that is, it tells what really happened as against what the people at the time thought had been happening. The meta-narrative finally explains how the interpretations are connected to the explanations. However, since meta-narratives are highly speculative, I listed a number of postulates which would have to be fulfilled for any narrative, including a meta-narrative, to be acceptable.

All this shows that every engagement leads to a yet different engagement and that every solution – as both Hegel and Popper said – creates a new problem which, in turn, necessitates a different engagement. But I cannot share Hegel's conviction that this insight is the mark of the absolute spirit beyond which there can be no further engagements. Nor can I agree with Popper that as solutions replace earlier solutions, we are edging closer to a final truth. Rather I would quote Hegel in one of his more sober moods, 'that the owl of Minerva takes wings only as the twilight falls'; and hold firm to the one and only certainty which stands at the centre of the turning wheel – the certainty of doubt.

11

IN SEARCH OF ARIADNE'S THREAD[1]

Beverley Southgate

Southgate, a prolific author on the nature of history, views it as a game with rules. But they are self-defined rules and in applying those rules we have a duty of care to the past. In a personalized autobiography Southgate leads us through what he describes as 'the maze' of completing his thesis, and his intellectual journey via the work of Richard Popkin and towards and through scepticism. Southgate also acknowledges his intellectual debt to Keith Jenkins' efforts to understand how the history we create has shaped our own world. He then describes the bifurcated nature of his thinking on truth, existentialism and the creation of history. His conclusion on the educative functioning of history is illuminating – and Ariadne's thread remains a revealing figure.

Introduction

On receiving the editors' invitation to explain why I think as I do about the past, I felt greatly honoured to be included in a party of confessional historians; but my immediate instinct was to decline. Then Sheila (my wife) reminded me that I had for some time been threatening to write my own obituary, and hinted that this could provide a rehearsal. So in the end, I found the invitation to what I fear may be little more than self-indulgence irresistible, and here I am – a voyeuristic guest at my own funeral, trying to make sense of my life, to find some thread or draw some threads together to lead me to where I momentarily am.

It seems necessary to begin at the end: Where am I? *What* do I (in the present tense) think about the past – and think about history? And I suppose that, for some years now, I have come to think of history as a game – a game that we play with the past. The object of the game is to make sense of whatever we have to hand – to endow ingredients (whatever they are) with meaning. Of themselves, those ingredients are meaningless (and so valueless); thus it is up to us to give them the worth that they need – and that we need from them. So the game is endless, because we are

constantly given new ingredients from an inexhaustible supply deriving from an ever-expanding territory (of the past); and, always torn between an ideal of inclusivity and a reality of inevitable selectivity and exclusivity, we restlessly shift positions and perspectives and perceptions. And I am certainly not meaning to imply that such games are unimportant: it can matter a great deal what moves and assignations and relative positions we assign to our kings and queens, bishops, knights and even (or especially) pawns; it matters what ludic compacts we strike with the devil of the past, since they help to determine our future.

These games, of course, have long been played within the constraints of certain rules, but these rules too – despite the best efforts of more authoritarian traditionalists – are no less subject to variation, and at our own choosing. We may, for instance, agree to be bound by the rules of an own-sakist empiricism, of well-established chronologies and of evidential processes narrowly defined. Or we may decide to be liberated from some aspects of the past as it has been known, to renounce some memories, and to refigure our histories in novel and exploratory ways (a number of which have been illustrated in this journal). Yet without some rules, whether self- or discipline-imposed, there may be self-pleasuring, but no game that can be shared; and it seems to me that we are currently groping towards some position that enables both – a position that enables us to be anarchic within bounds.

Now I am aware that Keith Jenkins has famously pronounced that that sort of game is up – or might as well be: in postmodernity we may have no more need of such pastimes, or even of passed times; we might well be strong enough, to change the metaphor, to live without such crutches. For the past is anyway promiscuous, and the fact that it will go with anyone in general calls into question its usefulness for anyone in particular. But although the historicized past is, as Keith Jenkins reminds us, only ever us, back there, with each of us getting from that past what we put into it, there are those who have still not received their due from it – those who have, both in the actuality of the past and in subsequent historiography, been ignored, excluded, marginalized, misread, and for whom the past and its treatment still seem to matter a lot.

This confirms me in my own belief that the past is there for our benefit – to be used by us as we see fit, for purposes that it is up to us to devise. It has no autonomy – no 'rights' of its own – other than what we willingly bestow on it. Which is not, I would maintain, the same as saying that past *people* do not have rights (or that we are not bound to grant them rights): it seems to me that they do (and we are) – the same rights as living people. Not, for instance, to be deliberately misrepresented or demeaned, or just ignored. But a (reified) past makes no such moral demands, so it seems to me that we might as well use it for the best – by which I mean *our* best, or the best as we define it. And I will define it here – the choice again is mine – in Rortean terms of giving 'social hope'. For as Rorty has shown, once freed from the Platonic conception of an absolute Truth to which we all, severally, in our different disciplines, but ultimately communally, aspire – each contributing to one grand project – we can appropriate an alternative, pragmatic conception of truth defined roughly (in the words of William James) as 'what would be better for us to believe' (Rorty 1999, p. 149). Then we might hope that, as John Dewey

claimed for philosophy, an historical study 'which surrenders its somewhat barren monopoly of dealings with Ultimate and Absolute Reality will find a compensation in enlightening the moral forces which move mankind' (Dewey 1921, p. 27).

It is worth trying to evaluate the results of maintaining various aspirations for historical study. What *good* has come from historians' quest for absolutes, for 'the truth' about the past – from their self-sacrificing endeavours to tell it simply 'as it was' – over the past two centuries? It is impossible to give a simple answer to that, of course, but some illuminating studies have made a start, and indicate that the resultant 'good' may be defined in terms of conservatism – conservation of the status quo in social, political, institutional and disciplinary terms. Admittedly, historians themselves often seem to be unaware of or do not even care about such effects (whether perceived as positive or negative). The objective of historical study, as one British educationalist has reminded us, is to make, not better citizens, but simply better historians. Thus, to take an extreme example, the Holocaust, he insists, should be treated strictly 'as *history'* – by which he evidently means that teachers should be concerned (and concern their students) only 'with what happened and why' (whatever that could mean). The teaching of such historical events 'does not, or *should not,* involve any attempt at "making the world a better place". … All teachers can really do is to help students become, as far as they can, better historians' (Kinloch 1998, my emphasis). While the rest of the outer world disintegrates, a little inner clique of ideal historians is to continue to enjoy its own navel-gazing Utopia.

One is reminded, not so much of Pyrrho's pig (going about its business unconcerned as the storm raged), as of Nero's fiddle, or of Hitler's bunker, grandiose plans for the next imperial millennium intact, amidst the devastation. 'Denial', a pathological refusal or inability to face the present, let alone the future: is that what history is about? The quest for an anchor already securely embedded, a lifeline drawing us back to the safety of the shore, a tranquillizer enabling us to turn with equanimity (if not self-righteousness) from disturbances of which we are vaguely aware over the distant (or even nearer) horizon? Or is it time to rethink a refigured history in the light (or rather darkness) of our present needs?

By that I do not mean trying any longer to justify it in terms of those much publicized needs ascribed to us (rather perhaps than felt by us) as aspiring competitors in global markets, needs that can supposedly at least in part be satisfied through acquisition of those 'transferable skills' so conveniently conveyed by historical study. But I do wonder if it could not (or should not) be justified by virtue of some human *qualities* that it might engender and promote. I recently concluded (without any claims to originality) that those qualities – qualities essential for a satisfactory and free life in postmodernity – include: the old Delphic/Socratic goal of self-consciousness or self-reflectivity (some awareness of what we are doing and why); the ability to live with uncertainty and ambiguity in a foundationless world after the death of God; and a linguistic awareness that will facilitate the detection and interrogation of those 'regimes of truth' in which we are all necessarily ensnared – their boundaries, extent, manipulations, power structures, constraints and possible escape routes. Such qualities, I believe, are already being fostered by some historical works indicating possible (and

positive) directions for the future, and I was much heartened recently to read Greg Dening writing of his own history as possibly fulfilling a need, when it 'disturbs the moral lethargy of the living to change in their present the consequences of their past' (Dening 2002, p. 12).

That seems to be in brief more or less where I currently stand, so, to revert to the editors' question, how did I get to this position? Can I find some thread back through the labyrinthine past to lead me to my present?

Entrance

Certainly no beginning I recall – no formal teaching in the past – in any way resembles my present understanding of what history is, and what it is for. Entering my labyrinth, the earliest memories of 'History' at my first school are associated with utter and profound boredom – a hateful redbound book with small print and lacking any illustrations. Goodness knows what we did with it: I can remember nothing (though I can still recall some of the French vocabulary, taught with contrasting imagination and with the help of flash-cards illustrating Madame Souris and her parapluie). Later, at my grammar school, things were little better (and worse in French). O-level examinations seemingly required nothing but rote-learning of one's coursework essays, and our master had thoughtfully prepared his own mnemonics, designed to ensure that nothing important was left out. I can still remember some of his mnemonics – RefsPTPipPip was one – but what those letters stood for (Reform Bill to start, perhaps?) I have no idea, nor of the content of those essays, once they had enabled me to pass.

I do not wish to leave the wrong idea about my grammar school, which was itself an historic institution, founded by Henry VIII no less. One of the lines of our school song included the words 'sentiment is more than skill' (usefully rhyming and scanning with the preceding 'Sing together with a will!') – an admirable sentiment indeed, as I continue to think, but one that I could never reconcile with the actual ethos of the school as it then appeared to me. Skill at declining Greek and Latin nouns, at reciting irregular French verbs, at parsing English sentences and (while prodded in the stomach with a metre-rule) at repeating Boyle's Law – yes. But 'sentiment' was something left for the girls' school, carefully sited on another side of town. Yet there was some cultural osmosis, as we sat with teachers who led a campaign to save Colchester's historic Dutch Quarter (now the height of conservation chic) from the bulldozers of philistine town-planners; or who (as we discovered decades later) were respected war poets; or who looked with justified disgust at me sniggering when instructed to read out loud (in Latin, of course) the opening lines of the Aeneid. (The memory of that master's scorn helped me to remain calm when my own students later took my subject less seriously than I thought it merited.) And a little philosophy was there, disguised as English literature: no difficulty about choosing my favourite poem – the *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*. 'The moving finger writes, and having writ/ Moves on: nor all your Piety nor Wit/Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,/Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word of it.' The beginnings there of some feeling for the past – of passing time, and history; even a hint of interdisciplinary potential?

Another good thing about my grammar school was that it processed us efficiently to university; and, in the face of maternal ambition and paternal bemused acquiescence, I was offered a place at Oxford. I recall my own chagrin that I should have been considered fit to be entered, not for a properly ancient foundation, but for what sounded like a new one. Historical reassurance followed on discovery that New College was new only in 1379 – my first introduction to the theme of linguistic anachronism, which has continued as an interest.

My generation was processed first, though, through two 1950s-style 'gapyears', with little choice of destination, and where my own contact with history was slight but daily, as I polished my badge inscribed with 'Egypt' – the site of a triumph of the 44th' of foot against the French in 1801, and of a notorious sortie in my own time (1956) for which my services fortunately were not required. Regimental pride there was, but no attempt that I remember to instil any history that might have underpinned it. So I did little more of relevance here in those two years than become a bit of social history.

Yet on reflection that is not right, for I was left with a residue of detestation of authoritarian hierarchies (exemplified *par excellence* at that time by the rigid differentiation between 'officers' and 'other ranks'), of the resultant disempowerment (where resistance results in sinking ever deeper into the mire) and of admiration for those few who succeed none the less in resisting. I have subsequently been hugely impressed by the stories of such people as Hugh Thomson, the American in Vietnam, who, contrary to orders and any conceivable expectation, used his helicopter at My Lai to rescue villagers rather than join in the massacre. One of my back-burner projects is to present exemplary hope-inspiring narratives such as his of those who have succeeded against the odds in marching to another drum from those around them.

In terms of my own narrative, though, intellectual development awaited Greats – five terms of Greek and Latin (learning to dot the i's) and seven terms of philosophy and ancient history (having them opened, in what I see now is an essentially oral pun). And a few moments too, along the way, of historical illumination. The great Geoffrey de Ste Croix, lawyer turned Marxist Greek historian, taught by example, with his meticulous marshalling of evidence from primary sources; and Tom Stevens, famous for serving beer in tutorials from a barrel in his room, conveyed the wisdom that history was actually made by men and women. The events of the late Roman Republic and early Empire were the results of human intervention – obvious enough of course (and no doubt taught, if not understood, at primary schools nowadays), but for me an important insight at the time, and supplemented by Ronald Syme's then novel prosopographic approach to the actors in that drama. I still think it is all too easy to view history (and life) as some inevitable course of events in which we are all caught up, rather than (in both cases) a present potentiality over which we, as participating actors, have at least some control.

That is not to say that I have always thought myself in control, and pointing in a self-determined direction: far from it. Indecisiveness may be a characteristic that I have only recently come to embrace as a virtue, but it has long been a part of me. I could never, for instance, decide whether to concentrate on history or philosophy,

and ultimately resolved that dilemma by having my cake and eating it in the form of history of ideas, or intellectual history as I tend increasingly to think of it. But what surprises me, looking back, is how little philosophy at Oxford was explicitly applied to history. So, for example, we studied the perennial philosophical problem of 'other minds' – of whether we can ever get to know what another human being is actually thinking; but I recall no invitation to apply our analysis of that to minds in the past (or history). And similarly the sudden illumination that, if we spoke another language, we might experience another world, had no obvious application at that time to history. Perhaps I was just too thick to make such connections; but the philosophy of history was never (so far as I remember) explicitly addressed.

The maze

Indecisiveness, at all events, pursued me into the world of work, and it was only after three years helping to administer education in London (from a base now transmuted, with what significance I am not sure, into a fun-fair and aquarium) that I resumed anything like academic life. That then gave a chance for further study, and while teaching so-called 'General Studies' to scientists and engineers, I furthered my own education – first in history and philosophy of science (a prospective bridge across the then fashionably lamented gulf between two cultures), and then with research into more general intellectual history. Indeed, my research subject – a seventeenth-century English Catholic priest named Thomas White – forced me to follow his own wide interests, embracing theology and political theory as well as natural philosophy or science. A part of his attractiveness for me was that breadth of his intellectual interests, another part the heretical nature of his theological and political writings (all of which were consigned to the Index of prohibited works, and some of which even caused a rumpus in the English Parliament) and yet another part (as I have come to see) the 'ambiguity' central to his thought – by which I mean that he tried to reconcile the traditional Aristotelianism of his upbringing with aspects of 'the new philosophy' (even including Copernicanism and atomism).

The problem for the thesis-writer was to find some focus from which to make sense of such diversity – to construct a tidy narrative of White's life and thought. And that I finally found with the help of Richard Popkin's seminal *History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza:* it was, I realized, or anyway claimed, his opposition to what he considered the veritable 'contagion' of Pyrrhonism that served to unify White's ideas, whether in philosophy, or theology, or 'science', or even politics. However diverse in his thought, White did not like uncertainty, anywhere – though that, rather than inducing him to close his mind to intellectual challenges, provoked him more positively to formulate his own innovative syntheses. That, at any rate, as I have come to realize, is how I was able to ascribe some coherence to my material.

White and his followers – the so-called 'Blackloists', who took their name from his singularly unconcealing alias – provided a convenient historical niche for some years; and they demonstrated, as I hoped to show, the importance to history of those who, if not totally ignored within a predominantly Whig historiographical tradition, have

been conventionally considered as mere 'minor' figures. The big names – Galileo, Descartes, Hobbes – obviously revealed important aspects of the major intellectual revolution that they helped to bring about; but it was such long-forgotten characters as White and Kenelm Digby and John Sergeant, with their attempts to reconcile the old and new, who might be more typical, and actually, in their Janus-faced posture, reveal more than their less ambiguous contemporaries about the intellectual upheavals of their time (Southgate 1993, 1994).

One thing that they did reveal was shared concern with the revival and growth of the then fashionable sceptical philosophy; and scepticism came to occupy an increasingly important place in my own thought and in my courses on intellectual history. Initially the subject of just one lecture, it came to require a whole semester's course, and it was a subject that clearly resonated for many students with their own concerns. As I write this, I realize how fortunate I was in being able to adapt my courses in this way. Being in at the very beginning of humanities at the University of Hertfordshire, I wrote, taught and modified my courses in line with my own developing intellectual interests (closely monitored, for reassurance, by the late-lamented Council for National Academic Awards).

