



*Allegorical etching by Jan Van der Straet for Americae decima pars
by Jean-Théodore de Bry (Oppenheim, 1619)*

Michel de Certeau

THE WRITING OF HISTORY

Translated by Tom Conley

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Making History
Problems of Method and Problems of Meaning

FIRST of all, religious history is a field of confrontation between historiography and *archeology*, whose place it has taken to some degree. Second, religious history allows us to analyze the relation between history and *ideology*, which it must account for in terms of production. These two questions intersect and can be envisaged together in the narrowly circumscribed sector that is the "treatment" of theology by methods that belong to history. From the outset, historians take theology to be a religious ideology which functions within a broader totality that we assume can explain this ideology. Can theology be reduced to the terms resulting from this operation? No, probably not. But as an object of their discipline, theology is shown to historians under two equally uncertain forms in the field of historiography; it is a religious fact, and it is a fact of doctrine. The aims of this chapter are to study through this particular given case the manner in which historians treat these two types of facts nowadays, and to specify the epistemological problems that are thus broached.

History: A Practice and a Discourse

THIS analysis will obviously be determined by the very circumscribed practice with which I can be credited, that is, through the location of my work—at once in a period (the history called “modern”), as a subject matter (religious history), and in a place (the French scene). These limits are of capital importance. The display of the particularity proper to the location from which I am observing is linked in effect to the subject under study and to the point of view which I must assume in examining it. Three postulates define the subject and the point of view. They must be directly put forward as such (even if they seem to arise quite obviously from current historical practice), since they will not be the object of any proof.

First, underscoring the singularity of each analysis is equivalent to indicting the possibility of an all-encompassing systematic process, and instead, keeping central to the problem the need for discussion proportioned to a plurality of scientific procedures, social functions, and fundamental convictions. In this way we tentatively analyze the function of discourses which can throw light on the question, which are written after or beside many others of the same order: while these discourses speak of history, they are already situated *in* history.

Second, these discourses are not bodies floating “within” an all-encompassing whole that can simply be called history (or even a “context”). They are historical because they are bound to operations and are defined by functions. Thus we cannot understand what they say independently of the practice from which they result. In different ways we can probably find here a good definition of contemporary historiography (but also of theology—including, most specifically, its most traditional kind).¹ In any event, both the one and the other will be grasped at this junction between a “content” and an operation. Furthermore, such a perspective characterizes the current scientific process; for example that which, as a function of “models” or in terms of “regularities,” can explain phenomena or documents by clarifying rules of production and possibilities of transformation.² But more aptly, we shall take seriously all these expressions loaded with meaning—“making history,” “making theology”; usually we are all too likely to erase the verb (or their productive act) to give more weight to the complement (the fruits of their labors).

Making History

Third, for this reason I mean by “history” this practice (a discipline), its result (a discourse), or the relation of the two in the form of a “production.”³ To be sure, in current usage “history” connotes both a science and that which it studies—the explication which is *stated*, and the reality of *what has taken place* or what takes place. Other disciplines are not burdened with this ambiguity: French does not refer to “physics” and “nature” with the same name. The very term “history” therefore already suggests a situation of particular proximity between the scientific operation and the reality that it analyzes. But the first of these aspects will serve as our entry into the subject at hand, for various reasons: because the breadth and extension of the “real” are forever designated and considered as meaningful solely within the bounds of a discourse; because this restriction in the use of the word “history” gives its correspondent (historical science) over to science, or at least to the particular function which is indeed the field of theology; finally, we have to stay out of the virgin forest of History, a region of “rich fuzziness” in which ideologies proliferate and where we will never find our way. Perhaps, too, by holding to the idea of discourse and to its fabrication, we can better apprehend the nature of the relations that it holds with its other, the real. In this fashion, doesn’t language not so much implicate the status of the reality of which it speaks, as posit it as that which is other than itself?

Beginning thus with historiographical practices and discourses, I propose taking up in turn the following points:

1) The treatment of religious ideology by contemporary historiography requires us to recognize the ideologies that are already invested in history itself.

2) There exists a historicity of history, implying the movement which links an interpretive practice to a social praxis.

3) History thus vacillates between two poles. On the one hand, it refers to a practice, hence to a reality; on the other, it is a closed discourse, a text that organizes and concludes a mode of intelligibility.

4) History is probably our myth. It combines what can be thought, the “thinkable,” and the origin, in conformity with the way in which a society can understand its own working.

A SIGN: THE TREATMENT OF RELIGIOUS IDEOLOGY IN HISTORY

THE relation between history and theology is first of all a problem germane to history. What is the *historical* significance of a doctrine within the totality of a period? According to what criteria can it be understood? How can it be explained in relation to terms advanced by the period under study? These questions are difficult and debatable if, on the one hand, we cannot be satisfied with a purely *literary* analysis of the contents or of their organization;⁴ and if, on the other, we refuse ourselves the facility of considering ideology solely as a social epiphenomenon, a facility which effaces the specificity of doctrinal affirmations.⁵

For example, what rapport can be established between Jansenist spirituality or theology and the sociocultural structures or social dynamics of the same period? A broad range of answers is offered to us. Thus for Orcibal, a radical experience in its pristine state, in the oldest primary source, must be sought above all. Yet still it is alienated within the constraints of a contemporary language; the history of its diffusion will thus be the history of a progressive degradation. Even by returning endlessly to the oldest primary sources, by scrutinizing the experience that linguistic and historical systems mask as they develop themselves, historians never apprehend origins, but only the successive stages of their loss. In opposition to Orcibal, Lucien Goldmann finds in Jansenist doctrine both the result and the symptom of the economic situation in which a social category is located: losing their power, lawyers turn to the heaven of predestination and the hidden God, and thus betray the new political circumstances which seal off their future from them; here spirituality, a sign of what it does not express, refers back to the analysis of an economic change and to a sociology of failure.⁶

Works on Luther present the same diversity of positions: some authors refer to the events in Luther's youth to find the organizing principle and unspoken secret of his doctrine (Strohl and Febvre for example); others place his thought within the continuum of an intellectual tradition (Grisar, Seeberg, etc.); still others observe in it the effects of a modification in economic structures (Engels, Steinmetz, Stern), or the growing consciousness of sociocultural transformations (Garin, Moeller, etc.), or even

the result of a conflict between the adolescent and the society of adults (Erikson). Finally, the Lutheran movement has been considered as an emergence of a religious disquiet which characterizes the period (for example, by Lortz and Delumeau); the end result of a promotion of the laity as opposed to the clerical order (Natalie Z. Davis), an episode belonging to the series of the evangelical reforms which mark the history of the church; or the wave precipitated in the West by the eruption of a truly unique advent (Holl, Bainton, Barth). All of these interpretations have been proposed, and many more can be enumerated.⁷

Clearly, all of the above interpretations are relative to the response that each author proposes for analogous questions located in present times. Although this is a patent truth, we should recall that any reading of the past—however much it is controlled by the analysis of documents—is driven by a reading of current events. Readings of both past and present are effectively organized in relation to problematic issues which a historical situation is imposing. They are haunted by presuppositions, in other words by “models” of interpretation that are invariably linked to a contemporary situation of Christianity.

The “Mystical” Model and the “Folkloric” Model: A Hidden Essence

GLOBALLY and also for France, two tendencies seem to have marked religious history for about three centuries: one, issuing from spiritual currents, directs its attention to an analysis of doctrines; the other, marked by the “Enlightenment,” places religion under the sign of “superstition.” In sum, we would have on the one hand emergent truths in texts, and on the other “errors,” or a folklore abandoned along the roadside of progress.

Without going very far back in time, we can observe that during the first half of the twentieth century religion hardly took advantage of the new trends that mobilized medieval or “modernist” historians, in for example the socioeconomical analysis of Ernest Labrousse (1933–1941). Religion was rather an object of study, disputed among exegetes or historians of Christian origins. When it intervened within the history of mentalities in Lucien Febvre's work (1932–1942), it was as a sign of coherence belonging to a past society (and surpassed, thanks to progress), in a perspective very much inflected by the ethnology of “primitive” societies.

Paradoxically, two names appear to symbolize the more or less explicit place reserved for the analysis of belief between the two world wars, and the slippage produced during that period: Henri Bremond and Arnold Van Gennep. The former, partaking of the tradition of literary history, attests to a loss of confidence in doctrines by referring them to "mystical" meanings, or to a hidden "metaphysics" of saints.⁸ The latter, a scrupulous observer of religious folklore, envisions the resurgence of an immemorial element of societies, the return of an irrational cause, of an originary and almost repressed force.⁹ Their two positions are not without analogy, even if they are cast in very different methodological terms. Bremond refers the meaning of the literature being studied back to a mystical source of man, to an "essence" which is diffracted, expressed, and found compromised in institutional or doctrinal religious systems. The doctrinal facts are thus isolated from their meaning, which remains forever hidden in depths ultimately foreign to social or intellectual categories. In his fashion, inspired by American or German anthropology (and especially the Jungian school), Van Gennep reveals signs of unconscious archetypes and permanent anthropological structures within religious folklore. Across an always-menaced mysticism (according to Bremond) or a folklore (for Van Gennep), the religious element embodies the figure of a marginal or timeless type; in this way, a profound nature—foreign to history—is combined with what a society throws along the wayside.

