

# Manifestos for History

Edited and Introduced by  
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bare. The Japanese refused the request. When pressed for an explanation, the artist said that if he did fill up the painting, there would be no space for the bird to fly.

#### Traditional story

This manifesto is not meant as an attack on books or traditional works of history. The tradition of such scholarship is a great tradition and one that will, no doubt, continue of its own inertia. This is an attack (if attack it is) on those preformed images imprinted on our brain, on the images that keep us from seeing or creating those undiscovered truths we need to discover in the past. It is an attack on a single notion of truth that disguises itself as 'The Truth'; that insists that once we have excavated the remains of the past, once we have studied its traces, there is but a single way of conveying their meaning to our culture, and that other ways are off limits, *verboden*, simply wrong. This is a call for opening our eyes and our imaginations to other ways of telling, showing, representing, making meaning out of the stories of humanity's past, our deep laboratory for understanding who we are and who we may become. This is a call for us to use imagination in our rendering of our relationship to the past – and when I say 'us', I mean those trained in history, for the deeper the knowledge, the more confident one can be that innovations in historical renderings and performances intersect with, comment upon, and add to the larger discourse of history, the things we already know and the debates we already have had about the past.

Oh yes, one more thing: it's time that we historians also learn to leave space for the bird to fly.

## 2 History-writing as critique<sup>1</sup>

Joan W. Scott

The genuine historian must have the strength to recast the well known into something never heard before.

F. Nietzsche

La critique, ce sera l'art de l'inservitude volontaire, celui de l'indocilité réfléchie.

M. Foucault

It is fashionable these days to talk about poststructuralist theory in the past tense, as a disruptive moment that once threatened to undermine the discipline of history, substituting fancy French distractions for serious empirical investigations. Orthodox disciplinarians, along with journalists, politicians and public intellectuals, have declared this theory to be dead. And not only dead, but thankfully so, since it is held responsible for all manner of ethical lapses, ranging from the decline of academic standards (plagiarism, lack of attention to factual accuracy, radical scepticism about truth and the possibility of objectivity) to the vagaries of multiculturalism (disunity, loss of coherence and shared focus), the erosion of society's moral centre, the defeat of working-class political movements, tolerance for violations of universal human rights in the name of cultural relativism, and even to the 11 September terrorist attacks in New York City and Washington, D.C.<sup>2</sup>

Those who celebrate the passing of poststructuralism (and there is a convergence here of right and left) have in common a yearning for certainty, security and stability. 'Balance' and 'neutrality' are currently the watchwords of political conservatives in the United States who, in the name of students' rights, are against any expression of opinion or point of view by classroom teachers.<sup>3</sup> This is particularly evident in Middle Eastern studies programmes that are under surveillance by right-wing supporters of the current regime in Israel, but also in many courses which take up questions of inequality or social justice. In various humanities and social science disciplines there has been a recourse to scientific models of investigation to eliminate subjective assessments and replace them with solid facts. There has been, too, a closing

of borders in what were once disruptive interventions on the left: the formalising of some theories that used to encourage innovation, the imposition of orthodoxy in formerly troublesome fields such as women's studies.

Among historians, the search for security takes various forms: a renewed emphasis on empiricism and quantitative analysis, the rehabilitation of the autonomous willing subject as the agent of history, the essentialising of political categories of identity by the evidence of 'experience', the turn to evolutionary psychology for explanations of human behaviour, the endorsement of the timelessness of universal values, and the trivialisation and denunciation of the 'linguistic turn' – an attempt to deny it a serious place in the recent life of the discipline.<sup>4</sup> Often the return to traditional disciplinarity is depicted as innovation (once it was the 'new cultural history', now it's the 'new empiricism') but this should not mislead us; despite any number of quarrels about the causes of the Civil War or the French Revolution, it's the old rules about the transparency of language (words mean what they say, analytic categories are objective) and the equally transparent relationship between social organisation and individual self-perception (there is no place for alienation, interpellation, subjectivation or the unconscious) that are being asserted as the only acceptable rules of the game.<sup>5</sup> Throughout the 1980s and 1990s – the supposed heyday of poststructuralist theory in the United States – there were, to be sure, resistances in the name of the right way of doing history; but these have now become triumphalist proclamations that no longer engage debate; they simply declare victory. Poststructuralism's harshest critics now regularly congratulate themselves on their prescience. So it surely won't be long before the authors of *Telling the Truth about History* offer their 1994 conclusion as an obituary notice. 'In the final analysis, then, there can be no postmodern history. We turn now to the task of elaborating models for the future of history, models for understanding the search for historical truths within the framework of a revitalised and transformed practice of objectivity.'<sup>6</sup>

I want to argue that such an obituary would be not only premature but foolish, for at least two reasons. The first is that, like it or not, we are in a post-modern age, and poststructuralism – not to be confused, as it is in that 1994 text I just cited, with postmodernism – is a critical practice for the post-modern age. As Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth has maintained, 'To be "against" postmodernity is about as informed a position as it was to be against Galileo and Luther: the perfect gesture for a postmodern Mr Podsnap, Dickens's character who sweeps away with grandiloquent gestures what he will not or cannot understand.'<sup>7</sup> Ermarth's is a historical point: postmodernism is an epistemic moment (of heterogeneity, discontinuity, fragmentation) with its own representational and critical demands (we are, in other words, no longer living in the nineteenth century), and I am arguing that post-structuralism meets some of those demands. This leads to the second reason: poststructuralism is one of the critical theories that inspired the practice of history as critique in its late twentieth-century form, a practice that needs to

be protected and reinforced in the face of a conservative revolution that, in the academy as in politics, seeks to discredit critique as disruptive, discordant, even disloyal. Those on the left who welcome the end of poststructuralism in the name of the 'truth' about the experiences of women, workers, post-colonial subjects and minorities unwittingly join their colleagues on the right who associate anti-relativism with morality. They are not only relinquishing an important critical weapon; they are becoming part of the consensus they say they want to challenge. My argument, to put it briefly, is that a poststructuralist history is not only possible, but necessary. Now more than ever.