At all events, my seventeenth-century Blackloists came explicitly to impinge on historiography. With their ambition to demolish the scriptural foundations of Protestantism, these Catholic writers questioned the validity of the biblical record; that is, the supposedly historical record of early Christianity. And it was not a great step to see that secular historians were unlikely to be any more immune than sacred ones to such sceptically based critique; so that, ironically, these anti-sceptics came to be accused of themselves promulgating a more extreme scepticism than anyone else ever had. Thus there was for me a natural progression – which is to say that one can, in retrospect, trace a consistent path from seventeenth-century scepticism and its application to historiography, to a more pervasive (and contemporary) critique (Southgate 2000).

Another thing I learned from Dick Popkin was that intellectual history had to do with 'real' life – or that it was acceptable to think that it might do. While others ploughed their academic furrows with blinkers firmly in place, Popkin has always made clear his belief that history should illuminate our present: scepticism is an ingredient of our modern mind; so to understand ourselves, we need to see how and when and why it came to be assimilated. There is a *practical* point to it all, just as there is, too, in the examination of foundations of modern racism, which he detects in the eighteenth century in the writings of people such as David Hume.[2] Popkin's history, in short, has to do with humanity – and, as I have come to realize, with all three of the qualities (identified above) with which I am currently concerned. I hope that my own work on seventeenth-century intellectual history may be seen to have derived from twentieth-century socio-political (human) concerns: even my own apolitical generation was politicized in the 1980s, and I tried at that time to indicate the folly of believing that one monolithic ideology (whether early-modern mechanistic 'experimental philosophy', or late modern Thatcherism with its anti-humanistic implications for education) could ever be universalized as their proponents claimed, and, for all their assumed benefits, could ever be embraced without corresponding loss (Southgate 1989, 1990).

Further pondering intellectual indebtedness, it occurs to me that another book which neatly summed up what I had been personally (but less coherently) concluding was Keith Jenkins' now classic *Rethinking History* (1991). I was basically in agreement with the arguments, but I was also intrigued by the challenge implied in his conclusion, where he wrote of the need, in postmodernity, for history 'that helped us to understand the world that we live in and the forms of history that have both helped produce it and which it has produced' (Jenkins 1991, p. 70). That has, I suppose, constituted my own agenda for the past decade.

Bifurcations

When I submitted my first draft of *History: What and Why?* to Routledge, one of the readers to whom it was sent was Keith Jenkins. Among other perceptive and characteristically helpful comments, Keith (whom I did not know at the time) identified me as what he called a *'reluctant* deconstructionist'; and I suppose that in a sense I was (and maybe am). By that I mean that I have always been attracted by two seemingly incompatible philosophies – forms of Platonism and of existentialism – and I remain to some extent torn between the two, 'torn', as Hobbes once said of those with interest in both science and religion, 'between two obligations'. No labyrinth can be free of bifurcations.

Plato was an early enthusiasm, and I am still moved by Diotima's talk of love in the *Symposium* as somehow aspirational – as an endless quest for an absolute. A book from the 1960s to which I remain indebted is R. V. Sampson's *Equality and Power* (1965), where, against the already pervasive relativism of his time, Sampson insisted on 'equality' as such an absolute in the context of both personal and public morality; and that still seems to me to make sense in terms of personal and social hope. Even historical 'Truth' (perhaps even with a capital 'T') might still retain some meaning or function, as an ideal towards which we ever unsuccessfully strive. This is not to say that I believe in 'Truth' as an entity, which might be ultimately apprehensible by an ascetic historian or a priest of any other persuasion; but it is to question whether there might not be some virtue in positing something outside, and even higher than, ourselves (whatever we choose to call it), which would give us something (however hypothetical) to work towards – an ever receding horizon, which would at least remind us of the need for (professional and personal) onward passage and *humility*. In the prospect of Plato's (or Christianity's, or Buddhism's) ideal 'Truth', we are forced to the Socratic confession that we know nothing, and brought to the realization that it is just that that might be the beginning of wisdom?

But such transcendentalism may be hard to reconcile with a humanistic existentialism; and that has been another long-standing intellectual enthusiasm. Indeed, I can still remember coming across some extracts from Sartre's writings, and thinking that at last I had found respectably written what I had already (but incoherently) been formulating for myself. It rang a bell, as we say, and its chime still resonates. I still believe that we are responsible for defining ourselves and by implication human beings generally; and I believe that any educator needs to believe *in principle* that 'human nature' *can* change, so that improvements *can* be effected.

That assumed ability to change ourselves is, it seems to me, closely linked to an ability to modify our pasts – that is, to view them differently and more positively, in the interests of a better future (which is where existentialism feeds into a post-modern attitude to history, and our ability to *change* it). That belief is derived in part from very personal emotional experiences, and in my case associated with divorce; and I often wonder how often our professional passions are linked with our personal ones. At traumatic times, we are forced to review our pasts – self-reflectively to reconsider how we got to where we are – and we are almost certainly forced to concede that (however closely involved two people's experience has been) there is more than one narrative that can be imposed on what has happened. That in itself is likely to enable – or force – us to modify our own interpretations. In other words, Ariadne does seem to offer a choice of threads; but again we confront the Pyrrhonian problem of finding or determining some criteria for choosing.

This returns us to our own responsibility and power: in the absence of any 'natural' criterion it is up to us to choose our own. And on the personal level – as I believe also on the public – we can choose to be essentially negative or positive, backward-looking or forward. We can harp on endlessly with recriminations about past misdemeanours (whether our own or other people's), or use our past experiences to grow. On a political level, in 1997 British Prime Minister Tony Blair (as reported in *The Times* of 12 December) famously proposed to the Irish negotiator Gerry Adams a 'choice of history' – a choice of persisting with the conventional narrative of 'violence and despair' or of adopting an alternative that might lead to 'peace and progress'. On a personal level, the therapist Janette Rainwater has proposed that negative auto-biographies be replaced with positive, and has described how her own account of past experiences changed from sounding 'aggrieved, embittered, and victimised' to emphasizing 'the strengths that I gained as a result of these events' (Rainwater 1989, pp. 99–100). Histories, both personal and public, can provide a form of therapy, leading forward, as proposed by Richard Rorty, to whatever gives us cause for hope. It is up to us, at bifurcations, to choose the more positive path.

No exit?

Retirement, no less than (and perhaps even more than) divorce, is a time for, among other things, looking back and wondering what one has been doing with one's life, and more particularly with all that 'history' one has been researching and teaching; and that provokes (in my case) further concern about what history should have been and should be for.

Answers to that rather obvious question are, it seems to me, still too often given in terms of 'transferable skills' and 'cultural inheritance'. For the former, there can be nothing wrong with equipping students to function in the 'real' world of industry and commerce; and if history can be a vehicle for that, so much the better – as long as my requisite 'qualities' are conveyed at the same time, to preclude the possibility of providing mere bureaucracy fodder or cogs in mechanistic enterprises. Concerning the latter, the aspiration to transmit some shared cultural experience, some agreed

story of our (preferably glorious) past is, perhaps, natural for those who have witnessed the dissolution of those 'national identities' nostalgically remembered from earlier and seemingly more straightforward times. Thus it is widely agreed (presupposed even) that 'citizenship' programmes should entail a good dose of national history – that agreed record of our national past designed to enable understanding of our present place in the world, to be proud of those past national achievements (however identified) of which we are the present custodians, and to encourage some sense of a 'community' based on shared (even if recently adopted) roots. Thus immigrants to Britain, we are advised, should learn in particular about Magna Carta as a root of civil liberties now thoughtlessly enjoyed, and about Nazi Germany as exemplifying evils that must never be allowed to recur.

There is more than a passing resemblance between those seemingly disparate examples, since both the progressive path of 'liberalism' and the all-too-late (for many) defeat of (twentieth-century German) Nazism have ultimately to do with standing up against prevailing authority – of facing down respective cases of evil (socio-political tyrannies or established ideologies). Or that is how I would want to read their joint significance: that is the moral lesson I personally would choose to draw; that is what my historical narrative in both those cases would be for. But the problem is to make connections – to enable students to make that imaginative leap from King John or Adolf Hitler to ourselves. And one wonders just how successful historians have been in that respect. 'Few hearts swell with pride in Mosley Road Secondary Modern School at the thought of Magna Carta', conceded J. H. Plumb (Plumb 1964, p. 7); even now, how much more aware are we, after studying all our histories, of the need to protect our civil liberties? Or of the need to resist authoritarian pressures, and stand up against the norm? How much, for all our emphasis on Third Reich studies, has actually been learned about how and how not to treat each other?

That is where disillusionment threatens, as a personal example will show. I have an aunt, now nearly 90, disabled by polio from early childhood. She sometimes drives her motorized wheelchair along the mile-and-a-half run of Southend pier, then takes the little train back. There is a special compartment on the train for the disabled, and the station-guard is usually there to ensure that she gets safely into it. Some weeks ago (in 2003), the guard was absent, and a crowd of young people swarmed on to the train and filled it. They looked out from the compartment for the disabled, saw my aunt unable to get on, and, as the train drew out, mockingly waved her goodbye.

At about the same time I read news reports of how professional 'carers' had refused to try and lift a disabled woman, weighing only 7 stone, who had fallen from her chair and was lying helpless on the floor. 'I asked them for help. They did not. They watched me crawling on the floor. It was the most humiliating and degrading experience of my life.' A week later there were further reports of how paramedics elsewhere had similarly left helpless on the floor a 90-year-old war hero: their 'regulations', they explained, would not allow them to pick up this man, who weighed under 10 stone.

How can such stories not remind us of behaviour in the Third Reich? Don't the railway lines to Auschwitz connect with those on Southend pier? Didn't unthinking obedience to regulations die with Adolf Eichmann? How can we not wonder what

their history lessons have conveyed to these 'ordinary' Englishmen? Why have they not been disturbed in their 'moral lethargy … to change in their present the consequences of their past'? Presumably because it is not, so it is claimed (as we have seen), the job of history to teach such moral lessons; that is not what history is about or for. But if it is not history's (or historians') job, whose is it? And if that is not history's job, what is? How can there be a more important job to do? And who, with what academic subject, is better qualified to do it? Is it not, in these matters, time to heed Frank Ankersmit's recent call to a sense of *urgency* (Ankersmit 2003)? Or is there no way out?

Conclusion

It occurs to me that the quest for Ariadne and her thread is, after all, misguided: there can of course never be any one single way through the complexity of our past to lead us out, satisfactorily, tidily, safely, conclusively, back to our present. A more appropriate metaphor might be taken from the story of long-haired Rapunzel imprisoned in her tower: what is needed for access (to her or to the past) is an infinity of finely interwoven threads (of her hair, or of historical narratives) which, together, might be strong enough to enable our escape, whether from towering memories or philosophical fly-bottles or labyrinthine pasts. What I have disentangled here is one hair: now for the next, and the next, and the next …

Notes

1 I am grateful to Alun Munslow for his encouragement, and to John Ibbett, Keith Jenkins and Sheila Southgate for comments on an earlier draft.

2 For a useful introduction to the range of Richard Popkin's work, see his essays in *The High Road to Pyrrhonism,* ed. Richard A. Watson and James E. Force (San Diego: Austin Hill Press, 1980), reviewed by me in *History of European Ideas* (1981).

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12

INVITATION TO HISTORIANS

C. Behan McCullagh

One of the leading philosophers of history, McCullagh explains how his engagement with the nature of history took him from a study of the past, as a historian might, to a study of philosophy in order to understand the logic of historical thinking. His early work was on the nature of inference, interpretation and the nature of justified belief (truth) and causation. He came to the judgement that there are practical and epistemic reasons for our beliefs. His defence of what he takes to be the rational basis for historical thinking and practice is formidable. His defence of history is also founded on his belief in the importance of the social functioning of history.

I don't know why historians by and large have little interest in philosophy of history. I suspect it is because their interests are historical and ours are philosophical. I first suspected this when I was introduced to my PhD supervisor in history and raised some basic philosophical concerns with him. I wanted to know what standards were expected of professional historians, more specifically how one justifies descriptions of the past, how one interprets past events, and how one is meant to explain them. Not only was he unable to answer these questions, but it seemed to me he had never seriously considered them. I expect he enjoyed getting into the evidence and drawing conclusions from it, without reflecting upon the logic of what he was doing.

This did not matter, I suppose, while the works of professional historians were widely respected, for they had no need of philosophical defence. But when sceptics attack their credibility, and the public are told that all histories are just matters of personal opinion, equally biased and unfounded, then they do need philosophers to help rescue them. But I run ahead of my story.

My study of history at school and university had required me to read an immense amount of history, so that when I explained to Geoffrey Elton, my director of studies at Clare College, Cambridge, that my PhD supervisor could not answer my questions, he rather reluctantly offered to support my doing a PhD in philosophy of

history, saying that at least I knew how history was written. He had been one of my tutors for the history tripos at Cambridge, so he knew I had been well educated! Elton, like most historians, was unimpressed by philosophy of history, but nevertheless asked Herbert Butterfield to take me under his wing, and supervise my doctorate in that field. Butterfield was very gracious and shared many of his reflections on history in a most generous way.

In the 1960s, philosophers of history were discussing C. G. Hempel and William Dray's theories of historical explanation, so I joined the fray. I soon discovered that an education in history was not nearly enough. Hempel was drawing upon philosophy of science, and Dray turned to Collingwood and the philosophy of hermeneutics. So I read assiduously in those fields. To explain individual and social behaviour it seemed obvious that one also needed a familiarity with commonsense psychology and social theory, so I attended lectures that introduced me to those. Finally, philosophers employ forms of inductive argument, and concepts such as cause and responsibility, so I had to learn a lot of philosophy as well. No wonder historians give philosophy of history a wide berth! The program of reading I set myself in those years is one that I have continued ever since.

On reflection I can see now that historians who have no interest in these fields will have little interest in the philosophy of history that draws upon them. They will prefer to discuss evidence of the past, not the logic underlying their inquiries. If they attempt to read philosophy of history such as I have published, as a few of my friends have told me, they find it difficult to follow, even though I think it is written as plainly as can be. That is because they really have no idea of the problems I'm discussing, nor of the various attempts that have been made to resolve them in the past.

Patrick Gardiner and Michael Oakeshott examined my dissertation, and my memory of my oral exam is of the two of them discussing the issues together in Oakeshott's study. With the degree in hand I needed a job, and as there were none on offer in philosophy of history I applied for and obtained a lectureship in history at the University of Melbourne. The advertisement was to teach seventeenth-century British history, but on arriving at Melbourne the professor in charge, Max Crawford, asked me to teach medieval European history. I complained that although I had studied history for four years at Sydney University and for several years at Cambridge, I had never ever read a word of medieval European history. He replied that since I was a trained historian, I would certainly be able to learn and teach it. So that was that. I'm glad to say those who succeeded Max would never ask a lecturer to teach entirely outside his or her area of competence. I have never worked so hard in my life.

Relief came after three and a half years, with an advertisement to teach philosophy of history at the newly formed La Trobe University in Melbourne. Philosophy was one of the few subjects initially offered in Humanities, and its foundation professor, Brian Ellis, was keen to make the subject relevant to other subjects being taught: notably history, science, politics, law and English. So he appointed lecturers to teach philosophy of science, philosophy of history, and so on. His department quickly expanded to well over twenty staff of lively young lecturers with a wide variety of

interests in contemporary philosophy. It was immensely stimulating. Our weekly staff seminars were friendly but challenging.

At last I was free to devise a research program that would build on my work in Cambridge. I decided to write two books, one on how historians draw inferences from evidence to discover what happened in the past, and the other on how they interpret and explain the facts they have discovered. The method I adopted was to examine the philosophical literature relevant to these topics, and then see whether the theories the philosophers proposed did in fact illuminate the practice of historians. For example, I studied theories of inductive inference, such as arguments to the best explanation, and statistical inferences, and then looked at arguments among historians about the significance of historical evidence to see whether they assumed patterns of inference I had learned in philosophy. (See McCullagh 1984, chapters 2 and 3.) Historians normally do not present the reasoning that lies behind their descriptions of the past, but when those descriptions are challenged, and the significance of the relevant evidence is debated, then the patterns of inference become clear.

