

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "James M. Banner, Jr.", slanted upwards to the right.

Becoming Historians

Edited by

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and **JOHN R. GILLIS**

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS

CHICAGO AND LONDON

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The University of Chicago Press,
The University of Chicago Press, Ltd., London
© 2009 by The University of Chicago
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Printed in the United States of America
18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11 10 09 1 2 3 4 5

ISBN-13: 978-0-226-03656-4 (cloth)
ISBN-13: 978-0-226-03658-8 (paper)
ISBN-10: 0-226-03656-1 (cloth)
ISBN-10: 0-226-03658-8 (paper)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Becoming historians / edited by James M. Banner, Jr., and John R. Gillis.
p. cm.

ISBN-13: 978-0-226-03656-4 (cloth : alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 0-226-03656-1 (cloth : alk. paper)

ISBN-13: 978-0-226-03658-8 (pbk. : alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 0-226-03658-8 (pbk. : alk. paper)

I. Historians—Biography. I. Banner, James M., 1935– II. Gillis, John R.

D14.B43 2009

907'.2022—dc22

2008032581

⊗ The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of the American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1992.

JOAN WALLACH SCOTT

Finding Critical History

There are so many ways to tell this story, so many reasons I could give for having ended up in history. But one thing is certain: I was never in love with Clio. Facts, events, causality weren't compelling. I wasn't one of those kids who devour books about wars or the lives of the famous, though I read my share of exemplary biographies borrowed, along with novels and fairy tales, from the Eastern Parkway branch of the Brooklyn Public Library. History was something I learned well, but so also were biology and algebra and most other subjects. I was a good student and I usually got high grades, more because of a need to be good than because of the appeal of any particular body of knowledge. I don't think I knew, in those days, what intellectual passion meant; school was about the acquisition of skills and information and the ability to use them to prove something about myself: that I was bright, capable, smart, that I could excel at most things and so please my parents, make them proud, earn their love.

* * *

It might be said that since my parents were high school history teachers it was inevitable that I would become a historian, moving up the professional ladder they had begun to climb as children of East European immigrants. They had college degrees, I got a Ph.D.; they taught history, I wrote history; their love of the subject nurtured mine. But I don't think

that's exactly right. My father taught history and economics because he'd been told as a student at Brooklyn Technical High School that there wouldn't be jobs as engineers for Jews. At City College in New York in the late 1920s, it was Marxism that called. The story of the past served to illuminate the theory. And it was the theory—a way of seeing how economic relations determined social ones—that he wanted to instill in me, along with his faith in inevitable progress, in the redemptive power of history. I don't know why my mother chose history. All I remember is that she loved to teach. Her stories at the dinner table were about how she'd finally won over a sullen girl or figured out how to explain some difficult idea to a skeptical boy. Or about how she'd thwarted mischief; rescued a favorite but troubled student; converted a bigot; convinced a colleague to join the union. From my mother's example I learned that teaching was a form of activism: the transmission of knowledge for a purpose beyond itself, a purpose animated by caring relationships and politics, shaping the way kids thought about the world in order to make it a better place.

* * *

Surely, then, it was politics that drew me to history. Perhaps that's true, but only if you stretch the connection, only if you think that I took literally the injunction to change the world. In our family doing politics was the most obvious way to "make history." Long before my father was fired in 1953, he told us bedtime stories about bunny rabbits (black and white together) on strike. My lullabies were "Joe Hill" and "Union Maid." If his firing was meant as a warning to other radicals in the heat of the cold war, for us his refusal to name names, his proud invocation of the democratic ideals of the American Revolution, made him a hero to emulate. In response to a reporter's question after his testimony at a House subcommittee hearing: "Don't you know that you placed your job in jeopardy?" he famously replied, "Those guys placed the Constitution in jeopardy; that worries me more." The moral imperative in many Red Diaper families was to vindicate one's parents by following in their political footsteps. One of my persistent fantasies was that I would be, as I put it on the psychological personality assessment questionnaire I filled out as a freshman at Brandeis, "a leader of men."

* * *

Perhaps, you might say, writing history was a fallback position, what one reached for when politics turned out to be disappointing or thwarted or too hard; when it became clear that power would resist our yearnings for peace and justice and equality (always my wishes as I blew out my birthday candles); when progress no longer seemed inevitable and revolutionary struggle yielded results more complex than our utopian imaginings had promised. I don't think that's right either. Not only because I decided to become a historian in the heat of my own political activism in the 1960s, but also because I continue to think of myself as politically engaged. Becoming a historian was not a consolation for politics, but a companion to it. Though not an inevitable one.

* * *

So then, why history? It might just as well have been literature. The first real excitement I remember as a student was in an AP English class at Midwood High School. Mr. Schlakman taught us how to read. Using the classic texts of the New Criticism, Brooks and Warren's *Understanding Poetry* and *Understanding Literature*, we learned about metaphors and symbols, the ways language could signify and figures represent. Deciphering those texts was the hardest work I'd ever been asked to do. I didn't do it well at first, but learning how to do it was the most fun I'd ever had. There were secrets to be uncovered, mysteries to be solved, meanings to be unraveled. And no answer was final. There was always something more to ponder. The joy was in the chase. Now I can say that this was a formative moment in the linking of knowledge and desire; then I said I loved my English class.

The next class I loved was Frank Manuel's. The legendary historian of ideas at Brandeis thundered his interpretations of the great moments of Western civilization. The tone was authoritative, but I somehow understood there was more to uncover where he worked. Manuel was a terrifying figure. His empty trouser leg—we speculated endlessly about how he'd lost his leg—swaying as he led us down intricate and difficult pathways. I followed one course after another. We read the canonical texts of European political thought line by line. And though I never dared speak in class or to him, I was hooked. In what might have been a challenge to my father's teachings, I began to see the importance of ideas. It was less their world historical import that mattered to me than it was the pleasure

of pursuing them. Alice following the rabbit into unknown, unforeseen territory. Thrilled.

The courses at Brandeis I still remember were like that, the ones where doors opened and new ideas emerged. Most of these were in history or sociology; few were in literature—the accident of who was teaching there at the time. At home, Oedipal battles were fueled by ideas. When I had out-argued my father he'd resort to moralism. I knew even then that moralism was the enemy of desire.

