SCHOLARLY CONTROVERSY: FAREWELL TO THE WORKING CLASS?

Farewell to the Working Class?

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Abstract

By the early 1980s, the class-centered politics of the socialist tradition was in crisis. In this situation, leading commentators took apocalyptic tones. By the end of the 1980s, the Left remained deeply divided between the advocates of change ("New Times" required new politics) and the defenders of the faith (class politics could be practiced, *mutatis mutandis,* much as before). By the mid-1990s the former had mainly carried the day. We wish to present this contemporary transformation *not* as the "death of class," but as the passing of one particular *type* of class society, one marked by the process of working-class formation between the 1880s and 1940s and the resulting political alignment, reaching its apogee in the social democratic construction of the postwar settlement. As long-term changes in the economy combined with the attack on Keynesianism in the politics of recession from the mid-1970s, the unity of the working class ceased to be available in the old and well-tried way, as the natural ground of left-wing politics. While one dominant working-class collectivity went into decline (the classic male proletarians of mining, transportation, and manufacturing industry, with their associated forms of trade unionism and residential concentration), another slowly and unevenly materialized to take its place (predominantly female white-collar workers in services and all types of public employment). But the operative unity of this new working-class aggregation—its active agency as an organized political presence—is still very much in formation. To reclaim the political efficacy of the socialist tradition, some new vision of collective political agency will be needed, one imaginatively keyed to the emerging conditions of capitalist production and accumulation at the start of the twenty-first century. Class needs to be reshaped, reassembled, put back together again in political ways. To use a Gramscian adage: The old has been dying, but the new has yet to be born. Class *decomposition* is yet to be replaced by its opposite, the recomposition of class into a new and coherently shaped form.

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Picturing Class

Let's begin with two photographs, each on the jacket of a programmatic volume. The first book is *Bringing Class Back In: Contemporary and Historical Perspectives,* edited by Scott McNall, Rhonda Levine, and Rick Fantasia (Boulder, 1991); the second is the volume on *Class* in the *Oxford Readers,* edited by Patrick Joyce (Oxford, 1995). The imagery of the former refurbished a classical set of meanings at a time when "class" was already coming under fire—not only among historians, but also in the wider public sphere, as changes in the social world of production undermined the efficacy of class forms of understanding. This first photograph shows a crowd of workers who are clearly meant to be typical, attending a mass meeting, presumably for a strike or some other trade union event: They are cheerful, militant, proletarian, manual workers, all men. The second photograph shows a sour and haughty old lady looking out from the window of a first-class railway compartment in a British train: She is upper-class, privileged, and, from the hat she is wearing, possibly on the way to Ascot. The first photo displays the collective strength of the working class, a visual manifesto of class-political agency, an embodiment of class consciousness, a celebration of the mass. The second image conveys a very different idea—not the collective strength of an organized social force, but the individualized arrogance of power, in the splendid isolation of wealth. The two representations could hardly be more contrary. What is going on?

At a time of massive structural change in the "real world" of class, in which former certainties were starting to break apart (between the mid-1970s and the 1990s), certain radical iconoclasts began arguing for the diminished usefulness, even the obsolescence, of class-analytic approaches to understanding the social world. Such discussions also addressed the class-centered concerns of the socialist political tradition, which during the 1980s entered its protracted contemporary crisis. The tones were often apocalyptic. "Socialism is Dead," the sociologist Alaine Touraine declared. "Farewell to the Working Class," echoed the radical social theorist André Gorz.[1] Reeling from the disappointments of the late 1970s and the electoral disasters of 1979 and 1983, British socialist intellectuals also undertook a root-and-branch examination of established class-political thinking, from the given model of the party to the automatic assumption of "the leading role of the working class."[2] Reflecting on British deindustrialization, the radicalism of Thatcher's attack on the postwar settlement, and the recomposition of the working class, they concluded that "the world has changed, not just incrementally but qualitatively," and that out of the contemporary restructuring a new kind of social order was being shaped—one "characterized by diversity, differentiation, and fragmentation, rather than homogeneity, standardization, and the economies and organizations of scale which characterized modern mass society."[3]

We're closer now to what might have produced the imagery on our two books. The power of the workers' collective agency in the first photo (the activism of a collective subject aiming at change, the future inheritor of the good society) is replaced by the purely individualized image of class as status—in the

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protected physical spaces of great wealth and privilege. Moreover, the meanings of these two pictures are figured through gender. The complete absence of women in the first representation of working-class collective agency is replaced by the arrogance of the female presence in the second image, where the old lady concerned gazes balefully out, possibly onto the kind of plebeian manifestation pictured by *Bringing Class Back In.* In other words, class is gendered male where workers are exercising agency, female where class signifies privilege, parasitism, and moneyed power. Collective action faces selfish and self-centered individualism in an all too familiar way.

The image of the old lady is removed from politics and agency. It is an image of privileged passivity. In seeking to picture the new valencies of class, Joyce (or Oxford University Press's designer) turns away from collective imagery altogether, rejecting archetypes or other representations of the mass or the ordinary majority of workers. He also divorces class sharply from economics and production. In fact, in Joyce's selection of readings there is little trace of workers in collective motion at all, organizing themselves at the point of production, going on strike, mobilizing in communities, joining socialist parties, confronting employers or the state. Instead, "class" functions abstractly and impersonally as an analytical tradition, a discursive structure, and a linguistic term. After the first three sections on usages of class by social theorists and historians, Joyce opts exclusively for this approach, finding "class" in dominant structures of meaning beyond popular agency or control—in "The History of the Social," "The Hermeneutics of the Social," "The Language of Class." Not much sign of workers demanding their rights here.

This framing of class is surprisingly ethnocentric, too, omitting questions of national difference, empire, race, and immigration entirely. After all, the postmodernism advocated by Joyce rejects older forms of class-centered analysis by seeing identity shaped in other ways, and so it is strange to find neither race nor the wider politics of recognition among his selections. For it is not only the challenge of *theory* that destabilizes older notions of class (the story stressed by Joyce), but a powerful set of contemporary social histories, too, including the eruption of "race" into the very centerground of politics. At a time when Western European labor markets are becoming not only *feminized,* but visibly *racialized* as well, the tried and true iconography of the skilled white male worker becomes not just the repetition of old exclusions, but a serious distortion of how the working class is currently being made. In his selected readings, Joyce gives no access to these issues. Yet Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, and others have insisted that British identity—and the "Englishness" at its heart—is structured around powerful assertions of racial difference, coming partly from the imperial past, and partly from the postimperial tensions of Britain's decline, which both center national identity around an unspoken "whiteness" and marginalize the presence of blacks.[4] Work by David Roediger and others has been changing the parameters of US working-class history in this respect.[5] Monographs are slowly beginning to appear for Western Europe, too.[6]

Now let's introduce a third book jacket, this time from the volume edited

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by John R. Hall, *Reworking Class* (Ithaca, 1997). Here, the design is provided by two lithographs, one inset on the other. The smaller of the two, "Domestic Workers," by Claire Mahl Moore (1936), shows the drudgery presupposed by bourgeois good living, as two menial workers scrub the kitchen floor against the background of a dinner party, and a third person, presumably the lady of the house, looks brutally on. This is superimposed on a much larger picture, "Home Front Assembly Line," by Jolán Gross-Bettelheim (1940), which shows workers in a classically Fordist plant, probably producing munitions. This image shows the mass worker of the more celebratory versions of "modern times" (as opposed to its dystopias), epitomized by the Diego Rivera murals in the Detroit Institute of Arts—muscular, concentrated, applied to the heavy machine, marching in formation, surrounded by the monolithic greyness of the plant. *This* juxtaposition is interesting. It reverts to certain well-established progressive conventions for its images of both "the mass" and "work," yet disrupts our expectations in other ways. For in both pictures, the workers are entirely women.

Feminist Critiques

These three images tell us something about the contemporary discomforts of class. During the past decade, feminist critiques of the gendered conventions of class analysis have been coming powerfully to fruition. After the pioneering critiques of the 1970s, the early challenge of women's history became most effectively realized via the advocacy of gender as a necessary category of analysis. In some areas feminist analysis made considerable progress among the profession at large, if not in quantitative extent, then certainly in the power of the key interventions. The history of political thought is brought to mind, a substantial genre of writing about the nineteenth-century British and North American middle class, work on late twentieth-century popular culture, and histories of social policy. In labor history (and some other areas like family history), on the other hand, older conventions were more lasting. For some years, the great volume of women's history left them broadly intact. Just to take an example closest to home, it was not really until 1987, with Joan Scott's scholarly controversy "On Language, Gender, and Working-Class History," that gender concerns, even loosely or pretheoretically understood (anything involving women workers, gendered divisions of labor, masculinity, family relations, sexualities, and so on) entered the field of vision of *International Labor and Working-Class History,* and then mainly as an occasional inclusion of a specifically gendered perspective in controversies and other theme discussions.[7] Another familiar example from around the same time, Ira Katznelson's and Aristide Zolberg's *Working-Class Formation* (Princeton, 1986), notably missed gender entirely from its concerns, although some contributors (Michelle Perrot, Alain Cottereau, and Mary Nolan) occasionally noticed women workers.[8]

By 1990, on the other hand, in the intended flagship volume of *Perspectives on American Labor History* (DeKalb, IL, 1989), edited by J. Carroll Moody and Alice Kessler-Harris, two of the eight essays addressed gender concerns, Mari Jo Buhle's "Gender and Labor History," and Alice Kessler-Harris's "A New

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Agenda for American Labor History: A Gendered Analysis and the Question of Class."[9] Several benchmark volumes appeared in the 1990s, either collectively establishing the centrality of gender to the study of work and the working class—Ava Baron's edited *Work Engendered* (Ithaca, 1991) or Laura Frader's and Sonya Rose's *Gender and Class in Modern Europe* (Ithaca, 1996)—or integrating gendered perspectives into their framework, as in Leonard Berlanstein's *Rethinking Labor History* (Urbana, IL, 1993), which took stock of the French field.[10] By the 1990s, Joan Scott's challenge to the field was also inspiring further theoretical responses, grounded in the first full-scale particular studies, for which Kathleen Canning's *Languages of Labor and Gender* (Ithaca, 1996) now holds the place.[11] In his Introduction to the reader on *Class,* Joyce acknowledges the force of these developments:

> Feminism has offered as great a challenge as any to the sovereignty of class in social theory, sociology, and history. Feminist theory—and feminist political practice—has offered a new subject for analysis, and new conceptions of identity for our understanding, in the shape of gender.[12]