The aim of this work was to expose the rationality of historical descriptions. Of course there is a big difference between the process of historical thinking, in which historians imagine many possible scenarios in the past and consider their plausibility, and the arguments by which they finally justify their conclusions. It is only the latter that are relevant to judgements of the rationality of their published descriptions of the past.

What made this method of doing philosophy of history difficult were quite vigorous debates among philosophers about the subjects I had to study. For example, if one draws rational conclusions about what happened in the past from evidence available today, does the rationality of those conclusions warrant the assertion that they are true? This question has been very difficult to answer. To begin with, it requires one to have a defensible theory of what is meant by 'truth', and there is no consensus about that. Then, if historical statements cannot be proved absolutely true, in some sense, is there any good reason for believing them? More to the point, for belief to be rational, can pragmatic as well as epistemic considerations be taken into account? In other words, is it reasonable to believe something because it is useful to do so, as well as because the available evidence implies it is probably true (whatever that means)?

The more I studied the rationality of our beliefs about the world, including historical beliefs, the more I discovered that our confidence in those beliefs is out of all proportion to the probability of their absolute truth. However, were we to remain sceptical of our knowledge of the world, we could not act very confidently within it. Those beliefs which we think are probably true we accept as such for practical purposes, to achieve what we want to in the world. Whether historical knowledge has practical significance is a question to be taken up later. But even the need to produce a good history book will lead historians to assert statements as true, without qualification, though professionals know they are sometimes revised in the light of later evidence. There are practical reasons as well as epistemic ones for our beliefs about the world.

This fact has helped me understand the strength of people's religious beliefs as well. I am sceptical of those beliefs for which there is almost no evidence, or which

available evidence implies are probably false. But others, for which there is evidence that is inconclusive, can be accepted I think for practical reasons, as enabling people to make better sense of their experiences of the world, and as motivating and assisting them to lead a good life (see McCullagh 2007).

The truth of history was strongly challenged at first by Leon J. Goldstein in *Historical Knowing* (1976), and later the possibility and intelligibility of arriving at any truths about the world was denied by Richard Rorty in his book *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979). The issues are complex, and when I came to discuss them in the opening chapters of subsequent books, I imagine any historians who happened to read them would probably wonder why I adopted the position I did, rather than the commonsense idea that historical descriptions are true if things really happened as they say they did. Unfortunately, from a philosophical perspective, such simple answers will not do. The relations between descriptions of the world and the things or events that make them true are very difficult to describe.

Another central topic that philosophers debated at length was the nature of causation. I had attended a term's lectures on just that subject by Elizabeth Anscombe in Cambridge, so I knew the range of views. At first I decided to remain neutral about the meaning of 'cause', and simply identify the conditions for using the word. I argued that an event or state of affairs was a cause of a consequent event or state of affairs if it was contingently necessary for its occurrence (McCullagh 1984, chapter 7). By the time I came to write on causation in *The Truth of History* (McCullagh 1998, chapter 7), I had recognized the value of the analysis of causes as events triggering dispositions or causal powers, which produce tendencies for a certain consequence to occur without necessitating its occurrence. There is not a very regular relation between causes and effects, as Hume had supposed. Causes trigger tendencies for certain effects to occur, but these tendencies can be modified or defeated by other tendencies at work in a situation. Thus the tendency for a seesaw to be depressed when you sit on one end of it can be modified when someone sits on the other end at the same time. The analysis of causes as events triggering tendencies fits historical cases beautifully, so I added it in that later book, and in *The Logic of History* (McCullagh 2004, chapter 7). There is little doubt that as philosophers improve their theories, our analysis of historical reasoning will improve also.

Scepticism about the possibility of knowing what happened in the past, initiated by Goldstein and Rorty, was further developed by postmodern writers, particularly by Keith Jenkins in *Re-thinking History* (1991) and subsequent publications. Post-modernists view history as little more than a literary construction, moulded according to historians' language and their views of the world, in pursuit of their personal interests, which are themselves the product of the historian's place in society. They have little interest in examining the relation of written history to the past, or its rational basis in available evidence. They generally assume that although historians follow conventions of rational inquiry, these could not be proved to yield true descriptions of the past, so they were not worth worrying about. To them, history is a conventional practice, and its products are of doubtful veracity and uncertain significance.

This attack upon the rationality and credibility of history is formidable, and I have discussed it in a number of papers, papers on the meaning of symbols and metaphors, on bias and objectivity, on narratives and interpretation, and on the role of interests in explaining actions. These studies contributed substantially to my second book, *The Truth of History* (McCullagh 1998), which was mostly about interpretation and explanation in history. What I argued was that written history is both a literary construction and usually a fair, credible and intelligible account of the past. The two are not incompatible. We use language to describe and explain things in the world every day, without much difficulty, and people generally do not deny the truth of what we say just because we use words and concepts we have inherited from our culture. The same thing can often be described in different ways, using a variety of words and concepts, yet all the descriptions can be true.

In order to understand the work of other philosophers of history as fully as I could, I visited a number of them in Britain, Canada and the USA, and gave papers in several universities there. The hospitality I received from Quentin Skinner, Bill Dray, Alan Donagan, Leon Goldstein, Le Roy Cebik, and Arthur Danto and their departments was very generous. And I recall enjoyable seminars at York University, Toronto, Queens University, Kingston, and Guelph University, as well as at the University of London and the University of Oslo. To keep up with purely philosophical inquiry, I attended the annual conferences of the Australasian Association of Philosophers, offering a paper on average every two years. I also attended, and presented papers at, annual meetings of the Eastern Division of the American Philosophical Association.

My work on the rational justification of historical writing was intended to help historians appreciate the kinds of descriptions, interpretations and explanations they provide, and the ways in which they can be rationally justified. To that end I was careful to illustrate the points made in my analyses of history by drawing upon the works of recent and reputable historians. Even so, some found the first two books I wrote too long and complicated to read, so I decided to produce a short book, summarizing the conclusions drawn in the other two, and updating them with additional material. The result was *The Logic of History* (McCullagh 2004). I hope it is accessible to both historians and advanced students of history.

I have long been concerned to understand and promote the personal and social value of historical knowledge. I mention some of my convictions in the very brief conclusion to *The Logic of History*. Investigating the value of historical knowledge has now become my major research project. It raises very interesting questions, the main one being how can what happened in the past be relevant to the present, given the great differences between the two? In fact, of course, we have inherited institutions and habits, values and beliefs from the past, which frame our lives in the present. To assess their value, we should rely to a great extent upon information about their origins and how they have affected communities in the past. Those lacking knowledge of their history can scarcely judge the value of the various legal, political, economic and religious beliefs, practices and institutions that influence people's behaviour and consequent experience today.

Once the social values of history are appreciated, those who teach the subject, especially at schools, will be encouraged to choose topics that illuminate students' social and cultural heritage, and enable them to value it appropriately. It appals me that many teachers of history choose subjects simply for their entertainment value, leaving students ignorant of the most important elements of their traditions. They often focus upon skills of interpretation and narration, without explaining either the rational basis or the social value of the histories the students are writing. The triviality of such teaching is soon recognized by bright students, who turn away from the subject for something better.

Recently I have made a special study of the value of historical knowledge to the social sciences, in particular to the development of economic theories and policies. Neoclassical economists are content to display the rationality of their theories, with little concern for sources of irrational behaviour. Heterodox theories are much more willing to take account of historical contingencies. Both approaches have merit, and the challenge is to discover how to relate the two. Human behaviour at its best displays practical rationality, adopting means appropriate to certain ends and values in a certain context. The more accurate the information upon which a policy is based, the more successful it is likely to be.

It is my dream that history will eventually come of age. Historians will not only think rationally, as the best do today, but come to recognize the standards of rationality that distinguish professional history. And rather than writing simply to entertain, or to create and test novel interpretations of historical evidence and historical events, they will acknowledge their obligation to help society understand itself. Then, when students see how rational and valuable history is, they will be drawn into a profession upon which the health of our civilization largely depends.

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13

AN INTELLECTUAL SELF-PORTRAIT OR THE HISTORY OF A HISTORIAN

Peter Burke

Burke begins by stating that he believes being a historian means combining the qualities of 'intelligence, perception (psychological, political or whatever) and the ability to communicate well', attributes that have nothing to do with any cleavage between 'traditional' and 'modern' approaches. But he thinks historians should mediate between past and present, which means rethinking and rewriting history 'in every generation'. His initial interest in the *Annales* historians was strengthened by the concept of 'total history' but he eventually moved into teaching intellectual and political history. Burke also developed what became a continuing interest in images. He emerged as a wide-ranging cultural historian.

An invitation of this kind can be interpreted in at least two ways, as an opportunity to produce a programme (or even a manifesto) for a particular way of doing history, or to paint an intellectual self-portrait (warts and all, of course). Having produced a number of such programmes in my time – perhaps too many – I shall opt for the self-portrait, hoping to produce a moving picture rather than a static one, to show how an individual interacts with various milieux and in this way to confront a number of problems currently under debate. In this way an account of a single historian's development may contribute to the collective process of rethinking history.

It is worth asking right at the start whether history needs to be rethought at all. In my view, what makes a good historian is a combination of intelligence, perception (psychological, political or whatever) and the ability to communicate well, qualities that have nothing to do with any division between 'traditional' and 'modern' approaches. However, I also feel very strongly that the function of a historian is to mediate, like a translator, between past and present. This function involves rethinking and rewriting history in every generation.

How does an individual become a historian at all, let alone one of a particular type? The question is best addressed to that person's psychoanalyst.[1] I don't have a

psychoanalyst, but if I were lying on the couch I would probably evoke two images that are still vivid. The first is that of a seven-year-old boy saying to his mother 'When I grow up, I want to be a professor of history.' The problem for me now is of course to reconstruct what that earlier self believed that professors of history did – lecturing? Writing books? Even one's own past is a foreign country.

In any case, the seven-year-old was already fascinated by history. The fascination began, I think, when I was playing with soldiers, leading to an enthusiasm for castles and knights, arms and armour, gradually extended to include Gothic cathedrals, illuminated manuscripts and, above all, heraldry. By the time I was 14, I wanted to be a medievalist and hoped to become a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries one day.

The second image is that of a 16-year-old sitting on a bus, sometime in the early 1950s, reading a book by a Cambridge don, Kenneth Pickthorn, entitled *Early Tudor government: Henry VII* (1934). I was not reading Pickthorn from choice, but for my A levels. What I remember is my irritation with the author for writing about a handful of officials and telling the reader virtually nothing about England in 1485. In other words, what I really wanted to be reading was social history, the history of everybody. This idea I probably derived from G. M. Trevelyan's *English social history* (1942) – my father had given me a copy, which I still possess – and also, perhaps, from Arnold Hauser's *Social history of art* (1951), still a recent publication, which I had discovered on the shelves of Stoke Newington Public Library (I remember being intrigued by the title: how could *art* have a *social* history?).

The Army

Despite disliking Pickthorn, I did well at A level and won an Open Scholarship to St John's College, Oxford. In those days a number of Oxford and Cambridge colleges encouraged the students to whom they had offered places to do their National Service before coming up; and so, just after my 18th birthday, I found myself in the Army, in the Royal Corps of Signals. Since I understood nothing about communication by telegraph, telephone or wireless, I was trained to be a clerk and posted to Singapore.

The 19 months I spent in Singapore District Signal Regiment turned out to be something of an education. I was a pay clerk. The work was easy but boring, mainly mental arithmetic. What was interesting was the fact that the regiment consisted almost entirely of what the Army called 'locally enlisted personnel', mainly Malays, with some Indians (Sikhs and Tamils) and a few Chinese. This was a multicultural society in which new British arrivals were told by the Commanding Officer to respect their 'brown brothers' and not to offer anything to a Malay with one's left hand, since for them the left hand was unclean. The regiment had four cook-houses serving different ethnic varieties of food.

I now see that I came very close to doing anthropology in Singapore without realizing it. The regiment was a social world more isolated in some ways than a village in Malaya, since the boundaries were guarded and we only had permission to leave at certain times. The social as well as the physical environment was very new and I soon

began to take notes about this exotic form of everyday life. Even the habits of my few British colleagues seemed exotic to me, notably the professional soldier's habit of inserting more swear words into every sentence than I would have thought possible.

I felt rather detached from the world of the regiment, a kind of spectator, not only because I had not volunteered to join it but also because I was difficult for other people to classify, low in status by military rank but relatively high in the hierarchies of colour and education. From my position at the bottom of the military hierarchy I was able to observe many things unknown to the officers, who were only in the barracks during the day. To me, an innocent fresh from an English school, the world of the regiment was excitingly scandalous. Everything was for sale. Drivers siphoned petrol out of their vehicles and sold it. Objects from the military stores turned up in the so-called 'thieves market' in the centre of town, offered for sale for a fraction of the official price. An old Punjabi in a white turban who during the day delivered tea to the regimental offices, by night rented out sleeping spaces in the regiment to homeless civilians.

How far I have misremembered or reconstructed these experiences it is difficult to say, but I have little doubt that they were influential on my later career. Edward Gibbon famously claimed that his years in the Hampshire militia were 'not useless to the historian of the Roman Empire'. Many lesser historians can point to similar experiences, and Singapore District Signal Regiment bears some responsibility for making me into a particular breed of historian, fascinated by cultural encounters and misunderstandings and the distance between official and unofficial rules, a topic central to social history (though more work might usefully be done from this point of view on churches, colleges and firms as well as on regiments).

The impact of life in the regiment was reinforced by the weekly experience of wandering through a city – a very different Singapore from the city of today, since it was rather dirty and almost bare of tourists and skyscrapers. As in medieval or early modern Europe, most social life took place in the street, workshops were open and workers might be observed sewing clothes or carving elaborate Chinese coffins (for similar experiences today, it is better to visit Beijing or Taipei rather than Singapore). The shops provided an entry to a culture of bargaining, sometimes protracted (the shopkeeper might bring a chair and a bottle of 'Green Spot' orangeade so that we could enjoy the process of negotiating together).

Why I should have found this kind of contrast with English culture quite so exciting to observe is not easy to say. Only many years later, when my wife interviewed me alongside eight other 'new' historians, did I realize that I had been prepared for this experience by a childhood spent in the house of my mother's parents, both of them émigrés from Eastern Europe. My grandparents spoke differently from my father and mother and they ate traditional Jewish food, so that crossing the hall to visit them was like crossing a cultural frontier.[2]

Oxford

Studying history at Oxford, as I did between 1957 and 1962, was an exciting experience even if it was also, by the standards of 2007, a somewhat narrow one.

There were three compulsory papers in English History and one in English Constitutional Documents (out of a total of nine). The history taught was predominantly political and to a lesser degree economic. The method was the weekly essay, read aloud to one's tutor. My main tutors were Howard Colvin and Keith Thomas. What first impressed me was Colvin's study, the table piled high with photostats of medieval documents, probably the Pipe Rolls from which he was constructing his history of the King's Works. The Keith Thomas I knew at that time was not yet the urbane, witty and ironic personality familiar to British historians today, but a young man who had just arrived in St John's and spoke in tutorials, as I gradually realized, in the style of his own tutor, Christopher Hill. He did not mention social anthropology, although he was already interested in the subject. His technique was to ask us to write essays on orthodox political questions, but to expect a social twist to our answers.

Christopher himself was one of the most impressive figures in the Faculty at this time, and he soon became one of my heroes, together with the more flamboyant Lawrence Stone, while the journal with which they were associated, *Past and Present,* at that time considered by many to be a subversive publication, became my favourite reading. Hill and Stone both lectured on the English Revolution and looked at it from economic, social and cultural points of view as well as from a political one. I think that it was their example that most encouraged me to become an early modernist. When the time for choosing a Special Subject came round, my choice was 'The Italian Renaissance', because this was the only Special with room for cultural history.