Quite visible in these two authors, this model can be located in other forms; for example, in the concepts of the sacred, panic, the collective unconscious, etc. No doubt it can be explained by the position that Christianity had assumed before 1939 in French society, divided between a movement of interiorization—with Maritain's *Primacy of the Spiritual* (1927) or Mounier's *Esprit* (1932)—and a religious positivism among traditionalists. It also explains why religious history had been "hard to think" in a social history and why it remained aberrant in respect to the history that was being fashioned, particularly the socioeconomic history of Henri Sée (1921–1929), of Simiand (1932), of Hamilton (1934–1936), of Marc Bloch (1939–1940), or of Ernest Labrousse. But in turning the research it inspired more and more toward the study of spiritual currents or popular culture, this model directed religious history toward a splendid future. Science would examine a field of pure religious "phenomena" whose meaning was withdrawn into another, hidden order. It would situate them in the direction of ethnology, and link an

exoticism of inner man to a lost *essential* part, in the region of the imaginary or of symbolic orders of society. In religion, science could seek the metaphor of a nonhistorical basis of history.

The Sociological Model: Practice and Knowledge

THE importance that the analysis of religious practice takes on with Gabriel Le Bras must be connected with a recent archeology.¹⁰ Linked to the rise of sociology, ethnology, and the study of folklore,¹¹ this interpretative model represents a French reaction in favor of sociological practices (polls, etc.) as opposed to the theoretical typologies of Troeltsch (1912), Weber (1920), or Wach (1931). But from the standpoint of Christianity, it also presupposes a new situation which dates back to the "modern" period. A past haunts this present.

To be sure, the religious practice probably does not hold the same meaning in the course of different periods of history. In the seventeenth century it acquires a function that it had had to a much lesser degree in the thirteenth or fourteenth century. The crumbling of beliefs within societies that were no longer religiously homogenous makes objective reference all the more necessary: the believer has to be distinguished from the unbeliever—or the Catholic from the Protestant—through his practices. In becoming a social element of religious differentiation, the practice acquires a new religious relevance. Regroupings are made and accounted for according to this criterion.

Today, by keeping practice as the basis of a quantitative measurement of religion, sociology makes manifest a historical organization of Christian conscience (which moreover was not the case for Jansenism). It also accentuates a presupposition which had always been latent in these four-centuries-old origins: that is, of a rift between objective gestures and subjective belief. In the seventeenth century, religious belief had already begun to be dissociated from practice—a phenomenon which, since that time, has never failed to increase. In order to count their followers and to mark ruptures, reformists became suspicious of doctrines and insisted on social acts. Currently, in the works which count visible actions, interest has been drawn to practices precisely because they represent a *social* reality; on its underside this interest bears a scientific devalorization of their *dogmatic* meaning (referred to as "prejudices" demystified by progress, or private convictions which are impossible to introduce into scientific analysis). The logic of a sociology therefore further widens the

schism between social religious facts and the doctrines which claim to explain their significance.¹²

In turn, a sociological view has changed beliefs into objective facts. A sociology of religious *knowledge* has developed in proportion to the withdrawal inward of meaning. The same break is thus found in the apparently opposed field of research dedicated to ideology. Furthermore, in our relation as historians to the seventeenth century, we cannot dissociate the knowledge we have of its nature from the influence it still exercises over our methods of inquiry. The sociological view of ideologies and the conceptual tools which organize our cultural analysis (for example, the distinction between the elite and the mass, the use of knowledge versus "ignorance" as criteria for evaluating dechristianization, etc.) are still proof of the social function that knowledge was acquiring in the course of the seventeenth century. When the religious unanimity of Christendom was broken down into the diversity of European states, a knowledge was needed to take up the slack of belief and allow each group or each country to receive a distinctive definition. With the effects of the printing press, of a growing literacy and education, knowledge became a tool of unification and differentiation: a corpus of knowledge or degrees of wisdom sectioned off or isolated social levels, at the same time that illiteracy was associated with delinquency and considered its cause, or with the masses and considered to characterize them. These social divisions are not as new as the fact that it was a shape of knowledge or a doctrine that established the means of putting them into place, of maintaining or changing them. Among churches, too, the differences in knowledge became decisive. The determination of what was known, when one was either Catholic or of Reformed faith, furnished the community with its modes of identity and distinction. Catechisms changed and were refashioned by the urgency of definitions circumscribing at once both intellectual contents and socioinstitutional limits.

Today some very recent work (such as that of René Taveneaux) reconstructs sociocultural networks, outlines mental trajectories, establishes the geography of hidden groups from traces and resurgent points of religious ideas, just as physiological movements can be seen by means of the travels of some visible substance through the dark folds of the body.¹³ In sum, this work travels over trails made in the past by the ways in which a society availed itself of its modes of knowledge. In emphasizing the former roles of ideas, by exploiting them in turn as remainders (perhaps the only visible ones, at that) of frontiers between social groups, Tave-

neaux explains the usefulness that these ideas had already surreptitiously acquired—the service that they rendered to societies which circulated them, but at the cost of the "doctrinal" meaning that contemporary people gave to them or that these ideas can still keep. Since then such drawing and quartering of methods has separated more and more, in every doctrinal work, a sociological "object" at which the historian aims and a theoretical object which seems to be left aside for literary analysis.

A Cultural Model: From Ideas to the "Collective Unconscious"

BACZKO once remarked that the "history of ideas" is born of common reactions, in particular a reaction against the divisions within a particular body of work or period of time that followed in the wake of specialization of disciplines. Thus instead of arbitrarily fragmenting the work of Newton, dividing it among different specialties according to whether he deals with the Apocalypse, calendars, "natural philosophy," or optics, unities and organizing principles are sought.¹⁴ Similarly, there are objections to explaining a body of work in terms of influences, to frittering a corpus away by referring it to the muddle of its primary sources, to instigating, by going endlessly back through the dust of fragments, the disappearance of the totalities of the segments, of the ruptures that constitute history.

But how can this study be furnished with adequate methods? Since the advent in the United States of the *Journal of the History of Ideas* (in 1940 in New York and Lancaster), the first of the reviews dedicated to the topic, its development has been pursued. It lacks a proper name: in Germany, it is called *Geistesgeschichte*; in the United States, it is "intellectual history"; in France, it goes by the term *l'histoire des mentalités*; in the Soviet Union it is the "history of thought," and so on.

Within all of these tendencies, Baczko was able to trace distant, communal, Hegelian origins through the works of Dilthey, Lukács, Weber, Croce, Huizinga, Cassirer, Groethuysen, etc., around the decade between 1920 and 1930. *Ideas* become a mediation between the Spirit (*Geist*) and sociopolitical realities. They presumably form a level where the body of history meets its consciousness—the *Zeitgeist*.¹⁵ But the simplicity of the postulate breaks down under analysis, into complex and apparently insoluble problems. For example, who is the *real* Newton? What is the kind of unity being postulated—that of his work, or perhaps that of a period? What framework furnishes so many different ideas with the unity lent to

the "ideas of the time," the "mentality," or the contemporary "collective consciousness?"

This unity—in other words, the scientific object being sought—is worthy of discussion. We should like to go beyond individualist conceptions tending to cut apart and reassemble writings in accord with their "belonging" to a single "author," a move which confers upon biography the power of defining an ideological unity,¹⁶ and which supposes that a thought always corresponds to a man (thus the interpretive architecture reiterating the same singularity in the three parts of the classical model: the man, the work, and the thought). Attempts have been made to identify overall mentalities of periods of history, for example in the *Weltanschauung* in Max Weber (a conception of the universe or a vision of the world), the scientific "paradigm" in Thomas Kuhn's work, the "unit idea" of A. O. Lovejoy,¹⁷ and so on. These standards of measure refer to what Lévi-Strauss called the society that is *thought* in opposition to the society that is *lived*. They tend to make the coherences "sanctioned" by a period spring forth—that is, the received coherences implied by what can be "perceived" or "thought" in a given time, the cultural systems that might provide the basis for periodization or temporal distinction.¹⁸ A classification of raw material operates thus in forming the basis of ideological beginnings and endings, or in establishing what Bachelard has called "epistemological ruptures."¹⁹

The ambiguities of these modes of interpretation have been vigorously criticized, most vehemently in the work of Michel Foucault.²⁰ They essentially depend upon the uncertain status, neither fish nor fowl, of "totalities" which are not legible on the surfaces of texts, but which lurk just beneath them, in the fashion of invisible realities that would uphold phenomena. How can we simply assume these unities, and how can they be spotted in the middle depths between consciousness and the economic realm? They assume the place of a "collective spirit" and, as such, retain the trace of ontologism. Their function is soon carried on by the hypothesis of a "collective unconscious." Not being subject to real control, these underlying regions can be extended, stretched, or shrunk at will. They have the breadth of phenomena to be grasped, "understood." Far more than an analytical instrument, in fact they represent the need of historians for such vague notions. They signify a necessity of the scientific operation, but not a reality which can be discerned in its object.