### History's resistance to theory

The attack on poststructuralism by US historians (even by those who should know better) calls upon, probably reflexively, a long-standing discourse which positions history in opposition to philosophy. (This discourse is not an exclusively American phenomenon; it is characteristic of the nineteenth-century origins of scientific history.) My generation imbibed it in graduate school where we were told that, in addition to taking careful notes and identifying source and page number on every notecard, an eclectic handbag of tools was all we needed to make sense of the past. Something more systematic, more rigorous, would distort the truth, unacceptably distancing us from the people whose experience we must understand. Even when we were inspired by Eric Hobsbawm and E. P. Thompson, it was as often because they were innovative archival hunters as because they were Marxists – this in the 1960s, the heyday of left-wing student/social movements. In the USA social history was about illuminating the lives of the 'common man' – and later woman. And it often combined quantitative methods (based on the premise of objectivity) and revolutionary or at least reformist aspirations. There was indeed a political end for some of us and I don't want to deny its continuing importance: to bring the stories of these lives into consideration, making them visible, as a way of correcting the record of privilege and power that typically excluded them, a way of establishing agency in the present through identification with examples from the past.<sup>8</sup> But the emphasis was on our similarity with the past, not on our difference from it; on continuity; and on the universality of categories such as class, race and gender. In the field of history, second-wave feminism was critical of the exclusion of women, but reticent about theorising it. What theorising there was most often invoked universal structures of patriarchy, and male domination. Even 'gender' quickly became synonymous, if not with 'women', then with an already-known unequal relationship between the sexes. It was a handy label whose application reassured rather than disturbed us, turning questions into answers before they had even been asked.<sup>9</sup>

The great preoccupation, though, has been with 'objectivity'. Of course, it is acknowledged that true objectivity is impossible, but the point is to get

as close to it as possible. Or to have the appearance of being close, an appearance created precisely by abjuring any hint of philosophical predisposition, any avowed theory of human behaviour (even when there is one buried beneath the lines); an appearance achieved by insisting that human subjects act in full command of their intentions, that words literally mean what they say, and that 'nature' or 'experience' are transparent categories outside the reach of politics, philosophy or 'theory'. Read the presidential addresses to the American Historical Association since its founding in 1884; with few exceptions they are about substantive matters, maybe about practice or method, but not theory. One of the exceptions is Carl Becker, who was condemned by many of his colleagues for his strong philosophical preoccupations; indeed, his critics thought he ought not to be considered a historian at all. Go back to Lawrence Stone's ill-informed attack on Michel Foucault in the pages of the *New York Review of Books*. Stone dismisses Foucault as a historian *pretendu*.<sup>10</sup> Although he disputes some of Foucault's facts in order to do this, it is the epistemological challenge that, for Stone, puts Foucault outside the company of historians. Read, in historical journals, the negative or ambivalent reviews of books and articles endorsing a 'linguistic turn'; they search for 'objective' occurrences that can be taken to elude the mediation of language – natural disasters, horrific death, illness, sexual difference.<sup>11</sup> Listen to Lynn Hunt and Joyce Appleby, apostles even at the end of the twentieth century of that 'noble dream' – the special objectivity sought by historians.<sup>12</sup> Still in 2004, a thematic issue of the journal *History and Theory* finds historians anxiously discussing the place of ethics in the writing of history. Although most argue against what must by now be a straw man – the idea that 'moral evaluations lie outside any responsibilities that historians ought to be asked to meet' – they do so without interrogating the meaning of the morality they take to be a shared, self-evident set of beliefs.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, 'ethics' for most of these writers refers to a closed system of evaluation, one in which fixed categories of 'the good' and 'the just' are applied to events and actions in the past. The kind of self-reflective examination of the historian's own moral categories (called for by poststructuralists) is largely absent in this attempt to reconcile ethics and historical objectivity.

There is another less confrontational way in which history's insistence on the objective empirical resists theory. This resistance takes the form of superficial acceptance of the vocabulary of theory in the service of its domestication. Think of all those books and articles that begin with grand gestures to theory and then present utterly predictable historical narratives telling us that 'race' or 'class' or 'gender' (or any other identity category) is the predictable effect of capitalism or patriarchy or Western imperialism or its postcolonial aftermath. The questioning of these categories that is called for by the 'theory' being gestured to is absent. It is as if the requirements of the discipline cancel out the potentially disruptive effects of the theory, blinding the historian to the critical tasks theory enjoins. Nowhere

is this as clear as in the misappropriation of some of the terminology of post-structuralism, draining critical conceptual instruments of their force. Take the word 'deconstruction', repeatedly misused as a synonym for 'examine' (maybe for 'analyse'), but with no sense of how to perform the critical interrogation of metaphysics that was the aim of Derrida's work.

It is perhaps to be expected that the anti-Marxist animus of most mainstream historians in the United States takes the form of a resistance to theory and an endorsement of 'objectivity' as a standard for practice because, among other things, objectivity is taken to be an antidote to (leftist) politics. But it is disconcerting to find Marxists, too, condemning poststructuralism as a sell-out of truth, echoing Hobsbawm's comments in his recent manifesto, which bitterly blames 'postmodernists' (and the identity groups it spawned: 'nationalists, feminists, gays, Blacks and others') for the failure of the working-class movement he so fervently supported.<sup>14</sup> Before others settled it into orthodoxy, Marx's writing was precisely an endorsement of critique – of political economy's naturalised categories and of the official story of politics offered by bourgeois liberal regimes, but also of its own analytic categories. That its adherents today fail to see their kinship with post-structuralism is dismaying; it says something about the way they have lost touch with the tradition of critique, an important aspect of which was self-critique – so vital for the richest work of Marx and many of his followers.

## Critique

Critique is often mistakenly thought to be synonymous with criticism, but it has a more precise and systematic meaning. I take my definition from the literary critic Barbara Johnson, who writes:

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.<sup>15</sup>

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. In the characterisation of critique offered by Theodor Adorno, 'Open thinking points beyond itself'.<sup>16</sup>

Critique has long been associated with philosophers: Plato, Kant, Hegel, Marx, the Frankfurt school, Nietzsche, to name only some. But at least since

the nineteenth century, its concern has also been with *history*, with specifying and analysing the mutable social and political contexts within which foundational concepts are deployed. Hegel's critique of Kant and Marx's of Hegel involved attention to the social bases for a morality Kant (and the Enlightenment) took to be universal. In different ways, Hegel and Marx historicised the norms Kant refused to challenge. Nietzsche, too, called for a critique of 'all moral values' through an examination of their genealogy: 'We need to know the conditions from which they have sprung, how they have developed and changed.'<sup>17</sup> Morality, he argued, was a symptom whose precipitating conditions must be elucidated, as well as its consequences and effects – both the symptom and its effects were pre-eminently matters of history. But Nietzsche also warned against the paralytic influence of traditional histories which offered 'the happiness of knowing oneself not to be wholly arbitrary and accidental, but rather growing out of the past as its heir, flower and fruit'.<sup>18</sup> When 'the dead bury the living', he wrote, then creative futures become impossible.<sup>19</sup> 'It almost seems as though the task were to guard history so that nothing could come of it but stories, but by no means history-making events!'<sup>20</sup>