In those days of distribution requirements and the early declaration of majors, I chose history. Even in courses I didn't like, I picked research topics that were about the history of ideas. Except for my senior thesis, a silly, banal study of the Revolution of 1848 in France, offered to me by a professor who preferred diplomacy and politics to intellectual history. I arrived at Brandeis with French as my foreign language, having had a particularly good teacher in junior high school. In European history courses I tended to research French topics because I could read the language. In retrospect, I don't fully understand my passivity. Many of my fellow students wrote on the likes of Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud. That I didn't suggest that I hadn't fully realized that the pleasure I found in certain courses was mine to pursue. I attributed it to the courses; I didn't see how it could come from me, how I could choose it.

Anyway, my calling in those years was politics. I was still the dutiful daughter of political parents, seeking my fulfillment in their pleasure (or someone who was a substitute for them), or finding mine in an extension of theirs. I wrote for the student newspaper, joined picket lines at Woolworths, organized ban the bomb petitions and rallies—became that “leader of men” I'd said I wanted to be. During one of the international crises of the early 1960s, Herbert Marcuse thrust some money into my hands, urging me to “organize something,” which, with my equally activist roommate, I did.

* * *

But what I've said about parental pressures to engage in politics isn't exactly right either. If there was an expectation that I'd act to hasten history's inevitable forward motion, there was also an assumption that I'd acquire a profession, and not just any profession. Because I was raised, too, with a reverence for scholarship and learning that dedicated teachers inspire

in their own children as well as in their students. That was part of the reason I'd always been a good student; the value placed on academic achievement was very high. Even higher, perhaps, in families like mine (many teachers were, like my father, fired in the 1950s), because the child's success was seen as a vindication of the father's principles; the deprivation of his vocation would be rectified by the accomplishment of hers.

I had always expected to become a high school teacher, a career that became less appealing, less inevitable, as I glimpsed worlds of scholarship I hadn't been aware of before college. The possibilities for women in higher education were opening in 1962—the year of my graduation. In fact, much later when I was doing research for an article on American women historians, I realized that my choices were determined in large part by the circumstances of those years. An expanding economy and a growing population led to forecasts of a huge increase in college students. To meet the anticipated demand for teachers, it became clear that women would have to be recruited. To recruit us, there were some token fellowships and lots of informal advice. The professor who had supervised my senior thesis suggested I consider graduate school in history. And, lacking any other serious options, *faute de mieux*, as they say in French, I complied. My acceptance of history had some of the features of an arranged marriage: wiser adults, whose judgment I had no reason to doubt, urged me on. There was nothing repellent or unworthy about the match; indeed I had already glimpsed its pleasurable possibilities. But pleasure was not passion; that would take many years of learning, both about history and myself.

* * *

Although I applied to the University of Wisconsin blindly and for reasons having little to do with professional ambition, it turned out to be a wise choice. Madison was a thriving center of political thought and action. The journal *Studies on the Left* was edited there; courses offered by William Appleman Williams drew graduate students who wanted a radical take on American foreign policy; since the days of John R. Commons Wisconsin had been a center for the study of labor relations; and the legal scholar Alexander Meiklejohn had, well before my time, identified the school with advocacy for civil liberties and academic freedom. I didn't know much of this when I decided to go there and I was startled, and even a little disappointed, when I arrived to find it teeming with the children of

trade unionists, socialists, and communists. I had hoped to leave home in some definitive way and this felt too much like home. Still, I joined the ranks of activists. There was a lot to do in those years from 1962, when I got there, until 1967, when I left to do dissertation research in France. We organized to support Freedom Riders in the south, rallied against the Vietnam War, spent hours arguing about strategy and tactics in demanding and sophisticated ways, and balanced our course work with our politics. At Wisconsin I saw more clearly that scholarship and politics could be linked: it was especially Williams's course and the graduate students in his seminar who set the example. And yet I did not become a Williams student.

Part of the reason was that I was assigned to a seminar in French history by the chair of the department, American historian Merrill Jensen. Jensen thought that women would destroy the collegiality he so enjoyed with his male students and so he took few of them and, I suspect, he acted to protect his fellow Americanists from having their seminars corrupted by the disturbing presence of the fair sex. When in our initial interview I responded to his question about languages that I had French and had written a senior thesis on 1848, he put me in the modern French history seminar. In those days, one was assigned to the same seminar for the entire time in grad school; getting into a different one was difficult and, political activist that I was, I was still remarkably passive about scholarly choices.

But that's not the only reason. I think I wanted to stay away from American history because my parents had done it, because there was a family line I knew I would be expected to toe. Independence would be easier to achieve on different soil, in a different language. So I did not take up French history for love of it, which is not say it wasn't rich and compelling as a field of study.

What I did love in those years were the classes in American intellectual history taught by William R. Taylor. Himself influenced by New Criticism and by Ruben Brower's courses at Amherst that emphasized interpretive reading, Taylor led us through one hermeneutic circle after another. We read novels and philosophical texts always attending to language: to the way metaphors were deployed and narratives woven, to the symbolic work of figures of speech and the manner in which tension and contradiction were managed. I can still remember how I felt confronting some of his exam questions: invited to explore, excited at what I could see, filled with a rush of creativity that didn't happen anywhere else. In retrospect I think this is the true experience of sublimation, not so much a substitute

for physical sex as an erotics of knowledge for its own sake. That I married one of Taylor's graduate students seems no accident, even though the reasons for romance are many and overdetermined: we were both turned on by the pleasures of Taylor's way of thinking and teaching, something we still share though we are no longer husband and wife.

Taylor's pedagogy made a difference too; his questions were open-ended and he sought to elicit students' reactions to texts. He was more provocative than authoritative; it was not mastery, but discovery that he was after. His teaching assistants were instructed in the method—teaching was an intellectual challenge on a par with their own research—and they became remarkably skillful at creating communities of interpretation among their undergraduates. The best teaching I've done has been modeled on those courses.

* * *

I didn't become a Taylor student, but his influence had an important effect on the direction of my work in French history. It happened the year my dissertation advisor, Harvey Goldberg, was on leave. In Goldberg's seminar we were all being trained to be biographers of French socialist and labor leaders, following in Harvey's footsteps—he had written a biography of Jean Jaurès. We met in a stifling, windowless room in the basement, with stark white walls and harsh neon lights. The combination of Goldberg's narcissism and the heroic narratives we were expected to produce week after week made me restless and rebellious. For my paper on Paul Lafargue (Marx's son-in-law and the author of *The Right to be Lazy*), I attempted a textual exegesis à la Taylor, which won only scorn from the professor. Goldberg walked into the room, threw my paper down on the table and commented caustically that this was an example of how not to write history. I was not completely crushed; instead I was confirmed in my wish to somehow escape, but not entirely. I wanted Harvey's approval despite my fury at his response to my paper. The psychology was complex: I was seeking approval for behavior that defied the conditions upon which love and approval were based.