Yet on the other hand, only six of the forty-seven readings Joyce assembles are by women, and only four present a feminist view. As we've observed, the cover image to *Class* presents the opposite of a female worker, and the peculiarly abstracted quality of this particular illustration suggests the difficulties still of registering the difference feminist critiques have made for the construction of the overall problematic. Sometimes, this results from a developmental lag, with empirical research running behind the consciousness of the field. Thus Lewis Siegelbaum and Ronald Suny explicitly address these questions of theory in their framing of a volume on Soviet working-class formation, entering the discussion with a theoretical sophistication now permitted by preceding historiographies (of North America, Britain, France, Germany, and elsewhere), and pressing the importance of gender in particular. But the surface of a gendered analysis is barely scratched in the practical analyses of the eleven excellent contributions to this book, which explore aspects of class identities for a variety of working-class circumstances between the 1870s and the Second World War.[13] In this case, theoretical consciousness was outrunning the field's immediate ability to deliver.[14]

The *Oxford Reader* on *Class* can't use the same excuse, because historians like Baron, Canning, Rose, and Scott have been changing the terms of discussion—in theoretical debate, but also in the practice of research—for over a decade. This returns us to the heavily abstracted quality of Joyce's selections, where class resides in a repertoire of social theory rather than ethnographically or in the extraordinarily rich social-historical literatures on this or that particular working class. Joyce approaches class via the classics of sociological theory (from Karl Marx and Max Weber to Zygmunt Bauman, Alain Touraine, Pierre Bourdieu, and Anthony Giddens), via Jean Baudrillard and Cornelius Castoriadis, via Foucauldian governmentality, via "the hermeutics of the social," via E. P. Thompson and other general historians, as well as via recent debates about

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the "languages of class." Within this theoretical framing, feminists, with the exceptions of Joan Scott herself, Donna Haraway, and Denise Riley, are mainly absent.[15] So too are case studies of actual groups of workers.

Joyce is far less interested in how gender changes class analysis on the ground (in all the particular social histories one could describe or invoke, like the studies of factory paternalism Joyce himself conducted once upon a time) than in moving us to a place where such older-style social histories no longer matter. "Class" becomes a "discourse," or a "narrative principle," a way of organizing "stories of past and present." Furthermore, these stories are misleading. For Joyce, class is a hardened construction of "relatively recent origin," projected back onto earlier times ("imaged back upon the past"), and thereby "distorting" them, obscuring the forms of understanding actually operative, like the categories of "citizens" or "people" (in Joyce's studies of nineteenth-century Britain). These retroactive "views of class" are where historians ought to be focusing, according to Joyce, getting behind the dominant languages to find "new actors and new narratives" to replace the old class-based interpretations, which contemporary social change (the "postmodern condition"), politics (end of communism), and epistemological progress (postmodern theory) have all discredited.[16] Joyce would like us to theorize the terms of identity, rather than trying to complicate the everydayness of class relations in social histories of the workplace, neighborhood, and home. This is an irony familiar to feminists. Women workers finally arrive on the pages of social historians, and the theorizing of *class* promptly migrates elsewhere.

Histories of Language, Histories of Class

Thus there is nothing in the turning to discourse or linguistic analysis per se to guarantee discussion of gender, despite Joan Scott's pioneering role in bringing poststructuralist and "deconstructive" approaches to the historian's agenda. Joyce's self-described postmodern "history of identity" (of "the self and the social") increasingly departs the ground of social history as usually understood for a particular type of Foucauldian vantage point from which the dispersals and patternings of power and knowledge can be read. In contrast to his earlier *Voices of the People* (1991), where the rich culture of the Lancashire laboring poor provided the moorings for an original and challenging analysis of popular discourse, *Democratic Subjects* (1994) confines itself to the interpretation of two individual biographies. Where working people ("class" in a collective sociological sense) were previously the context for an argument about populist identifications that creatively destabilized "the question of class," Joyce's subtle and complex narratives of political selfhood in the more recent book now circulate freely through the nineteenth century as a whole, with no moorings to the densely contextualized studies of working-class life social historians have come to require.

In Joyce's trajectory, in other words, there is a definite pull to what can only be described as a redeployed intellectual history based on restricted readings of the printed word, rather than the ramified cultural archive still grounding his earlier *Voices of the People.* This predilection for intellectual history has character-

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ized other advocates of linguistic analysis, from Stedman Jones to Scott, or for that matter William Sewell.[17] Here we do not want to be misread. There's nothing wrong with intellectual history or readings of published sources per se. On the contrary, we would uphold the empowering impetus of works like *Work and Revolution in France, Languages of Class,* or *Gender and the Politics of History* during the past two decades. But for both Joyce and Stedman Jones at least, this now seems an exclusive choice. The legitimacy of social analysis seems now to be disputed as such, as something distinct and problematic, flawed by epistemological error, by comparison with histories acknowledging the primacy of language. But why should attention to language require disparagement of social history in this way?

The most cogent objections to Stedman Jones's essay on Chartism—which originally set the linguistic cat among the social history pigeons—were not against the importance of studying language per se (either as research strategy or theoretical program), but against the attenuated quality of Jones's particular practice, which moved from the radical proposals of linguistic analysis to a straightforward exegetical account of the Chartists' public rhetoric. Aside from the substantive case Stedman Jones makes here about the nature of Chartist radicalism (which remains largely persuasive), this exchanged the archive of social history (its sites, contexts, and sources) for an intellectual history narrowly based on published texts, a move only strengthened in the meantime. In the more than twenty years since Stedman Jones first presented his arguments, he has withdrawn still further into the history of formal intellectual traditions (from utopian socialism through political economy to legacies of Enlightenment) rather than elaborating his argument about Chartism.[18] The complexities of Chartist language—its ordering around multiple and incommensurate discursive fields, where incompleteness and instabilities of meaning mattered as much as the unities of its outward appeal—were too rapidly passed over. Rightly castigating the unproblematized materialism of social explanation commonly assumed by social historians, Stedman Jones advanced an oversynthesized conception of public political language in its stead. As Robbie Gray observed at the time, language is "multilayered, complex, fractured, composed of incoherences and silences, as well as the smooth flow of would-be authoritative public discourses," and therefore must be read for its exclusions as well as its unifying appeals.[19]

Joan Scott helped define the space where social historians might conduct such readings. Prying open Stedman Jones's exegesis, and breaking its silences over gender, she shifted the focus from Chartism's "particular politics" to "the processes by which social relationships were conceived and constructed." As she argued: "A theory of meaning that assumes a multiplicity of references, a resonance beyond literal utterances, a play across topics and spheres makes it possible to grasp how connections and interactions work." If the potential for contestation ("reinterpretation, restatement, and negation") is held to be inscribed in the production of meaning as such, the problem of change can also be grasped.[20] This is partly an issue of sources. An extended notion of textuality has become one of the new cultural history's liberating gains. Even where restricted to "politics" (as opposed to social history), the potential archive has be-

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come immeasurably richer than before. For example, in studying nineteenth-century popular politics, James Vernon eschews the normal ground of political history ("the organizations, personnel, or policies of the national institutions of politics") and instead searches out the "neglected traces like ballads, banners, cartoons, handbills, statues, architecture, the uses of time and space, and the rich vein of ceremonial and iconographic forms," as well as creative rereadings of standard sources "like newspapers and poll books" in order to expand our understanding of how politics worked ("the ways in which politics defined and imagined people").[21]

But Scott's challenge has also enriched social history itself. Cultural meanings have become constitutive for social relations, the economy, and other aspects of material life in the work of many recent historians, and there is no reason why "the social" should be held graspable as the effect of linguistic analysis alone in the way Joyce and Stedman Jones now seem to imply. In their different ways, Michael Sonenscher, Richard Biernacki, and Robbie Gray have all shown the necessity of cultural analysis if the meanings of labor are to be grasped.[22] The linguistic turn was certainly not the only impulse to innovation in the 1980s. Studies of gender and work were well under way before Scott published her essays, as were the gender critiques of the welfare state, and neither area was especially informed by poststructuralist theory per se.[23] But in all of these ways, feminist historians working with gender have been showing the way. If there is an "acute sense of 'epistemological crisis' that has accompanied the feminist interrogation of established categories, narratives, and chronologies," then the study of class has benefited powerfully from feminist revisions.[24] If Stedman Jones attacked the habits of explaining the politics of movements by their sociologies (of deriving Chartism from class relations and social changes in the economy) and helped to destabilize approaches to the working class based on productivist or social-structural theories of labor, life chances, and social inequality, it has fallen to others to show how class analysis can become more viable again.

In exploring the constitutive importance of gender in the politics of working-class formation, Kathleen Canning's work has disengaged class from the sovereignty of "objective" economic and social interests.[25] Grounded in imaginative and meticulous studies of labor markets, workplace organization, job cultures, family and household dynamics, industrial relations, and so on, she nonetheless opens class formation to a wider process of cultural and political definition. Here at least, social history of the classical kind and readings of language and political history are the opposite of incompatible. The meanings of class become historicized via the kind of discursive analysis Scott had proposed. In Canning's work, the pre-1914 German working class appears as a partial, historically situated, and contingent formation whose institutions and subcultures and its solidarities and divisions offered powerful but exclusionary ways of organizing the social world—some of the most crucial of which were structured around gender. But however powerful the logics of workplace and other experiences (the local and everyday processes of working-class living), these could only ever be shaped by wider forces, sometimes coming from the outside (the

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state, churches, parties, charitable agencies, commercial goods), sometimes working in and through working-class communities themselves, all of whose languages need to be disentangled and understood. Furthermore, however exactly languages of working-class identity became ordered, they remained only one of "several possible ways of describing, ordering, organizing, and making sense of the often diverse and contradictory realities of workers' everyday lives and experiences" under capitalism. Working-class formation was a never-finished and unstable ensemble of possible histories in that sense. As David Crew has said:

> In Germany, between 1890 and 1933, class languages had to compete with many other social and political languages—Catholicism, nationalism, liberalism, Nazism—which ordered the same social facts in quite different ways and gave them other meanings and significance.[26]

The "Political" and the "Social"

When we published our earlier article in 1980, "Why Does Social History Ignore Politics?," it was this complex field of interconnections between the social histories of labor and the organized practices of politics we were trying to engage.[27] From that earlier vantage point, it was precisely the enriched understandings of social history, in conjunction with contemporaneous redefinitions of the category of the political, that incited our critique—not because we were opposed to either of those things (quite the contrary), but because we were worrying about their logics of merger. To explain the direction of our current argument—to explore how discussions of class and discussions of politics might be working together *now*—some revisiting of this earlier intellectual-political history makes sense.[28]

In their heroic days (say, from the mid-1960s to mid-1970s), social historians defined themselves against the narrowness of political history as it was then practiced and understood. But as the political turmoil of the time also invaded the seminar rooms, the positive case for social history became not only the power of social determinations in explaining how politics took place at the top, fundamental though this was. It was also an argument for expanding the meanings of politics in society at large. A decisive effect of the social history upswing was a radical *expansion* of politics—that is, an enlarged perception of "the political" in the ordinary parts of social life. Previously "nonpolitical" locations (the workplace, the neighborhood, the subculture, the family, the home) were claimed for "politics" in a new way, and sometimes for the first time. These places were already present as the *objects of policy,* through law, welfare, social administration. But they were now claimed as sites of political identification and contestation, too, as places where power was organized and embodied. This perspectival shift moved politics away from the conventional institutional arenas (the state, the parties, and public organizations in the narrower sense) into a much broader and less manageable societal domain. It took politics "out of doors." It allowed the biggest questions of political life—the potentials for stability and co-

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hesion in the social order, the possibilities for conformity and opposition, and the circumstances under which dominant interests and values could be challenged, restored, or even overcome—to be posed very differently than before. "The personal is political" was one dramatic naming of this opening up, and the radicalism of the time found ever more political sites in a potentially limitless terrain of previously private and unclaimed everyday transactions.