The relationship between history and history-making events was clear to Marx: 'The immediate task of philosophy, which is in the service of history,' he wrote in his *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (1843), 'is to unmask human self-alienation in its secular form now that it has been unmasked in its sacred form.'<sup>21</sup> The way to do this was not abstractly with *a priori* philosophical concepts, but concretely, through the analysis of existing historical situations. This would expose the dialectical processes immanent in reality and so challenge the idea that the world consisted of fixed essences and eternal truths. For Marx, the writing of history was one form critique could take.

As for Marx, so for Adorno, history defined the concepts philosophers might employ: 'Whatever takes place within the interior of the concept always reflects something of the movement of reality.'<sup>22</sup> What Adorno called 'critical history' (a part of the critical theory he and his Frankfurt school colleagues elaborated) aimed at unmasking the unexamined presuppositions (including those of critical historians themselves) that served to legitimise social inequality.<sup>23</sup> It called into question assumptions about necessary links between past and present (these might simply be a projection of contemporary conceptions on to the past, an illusion of continuity), stressing discontinuity instead. David Hoy writes of Adorno,

The effect of critical history is temporal: it focuses our attention on the present. Critical history, however, does this with neither the rationalist intent of making the present seem the culmination of all that has gone before, nor the neo-conservative intent of preserving the status quo. Instead . . . the intent is to make certain the present is still open to the future despite its problematic connection to the past.<sup>24</sup>

The idea of staying open to the future is at the very heart of critique and defines it as an ethical project, though a very different one from that associated with objectivity. The ethics of objectivity, held up by the right or the left, advances a closed agenda; it is politically and methodologically conservative whether it offers a romanticised view of women's or working men's struggles or eulogises the individual heroism of national leaders. The ethics of critique, in contrast, lies in its endorsement of an *undetermined history*. Its critics often dismiss this aspect of critique as a kind of negativism (post-structuralists are regularly denounced as nihilists) because it offers no clear map, no plan for what comes next. Critique's proponents reply that that is precisely its value. Kant defended the 'purely negative' utility of critique, as a way of clarifying reason and keeping it free from error. Its purpose, he wrote, 'is not to extend knowledge, but only to correct it and to supply a touchstone of the value, or lack of value, of all *a priori* knowledge'.<sup>25</sup> Although the critics of Kant rejected the idea of a finite body of knowledge, they endorsed the negative utility of critique. Marx, calling for 'A Ruthless Criticism of Everything Existing', (1844) applauded the idea that reformers ought not to have a clear idea of what the future should be.

That, however, is just the advantage of the new trend: that we do not attempt dogmatically to prefigure the future, but want to find the new world only through criticism of the old . . .

We shall confront the world not as doctrinaires . . . We develop new principles to the world out of its own principles . . . We only show the world what it is fighting for, and consciousness is something that the world must acquire, like it or not.<sup>26</sup>

With 'consciousness' would come the shedding of illusion and the ability to change the circumstances that produced alienation; what might follow would be inevitably emancipatory, but its form could not be prescribed. Marx associated prescription with dogmatism and so did Adorno: 'A philosophy that would set itself up as total, as a system, would become a delusional system.'<sup>27</sup> Adorno saw the call for 'constructive critique' as a contradiction that would undermine its force: 'it is by no means always possible to add to critique the immediate practical recommendation of something better'.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, 'the repressive intolerance to the thought that is not immediately accompanied by instructions for action is founded on anxiety'.<sup>29</sup> The importance of critique, after all, lay precisely in 'the power to resist established opinions and to resist existing institutions' and at the same time to reflect upon itself.<sup>30</sup> 'An adequate philosophical thinking is not only critical of the status quo and its reified replica in consciousness but is equally critical of itself'.<sup>31</sup> This relentless resistance to common practices and their justifications was, for Adorno, 'essential to democracy'.

Not only does democracy require the freedom to criticize and need critical impulses. Democracy is nothing less than defined by critique. This

can be recalled simply in the historical fact that the conception of the separation of powers, upon which every democracy is based, from Locke and Montesquieu and the American constitution up to today, has its lifeblood in critique.<sup>32</sup>

It is not a far leap from Adorno's linkage of open-ended critique with democracy to a similar connection made by Jacques Derrida. (Although I should add here that Adorno would have had many criticisms of Derrida, as Derrida did of Adorno – it is not the similarity of their philosophies that I want to insist on, but the shared commitment to the idea of philosophy as critique.)<sup>33</sup> Writing in the early 1980s 'in defense of philosophy', by which he meant the kind of thinking defined as critique, Derrida wrote: "Thinking" . . . must even, in the name of a democracy still *to come* as the possibility of this "thinking", unremittingly interrogate the de facto democracy, critique its current determinations, analyze its philosophical genealogy, in short, deconstruct it.<sup>34</sup> By 'deconstruct' Derrida meant locate its blindspots, discover its limits, think critically about its operations, not in order to dismantle democracy, but to improve it in as yet unarticulated ways.

Despite the many important differences among them, these philosophers understand themselves as part of a philosophical tradition in which critique is the medium. Adorno puts it succinctly: 'Critique alone, as the unity of the problem and its arguments, not the adoption of received theses, has laid the foundation for what may be considered the productive unity of the history of philosophy.'<sup>35</sup> And Derrida offers the metaphor of the lever, which, according to Alexander Dickow, 'pushes or propels readers towards a new interpretive effort'.<sup>36</sup> Although these same philosophers' insistence on history as contradiction and discontinuity seems to argue against the notion of tradition, the commitment to critique understood instrumentally – as a negative yet productive incentive to action – offers a way of grasping their meaning. For historians, there is a double challenge here: to write the kind of history that will serve as a lever, unearthing the foundational premises upon which our social and political verities rest, in order (and this is the second part of the challenge) to clear space for the operations of a history whose direction cannot be determined and whose end will never come. My argument is that poststructuralism provides such a lever; that it offers a way of revitalising historical enquiry in a postmodern, postcolonial world.

