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Still 'marking time'? Text, discourse and truth in international history

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Abstract. This article explores the ambivalent if not hostile responses of mainstream international historians to what is generally characterized as 'postmodernism'. It attempts to trace the roots of this antagonism in the sub-discipline's culture and historical evolution as a distinctive mode of knowledge creation with very particular links to the real worlds of politics and international relations. It then suggests that maintaining this sceptical attitude towards 'theory' incurs costs for international history that are too seldom recognized, and explores the potential of post-structuralist-inspired critical historiography and discourse analysis approaches to reinvigorate practice.

Almost twenty years ago, Charles Maier published a famous essay accusing historians of international relations of 'marking time', ritualistically adhering to established categories of analysis and conventional modes of explanation, and lagging woefully behind theoretical developments elsewhere in the discipline of history. In his prescriptions to lift the field from the 'languishing' he discerned, Maier urged the adoption of broader structural and systemic approaches, the raising of sights away from questions resolvable through 'Rankean exegesis' towards 'larger and imponderable' ones, and an interdisciplinary reorientation: international historians, he contended, 'must be responsive to useful explanatory approaches from other historical or social science fields'.[2] Maier's views were much debated at the time, but my interest here is not with the specifics of his diagnosis nor of the responses that it engendered. Rather, his intervention stands as a good exemplar of a persistent disparaging attitude amongst the community of historians towards international history—varying as Gordon Craig has put it 'between condescension and antipathy'[3]—which has led to the regular issuing of calls from practitioners and critics for changes 'which would somehow revitalize, rehabilitate, redefine, reconceptualize, or broaden it'.[4] I hope to use Maier here as a general point of departure for posing the question of whether—and in what respects—international history today could be said to be excessively preoccupied with traditional forms of explana-

[1] This is a revised version of a paper delivered to the Eleventh Annual British International History Group Conference at University College Worcester on 10 September 1999. I am grateful for the helpful comments made by the audience there, and for the advice proffered by Michael Cox, Peter Jackson and three anonymous referees.

[2] Charles Maier, 'Marking Time: The Historiography of International Relations', in Michael Kammen (ed.), *The Past Before Us: Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), pp. 355–87.

[3] Gordon Craig, 'The Historian and the Study of International Relations', *American Historical Review*, 88 (1983), p. 2.

[4] Alexander DeConde, 'On the Nature of International History', *The International History Review*, 10 (1988), p. 283.

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tion, failing to keep pace with theoretical developments elsewhere in the discipline and blind to the benefits of interdisciplinarity.

Marking time today

Of course, two decades on, the intellectual landscape has changed dramatically: many (though by no means all) international historians have made impressive use of conceptual tools from outside the discipline,[5] and when one now reads Maier calling for greater attention to 'the international system as system', 'investigation of domestic and international pressures as part of one structure', and increased recognition of the role of non-state actors, interests and processes, he comes across as someone earnestly advocating the reinvention of the wheel.[6] Today, reference to 'theory' and 'interdisciplinarity' is less likely to connote models and practices drawn from hard social science, than the textualist, culturalist and perspectivalist critiques associated with the articulation across the humanities—from an initial beachhead in literary studies—of deconstruction and post-structuralism.[7] (This thinking is commonly bracketed together as 'postmodernist', a designation which it is impossible to avoid given its prominence in the literature, but which is increasingly problematic. It is not just that it is now most commonly used as a means of yoking together quite heterogeneous ideas prior to marginalizing them; it is also theoretically contestable in so far as it posits the existence of a new historical epoch and imputes a particular character to and relationship towards 'modernism'.) Historians have long conceived of themselves as producers of authoritative and reasonably disinterested knowledge about the past, but by these lights their efforts need to be regarded as both literary and political: history is 'basically an act of the moral imagination, that is, a search for predecessors, an ordering of value, a conversation with the dead about what we should value and how we should live'.[8]