The opportunity for something different came the following year when Goldberg was on sabbatical. Bill Taylor organized a comparative social history seminar in 1964–65 with a colleague who taught British History, and he invited me to join it. The seminar was the highpoint of my grad-

uate career. We read all the new social history as it was published: E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*, Eric Hobsbawm's *Primitive Rebels*, Stephan Thernstrom's book on Newburyport, Massachusetts, the work of Herbert Gutman and Eugene Genovese, Charles Tilly's study of the Vendée, and much more. It was then that I became aware of the work of the *Annales* school and read some of its historians. When Stanley Elkins came to class, we grilled him relentlessly about his use of psychoanalysis to characterize slaves as Sambos. And we designed our own studies of communities and social movements. Week after week the group argued about interpretation and method, about theory and historical practice. This was a moment of disciplinary reformation and we were eagerly participating in it. The limits of this disciplinary reformation became apparent to me only years later: we did not read anything by Michel Foucault, whose epistemological bomb shells were published in the same years as the English New Left historians and their American counterparts whose work we avidly consumed.

Inspired by the seminar, I dropped my project on Paul Lafargue and set out to find a community study. By the time Goldberg came back from his sabbatical, all he could do was suggest places and events I might look at. Carmaux was a mining town in the south of France, in the department from which Jaurès had been elected. There were glass bottle blowers there too. I applied for and received a cross-disciplinary research training fellowship from the Social Science Research Council. Under the guidance of a mentor, graduate students were to employ methods not usually associated with their disciplines; the result would be a cross-fertilization that enriched all sides. The historical sociologist Charles Tilly was designated my advisor and so began my excursion into sociological theory and quantitative methodology. The attempt to quantify the reasons for the collective behavior of social groups was engaging, as was the exploration of the relationship between family, occupation, and politics. Though in rereading some of my correspondence with Chuck, I'm startled to find how fiercely resistant I was to sociological classifications that didn't take account of what I referred to as historical process. My project became a study of the political effects of proletarianization on the glassworkers of Carmaux. The rest, as we might say, is history.

Or was it? To be sure, undertaking that dissertation established my identity as a historian of modern France and a labor historian; it also made me one of the early practitioners of the emerging field of social history.

But to assume continuous linearity would be to miss both the external contingencies of my trajectory (the jobs I got, the friends I made, the scholars I interacted with, the pressures—political and intellectual—I confronted, the changing problematics of my areas of study, the challenges posed by students along the way) and the internal dynamics of my psyche.

One thing that was continuous, though, was my connection to France and French history. It's taken me years to learn to read the culture and to make genuine friendships, not just professional contacts, but from the beginning—during my months of dissertation work in the archives at Albi—I knew this was a place I wanted to keep coming back to. Not only because the aesthetics of food and wine and clothes and conversation were so appealing, but also because France offered both an intriguing history of its own, and another way of thinking about History—one infused with philosophical questions and interpretive approaches that weren't part of what the French would call my "formation." It's no accident, I think in retrospect, that I was so drawn to French poststructuralism; it seemed a continuation of the critical influences I already associated with "France."

* * *

I'm trying not to write this as an account in which language is the persistent undercurrent, pulling me toward it even as I get sidetracked by quantitative history and a certain behaviorism. But some of that seems unavoidable. One of the insights I still remember vividly about *The Glassworkers of Carmaux* (1974) came when I was revising the chapter on mechanization. It had to do with the way the leaders formulated their demands for protection of this once highly skilled craft. They wanted apprenticeship to be regulated. Why I wondered was a system that was inherently regulated in need of regulation? I remember thinking then that this was a quintessentially "Taylor" question and it stirred a familiar excitement. Answering it enabled me to get at the nature of the changes that new technologies of production had created, to the ways in which the union conceived of its role, and to the ultimately unresolvable contradiction that conception contained. One of the readers of my dissertation wondered why I had gone so deeply into the language union leaders employed. I don't remember how I replied, but I didn't drop the pages. There was too much pleasure invested in grappling with the meanings conveyed by the union leaders' words.

But (there will always be "buts" in this necessarily imperfect recollection, which depends on memory, full of tricks of its own), there was pleasure too in simply figuring things out, learning about something I hadn't known before—not just to acquire more information but to make sense of it, see not more, but differently, in ways I hadn't imagined before.

And there was, too, and I don't want to underestimate it, the political resonance of the work many of us were doing, following the lead of Tilly's Vendée study and Thompson's book on the English working class. The aim, in the heated context of riots in urban ghettos in the late 1960s, was not just to study working class and other protest movements, but to demonstrate their logic and reasonableness: apparently angry, sometimes violent actions were strategic, driven by real interests; they were coherent, even organized; one could read their aims and motives if one understood the economic and social pressures, and the cultural repertoires on which they relied, what Thompson called the "moral economy." The influences operated to create or mobilize groups who were—however unfamiliar or nonnormative the forms might be—eminently political in their behavior. We were rewriting some of the meanings of politics in these studies, with an eye to legitimating the movements of social protest that were taking shape around us. And we were lending weight to arguments about the need for more equitable distribution of resources, for an end to discrimination based on class or race (gender hadn't yet come into it), for social policies based on considerations of justice and moral right. The sense that this was *relevant* history made it somehow more interesting and purposive than those dry exegeses of constitutional development or imperial diplomacy we had to read to prepare for prelims.

In 1983, at a conference on "representations of work" at Cornell University, the French philosopher-historian Jacques Rancière delivered a scathing critique of our burgeoning field. In a paper called "The Myth of the Artisan," he called into question the reigning premise of much of our research, insisting that studies of the proletarianization of highly skilled craft workers, which linked technical change to political militancy, were a misrepresentation. He questioned the motives of those of us writing this history, unconscious though they might be. He argued that what was at stake in what we were doing was the perpetuation of a socialist myth in which all workers shared a common experience, a common artisanal "culture," which their political movements sought to protect against the ravages of technology and Taylorization. This myth he attributed to

struggles within labor movements of the time that sought to protect one faction's version of labor militancy, which maintained that only it represented the authentic artisanal culture at the origin of working class politics, against the claims of others. In other words, we were reproducing a political position, taking sides in a past political struggle, as if it were a more or less accurate and dispassionate recounting of the past. Moreover, those of us using demographic and other statistics were lending an aura of objectivity to the project. In place of the story we were telling, Rancière offered one that insisted on contradiction and on attention to it in the writings—the language—of those we studied. His book, translated as *The Nights of Labor*, gave evidence of some workers' longing to be poets, not craftsmen—they toiled only in order to eat—and they aspired to a bourgeois life of ease and artistic fulfillment. Here was a serious challenge to the homogenous artisans of our mythology, an insistence on the complexity of experience. It was more than relations of production, more than work or class culture, but a host of influences and responses to them—the desire for change might, for example, take the form of emulation instead of political militancy. Rancière's critique replaced a field of closed determination—artisan culture transformed by capitalist industrialization leads necessarily to socialist politics—with a set of questions premised on the unknown effects and paths of experience. It opened the history we had studied to readings we hadn't entertained. At the time, I didn't know about Rancière's pedigree as a student of Althusser and Derrida, but I was persuaded that his critique made sense and that I needed to rethink the grounds of my own historical investigations. My response was undoubtedly influenced by the fact that I was deeply immersed in post-structural readings at Brown, where I taught from 1980 to 1985, but that gets too far ahead of my story.