This approach declares that it is impossible to eliminate from the labor of historiography the ideologies that inform it. But in awarding them the

place of an object, in isolating them from socioeconomic structures, or in supposing, furthermore, that "ideas" function in the same fashion as these structures, parallel to them and on another level,²¹ the "history of ideas" can only find in the form of an "unconscious" this inconsistent reality in which it dreams of discovering an *autonomous* coherence. What it manifests is in fact the unconscious of historians, or rather, that of the group to which they belong. The will to define history ideologically is the concern of a social elite. It is based on a division between ideas and labor. It has been equally usual for this elite to neglect the relation between the sciences and their techniques, between historians' ideologies and their practices, between ideas and their limited fields of applicability or the conditions of their production within the socioeconomic conflicts of a society, and so on. It hardly seems surprising that this division, a resurgence or a reinforcement of an elitism already strongly marked by the end of the eighteenth century (among others, François Furet has often underscored this point), is symbolized by the juxtaposing a "history of ideas" with an "economic history."

The search for a coherence belonging to an ideological level thus refers to the *place* of those who develop it in the twentieth century. Gramsci has probably best indicated its virtual breadth when, in turning over the history of ideas, in its place he substitutes the history of "organic intellectuals," a particular group that he analyzes through the relation between its social position and the discourses it uses.²²

HISTORICAL PRACTICES AND SOCIAL PRAXIS

THE study of these models (whose listing and analysis could be extended) reveals two related problems: the evanescence of ideology as a reality to be explained, and its reintroduction as a reference in relation to which a historiography is elaborated. As an *object* of study, it seems to be eliminated—or always lacking—in current methods of research. But in contrast, it resurfaces as the *presupposition* of the models that characterize a type of explanation; it is implied by each system of interpretation, by the kinds of relevance it maintains, by the procedures that are proportioned to it, by the technical difficulties met in the process, and by the results obtained. To put it differently, those who *make history* today seem to have lost the means of grasping a statement of meaning as their work's objective, only to discover this statement in the process of their

very activity. What disappears from the product appears once again in production.

It could be that the term "ideology" no longer has enough strength to designate the form by which meaning enters into the historian's optic or "viewpoint." The current use of the word dates from the moment when language became objectified; or, reciprocally, when problems of meaning were shunted in the direction of their operation and posed in terms of historical choices folded into the scientific process. This was a fundamental revolution, to be sure, since it replaced the historical *given* by historiographical *process*. It transformed the search for meaning unveiled by observed reality into analysis of the options or organizations of meaning implied by interpretive operations.

This does not mean that history rejects reality and turns in on itself to take pleasure in examining its procedures. Rather, as we shall observe, it is that the *relation* to the real has changed. And if meaning cannot be apprehended in the form of a specific knowledge that would either be drawn from the real or might be added to it, it is because every "historical fact" results from a praxis, because it is already the sign of an act and therefore a statement of meaning. It results from procedures which have allowed a mode of comprehension to be articulated as a discourse of "facts."²³

Before defining this epistemological situation, which no longer permits meaning to be sought in the form of an ideology or a "given" of history, we would do well to recall the indications in current historiography. It is a matter of taking up the problem formerly posited in Raymond Aron's classical thesis.²⁴ Yet we cannot be satisfied with historical interpretation, as he was, at the sole level of implicit philosophy common to historians. There we would end with an infinite play of ideas relative to one another, a game reserved for an elite and associated with the protection of an established order. The organization of every historiography as a function of particular and diverse points of view refers to historical *acts*, to what establishes meaning and founds the sciences. In this respect, when history takes "doing" (or "making" history) into consideration, it simultaneously locates its origins in the actions which "produce history." Discourse can be dissociated today neither from the origins of its production nor from the political, economic, or religious praxis that can change societies and, at a given moment, make various kinds of scientific comprehension possible.

From Historical Prejudices to the Situations They Reveal

NOWADAYS the regress of time, and no doubt a greater epistemological reflection, help us discern the prejudices that have constrained much recent religious historiography. These appear in the choice of subjects and in the determination of the given objectives of the study. But in each instance these prejudices are linked to situations which rivet the historian to a particular position in relation to religious realities.

Thus the conflicts between church and state, or the debates concerning the free school or *école libre* and the lay school, the *école laïque*, have had as one of their effects that of favoring those religious phenomena offered in the form of an opposition to orthodoxies, and consequently of favoring the history of "heresies" rather than that of ecclesiastical institutions or of "orthodoxies." Less than personal intentions, sociocultural localizations thus inspire the interest and type of research.

For example, in the study of the beginnings of the sixteenth century, historians adhere to the notion of "pre-Reformation" instead of examining scholastic currents however dominant and equal in importance. "Humanism" is envisaged in terms of a rupture with the Christian tradition, instead of being seen as an extension of patristic thought, or placed among successive reformisms, or within the series of renaissances of antiquity throughout the Middle Ages.²⁵ In the same fashion, the religious stamp of the seventeenth century has been identified with Jansenism, prophetic "rebellion," while this is only one of many phenomena of the period. Many of the elements assumed to be characteristic of Jansenism are found within other spiritual currents.²⁶ And also, theological or exegetical writings have been virtually erased from the works of the great "savants" of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as vestiges of epochs long since over, esteemed as unworthy of interest to a progressive society.²⁷

Within the tissue of history, analysis therefore chooses "subjects" conforming to its place of observation. It is hardly surprising that studies aimed at correcting such edited views in order to promote the greater value of the writing of others originate not only from different ideological traditions, but also from *places* juxtaposed and often opposed to the former—for example, ecclesiastical settings or cultural Centers outside

the French university. Thus have arisen the notices of Father Bernard-Maitre and others, running all the way up to Massaut's great book on conservative theologians at the beginning of the sixteenth century;²⁸ the works of Father de Lubac or of Father Bouyer on the repetition of apostolic and patristic exegesis in Erasmian humanism;²⁹ those of Gilson on the traditional vocabulary taken up by Descartes;³⁰ those of Bremond, and so many since then, on a whole range of mystical currents in which Jansenism plays a role. The considerable importance of these studies does not attenuate their more or less discreetly apologetic character. Perhaps the richness of their content has even been made possible through this quality of rejoinder or of crusade, which has made them equivalent to a Trojan horse.

The mark of socioideological compartmentalization is especially visible in French religious historiography. This compartmentalization is a quality of French society that is often underlined. Scientific works have consequently shown the university's position on this map. They have favored the liberal Catholics over the "unbending" Catholics (except in René Rémond's work, the latter have been studied particularly by the English or the North Americans, who are not concerned in quite the same way by French problems);³¹ or they have given their preferences to scientific or social "modernism" rather than to "integrism," the recent doctrine upholding the totality of a system (in which Emile Poulat has just shown historical interest).³² Debates inherent to French society have induced historiographical rigidity and have also long induced the unlimited reproduction of formal distinctions, while at the same time a new erudition was modifying its content.

This schematism has left as its effect a present reemployment of formerly opposed "sides"—Reform or Catholic, Jansenist or Jesuit, modernist or integrist, etc.—but turned them into partisan banners, less from personal conviction than for reasons of sociocultural situation. The former polemics unconsciously organized scientific research. The historians, notes Lucien Febvre, reached the point of "slipping under the cassock, the frock, or under the robe of their forebears, without noticing that these were the habits of controversists or of preachers each arguing for his own cause."³³

A silence about certain problems remains as a trace of this recent past. It even seeps into magisterial studies on classical society and thought: thus Goubert's discretion with regard to theologies,³⁴ or even to religion³⁵ and the absence of reference to religious literature in the interpretation

that Foucault makes of the classical *epistémè*.³⁶ But inversely, there is the silence too of Father Cagnet on socioeconomic history in *La Spiritualité moderne*³⁷ or even, on the opposite side, in numerous works devoted to the temporal affairs of abbey churches, a silence on the social pressure that made so many clerical historians inattentive to the religious life of these abbeys.³⁸

The Transformation of Prejudices Into Objects of Study

DETACHED from conflicting situations which are now further and further away from us, we can now more easily discern their presence in these studies. Today we are already elsewhere. As the divisions that formerly organized both a period and its historiography are being eroded, their presence can be analyzed in the very work of their time. The disappearance of the period is the condition for such lucidity, but this seemingly better comprehension that is now ours is due to the fact that we have changed our position: our situation can allow us to be familiar with their situation in ways other than their own ways.

What makes the relativization of these former debates possible—and the recognition of the constraints they placed on scientific discourse—is the new position of religion in our own society. Quite far from being a force, a menace, a totality of constituted bodies and groups as was the case in the past, French Christianity is throwing off its social weight by freeing itself from recent compartmentalizations. It no longer establishes correct, vigorous, but closed categories within the nation. It is becoming a poorly defined and poorly understood region of French culture. A religious historiography is *able* hereafter to treat its subject as a new exoticism, similar to that which once attracted the ethnologist to the "savages" of the forest or to French sorcerers. Christianity had a stronger social existence when it was granted less place in *Le Temps* yesterday than in *Le Monde* today. Either everyone was silent, or people were partial when crucial issues involved partners, adversaries, or groups circumscribed within their own vitality. More is said today, now that Christianity is no longer a force and now that through necessity it has "opened" itself, "adapted," and conformed to a situation in which it becomes the object of an impartial curiosity and a distant sign of "values."³⁹ The renewal of religious history, therefore, does not mean a resurgence of Christianity, but rather the dilution of its institutions and doctrines within

the new structures of the nation—its passage from the state of being a resistant and opaque body to a state of mobility and transparency.