I had hoped to be taught by John Hale, whose lectures on Machiavelli had fired my enthusiasm, but he was in the USA at the time and I was sent to D. M. Bueno de Mesquita. Bueno tried to teach the Italian Renaissance as the diplomatic history of the period 1494–1513, but third-year students know their own minds and I spent my time reading Castiglione and Guicciardini, whom I still consider to be one of the great Western historians, on a par with Thucydides. As for the artistic side, Edgar Wind was lecturing on Raphael and Leonardo at this time. An art historian without a department, Wind had no students but he gave the most popular lectures in Oxford. No lecture room was large enough to hold his audience, so he was moved to the Oxford Playhouse. His appeal was that he explained the iconography of Renaissance art to a generation that had assumed that art history was either art criticism or the biographies of artists.

Obtaining a first in 1960, I began work on a D. Phil. dissertation as a Senior Scholar of St Antony's. Moving a few hundred yards north of St John's turned out to be quite a new experience, in a college where all the students were graduates, only a few were British, and the atmosphere was one of passionate intellectual debate. St Antony's was an ideal place for thinking and talking about the way to write history, including the relevance of psychoanalysis, structuralism and sociology. My initiation into sociology was attending a series of seminars on 'Alienation' at Nuffield College organized by Norman Birnbaum and Iris Murdoch (I gave a paper describing recent studies of factory workers in the USA). The importance of oral culture in these examples, as in the academic system more generally, deserves to be noted, because it is often neglected.[3] Conversation and discussion has the advantage of being what

McLuhan called a 'hot' medium, making more impact on the listener than a book normally does on the reader.

At first, I could not make up my mind what subject to choose for my dissertation. One possibility was to work on the history of Oxford and Cambridge in the seventeenth century. Then, remembering my Jesuit education (at St Ignatius's College in North London), I decided on a study of the organization of the order in the time of General Claudio Acquaviva (1581–1615, a period still somewhat neglected by historians of the Jesuits). It proved difficult to obtain access to the archives in Rome, so I had to choose another topic. By this time a group of us (Tim Mason, Gill Sutherland and others) had developed an interest in the history of historical thought, and were trying to persuade the Faculty to give more attention to this subject. I chose to focus on the *History of the Council of Trent* (1619) by the Venetian friar Paolo Sarpi, as a case-study of more general changes in historical writing.

My supervisor was Hugh Trevor-Roper, who allowed me – as many supervisors would not have done – to give my project the ambitious title of 'New trends in European historical writing, 1500–1700'. It was Trevor-Roper who introduced me to Arnaldo Momigliano, from whose conversations, over 20 years, I learned more than I can remember about the history of history and much else. What most impressed me about Trevor-Roper was his skill at locating any event, problem or trend in a wider context and his interest in long-term trends.

These were more or less the same lessons that I was learning at this time from the writings of Fernand Braudel, Lucien Febvre, Marc Bloch and other members of the *Annales* group. Relatively little interest was shown in their work by the Oxford History Faculty at this time. I had to discover *Annales* more or less for myself, with help from Juan Maiguashca, an economic historian from Ecuador who had just arrived in Oxford after studying in Paris with a leading member of the group, Pierre Chaunu.

What did the French have to offer? In a sense it was a kind of 'third way'. Traditional Oxford history offered a good professional training, but I found it too narrow and – with exceptions such as Lawrence Stone and Richard Southern – insufficiently concerned with culture and society. The obvious alternative was Marxism, which attracted quite a number of Oxford students. This had the advantage of focusing on social history, but it seemed too reductionist, treating culture as a mere 'superstructure'. The *Annales* historians, on the other hand, followed no orthodoxy and were interested in both society and culture. I was particularly attracted by Braudel's idea of 'total history', his emphasis on *la longue durée* and by Febvre's history of 'mentalities', in other words a history of ideas that included everyone and was concerned with unspoken or even unconscious assumptions as well as articulated beliefs.

I never completed my dissertation. While I was working on Sarpi and his contemporaries, Asa Briggs came to Oxford to give a talk about sociology and history. In the course of the discussion he mentioned the fact that a new university was about to be founded in which studies across the disciplines would be encouraged. I duly applied and in October 1962 I found myself in Brighton as Assistant Lecturer in the School of European Studies at the University of Sussex.

Sussex

The shift from an old university to a brand new one was something of a culture shock. There was an exciting sense of the absence of traditions. What was particularly liberating was the independence that junior lecturers such as myself were allowed right from the start. Our seniors were too liberal, or too busy designing their own courses, to interfere with ours. In the first year, when future MA courses were under discussion, I suggested establishing one on the History of Ideas, and by the next academic year I was running it. A few years later, a lively Intellectual History Group had come into existence including John Burrow, Donald Winch and Stephan Collini, meeting in seminars on approaches and methods.

Working at Sussex was another education. The first lecture I ever gave was on Freud, part of a series on 'The modern European mind' in which philosophers and literary critics participated. Especially educational was the system of seminars in which two lecturers from different disciplines worked together. Most of what I have learned about how to read a literary text I derive from those early seminars in which I collaborated with Larry Lerner, Gabriel Josipovici, Stephen Medcalf and others. In similar fashion, I was initiated into sociology and art history by two refugees from Central Europe who became friends and mentors, Zev Barbu and Hans Hess. Sussex in the early years gave good lessons in intellectual collaboration.

By now I had also discovered anthropology, finding the descriptions of fieldwork even more fascinating than the theory, perhaps because they helped me understand what I had been doing when I took notes about life in Singapore.

If there is one central theme in my work, a 'red thread', it is the idea of acting as a kind of broker between sociologists and anthropologists on one side and historians on the other, precisely in order to rethink these three disciplines. The idea of doing this came from an invitation by the new Professor of Sociology at Sussex, Tom Bottomore, to write a short book on *Sociology and history* (1981), which my friend Alan Macfarlane observed could equally well have been entitled *Social anthropology and history*. By the time I came to revise it for a second edition, in the 1990s, the rise of cultural geography, the 'new historicism' in literary studies and other intellectual movements encouraged me to widen as well as lengthen the book and to call it *History and social theory* (it might equally well have referred to 'cultural' theory).

Attempting to expand my interests in all these directions meant that I had relatively little time for research. I was 28 before I published my first scholarly article, on the reception of ancient historians in early modern Europe, originally planned as the introductory chapter of my dissertation. By the time that I published my first substantial book, *Culture and society in Renaissance Italy* (1972), I was 35. Looking back, I am grateful to have had the opportunity for those years of preparation, without having to worry either about tenure or the Research Assessment Exercise.

I am not sure how that first book would have been written had it not been for a providential invitation to the Institute of Advanced Study at Princeton, courtesy of Lawrence Stone. Apart from the freedom to write and the first experience of American culture, what was particularly important for me was the daily contact with

some distinguished art historians, among them Millard Meiss, Julius Held and James Beck.

The book on the Renaissance was an attempt to combine rather different approaches. While writing it I was wondering how *Annales* historians would have carried out the task. The 'culture and society' approach owed something to Frederick Antal and Arnold Hauser (although I criticized them) as well as to Raymond Williams, who inspired the title. I also tried to integrate some ideas from Weber and Durkheim into the book. The prosopographical method, focusing on 600 artists and humanists, followed the model of Lewis Namier, while the exploration of patronage and taste was indebted to Francis Haskell (who, like Meiss, discussed the project with me). Michael Baxandall's path-breaking *Painting and experience in fifteenth-century Italy* appeared just too late for me to draw on his stimulating ideas, although we had some interesting conversations later.

Until 1972 I had never worked in an archive. The Sarpi project and the Renaissance project were both based on printed sources. I wanted to discover what I had missed, and to test the idea the only real historian is an archive-based historian. By this time I had become interested in comparative history, especially that of aristocracies and elites.

An archive-based study of two elites seemed to suggest itself, and I chose the patricians of Venice and Amsterdam in the long seventeenth century, 1580–1720. The choice offered an opportunity to write the 'total history' of two small groups, discussing their mentalities, sociability, art patronage and methods of child-rearing as well as their economic base and the sources of their power (attempting to test some of the hypotheses put forward in what was then a recent debate about elites among American political scientists).[4]

The book included a few more ambitious comparisons. My Sussex course on 'aristocracies and elites' extended to mandarins, samurai and the ruling elite of the Ottoman Empire. This teaching interest turned into a strategy that I have employed in one book after another, attempting to define what is specifically European by means of comparisons and contrasts, usually with parts of Asia.

Venice and Amsterdam was the first example of what later became another conscious strategy: the choice of a research topic that in some sense compensated for what was lacking in my earlier work. Since my Renaissance book focused on 'high' culture, I decided to work on popular culture, beginning with early modern Italy but widening out to include the whole of Europe from 1500 to 1800 in an overview that was encouraged by the example of Eric Hobsbawm's *Age of revolution*. The concern with the 'people' was also attractive at a time when I was discovering (belatedly) the work of Edward Thompson and becoming involved in the History Workshop movement, thanks to a meeting with Raphael Samuel in Oxford that turned into a long friendship. I soon discovered that although professional historians were only beginning to enter this field, folklorists had inhabited it for a long time. One of the challenges of the book was therefore to absorb the ideas of these scholars, especially the Scandinavians. I received a British Academy grant for research in Norway and Sweden, combining visits to folk museums with meetings with folklorists, who generously found time to

discuss my ideas and advise me what to read next. The three-way interaction between artefacts, people and texts made for an unusually fascinating form of research.

Cambridge

In 1978 I was informally invited to apply for a lectureship at Cambridge. In the 1960s I would not have thought of leaving Sussex: the ongoing experiment was too exciting. In the 1970s, in contrast, less money was available and the academic atmosphere began to change. To observe what was happening was for a historian, at least, yet another education. In the A-phase of academic expansion, colleagues had supported one another's projects. In the B-phase of contraction, they made intellectual objections to new courses that might have taken resources away from something they were planning themselves. Although by now one of the oldest inhabitants of the not-so-new university, I was therefore quite glad to leave.

Cambridge presented a challenge of a rather different kind. Readaptation to an old university was a kind of culture shock. My position slightly right of centre in a radical university translated into a position well to the left in Cambridge. I was typecast as a dangerous revolutionary (at least in the eyes of Sir Geoffrey Elton) and the experience was rejuvenating. It was now necessary to defend intellectual positions which could be taken for granted at Sussex, such as an enthusiasm for cultural history, for *Annales*, or for anthropology. Cambridge in 1979 offered the stimulus of a cold shower.

I was still working on Italy and in archives, originally with the idea of writing a social history of early modern Italy, a kind of comparative regional history. However, the experience of reading a Venetian or Florentine census page by page and working on the Roman judicial records encouraged me to limit my project to aspects of urban life at street level. Inspired by the Italian micro-historians, Edoardo Grendi, Giovanni Levi and (of course) Carlo Ginzburg, I ended up writing a series of essays that became the *Historical anthropology of early modern Italy* (1987). The essays both shaped and were shaped by the course on historical anthropology that I taught in Cambridge together with Bob Scribner, whose studies of Germany were so often in parallel with mine on Italy.

In a sense, *Historical anthropology* compensated for what was lacking in *Popular culture*. The latter book, written in the 1970s, had concentrated on the popular equivalents of 'art', 'literature' and 'drama' – prints, folksongs, folktales, festivals and so on. Now, following the lead of the anthropologists, I turned to the culture of the everyday, as I saw more clearly when an Italian publisher, Laterza, published a translation of *Historical anthropology* under the title 'Scenes from everyday life' (*Scene di vita quotidiana*). It should be added that – like some other historians of the everyday – my aim was not to describe scenes for their own sake but to treat them as a means to understand the rules or principles that underlie the organization of a given culture.

By the end of the 1980s, I had been studying and writing history full-time for some 30 years without ever making politics central. This was partly a matter of personal taste, a preference for the company of dead artists and writers rather than dead politicians. It was also a reaction against what seemed an overemphasis on past politics

in the Oxford of my student days. Following the principle (a conscious one by this time) that a new book ought to compensate for what was lacking in earlier ones, and looking for a topic that would combine politics with culture, I decided to work on the public image of Louis XIV. The first draft of *The fabrication of Louis XIV* was written when I was a Fellow of the Wissenschaftskolleg in Berlin, at a time, 1989–90, when politics was simply inescapable. The study might equally well be described as an essay on the politics of culture (the state patronage of artists and writers) or the culture of politics (the presentation of a ruler as a hero and his reign as an epic). The book was also a child of its time in the sense of being planned at more or less the moment that Mrs Thatcher was consulting Saatchi and Saatchi in order to improve her image. In my view, historians should try to be aware of the role that present concerns play in their studies of the past. Hence, the *Fabrication*'s explicit comparisons and contrasts between official image-making in the seventeenth and in the twentieth centuries.

Writing this book required using the evidence of images in the literal, visual sense. The end of the 1980s was of course a time when historians such as Simon Schama and Roy Porter were taking the evidence of images more seriously than their predecessors. Working on Louis in this way encouraged me to set up a course for Cambridge students (once again, in collaboration with Bob Scribner) on 'Images as Historical Sources', in which we tried to formulate and discuss principles of source criticism. A by-product of the course was my *Eyewitnessing* (2002), an essay which would, had he lived, have been written by Bob as well as myself.

Scholars are rightly suspicious of the memoirs of statesmen such as Cardinal Richelieu in which a career is presented as the simple fulfilment of a plan. This suspicion needs of course to be extended to the work of historians themselves. As is generally the case in the academic world of today, much of what I have written has been in response to invitations to conferences, seminars or to write for collective volumes. These invitations are often addressed to a past self who worked on a particular topic 10 or more years earlier. Believing as I do in intellectual collaboration, I try to accept a good number of these requests. Discussions of seminar papers, for instance, especially if they take place in a foreign country, often reveal angles on a theme that one had missed or failed to take seriously enough.

Of course invitations have their price – they are a distraction, even if a pleasant and illuminating one, from research and writing. The art of accepting invitations is to find a compromise between what one's hosts want and one's own current interests. Returning to a former topic is a challenge – a challenge not to repeat oneself but to attempt to look at familiar material from a new angle. For this reason, although I had vowed not to publish any more articles, let alone books, with the word 'Renaissance' in the title, I accepted the invitation of Jacques Le Goff to write on that subject for his series *The making of Europe*. Like other 'new' cultural historians, I do not think that traditional topics in cultural history are outdated – Natalie Davis still works on the Reformation and Robert Darnton on the Enlightenment.

In the case of the Renaissance, given that my brief was to write about Europe, I decided to focus attention on consumption rather than production, on the 'reception'

of the movement in different countries and among different social groups. That in turn meant emphasizing creative adaptations and the way in which ideas, objects and skills that were once associated with a small minority gradually entered the everyday life of a much larger group.

A more open-ended invitation to give a course of lectures at the University of Groningen resulted in *A social history of knowledge* (2000). In a sense this was another intellectual return, but as often happens in these cases, I did not arrive in quite the same place from which I had set out. At Sussex I had become interested in the sociology of knowledge, which offered a kind of bridge between intellectual history and sociology. Within this field I felt a special affinity for the work of Karl Mannheim (1952). Mannheim's idea of knowledge as socially situated (what he called *Situationsgebundenheit*) offered a thread on which to string a series of lectures that might appeal to students in more than one discipline. The lectures were therefore organized around the sociology, geography, anthropology, politics, economics and philosophy of knowledge, or more exactly of 'knowledges' in the plural, competing and interacting.

Another open-ended invitation, to deliver the Wiles Lectures in 2002, led to my latest book, *Languages and communities in early modern Europe* (2004). My 'linguistic turn', like that of friends and colleagues such as Raphael Samuel, Gareth Stedman Jones and Roy Porter, had taken place at the end of the 1970s. I still remember discovering with excitement two anthologies of essays on sociolinguistics, both published in 1972.[5] Conferences in Cambridge and Brighton helped launch 'the social history of language' – or as linguists say, 'socio-historical linguistics' – in Britain in the early 1980s.

Apart from the fascination of language in itself, the enterprise was based on the idea that language is a sensitive indicator of social relations. It was for this reason that I undertook the study of the language of insults in seventeenth-century Rome, as well as a complementary study of politeness. The invitation to give the Wiles Lectures in Belfast offered an opportunity to speak about languages and communities – including communities of class, occupation, gender and – obvious enough in Belfast – religion, noting the ways in which language helps to construct communities as well as expressing their values.