Rancière was right about the mythologizing effect of our studies, but his critique underestimated another of our aims: to insist that there were good reasons for the kinds of uprisings (strikes, riots, revolutions) that governments and employers (then as now) characterize as irrational. We wanted to demonstrate, as well, that these mobilizations constituted a legitimate form of politics, one that called into question prevailing assumptions about what counted not only as politics, but as history. Here Charles Tilly's notion of collective action was important because it brought into focus an array of militant behaviors previously deemed in official histories and contemporary accounts disruptive, riotous, violent, and, if not immoral, certainly impolitic. Beyond giving reason to what once seemed ex-

cessive and dangerous kinds of action, the expansion of the notion of politics surely made possible the reevaluation of women's role as historical actors and even the idea that "the personal is the political."

* * *

I entered the job market in 1969 just as the feminist movement was exploding on campuses and I eventually took one of those "turns" that continues to mark my career. As students clamored for "her-story," those of us sympathetic to the idea of including women in the history curriculum agreed to try to tell the tale. Most of us were women; those of us with jobs were usually the only woman in our department. Whether we volunteered or not, we were expected to acquire and transmit knowledge of women's history. In the process, I became a feminist historian.

That's not exactly right. I was, in one sense, already a feminist, having been raised by parents who treated women no differently from men. In my father's lessons about the idiocy of religion, one of the clinching points was that Genesis was a discriminatory tale, a plot (Eve created from Adam's rib!) concocted by men to keep women in an inferior place. Even if there was a traditional sexual division of labor in our family (my mother cooked, my father ruled), the ideology was one of equality and my mother had a respected professional career. So I had long been prepared to press for the recognition of women's part in history, even if not of their right to a separate her-story.

But in another way, the politics of feminism was not part of my political heritage. It was one thing to treat women as partners in the quest for social justice, quite another to seem to put what was always represented in socialist history as a bourgeois campaign for individual rights before the collective struggles of workers and blacks. As I became more involved in agitating about women on committees on the status of women at universities where I taught and in the professional associations to which I belonged, as well as on committees to establish Women's Studies programs, my father expressed doubt about the enterprise. "What are the women up to these days?" he would ask, looking for an opening through which he could pour cold water on my enthusiasm. Mostly I refused to engage the argument I knew was coming about the superiority of the class struggle to all others. Thinking his views were a relic of the Old Left, I was surprised to find his attitude alive and well in the labor history circles in which I then traveled. Today, you can still find scholars on the left who attribute

the downfall of Marxism to feminist deviations. To feminists and, what they insist on calling, postmodernists.

Before I get to poststructuralism (the more accurate designation) though, I have to talk more about feminism and the extraordinary moment of the mid-1970s and 1980s. It was then that the various aspects of my activity—scholarly, personal, and political—came together in ways that were both logical (everything was geared to a similar end) and amazing, because we were not only inventing a—for us—new politics, we were also producing new knowledge. That's why, when I finally began to read Foucault, the notion of power/knowledge seemed to make so much sense. The production of knowledge made possible the conceptualization of problems and the emergence of subjects in ways previously unseen; agency was not inherent in individuals, but a socially created possibility. It is not, as I eventually formulated it, individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience. And that's what we were doing in a gloriously rebellious and furious political campaign that was also an academic treasure hunt and a large and noisy theoretical debating society. We announced new discoveries only to learn we had foremothers who had already said similar things; we circulated reading lists like so much *samizdat* literature, crudely photocopied, mailed in bulky packages, passed from hand to hand at conferences with promises to send one's material in return—there was no email in those days; we organized and attended conferences, astonished at the numbers of students and colleagues who turned up; listened to papers for every fact and interpretive nuance we could glean; fought furiously over which theory—if any—made the most sense; faced painful challenges to the presumed universality of the category “women,” seeking to pluralize the term while retaining something of its unity; and we worried about whether politics would compromise the quality of our history. At the same time, we challenged the standards by which quality was judged and also the bias of the judges, linking questions about what counted as history to questions about who counted as historians. We learned first hand that those with power had the ability to define the rules of the game, including dismissing as unacceptably “political” or “ideological” the call for the inclusion of women in history. Formulating a critique of that power was a demanding intellectual task: where did some notion of “quality” figure in the writing of women's history? Was it wise or even legitimate to focus exclusively on women? Would “gender” dilute or strengthen our analysis? What would be the measure of our success? And though there were many bitter moments I can recall—

denunciations, accusations, exclusions, tears—they are outweighed by the excitement generated in a search for answers not yet known and by the camaraderie one could find along the way.

That's how I met Louise Tilly. I had already seen her in Cambridge and then Toronto, when, as a graduate student with an SSRC fellowship, I visited her husband Charles Tilly to study social theory and method. Louise had decided to return to graduate school—her four children were now all in school—to pursue a Ph.D. in history, inspired by Natalie Davis, then also at Toronto. As I recall, she brought sandwiches for our lunch and joined the conversation. We discussed her dissertation topic and mine. The real beginning of our collaboration though came during a meeting of the Society for French Historical Studies in 1972, when we compared notes on our teaching of women's history and discussed a paper that Edward Shorter had written about illegitimate births during the Industrial Revolution.

Louise and I disagreed with that paper because of its facile deduction of motive from behavior. Shorter attributed increased rates of illegitimacy to a newfound emancipation among young women exposed to the "market values" (independence, autonomy, rejection of tradition and parental authority) that accompanied the industrial revolution. Bastards were a consequence of women's sexual liberation, the sign of a search for individual self-fulfillment and self-expression. Shorter was not alone in representing industrialization as a story of progress instead of exploitation, but he had a particularly sensationalist way of inferring changes in values from statistical findings: heightened illegitimacy was a sign of women's liberation; high rates of infant mortality were indicators of a deficit of maternal love. As we heatedly countered his arguments, it became clear—Louise suggested it—that we had to write a paper contesting not only Shorter's ideas, but what we considered to be a short-sighted position of the feminist movement on the issue of women's work. That paper began the collaboration that led to our book, *Women, Work, and Family* (1978).