The prejudices of history or of historians disappear when the situation to which they referred is modified. The formerly living organization of a society invested within their point of view is changed into a *past* that can be placed under observation. Its status is transformed: no longer being present within authors as the frame of reference of their thought, it is now situated within the object that we, as new authors, have to render thinkable. As the function of an *other* situation, from now on it is possible to study our predecessors' modes of comprehension as prejudices, or simply as the givens of a period; we can sketch their relations with other elements of the same era, and write their historiography into the history that is the object of our own historiography.⁴⁰

Within this approach, the modes of comprehension that belonged to former historiography are located in the same position held by Christian ideologies or beliefs. The latter simply represent the traversing of a greater distance from the conviction that had furnished a past with its principles of intelligibility, and which today must be understood according to other frames of reference. The gap between these two positions points to the very problem of historiographical work: the relation between the "meaning" which has become an object, and the "meaning" which today allows it to be understood as such.

Now whenever we seek the "historical meaning" of an ideology or of an event, not only do we encounter methods, ideas, or styles of understanding, but also the society to which the definition of what has "meaning" is always referable. If, therefore, we face a historical function specifying the ceaseless confrontation between a past and a present—that is, between what had organized life or thought and what allows it to be thought nowadays—there exists an *infinite series of "historical meanings."* Religious belief offers only an extreme case of the relation between two systems of understanding across the passage from a society still religious (that of the sixteenth century, for example) to another society, our own, in which the conditions of thought have become secularized.

HISTORY, DISCOURSE, AND REALITY

Two Positions of the Real

NOW if we recapitulate these givens, the situation of the historiographer makes study of the real appear in two quite different positions within the scientific process: the real insofar as it is the *known* (what the historian studies, understands, or "brings to life" from a past society), and the real insofar as it is entangled within the scientific operations (the present society, to which the historians' problematics, their procedures, modes of comprehension, and finally a practice of meaning are referable). On the one hand, the real is the result of analysis, while on the other, it is its postulate. Neither of these two forms of reality can be eliminated or reduced to the other. Historical science takes hold precisely in their relation to one another, and its proper objective is developing this relation into a discourse.

Certainly, depending upon the periods or the groups, history is mobilized in favor of one over the other of its two focuses. There are in effect two types of history, according to which one of these positions of the real is chosen as the center of attention. Even if hybrids of these two types are more prevalent than the pure cases, the types can be easily recognized. One type of history ponders what is comprehensible and what are the conditions of understanding; the other claims to reencounter lived experience, exhumed by virtue of a knowledge of the past.

The first of these problematics examines history's capacity to render thinkable the documents which the historian inventories. It yields to the necessity of working out models which allow series of documents to be composed and understood: economic models, cultural models, and the like. This perspective—more and more common today—brings historians back to the methodological hypotheses of their work, to their revision by means of pluridisciplinary exchanges, to principles of intelligibility that might produce relevance and even "facts," and finally, back to the their epistemological situation, present in all research characteristic of the society in which they are working.⁴¹

The other tendency valorizes the relation the historian keeps with a lived experience, that is, with the possibility of resuscitating or "reviving" a past. It would like to restore the forgotten and to meet again men of

the past amidst the traces they have left. It also implies a particular literary genre, narrative, while the first approach, much less descriptive, prefers to compare series that make different types of methods emerge.

Between these two forms there is tension, but not opposition. Historians are in an unstable position. If they award priority to an "objective" result, if they aim to posit the reality of a former society in their discourse and animate forgotten figures, they nonetheless recognize in their recomposition the orders and effects of their own work. The discourse destined to express what is *other* remains *their* discourse and the mirror of their own labors. Inversely, when they refer to their own practices and examine their postulates in order to innovate, therein historians discover constraints originating well before their own present, dating back to former organizations of which their work is a symptom, not a cause. Just as the "model" of religious sociology implies, among other things, the new status of practice or of knowledge in the seventeenth century, so do current methods—erased as events and transformed into codes or problematic issues of research—bear evidence of former structurings and forgotten histories. Thus founded on the rupture between a past that is its object, and a present that is the place of its practice, history endlessly finds the present in its object and the past in its practice. Inhabited by the uncanniness that it seeks, history imposes its law upon the faraway places that it conquers when it fosters the illusion that it is bringing them back to life.

The In-Between, the Situation of History, and the Problem of the Real

IN the realm of history, an endless labor of differentiation (among events, periods, data or series, and so on) forms the condition of all relating of elements which have been distinguished—and hence of their comprehension. But this labor is based on the difference between a present and a past. Everywhere it presupposes the act of advancing an innovation by dissociating itself from a tradition in order to consider this tradition as an object of knowledge. The decisive break in any given science (exclusion is always necessary for rigor to be instituted) assumes in history the form of an originary *limit* which founds a reality as "past." This is clarified in the techniques proportioned to the task of "making history." Now this gap seems to be negated by the operation that establishes it, since this "past" returns in historiographical practice. The dead souls resurge, within

the work whose postulate was their disappearance and the possibility of analyzing them as an object of investigation.

The status of this necessary yet denied limit characterizes history as a "human" science. It is human, indeed, not insofar as it declares that man is its object, but because its practice reinvests in the "subject" of science what had been distinguished as its "object." Its functioning refers back and forth, from the one to the other, the two poles of the "real." The productive *activity* and the period *known* distort each other. The gap that had placed between them an urgency inspiring scientific investigation (and the origin of its "objectivity") begins to waver. It is thrown topsy-turvy, it is displaced, it moves forward. This movement is precisely due to the fact that this gap was posited, *and* that now it cannot be maintained.

In the course of the movement displacing the terms of the initial relation, this relation itself becomes the site of the scientific operation. But it is a site whose mutations, like a buoy floating on the sea, follow the more vast movements of societies, their economic and political revolutions, complex networks of influence among generations or classes, and so forth. The scientific relation reproduces the labor which, for some groups, assures domination to the extent of making others the objects they possess; but it also attests to the industry of the dead who, through a sort of kinetic energy, are silently perpetuated through the survival of former structures, "continuing," as Marx says, to live their "vegetative life" (*Fortvegetation*).⁴²

Historians escape neither from these latencies nor from the weight of an endlessly present past (an inertia that traditionalists call "continuity" before declaring it to be "truth" of history). And no longer can historians make abstractions out of the distancings and the exclusions that define the period or the social category to which they belong. In their labors, occult carryovers and innovative ruptures are combined. History demonstrates this all the more as it takes for its task the distinguishing of the one from the other.⁴³ The fragile and necessary boundary between a past object and a current praxis begins to waver, as soon as the fictive postulate of a *given* that is to be understood is replaced by the study of an *operation* always affected by determinisms, always having to be taken up, always depending on the place where it occurs in a society, and specified, however, by a problem, methods, and a function which are its own.

Here, then, history is played along the margins which join a society with its past and with the very act of separating itself from that past. It takes place along these lines which trace the figure of a current time by

dividing it from its other, but which the return of the past is continually modifying or blurring. As in the paintings of Miró, the artist's line, which draws differences with contours and makes a writing possible (a discourse and a "historicization"), is crisscrossed by a movement running contrary to it. It is the vibration of limits. The relation that organizes history is a changing rapport, of which neither of its two terms can be the stable point of reference.

The Relation with the Other

THIS fundamental situation is revealed today in many ways which concern the form or content of historiography. For example, the analysis of a brief or long socioeconomic or cultural period is preceded in the works of history by a "preface" in which the historian speaks of the course of his research. The book, made of two uneven but symbolic halves, joins to the history of a past the itinerary of a procedure. Already in 1928 Lucien Febvre inaugurated his study of Luther with the examination of his own situation as historian within the series of previous works dedicated to his object. He was inscribing himself within the evolution of a present-history, at the same time that he was placing Luther within an analogous but much older series. Since Febvre, historians not only specify their points of view, but also the movement they have made or the transformation that has been realized in their methods and inquiries. Thus Pierre Vilar and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, whose works dominate current historiography, juxtapose the drawing of a methodological curve of their undertaking with that of the structural transformations of Catalonia or of Languedoc over a period of four centuries.⁴⁴ The truth of history resides in this "in-between" on which a work marks its limits, without being able to create an object taking the place of this relation. In the case of Marc Soriano, analysis of Perrault's fairy tales becomes itself the narrative or avowal of an investigation, in such a way that the object of his research—fragmented as it is by diverse methodological inquiries—finds its unity in the operation where the actions of the author and the resistances of the material are being combined endlessly.⁴⁵

With this internal tension that is the mechanism of historical explanation, we must align another no less striking aspect of current research: the confrontation between an interpretive method and its other, or, more precisely, the manifestation of the relation that a mode of comprehension holds with the incomprehensible dimensions that it "brings forth." For

example, the immense cultural erudition of Alphonse Dupront always extracts a "panic" from history, a sacred and savage depth. If sometimes this "collective spirit of panic," this originary drive, or this opaque neutral element of a "collective mentality" assumes the shapes of a referent, of a meaning, or of the ground of history, it is by dint of a sort of fiction based on Jung's and Otto's more questionable views. For in reality, this "panic" is the name that prodigiously extensive knowledge assigns to its own limits, to the unknown that it reveals and meets as it advances, to the aporia of knowledge brought out by the progress of a science. A depth of history is therefore designated (and not, as in the case elsewhere, eliminated) but by an "irrational" proportioned to the investigation, which positions itself under the sign of a knowledge of ideas and cultural forms. "The nonhistorical element," notes Dupront, "is indispensable for the historical one."⁴⁶

Pierre Vilar offers an analogous phenomenon: the very existence of his subject matter—Catalonia—is the enigma that is brought forth by his rigorous socioeconomic analysis. How does Catalonia establish itself as a unity in its own right? How does this unity change with the equally problematic manifestation of the "Spanish" unity? With these questions Vilar's remarkable proof—which converts economic theory into historical analysis in order to apprehend a "deep history" from economic variation—meets its other. It opens onto enigmas, such as "the formations of groups with a strong communal conscience" and the nature of "regional" or national "personality" and of a "political will."⁴⁷ The rigor of his interpretation reveals, as its remainder or as that which *becomes* incomprehensible, the unity of consciousness whose conditions and functions have nonetheless been so vigorously enlightened.