My current project is still under way. It is an intellectual portrait of a great historian who remains virtually unknown in Britain, the Brazilian Gilberto Freyre (1900–87), a historian, sociologist, anthropologist or (as he preferred to describe himself) man of letters who wrote about what we now call the history of the everyday, the history of material culture and the history of the body – but did this in the 1930s and 1940s, long before these approaches became well known or widely accepted. There is something exhilarating and rejuvenating about exploring new territory at a late stage in one's career (in a typically vivid metaphor, Carlo Ginzburg has compared this kind of exploration to the excitement of skiing on fresh snow).

Why Freyre? In a sense the choice was accidental; in another it seems like destiny. If I had not accepted an invitation to lecture in Brazil, in 1986, I would not have met my wife, Maria Lúcia, a fellow-historian with whom I am collaborating on this study. Regular visits to Brazil have encouraged me to try to understand its culture (or cultures) through its history. I first encountered Freyre's work in the early 1960s and listened

to him lecturing on 'The racial factor in contemporary politics' at the University of Sussex in 1965. So studying Freyre is both exploring new territory and a kind of return; a return to the 1960s, to Sussex and also to *Annales* – since Braudel published an article in that journal, in 1943, drawing the attention of French historians to the importance of the Brazilian's work. The challenge of the new is to exploit sources unavailable to historians of early modern Europe, such as conversing with people who knew Freyre, watching videotapes of him or reading facsimiles of his letters in a 'virtual archive'.

Towards a conclusion

The intellectual self-portrait is a genre that was invented nearly 300 years ago. When Vico published his autobiography in 1728, it was in response to an invitation from three Italian scholars. The text was published in a learned journal together with a 'proposal to the scholars of Italy' to write their intellectual autobiographies on this model. The aim of the enterprise was to learn how intellectual discoveries were made. Such an aim may be overambitious, but the self-portrait I have painted may still serve to suggest one or two general conclusions.

Looking back, it seems that the historian I have become has been shaped by milieux that encouraged certain interests, attitudes and methods; so has membership of a particular generation, the post-war generation, sharing what Mannheim called 'a common location in the social and historical process', including major events such as 1956, 1968 and 1989. I am four years younger than Keith Thomas, three years younger than the late Raphael Samuel, two years older than Robert Darnton and Carlo Ginzburg, four years older than Bob Scribner and nine years older than Roy Porter. These friends form a network as well as a generation, illustrating the importance of small groups, rather than isolated individuals, in the process of rethinking history. Raphael's phrase 'History workshop' applies not only to the group he founded, but to all of us.

A final comment concerns the reliability of self-portraits such as these, as well as other confessions or 'ego-documents', as the Dutch call them, whether they were written down by the protagonist or recorded by interrogators.[6] This question has been debated by psychoanalysts and sociologists as well as by historians. One point they have made concerns the need to remember that autobiographies present the past of an individual from a particular viewpoint, that of the moment of writing. We also need to be aware of 'myths in life stories'.[7] It is all too clear that we sometimes 'remember' what we would like to have happened and, still more often, forget what we wish had not happened. We move our past selves to the centre of the stage and we excise former friends and collaborators who threaten to reduce our glory, just as the *Soviet encyclopaedia* excised Trotsky in the age of Stalin. Alternatively, but equally schematically, we may choose to present our life as a series of accidents. Our memories are also stereotyped, shaped by the practice of telling and retelling stories. In short, without realizing it we often superimpose a myth of coherence on a messier reality. *Caveat lector.*

Notes

1 George Devereux, who was trained as both an anthropologist and a psychoanalyst, explored this question in *From anxiety to method in the behavioral sciences* (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1967).
2 Maria Lúcia Pallares-Burke, *The new history: Confessions and conversations* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000).
3 Françoise Waquet, *Parler comme un livre: l'oralité et le savoir (16e–20e siècles)* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2003).
4 Robert Dahl, 'A critique of the ruling elite model', *American Political Science Review* (1958), 463–9. Cf Dahl, *Who governs? Democracy and power in an American city* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961).
5 Pier Paolo Giglioli (ed.) *Language and social context* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972); J. B. Pride and Janet Holmes, eds. *Sociolinguistics* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972).
6 Rudolf Dekker, 'Introduction' to Dekker (ed.) *Ego-documents and history* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2002), 7–20.
7 Erik Erikson, 'Gandhi's truth', *Daedalus* 1968, 695–729; Jean Peneff, 'Myths in life stories', in *The myths we live by,* eds. Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson (London: Routledge, 1990), 36–48. Cf the contributions of Luisa Passerini and Alessandro Portelli to the same volume.

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14

HISTORY, THE HISTORIAN, AND AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Jeremy D. Popkin

It is perhaps unsurprising that the historian who has done more than most to address the issue of *ego-histoire* would examine the connections between history and autobiography in his Invitation. This narrative of his youthful and college years in the mid to late 1960s, being taught by Herbert Marcuse and Angela Davis, learning to pursue history from Geoffrey Barraclough, all against the background of the Vietnam War and his move to Berkeley, is as fascinating as autobiography as it is instructive as history. His intellectual position, somewhere between Carl Schorske and Jacques Derrida, makes for a compelling personal intellectual history.

Of all historians invited to write about how I ended up in the profession, I should have the fewest problems fulfilling the assignment: in 2005 I published a book on *History, historians and autobiography,* based on my reading of several hundred autobiographical books and essays by members of my own profession.[1] Furthermore, I come from a family with a habit of autobiography: my father, his mother, and her father wrote about their lives.[2] How could I improve on the opening line of my immigrant great-grandfather's account of his childhood in Poland: 'The first years of my life was useless'? (He suffered from paralysed legs.) Yet this double background, professional and personal, also creates obstacles to writing about myself. Other historians have turned to autobiographical writing as a welcome escape from the constraints of academic prose, but I know that first-person narrative can be just as demanding and difficult as scholarship. Looking at the personal stories crafted by my three generations of ancestors, all of whom I knew, I can also see that such creations are always controversial interventions in family dramas. Some relatives called my novelist grandmother Zelda Popkin's autobiography 'her greatest work of fiction'.

When I first became interested in the topic of autobiography in the early 1990s, I was acutely conscious of the connection between my personal life and my new subject of study. I joked about making academic capital out of my midlife crisis.

Nevertheless, I chose to study the life stories of others rather than writing my own. Cautious and methodical son of a famous academic father who had put his career at risk when he suddenly swerved from his specialty to devote himself to a very public campaign to refute the accepted explanation of the assassination of President Kennedy,[3] I was relieved to discover that the study of autobiography had a respectable Library of Congress catalogue classification of its own – CT 25 – and established journals in which I could publish properly footnoted articles. Writing about autobiography got me out of the rut I had dug myself into after two decades of research on my original specialty, the history of the French revolutionary press, without requiring me to rethink the basic formula of my life; in some ways, it even promoted my career.

The better I became at deconstructing the autobiographies of others, however, the more daunting the prospect of writing about myself appeared. Daunting, but also tempting. Some of the historian-autobiographers I read had clearly enjoyed writing about themselves, even if they claimed to have found the process painful. According to my own argument, some historians' autobiographies had made genuine contributions to historical understanding and to the art of life-writing: should I refuse to take up the challenge? Others had written narratives so awkwardly structured, so fatuous, or – let's say it! – so boring that I thought I could do better. Was it even ethical of me to cling to my protected status as an observer, refusing to take part in the activity going on around me? In the back of my mind, I knew that I would accept an opportunity if it was offered, but, like most academic autobiographers, I would wait for an invitation.

The invitation to which I am now responding has come at a curious moment in my engagement with both history and autobiography. After completing two books in which autobiography and the questions about authorial subjectivity it raises figure heavily, I have now turned away from that subversive terrain.[4] The composition of this essay is interrupting the writing of the most 'traditional' book I have ever undertaken, an exercise in political history based on the most conventional sorts of documentation. Particularly since the death of my father in 2005, however, I have also been occupied with assembling his personal correspondence and other family documents, and thinking about the problems of reconstructing the lives of those with whom one's own life has been bound up. In reading my father's letters and writing about him, I have necessarily been examining aspects of my own life; since I also have forty years of my grandmother's letters to my father, I can even extend this process back a generation. A few months ago, when I helped my mother prepare to move out of the family apartment, I discovered that she, too, has written autobiographical essays. I may have decided, for the moment, to put my professional energies into scholarship about distant events, written in the third person, but I am also immersed in this family dialogue that vividly demonstrates the ways in which individual lives are always intermeshed with one another.

If studying autobiography was, for a time, a way of putting some distance between myself and the discipline of history, can writing autobiography be a way of understanding how I became involved with history in the first place? At first glance, my

story seems simple, and very familiar to me from my reading of other historians' autobiographies: academic parents, a house full of books, childhood trips to Europe that introduced me to a world with a longer and more complicated past than that of the United States. I can honestly say that I visited the *Bibliothèque nationale* in Paris for the first time at the age of three, waiting for my father, recipient of one of the first Fulbright fellowships, to emerge from the building after a day at his desk. When I was old enough to start borrowing books for myself from the public library in Iowa City, Iowa, where I joined the baby boom generation in 1948, I quickly gravitated to the shelf in the children's section that held the volumes of the Landmark Books history series: there was something about these 'true' stories that attracted me. I was one of those irritating children who delight in accumulating facts and inflicting them on unwary adults. Presented with a copy of the *Information please almanac* as a Christmas gift, I memorized indiscriminately: largest cities, longest rivers, worst nautical disasters. Perhaps to keep me from taking up too much of his time reciting what I had learned, my father introduced me to stamp collecting. Arranging my possessions added to my unsystematic store of historical data. I knew the battle of Vimy Ridge as the subject of Scott's Catalogue, France, numbers 311 and 312, long before I knew about the First World War, and Millard Fillmore remains indelibly engraved in my mind as the face on the 13-cent stamp in the American Presidents series of 1938.

The choice to be a reader, a sponge for information, was, of course, also a choice not to do other things. I was always small for my age and poor at defending myself in rough-and-tumble play with other boys – shades of my great-grandfather with his paralysed legs! Relatives of a long-lost childhood friend who passed away this year tell me that at his memorial they exhibited a photograph of the two of us, dressed as cowboys and armed with toy guns, but when I spent a year in school in the Netherlands, where such games were forbidden, I cheerfully converted to pacifism. My father had been something of an athlete in his youth, but he did nothing to encourage me in that direction; the first time we attended a sports event together was when he and I took my own two sons to Dodger Stadium. My mother saw to it that I had piano lessons for a couple of years; I developed an enthusiasm for listening to my parents' classical record collection, but no passion for performing. I was shy but not friendless. Iowa City, where I spent my elementary-school years, was a classic mid-western college town where every school class included other boys like me.

Family life in my childhood years during the 1950s revolved around my father's career. Part of the first generation of American Jews to crash the gates of academia, my father started his first tenure-track teaching job at the age of 23. At the University of Iowa, where he taught philosophy until I was 11 years old, my father was at odds with most of his own colleagues, but he got along well with the historians; in later life, old friends such as George Mosse and Nicholas Riasanovsky still remembered him warmly. My father was also a historian in his own right. As a child, I could not understand the details of his work on the development of philosophical scepticism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but I absorbed the lesson that studying the past was somehow very important.[5] American history never interested my father, but on the three trips we made to Europe before I turned 10, he turned into an enthusiastic

tour guide. He revelled in the opportunity to visit cathedrals, museums, and monuments, and kept my younger sister Maggi and me spellbound with stories about William the Silent, Napoleon, and the Second World War. Family life back in Iowa was more troubled: my father's unhappiness with his professional situation often expressed itself in black rages or bouts of depression. His burning desire to escape from Iowa City made it difficult for me to develop any sense of having roots there. Retreating into my books and stamps was a way of constructing a shelter for myself.

In retrospect, I can see that my childhood relationship with history was not necessarily as foreordained as this account makes it seem. I did have other interests, particularly in math and science. The first Sputnik went into orbit just before I turned nine; in the years that followed, American schools did everything possible to encourage bright students to study those subjects. My scientific interests were not a rebellion against my father: he had also been deeply interested in mathematics, and in fact wrote his Ph.D. thesis on a problem in mathematical logic. By the time I got to High School, my abilities in math and science even earned me a certain amount of celebrity. The 1500 students and teachers who listened to me compete in the finals of the 'Chalk talk' event at Occidental College's Southern California math contest in 1965 are still the largest audience I have ever addressed, and I can vividly recall the thrill when our team won that year's top prize.

Although my father was a historian by profession, my parents were in some ways bent on separating themselves from their own personal pasts. When they left New York City for Iowa, they left behind the thoroughly Jewish milieu in which they had grown up. In my early childhood years, we had a Christmas tree and did not celebrate Jewish holidays. My parents also detached themselves from the secular political radicalism of their families. It was the era of McCarthyism, and my father, as a 16-year-old, had been a member of the Young Communist League; his parents' public-relations firm had represented the Spanish Loyalists. In fifth grade, my teacher had us research our family's origins. My mother told me that our ancestors came from Russia, homeland of the national enemy. I was awestruck by this unexpected revelation, but perplexed when she told me not to share the information with anyone but my classmates and my teacher.

In itself, as I now know, this effort at escape from the past was not uncommon among American Jews in the 1950s. Only in recent years, as I have read my parents' and my grandmother Zelda's personal papers, have I realized how complicated my family's own version of this story was. In particular, Zelda had been personally involved with the great events of Jewish history in the 1940s. She had visited the post-war DP camps in Germany a few months after the defeat of the Nazis, and in 1947, she used the material she had gathered to write one of the first American novels with a Holocaust theme. In 1948, she flew to Israel, arriving in Jerusalem during the last weeks of the fighting that secured the existence of the new Jewish state. Out of this trip came *Quiet street,* the first American novel about the Israeli struggle for independence. Had either of these books made my grandmother a celebrity, my parents' chameleon act would have been harder to pull off, but both were resounding flops. My disappointed grandmother, as I later learned from her

papers, reacted by blaming her fellow Jews, who showed so little interest in books with Jewish themes.[6]

Like many other American Jews of their generation, my parents eventually acknowledged their origins, but the suddenness and intensity with which my father re-embraced the Jewish past was unusual. Since his death, I have had the opportunity to read his correspondence, particularly his letters to his former Iowa colleague Judah Goldin, one of the great figures of twentieth-century Jewish studies, and reconstruct some of the reasons that led him to embrace a Jewish identity and make it central to his career. As a child, I received no explanation: I simply found myself attending Sunday school and learning Hebrew. While I was becoming the local rabbi's star pupil, my father was developing his own idiosyncratic style of being Jewish. He could never reconcile himself to participation in community institutions, and he identified himself, not with the East European Jewish tradition from which our ancestors actually came, but with the crypto-Jews or Marranos who had had to convert or flee from Spain and Portugal after the expulsion of 1492. He would achieve scholarly fame for tracing their impact on European philosophy and religious thought, but he would also imitate them in deciding for himself just how much of Jewish belief and tradition he would accept.

While my father pursued the Marranos, I also became fascinated with Jewish history. Here was a whole new set of stories about the past to learn, and one with which I had a genealogical connection. From Harry Golden's *For two cents plain* (1959) I learned about New York's Lower East Side, where some of my immigrant ancestors had lived; from William Shirer's *Rise and fall of the Third Reich* (1960) and newspaper stories about the Eichmann trial I reached my first understanding of the Holocaust, and from *Exodus* (1958) and my grandmother's novel, I imbibed a heroic legend about how Israel had come into existence. By now, we were living in Claremont, California, a suburb of Los Angeles. Our local congregation, where I prepared for my Bar Mitzvah, was small, but once a year, youngsters from our congregation went to a weekend retreat at a camp on the Southern California coast. As we rolled west on the freeway, we would gradually be surrounded by buses from larger Jewish communities, all heading the same way, visible evidence that we were indeed a people 'mighty and numerous'.

Not everything in my life during these years of junior high school revolved around questions of Jewish identity. I had been a precocious reader of newspapers, and I followed public issues such as civil rights with increasing interest in the early 1960s. These were the years of the American Civil War centennial, and I diligently digested Bruce Catton's trilogy on the subject. Eager as I always had been to know things that no one else did, I then developed a passion for the history of World War I; my father showed me the bound volumes of the *New York Times* in the Claremont Colleges library, my first primary source, and an eighth-grade teacher let me give my first classroom lecture, in which I struggled to explain the Triple Alliance and the Schlieffen Plan to my classmates. At the time of the Cuban missile crisis in October 1962, my father, always the contrarian, distinguished himself by denouncing President Kennedy's actions. Convinced by his arguments, I produced my first original

piece of historical analysis: a comparison of the number of years Russia and America had been at war, demonstrating that Russian fears of foreign encirclement were understandable if one took the past into account.