In this period, social history produced two distinct and countervailing logics. If in one sense the turning to social history encouraged a definition of "society" as separate and distinct from politics, then in another sense it discovered political potentials precisely within the "social" itself. If one possible consequence was depoliticizing the social into a discrete and manageable object for study, then another was investing it precisely with political meanings. The tension of these two logics supplied both the excitement and the frustration, the shared identity and the divisiveness, in social history. When some social historians argued for explicitly reconnecting social-historical work *back* to the political sphere, in the second half of the 1970s, at a time of theoretical debate over the specificity of the political and its autonomies, the divisiveness grew. In the course of the 1980s, by combinations of new empirical fields, radical politics, and extensive theorizing, many social historians brought themselves to an understanding of what politics *includes.* This new understanding differed markedly from the assumptions with which they had originally begun, when social history had been viewed as a contextually determining and conceptually superior alternative to a narrowly institutional model of political life. In this new situation, getting back to politics—that is, trying to reconceptualize the relationship between "the social" and "the political," once the older and limiting boundaries had been breached—seemed an increasingly urgent task. But bringing "society" and "politics" back together again has been an immensely complicated thing.

Simplifying enormously, there have been two main routes. *One* came through state theory. The enlarged understanding of politics just described brought an expanded but deinstitutionalized appreciation of the state's involvement in society, outgrowing the boundaries of government in the narrower sense to embrace areas of social administration, public health, the law, schooling, religious practice and belief, the organization of private life in families, sexuality, gender divisions, work for wages and in the home, and the shifting distinctions between the private and the public. Along all these dimensions, especially under the impact of feminism, public power has been tracked through the main thoroughfares and alleyways, into the protected spaces and hidden corners of social life. The state's presence is now sought in less visible and more indirect ways than before. Beyond the conventional business of governing, the state is seen to consist in wider systems of regulation and intervention, involving the larger process of social reproduction, of constructing and reconstructing social relations on the broadest fronts. In its early days, social history often implied a mechanical distinction between "society" on the one hand, and "state," "ideology," and "politics" on the other. But so far from belonging on one side of that dichotomy, social history has now increasingly positioned itself inside the complex force field between the two.[29]

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The *second route* has been through various kinds of what we might call "culturalism," if an earlier moment of polemics doesn't make this ill-advised.[30] Among the plethora of major influences here, running from Thompson and Clifford Geertz through Bourdieu, cultural studies, feminism, literary theory, and various poststructuralisms, we want to single out the reception of Michel Foucault. For Foucault has helped shift our perceptions of politics still further, confirming the movement away from the state's core institutions in the national-centralized sense toward their "micro-physics," what he calls the emergence of new individualizing strategies, functioning "outside, below, and alongside the State Apparatuses, on a much more minute and everyday level."[31] Power in this sense becomes more widely and insidiously diffused through society than the older antinomies between social and political history, or society and the state, allowed us to think. Power—and hence political meaning—is organized in all types of social institutions, cultural practices, and informal transactions, as well as in the formal contexts of national and local politics, and the more visible and obvious locations of public decision making. Power—and thus the chances for political action—is structured into both the most basic and usually unspoken assumptions through which we perceive our relationship to the social world and the practices of the everyday. Consequently, power is no longer just the property of the state—whether we see this as coercion and repressive interventions, as a machinery of ideological apparatuses, or more broadly as the ensemble of public institutions—but may be sought in the smallest and most intimate of human relationships, too.

If "power," or at least our understanding of how it is ordered and where it is to be found, has been "moving around the social space," then "culture" (as the production, interpretation, and contestation of meaning) becomes vital to how its definition needs to be approached.[32] This has required a certain blurring of categories and recognizing their mutual permeability—an antireductionist recognition that politics, law, culture, and beliefs are not external to the economy and its social relations or to each other, but are always already imbricated together in complex unities of structure and action, indissolubly and constitutively interconnected in concrete practices, specific events, and individual lives. Such a recognition encourages an interest in microhistory, in the hidden histories of the everyday, because it is here that the dynamics of such relationships, and their profane interconnectedness, might be realistically approached. Further, if power is to be found in social as well as formally political arrangements, and culture can be both an effect and a medium of domination, then all the mundane relations of everyday life fall beneath power's sway. People in their multiform identities, thinking and acting across the different dimensions of their lives, all produce and are produced by relations of power—that is, relations where the participants are continuously negotiating and renegotiating aspects of inequality, authority, and the capacity to define the meanings of the world.

Here it is the element of *negotiation* that is key. If power secures the silencing of certain voices by ordering the experienced world into definite regimes of truth, allowing some things to be spoken easily or legitimately, while other

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things go normally unsaid, we certainly can't leave it at that. For in so doing, power also puts itself at risk, by producing positions from which subjects can try to speak. This is an absolutely vital caveat, frequently neglected when "power" and "domination" are under discussion: Power relations are never simply vectors of domination or "social control," but are simultaneously media of possible contestation, even sometimes of emancipation, too. As Foucault repeated, where there is power, there is always resistance. If this point is to be grasped, if the politically incapacitating temptations of an overtotalized conception of power as domination can be overcome, then "resistance" as well as "power" has to be thought. In effect, perhaps, Antonio Gramsci has to be added to Foucault.

This was where our earlier article tried to intercede. Gramsci's conception of *hegemony,* we argued, with its stress on consent as opposed to domination, and on the processes of moral persuasion needed before popular acquiescence or participation in a particular ordering of the world can be secured, is an excellent place to begin. It accepts the pervasiveness of power in society and certainly presumes the inscription of political meanings in both social relations and the practices of the everyday in the ways already alluded to. But it also conceptualizes power as a space of contestation and a terrain of struggle rather than a one-way street. Yet while historicizing power, and stressing the contingencies and conjunctures on which power regimes depend, hegemony also postulates the structured inequalities predisposing certain sets of outcomes as opposed to others, the stacked deck of concentrated ownership, access, and control, which ensures that any sustained and effective process of contestation will be a tiringly uphill struggle, requiring more than simply individualized and local resources in order to work.

In other words, Gramsci reminds us (or allows us not to forget) that as well as being insidiously dispersed, power is also organized, accumulated, engrossed, stockpiled, put aside for a rainy day, configured into institutions, concentrated into forms of agency, normalized and systematized into a public sphere, naturalized, and made opaque. Of course, these large-scale or societal modalities are no less susceptible to contestation. But there is a sense, for instance, in which a post-Foucauldian stress on power's dispersal can back us unnecessarily away from power in the state-centralized form, so that when power in that more conventional sense speaks—through armies, emergency decrees, policing, and repression—we are left protesting ineffectually from the side. Focusing on power's microphysics can also obscure the regularities and normativities, the logics of social structuration, that the concept of *class* is needed to reveal. This should perhaps be obvious. To say that power has no single center does *not* mean that centralized locations can't be found, or that we somehow have permission to ignore the state, or that class differences have no generalizable potential for societywide order. The Gramscian idea of hegemony gives us a way of seeing precisely how *different* sources and locations of power can be organized into working together.

Finally, if Foucault and Gramsci are complementary to rethinking the politics-and-society relationship—the one making power a dimension of all so-

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cial relations, the other returning to the specificity of politics as processes of hegemonic construction—there is a third key influence, namely, three decades of feminist theory. On the one hand, feminist critique has been key to expanding the political in the ways we've been suggesting—that is, *away* from politics in the old institutional and state-centered sense, and *toward* the other sites and situations where contestation occurs. Family, health, sexuality, food, reproduction, the body in general—all these entered political discourse in new ways thanks to feminism, with profound effects on how social historians have come to approach their work. On the other hand, such critiques have problematized older assumptions about the individual as a rationally acting subject, whether as the author of political initiatives or their intended object. The poststructuralist insight that power itself *produces* forms of subjectivity, rather than operating on already constituted autonomous individuals, has been taken up extensively by feminists, with unsettling effects for how questions of agency, experience, and consciousness can now be broached. The theorizing of gender as the mobile construction of sexual difference, the recognition that gendered assumptions of masculinity and femininity are inscribed in the basic languages of social identity, and the radical claim that everything is gendered (nothing is innocent of gender's codings and asymmetries) are now inescapable dimensions of the discussion we are seeking to provide.

Getting Back to Class

Our earlier essay worried that the turning to social history, particularly in its "culturalist" versions, was encouraging labor historians to subsume the specificities of political history into overgeneralized arguments about "hegemony" and "social control." That is, the Gramscian term was used in a way that took all the process of negotiation we've just described as a *given,* as a very *un*permeable boundary, behind which social histories could be written, and where popular cultures and working-class experiences could disclose their forms of resistance. Using the example of the German Social Democratic party (SPD), we argued that labor's institutional histories (parties and unions) were a key site for the production of working-class *consent,* as the contexts, that is, where logics and potentials of conformity, opposition, acquiescence, independence, assimilation, resistance, indifference, anger, gratitude, deference, and straightforward bloody-minded refusal could be translated from the everydayness of working-class experience into workable political agency for local and national ends. This was *not* any kind of rejection of social history on our part, but a plea for new ways of keeping social and political history together. In fact, we saw some of the new trends, like *Alltagsgeschichte* in Germany (the history of everyday life), as very conducive, making it easier to avoid some earlier pitfalls.[33] In trying to understand the capacities for conformity and opposition in the German working class before 1914, we argued, the history of the SPD should not be evacuated. On the contrary, rather than doubting the latter's relevance to ordinary working-class experience (a standard trope of discussion, especially with respect

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to the party's Marxism), we should be exploring the complex ways in which it was and wasn't embedded.