It is hardly surprising that the problem opened by the *other* erupting into scientific process also appears in its object. Research no longer merely seeks successful comprehension. It returns to things that it cannot understand. It measures what it loses by fortifying its needs and methods. Michel Foucault's *Madness and Civilization* delimits the time when an augmented scientific sensibility was confronted by zones that it left as its remainder or unintelligible underside.⁴⁸ As it progresses, the science of history witnesses the enlargement of the silent areas of its lacunae. This occurs at the same moment when other sciences are taking an inventory of the harm born of their success. Michel Foucault's book is a sign of this interrogation. It is expressed through an object *lost* by the work of history, an object that is nonetheless impossible to suppress: namely,

madness, as it is constituted by the exclusions of reason. Certainly, after this, the author's attempt to restore to madness its own language can only end in failure and be contradictory; it vacillates between the "redemption" of madness within a new kind of understanding, and the infinite enlargement of the abstract sign—"madness"—fated to designate the empty space that can never be filled through the work of historiography.⁴⁹ But there remains this abyss opened before scientific reason in the form of objects that it winds around without reaching. Studies devoted to sorcery, to miracles, to madness, to "primitive" culture, and so forth, have multiplied since the publication of Foucault's work. They designate a face-off whose disquieting uncanniness ethnology and psychoanalysis have allowed history to clarify. Scientific "reason" is indissolubly wedded to the reality that it meets again as its shadow and its other, at the very moment when it is excluding it.

Such a mobilization of historiography on the limits which both specify and furnish its discourse with relativity can also be located in the more epistemological form of works dedicated to the modes of *differentiation* among sciences. Here too, Michel Foucault is eminently important. Taking up former studies, especially those of Canguilhem, he shows how history is classified (and defined) in relation to a synchronic combination of discourses which are mutually contradistinguished and referable to common laws of differentiation.⁵⁰ Whatever the author's own position, his work both describes and engenders the movement which leads history to become a *work on the margins*: to situate itself through its relation to other discourses, to place discursivity in its relation to an eliminated other, to measure results in relation to the objects that escape its grasp; but also to establish continuities by isolating series, to analyze methods closely by distinguishing distinct objects which they grasp at once in a single fact, to revise and to compare the different periodizations that various types of analysis bring forth, and so forth. Hereafter the "problem is no longer of tradition and trace, but of delimitation and margins."

We can speak more appropriately of "limit" or of "difference" than of "discontinuity" (a far too ambiguous term, because it seems to postulate evidence of a rift in reality). From now on we must say with Foucault that the limit becomes "at once the instrument and the object of study."⁵¹ As an operative concept of historiographical practice, it is both the working apparatus and the area of methodological investigation.

The Discourse of History

ONE step further, and history will be envisaged as *a text* organizing units of meaning and subjecting them to transformations whose rules can be determined. In effect, if historiography can have recourse to semiotic procedures in order to renew its practices, it likewise offers itself to these procedures as an object of study, inasmuch as it makes up a story or a discourse of its own.

Up to now, it may be that essays written on history from this perspective have not been entirely convincing, to the extent that they have posited the univocality of the genre of the "historical" over the ages. This is the case for Roland Barthes when he wonders whether "the narration of past events submitted to . . . the sanction of historical 'science,' placed under the imperious guarantee of the 'real,' justified by principles of 'rational' exposition . . . truly differs, through indubitable relevance, or through some specific trait, from imaginary narrative such as one finds in the epic, the novel, and the drama."⁵² To seek an answer to this question solely through the examination of some "classical" historians—Herodotus, Machiavelli, Bossuet, and Michelet—isn't this to take too quickly for granted the homology among these discourses? To give too easily the examples nearest to narrative but quite distant from current research? To assume the discourse apart from the actions that establish it in a specific relation with the (past) reality from which it is distinguished? And consequently, not to account for successive modes of this relation? And finally, doesn't this deny the current movement that makes of scientific discourse the exposition of the conditions of its production, instead of the "narrative of past events"?

It still happens that throughout these "classic" works, the status of a "historical" writing seems to be defined by a combination of *meanings* articulated and advanced only in the name of *facts*. But indeed for Barthes (if we leave the details of his linguistic argument aside), the "facts" about which history speaks will function as indications. Throughout the relations established among facts, or the elevation of certain of them to the value of symptoms of a whole period, or the "lesson" (moral or political) which organizes the discourse as a whole, in every history a process of meaning can be found which "always aims at 'fulfilling' the meaning of History": "Historians are those who assemble not so much facts as sig-

nifiers."⁵³ They seem to tell of facts while, in effect, they express meanings which moreover refer what is *noted* (what historians hold to be relevant) to a conception of *whatever is notable*. The *signified* of historical discourse is made from ideological or imaginary structures; but they are affected by a referent outside of the discourse that is inaccessible in itself. Barthes labels this artifice proper to historiographical discourse the "realistic effect"; its task is to hide under the fiction of a "realism" a way of positing meaning, necessarily within language. "Historical discourse does not follow the real; rather, it only signifies it, endlessly reiterating that *it happened*, but without having this assertion be anything other than the obvious underside of all historical narrative."⁵⁴

In evoking the "prestige of *it happened*" as regards history, Barthes places it in direct relation with current developments in the realistic novel, in the diary, in bits of news, museums, photography, documentaries, and so on. All of these discourses are actually built over a lost (and past) *real*; inside the closure of a text, in the form of a relic, they reintroduce the real that was exiled from language. It appears that words can no longer be accredited with an effective relation with the things they designate; they are especially adept at formulating meanings, the less they are restricted to adhering to the real. Rather than representing a return to the real, "realism" expresses the release of a population of words that until now had been attached to well-defined facts and that, from this point on, become useful for the production of legends or fictions. The vocabulary of the "real" penetrates all verbal matter that can be organized into a statement concerning what can be thought or what is thought. This vocabulary no longer has the privilege of being the outcrop of facts, of allowing a grounding Reality to emerge through them, or of being sanctified with the power of expressing both the "thing itself" and the Meaning which would infuse it.

From this standpoint it is true to say as Barthes does that "the sign of History has since become less the real than the intelligible."⁵⁵ But we are not dealing with just any kind of intelligibility. "This erasure of narrative in current historical science" attests to the priority accorded by this science to the conditions in which it elaborates "what can be thought"—this being the sense of the whole structuralist movement. And in the field of history, this analysis which bears on the methods—that is, on the production of meaning—cannot be dissociated from its site and from an object. Through its procedures, the site is the present act of this very production and the situation that currently makes it possible by virtue of

determining it; the object is the set of conditions in which such and such a society could ascribe meaning to itself through a work that has its own determinations. History is not an epistemological criticism. It remains always a narrative. History tells of its own work and, simultaneously, of the work which can be read in a past time. Besides, history understands the latter only as it elucidates its own productive activity, and reciprocally, it understands its own work through the set of productions, and the succession of productions, of which this history is itself an effect.

If therefore the story of "what happened" disappears from scientific history (in order, in contrast, to appear in popular history), or if the narrative of facts takes on the allure of a "fiction" belonging to a given type of discourse, we cannot conclude that the reference to the real is obliterated. This reference has instead been somewhat displaced. It is no longer immediately given by narrated or "reconstituted" objects. It is implied by the creation of "models" (destined to make objects "thinkable") proportioned to practices through their confrontation with what resists them, limits them, and makes appeal to other models; finally, through the clarification of what has made this activity possible, by inserting it within a particular (or historical) economy of social production.