### The genealogy of Michel Foucault

One of the great accomplishments of Michel Foucault was to theorise the idea of critical history and to operationalise it, to demonstrate in specific studies how it might be done. (I focus on Foucault because his interest in history as critique was so explicit not because I want to limit our possibilities only to his approach. My intent is exemplification not prescription.)

Genealogy was Foucault's name for his 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.'<sup>37</sup> In contrast to Kant's explorations of the limits of reason, Foucault had a different goal, one he shared with Nietzsche; it was to write 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'.<sup>38</sup> The reigning concepts of modernity, beginning with reason, were to be historicised, treated not as transcendent categories whose essential meaning awaited the probes of philosophers, but as attempts by historically situated humans to define and redefine who they were. Let others theorise about reason; Foucault undertook to write its history not by echoing the words of its prophets, but by looking at the containment of madness – an attempt both intellectual and institutional, he argued, to fortify reason as the self-definition of man. This attention to the role of difference in the construction of meaning is one of the hallmarks of poststructuralist history.

After reason, Foucault wrote about discipline and sexuality and the emergence of the human sciences in the enunciation of the modern subject. History itself did not elude his attention; indeed, he argued that historical ways of thinking were themselves time-bound. By the nineteenth century, 'History . . . is not to be understood as the compilation of factual successions or sequences as they may have occurred; it is the fundamental mode of being of empiricities . . . Since it is the mode of being of all that is given us in experience, History has become the unavoidable element in our thought.'<sup>39</sup> Foucault's interest was in the way different epochs posed problems and found solutions to them; the way in which some solutions came to seem inevitable and necessary while others were overlooked or rejected. In what he called 'the profusion of lost events', Foucault called into question the self-proclaimed inevitability of any moral or social system.<sup>40</sup> David Hoy calls this 'the history of problematization'.<sup>41</sup> The point, of course, was to treat our current understandings of ourselves as the effects of processes of problem-solving, processes which articulated relations of power as they identified objects of knowledge. Another way of putting this is to say that what counted as history was a series of discontinuous interpretive shifts:

If interpretation were the slow exposure of the meaning hidden in an origin, then only metaphysics could interpret the development of humanity. But if interpretation is the violent or surreptitious appropriation of a system of rules, which in itself has no essential meaning, in order to impose a direction, to bend it to a new will, to force its participation in a different game, and to subject it to secondary rules, then the development of humanity is a series of interpretations. The role of genealogy is to record its history: the history of morals, ideals, and metaphysical concepts, the history of the concept of liberty or of the

ascetic life; as they stand for the emergence of different interpretations, they must be made to appear as events on the stage of historical process.<sup>42</sup>

Since interpretations were an ongoing, unlimited process – the product of an unstoppable human desire for knowledge – genealogy could provoke this desire rather than satisfy it. When any taken-for-granted idea or established fact is understood to be an interpretation of reality rather than reality itself, its history can be written by specifying its operations and resurrecting its forgotten alternatives. It is not, then, an inevitable consequence of the march of time, but a set of options that prevailed by ruling out others. The result of this kind of enquiry is an opening to reinterpretation.

History becomes 'effective' to the degree that it introduces discontinuity into our very being . . . 'Effective' history deprives the self of the reassuring stability of life and nature, and it will not permit itself to be transported by a voiceless obstinacy toward a millennial ending. It will uproot its traditional foundations and relentlessly disrupt its pretended continuity. This is because knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting.<sup>43</sup>

Foucault's history-as-critique provides leverage ('uprooting', 'cutting') for an unspecified future.

Many historians, missing the critical epistemological thrust of Foucault's work, have either quarrelled with his choice of topic, periodisation, or facts (in an effort to discredit him), or (in an effort to emulate him) read his work thematically as a call to study more asylums, prisons or sexual norms, now in comparative perspective. Among the emulators are those who use terms such as 'desire' or 'the subject' as labels rather than levers for excavating meaning. Or those who invoke 'power' as if it were a definable entity rather than a constituted relationship, confirming the objections of others who insist that Foucault's attention to the relational constitution of power in many realms distracts us from its 'real' institutional locations, especially the state. This, I think, is to miss the point; to misread his attempt to theorise critique as an operation of history-writing. That operation, he tells us, must begin with a question: 'In what is given to us as universal, necessary, obligatory, what place is occupied by whatever is singular, contingent, and the product of arbitrary constraints?'<sup>44</sup> The pursuit of answers to this question might take the form of more questions. What counts as universal? (Here the universal human truths of the Enlightenment are treated as mutable products of history.) How has nature (or some other inviolable essence – culture or historical continuity, for example) been invoked to establish the necessity of certain exclusions; of obligatory social behaviours? How do objects of knowledge become political or legal or economic or social subjects? These questions are not meant to have general answers; instead, they direct us to concrete historical investigations, investigations that may offer different

explanations than his, different ways of understanding the psychological dimensions of subject formation, for example. The critical point, however, is that the end of these investigations is not to establish timeless patterns of human conduct, but precisely to historicise our belief in such patterns and the categories upon which they rest. 'We want historians to confirm our belief that the present rests upon profound intentions and immutable necessities. But the true historical sense confirms our existence among countless lost events, without a landmark or a point of reference.'<sup>45</sup> Achieving this 'true historical sense' meant refusing the frameworks and analyses of other historians. 'Even if I refer to and use many historical studies, I always do my own historical analyses in the areas which interest me.'<sup>46</sup>

Foucault's interest in the constitution of the human subject has sometimes been taken for a denial of agency when, in fact, his aim is to explain how agency is established, how concepts structure our understanding of ourselves and others, how the traits and characteristics attributed to different kinds of people come into being, affect behaviour, and change. In place of the autonomous willing individual of liberal individualism whose agency is inherent in his humanity, we are given an individual whose very self is articulated – conceptualised – socially, through language, the result of historical processes that need to be explored. The emphasis on discourse was one of the ways Foucault distinguished himself from the Frankfurt school philosophers who, he felt, gave short shrift to the importance of concepts and ideas. For Foucault, 'taking account of that which goes through the head of someone, or of a series of individuals, or in the discourse they hold, is effectively part of history: to say something is an event [*dire quelque chose est un événement*]'.<sup>47</sup>