In other words, we were trying to create a space for political analysis in the expanded sense given to "politics" by the politics of knowledge of 1968. We were worried by the collapse of politics into culture via simplified versions of Gramsci, where "hegemony" functioned as a name for the closure of cultural contestation in a totalized societal sense. That is, the stability of capitalism and its relations of domination was being conceptualized too easily through an abstract and overgeneralized model of societywide consensus, an all-encompassing dominant culture, for which "Gramscian" vocabularies of hegemony threatened to become the master key. In their concreteness, and in the meantime, the accumulating social histories of the working class (across national historiographies) have added hugely to our knowledge, and a variety of outstanding rejoinders to our 1980 complaint might now be cited.[34] But the institutional world of politics—in which state apparatuses, civil agencies, parties, and all manner of organizations play their part—still remains relatively neglected, we would suggest.

What is the answer? Ira Katznelson urges social historians to return *to* political history, that is, to the institutional study of government, parties, and law. Invoking our own article, he argues:

> The fracture dividing social from political history not only made analyses of the domain between state and civil society impossible but impaired our understanding of the mutual constitution of institutions and culture, organization and ideology.[35]

So far, so good. But amid the general intelligence of Katznelson's discussion, we have some basic disagreements. We endorse his desire to avoid binarisms of epistemologically based choice (between "hard-to-soft *Marxisant* versions of linear causality flowing from the material base to secondary superstructural constructs, and, on the other hand, the full elimination of the dualism of structure and agency"); and we like the idea of keeping the two in creative tension, to see how the "plasticity of identity" and the institutional forms of politics combine together.[36] But by making the institutional categorically separable as an object of research, correcting its neglect by freestanding studies of the institutional realm, he creates a new severance. Moreover, his positive recommendations confirm our skepticism, for neither Henry Pelling's works nor the collection edited by Eugenio Biagini and Alastair Reid ground their political histories in the densities of social history we have in mind.[37]

As Katznelson says, Pelling's work reflects "the quest to understand how the labor movement in Britain, in all its aspects, has forged institutional ties of representation, influence, and negotiation with the state within a broadly liberal framework of rights and citizenship."[38] But Pelling's work bears little relationship to the vast historiography of working-class formation generated during the past few decades in Britain, with its intensive mapping of trade and occupational cultures, industrial geography, and community studies.[39] More to the

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point, it makes no effort to relate Labour's rise to either the uneven histories of class formation or the unstable and fluctuating constructions of social identity, let alone the dynamic interrelations of the two. It is utterly innocent of anything resembling gender analysis, and that alone, given the centrality of gender relations to our understanding of the "ties of representation, influence, and negotiation with the state" Katnelson describes, decisively compromises Pelling's corpus as a model.

Likewise, the Biagini-Reid volume assembles an excellent array of work on the architecture of post-Chartist parliamentary politics, grounding its claims about liberal public culture in a series of case studies, some of which reach far down into particular issues, careers, and localities for their analyses of popular political discourse. But this work is also a polemic *against* social history of the established kind, insisting that public language provides the best key to working-class political allegiances and behavior, as opposed to the kinds of materialist grounding of the latter social historians have preferred. "Ideas matter," Biagini asserts, because "people's behavior is deeply influenced by what they think, and especially by what they believe firmly." Consequently, the crucial binding-force of political movements (in Biagini's case, Gladstonian liberalism) was "the values shared by activists, electors and supporters in general," and *not* "the material interests of the social groups to which they belonged":

> Politics then did not have the function of providing favorable legislative changes for class-conscious groups: rather it supplied a collective identity to groups whose social and material interests did not in themselves lead to a politically relevant class consciousness.[40]

In its freeing of the political question from the determinist causalities of social explanation, this statement repeats the basic antireductionist move of the past two decades, whose origins (in the British case) go back to the earliest "post-Marxist" debates associated with Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, and then with the essays of Stedman Jones.[41] This basic commitment is one we also share. But there are some distinctions here that still need to be drawn. First, the Biagini-Reid approach frames an argument about broad continuities of British radicalism from the early nineteenth century to the twentieth-century Labour party, which remains enormously contentious and problematic. Second, it presumes an overall reading of Victorian politics "as based on status and culture, rather than class," which goes unexplicated, while the structural "facts" of class and status in the patterning of social life (in residential communities, in production, in access to social goods, in the general distribution of social inequalities, and so forth) merely backshadow the analysis rather than entering into its terms.[42] Third, an entire historiography—tagged as Marxist, but subsuming both the latter's diversities and other social histories of a non-Marxist kind—is dismissed as "reductionist" in a polemical positioning that inevitably forecloses debate. Fourth, it's wholly unclear why making the case for political history's autonomies—in this case in relation to public political language—should require

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the total bracketing of social analysis, and even (in the most extreme versions) the banning of social explanation altogether.[43]

We want to break this logic of disavowal. Thinking nonreductively—from questioning the sovereignty of the social and acknowledging the "discursive character of all practices" to seeing the autonomies of politics—does *not* require abandoning the attempt to do social history in the ambitious ways given to us since the 1960s.[44] Similarly, if we "acknowledg[e] that politics occurs wholly within discourse," and "refus[e] to counterpose discourse to an extra-discursive reality," as an axiom of understanding, with all the attendant methodological effects, that doesn't require us to abstain from social history in the accepted usages of that term (as practiced in the work, for example, of Anna Clark, Lizabeth Cohen, Robin Kelly, Stephen Kotkin, or Kathleen Canning), although the advocates of a discursive approach sometimes seem to be saying we should.[45] Moreover, we want to uphold the value of the work still being produced by social historians, some of whom we've cited, who provide far more sophisticated approaches to the analysis of politics than critics such as Joyce, Stedman Jones, or Biagini and Reid are willing to suggest. As Gray says:

> The best work on class has been informed by a strong sense of the complex, sometimes tense relations between diverse and uneven class situations, and the fragile and contingent construction of broader class interests and identities.[46]

Writing Working-Class History Now

In this essay, we're trying to escape from the polemics interrupting and disfiguring the conversation among historians interested in the working class during the past two decades.[47] We've been excited by the opening of new theoretical perspectives, particularly those complicating the older understandings—which remained stable and obdurately resistant to critique for many years—of the relationship between "the social" and "the political," in all the ways to which we have already referred. We've been inspired by the linguistic turn, through which the manifold antireductionisms of Marxists, feminists, and the pioneers of cultural studies in the 1970s became so powerfully radicalized. We're challenged by the condition of postmodernity and accept many of the arguments about contemporary transformations of capitalism articulated around globalization, transnationalism, and the post-Fordist transition. We accept that the reconfiguring of identities and the shifting terms of political affiliation, which delaminate citizens from accustomed and previously secure social locations, are the inescapable starting point for thinking about politics at the end of the twentieth century—particularly in the traditions of the Left, with their stress on the collective agency of social movements, the concerted pursuit of socially organized measures of democracy, the struggles for more equitable distributions of the social product, and the practical imagining of modalities of societywide change. Amid all of this, we welcome the critique of social explanation and the necessity of all the debates mobilized by Joyce and Stedman Jones, which have rendered the sovereignty of the social so problematic.

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Without making exaggerated claims for the influence of Marxism as such, we'd argue that some classical *materialist* assumptions (sometimes Marxist in derivation, more often not) were the main grounding for the new social histories of the 1960s and 1970s. These included robust conceptions of social causality, social determination, and social totality; the analytical priority of social context if the forms of politics and ideology in a society were to be understood; and the foundational valency of social explanation for ideas of historical stability and change. In this intellectual history, "class" did tend to serve as a generally accepted master category. Its power for labor history was its totalizing utility. It not only provided an effective means of organizing the analysis of the social world; it also contained an inscription of political meaning and agency. It provided an extraordinarily flexible analytic in that respect.

When labor history broadened its charge after the 1960s, it encouraged three types of engagement with politics. It explored institutional processes and their conjunctural forms, and eventually extended this from parties and the state to the forms of power operating behind people's backs, in ways not accessible to studies of experience, agency, or consciousness in a Thompsonian mode.[48] It encouraged the linking of historical work to the wider project of making the world a better place—for example, by recuperating incidents and moments of class struggles emphasizing continuities of past with present, making social and cultural histories a bridge to contemporary transformations. And it inspired the unearthing of narratives "hidden from history," as a means of both enriching historical analysis and providing self-consciously generative accounts designed (as in the first waves of women's history) to inspire a politics precisely by attacking the exclusionary narratives of conventional historiography. But if we consider each of these three forms of labor history's relation to politics from a vantage point in the 1990s—the institutional domains of politics and the public sphere, the betterment of the contemporary world, the production of counternarratives within the valorizing of subaltern identities—it becomes readily apparent that the structural and developmental metanarratives of class can no longer do the same job.

Among historians, the older belief that people's actions are best explained by their social locatedness, their sociological identities, and their belonging in "objective" social categories like class, understood in social-structural or other materialist terms, has undergone extensive damage. Likewise, the counterclaim of this antimaterialist critique, that the basic categories of modern social understanding are not the "objective realities" so often assumed, but are instead historically constructed, is now also widely agreed. From our contemporary crisis of class, we can better appreciate the difficulties of making class into a transhistorical category of analysis for industrial capitalist societies in general, whose logics of development had clear direction, with effects in politics and culture transparently understood. We can now see more clearly the specificities of history sustaining the socialist political tradition as a species of class-political agency with broader claims to national leadership. Those histories involved a constellation of urban-industrial milieus and associated social structures, often demarcated geographically, residentially and visibly against the rest of society,

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supporting separate working-class cultures, and shaped by definite local and central government relations. In Western Europe, the formation of distinct proletarian worlds between the 1880s and 1920s crystallized cultural and organizational solidarities that became articulated successfully into socialist and communist parties between the wars, with political effectivities lasting well into the 1960s and beyond.

If we historicize the politics of class like this—by regarding class politics as a distinctive and historically located repertoire of languages for organizing the social world, achieving its purchase from the 1880s to 1960s, with a variable and contested relationship to the social histories previously thought to be driving the show—we get much further with the question of discursivity. The latter is being offered by polemicists on either side as a polar choice between "discursive" and "realist" opposites, where the one is either sophisticated and epistemologically pure or else hopelessly theoreticist and removed from actual societies, and the other is either grounded and well attested or else irredeemably mired in conservatism. Here, in the interests of dialogue and collaboration, we would propose a pragmatics of good faith. On the one hand, the defenders of class might acknowledge—if only strategically, and for a while—the intractable difficulties, methodologically and theoretically, of analyzing working-class politics as the expressive outcome of an economically located class interest and social-structural position. On the other hand, the advocates of "postmodernism" or "discursive history" might affirm the usefulness of social historians continuing to do their work, if only to generate carefully constructed and archivally grounded studies which they can then proceed to "read." Such a pause for breath, or mutual suspension of disbelief, might stall the speed at which growing numbers of (ex-) social historians are treating social history as a set of outmoded practices deserving to be disavowed. For there is a danger in the current polemic of disconnecting the rich and detailed social history of class from the very explanations of political change it was designed to underwrite.