Just as I started high school, my father changed jobs again. From Claremont, we moved to the San Diego suburb of La Jolla, where he became the founding chair of the philosophy department at a new University of California campus. In time, I would adopt this beautiful beach community as my 'home town', but at first, the move badly disrupted my life. Among many other things, it dissolved my connection with things Jewish. Until just before we arrived, La Jolla had been virtually *judenrein:* restrictive housing covenants kept identifiable Jews from buying homes there. The creation of UCSD brought an end to this discrimination – La Jolla now has a thriving Jewish community – but during my high-school years, from 1963 to 1966, my father was able to live out his fantasy about a Jewish life without rabbis, synagogues, or fund-raising campaigns. In all of this, however, there was no place for me. I did not encounter any prejudice in school, but there were not enough Jewish students to form any kind of group. I threw myself into other activities, and lost the opportunity that I might have had to immerse myself in a form of history rooted in personal identity.

After I had begun to make a few friends in La Jolla, I found many other things to keep me busy. My interest in history continued, and for the first time I encountered a competent teacher of the subject, Jules Tanzer. Perhaps he let me write a long paper on 'Grover Cleveland and the Gold Standard' to see whether my enthusiasm would survive such a subject. Math seemed to offer bigger opportunities, however. I played second fiddle to another student who was a real math whiz, but I thoroughly enjoyed the recognition that went with being part of the school's well-publicized competitive math team, as well as the school chess champion. I joined the Young Democrats, which operated like an underground organization to avoid attracting hostile attention in reactionary La Jolla. Lyndon Johnson's sweeping victory in November 1964 seemed to prove that history was on our side, but the Vietnam war soon taught me some of history's painful complexities. In July 1965, my friends and I made the placards for San Diego's first public antiwar demonstration in our basement, but many of the other Young Democrats could not accept the idea of opposing a president whose election we had celebrated just eight months earlier. Among the witnesses to the heated debate that soon sealed the demise of our club was my first girlfriend. That probably now-defunct institution, the annual 'Sadie Hawkins Day' high-school dance, to which the girls invited the boys, had allowed her to overcome my shyness.

History was not much on my mind as I graduated from high school in June of 1966 and prepared to start college. Determined to be a nonconformist, I had refused to apply to any of the Ivy League schools, particularly Columbia, my father's alma mater. My mother, who had had a struggle to be able to attend Hunter College, New York City's free municipal university for women, had a romantic attachment to the idea of my attending a small liberal arts college, something she must have dreamed about for herself. I applied exclusively to such schools and wound up at

Reed College in Portland, Oregon. It was not a happy choice. Reed attracted imaginative, high-strung students, and I was too immature and too conventional in my ways to get along with most of them. The semester began with a public lecture by the apostle of LSD, Timothy Leary. My room-mate embraced Leary's urging to 'Turn on, tune in, drop out'; because I did not want to go along on his 'trips', I was frequently asked to evacuate myself from our dorm room while he dropped acid. Reed also did not tell students their grades. In high school, much of my identity had been built around my visible academic success; I was now suddenly deprived of that source of self-esteem. I had picked math as my major, and was placed in classes with more advanced students since I had already finished the first two years of college work in high school, but I was losing my passion for the subject. The most positive aspect of Reed for me was the required freshman humanities course. In retrospect, the reading list – Homer and Hesiod, Plato and Aristotle, Sophocles and Euripides, Saint Augustine and Saint Bonaventure, the three volumes of Dante's *Divine comedy*, with *De Monarchia* thrown in for good measure – seems woefully 'canonical', and history was the most poorly taught aspect of the course. For the first time, though, I really learned how to read and analyse a text, and how to construct a good essay. I did not think of it that way, but what I was doing was learning my father's skills.

I returned to San Diego after my unhappy freshman year, but at the end of the summer, I simply could not face the prospect of going back to Reed. For the only time in his life, my father pulled strings and got me admitted to UCSD just before classes began in the fall. UCSD, which had admitted its first undergraduates just three years earlier, was not known as a centre of student activism in that extraordinary year 1967–68, but it proved to be a remarkably interesting place to be. Living at home after being away at college for a year was something of a comedown, but my parents, preoccupied with other matters, left me a considerable degree of freedom. I had my own entrance to the family house, which gave me and the new girlfriend I soon acquired enough privacy to conduct our fumbling sexual apprenticeship without serious interference. Unable to fathom the psychological problems that had made it impossible for me to return to Reed, my parents turned me over to an elderly European-trained analyst, whose patience and understanding helped me achieve a certain equilibrium.

I decided to give myself a break from mathematics and enrolled for courses in literature, philosophy, and history. Despite my passionate childhood enthusiasm for the Paris *métro,* I had never learned any French during my family's European stays in the 1950s – the only foreign language I had acquired was a little Dutch – but three years of high-school classes and the connivance of the young native speaker assigned to evaluate my proficiency, who was also living with my family as an *au pair* and caring for my little sister Sue, got me into the French literature survey. I was genuinely enthralled by the discovery of the richness of the French literary tradition, from the *Chanson de Roland* to Stendhal, who became my favourite author for many years. Whatever I studied, French would be 'my' language. As an academic discipline, however, literature was both too subjective and too personal for me. I did not see how one could ever know if one had found the 'true' interpretation of Rabelais, and

critical approaches such as Freudianism perturbed me: if there were so many hidden meanings in a literary text, how could one hope to make any sense out of one's own life?

My philosophy class was taught by Herbert Marcuse, a neo-Marxist thinker whom my father had brought to the campus just when he was becoming a worldwide celebrity as the third figure in the trinity of 'Marx, Mao, Marcuse', the supposed gurus of the period's student protest movements. Marx was dead and Mao was otherwise occupied, but I had the honour of listening to Marcuse twice a week. In that memorable year 1967–68, to be in his class was to feel oneself part of the charmed circle of those who were going to shape the future of the planet. For a revolutionary, Marcuse was a surprisingly traditional professor. He lectured from the podium, leaving discussion to sessions with his graduate student assistants – for one term, I was taught by the future African-American activist Angela Davis, who was then working with Marcuse on a dissertation about Kant – and the reading list was the usual list of dead white male suspects, from Plato to Marx. Marcuse left no doubt about his commitment to socialism, but he was eminently fair-minded in his presentation of other intellectual traditions. Although I was committed to seeing myself as a radical leftist, I found myself deeply affected by reading Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* and by Marcuse's lecture on the even more reactionary French conservative of the period, Joseph de Maistre. For the first time, I was confronted with intelligent thinkers who did not believe many of the truths about justice and progress that I took to be self-evident. I continued to demonstrate against the war and denounce bourgeois society, but, thanks to Marcuse, I now harboured secret doubts.

When my wavering leftist convictions needed strengthening, I found inspiration from my history professor, Geoffrey Barraclough. Like Marcuse, the distinguished British medievalist had been hired by UCSD in an attempt to build up the fledgling campus's reputation in a hurry. Barraclough resented Marcuse's notoriety and left La Jolla after a year or two, but he was there long enough to convince me that history really was what I wanted to study. At UCSD, Barraclough taught a sprawling course on 'contemporary world history', linking the past directly to the dramatic events that dominated the headlines. He was a masterful lecturer, clear, dramatic, and always opinionated, and in retrospect, it seems remarkable how well his course anticipated many of the major themes that have changed the discipline in the past forty years: the provincialization of Europe, the importance of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, the creation of a global urban culture.

As exciting as my sophomore year at UCSD had been, I was determined not to stay there. No one realized that the extraordinary concatenation of events that marked the first half of 1968 – the Tet offensive in Vietnam and the subsequent upsurge of antiwar protest in the USA, Johnson's withdrawal from the presidential election, the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy, the *événements de mai* in Paris, which Herbert Marcuse told us about first-hand when he returned from his visit there at the end of the month, and the Prague Spring – would turn out to be the high-water mark of a political wave that was about to recede. It was no time to be living at home with one's parents and attending a small branch

campus of the University of California system when one could transfer to Berkeley, the birthplace of 1960s student radicalism, and enroll for something like $240 a year, thanks to the state's now long-vanished policy of free tuition. Eager to be in a place where history was not just being studied but was being made, and a good deal more self-confident than I had been when I left for Reed two years earlier, I headed for the Bay Area.

Unlike UCSD, whose small history faculty could only offer a limited number of courses, Berkeley had a broad range of offerings, but, in spite of the lessons I should have learned from Geoffrey Barraclough, I gravitated to the field of modern Europe. Somehow I learned that *the* class to take was Carl Schorske's course on modern European intellectual history. Although there were 300 places in the class, it was so popular that one had to survive a screening process to be admitted. The effort was worth it. Schorske had the talent for making it seem that he was discovering the insights in his lectures as he delivered them. Around that time, quite unknown to me (and, probably, to Schorske), Jacques Derrida was pronouncing that 'there is nothing outside of the text'. Schorske made it seem as if everything was inside the text: by teasing out the full meaning of Locke's *Treatise on education* or Goethe's *Faust,* one could recapture the richness of the world in which those works had been written. The tradition of intellectual history of the 1950s and 1960s that Schorske represented is now often criticized as narrow and elitist, too concentrated on a high-cultural canon, but in Schorske's version, it foreshadowed the more elastic interpretive cultural history that would flourish several decades later. The more limited topics on which Schorske focused also seemed more manageable to me than the grand panoramas sketched out by Barraclough: this was a way of doing history that I might learn to master.

The orderly progression of Schorske's two terms of lectures on European thought was constantly interrupted in the fall of 1968 and the winter of 1969 by turmoil on the campus. Here was the present-day history I had wanted to participate in, but I found myself less and less sure of my proper part in it. The winter term was marked by a long-drawn-out 'Third World Strike' called by black and Mexican-American student groups demanding more attention to minority issues. Schorske, well known for his sympathy with the student protesters of the Free Speech Movement in 1964, felt that his responsibility as a teacher required him to keep his course going, while the strikers attempted to disrupt classes and intimidate other students from attending. I was very torn. I believed in the justice of the Third World students' cause, but the tactics their movement adopted troubled me. I was finding my courses, and especially Schorske's, too stimulating to renounce them; like other male students, I was also worried about putting my draft deferment in jeopardy.

Unable to give myself over to campus activism but unwilling to be left out of the excitement altogether, I found a solution by joining the staff of the student newspaper, the *Daily Californian*. As a reporter, I had a reason to be on the scene whenever anything interesting was happening, but I also had an excuse for not taking sides. Journalism and newspapers had interested me even earlier. My grandmother Zelda, who began her autobiography by describing her hiring as the first woman

reporter for the Wilkes-Barre *Times-Leader,* encouraged me, and it was she who had presented me with a copy of *New Yorker* writer A. J. Liebling's *The press* (1964), a collection of columns he had written about American journalism in the 1940s and 1950s that became one of my favourite books in my teenage years. Now, at the *Daily Cal,* I tried my own hand at the business, and had the heady experience of seeing my words in print the day after they were written.

I quickly showed that I did not have the instincts of a great reporter. Sent along with another staffer to cover a protest that resulted in a mass arrest, I took my notes, flashed my press badge at the police, and went back to the office to write up the story. My companion quickwittedly discarded his own badge, allowed himself to be arrested along with several hundred other students, and wrote a sensational first-hand report that exposed the brutality of the Alameda County sheriff's department and won national attention. I nevertheless made myself useful at the paper. I wrote decently, but my main talent was for overseeing the actual production of the paper, which was then still set in 'hot type' by crusty printers none too patient with the long-haired students sent to work with them. My skill at proofreading, writing headlines, and doing emergency editing when stories did not fit in the spaces allotted for them won me their respect. Within a few months, I was promoted from cub reporter to 'night editor' and became part of the paper's inner circle.

During the two undergraduate years I spent at Berkeley, the *Daily Cal* absorbed far more of my time and energy than my history studies. The inspirational Carl Schorske left Berkeley for the calmer environs of Princeton after my junior year: on one of my visits to his office, he showed me a rock that had just been thrown through his window because of his refusal to call off classes in support of the Third World strike. Still intrigued by what Marcuse had told me about de Maistre, I did a senior honors thesis on French counter-revolutionary thinkers under the direction of the Russian historian Martin Malia, who also taught courses on European intellectual history. Reading Catholic reactionary writers was an odd choice in the atmosphere of the time; perhaps I had inherited more of my father's contrarian streak than I realized. I did not become either a reactionary or a Catholic, even though my interest in Judaism had hit a low ebb during these years, but I learned that history is not just about studying people and ideas one finds congenial. My interest in the counter-revolution should have given me something in common with Malia, a probing analyst of the defects of Communism, but we did not hit it off on a personal level. For various reasons, I would eventually return to Berkeley as a graduate student and complete my dissertation under Malia's direction, but other teachers had more influence on me.

As I finished my undergraduate studies, however, I first had to decide whether to go on to graduate work at all. In the spring of 1969, while Berkeley was rocked by yet another wave of violence and demonstrations following the university administration's decision to fence in a vacant lot that local activists had turned into a 'People's Park', I had been a major player in an internal revolution at the *Daily Cal,* which overturned the traditional process of cooptation by which the paper's top editors were chosen. Narrowly defeated in the first staff election for editor-in-chief, I became the paper's city editor for a semester. Many of the colleagues alongside

whom I put in 12-hour days went on to distinguished journalistic careers, and I seriously considered joining them. In early 1970, however, I learned another history lesson. The editorial team I had been part of was swept out of office by more radical staffers, bent on turning the paper into 'The People's Daily', and I was unceremoniously ousted from my position. It was a painful experience, and dimmed my enthusiasm for journalism. Contemplating the entry-level positions with small-town papers that some of my *Daily Cal* colleagues were landing did not help. The one job interview I secured for myself was even more disillusioning. Summoned to a local bar, I watched the interviewer rapidly down three double scotches and listened as he told me how miserable the paper he worked for was. As I eyed the three untouched drinks the man had ordered for me, I wondered if this was really how one made it to the *New York Times*.

I did not have enough imagination to think of any alternative except graduate school. The enormous expansion of American universities in the 1960s had created the illusion that the demand for new professors was bound to keep growing; my professors assured me that I had all the necessary talents and was bound to succeed. Certainly this was what my parents had always expected me to do. Becoming a professor had meant upward social mobility for my father, even if his own mother occasionally needled him because his books never made much money; being part of an academic family had meant even more to my mother, whose family had been much poorer than my father's. Most of my parents' friends were fellow academics, and academic success was the only kind of achievement my parents truly valued; neither of them had ever suggested that I should aim at money, celebrity, or public influence. The life my father led made academia seem glamorous indeed: by the late 1960s, he was at the top of his field, regularly awarded fellowships and invited to lecture in exotic places like Budapest and Jerusalem. I understood nothing of the stresses and pains that I now see so clearly in his letters, although I can recognize the reasons why he had little time to pay any attention to my problems.

And so, in the fall of 1970, I became part of the largest cohort of American students ever to enrol in graduate school in history. I still had much to learn about history, and even more about being a historian, but my path was clear. I persisted in my studies even when the booming job market of the late 1960s turned almost over night into the prolonged crisis that would drive many of my peers to law school or other careers. Was it an inevitable choice? Certainly, academia suited my personality, as it had developed from childhood on, and while my parents had never insisted that I must follow in my father's footsteps, there was no doubt that they had always seen me as a future professor. American society played its part, too: the years when I was growing up were a time when research and researchers enjoyed more prestige than at any time before or since.

Fate seemed to destine me for academia, but becoming a historian was nevertheless a choice, one whose meaning becomes clearer when I compare it with my autobiography-writing ancestors' experiences. I was fortunate to have a choice at all, unlike my great-grandfather Harry, who spent his life being buffeted by a harsh world he never understood. My grandmother Zelda may not have been quite as much the

adventurer as the title of her life story, *Open every door,* suggested, but she did help create a new professional field – public relations – and she had some success in that most individualistic of endeavours, novel-writing. Should I have been willing to take the risks she did? My father took a big gamble when he embarked on an academic career: even after Hitler's defeat, some of his professors warned him that antisemitism would stand in his way. A generation later, I faced no such problem. The risk I took was that of following in the footsteps of a successful parent, so that my achievements would be judged – if not by others, at least by myself – in comparison with a very high standard. The title my father chose for his own autobiographical essay – 'Warts and all' – reminds me, however, that his success had its shadow side. The private dramas of my own life have been far less painful than the struggles with alcoholism and manic-depression he wrote about.