We steeped ourselves in historical materials: monographs, government reports, memoirs, social investigations, newspaper accounts, novels, trade union records, socialist meetings, and feminist congresses. The point was to counter, with evidence from the past, the easy equation of paid work with liberation and the idea that women's entry into the wage labor market was the source or the consequence of the acquisition of political rights. We disputed the idea that women's work outside the home was an invention of capitalist industrialism that was to universalize nineteenth and

twentieth century middle class experience. Among craftspeople, manual laborers and peasants, women had long engaged in productive activity; the pressure to work and the jobs women did were a function of a family economy which depended for survival on everyone's contribution. The family economy was at once a practical institution and a set of cultural values. In place of schematic representations of change, we offered historical process. We objected to studying the past through the lens of the present, insisting that our notions of sexual self-realization, for example, were inappropriate for thinking about the lives of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century, working women. The advent of industrialization and urbanization changed the context in which the family economy operated, we argued, even as young women continued to understand themselves in its terms. So, to return to Shorter, illegitimacy might well result from a loss of family protection, or an attempt to recreate a family in a new urban context rather than be a sign of a newfound desire for sexual self-realization.

But I don't want here to summarize the arguments of "Tilly/Scott." The point of this essay is to reflect on my relationship to history. In that connection, I want to emphasize that we used history to complicate feminist, political theorizing, working against the grain of prevailing assumptions in order to refine the theory. Although we didn't think about it in quite the terms I'm about to use, we were insisting that the category of "woman" needed not only to be pluralized, but also historicized. This tacking back and forth between current political preoccupations and empirical history was exhilarating and demanding. But there was more to it: we were also making women, ourselves included, visible as historical subjects within the discipline of history.

And though social history made the job easier, having identified a whole series of actors whose lives and politics needed to be included in the story, whether of nationhood or class formation or economic development, establishing the case for women's inclusion was trickier, since women were assumed to be either already included in the idea of "man" or irrelevant to the narratives of public events because attached to the private or domestic or sexual sphere. It was made even more difficult because of pressure from feminist political activists, many of them students sitting in our classes or colleagues in women's studies programs, to write "herstory" as an analysis of patriarchy in terms the movement prescribed. How to resist herstory as a form of present-focused consciousness-raising and yet make women visible agents, past and present? Politics at once

enriched our work, making research an engaged enterprise, and it tried to set limits to the insights we produced. The resulting tension was, however, not crippling but enormously productive. In one way or another, I have worked best negotiating this kind of tension, perhaps because it resonates with that complicated stance I mentioned before: a critical refusal to accept the rules (the terms of identity) set by someone (or some group) I nonetheless care about, indeed whose aims I share and whose approval and affection I also seek. For me, that constitutes what—perhaps—might be labeled the psychodynamic of critique. About which more later.

But there was another aspect to my feminist turn that also bears mentioning: the tremendous pleasure I found working with women. My collaboration with Louise Tilly was a remarkable lesson in professional deportment. Until then, I tried to separate the realms of my life: in public I was a professor and a scholar, in private a wife and mother and I tried never to let the demands of the latter impinge on the former. Certainly, I'd never admit to a professional colleague that I hadn't finished a paper or couldn't attend a meeting because one of my children was sick or that I couldn't concentrate on a topic we had to discuss because I was upset about how someone in the family was behaving. If there had been maternity leaves available, I would probably not have taken one, so anxious was I to prove that having children would not impede my intellectual productivity. And, yet, of course, I also very much needed to prove that my femininity had not been compromised by my intellect. Yet here was Louise writing that she hadn't had time to finish her share of one of our chapters because she'd been up all night with a vomiting daughter or that the washing machine had broken down or the car needed to be serviced: None of this prevented her from going to the library and eventually completing her assignment or from wrestling with a particularly difficult interpretation we were trying to sort out; it was her willingness to avow the interconnections between the two parts of her life that allowed me to acknowledge that my own life was a lot like hers. What a relief!

But there was more. I was no longer engaged in battles that were mine alone; Louise and I shared a similar stance in regard to the feminism we both supported and critiqued. This mutuality was different from what I'd experienced in the brotherhood of labor and social historians—an openness that permeated the rigid boundaries between public and private I had tried to maintain for myself. And there was still more: beyond my collaboration with Louise, the company of women with whom we exchanged

papers and ideas, hardly a homogeneous or coherent assemblage, but one not governed by prevailing disciplinary and professional norms, gave me a new perspective not only on myself, but on ways to think about the present and the past. If I was already inclined to work against the grain of disciplinary orthodoxy, it was still a lot easier with allies.

* * *

And yet there were questions about women's history I couldn't seem to answer, let alone pose, within the terms of social history. How to explain the persistence of the oppression of women after political equality had been achieved? Why did reforms seem only to superficially address wage disparities and gender hierarchies? If sheer male enmity didn't explain the persistence of patriarchy, if masculine self-interest wasn't a good enough reason, and if social roles and customs didn't do it either, then how to account for what seemed to be the foundational place of sexual difference in the organization of societies across time and place? It wouldn't do to pile up examples of the subordination or mistreatment of women as proof of a timeless patriarchy. For one thing, there were warnings from medievalists, as well as historians and anthropologists of non-Western cultures, not to read apparent similarities as reflections or confirmations of the urban, industrialized patterns that first- and now second-wave feminists challenged. For another, if we wanted to argue for change, we had to show that it could take place, not only through social protest movements, though these were undoubtedly important, but also by some alteration of the very meaning of the concepts "women" and "men." Beyond that was a question about the recalcitrance of the discipline to our efforts. What difference did it make for understanding the French or American Revolutions, the noted male historians of those events demanded, that women had participated in crowds or even claimed inclusion as citizens? The "so what?" question demanded answers more informed than accusations of bias. In what ways did women's history challenge not only the storyline of mainstream history but also the rules of the discipline and the image of the disciplinary practitioner? Feminists were insisting that we would do exactly that—it wouldn't work just to add women and stir. But staying within established disciplinary frameworks made it hard to fulfill the promise of radical transformation. How did being a historian of women or, for that matter, a woman historian, change the way we thought about history, both in the sense of the record of the past and of the craft we practiced? How

to avoid the essentialist answer that made women "natural" historians of the fair sex?