Given the basic conundrum of ascribing intersubjective unity to a social category, especially one so divided by internal differences, it helps to see class formation more as a cultural and political *postulate* (asserting a particular model of social identity) than as a demonstrable social fact (the creation of new social positions defined by relation to the means of production or some other material criteria). Class *discursively* understood, we would argue, is a better starting point for the study of class formation than the classical approaches of economics and social structure, because it was at this discursive level that a new operational collectivity (class in its actually existing forms) was defined—who got to be included, who formed the boundaries, who set the tone, and who won the recognized voice.

Let's be clear: this is a conceptual starting point, not a decision *for* certain kinds of history (or sources) and *against* others. It doesn't mean that economics (capital composition, accumulation regimes, labor markets, divisions of labor, technologies of skill, workplace relations, wage systems, and apprenticeships) and social history (neighborhoods and communities, families and households,

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sexualities, recreation, and all the rest) are not to be studied. But languages of class were inextricably embedded in all of those things—in practices and cultures of everyday life, as well as the codifications and official statements of organizations, literature and the press, and all other kinds of public talk. The *discourse of class,* an insistence on class as the organizing reality of emerging capitalist societies, plus the growth of specific practices and organizations around that insistence (like trade unions and socialist parties), constitutively shaped those social histories from the start. In other words, the history of class is inseparable from the history of the category. Class emerged historically as a set of discursive claims about the social world seeking to reorder the latter in terms of itself.

This *discursive move*—from assuming an objective reality of class to studying how the category of "class" came to be made, via all the programs and methods of social history, *as well as* the new cultural and intellectual accounts—can be extraordinarily fruitful. It frees analysis from the teleology of a class consciousness thought to be inscribed in the directional interest-based logics of class-collective experience. It also frees us from the need for alibis—from the search for special explanations when the idealized versions of class consciousness don't arise. Rather than seeing working-class interests as a structurally given and agreed-upon basis for action, we might treat the idea of "interests" itself as a problem, the discursive effect of complex histories that first need to be explored. Instead of asking which working-class interests became reflected in which organizations and forms of action (a classic project of labor history), we might examine how particular practices and institutions encouraged or hindered definite constructions of working-class interest. The transmission between interest and action is two-way. As a discursive field, working-class interests aren't reducible to any single essential contradiction of capital and labor. So far from such a contradiction being structurally constitutive for the rise of a labor movement in some necessary and straightforward fashion, labor movements were actually shaped from the field of force between the emergent conditions and their increasingly intense discursive rendition.

This returns us to the *pluralities* of language—to the many different forces acting on and through the lives of working people, the babble of interpellation, allowing them to recognize themselves in diverse possible ways. These indeterminate qualities of working-class identity, its nonfixity, recall us to the silences and exclusions class appeals always involve. How we see ourselves as a basis for action, how we become addressed as particular kinds of publics, aren't fixed. We recognize ourselves variously—as citizens, workers, consumers, parents, sexual beings, enthusiasts of sports and hobbies, audiences for music and film, believers in religious and other creeds, generations, objects of policy and surveillance, subjects of race and nation, and so on. Such recognitions are structured by power relations of various sorts. They are gendered by assumptions placing us as women or men. At one level, this observation is not especially controversial. The fragmentary, complex, nonfixed quality of identity or subject positions is not only a commonplace of contemporary identity talk, but has license in older tra-

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ditions of social theory, too. But politics is usually conducted *as if* identity were fixed. The question then becomes, How does identity settle and congeal? How is it worked upon? How does it acquire continuity? How is it fashioned into concentrated, resolute, or reasonably reliable shapes? That is, how is *agency* produced? Under what circumstances, in particular places and times, does identity's nonfixity become provisionally fixed, in such a way that individuals and groups can behave as a particular *kind* of agency, political or otherwise? How do people—workers—become shaped into acting subjects, understanding themselves in justified or possible ways?[49]

Politics is the effort at domesticating the infinitude of identity.[50] It's the attempt to hegemonize identity, to "order" it into a strong programmatic direction. If identity is decentered, politics is the attempt *to create a center.* Moreover, this drive for coherence, to produce consistency and completeness, in whatever precise modalities but certainly via party-political and other programmatic interpellations, often in simplified and reassuring ways, entails simultaneous work on "society"—or to be more precise, on identity's social referents, on the systems of meanings and representations through which people organize their relationship to the material world, through which they manage the relationship to the social and historical conditions of their lives. Politics works on this imaginary field by seeking to make stable and unitary sense of the fragmentary, divided, and antagonistic aggregations of social relations and social spaces we call "society." Again, this is what has to happen before individuals and groups can organize their multiple and complex relations to the world into a strongly centered political identity capable of motivating action. For such collective action to occur, "society" itself has to be imagined, visualized as the place where identity is bounded, as that in whose name things can be done.

What Does "Class" Allow?

The power of the socialist political tradition was its capacity to harness and harmonize popular identities into a strongly centered idea of the working class—that is, to construct popular political agency around the discourse of class in all the classic materialist (gendered, skilled, nationally bounded, industrial) ways. This worked most successfully between the founding of socialist parties in the late nineteenth century and the rise of fascism in the 1930s, followed by another phase in the 1940s, when socialists and communists joined larger coalitions of the Left, connecting class-political agency to broader democratic appeals. But whatever the period and place, socialist parties always contained a far richer sociology than a simple class-political argument would imply, whether in membership, voters, practices, or appeal. They appealed to workers, even on the most restricted definitions, highly unevenly. They also integrated much broader sections of the populace around the male, skilled, religious, and ethnic working-class core, whether these constitutencies themselves met the criteria of working classness (for instance, women, the unskilled, national minorities), or were not working class at all (dissenting intellectuals, parts of the professions, clerical and

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other white-collar layers, and shopkeepers and other small tradespeople in working-class neighborhoods). Finally, socialist parties developed their public presence across a wide variety of "nonclass" issues and institutional fields, working through the public rhetorics of democratic citizenship, social justice, and egalitarianism as much as through the languages of socialism per se.

Yet despite this actual eclecticism, the programmatic centering of socialist practice around the notion of class is clear enough. In its default loyalties—the priorities of campaigning, the syntax of official manifestos, the militants' rhetorical common sense—the socialist tradition was class conscious to the core. But concentrating identity that way had its costs. It brought a reduction *to* class. It involved silencings, exclusions, and neglects. Celebrating the working class presumed denigrating and disregarding others—expressing hostility towards not just other classes, but other categories of *workers* too. Distance was marked from any workers not organized into the parties, unions, and wider subcultural machineries of socialist affiliation—the rough and the unrespectable, the criminal, the frivolous, the sexually transgressive, the religiously devout, the ethnically different, and of course the feminine in her many possible incarnations. Elements of culture and subjectivity were similarly disowned—any aspect of identity not easily disciplined into a highly centered notion of class-political agency. Crucially, socialist disregard for this kind of political space—the space of those "other" identities—provided openings for contrary labors of persuasion and affiliation to occur, coming from the state, political rivals, churches, commercial entertainment, and so on.

Consequently, while the existence of the working class might be postulated via analysis of production and its social relations, its "unity" remained a never attainable and always incomplete object of construction, a fictive agency, a contingency of political action. The point of this argument—this way of regarding class, as a never-finished project of making through a dialectic of discursive labor and actually existing forms and relations—is to *open a space for politics,* to allow us to understand much better the variable popularity of different political outlooks among the working class of different times and places, and in particular the dynamics of socialism's twentieth-century rise and fall.

Our argument shouldn't be misconstrued. The hard-won ground of social history (for instance, studies of family, neighborhood, and work, with their materialist analytic of social relations and means of production) should not now be abandoned. But seeing consciousness of class as an unstable, shifting, and indeterminate faculty heightens the urgency of political and cultural analysis—discursive analysis of the "languages of class"—if we are to show how sociologically specified class capacities materialized in action and effects. As a collective identity, class presumed fixities and partialities of meaning that necessarily required silences, demarcations, and exclusions for its solidarities to strengthen and grow. These are the boundaries contemporary debates are bringing into view. Not only feminist theorizing of gender, but also critiques of racialization and whiteness and postcolonial analyses of empire's continuing metropolitan effects have equipped us better than ever before to bring the universalizing claims

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of class analysis down to the ground.[51] By learning from the decomposition of class in the present, we can produce different histories of class and its valencies in the past.

We have the chance to rethink what "class" entails or allows, *both* as a category of social analysis *and* as a basis for political mobilization. If, as we've argued, identity is mobile and not fixed, if it isn't an effect or reflex of social circumstances and experience in that old materialist manner, and if the working class is divided in all sorts of ways, with no necessary unity in consciousness and shared experience, then what possible meanings remain for class as an operative political category, capable of moving masses of people into agency? How might it still be approached as a structural attribute of societies and an essential means of grasping inequalities of distribution? How might we take the measure of contemporary "postmodernist" critiques and join them to what is salvageable and enduring in the existing social history corpus, with its capacities for capturing the dynamics of stability and change in densely and intensively studied local contexts?

Politics Again

Here we have chosen a particular entrance into contemporary debate, where a variety of contentions are unsettling the consensus one might have projected for left-inclined social history as it emerged from the earlier legitimation fights of the 1970s—not just the "defense of class" against "the end of social history," but a wider clash of historical epistemologies ("realists" versus "postmodernists"), philosophical disagreements ("politics of redistribution" versus "politics of recognition"), left versions of the culture wars, a range of debates over the linguistic turn, and so on.[52] We have put in the foreground gender and the value of feminist critique, but other challenges to the materialist sufficiencies of labor history's older class-centered analytic should be added—the cultural politics of race and postcoloniality chief among them. Consumption and mass culture (themselves always "gendered" and "raced") are a further dimension of twentieth-century class formation, which until recently both left political traditions and post-1960s social history have sorely neglected, but which some pioneering studies are starting to address, with feminisms and cultural studies leading the way.[53] Of course, the Right—especially in its Thatcherized notation—successfully captured the politics of consumption, creatively deploying languages of individualism, choice, and the market, hyping a consumerism expanded to embrace both the structural requirements of the post-Fordist economy and elaborate discourses of style. Only recently has the Left taken mass entertainment cultures and their popular pleasures seriously, led again by feminists. Much of contemporary politics has migrated to this ground, a terrain of crucial relevance for identity and subjectivity, a key site perhaps for the new politics of class.