Foucault talked of the subject, not the self, as a way of insisting on the process which subjected individuals to certain constraints even as it defined them as free-willing agents. Here, too, he rejected the Frankfurt school's humanist definition of the subject, because it endorsed the idea that there was an essence of the human. 'I don't think that the Frankfurt School could admit that what we have to do is not recover our lost identity, or liberate our imprisoned nature, or find the fundamental truth of ourselves; but go in an entirely different direction . . . We have to produce something that doesn't yet exist and of which we can have no idea what it will be.'<sup>48</sup> For Foucault the point was, in the words of one of his Italian interviewers, 'to think about the origins of man in a historical-genealogical sense rather than in metaphysical terms'.<sup>49</sup> The homosexual is a case in point. Foucault insisted that though same-sex behaviour had existed for centuries, the notion that that behaviour was enacted by a person whose very being was defined by his sexuality – who bore the identity of 'invert' or 'homosexual' – was a late nineteenth-century conception.<sup>50</sup> The attribution of identity made homosexuals objects of science and subjects of law, and so provided the grounds for collective identification and, eventually, political action. We can take other examples, some not expressly mentioned by Foucault. Feminists



for one, whose agency (and consequent 'illegal' actions), I argue elsewhere, were established precisely by their exclusion as citizens in the age of democratic revolutions.<sup>51</sup> Or women workers who, although they had existed in the ranks of paid labour for centuries, became a problem (and so subjects of the law and also potential 'heroes of their own lives') only in the mid-nineteenth-century context of urban, industrial growth, of ideologies of domesticity, and of new concerns about the form the sexual division of labour should take.<sup>52</sup> By asking *how* homosexuals or women workers (to take only some of many examples we could cite) became a problem, rather than assuming that they had always been one, we can historicise these categories of identity and so the matter of agency, and in the process establish critical distance not only from the nineteenth century, but from our own time.

It is the expansiveness of Foucault's theorising of history as critique that is so appealing, the unlimited nature of its possibility. Not only are any prevailing concepts fair game (the home, the individual, the self, the moral accountability of parents, incest, even bodily experiences such as fever), but so is the idea of their transhistorical meaning. 'Nothing in man – not even his body – is sufficiently stable to serve as the basis for self-recognition or for understanding other men.'<sup>53</sup> If all claims to universality are put into question, then we have a way of thinking beyond Whig history's assumptions not only of progress, but of the inevitable path modernity must take (to secularism, 'civilisation' and an increasing homogeneity of values and cultures). Foucault has been accused of ethnocentrism because he did not extend his histories beyond the West (indeed, often not beyond France), but this is not entirely accurate. His work on ancient Greece is hardly about 'the West', and his writing on Iran at the time of the revolution against the Shah sought to make sense of the new role of religion in politics there in 1978.<sup>54</sup> Although his *History of Sexuality* has been faulted for neglecting both gender and race in the construction of sexual discourses and sexual subjects, in fact there is attention to both. 'Beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century', he writes, 'the thematics of blood was sometimes called on to lend its entire historical weight toward revitalizing the type of political power that was exercised through devices of sexuality. Racism took shape at this point (racism in its modern, "biologizing" statist form).'<sup>55</sup> But even without these examples, my main point is that objections on thematic grounds ought not to prevent our use of his critical conceptual tools. Whether or not *he* addressed it as fully as might be wished, Foucault has enabled *us* to think about the current crisis of Western universalism and the ways its definition of the 'problem' of Islam (for example) rests not on essences but on strategic deployments of essentialised concepts in particular historical circumstances.

The presuppositions upon which Foucauldian critical history rests seem to make some historians uncomfortable, perhaps because they are so clearly articulated or perhaps because they confound any notion that objectivity – pure or qualified – is possible. What are we then to make of truth? How can we argue if we can't 'prove' the validity of our points with what is now

being increasingly referred to (in science and history) as 'evidence-based' information? For Foucault, I would argue, there is evidence; it is the evidence of language, of concepts, taken not to reflect reality but to structure it, to make it visible, effective, active in institutions and social organisation. And there are facts and even 'truth', though truth is defined as a system of shared standards rather than a transcendent entity; it is defined differentially, in relation to things that are taken to be untrue. In this way, Foucault restructures the concept of objectivity, opening it to critical interrogation.

[T]he very question of truth, the right it appropriates to refute error and oppose itself to appearance, the manner in which it developed (initially made available to the wise, then withdrawn by men of piety to an unattainable world where it was given the double role of consolation and imperative, finally rejected as a useless notion, superfluous, and contradicted on all sides) – does this not form history, the history of an error we call truth?<sup>56</sup>

The idea that meaning is established differentially is not Foucault's invention, but, as Ermarth and others have argued, is fully consistent with early twentieth-century theories of measurement (Einstein) and linguistics (Saussure), theories that ushered in the era referred to as postmodernity.<sup>57</sup> Foucault's work is based on the premise that the relationship between words and things is interactive, not reflective; it is differentially established – 'In what ways?' is the question – and mutable. So – and this is the invitation to think critically – the historian needs to probe that relationship rather than assume its transparency. Or, to return to Derrida's metaphor of the lever, s/he has to unearth the disturbing questions about what seems sure or established in order to make new interpretive efforts – and so new futures – possible.

### The passion for critique

There is no question that critique is uncomfortable – and not only for historians. To subject the taken-for-granted to new scrutiny is disturbing and destabilising. Adorno, in a passage I cited earlier, attributed the intolerance for critical thought's lack of a new plan for the future to 'anxiety'. An anxiety we might say, following Jacques Lacan, that serves as the obstacle to, the protection against, desire. Indeed, I want to argue, with Wendy Brown and Janet Halley, who have written a compelling introduction to a volume of essays called *Left Legalism/Left Critique*, that desire animates critique, and so yields pleasure. This is not pleasure as comfort or reassurance, or in Elizabeth Weed's terms, 'consolation'; it is instead the 'shock of the new', the disorienting effect of a different perspective, the thrill of thinking beyond established frontiers.<sup>58</sup> 'The work of critique', write Brown and Halley, 'is potentially without boundary or end.'<sup>59</sup> As such it 'hazards the opening



of new modalities of thought and political possibility, and potentially affords as well the possibility of enormous pleasure – political, intellectual, and ethical'.<sup>60</sup> Their characterisation of critique uses the language of desire: it is a 'kindling spirit', it produces 'euphoria'; the pursuit of this 'pleasure itself [is] a crucial source of political motivation'.<sup>61</sup>