* * *

Those were the questions nagging at me when I arrived at Brown University to take up the Nancy Duke Lewis chair, a chair for a scholar in women's studies. My appointment was in the history department. In the wake of a sex discrimination suit brought by anthropologist Louise Lamphere and with an eye to increasing gift-giving by alumnae of Pembroke College, the coordinate institution that had been incorporated into Brown in 1971, the university wanted to improve its record on women. The terrain was open and there was a group of women ready to work it with me. It matters a great deal for the turn I took at Brown that most of these women were literary scholars, schooled in theories I had had little exposure to before. Not only poststructuralism (Barthes, Foucault, Derrida, de Man), but psychoanalysis (Freud, Lacan, Laplanche) and "French feminism" (Irigaray, Cixous, Kristeva) provided the frames within which they wrote; they were (some still are) forging feminist theory in remarkably creative ways.

I cannot say that I instantly recognized the value of theory for my own thinking. Not at all. I was confused, intimidated, resistant, dismissive. And anyway, my attention was claimed initially by the institutional work I had signed on for: fund-raising to complete the financing of my chair, the creation of a woman's studies program, and the founding of the Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women—still my proudest institutional accomplishment. It wasn't just my accomplishment. My fellow architect and co-conspirator was Elizabeth Weed, whose gifts as a reader of institutional politics are matched only by her abilities to read even the most difficult of philosophical texts.

If my collaboration with Louise Tilly had been built on a shared formation as social historians, my work with Elizabeth had to negotiate mutual philosophical incomprehension. Of course, as with Louise, we shared a commitment to making women visible and to legitimizing their presence as objects of scholarship and subjects of inquiry. And there was for me, again, pleasure in feminist company, in a joint endeavor that was at once political and scholarly. But as Elizabeth and I wrote grant proposals and designs for a women's studies curriculum, we found ourselves having to translate key words, explain our basic assumptions to one another, and

spell out the meanings of things we each took for granted in very different ways. This process of institution building wasn't just practical, it was the beginning of my intellectual reorientation. Looking back on that early encounter, I think it enabled me to begin to relate my history to her theory. I already cared too much about history to leave it: the archival surprises; the awareness of contingency; the puzzling over influence, cause, and effect; the telling of stories; and the use of the past to bring the present into relief. But some of the theory also made sense, not because it provided me with a reliable explanation for why things happened, but precisely because it didn't. Rather, it enhanced my ability to read differently and made me conscious that I was not just discovering, but producing knowledge. Thinking about myself in those terms brought politics and scholarship together in a new way; it enabled me to begin to address the questions that my earlier work in women's history had left unresolved.

But, as I've said, it didn't happen all at once. And here, the role of institutions in scholarly directions matters a great deal. Having secured external foundation funding, the Pembroke Center came into existence in 1981 and, with it, an interdisciplinary seminar that remains one of the premier intellectual venues in academe. Over the course of the next four years, I read books I'd not encountered, listened to and sometimes argued with scholars in fields I'd never traversed, and found myself forced to examine and explain the presuppositions of the work I did. There were moments of frustration so great that I wished I'd never gotten involved; some ideas were so difficult that I found myself unable at first to absorb them. It was like squinting in the face of light that was too bright. Some of what was said was scary because it challenged the premises upon which I had learned to rely, notions of experience, agency, structure, reality. But there was, too, the stirring of that enormously pleasurable sensation I had long associated with attention to language and exposure to completely different ways of thinking—that early linking in high school between desire and knowledge as the pursuit of the unknown. Not unknown facts, but unknown meanings; a readiness to think the not-yet-thought required an openness that my disciplinary training precluded. Of course, thinking needs discipline in the sense of rigor and hard analysis; but not the application of inflexible rules about what counts as history and what doesn't. Or maybe it's better to say we at once need those rules *and* the ability (the right?) to challenge them; against the closure that orthodoxy seeks to maintain the lure of the unknown provides resistance, the desire to keep moving on.

In those years my feminism acquired its intellectual rationale, the philosophical underpinnings for my work as a historian. That kind of work now has a name: critical history. But then I improvised, applying critique not only to events of the past, but also to the interpretive practices of the discipline. Poststructuralist theory gave me a language for articulating a feminist critique and for conceiving of how history might serve it. In those years, too, I developed an increased sense of trust in the connection between the pleasure I felt and the knowledge I produced.

I've been accused by more than one outraged historian, especially historians of women, of following fads instead of sticking to the tried and true. In a strange evocation of patriotism, they've ridiculed my attraction for "fancy French theory," suggesting it was easier to deal in abstraction than to go to the dusty archives in pursuit of truth. As if one canceled the other; philosophy or history, but not both. These were the charges leveled against Carl Becker and Charles Beard in the 1930s; the opposition between philosophy and history is one of the ways that the orthodox idea of history's objectivity has been protected. For me, philosophy only improved my ability to do history by analyzing the past in a new way, by clarifying what it meant to be doing history, and by throwing important light on the reasons that mainstream or traditional historians resisted the validity of, for example, women as subjects of history and objects of historical investigation. It provided both a diagnosis and a way of addressing the problem. Reading the work of Michel Foucault—critically engaged, philosophically driven history—was the earliest and probably the most important, though not the only, influence on my "linguistic turn."

My first encounter with Foucault was *The Order of Things*, the book that begins with an analysis of Velázquez's *Las Meninas* and goes on, dizzily, to uncover an "archaeology of the human sciences," and, with it, the emergence of "the age of history," and concludes by reminding us that "man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end . . . like a face drawn in the sand at the edge of the sea." If I wondered at the triumphant harshness of that final image, it was the historicizing of History that left me breathless: "History, as we know, is certainly the most erudite, the most aware, the most conscious, and possibly the most cluttered area of our memory; but it is equally the depths from which all beings emerge into their precarious, glittering existence. Since it is the mode of being of all that is given us in experience, History has become the unavoidable element in our thought."

It hadn't always been this way, Foucault argued. History had become both a form of knowledge and "the mode of being of empiricity" only in the nineteenth century. We were "still caught inside" the momentous conceptual change that it signified, so it was "largely beyond our comprehension." Yet, of course, Foucault aimed to produce that comprehension by interrogating the categories we took for granted as analytic tools: not only history, but—among others—reason, truth, event, sexuality, Man and man. These categories weren't fixed and reliable instruments for discovering truth; instead they were malleable and mutable terms by which understanding was organized and knowledge produced. I've taught and reread that text many times, but I haven't forgotten my initial impression: a combination of enormous anxiety and great temptation (the two often go together), which I didn't do much to resist. If it is possible to pinpoint the moment at which passion entered my arranged marriage with history, it was in that reading group at Brown in 1981 or 1982 when I was introduced to the writing of Michel Foucault.