'Call no man happy before his death': Solon's warning is one of the memorable lessons I learned in Reed College's humanities course. On balance, history has given me a satisfying career, but I remain uneasily aware of some of the limitations I accepted by embracing it. Now, as I watch my two sons, intelligent young men who have chosen paths outside of academia, I gain new perspectives on my own choices. Both did well in school, and I sometimes imagined that one or the other would follow in my footsteps. I can only admire their determination to strike out on their own, as their mother did when, as a young woman, she left her native Germany to come to the United States. Will one or the other of them become the fifth generation of my family to write about their own lives? Or will that also be a tradition they will feel the need to break with? Perhaps they will come to realize, as I have, that one can acknowledge the role of family and circumstances in one's life and still feel that one made meaningful choices for oneself.

Notes

1 J. D. Popkin 2005.
2 Feinberg 1995; Z. Popkin 1956; R. H. Popkin 1988.
3 R. H. Popkin 1966. I have published some documents about my father's obsession with the Kennedy assassination and other political causes célèbres in an article based on his letters: J. D. Popkin 2008.
4 Following *History, historians and autobiography,* in 2007 I published *Facing racial revolution: Eyewitness accounts of the Haitian insurrection,* a collection and analysis of first-person accounts of the Haitian Revolution of 1791–1804.
5 R. H. Popkin, *The history of scepticism from Erasmus to Descartes* (1960). My father continued to revise this book, which made his career, until the very end of his life; the final edition is *The history of scepticism from Savonarola to Bayle*. For my own reconstruction of the story of its composition, see J. D. Popkin 2009.
6 J. D. Popkin 2001. The novels were *Small victory* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1947) and *Quiet street* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1951; reprint 2002).

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15

INVITATION TO HISTORIANS

Alexander Lyon Macfie

After a brief survey of the possible functions of history in terms of purpose and motivation, Macfie concludes his introduction by referencing key thinkers from Michael Oakeshott to Keith Jenkins with the effect that all histories are generally defended as practical and future-orientated activities and really irrelevant from a 'historical' point of view. He judges his own history writing to be a complex amalgam of writing for a purpose and writing for the sake of writing. His judgement is that historians should identify the nature of events, create an experience of time and try to understand the character of human experience.

In my early years at school and university in the 1940s and early 1950s I was, as far as I remember, largely ignorant of the fact – if it is a fact – that history is supposed to have a purpose, possibly a function, social, economic, political, psychological, even philosophical, to be of use that is, to be as Beverley Southgate puts it in his excellent and all-embracing study of the subject, *What is history for?* (2005) – for something. At school (Stockport Grammar School), of course, I was aware that history is supposed to be for something – for the passing of exams. But at (Manchester) university – again as far as I remember – the question was never raised. It was, I suppose, just taken for granted: that in studying the English Civil War or the history of Europe in the nineteenth century, for instance, one was somehow equipping oneself the better to understand the world, or at least that part of the world in which we happened to be living. I suppose one was also somehow learning to 'do' history, which in effect meant writing about some aspect of the subject in a precise and comprehensible manner; an attitude which I am obliged to admit I carried with me for many years, when, some time later (in the 1960s), I began seriously to 'write' history, or histories, as distinct from merely reading it, or them. It was, therefore, only many years later (in the late 1990s) when, driven by an occasional and somewhat haphazard interest in the so-called philosophy of history, I began to read around the subject, that I began

to learn something about what history is 'for'; though I am not sure that I ever learnt quite what my history was 'for', if, indeed, it was actually 'for' anything.

Some small distinction can be made, I suppose, between the function and purpose of history and the use of history, that is, what history is sometimes (used) for. Function and purpose suggest a degree of appropriateness and propriety, whereas use, what a thing is (used) for, suggests a wider scope, more heterogeneous in its application. It is doubtful how far the distinction can be maintained, as in many cases (including history) it is difficult to distinguish the function and purpose of a thing from the uses to which it can be put, 'use' often defining function and purpose rather than function and purpose 'use'.

What I learnt, from my somewhat haphazard study of the philosophy of history, is that history is, or has been, 'for' almost everything. Frederick Nietzsche, in an untimely meditation 'On the uses and disadvantages of history for life' (1874), for instance, suggests that history, which he seems at times to equate with the act of remembering, might perform three useful tasks: the promotion of action (the monumental), the preservation of the past (the antiquarian), and the facilitation of deliverance (the critical). As for the ultimate purpose of all history that, as the title of Nietzsche's essay suggests, should be the enhancement of life.

Louis Bernstein Namier (who I heard lecture on nineteenth-century European history in Manchester in 1952), in an essay 'On history' published in *Avenues of history* (1952), suggests that history should

> help man to master the past imminent both in his person and in his social setting, and induce in him a further understanding of the present through a heightened awareness of what is, or is not, peculiar to his own age. (1)

Moreover, history might also (as 'case history') supply material for training in a profession; enable a full enjoyment of man's cultural inheritance; and, in dealing with the unconscious memories of a society, to some extent perform a psycho-analytic function, ridding society, like the Freudian individual, of the unconscious memories of a 'dead festering past' (5).

Felipe Fernández-Armesto, in an epilogue to *What is history now* (2002), suggests, somewhat oddly, that there are, in the end, only two reasons for studying history (and, for that matter, anything else): the enhancement of life and the preparation for death. (History, in Fernández-Armesto's opinion, enhances life by conjuring up in the mind a vivid context for the appreciation and understanding of encounters with people and things. It prepares for death by cultivating imaginative understanding, broadening the mind and exercising the ability to understand the other.)

Norman J. Wilson, in *History in crisis* (2004), more prosaically, suggests that history can cure people of provincialism; teach them about time and about the irreversible nature of the past; teach them about the 'foreignness' (difference) of the past, and by implication of the future; make them aware of otherness and perspective; provide them with a collective memory; and by way of the activities of imaginative and ambitious historians provide them with new ways of constructing the past, present and future.

Finally, Southgate in *What is history for?* – as we have seen, the most wide-ranging of all the studies of the uses of history here considered – suggests that history – which in his opinion is always 'for' something: he makes no allowance in his analysis of the subject for the possibility of a history 'for its own sake' – is, or occasionally has been (overtly), for the promotion of transferable skills (analysis, synthesis, personal expression, etc.); the cultivation of the individual (as a civilised member of a civilised society); the identification of myth (and its replacement by some kind of historical truth); the historical underpinning of faith (by the discovery of 'roots' and a recognition of the workings of divine providence); the preservation of the memory of the dead (in particular, the war dead and the victims of the Holocaust); the identification of tradition (political, national); the construction of personal and national identity; and – most importantly from Southgate's point of view: it is his recommendation – the improvement of the health of the individual and society (the historian as therapist).

More surreptitiously ('hidden agendas') history can also, according to Southgate, perform the task of underpinning the power of a regime (the Emperor Augustus, Napoleon, Hitler); justifying and supporting the dominant values of a society (capitalist, socialist, Communist); and gendering the story of the past (as masculine at the expense of the feminine).

Interestingly, in his account of the uses of history (what history is for), Southgate pays little or no attention to what Herbert Butterfield, in *The origins of history* (1981), identifies as the origins of history: the identification and cataloguing of events (inundations of the Nile, victories achieved); the creation of time (the succession of kings and dynasties); the explanation of divine providence (the doings of the Gods) (briefly mentioned by Southgate); and even, perhaps, the structuring of human experience (the discovery of literary form, the construction of narrative); things, in other words, that we, inhabitants of the (post)modern world, usually take for granted.

In his analysis of the uses of history in *What is history for?,* Southgate cites many instances of historians who advocated a particular use or function for history, who, that is to say, answered the question 'what is history for?' Thus, for instance, William Stubbs, writing in 1877, emphasised history's role as a mental discipline and as an 'apparatus of cultivated life' (31). E. H. Carr, in *What is history* (1964), claimed that an understanding of history would enable a people to understand the present and control the future. J. H. Plumb, in *The death of the past* (1973), claimed that it would increase man's awareness and enable him to improve his capacity for controlling his environment. Geoffrey Elton, in *Return to essentials* (1991), claimed that it would equip the living with a wider and deeper acquaintance with the possibilities open to human thought. And Ian Kershaw, in *The 'Hitler myth': image and reality in the Third Reich* (1987), claimed that by revealing the Hitler myth for what it was, he would, as Southgate puts it, 'enhance our political awareness' (31–3, 39–40, 46–7).

Numerous philosophers of history have attempted to bring some order to this apparent chaos of purpose and motivation. Three, in particular, are worthy of note: Michael Oakeshott, in *On history* (1983), M. C. Lemon, in *Philosophy of history* (2003), and Keith Jenkins, in *At the limits of history* (2009) (and in his numerous other works). Oakeshott, in *On history* (and previously in *Experience and its modes,* 1933), argues that

history can be viewed philosophically in two ways: first, as a mode of understanding the world concerned with the construction, from a present experience of past remains, of a logically inferred past – the product, as he puts it in *Experience and its Modes* (1933), of 'what the evidence obliges us to believe' (109); and second, as the product of a practical mode of understanding the world concerned with present experience interpreted in terms of an awareness of future ends. The history thus produced, as the product of the historical mode of understanding, would be distinct, coherent and ideal, devoid of all practical purpose, whereas the history produced (or used) by the practical mode of understanding would be nothing but practical, concerned only with the securing of future ends. For Oakeshott, therefore, the various uses of history – what history is for – as listed by Southgate and others above, would have nothing whatsoever to do with history, defined as the answer to an inquiry inspired by the historical mode of understanding. Without exception, they are all practical, future oriented and, from the purely 'historical' point of view, irrelevant.

Lemon, in *Philosophy of history,* likewise makes a clear distinction between an ideal sort of history, which he defines as a history written 'for its own sake' (as an end in itself), and a practical sort of history, which he defines as a history written as a 'means to an end' (325); though the distinction he makes is by no means as clear as that made by Oakeshott. As a practical activity, as distinct from an ideal 'for its own sake' one, history may be written with a number of objectives in mind, including the entertainment of the reader; the communication of knowledge (the intrinsic purpose of the activity); the generation of controversy (a means for the ambitious historian to 'make his mark'); the persuasion of the uncommitted; the justification of revolution; and the support and strengthening of a national movement. Such histories, written as means to an end, are as much an engagement with the present, as with the past, and it would be naïve to take them at face value as 'history' (334–5).

Jenkins, in *At the limits of history* (and most of the other so-called postmodern philosophers of history with whom he is associated), on the other hand, as a result of his sceptical deconstruction and (philosophical) destruction of all history, as a supposedly truthful account of what happened in the past, effectively abolishes the distinction made by Oakeshott and Lemon between 'true' history (as they define it) and practical history, thereby making all history practical, confining it, that is to say, to the realm of the fictive, the imaginative, the probabilistic and the rhetorical, making it, in other words, 'merely a faculty for the furnishing of arguments'. As such, history, in Jenkins's opinion, is always 'for someone', driven by a political/ideological/suasive impetus. It is never 'in and for' itself (7).

Southgate's analysis of the uses of history is, I suppose, primarily empirical, based on an analysis of what actual histories do and what the historians who composed them say they do, whereas Oakeshott and Lemon's, and, to a lesser extent, Jenkins's, is primarily analytical and philosophical. Not that it makes much difference. All conclude that history, as represented by the many histories actually written, is almost always – some would argue always – practical in its intention and purpose, future oriented (as, in a sense, is all human activity), always for something or someone.

(Though as we have seen, Oakeshott and Lemon continue to argue the case for a disinterested, objective history, unadulterated by human motivation – despite the fact that any such history must inevitably be composed by a historian driven by some kind of human motivation, if only a desire to construct a 'pure' history, devoid of human motivation.)

That does not mean that it is always easy to identify the practical purpose or purposes of a particular work of history, or, indeed, of history in general, read or written. In my own case, for instance, I find the problem particularly baffling. Certainly, in my formative years, I read history mainly to pass exams, and to gain some knowledge of the history of Europe in the First and Second World Wars – formative events in the lives of my parents and the society into which I was born and grew up. Certainly, again in my formative years, a certain kind of history (nationalistic, patriotic) must have played a significant part in the shaping of my personal and national identity, particularly in the period of the Second World War – though not as much, perhaps, as some historians and philosophers of history might suppose. Beyond that, I have no doubt that, in my early years, I made much use of what Nietzsche referred to as monumental history (Shakespeare, Samuel Johnson, Jack London, Bernard Shaw, Tolstoy, Namier, A. J. P Taylor, T. S. Eliot, and so on), though I doubt if I made much use of the antiquarian and the critical (we were not taught to be critical of anything much in those days). When it comes to the writing of history, I am paradoxically much less certain of the nature of my motives. Again, my initial purpose was almost certainly qualification: to obtain a better degree and (possibly) a better (academic) position. (I wrote a dissertation for an MA degree in Middle Eastern Studies in 1968, effectively my first attempt to 'write' history. My second attempt, inspired by a number of visits to the area of the Turkish Straits in the 1960s, was a Ph.D. thesis on *The Straits question, 1908–36,* presented three or four years later.) Then, I suppose, encouraged by the odd proposal from a publisher or an editor, who evidently had their own ideas of purpose and objective, mainly practical (for books on the Eastern Question, Ataturk, and the End of the Ottoman Empire), and the prospect of becoming a 'historian' (an occupation of high esteem in my youth) I became hooked on the activity of 'doing' history, that is to say, of writing and editing books and articles on various aspects of the subject, including a number of articles on the local history of the places in which I lived and two or three books on Orientalism – a subject of great interest at the time (the 1980s and 1990s). In this respect, I seem, again paradoxically, to have resembled Lemon's model of a 'for its own sake' historian, devoid of all personal purpose and objective, except a certain kind of (possibly pleasurable) fulfilment – though, of course, various unconscious impulses may also have been at work. Throughout, I have, as far as I know, never intentionally sought to underpin the power of a regime (though one or two of the things I have written may have had that effect); justify the dominant values of a society; gender the story of the past (in my days, the past was nearly always gendered male, so the question did not, from my point of view, really arise); adopt a therapeutic role; or (until recently, at least) question the established view of things. In other words, I have remained a sturdily (sadly) conservative historian, devoid of all

pretensions to influence or change the world. No wonder that my books have proved so unprofitable.

If you were to ask me what exactly I was fulfilling – fulfilment implying some kind of consummation, compliance, or completion – I suppose that I would have to refer, for want of a better word, to vocation, a feeling of fitness or suitability. Not that I have ever felt particularly suited to doing history – a discipline that requires (it seems to me) a profound conviction that the world, in particular, the past, is both real and understandable. However, I have felt a desire to play with words and images, and to compose text – a desire satisfied, to some extent, by the writing of history. In the end, therefore, I suppose that my purpose, in writing history – what my history was 'for' – was the satisfaction of a disposition or inclination, fostered in various ways at school and university onwards, to express myself as well as I could in the English language, that is to say, simply to write.

The purposes of writing and reading history – what history is for – are clearly numerous, almost as numerous as the varieties of human behaviour and motivation they reflect. It would be foolish to argue about their validity. They are evidently as valid as the human nature (whatever that might be) they reflect. Nevertheless, there might be some advantage to be gained in an investigation of the general uses or functions of history, not for the individual but for all men – those men, at least, who write 'histories'. Thus, for example, history (what has happened in the past) might be seen as the working out of divine providence, and the use of history – what history is for – as essentially an explanation of that providence – a justification of the 'ways of God to man'. Or it might (in the very narrow sense suggested by Oakeshott) be seen as a mode of understanding the world (whatever the world might be), one of a number of such modes. Or (as written) it might be seen as the intellectual product of the productive material forces of a society, and its necessary function – what it does and, by implication, what it is for – as the support and defence of those material forces. As such, history might be seen, as Martin Davies puts it, in *Historics* (2006), as a 'technology of technologies', designed to promote 'affirmative culture' and organise the world in the interest of a dominant class (Introduction).