Brown and Halley are not the first to liken critique to desire; indeed, it echoes through the writings of the philosophers I have been considering here. Some of them see critique as an effect of desire, others equate the two. Whichever it is, the complicated association drawn between desire and critique explains the impossibility of disinterested objectivity on the one hand, and the association of critique with danger and disruption on the other. Passion, of course, has a complicated genealogy, one Albert Hirschman detailed in his classic *The Passions and the Interests*.<sup>62</sup> The 'passion' that modernity worries about can neither be predicted nor contained. When Derrida refers us back to Aristotle's *Metaphysics* – 'All men, by nature, have the desire to know' – he does so to establish an insight of his own: 'The pleasure of useless sensations explains the desire to know for its own sake.'<sup>63</sup> Kant believed there was an innate human disposition to push thought beyond its established boundaries: 'Man', he wrote, 'has an inward need to ponder questions that cannot be answered by any empirical employment of reason, or by principles thence derived'.<sup>64</sup> Nietzsche, who might well have quarrelled with Kant's essentialising of the desire to know (as would have Foucault or Derrida), associated critique with thought's ability to 'tear itself loose and attain freedom'.<sup>65</sup> Adorno considered this kind of thinking 'insatiable', 'its aversion to being quickly and easily satisfied refuses the foolish wisdom of resignation'.<sup>66</sup> He equated the insatiable drive that animated critique with the ultimate form of happiness, the deep satisfaction that comes from learning to see differently: 'The happiness that dawns in the eye of the thinking person is the happiness of humanity . . . Thought is happiness, even where it defines unhappiness: by enunciating it.'<sup>67</sup> Freud linked the pleasure associated with the desire for knowledge explicitly to sex. He posited 'an instinct for knowledge or research', evident in children between the ages of three and five, that stemmed from their curiosity about sex: 'Knowledge in children is attracted unexpectedly early and intensively to sexual problems and is in fact possibly first aroused by them.'<sup>68</sup> It is not surprising to find Freud making knowledge and desire synonymous, though it was Marx who said it more eloquently and succinctly: 'criticism is not a passion of the head, but the head of passion'.<sup>69</sup>

This is the passion Foucault describes in the Preface to *The Order of Things*. It is startling – at once delightful and disconcerting:

This book first arose out of a passage in Borges, out of the laughter that shattered as I read the passage, all the familiar landmarks of my thought – *our* thought, the thought that bears the stamp of our age and our geography – breaking up all the ordered surfaces and all the planes with

which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things, and continuing long afterwards to disturb and threaten with collapse our age-old distinction between the Same and the Other . . . That passage from Borges kept me laughing a long time, though not without a certain uneasiness that I found hard to shake off.<sup>70</sup>

The uneasiness, Foucault tells us, has several sources and not just the questioning of the belief that the fundamental codes of our culture reflect an incontestable empirical reality. Uneasiness is a symptom of insecurity, of a loss of familiar markers in a moment of surprise. As with any passion, the known limits are hard to discern.

It is tempting to shake off this kind of uneasiness by sticking with the already known, by doggedly continuing to explore familiar terrain and, through that exploration, confirming its boundaries, fortifying its existing frontiers against unwelcome incursions. Foucault did not opt for this kind of security, choosing instead to follow desire where it led even if, or perhaps because, it meant trespassing on the field of established history. For some of us, following his lead has led to exciting challenges. We have resisted what Robyn Wiegman called 'the impulse to reproduce only what [we] think we already know', instead interrogating the grounds of our knowledge, both the historical accounts and the analytic categories that established their inevitability.<sup>71</sup> For feminist historians such as myself it has meant not simply restoring the visibility of women, but – following Denise Riley's incitement – treating the very category of women as an object for historical study.<sup>72</sup> These efforts have not always been welcome; indeed, they have sometimes earned the scorn of those who righteously uphold an unquestioned belief in the real and eternal existence of women and their agency as touchstones of a one true feminism. If we understand this scorn as an expression of unease or anxiety, we can understand it too as a retreat from or resistance to critique. This retreat is a great pity, since feminism has historically derived its strength and influence from its own desire to interrogate the 'fundamental categories, methodology, and self-understanding of Western science and theory'.<sup>73</sup> That some feminists seem now to have retreated from this position, or solidified it into an orthodoxy which refuses the kind of ongoing self-examination required by critique, is, I submit, a sign of the times.

### The ethics of critique

Although critique has been discounted as negative and impractical, it is in fact driven by a desire for change – and one that is not always 'progressive' or 'left'; there are critiques from the right too, although my focus here has been on those from the left. The aim of critique is to make things better. In our world, this is often defined in terms of fulfilling the ideals of democratic society – liberty, equality, justice – although with no pre-drawn plan in mind.

The notion is that any legitimating authority – even one founded on these ideals – will become so invested in its own power that it will resist innovation and attempt to put a stop to history; the opening to a different (and by definition better) future is protected (though by no means guaranteed) if critique can continue to operate. The emancipatory goals of Marx and Adorno were clear (to raise the consciousness and so change the fate of those oppressed by bourgeois capitalism), but so were those of Foucault when he retold liberal Whig stories as the emergence of new regimes of power. The point was to bring down established boundaries in the interests of ‘liberty’.<sup>74</sup> ‘Bodies and pleasures’, the enigmatic ending of the first volume of the *History of Sexuality*, points in the direction of greater freedom of sexual expression even if it takes as a given that there will always be some form of regulatory norm in operation that itself will have to be subjected to critique. ‘The most ruthless critique’, Derrida wrote at the time of the founding of the Collège de Philosophie – an attempt to institutionalise philosophy as critique within and against the grain of established academic philosophy –

the implacable analysis of a power of legitimation is always produced in the name of a system of legitimation . . . We already know that the interest in research not currently legitimated will only find its way if, following trajectories ignored by or unknown to any established institutional power, this new research is *already underway and promises a new legitimacy* until one day, once again . . . and so on.<sup>75</sup>

Critique is never satisfied with the regimes that claim to fulfil its desire; futurity is guaranteed only by the persistent dissatisfaction of critique.