It's astonishing to me that many historians today cite Foucault and claim to be inspired by him and yet refuse the epistemological challenge he posed. They refer to discourse as if it meant simply words and they treat the topics of his research thematically as about prisons, asylums, or sex, without grasping his subversive intent: to call into question the taken-for-granted aspect of the institutions and concepts that organize our existence; to unveil the discursive regimes of truth that pass themselves off as objective descriptions of nature or ethics or the essence of the human. And above all, to write what he called a "history of the present," a history that "serves to show how that-which-is has not always been," and so to show "why and how that-which-is might no longer be that-which-is." Genealogy was Foucault's name for this critical history. "Criticism is no longer going to be practiced in the search for formal structures with universal value but, rather, as a historical investigation into the events that have led us to constitute ourselves and to recognize ourselves as subjects of what we are doing, thinking, saying." Events were not revolutions, elections, or wars, but discursive shifts, changes in concepts that created values, meanings, and subjects. People and their societies came into being through discourse; it was not words attached to preexisting realities, but the construction of those realities themselves. Discourse was not about conflicts of ideas or opinions—the stuff of ordinary intellectual history—it was about the shared premises that established the very grounds on which debate could occur: reason as the primary attribute of Man or sovereignty

as the inherent right of the individual or freedom as his desired condition. Or sexual difference as the referent "in nature" for social and political hierarchies.

For Foucault, discourse was about the relationship between knowledge and power, the ways in which things acquired words to define them, the ways in which people came into existence as subjects by becoming objects of knowledge. Knowledge was a field—but not the only one—upon which power was enacted. Becoming a subject meant being placed in certain positions in relationships of power (men and women, teachers and students, workers and employers, rulers and ruled, doctors and patients, immigrants and natives, sane and insane) and through that positioning acquiring agency—agency taken not as an inherent capacity of humans, but as an attribution of traits and responsibilities upon which subjects are expected to act.

Here was a way to interrogate the attributions to biology of the social assignment of sex roles, to ask how feminine and masculine subjects were constructed, how normative systems operated, and how people were able to imagine themselves outside prevailing rules of behavior. Instead of thinking of resistance as innate, one had to ask what the specific discursive resources of such oppositional agency were. It was the possibility of putting these kinds of political questions to historical materials, the linking through them of feminist critique and feminist history, that led me to hail gender as "a useful category of historical analysis."

Of course, it was not only Foucault that inspired that claim. The Brown feminist theory reading group, a name I've retrospectively assigned to it, also devoured its share of Derrida, Kristeva, Irigaray. Through these authors I learned how to think about difference, to be alert to its operations, its variability, its symbolic power and its instability. Through contacts with scholars who came to the center—Denise Riley was prominently among them—I was able to articulate an approach to history that took conceptualizations of difference to be its focus. I learned that meanings are always sliding even as they are being declared inviolate. To get at what is happening requires a different kind of attention—to language, its figures of speech, its allusions and symbolism—from that usually paid by historians. To take things literally usually misses the point, making historians party to ideological systems whose terms they ought to analyze. Describing what women did or what was said about them is not the same as asking how their subjectivity is being constituted and in what relationships; pointing out that "class, race, and gender" are all part of a woman's identity is not

the same as asking how those attributes are used to identify and position women in specific relationships and contexts. To assume that there is something universal about "women" or "men" is essentializing and ahistorical, no different in the end from the attribution of inevitable sexed traits to anatomy; it obscures the fact that the terms themselves, and the subjects who inhabit them, have a history. Gender is a useful category only if differences are the question, not the answer, only if we ask what "men" and "women" are taken to mean wherever and whenever we are looking at them, rather than assuming we already know who and what they are. In this sense, my appropriation of poststructuralism is relentlessly historical—there are no women or men, no classes, no races, outside of the relationships established between them and the ways those relationships are understood. Even deviations from the norm refer to normative understandings, indeed they find the possibilities for nonnormative behavior in the negative terms with which norms are constructed, and upon which they invariably lean.

This is where Derrida comes in. It was his theorization that provided me with a set of analytic tools (his metaphor is levers) by which the operations of difference could be unearthed and examined in all their elusive complexity. Elizabeth Weed, Naomi Schor, Gayatri Spivak, and, perhaps most of all, Barbara Johnson helped me to understand what deconstruction meant and how to make it work for feminism. The exciting thing about our appropriations of this critique of metaphysics was that it never had to end; it was not a matter of becoming a doctrinaire follower of a particular school, but rather the deployment of a theory of signification that made language the object of our inquiry, the way in to historically specific analyses of subject construction, social organization, and relations of power. Indeed, it was the insight into politics that, for me, was crucial.

It's important, I think, to stress the appeal of critique here, since the term is so often misused and misunderstood. At the moment that I discovered it, poststructuralism—both as exemplar and mode of analysis—provided a critical intervention in the disciplined way I had practiced history. Critique is not a criticism, nor the proposal of alternatives. Rather it is an interrogation of the very premises upon which things we take to be foundational are based. In the translator's introduction to Derrida's *Dissemination*, Barbara Johnson puts it succinctly:

A critique of any theoretical system is not an examination of its flaws and imperfections. It is not a set of criticisms designed to make the system better. It is

an analysis that focuses on the grounds of the system's possibility. The critique reads backwards from what seems natural, obvious, self-evident, or universal in order to show that these things have their history, their reasons for being the way they are, their effects on what follows from them and that the starting point is not a (natural) given but a (cultural) construct, usually blind to itself.

The point of critique is to make visible those blind spots in order to open a system to change. Not to replace what is with a fully formulated, ideal plan, but to open the possibility for thinking, and so acting, differently. Here at last was a way to make feminist history achieve the radical promise its advocates had offered, but—to my way of thinking at least—had not yet delivered. I spent the next several years reading and writing as much about disciplinary presuppositions as about women, seeking to expose and so intervene in “the politics of history.” The results were published in *Gender and the Politics of History* (1988; 1999).