In this respect we can agree with A. J. Greimas, who states that with respect to models that can take cognizance of the functioning of a language, or if one prefers, with respect to the analysis of *possible* combinations in the organization and transformation of a finite number of elements, the historical element appears in the structuralist formulation "as a limitation of the possibilities of its manifestation." "Just as the atomic structure," he remarks, "is conceived easily as a combinatory whose currently manifest universe is only a partial realization, so then the semantic structure, imagined according to a comparable model, remains open and becomes closed only through history."⁵⁶

The *limit* is found in the center of historical science, designating the other of reason, or of the possible. In Greimas' figure the real appears once again within science. It might be, moreover, that the distinction between "exact" and "human" sciences no longer passes through a difference in formalization or in the rigor of proof, but rather tends to separate disciplines according to the place that the one group of sciences accords to the *possible*, and the other accords to the *limit*. In any case there is no doubt that bound to the ethnologist's or the historian's task is a fascination with limits, or what is nearly identical, with the other.

Yet the limit is not only that which historical work constantly con-

fronts, organized as it is by the will to make all things thinkable. It also keeps in view the fact that every interpretive procedure has had to be *established* in order to define the procedures suited to a mode of comprehension. A new determination of "what can be thought" presupposes those economic or sociocultural situations that are its conditions of possibility. All production of meaning admits to an event that took place and that permitted it to be accomplished. Even exact sciences are led to exhume their relation to a history, that is, the problem of the relation between their discourse and what it implies without stating it—between a coherence and a genesis. In historical discourse, investigation of the real therefore comes back, not only with the necessary connections between conditions of possibility and their limitations, or between the universals of discourse and the particularity attached to facts (whatever their delimitation may be),⁵⁷ but in the form of the *origin postulated* by the development of a mode of "the thinkable." Scientific practice is based on a social praxis independent of knowledge. The space of discourse refers to a temporality different from that which organizes meaning according to the classifying rules of verb tenses. The activity that produces meaning and establishes an intelligibility of the past is also the symptom of an activity *endured*, the result of events and structurings that it changes into objects capable of being thought, the representation of an evanescent order of genesis.

HISTORY AS MYTH

HISTORY would fall to ruins without the key to the vault of its entire architecture: that is, without the connection between the act that it promotes and the society that it reflects; the rupture that is constantly debated between a past and a present; the double status of the object that is a "realistic effect" in the text and the unspoken element implied by the closure of the discourse. If history leaves its proper place—the *limit* that it posits and receives—it is broken asunder, to become nothing more than a fiction (the narrative of what happened) or an epistemological reflection (the elucidation of its own working laws). But it is neither the legend to which popularization reduces it, nor the criteriology that would make of it merely the critical analysis of its procedures. It plays between them, on the margin that separates these two reductions, like Charlie Chaplin at the end of *The Pilgrim*, running along the Mexican border

between two countries both chasing him in turn, with his zigzags marking both their difference and the seam joining them.

Also thrown back either toward their present or toward a past, historians experiment with a praxis that is inextricably both theirs and that of the other (another period, or the society that determines them as they are today). They work through the very ambiguity that designates the names of the discipline, *Historie* and *Geschichte*, an ambiguity ultimately laden with meaning. In effect, historical science cannot entirely detach its practice from what it apprehends to be its object. It assumes its endless task to be the refinement of successive styles of this articulation.

This is probably why history has taken up "primitive" myths or ancient theologies ever since Western civilization has become secular and ever since it has defined itself, in a political, social, or scientific mode, by a praxis which engages its relations equally with itself and other societies. The tale of this relation of exclusion and fascination, of domination or of communication with the *other* (a position filled in turn by a neighboring space or by a future) allows our society to tell its own story thanks to history. It functions as foreign civilizations used to, or still do, telling tales of cosmogonic struggles confronting a present time with an origin.

Such localization of myth does not appear merely with the movement that leads sciences, whether "exact" or "human," back to their history (allowing scientists to be situated within a social totality);⁵⁸ or with the importance of the vulgarization of history (which makes thinkable the relation of an order with its changes, or which exorcises it in the tone of "things have always been that way"); or yet with the thousand and one resurgences of the genial identification, bound together by Micheler, between the history and the autobiography of a nation, of a people, or of a party. History has become our myth for the more fundamental reasons summarized in the preceding pages.

An Identity Through a Differentiation

HISTORICAL discourse makes a *social identity* explicit, not so much in the way it is "given" or held as stable, as in the ways it is *differentiated* from a former period or another society. It presupposes the rupture that changes a tradition into a past object, in the manner in which the history of the ancien régime implies the Revolution.⁵⁹ But this relation with an origin, either near or distant, from which a society separates itself without being able to eliminate it, is what historians analyze. They make this re-

lation the locus of their science. In a text that still has the shape of a narrative, they link the practice of a new intelligibility to the remainders of different pasts (which survive not only in documents but also in the particular "archive" which is the historical work itself).

If, in one respect, the function of history expresses the position of one generation in relation to preceding ones by stating, "I can't be that," it always affects the statement of a no less dangerous complement, forcing a society to confess, "I am other than what I would wish to be, and I am determined by what I deny." It attests to an autonomy and a dependence whose proportions vary according to the social settings and political situations in which they are elaborated. In the form of a "labor" immanent to human development, it occupies the place of the myths by means of which a society has represented its ambiguous relations with its origins and, through a violent history of Beginnings, its relations with itself.

The Origin of Language: The Living and the Dead

DESPITE its introductions or its prefaces in the first person (in *Ichber-icht*) which have the value of an introit and put forward an "in those days," thanks to a noted difference from the author's time of writing, history is a *discourse in the third person*. Battles, political struggle, or debates over salary are the subject-object, but, as Roland Barthes has written, "no one is there to assume responsibility for the statement."⁶⁰ Discourse about the past has the status of being the discourse of the dead. The object circulating in it is only the absent, while its meaning is to be a language shared by the narrator and his or her readers, in other words, by living beings. Whatever is expressed engages a group's communication with itself through this reference to an absent, third party that constitutes its past. The dead are the objective figure of an exchange among the living. They are the *statement* of the discourse which carries them as an object, but in the guise of an interlocution thrown outside of discourse, in the unsaid.

Through these combinations with an absent term, history becomes the myth of language. It manifests the very condition of discourse: *a death*. It is born in effect from the rupture that constitutes a past distinct from its current enterprise. Its work consists in creating the absent, in making signs scattered over the surface of current times become the traces of "historical" realities, missing indeed because they are other.

But the absent term is also the present form of the origin.⁶¹ Myth exists because, through history, language is confronted with its origins. Certainly in this case the confrontation assumes different poses: it is the relation of historical discourse with whatever period has been favored as an object of study within the linear succession of a chronology; or else it is the movement which refers this period to its more primitive time and endlessly traces it back to its imaginary "beginning," to a fictive but necessary caesura allowing us to travel back through periods of time and classify them, and so on. But a closer and more fundamental rapport is signified by this initial zero-degree, the rapport of every discourse with the death that makes it possible. The origin is inherent to discourse. It is precisely the topic about which nothing can be said. This discourse in its basic definition is *speech* articulated over what else *took place*; its own beginning is one which presupposes a *lost* object; its function is one of being, among human beings, the representation of a primitive scene that is effaced but is still an organizing force. Discourse is incessantly articulated over the death that it presupposes, but that the very practice of history constantly contradicts. For to speak of the dead means to deny death and almost to defy it. Therefore speech is said to "resuscitate" them. Here the word is literally a lure: history does not resuscitate anything. But the word evokes the function allocated to a discipline that deals with death as an object of knowledge and, in doing so, causes the production of an exchange among living souls.

Such is history. A play of life and death is sought in the calm telling of a tale, in the resurgence and denial of the origin, the unfolding of a dead past and result of a present practice. It reiterates, under another rule, the myths built upon a murder of an originary death and fashions out of language the forever-remnant trace of a beginning that is as impossible to recover as to forget.

Saying and Doing

HISTORY finally refers to a "making," a "doing," which is not only its own ("making history"), but also that of the society which specifies a certain scientific production. If it allows a common way of operating to find its own technical language, it refers to this social praxis as what allows a production of texts organized around a new intelligibility of the past.

This relation of discourse to a "doing" is internal to its object, since,

in one fashion or another, history always deals with tensions, webbings of conflicts, or plays of force. But it is also external to its object, insofar as modes of comprehension and types of discourse are determined by the greater sociocultural ensemble which defines the particular situation of history. Stable societies allow history to favor continuities and tend to confer the value of a human essence upon a solidly established order. In periods of movement or revolution, ruptures of individual or collective action become the principle of historical intelligibility. Yet this reference to the social organization of history's operating—mobilized by the development of a political order or by the foundation of new regimes—intervenes only indirectly in scientific analysis. It is introduced symbolically through a *topos* of intelligibility: depending upon the periods of historiography, it is the event, or it is the continuous series, which is the point of departure and the definition of the intelligible. A type of society reveals itself also through the mode in which the discursivity of "understanding" and the uncanniness of "what happens" are combined; for example, socioeconomic models will be preferred to biography, or the inverse.

As a mirror of the "doing" which defines a society today, historical discourse is its representation and its underside. It is not the sum—as if knowledge provided reality or made it accede to its highest degree! Such an inflation of knowledge is superannuated. The entire movement of contemporary epistemology in the field of the so-called human sciences contradicts this inflation and humiliates its consciousness. Historiographical discourse is only one more bill in a currency that is being devalued. After all, it is only paper. But it would be erroneous to toss it from an excess of favor into an excess of indignity. The text of history, which must always be taken up over and over again, doubles the doing both as its trace and as its interrogation. Articulated upon what it is not—the "stir and toss" of a society, but also scientific practice itself—the text runs the risk of stating a meaning that is symbolically combined with its doing. History is not a substitute for social praxis, but its fragile witness and necessary critique.