This is where history-writing comes in. And with it, a different kind of ethics from the one the historians writing in that special issue of *History and Theory* were worrying about. It is not a question of judging whether the actions of men and women in the past were good or bad from some contemporary ethical perspective (whether or not, for example, Sartre was a willing dupe of communists, or Fanon an unacceptably violent man, or slavery an oppressive institution). Of course, historians are free to make such judgments and base their work upon them and that work often has undeniably important political resonance, making previously ignored people visible or revising prevailing interpretations. I’m not calling for an end to studies of that kind; we surely need them. But I don’t think they usually constitute critique. Instead, they comfortably confirm our own sense of moral superiority, our own sense of who we are.

Critique ought to make us uncomfortable by asking what the sources of those values are, how they have come into being, what relationships they have constituted, what power they have secured. This is not the kind of negativity that leads to denying the Holocaust or justifying slavery or the oppression of women. It is not at that level that the interrogation takes place. Rather, the attempt is to make visible the premises upon which the organising

categories of our identities (personal, social, national) are based and to give them a history, so placing them in time and subject to review. This kind of history-writing takes up topics not usually considered ‘historical’ because they are either objects taken to be self-evident in their meaning (women, workers, fever, incest) or categories of analysis outside of time (gender, race, class, even postcolonial). The object of critical history-writing is the present, though its materials come from the archives of the past; its aim is neither to justify nor to discredit, but to illuminate those blind-spots Barbara Johnson referred to (in the quote I cited at the beginning of this manifesto) that keep social systems intact and make seeing how to change them so difficult. This kind of critical history-writing serves the interests of history in two senses: it opens doors to futures we might not otherwise have been able to imagine and, in so doing, gives us ever more material for the writing of history.

## Notes

- 1 An earlier version of this paper, titled ‘Against Eclecticism’, was published in *differences* 16:3 (Fall 2005): 114–37. This paper was strongly influenced by the work I did with graduate students in a seminar on ‘Critique’ at Rutgers University in the fall of 2005. I am grateful for their hard work and their insights, individual and collective. I would also like to thank Andrew Aisenberg, Caroline Arni, Wendy Brown, Brian Connolly, Geoffroy de Lagasnerie, Didier Eribon, Carol Gluck, Denise Riley, Sylvia Schafer, Donald M. Scott and Elizabeth Weed for their critical comments on this paper.
- 2 For example, see Emily Eakin, ‘The Theory of Everything, R.I.P.’, *New York Times*, 17 October 2004; Jonathan Kandell, ‘Jacques Derrida, Abstruse Theorist, Dies in Paris at 74’, *New York Times*, 10 October 2004; Edward Rothstein, ‘An Appraisal: The Man who Showed us How to Take the World apart’, *New York Times*, 11 October 2004.
- 3 There is even now (2006) a bill pending in the Arizona state legislature that would give students the right to have alternative readings more suited to their tastes than those required on course syllabi.
- 4 For a critical response to one such effort, see Carla Hesse, ‘The New Empiricism’, *Cultural and Social History* (2004): 201–7. See also Dominick LaCapra, ‘Tropisms of Intellectual History’, *Rethinking History* 8:4 (December 2004): 499–529, especially 522.
- 5 The return of the sociobiology of the 1970s as the all-new evolutionary psychology is a similar phenomenon. So also is the use of neuroscience by some scholars who would entirely replace the theorised subject with a hard-wired mind.
- 6 Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt and Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth about History* (New York: Norton, 1994): 237.
- 7 Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, ‘Ethics and Method’, *History and Theory* 43:4 (December 2004): 61–83, 68.
- 8 For a powerful critique of this see Jacques Rancière, *La Nuit des prolétaires: Archives du rêve ouvrier* (Paris: Fayard, 1981). See also, Joan W. Scott, ‘The Class We Have Lost’, *International Labor and Working Class History* 57 (Spring 2000): 69–75.
- 9 Joan W. Scott, ‘Preface’ to the second edition of *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia Press, 1999).
- 10 Lawrence Stone, ‘Madness’, *New York Review of Books*, 16 December 1982; Michel Foucault, ‘An Exchange with Michel Foucault’, *New York Review of*

- Books, 31 March 1983. In the exchange with Stone, Foucault replies, furiously, that his footnotes prove his credentials as a historian.
- 11 See, for example, John E. Toews, 'Intellectual History after the Linguistic Turn: The Autonomy of Meaning and the Irreducibility of Experience', *American Historical Review* 92 (October 1987); and William H. Sewell, Jr., 'Gender, History and Deconstruction: Joan Wallach Scott's *Gender and the Politics of History*', CSST Working Paper 34, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, August 1989. See also, Joan W. Scott, 'The Evidence of Experience', *Critical Inquiry* 17:4 (Summer 1991): 773–97.
  - 12 Appleby, et al., *Telling the Truth about History*. 'That noble dream' refers to Peter Novick's book, *That Noble Dream: The Objectivity Question and the American Historical Profession* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).
  - 13 'Historians and Ethics', special themed issue of *History and Theory* 43:4 (December 2004): 9.
  - 14 Eric Hobsbawm, 'Le Pari de la raison: manifeste pour l'histoire', *Le Monde diplomatique*, (December 2004): 1, 20 and 21.
  - 15 Barbara Johnson, translator's introduction to Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981): xv. See also Barbara Johnson, *The Wake of Deconstruction* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1994).
  - 16 Theodor Adorno, *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998): 293.
  - 17 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. F. Golffing, (New York: Doubleday, 1956): 155.
  - 18 Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishers, 1980): 20.
  - 19 Ibid., p. 18.
  - 20 Ibid., p. 29.
  - 21 Robert C. Tucker (ed.), *The Marx–Engels Reader* (New York: Norton, 1978): 54.
  - 22 Adorno, *Critical Models*, p. 10.
  - 23 The emancipatory thrust of critical theory was clear. For another example, see Max Horkheimer, 'Traditional and Critical Theory', in his *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, trans. M. J. O'Connell (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972): 188–243.
  - 24 David C. Hoy and Thomas McCarthy, *Critical Theory* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1994): 139.
  - 25 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. N. K. Smith, (New York: St Martin's Press, 1965): 59.
  - 26 Tucker (ed.), *The Marx–Engels Reader*, pp. 13, 14–15.
  - 27 Adorno, *Critical Models*, p. 7.
  - 28 Ibid., p. 287.
  - 29 Ibid., p. 290.
  - 30 Ibid., p. 281.
  - 31 Ibid., p. 133.
  - 32 Ibid., p. 281.
  - 33 Jacques Derrida, *Fichus: Discours de Francfort* (Paris: Galilée, 2002).
  - 34 Jacques Derrida, *Right to Philosophy*, Vol. I: *Who's Afraid of Philosophy?*, trans. Jan Plug (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002): 42.
  - 35 Adorno, *Critical Models*, p. 8.
  - 36 Alexander Dickow provides an illuminating discussion, 'Derrida's Summons: Responsibility in "Mochlos", or, the Conflict of the Faculties', unpublished, Vol. II: *Eyes of the University* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), paper, Rutgers University, December 2005, p. 14. See also Jacques Derrida, *Right to Philosophy* pp. 110–11: 'Now, when one asks how to orient oneself in history,