Turning again to the "discursive move" already outlined, it is not hard to imagine an analysis of the Thatcher or Ronald Reagan years that traversed those lines, presenting a picture not of a class-located conspiracy (the temptation of

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older Left critiques), but of a dominant, briefly hegemonic "imaginary," which organized meaning and representation, and created identities in a powerful political centering of the kind we have described—not a centering that banished dissent or counterimpulses completely from the field (that never happens, short of fascism or wholly coercive regimes), but certainly one that profoundly disordered and disabled the possible forms of left response. So the sphere of state politics is not simply a vacancy. Nor is the exercise of a centralized power an illusion. This restores Katznelson's hopes for restoring party and other formal political concerns in historiography, but now without need of severance from the "social" and with full recognition that government "regimes of truth" need negotiation, flow both ways, and provoke silences as well as resistance and contestation.

The history of the making of the category of "class" is replete with examples of the latter, to be sure. At the very least, a vital contribution of social and labor history in the last thirty or forty years has been to recuperate them in subtle and well-grounded detail. This historiography doesn't stand utterly vitiated by its commitments to notions of class that we agree are no longer workable. Rich and complex historiographies can't simply be obliterated ("almost moribund," as Joyce says of British labor history) by one kind of "postmodernist" fiat or another, as though they no longer matter.[54] Indeed, right now, something called "Old Labour" stands at the very center of the rhetorics of a Labour Government and a party-political leadership determined to silence the social-democratic voice of previous generations and sideline the discourses through which the Labour party itself constructed a working-class politics of emancipation. *New* Labour amounts to a discursive maneuver to create a new center precisely on the ruins of its own past.

The communitarian discourses of Blairism, the largely empty rhetorics of "modernization" and "fairness," together with the fast-fix "Third Way," deliver permission for reinventing the party and evacuating its past. New Labour has bid "farewell to the working class" in every sense, expunging the "blue-collar, working-class, northern, horny-handed, dirty-overalled people" from its political imagination.[55] It convenes and interpellates a new political formation, whose discursive code is an infinitely flexible and "common-sense" communitarianism. As Stuart Hall has said, the Labour Government delivers some of what the Left might want, but "the difficult truth seems to be that the Blair project, in its overall emphasis and key assumptions, is still essentially framed by and moving on terrain defined by Thatcherism."[56] Here, some notion of the "virtuous community"—an imagined nation, Middle England, the decent and the fair—is invoked, whose protection against asylum seekers, single mothers, and welfare claimants authorizes policies so illiberal as to grace Thatcherism's high-water mark.

We introduce these brief (and no doubt tendentious) remarks on the Blair Government to make a point. Writing a few years ago in this journal, Ira Katznelson spoke of labor history and labor historians as "making a difference."[57] This was not a claim, we think, for labor history as a transformative po-

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litical act, a claim that through historiography the world could be made over. Rather his was a sense, shared, we believe, by many people interested in the history of the working class, that the manner in which the past is recuperated affects perceptions of the present. This was the inspiration of Edward Thompson and Sheila Rowbotham, along with many others in Britain and North Amercia—that a knowledge of past struggles itself contributed to resistance, that the past afforded a potential node of opposition, if only by showing that it need not be like this. It can be different. Power can be resisted in its multiple, microphysical forms, as well as where it continues to be exercised in vast wedges as policy, policing, legislation, and force. Resistance has its identities and subjectivities, too—plastic maybe, created involuntarily and on the move, without the reflexive fixity a former class analysis awarded them, yet occasionally convened around multiple refusals that the "class actors" of a previous generation would surely have found familiar.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This essay originates in a longstanding collaboration, most immediately in the paper on "Classes as Historical Subjects" that we presented to the conference on "Historical Perspectives on Class and Culture" at the University of Portsmouth in September 1993 (see the report by Kelly Boyd and Rohan McWilliam in *Social History* 20 [1995]:93–100). It forms part of the basis for a book on the same theme to be published by the University of Michigan Press. While we are concerned here with general issues of theory, politics, and historiography, we are also limited by our own primary specialisms, and most of the discussion will concern British and Western European historiographies, together with debates occurring in North America. But the discussion could easily be carried into African, Latin-American, and South Asian contexts. See especially Frederick Cooper, "Work, Class, and Empire: An African Historian's Retrospective on E. P. Thompson," *Social History* 20 (1995):235–41; Rajnarayan Chandavakar, "'The Making of the Working Class': E. P. Thompson and Indian History," *History Workshop Journal* 43 (1997):176–96; and the discussions of subaltern studies by Gyan Prakash, Florencia E. Mallon, and Frederick Cooper in *American Historical Review* 99 (1994):1475–1545. For the writing of this essay, we are indebted to the intellectual advice and inspiration of many friends, in particular Kathleen Canning, Kali Israel, Gina Morantz-Sanchez, Sonya Rose, and Ron Suny.

NOTES

1. Alaine Touraine, *L'après socialisme* (Paris, 1983); André Gorz, *Farewell to the Working Class* (London, 1982). For the West German debate at this same time, Rolf Ebbighausen and Friedrich Tiemann, eds., *Das Ende der Arbeiterbewegung in Deutschland? Ein Diskussionsband zum sechzigsten Geburtstag von Theo Pirker* (Opladen, 1984). The British equivalent began earlier, actually before the election of Margaret Thatcher in 1979, in the 1978 Marx Memorial Lecture by Eric Hobsbawm. See Eric Hobsbawm et al., *The Forward March of Labour Halted?* (London, 1981). For the general context of these debates, see Michael Schneider, "In Search of a 'New' Historical Subject: The End of Working-Class Culture, the Labor Movement, and the Proletariat," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 32 (1987):46–58.

2. The debate in Britain began in the newly established (and short-lived) Labour party discussion journal *New Socialist* (from 1981 until its independence was effectively ended in the mid-1980s) and was then taken over by the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) theoretical journal *Marxism Today,* which coined the slogan of "New Times" and pioneered a new left revisionism until its discontinuation in 1991. See James Curran, ed., *The Future of the Left* (London, 1984); Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques, eds., *New Times: The Changing Face of Poli-*

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tics in the 1990s (London, 1991); Eric Hobsbawm, *Politics for a Rational Left: Political Writing 1977–1988* (London, 1989); Stuart Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal* (London, 1988).

3. Hall and Jacques, "Introduction," in *New Times,* 11.

4. The fullness of possible citations here would be huge. For an indication, see Stuart Hall, "Ethnicity: Identity and Difference," and Paul Gilroy, "One Nation under a Groove: The Cultural Politics of 'Race' and Racism in Britain," both in *Becoming National: A Reader,* ed. Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny (New York, 1996), 337–49 and 250–69.

5. See David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London, 1991), and "Race and the Working-Class Past in the United States: Multiple Identities and the Future of Labor History," *International Review of Social History* 38 (1993):127–43; Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York, 1995); Matt Wray and Annalee Newitz, eds., *White Trash: Race and Class in America* (New York, 1997).

6. For Britain, see especially Laura Tabili, *"We Ask for British Justice": Workers and Racial Difference in Late Imperial Britain* (Ithaca, 1994); and on the broader terrain of citizenship, Kathleen Paul, *Whitewashing Britain: Race and Citizenship in the Postwar Era* (Ithaca, 1997). For a searching review of Tabili, drawing out the general historiographical context, see Laura Lee Downs, *Social History* 22 (1997):202–7. For France, see Gérard Noiriel, *The French Melting Pot: Immigration, Citizenship, and National Identity* (Minneapolis, 1996).

7. Joan W. Scott, "On Language, Gender, and Working-Class History," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 31 (1987):1–13, with responses by Bryan D. Plamer (14–23), Christine Stansell (24–29), and Anson Rabinbach (30–36). Scott's "Reply to Criticism" was in *International Labor and Working-Class History* 32 (1987):39–45.

8. Ira Katznelson and Aristide R. Zolberg, eds., *Working-Class Formation: Nineteenth-Century Patterns in Western Europe and the United States* (Princeton, 1986). The editors' regret at the exclusion was expressed in footnote 2.

9. J. Caroll Moody and Alice Kessler-Harris, eds., *Perspectives on American Labor History: The Problems of Synthesis* (DeKalb, 1990), 55–79, 217–34. But only thirteen women of the sixty-seven participants at the original conference (Northern Illinois University, October 1984) were women.

10. Ava Baron, ed., *Work Engendered: Toward a New History of American Labor* (Ithaca, 1991); Laura L. Frader and Sonya O. Rose, eds., *Gender and Class in Modern Europe* (Ithaca, 1996); Leonard R. Berlanstein, ed., *Rethinking Labor History: Essays on Discourse and Class Analysis* (Urbana and Chicago, 1993). See also Patrick Joyce, ed., *The Historical Meanings of Work* (Cambridge, 1989); and Sonya O. Rose, "Gender and Labor History: The Nineteenth-Century Legacy," *International Review of Social History* 38 (1993):145–62.

11. Kathleen Canning, *Languages of Labor and Gender: Female Factory Work in Germany, 1850–1914* (Ithaca, 1996); "Gender and the Politics of Class Formation: Rethinking German Labor History," in *Society, Culture, and the State in Germany, 1870–1930,* ed. Geoff Eley (Ann Arbor, 1996), 105–41; "Feminist Theory after the Linguistic Turn: Historicizing Discourse and Experience," *Signs* 19 (1994):368–404. Joan Scott's challenge was raised initially in 1986 in the *American Historical Review* 91 (1986):1053–1075, with "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," which was then reprinted in *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York, 1988), 28–50.

12. Patrick Joyce, "Introduction," in *Class,* ed. Patrick Joyce (New York, 1995), 5.

13. See Lewis H. Siegelbaum and Ronald Grigor Suny, eds., *Making Workers Soviet: Power, Class, and Identity* (Ithaca, 1994). A majority of essays consider particular categories of workers (Heather Hogan on St. Petersburg metalworkers, Hiroaki Kuromiya on Donbas miners, Diane Koenker on printers, Chris Ward on cotton workers, Daniel Orlovsky on white-collar workers) or particular locations (S. A. Smith on St. Petersburg 1905–17, Stephen Kotkin on Magnitogorsk in the 1930s). Several explore the broader discourse of class identity in particular periods (Mark Steinberg on "Vanguard Workers and the Morality of Class" before the Revolution, Gabor Rittersporn on the changing categories of Bolshevik social address, and Sheila Fitzpatrick on labor-management relations—the last two on the 1930s). A twelfth essay, by Victoria E. Bonnell, departs from the social historical ground of the main volume to analyze "The Iconography of the Worker in Soviet Political Art," but barely remarks on the gendered dimensions of the material.