Dethroned from the place to which it had been elevated by philosophy, which in the time of the Enlightenment or of German idealism, had made it the last manifestation of the World Spirit, historiographical discourse probably exchanges the place of the king for that of the child in the tale, pointing to a truth that everyone feigns to overlook. Such also is the

position of myth, reserved for the festival which opens within daily labors the parenthesis of a truth. Without withdrawing anything from the functions underlined above, we do not have to neglect that which binds historical *saying* to social *doing*, without identifying the former with the latter: work is so reminded of its relation with death and with meaning; it situates genuine historiography in the direction of indiscreet questions that must be opened within the immense movement of praxis.

NOTES

1. Theology articulates the communal *act* of faith, and in its former definitions, it was the deepening of the experience itself.

2. In history, as in the totality of the human sciences, what Lévi-Strauss called the "testing of models" replaces the former methods of observation; determination of types of analysis wins over determination of the means or places of information. See Jean Viet, *Les Sciences de l'homme en France* (The Hague: Mouton, 1966), pp. 163–75.

3. Here, as in many other instances (consider "manifestation," "apparition"—and even "action"), a pressure of current language leads meaning to turn from the *act* to its *result*, from the active state of *doing* to the passive state of *being seen*, from a gesture to its image in a mirror. A growing rift between research and popularization cuts across both history and theology. Research takes the form of specific *steps* that are differentiated by their own procedures; but, in their popularization, history and theology become *objects* of knowledge or curiosity that are distributed to and imposed upon a public of consumers having less and less to do with production.

4. Many of the so-called theses of theology, it must be admitted, are simply literary analyses of an author and are hardly distinct from any other literary study except by dint of having a religious subject—as if describing the theological ideas contained in a work could be considered a way of "making theology."

5. Thus, in his great study *Chrétiens sans Eglise: La Conscience religieuse et le lien confessionnel au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), the Marxist Leszek Kolakowski wishes to take doctrinal and religious fact very seriously as such: "From the standpoint of a materialist interpretation of history, the irreducibility of religious phenomena can be recognized, even while we can admit to being able to explain them genetically through others. . . . We consider their specificity [that of "religious ideas"] understandable in the form of specificity in general, in taking account of the richer whole that is the totality of the social needs of a period in all their interrelations" (pp. 49 and 51). On the methodological problems advanced by the work, see Robert Mandrou, "Mysticism et méthode marxiste," in *Politique aujourd'hui* (February 1970), pp. 51ff., and my *L'Absent de l'histoire* (Paris: Mame, 1973), pp. 109–15.

6. See Jean Orcibal, *Les Origines du jansénisme*, 5 vols. (Paris: Vrin, 1947–1962); Lucien Goldmann, *Le Dieu caché* (Paris: Gallimard, 1956), available in English as *The Hidden God* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977); and my “De Saint-Cyran au jansénisme,” *Christus* (1963), 10:399–417.

7. On this subject see Edgar Magnus Carlson, *The Reinterpretations of Luther* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1948); J. V. M. Pollet, “Interprétation de Luther dans l’Allemagne contemporaine,” *Revue des sciences religieuses* (1953), pp. 147–61; H. J. Grimm, “Luther Research Since 1920,” *Journal of Modern History* (June 1960) vol. 32; R. H. Bainton, “Interpretations of the Reformation,” *American Historical Review* (October 1960), vol. 36; Jean Delumeau, *Naissance et affirmation de la Réforme* (Paris: PUF, 1965), especially pp. 281–300; or the notes by R. Stauffer and T. Süß in the *Bulletin de la Société de l’histoire du protestantisme français* (1967), 113:313–46 and 405ff.

8. See “Henri Bremond, historien d’une absence,” in my *Absent de l’histoire*, pp. 73–108.

9. Unfortunately Van Gennep (who died in 1956) had not yet been the subject of the collective study Pierre Marot called for in his “Homage to Arnold Van Gennep,” in *Arts et traditions populaires* (1957), 5:113ff. Since that time the lacuna has been filled by Nicole Belmont, in *Arnold Van Gennep* (Paris: Payot, 1974).

10. On the work of Gabriel Le Bras, see the studies of Henri Desroches in the *Revue d’histoire et de philosophie religieuse* (1954), 2:128–58, and François Isambert, in the *Cahiers internationaux de sociologie* (1956), 16:149–69.

11. Le Bras’ first article on “La Pratique religieuse en France” took as its object “the popular life of Catholicism”; for its model, “the folklorist”; and as its point of departure, “the planning of investigation proposed by M. Saintyves.” It was published in the *Revue de folklore français* (1933), 4:193–206.

12. In his *Introduction à l’histoire de la pratique religieuse en France* (Paris: PUF, 1945), Gabriel Le Bras posits the problem of the relation between a single practice and plural beliefs (1:116–20), but for him this plural designates “faith.” Reacting against the overabundance of studies dedicated to doctrines (see his article of 1933), he short-circuits the ideologies in order to note the enigma of the relation between the practice (i.e., the sociological, the “visible” as he puts it) and the beliefs (for him this is not a sociological concept, but the invisible, the “flame” or “the grace of inner illumination”). Little by little he nuances this division, a product of the theological distinction between nature and the supernatural, at the same time that he has less and less confidence in the practice (the term disappears from the title given to the new edition of his *Introduction* in 1956). To this second evolution Isambert dedicated the article noted above, “Développement et dépassement de l’étude de la pratique religieuse chez G. Le Bras.”

13. Thus from obscurity René Tavenaux, in *Le jansénisme en Lorraine, 1640–1789* (Paris: Vrin, 1960), derives what he calls “the networks of the transmission of thought.” In reality, what he brings to light are rifts, polarizations (first Parisian and then Dutch), unexpected combinations (e.g., the reemployment of the monastic bastions of Saint-Vanne in this ensemble), etc., which characterize a

complex social unity. “Thought” allows him to establish a very delicate sociology of a clerical group.

14. It is hardly surprising that this current is born of a widening gap in the history of sciences. See, for example, Edwin Arthur Burtt, *The Metaphysics of Modern Physical Science* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1925); H. A. Smith, *A History of Modern Culture* (New York, 1930–1934); A. Wolf, *History of Science, Technology, and Philosophy in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (London: Allen, 1935); and A. R. Hall, *The Scientific Revolution, 1500–1800* (London: Longmans, 1954).

15. In *Geistesgeschichte* the notion of *Zeitgeist* has acquired a meaning which almost inverts its origins. Central among the German revolutionaries at the crossroads of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Henning, Rebmann, Niethammer, Arndt, especially in his *Spirit of the Time* in 1806, or Hardenberg, etc.), it designates an irresistible force whose advance throws all institutional obstacles topsy-turvy. It is in this sense that Hegel takes it up, and that in 1829 it is criticized by Schlegel as indeterminate and subversive, in *Philosophie der Geschichte* (1829), 2:18. See Jacques d’Hondt, *Hegel, philosophe de l’histoire vivante* (Paris: PUF, 1966), pp. 211–16. Since that time the *Zeitgeist* has to the contrary defined an established order or the static coherence of a mentality. It is the significant trace of a “liberal” and “ideological” thought which then confronts Marxism.

16. See for example V. P. Zoubov, “L’Histoire de la science et la biographie des savants,” *Kwart. Hist. Nauki* (1962), 6:29–42.

17. Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936).

18. On the French “history of mentalities,” see especially Georges Duby, *L’Histoire et ses méthodes* (Paris: Gallimard-Pléiade, 1961), pp. 937–66. But reference must be made to historical works more than to theoretical presentations: those of Georges Duby or Jacques Le Goff to be sure, but also Franco Venturi’s remarkably lucid study “L’Illuminismo nel settecento europeo,” in *Rapports of the 11th International Congress of Historical Sciences* (Stockholm), Uppsala, Almqvist (1960), 4:106–35. In historiography of the “modern” period, in the same way that the seventeenth century is at once the object and the archeology of an analysis of practices, the eighteenth century is both object and archeology for a history of ideas. In the eighteenth century, for example with the “Students of Man,” the relation between the man of the “Enlightenment” and the popular man, between the elite-subject and the population-object of science, is formed. See Sergio Moravia, *La Scienza dell’uomo nel settecento* (Bari: Laterza, 1970).

19. Gaston Bachelard, *Le Rationalisme appliqué* (Paris: PUF, 1949), pp. 104–5.

20. See Michel Foucault, *L’Archéologie du savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), pp. 29–101; in English, *The Archeology of Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon, 1972), pp. 21–76.

21. This problem of parallelism is evident all the while that, at least in the case of Georges Duby, the historian is interested in literature as the “transposition” or the “reflection” of the group which is the real object of his study. It would

be necessary to measure the effects proper to this "transposition." Literary expression is not the transparency of social life, but its complement and often its inversion (to the degree where it expresses what is perceived as "lacking").