- morality, or politics, the most serious discords and decisions have to do less often with ends, it seems to me, than with levers.'
- 37 Michel Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment?', trans. C. Porter, in Paul Rabinow (ed.), *The Essential Works of Michel Foucault, 1954–1984*, Vol. 1 (New York: New Press, 1997): 315. See also, Foucault, 'What is Critique?', trans. L. Hochroth, in David Ingram (ed.), *The Political* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2002).
  - 38 Cited in Hoy and McCarthy, *Critical Theory*, p. 48.
  - 39 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994): 219.
  - 40 Michel Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', in Donald F. Bouchard (ed.) and trans., *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews by Michel Foucault* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977): 146.
  - 41 Hoy and McCarthy, *Critical Theory*, p. 163.
  - 42 Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', pp. 151–2.
  - 43 Ibid., p. 154.
  - 44 Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment?', p. 315.
  - 45 Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', p. 155.
  - 46 Michel Foucault, 'Entretien avec Michel Foucault', in his *Dits et Ecrits II, 1976–1988* (Paris: Gallimard, 2001): 895.
  - 47 Ibid.
  - 48 Ibid., p. 893.
  - 49 Ibid., p. 894.
  - 50 There have been debates about this timing. Among them, see Didier Eribon, *Hérésies: essais sur la théorie de la sexualité* (Paris: Fayard, 2003).
  - 51 Joan Wallach Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996).
  - 52 Joan W. Scott, 'The Woman Worker', in Georges Duby and Michelle Perrot (eds), *A History of Women*, Vol. IV (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993): 399–426.
  - 53 Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', p. 153.
  - 54 See Janet Afary and Kevin B. Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); see also, Pankaj Mishra, 'The Misunderstood Muslims', *New York Review of Books* 52:18 (17 November 2005): 15–18.
  - 55 Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. I: *Introduction*, trans. Peter Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1980): 149.
  - 56 Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', p. 144.
  - 57 Ermarth, 'Ethics and Method', pp. 68–75.
  - 58 Elizabeth Weed, 'Luce Irigaray and the Waning of Critique', paper given at the University of Buffalo Humanities Institute Inaugural Conference, 28–9 October 2005. To be published in a volume of essays from the conference.
  - 59 Wendy Brown and Janet Halley (eds), *Left Legalism/Left Critique* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002): 26. See also Wendy Brown, 'Untimeliness and Punctuality: Critical Theory in Dark Times', in her *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005): 1–16.
  - 60 Ibid., p. 29.
  - 61 Ibid., p. 32.
  - 62 Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before its Triumph* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977).
  - 63 Derrida, *Right to Philosophy*, Vol. II, pp. 130–1.
  - 64 Kant, 'Introduction', *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 56.
  - 65 Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage*, p. 4.
  - 66 Adorno, *Critical Models*, p. 292.
  - 67 Ibid., p. 293.

- 68 Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, trans. J. Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 1975): 60.
- 69 Tucker (ed.), *The Marx-Engels Reader*, p. 55.
- 70 Foucault, *The Order of Things*, pp. xv and xvii.
- 71 Robyn Wiegman, 'What Ails Feminist Criticism? A Second Opinion', *Critical Inquiry* 25:2 (Winter 1999): 362-79.
- 72 Denise Riley, 'Am I That Name?' *Feminism and the Category of 'Women' in History* (London: Macmillan, 1988); see also her 'A Short History of Some Preoccupations', in Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (eds), *Feminists Theorize the Political*, (New York: Routledge, 1992): 121-8.
- 73 Seyla Benhabib and Drucilla Cornell (eds), *Feminism as Critique: Essays on the Politics of Gender in Late-Capitalist Societies* (London: Polity Press, 1987): 1.
- 74 On the connection of Foucault's critique to contemporary political movements, see Didier Eribon, 'Introduction: L'Art de l'inservitude', in Eribon (ed.), *L'Infréquentable Michel Foucault: Renouveau de la pensée critique* (Paris: EPEL, 2001): 9-18.
- 75 Derrida, *Right to Philosophy*, Vol. II, pp. 126-7.

### 3 Manifesto for a history of the media

#### Mark Poster

He had been taught . . . that history, along with geography, was dead. That history in the older sense was an historical concept. History in the older sense was narrative, stories we told ourselves about where we'd come from and what it had been like, and those narratives were revised by each new generation, and indeed always had been. History was plastic, was a matter of interpretation. The digital had not so much changed that as made it too obvious to ignore. History was stored data, subject to manipulation and interpretation.

William Gibson, *All Tomorrow's Parties*

Marx theorised a changed relation between men and machines. Machines had changed: they had been hooked up to natural energy sources, first steam, then petroleum, then electricity. So men could change too: their work relations and skills could be reorganised. In the Industrial Revolution, labourers acted upon natural materials but only through the mediation of increasingly complex machinic apparatuses, so complex and expensive that, unlike their artisan forebears, industrial workers could not own their own tools. The consequences of these alterations in the daily work life of men and women were played out in the politics and society of the past two centuries and were increasingly the main focus of historical investigations. History took into account a new relation of humans to machines.

Now machines are changing again. They are processing information, not raw materials, and they are globally networked. Today all elements of culture (texts, images and sounds) are coded into digital logic and uploaded into a global network that incorporates all human groupings, however unequally. Texts, images and sounds are exchanged between humans increasingly only through the mediation of networked computers. The work of human beings changes accordingly. No longer Chaplinesque cogs in assembly lines; workers are increasingly monitors of work processes and manipulators of symbols in close conjunction with computers. The historian's task is thus to theorise the implications of this transformation, to create research projects that explore its many aspects, and to write its histories with an eye to the political possibilities it opens up.