14. The volume originated in a conference at Michigan State University in November 1990, conceived deliberately in response to discussions in other fields, including especially Katznelson's and Zolberg's *Working-Class Formation* and Joan Scott's general proposals. Commentators from outside the field framed the conference discussions with this in mind, including

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Michael Burawoy, Kathleen Canning, Geoff Eley, David Montgomery, Sonya Rose, and William Sewell, Jr. An extraordinarily stimulating level of discussion was achieved at the conference itself, which addressed questions of nationality and religion as well as gender.

15. Something of the same gap between the acknowledgment of theory and the practice of the detailed analysis is present in Joyce's most recent book. Scott, Riley, and others are generously cited in the Introduction, while the detailed reading of his two lives (Edwin Waugh and John Bright) proceeds conspicuously without gender. See Patrick Joyce, *Democratic Subjects: The Self and the Social in Nineteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, 1994), 6.

16. These quotations are taken from 10f. and 16 of the Introduction to Joyce, ed., *Class.* It's only fair to quote one of the passages in full (10f.): "In liberal as well as right historiography class is still a central term. When its Marxist framework is challenged, it none the less remains unscathed as part of professional common sense. In fact, the more the notion is questioned the more it appears to become entrenched in this common sense. Numerous textbooks and monographs continue to be written in which classes are still historical actors, albeit without their historical roles. As an adjective, 'class' sends millions marching up and down the pages of history, complete with 'working-class' values, 'middle-class' politics, and so on. As a narrative principle it gives these actors their various parts in the resulting stories of past and present. Perhaps it is time to look for new actors and new narratives?" Joyce's earlier work on factory paternalism was in *Work, Society, and Politics: The Culture of the Factory in Victorian England* (Brighton, 1980). For his subsequent claims for the superordinate status of populist notions of "people," "citizens," and "nation," see *Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class, 1840–1914* (Cambridge, 1991), and *Democratic Subjects.* For a useful general statement, see "A People and a Class: Industrial Workers and the Social Order in Nineteenth-Century England," in *Social Orders and Social Classes in Europe Since 1500: Studies in Social Stratification,* ed. M. L. Bush (London, 1992), 199–217. Our comment shouldn't be taken as hostility to theories of narrativity as such. Joyce himself has deployed these to interesting effect, but see especially Margaret R. Somers, "Narrativity, Narrative Identity, and Social Action: Rethinking English Working-Class Formation," *Social Science History* 26 (1992):591–630.

17. All three were in a kind of intimate and self-reflexive dialogue with social history, in which they'd earlier occupied leading roles. See Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working-Class History 1832–1982* (Cambridge, 1983); Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History;* William H. Sewell, Jr., *Work and Revolution in France: The Language of Labor from the Old Regime to 1848* (Cambridge, 1980). While fundamentally informed by social categories of analysis, their subequent works are intellectual histories in the formal sense (histories of ideas based on readings of published texts). See Gareth Stedman Jones, *Charles Fourier: The Theory of the Four Movements* (forthcoming); Joan Wallach Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man* (Cambridge, MA, 1996); William Sewell Jr., *A Rhetoric of Bourgeois Revolution: The Abbé Sieyes and What Is the Third Estate?* (Durham, 1994). Stedman Jones is working on "changes in European social and political thought in the aftermath of the French Revolution." See the "Contributor's Note" (252) to Stedman Jones, "The Determinist Fix: Some Obstacles to the Further Development of the Linguistic Approach to History in the 1990s," *History Workshop Journal* 42 (1996):19–35.

18. So far as we know, Stedman Jones has neither replied to critics of his essay on Chartism nor taken his analysis of Chartist language any further. He reiterates the argument in Gareth Stedman Jones, "Anglo-Marxism, Neo-Marxism, and the Discursive Approach to History," in *Was bleibt von marxistischen Perspektiven in der Geschichtsforschung?,* ed. Alf Lüdtke (Göttingen, 1997), 173–82, the full text from which Stedman Jones, "Determinist Fix," was excerpted.

19. Robert Gray, "The Deconstruction of the English Working Class," *Social History* 11 (1986):367. Among other critical responses, see especially James Epstein, "Rethinking the Categories of Working-Class History," *Labour/Le Travail* 18 (1986):195–208; David Mayfield and Susan Thorne, "Social History and its Discontents: Gareth Stedman Jones and the Politics of Language," *Social History* 17 (1992):165–88. Among the most important substantive contributions postdating Stedman Jones's intervention, which also carry the discussion beyond his essay, see especially Anna Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches: The Making of the British Working Class, 1780–1850* (Berkeley, 1995); Paul Pickering, "Class Without Words: Symbolic Communication in the Chartist Movement," *Past and Present* 112 (1986):144–62; James Epstein, "Understanding the Cap of Liberty: Symbolic Practice and Social Conflict in Early Nineteenth-Century England," *Past and Present* 112 (1989):75–118, and James Epstein, *Radical Expression: Political Language, Ritual, and Symbol in England, 1790–1850* (New York, 1994); John Smail, "New Languages for Labor and Capital: The Transformation of Discourse

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in the Early Years of the Industrial Revolution," *Social History* 12 (1987):49–72; Marc W. Steinberg, "Culturally Speaking: Finding a Commons between Post-Structuralism and the Thompsonian Perspective," *Social History* 21 (1996):193–214, and "'The Labour of the Country is the Wealth of the Country': Class Identity, Consciousness, and the Role of Discourse in the Making of the English Working Class," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 49 (1996):1–25. See also Richard Biernacki, *The Fabrication of Labor: Germany and Britain, 1640–1914* (Cambridge, 1995), which proposes a mode of cultural analysis based on nonlinguistic practices.

20. Joan W. Scott, "On Language, Gender, and Working-Class History," in *Gender and the Politics of History,* 67. Stedman Jones's only direct rejoinder to Scott, which grudgingly admits the "incompleteness" of an approach that leaves out gender, merely accuses her of "continued adherence to an essentialist notion of class," in which a post-Foucauldian stress on power relations replaces the Marxist stress on relations of production. See Stedman Jones, "Anglo-Marxism," 177, note 39. This surely misses Scott's meaning and distorts the theoretical effects of *Gender and the Politics of History.*

21. James Vernon, *Politics and the People: A Study in English Political Culture, c. 1815–1867* (Cambridge, 1993), 6. See also Pickering, "Class Without Words"; Epstein, "Understanding the Cap of Liberty"; and Epstein, *Radical Expression.* To dismiss these proposals as just a new version of the old economism, in which political cultures are approached as "simply mirrors of social experience," is surely a blunt reduction of a complex and imaginative analytic, a striking example of the epistemological line-drawing we're trying to transcend. See Stedman Jones, "Anglo-Marxism," 181, note 44.

22. Michael Sonenscher, *Work and Wages: Natural Law, Politics, and the Late Eighteenth-Century French Trades* (Cambridge, 1989); Biernacki, *The Fabrication of Labor;* Robert Gray, *The Factory Question and Industrial England, 1830–1860* (Oxford, 1996). William Reddy, *The Rise of Market Culture* (Cambridge, 1984), and William Reddy, *Money and Liberty in Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1987) were important transitional texts. More generally, see Joyce, ed., *The Historical Meanings of Work.*

23. The projects assembled in Baron, ed., *Work Engendered,* and Frader and Rose, eds., *Gender and Class,* had genealogies independent of Scott's influence during the 1980s. See especially Sonya O. Rose, "'Gender at Work': Sex, Class, and Industrial Capitalism," *History Workshop Journal* 21 (1986):113–31. For work on the welfare state, see Elizabeth Wilson, *Women and the Welfare State* (London, 1977); Anna Davin, "Imperialism and Motherhood," *History Workshop Journal* 5 (1978):9–65; Jane Lewis, *The Politics of Motherhood* (London, 1980); Karen Offen, "Depopulation, Nationalism, and Feminism in Fin de Siècle France," *American Historical Review* 89 (1984):648–76; Linda Gordon, ed., *Women, the State, and Welfare* (Madison, 1990); Gisela Bock and Pat Thane, eds., *Maternity and Gender Policies: Women and the Rise of the European Welfare States, 1880–1950s* (London, 1991); Seth Koven and Sonya Michel, eds., *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Emergence of Welfare States* (London, 1993).

24. Kathleen Canning, "German Particularities in Women's History/Gender History," *Journal of Women's History* 5 (1993):102–14. In addition to the work collected in Baron, ed., *Work Engendered,* and Frader and Rose, eds., *Gender and Class,* see especially Sonya O. Rose, *Limited Livelihoods: Gender and Class in Nineteenth-Century England* (Berkeley, 1992); Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches.*

25. Canning, *Languages of Labor and Gender.*

26. David Crew, "Who's Afraid of Cultural Studies? Taking a 'Cultural Turn' in German History," in *A User's Guide to German Cultural Studies,* ed. Scott Denham, Irene Kacandes, and Jonathan Petropoulos (Ann Arbor, 1997), 50.

27. Geoff Eley and Keith Nield, "Why Does Social History Ignore Politics?," *Social History* 5 (1980):249–71.

28. One of us previously explored these ideas in Geoff Eley, "Is All the World a Text? From Social History to the History of Society Two Decades Later," in *The Historic Turn in the Human Sciences,* ed. Terrence McDonald (Ann Arbor, 1996), 193–243; and Nicholas B. Dirks, Geoff Eley, and Sherry B. Ortner, "Introduction," in *Culture/Power/History: A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory,* ed. Dirks, Eley, and Ortner (Princeton, 1994), 3–45.

29. For excellent discussions of the state's presence inside the social, see Paul W. Werth, "Through the Prism of Prostitution: State, Society, and Power," *Social History* 19 (1994):1–15; Canning, *Languages of Labor,* 126–69; Kathleen Canning, "Social Body, Body Politics: Recasting the Social Question in Germany, 1875–1900," in *Gender and Class,* 211–37. For recent state theory, see Bob Jessop, *State Theory: Putting Capitalist States in Their Place* (Philadelphia,

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1990); and Timothy Mitchell, "The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and their Critics," *American Political Science Review* 85 (1991):77–96.

30. We're thinking here of the disproportionate anger provoked by Richard Johnson's important article, "Edward Thompson, Eugene Genovese, and Socialist-Humanist History," *History Workshop Journal* 6 (1978):79–100, in which he proposed the name "culturalism" for the perspectives deriving from Thompson's and Genovese's work.

31. Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977,* ed. Colin Gordon (New York, 1980), 60.