There may well be a strong case for each of those possibilities, the necessary consequences of the presuppositions on which they are based; but as a historian and a somewhat ill-equipped philosopher of history, I am not so sure. Who could possibly explain divine providence, even if it could be discovered? Of what relevance is a mode of historical understanding that excludes from its ambit almost all of the works of history actually written? Might not some works of history occasionally challenge the material forces of a society instead of just promoting them? No, rather, I would prefer to opt for something, superficially at least, more mundane: the interpretation of history as an art form, similar to poetry, drama and the novel, not to speak of painting and sculpture, the principal and necessary functions of which, in a world of imagining (subject from time to time to [poetical] 'arrests of experience', as described by Oakeshott in *The voice of poetry in the conversation of mankind,* 1959), would be the identification of events, the creation of time and the structuring of human experience – as discovered, incidentally, by Butterfield in his account of the origins of

history. One might also possibly add, in our secular age, the discovery and explanation of change and development, with or without a metaphysical dimension. These, it seems to me, are the things that history *necessarily* does, and the things which, by implication, it is *necessarily* for, in so far of course as it is actually for anything.

What Oakeshott means by an arrest of experience, by the way, is a mode of experience abstracted from the concrete whole. One mode of experience, occasionally relevant, in my opinion, to the activity of being a historian and reading history, identified by Oakeshott, is the poetical (the others are the practical, characterised by the activity of desiring and obtaining, the scientific, characterised by the activity of enquiring and understanding, and as we have seen the historical, characterised by the activity of viewing the past merely as past). By the poetical mode of understanding, Oakeshott means the activity of contemplating and delighting. That is to say, the activity of making and moving about among images, images not subject to a 'fact' or 'not fact' interpretation, as the other modes are, not in other words either practical, historical or scientific. Writing and reading history is clearly, for the most part, a practical activity, but it can, it seems to me, occasionally suffer a metamorphosis, opening up the practical to the poetical (the contemplative) (31–8).

What this means is that what history is ultimately for, as distinct from what its purpose is for its individual practitioners and readers, is the imposition of being on the flux of becoming (Oakeshott's abstraction from the concrete experience again), one more expression of the deep-seated human desire to stabilise the world of experience, create significant meaning, and discover reality in appearance; everything, in fact, that Jenkins and the other postmodern philosophers of history assert.

That does not mean that it is not possible, in the spirit of argumentation, to challenge some of the instances of individual motivation (what history is for) cited by Southgate and others. How could one possibly know, for instance, what sort of history would contribute to the well-being (health) of the individual and society, particularly in the long run, when unintended consequences often appear? How would one define such a well-being, and who would do so? The historian perhaps who seeks to underpin a regime? Or the historian who seeks merely to support the dominant values of a society? What sort of history is best suited to the cultivation of the individual, the construction of personal and national identity, and the promotion of mental discipline? Empirical history, imaginative history, modernist history, postmodernist history, or critical history? How would one ever know? If the historian provides society with a collective memory, how can he be sure that the collective memory he provides is not a false one, wholly misleading as false memories tend to be? In challenging myth, how can the historian be sure that he is not just replacing one dubious myth with another, masquerading this time as 'history'? How, by performing a sort of psycho-analytical function, can the historian ever know that he has rid a society of a 'dead festering past' (as Namier more or less admits in his article)? Finally, how can we be sure that the almost universal historicisation of consciousness, now evident in our culture, does not blunt the normal human sense of things, thereby incapacitating both the individual and society in their capacity to respond adequately to the challenges human beings face (the question that Davies raises in *Historics*)?

Which is merely to say, I suppose, that historians may offer up many reasons for the writing of history, but it is extremely unlikely that they will ever know for sure how far they have been successful in attaining their objectives. All they will know for sure is that in writing history, they have performed three essential tasks: the identification of events (usually in a chronological sequence), the creation of time (again usually in a sequence of before and after) and the structuring of human experience (as story, narrative, or discourse) – all essential services to the human being in his existential predicament.

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GLOSSARY

Aesthetic(s) Notoriously difficult to define it is that area of human understanding which endeavours to engage at a variety of levels with the relationship between form (history) and content (the empirical past). It is also the perception of that which we choose to represent and our reactions and judgements concerning its value and nature. This engagement and perception differ for any individual historian. See Frank R. Ankersmit, Robert A. Rosenstone.

Archive Usually defined as a physical place which functions as a repository for documentary and/or other physical artefacts (records office, library, personal collection). It can also be regarded as an epistemic state of mind ('a sense of the archive') that defines a belief in the preservation of cultural memory and a conservancy site of and for the past. See Peter Burke, Greg Dening, Patrick Joyce, Jeremy D. Popkin, Robert A. Rosenstone.

Author(ship) The author fabricates the history and is the site of historical understanding and analysis. It is essential to recognize the historian as an author in order to grasp the nature of history. Because the past does not speak for itself it has to be voiced. See Frank R. Ankersmit, Peter Burke, Greg Dening, Keith Jenkins, Patrick Joyce, Alice Kessler-Harris, C. Behan McCullagh, Jeremy D. Popkin, Richard Price, Robert A. Rosenstone.

Autobiography A narrative form (usually written) that serves several functions ranging from authorial self-exculpation to memoir. It can be authored in a number of voices or genres. Often testimonial in arrangement, it offers an opportunity to explore the fine line between fact and fiction. It offers a rich source for examining the fictive in life writing. See Frank R. Ankersmit, Peter Burke, Keith Jenkins, Alice Kessler-Harris, C. Behan McCullagh, Jeremy D. Popkin, Beverley Southgate.

Deconstruction Primarily associated with French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930–2004) it is the act of taking apart that which is constructed such as 'writing' or a language or other 'text' or a 'discipline' (like history) in order to understand its nature in terms of its context of why, what, how and for whom it was created. See Frank R. Ankersmit, Keith Jenkins, Alexander Lyon Macfie, Jeremy D. Popkin, Robert A. Rosenstone, Beverley Southgate.

Discourse A structure of language (oral, written, physical play, filmic, etc.) that 'tells a story'. Discourses range from a simple literary form to a highly complex set of related cultural activities. See Greg Dening, Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, Keith Jenkins, Alexander Lyon Macfie, Richard Price, Robert A. Rosenstone.

ego-histoire The autobiographical form or 'life writing' of historians. See Robert A. Rosenstone.

Empiricism/Empirical Empiricism is the philosophical belief that assumes all concepts and ideas result primarily through experience (*a posteriori*). This opposes the idealist judgement that human consciousness limits and defines concepts. Empiricism is foundational for the vast majority of historians because it is considered to be essential for the verification of knowledge of the past as well as the present. See Frank R. Ankersmit, Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, Keith Jenkins, Patrick Joyce, Alexander Lyon Macfie, Robert A. Rosenstone.

Epistemology Epistemology concerns the foundations and nature of knowledge creation and its attainment. It is possible to distinguish four forms of epistemological choices or decisions that historians either consciously or unconsciously make: empirical (the sources), epistemic (nature of knowledge creation), ontological (nature of 'history-*as*-*a*-text'), and semantic (creation of 'history-*as*-*a*-text'). See Frank R. Ankersmit, Keith Jenkins, Patrick Joyce, C. Behan McCullagh, Richard Price, Robert A. Rosenstone.

Ethics The codes and principles that formulate and regulate moral behaviour. All histories contain ethical foundations, elements introduced by the author-historian either consciously or unconsciously. Ethics serve both cognitive and aesthetic functions. See Keith Jenkins, Patrick Joyce, Jeremy D. Popkin, Richard Price, Steven A. Riess.

Experiment/Experimental History/Texts Forms or kinds of histories that provoke and/or 'make unfamiliar' conventional notions of historical expression, i.e. empirical-analytical-representationalist. The assumption that form follows content is the fundamental precept of non-experimental history (of a particular kind that its practitioners presume it to be universal). See Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, Keith Jenkins, Richard Price, Robert A. Rosenstone.

Form The design and intellectual structure of the history created by the historian to accommodate the connection between (past) experience and (present)

historical description. See Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, Patrick Joyce, Richard Price, Robert A. Rosenstone.

Historicism/Historicization Can be variously defined but is most likely to be defined as a version of relativism that admits to knowledge of and a judgement about the past emerging from the contemporary conditions of the production of such knowledge. See Frank R. Ankersmit, Peter Burke.

History Most usually defined as that special form of narrative representation of the past that is researched and written by the historian. Always subject to the nature of its production as a narrative, it provides meanings for and descriptions of the past. History can take as many forms as the historian can conceive for it. See all contributors.

Imagination To imagine is to create a mental representation of something. Historical imagining (the historical imagination) is typically distinguished from other mental states such as direct perception or memory (although these are closely aligned). While there are physical documentary sources used by historians, the historical imagination must be distinguished from direct knowledge of the past. The historical imagination is given a form through processes of representation. See Greg Dening, Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, Keith Jenkins, Patrick Joyce, Alice Kessler-Harris, Alexander Lyon Macfie, Peter Munz, Jeremy D. Popkin, Richard Price, Robert A. Rosenstone, Beverley Southgate.

Linguistic Turn This concept refers to the emphasis on words, linguistic conventions and symbols as structuring agents of our understanding of experience past and present. It thus raises issues concerning the inherent relativism in the creation of historical meaning and explanation. See Peter Burke, Patrick Joyce.

Memory The intellectual/cognitive ability to recall and retell narratives about the sensory reality of the time before now. See Frank R. Ankersmit, Peter Burke, Greg Dening, Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, Keith Jenkins, Patrick Joyce, Alice Kessler-Harris, C. Behan McCullagh, Alexander Lyon Macfie, Jeremy D. Popkin, Richard Price, Beverley Southgate.

Metahistory The main title of Hayden White's key text (*Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe,* Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973). White defines the concept as referring to the deep structure of the historical imagination. See Frank R. Ankersmit, Keith Jenkins, Peter Munz, Robert A. Rosenstone.

Narration/Narrative The recounting/telling of a series of events. Only through the narration/narrative-making process can the past be constituted as history defined as 'understanding the meaning of the past'. See Frank R. Ankersmit, Greg Dening, Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, Keith Jenkins, Patrick Joyce, Alexander Lyon Macfie, Peter Munz, Richard Price, Robert A. Rosenstone, Beverley Southgate.

Objectivity Usually taken to mean simple reference to empirical objects, people and events in the past. Exemplifying the concept suggests the satisfactory resolution of issues of 'evidence selection', 'interpretation', 'construction of the narrative', 'value judgements', 'inference', 'failure of language', 'the story back there' or 'a story back there'. For a variety of reasons it may be unreasonable to claim that we can isolate the meaning of a history text by relating it to an object. See Frank R. Ankersmit, Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, Keith Jenkins, Alexander Lyon Macfie, Peter Munz, Beverley Southgate.

Ontology The study and understanding of what exists and the nature of 'being'. In the case of most historians (of a particular kind) the question resolves itself into what was the empirical nature of the past. Additionally, the ontology of the history produced about the past may be addressed as an ontological concern. See Frank R. Ankersmit, Keith Jenkins.

Perspective This is a basic epistemological concept which defines the location, position or situation of a knower. It is reasonable to assume that all knowledge is derived from, to some greater or lesser extent, and that it 'reflects' and/or 'mediates' the perspectives of the knower. Thus, for example, feminist historians (variously defined) would be interested in how gender situates them as knowing subjects and thus the nature of their knowledge(s). See Frank R. Ankersmit, Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, C. Behan McCullagh, Alexander Lyon Macfie, Jeremy D. Popkin, Richard Price, Steven A. Riess, Robert A. Rosenstone, Beverley Southgate.

Postmodern(ism/ist) A complex multi-scepticism that confronts and destabilizes knowledge defined exclusively in practical realist and representationalist terms. Such scepticism(s) may be defined variously as being epistemic, ontological, semantic or more unusually global. Hence the 'postmodern historian' would likely move radically beyond the belief in artless empirical scepticism. See Frank R. Ankersmit, Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, Keith Jenkins, Patrick Joyce, Alexander Lyon Macfie, Macfie, Richard Price, Robert A. Rosenstone, Beverley Southgate.

Public History That form of history that may deploy 'academic history' methods but which is intended to enter the public realm outside the professional academic world. It may be defined as 'peoples' history' in which the understanding of the past is characterized through the deployment of terms such as 'heritage' and 'folk' history or specifically as histories of class or race experience. See Frank R. Ankersmit, Peter Burke, Greg Dening, Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, Keith Jenkins, and Patrick Joyce.

Realism/Realist The belief that concepts/ideas are either true/false, and independent of the historian's belief/disbelief/theories/perspectives. See Greg Dening, Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, Peter Munz.

Relativism/Relativist A common feature of relativism is that some past experience, belief, understanding or sensibility can only be understood in the context of its relation to something else. Hence justified beliefs, ethical principles or concepts

of truth might be regarded as being relative to semantic, cultural, biological or gender influences. What remains unanswerable is the question as to the precise criteria of verification for a given statement. See Greg Dening, Keith Jenkins, Patrick Joyce, Beverley Southgate.

Representation For particularly unsophisticated empiricists, ideas/concepts re-present (or represent or even more crudely reflect) the nature of attested past experience (see **Empiricism**). Hence the thought represents the object. Opposing this judgement is the argument that as a narrative, history is not 'caused' by the past thing in itself but is a fabricated (i.e. built) textual rendering which does not exist in a direct causal-representational relationship despite the nature of factualism. See Frank R. Ankersmit, Peter Burke, Greg Dening, Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, Richard Price, Robert A. Rosenstone.

Responsibility When a historian (or any human being) performs an ethically significant act in circumstances that might be considered as warranting action. Admiration, guilt and culpability are often associated reactions to action or inaction. For historians, responsibility takes numerous forms which include inference, empiricism and representationalism, but also concepts such as the presumption in favour of 'the lessons of history'. See Peter Burke, Patrick Joyce, Alice Kessler-Harris, C. Behan McCullagh, Jeremy D. Popkin, Beverley Southgate.

Scepticism As a basic philosophical issue, 'empirical' scepticism concerns whether and how we can acquire justified belief about the world of the past in order to make it meaningful. However, there are other forms of philosophical scepticism which concern the nature of knowledge more broadly. See Keith Jenkins, Patrick Joyce, Alice Kessler-Harris, Alexander Lyon Macfie, Jeremy D. Popkin, Beverley Southgate.

Self This concept in this present context refers to the 'affective' contribution of the historian to the history they create as authors who engage with the past in the form of a history. This necessitates self-consciousness concerning their 'narrative making' and also how this contributes to and reflects upon the historian's own epistemological understandings and subsequent decisions. See Peter Burke, Greg Dening, Alice Kessler-Harris, Beverley Southgate.

Story The narrative told in the history constructed as a series of events or content. Story is rarely – but is more properly understood – in terms of the historian's preferred plotting of past events as opposed to their discovery of a given story which they assume/presume must have existed in the events. See Frank R. Ankersmit, Peter Burke, Greg Dening, Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, Patrick Joyce, Alice Kessler-Harris, Alexander Lyon Macfie, Peter Munz, Richard Price, Robert A. Rosenstone, Beverley Southgate.

Subject (Subjectivity, Subjectivism) A central characteristic of knowledge attainment through language use, and an understanding that is dependent on the intervention of the person (the subject) acquiring the knowledge. See Frank R.

Ankersmit, Peter Burke, Greg Dening, Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, Keith Jenkins, Patrick Joyce, Alice Kessler-Harris, C. Behan McCullagh, Alexander Lyon Macfie, Peter Munz, Jeremy D. Popkin, Richard Price, Steven A. Riess, Robert A. Rosenstone, Beverley Southgate.

Trope/Tropes/Tropology Tropes are figures of thinking and speech that operate by using words and/or concepts in ways that ease the construction of connotation/denotation, description, elucidation and explanation. Troping is thus a reasoning instrument for creating an understanding of the imaginable nature of reality in the present, and for the past understood as history. See Frank R. Ankersmit, Alice Kessler-Harris.

Truth Truth is usually defined as the 'factual correspondence' between a proposition and the reality to which it refers. This definition is generally inadequate for historians because history is a narrative representation. Because factualism can only take historians so far in creating explanations and meanings for the past, historians should be aware of other forms and theories of truth such as coherence, correlation and consensus. See Frank R. Ankersmit, Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, Patrick Joyce, Alice Kessler Harris, C. Behan McCullagh, Peter Munz, Richard Price, Robert A. Rosenstone, Beverley Southgate.

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