To generalize, I think it is fair to say that the predominant response of international historians to these theoretical challenges has been one of ambivalence if not hostility: they have reacted, as one eminent practitioner has put it, with 'varying degrees of scepticism, agnosticism, or horror'.[9] The most predictable thing to do at this point would be simply to reiterate Maier's censures and conclude that while the times may have changed, international historians are still reactionary fuddy-duddies dawdling behind them. But this would be very superficial and—if it entailed an

[5] Zara Steiner, 'On Writing International History: Chaps, Maps and Much More', *International Affairs*, 73 (1997), pp. 531–46 gives an overview of what has been achieved, and points to more which could be done, by way of interdisciplinarity. Some of her prescriptions are compatible with the kinds of things that I advocate below (such as greater attention to 'soft data').

[6] Maier, 'Marking Time', p. 387.

[7] I am obviously not claiming to be carrying out a comprehensive overview of debates in the discipline, nor to be setting an exclusive agenda. Other types of interdisciplinarity are available: see, for example, the discussion in John Lewis Gaddis, 'New Conceptual Approaches to the Study of American Foreign Relations: Interdisciplinary Perspectives', *Diplomatic History*, 14 (1990), pp. 405–23, and the response by Thomas McCormick, 'Something Old, Something New: John Lewis Gaddis's "New Conceptual Approaches"', immediately following at pp. 425–32.

[8] David Harlan, *The Degradation of American History* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1997), p. 105.

[9] Anonymous referee's report in author's possession.

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ascription of this dominant attitude to simple naïveté or lack of conceptual sophistication—it would perpetuate an impertinent caricature. So instead, I want to explore the roots of international historians' antipathy to this body of ideas, and to suggest that these lie in the sub-discipline's culture and historical evolution as a distinctive mode of knowledge creation with very particular links to the real worlds of politics and international relations. The reason why I want thus to unpick this scepticism is because I do not share it; rather, I think that this critical thinking can offer us valuable, even necessary, insights into the nature of our practice, and suggest innovative ways to expand its parameters. These comments are thus principally directed towards fellow international historians, and draw on recent theoretical debates within the discipline of history, but they may also be of interest to scholars in International Relations where cognate issues have been the subject of spirited controversy.

It is probably advisable to begin with some definitions and ground rules. All attempts to survey the state of the field are perilous and contestable, since they inevitably involve drawing arbitrary boundaries, generalizing from partial perspectives, and making subjective judgements as to which work is most central and vibrant within the discipline. The vigorous and varied responses to Maier's critique prove this point: within a single forum, some commentators accepted his strictures, others rejected them by defending the integrity of traditional practice, while yet others contested them on the grounds that the progressive approaches being advocated were already amply in evidence.[10] Almost precisely the same range of responses, *mutatis mutandis*, are in evidence in the on-line forum held by the *Chronicle of Higher Education* in September 1999 on the condition of 'diplomatic history'.[11] The kind of work which is my focus here is the classic type of international history—dealing primarily with relations between states (though with much more than their political and diplomatic relations), valorizing archival-grounding, eschewing theory and unapologetically realist in epistemological terms—which forms the backbone of the sub-discipline as it is taught in universities and which makes up the bulk of the work published in the major journals—such as *The International History Review* and *Diplomacy and Statecraft*—and in the international history lists of the major academic publishers. (My criticisms and observations do not apply quite so straightforwardly to the various species of 'constructionist' work that foreground theoretical concerns—from the New Left diplomatic historians through 'corporatist' interpretations of American foreign relations to world-systems theory approaches—though these are often no less epistemologically realist.[12])

This mainstream work permits us to generalize about international historians' indifference or hostility to the ideas under discussion here, since it is marked in general by a complete absence of engagement with them. Similarly, international historians have not been very prominent contributors to the general history and theory debates that have lately been raging in books, journals and e-mail discussion

[10] Michael Hunt et al., 'Symposium. Responses to Charles S. Maier', *Diplomatic History*, 5 (1981), pp. 353–82.