32. Dirks, Eley, and Ortner, "Introduction," 5.

33. We are really at a loss to see how Louise Tilly could read our 1980 article as primarily an attack on *Alltagsgeschichte* ("a rather narrow but admonitory look at the first steps of younger German labor historians toward the 'everyday life' approach"), or a kind of preemptive strike. On the contrary, our advocacy of *Alltagsgeschichte* over a longer period speaks for itself. For example, Geoff Eley, "Labor History, Social History, *Alltagesgechichte:* Experience, Culture, and the Politics of the Everyday—A New Direction for German Social History?," *Journal of Modern History* 61 (1989):297–43; Eley, "Foreword" to *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life,* ed. Alf Lüdtke (Princeton, 1995), vii-xiii, which was the first programmatic translation of work from the German. In *Social History,* we also sought exposure for the new work in its earliest stages. See the special German issue, including articles by Alf Lüdtke, "The Role of State Violence in the Period of Transition to Industrial Capitalism: The Example of Prussia from 1815 to 1848," and Dieter Groh, "Base-Processes and the Problem of Organization: Outline of a General History Research Project," *Social History* 4 (1979):175–221 and 265–83. Tilly's description ignores the main purposes of our 1980 article, which argued the relationship between social history and politics on a broad front of British and German social history. See Louise A. Tilly, "History's Noncrisis," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 46 (1994):87.

34. The bibliography of possible illustrations is obviously much greater than can be cited here, but might include the following. In US history: Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919–1939* (Cambridge, 1990); Gary Gerstle, *Working-Class Americanism: The Politics of Labor in a Textile City, 1914–1960* (Cambridge, 1989); Earl Lewis, *In Their Own Interests: Race, Class, and Power in Twentieth-Century Norfolk, Virginia* (Berkeley, 1991); Robin D. G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill, 1990); Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, 1996). In Soviet history: Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley, 1995). In British history: Clark, *Struggle for the Breeches;* Gray, *Factory Question.* In German history, the list might run from Mary Nolan, *Social Democracy and Society: Working-Class Radicalism in Düsseldorf, 1890–1920* (Cambridge, 1981); Eve Rosenhaft, *Beating the Fascists?: The German Communists and Political Violence 1929–1933* (Cambridge, 1983); and Adelheid von Saldern, *Auf dem Wege zum Arbeiter-Reformismus: Parteialltag in sozialdemokratischer Provinz Göttingen (1870–1920)* (Frankfurt am Main, 1984); to Canning, *Languages of Labor;* Thomas Lindenberger, *Strassenpolitik: Zur Sozialgeschichte der öffentlichen Ordnung in Berlin 1900 bis 1914* (Bonn, 1995); and Anthony McElligott, *Contested City: Municipal Politics and the Rise of Nazism in Altona, 1917–1937* (Ann Arbor, 1998).

35. Ira Katznelson, "The 'Bourgeois' Dimension: A Provocation about Institutions, Politics, and the Future of Labor History," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 46 (1994):18.

36. Ibid., 9.

37. See Eugenio F. Biagini and Alastair Reid, eds., *Currents of Radicalism: Popular Radicalism, Organized Labour, and Party Politics in Britain, 1850–1914* (Cambridge, 1991). Pelling's only monograph (as opposed to a series of general histories of the Labour party, the British Communist party, the trade unions, the Labour govenments of 1945–51, and Britain in the Second World War) was his first book, *Origins of the Labour Party* (London, 1954).

38. Biagini and Reid, eds., *Currents of Radicalism,* 21. On the other hand, Katznelson's commendation is absurdly inflated, given the relative thinness of Pelling's work apart from *Origins* and the reference work *Social Geography of British Elections, 1885–1910* (London, 1967), his hostility to theory, and indifference to social contexts: "[T]oday within labor history there is no single body of work as accomplished as Pelling's that takes seriously a relational approach to the ties between the state and the working class via an analysis of their institutions considered in a larger regime framework."

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39. Even an extensive list of citations would only scratch the surface of the potential bibliography here. One start might be through Neville Kirk, "'Traditional' Working-Class Culture and 'the Rise of Labour': Some Preliminary Questions and Observations," *Social History* 16 (1991):203–16, which contains a critical survey of recent literature as of that time.

40. Eugenio F. Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform: Popular Liberalism in the Age of Gladstone, 1860–1880* (Cambridge, 1992), 2.

41. We are thinking of Ernesto Laclau, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory* (London, 1977); Stuart Hall, "Notes on Deconstructing 'the Popular,'" in *People's History and Socialist Theory,* ed. Raphael Samuel (London, 1981); the essays in Stuart Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left* (London, 1988), especially 123–73; Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London, 1985); and the essays in Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class.*

42. The argument for status and culture as the decisive referents of later nineteenth-century politics comes from Peter F. Clarke's classic article, "Electoral Sociology of Modern Britain," *History* 7 (1972):31–55. See also his *Lancashire and the New Liberalism* (Cambridge, 1971).

43. Stedman Jones, "Anglo-Marxism," seems to be making this move.

44. We assume the readers of this journal need no persuading of this basic point. At the same time, Katznelson's foregrounding of the institutional forms of politics, no less than the "postmodernist" advocacy of Joyce or some recent statements by Stedman Jones, takes us into this territory. In particular, Katznelson recommends as models the exponents of a political history (Biagini and Reid), who appear to be rejecting social historical explanations as such.

45. Stedman Jones, "Anglo-Marxism," 205.

46. Robert Gray, "Class, Politics, and Historical 'Revisionism,'" *Social History* 19 (1994):211.

47. The main peaks of intensity will be familiar. They include the British conflicts of the later 1970s, brought to a head in Edward P. Thompson's anti-Althusserian diatribe *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* (London, 1978), and memorably staged at the Ruskin History Workshop in December 1979; debates around Stedman Jones's *Languages of Class;* the reactions to Joan Scott's poststructuralist theorizing of gender history, represented most viciously by Bryan D. Palmer's *Descent into Discourse: The Reification of Language and the Writing of Social History* (Philadelphia, 1990); and most recently, the hostilities around Patrick Joyce's advocacy of postmodernism.

48. Here we'd see Richard Johnson's doubled critique of "structuralism" and "culturalism" (and the larger rethinking of ideology, subjectivity and identity associated with Stuart Hall and the Birmingham Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies), Stedman Jones's *Languages of Class,* and Scott's appropriations of poststructuralism as the three moments of this trajectory. In addition to the references already given, see especially Joan Wallach Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," in *The Historic Turn in the Human Sciences,* 379–406.

49. For a good guide through the pitfalls of theorizing identity, see the now classic article by Linda Alcoff, "Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory," in *Culture/Power/History,* ed. Dirks, Eley, and Ortner, 96–122.

50. This formulation is indebted to Laclau. See especially Ernesto Laclau, "The Impossibility of Society," in Laclau, *New Reflections of the Revolution of Our Time* (London, 1990), 89–92.

51. On the other hand, in contrast to US historians, in Western European working-class history the willingness to deal with exclusions of race has an enormous way to go. In Joyce's *Oxford Reader* on *Class,* any discussion of empire or race is striking by its absence. Likewise, David Cannadine's *The Rise and Fall of Class in Britain* (New York, 1999) completely ignores the importance of empire, decolonization, immigration, and race for the shaping of working-class identities in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For succinct counterstatements, see Hall, "Ethnicity: Identity and Difference"; Gilroy, "One Nation under a Groove"; Catherine Hall, "Histories, Empires, and the Post-Colonial Moment," in *The Post-Colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons,* ed. Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti (London, 1996), 65–77; and Catherine Hall, "Re-Thinking Imperial History: The Reform Act of 1867," *New Left Review* 208 (1994):3–29.

52. The first two of these phrases are from titles by Neville Kirk and Patrick Joyce, who are among the most polemical advocates of the respective positions. See Neville Kirk, "In Defence of Class: A Critique of Recent Revisionist Writing upon the Nineteenth-Century English Working Class," *International Review of Social History* 32 (1987):2–47; and Patrick Joyce, "The

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End of Social History?," *Social History* 20 (1995):73–91. For "realism" versus "postmodernism," see Neville Kirk, "Class and the 'Linguistic Turn' in Chartist and Post-Chartist Historiography," in *Social Class and Marxism: Defences and Challenges,* ed. Kirk (Aldershot, 1996), especially 93–100, 119–26, 128 (note 22); Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth about History* (New York, 1994). For "redistribution" *versus* "recognition," see the exchange between Nancy Fraser and Iris Marion Young, provoked by Fraser's "From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a 'Postsocialist' Age," in Fraser, *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the 'Postsocialist' Condition* (New York, 1997), 11–39; Iris Marion Young, "Unruly Categories: A Critique of Nancy Fraser's Dual Systems Theory," *New Left Review* 222 (1997):147–60; and Nancy Fraser, "A Rejoinder to Iris Young," *New Left Review* 223 (1997):126–9. Fraser's admirably lucid exposition converges with our own political position. See also another important exchange: Judith Butler, "Merely Cultural," *New Left Review* 227 (1998):33–44; and Nancy Fraser, "Heterosexism, Misrecognition, and Capitalism: A Response to Judith Butler," *New Left Review* 228 (1998):140–9.

53. Here US social history is way ahead of work in Europe. See Cohen, *Making a New Deal;* Dana Frank, *Purchasing Power: Consumer Organizing, Gender, and the Seattle Labor Movement* (New York, 1994); Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia, 1986). Work in German history has taken more of a cultural studies turn. See Erica Carter, *How German Is She? Postwar West German Reconstruction and the Consuming Woman* (Ann Arbor, 1997), and "Alice in the Consumer Wonderland: West German Case Studies in Gender and Consumer Culture," in *West Germany under Construction: Politics, Society, and Culture in the Adenauer Era,* ed. Robert G. Moeller (Ann Arbor, 1997), 347–72; Uta G. Poiger, "Rock 'n' Roll, Female Sexuality, and the Cold War Battle over German Identities," in *West Germany Under Construction,* ed. Moeller, 373–410; and Katherine Pence, "Schaufenster des sozialistischen Konsums: Texte der ostdeutschen 'consumer culture,'" in *Akten. Eingaben. Schaufenster. Die DDR und ihre Texte. Erkundungen zu Herrschaft und Alltag,* ed. Alf Lüdtke and Peter Becker (Berlin, 1997), 91–118.

54. Joyce, "End of Social History?," 76, note 7.

55. This description comes from a speech by Peter Mandelson, then the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and Tony Blair's right-hand adviser, who's since resigned as the result of a financial scandal. See *Independent on Sunday,* October 4, 1998.

56. Stuart Hall, "The Great Moving Nowhere Show," *Marxism Today* (1998):14.

57. Katznelson, "The 'Bourgeois Dimension,'" especially 7–11.

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