* * *

My time at Brown was transformational. There I began a process that has by no means ended and I acquired the resources and the stimulus to stake out a territory of my own—one beholden neither to the pressures of mainstream historians of women, nor to the conventions of the discipline of history, although both have claimed my critical attention. When I left Brown in 1985 for what seemed an irresistible offer to become a permanent faculty member at the Institute for Advanced Study, my metamorphosis was well underway, though perhaps not as apparent as it would become. I was hired for my work as a social historian; I think it's fair to say that I became more of an intellectual historian at the Institute, one for whom theory—feminist theory—was and is a primary preoccupation. Or, perhaps it is more precise to designate the object of my work as the question of difference in history: its uses, enunciations, implementations, justifications, and transformations in the construction of social and political life. Difference not just as sexual difference, but as any of those factors in human life upon which primary distinctions, hierarchies, and conflicts come to be based; factors whose grounding in nature, culture, religion, ethnicity, or race needs to be interrogated rather than simply described.

Here again, the institutional location in which I worked mattered a lot. The School of Social Science, to which I was appointed, was the creation of anthropologist Clifford Geertz, who envisioned it as a place where

disciplinary orthodoxies would be challenged. As he conceived it, the School was to be "a thorn in the side of the main direction of things." That's a good way of describing critique—though Cliff's notion of it was more philosophical and less explicitly political than mine. Those differences mattered less, however, than the ethos of critical thinking itself: the interrogation of prevailing disciplinary norms, the questioning of the value of scientific models for thinking about human social relations, the insistence on interpretation as both the object of inquiry and the method of the inquirer. The rich resources and open space of the Institute—physical and intellectual—encourage and reward exploratory and innovative thinking. And the interdisciplinary composition of the faculty and members, as those who come for a year with fellowship support are called, of the School of Social Science brought new perspectives into view.

New perspectives might be the theme of my twenty-some years at the Institute. In addition to engaging with philosophers, literary scholars, and all manner of social scientists, I began to explore themes and theories I had once either underestimated or ignored. Some of this was the influence of members—such as Judith Butler, Drucilla Cornell, and Wendy Brown. Their work took critique to new arenas: sexuality, the law, political philosophy. The growing interest in sexuality studies and queer theory, as well the use these scholars and others made of psychoanalysis, turned my attention to Freud and Lacan, whom I read in seminars I gave at Rutgers with amazingly smart graduate students. In my essay "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis" (1986), I had minimized the importance of psychoanalysis for historical work, but now I began to rethink that too-hasty dismissal. This coincided with my own decision to seek psychotherapy, which I did with an analyst of the "old school."

It did not always work well to pursue theory while undergoing psychoanalysis, but there were some advantages. Among them, I learned that theory only went so far for explaining the highly individualized formations of the psyche and that the best insights one gained did not come from the application of diagnostic labels. Rather, they came from astute attention to language, from the interpretive readings of dreams, stories, and fantasies in the context of a particular life experience. Of course, these interpretations were theory-driven, in the sense that they were based on an understanding of the workings of the unconscious, of operations such as displacement and condensation, imagination and symbolic representation, and of the importance of sex and sexual difference as a dilemma for

the identification of subjects. This kind of psychoanalytic reading—which posited the assumption of masculinity and femininity as an ongoing problem rather than an accepted social assignment—gave greater flexibility to the notion of gender I had tried to articulate. While my attempt to make gender a *question* for historical investigation has too often been read as a set of methodological prescriptions, psychoanalysis's theorizing of sexual difference insists on interrogation—at both the individual and collective levels. It offers a way of reading gender, the social and political policing of sexual boundaries, as an attempt to negotiate the anxieties attached to sexual difference—a difference that is known, but whose meanings and effects are never clear. Gender is the always failed attempt, in particular historical contexts, to fully secure those meanings; politics at once creates and depends on these meanings to produce its vision of social order. Conflicting visions of social order and so also of gender are the stuff of politics.

My own psychoanalysis had a different kind of effect—a calming one—on the psychic underpinnings of my attraction to critique. Earlier in these pages I described the psychodynamics of this critique as “a critical refusal to accept the rules (the terms of identity) set by someone (or some group) I nonetheless care about, indeed whose aims I share and whose approval and affection I also seek.” I attribute this to a complex Oedipal formation and, for many years, it was driven by anger. The desire to be accepted by those whose premises I was challenging, their failure even to be willing to think about the contradictions or limitations I saw, their inevitable refusal to accept the critique—to see that it was offered affectionately, aimed at improvement, not rejection—had anger as its cause and effect. The loss of that anger did not diminish either the force or attraction of critique; if anything, it made the intellectual aspects clearer and the experience more pleasurable.

* * *

Critique doesn't work without theory, although there are many theoretical positions one can take. I think this is what distinguishes the history I most like from that which informs, but doesn't enlighten or excite me. And there's lots of “faux theory” around these days—people who make big gestures to Foucault, Freud, or for that matter Marx, and end up doing conventional descriptive narratives of ideas, events, or movements. The recuperative power of the discipline relies on the ambition of its young

practitioners—I've watched it claim students of great promise and torture the most creative students I know. These latter haven't succumbed and they are, I think, paradoxically, the future hope of the discipline. For, as Adorno long ago pointed out, critique, or what he called "open thinking," "points beyond itself."

Or to turn to Foucault again and, with him, to the link between critical thinking and politics:

I don't think we should oppose critique and transformation, critique as "ideal" and transformation as "real." A critique does not consist in saying that things aren't as they should be. It consists in seeing on what types of evidence, colloquialisms, and inherited modes of thought rest the practices that we take for granted. . . . There is always a bit of thought even in the most stupid of institutions, there is always thought even in mute habits. Critique consists in flushing out this thought and in trying to change it. . . . In these conditions, critique (radical critique) is absolutely indispensable for all transformation.

* * *

My recent writing takes up Foucault's challenge, working critique through the retelling of the histories of French feminism and of two recent legal enactments in France. These books are about feminism (*Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man* [1996] and *Parité: Sexual Equality and the Crisis of French Universalism* [2005]) and about republican objections to Islamic headscarves (*The Politics of the Veil* [2007]). Although written as histories, the three are also a sustained critical examination of the effects of the French doctrine of universalism. By refusing the standard story which extols universalism as the accomplishment of the French Revolution, I intervene in an ongoing conversation about the limits and meanings of French national identity. My most recent project, written as the Wellek lectures for the University of California, Irvine, will become a book on academic freedom—a history of the concept in the United States and an analysis of its applications. This is my way of taking part in a contemporary struggle—at once political and intellectual—about the future direction of the university. Then I will turn my attention to a book of essays on the value of psychoanalysis for historians, especially on the uses of the concept of fantasy for our interpretive readings. This is a critical intervention in the way we think about the practice of history.

What comes after that remains to be seen; my choice of topics will depend on what political/conceptual problems draw my interest, what useful contributions I might make. What I do know is that my passion for critique, and the ongoing need for it, are inexhaustible. A good reason—even with time seeming to run out—to keep writing critical history.