22. In *Quaderni del carcere* (Turin: Einaudi, 1975), vol. 3, Antonio Gramsci notes, "As these diverse categories of traditional intellectuals experience, with an *esprit de corps*, the feeling of their uninterrupted historical continuity and of their qualification, they consider themselves autonomous and independent of the dominant social group. This self-positioning is not without broad consequences in the political and ideological field: all idealist philosophy can be easily attached to this position taken by the social complex of intellectuals" (p. 1515).

23. The evolution of historiography concerning the notion of "historical fact" can be measured by comparing Henri-Irénée Marrou's synthesis ("Qu'est-ce qu'un fait historique?" in Duby, *L'Histoire et ses méthodes*, pp. 1494-1500) and the problems advanced by François Furet in Jacques Le Goff and Pierre Nora, eds., *Faire de l'histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), 1:42-61.

24. Raymond Aron, *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire: Essai sur les limites de l'objectivité historique* (Paris: Vrin, 1938). The same theses are repeated in *Les Dimensions de la conscience historique* (Paris: Plon, 1961).

25. See the magisterial work of A. Renaudet, *Préforme et humanisme à Paris pendant les premières guerres d'Italie, 1494-1517* (Geneva: Droz, 1916), and its many descendants.

26. A university tradition which responds to the widespread rejection of Jansenism by academic teaching spreads all the way up through the middle of the nineteenth century, and is maintained even in Antoine Adam's vigorous synthesis *Du mysticisme à la révolte: Les Jansénistes du XVII^e siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 1968).

27. One index of this among many is the place accorded to Newton's theological writings—see *Theological Manuscripts*, Herbert McLachlan, ed. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1950)—within the interpretation of his work. Alexandre Koyré especially has modified this perspective; see his *De monde clos à l'univers infini* (Paris: PUF, 1961), in English, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe* (New York: Harper, 1958). Today it is even emphasized that Western science has developed as a function of theological debates and that it has for example an intrinsic bond with the dogma of the Incarnation; see Alexandre Koyré, "L'Origine chrétienne de la science moderne," in *Mélanges Alexandre Koyré* (Paris: Hermann, 1964), 2:295-306.

28. See Henri Bernard-Maitre, "Les 'Théologastres' de l'Université de Paris au temps d'Erasmus et de Rabelais," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* (1965), 27:248-64; and Jean-Pierre Massaut and Josse Clichtove, *L'Humanisme et la réforme du clergé* (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1968).

29. See Louis Bouyer, *Autour d'Erasmus: Etudes sur le christianisme des humanistes catholiques* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1955), in English, *Erasmus and His Times* (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1954); and Henri de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale* (Paris: Aubier, 1964), vol. 4.

30. See Etienne Gilson, *Etudes sur le rôle de la pensée médiévale dans la formation du système cartésien* (Paris: Vrin, 1951).

31. See René Rémond, *La Droite en France de 1815 à nos jours* (Paris: Aubier, 1954). The Anglo-American perspective is supplied by Richard Griffiths in his *Reactionary Revolution* (London: Constable, 1966) and by Eugen Weber, *L'Action française* (Paris: Stock, 1962), among others.

32. See Emile Poulat, *Intégrisme et catholicisme intégral* (Paris: Casterman, 1969), and the subsequent debate with Paul Droulers in *Archives de Sociologie des Religions* (1969), 28:131-52.

33. Lucien Febvre, *Au cœur religieux du XVI^e siècle* (Paris: Sevpen, 1957), p. 146.

34. See Pierre Goubert, *Beauvais et le Beauvaisis de 1600 à 1730* (Paris: Sevpen, 1960).

35. See Pierre Goubert, *L'Ancien Régime* (Paris: Colin, 1969), vol. 1; available in English as *The Ancien Régime* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1973).

36. See Michel Foucault, *Les Mots et les choses* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), chapters 3-6; available in English as *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage, 1970).

37. See L. Cognet, *La Spiritualité moderne* (Paris: Aubier, 1966), and M. Venard's book review in *Revue d'Histoire de l'Eglise de France* (1968), 54:101-3.

38. See the remarks by D. Julia, P. Levillain, D. Nordman, and A. Vauchez, "Réflexions sur l'historiographie française contemporaine," *Recherches et débats* (1964), 47:79-94.

39. On the ethnological or folkloric interest through which religion becomes an object of study, and which explains at once the nature of a new "curiosity" and the renewal of studies on ideologies (from now on held to be unbelievable, but symbolic of a meaning to be deciphered), see "Les Révolutions du croyable," in my *Culture au pluriel* (Paris: Union Générale d'Editions, "10/18," 1974), pp. 11-34.

40. Here the problem is one of knowing what event or what sociopolitical transformation makes possible for twentieth-century historiography an analysis analogous to that which R. Mousnier recently devoted to historians of the eighteenth century. But most probably the terms of the question ought to be inverted: a new scientific point of view is clearly one of the indices by which an "event" is expressed and located.

41. See in particular the new series of *Annales E. S. C.* (since 1969), or *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* (Boston: MIT Press, 1970).

42. Karl Marx, *Das Kapital* (Berlin, 1947), 1:7 (first preface); in English, *Capital* (New York: International Publishers, 1979).

43. Foucault has strongly underscored this point, in particular in *The Archeology of Knowledge*, pp. 8-9.

44. See Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Les Paysans de Languedoc* (Paris: Sevpen, 1966), 1:7-11, available in English as *The Peasants of Languedoc* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974); and especially Pierre Vilar, *La Catalogne dans l'Espagne moderne* (Paris: Sevpen, 1962), 1:11-38.

45. See Marc Soriano, *Les Contes de Perrault: Culture savante et traditions populaires* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969).

46. Alphonse Dupront, in *Revue de Synthèse*, nos. 37–39, p. 329. See also some particularly important studies, namely: "Lourdes: Perspectives d'une sociologie du sacré," *La Table ronde* (May 1958), 125:74–96; "Problèmes et méthodes d'une histoire de la psychologie collective," *Annales E. S. C.* (1961), 16:3–11; and "Formes de la culture des masses: De la doléance politique au pèlerinage panique (XVIIIe–XXe siècles)," in *Niveaux de culture et groupes sociaux* (The Hague: Mouton, 1968), pp. 149–67.

47. Vilar, *La Catalogne* preface, 1:36–37. The confrontation between cultural expression and economic structures is especially rich (because of the very object to be studied) in "Le Temps du Quichotte," *Europe* (January 1956), pp. 3–16; in "Les Primitifs espagnols de la pensée économique," *Mélanges Marcel Bataillon* (Bordeaux: Féret, 1962), pp. 261–84; or, from a more methodological standpoint, in "Marxisme et histoire, dans le développement des sciences humaines," *Studi storici* (1960), 1(5):1008–43.

48. See Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization* (New York: Pantheon, 1965), tr. of *Folie et déraison: Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique* (Paris: Plon, 1961; 2d. ed., Gallimard, 1972).

49. On this topic see Jacques Derrida's pointed remarks in "Cogito et histoire de la folie," in *L'Écriture et la différence* (Paris: Seuil, 1967), pp. 51–97; available in English as "Cogito and the History of Madness," in *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 1–63.

50. See Foucault, "The Discursive Regularities," in *The Archeology of Knowledge*, pp. 21–76.

51. *Ibid.*, pp. 5 and 8.

52. Roland Barthes, "Le Discours de l'histoire," *Social Science Information* (1967), 6(4):65–75; to be compared on the same question, with "L'effet de réel," *Communications* (1968), 11:84–90, and "L'Écriture de l'événement," *Communications* (1968), 12:108–13. [These essays are reprinted in *Le Bruissement de la Langue* (Paris: Seuil, 1984). See ch. 2, note 15 below. —TR.]

53. Barthes, "Le Discours de l'histoire," p. 65.

54. *Ibid.*, pp. 73–74.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 75. In the "referential illusion" of the real in "realism," Barthes discerns a new verisimilitude ("L'Effet de réel," p. 88). This "real" is the connotation of *what can be thought*.

56. A. J. Greimas, *Du sens: Essais sémiotiques* (Paris: Seuil, 1970), p. 111. See the entire chapter entitled "Histoire et structure," pp. 103–16.

57. A problem that is not without analogy to what the first philosophies of language had dealt with at the end of the Middle Ages. See J. Claude Piguët, "La Querelle des universaux et le problème contemporain du langage," *Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie* (1969), 19:392–411.

58. In "L'Histoire et l'unité des sciences de l'homme," *Annales E. S. C.* (1968), 23(2):233–40, Charles Morazé using this approach envisions the central role of history: it is because the relation between human sciences is transferred and is played out in history that the latter is "syncretic" and seems fragmented today by its adhesion to more and more divergent disciplines.

59. After having said "the preceding regime," as of November 1789 one speaks

of the "ancien régime." See Albert Soboul, *La Civilisation et la Révolution française* (Paris: Arthaud, 1970), 1:37, and Goubert's thoughts in *The Ancien Régime*, vol. 1, ch. 10.

60. Barthes, "Le Discours de l'histoire," p. 71.

61. This is said leaving aside the examination—sketched elsewhere—of the problems opened by the intervention of psychoanalysis in the field of history. See chapter 8, "What Freud Makes of History."