[11] http://www.chronicle.com/colloquy/99/dhistory/re.htm

[12] 'Constructionist' is a term employed by Alun Munslow to denote historical approaches that explicitly wield one form or another of social theory: see Alun Munslow, *Deconstructing History* (London: Routledge, 1997).

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groups.[13] This silence undoubtedly speaks volumes, but it would be difficult to construct too elaborate a critical edifice upon a void. It is fortunate, therefore, that there is some rather more tangible evidence to go on, provided by those relatively few public interventions which international historians have made in these debates, either in general forums or in discussion of the work produced by fellow practitioners experimenting with new approaches. A particularly fruitful source in this last respect is the journal of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations, *Diplomatic History*, and its associated e-mail discussion list, H-DIPLO. *Diplomatic History* has been a pioneer in showcasing innovative critical work, alongside more resolutely traditional fare, and has thereby stimulated extremely fierce debate.[14] Whether the material gleaned from these sources is sufficiently representative to serve as the basis for generalizations about the discipline and discourse must remain, I suppose, a moot point. It is as well to acknowledge that the material is solely drawn from Anglo-American debates, and that the manner in which I am using it may obscure significant differences in the cadences and content of the discussions on the two sides of the Atlantic. But hopefully the validity of what follows will nonetheless become apparent.

Responses: pragmatism, philosophy and triviality

In general terms, international historians' responses to these issues tend to take one of two tacks. Conventional wisdom holds that what is at stake here is a difference of perspective between, on the one hand, practising historians prioritizing archivally derived empirical truth and, on the other, those more inclined towards abstract philosophical and theoretical reflection. That there is some truth in this is confirmed by those—such as Donald Watt—who have offered a defence of 'traditional historical methodology' as a tried and tested, reliable means of producing and validating statements—useful knowledge—about the past.[15] This argument is akin to other, increasingly common, pragmatic—or, 'practical realist'—defences of historical truth in the general literature.[16] These attempt to bypass the epistemological challenges of anti-foundationalist thought by focusing on 'the idea of history as an interpretive community, a practising discipline with professional standards',[17]

[13] My opinions have also been formed anecdotally in the course of discussions and experiences at those other critical nodes of academic life, job interviews and conferences.

[14] This work is now too voluminous to reference in full, but for an orientation see most recently the round-table on 'Culture, Religion and International Relations', *Diplomatic History*, 24 (2000), pp. 593–640. H-DIPLO has a web-site at http://www.h-net.msu.edu/~diplo/ at which all contributions are archived. Discussion logs can be searched by author, date and subject.

[15] Donald Watt, 'Postmodernist History', letter to the editor, *Times Literary Supplement*, 30 October 1992, p. 15; cf. Donald Puchala, 'The Pragmatics of International History', *Mershon International Studies Review*, 39 (1995), pp. 1–18.

[16] 'Practical realist' is the description adopted by Lynn Hunt, Joyce Appleby and Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth about History* (New York: Norton, 1994). For sample criticisms of their influential work, see Raymond Martin et al., 'Forum: On *Telling the Truth about History*', *History and Theory*, 34 (1995), pp. 320–39; Mark Poster, *Cultural History and Postmodernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 47–59; and on the general position, Munslow, *Deconstructing History*, esp. chs. 3 and 6. A more conservative and less rigorous variant of the position is adopted in Richard Evans, *In Defence of History* (London: Granta, 1997).

[17] John Zammito, 'Are We Being Theoretical Yet? The New Historicism, the New Philosophy of History and "Practicing Historians"', *Journal of Modern History*, 65 (1993), p. 804.

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within which 'historical knowledge is produced and validated—and in ways which allow for reasoned debate as well as for the empirical regulation of propositional statements—without the question of our access to an extra-discursive past arising'.[18] Reconfiguring truth as 'warranted assertibility' thus permits historians to move through 'postmodernism' and carry on their business as usual.[19] On the other hand, overstating the opposition between 'doers' and 'thinkers' can obscure the fact that on a deeper level what is at stake is rather a preference for different kinds of theory. Thus some international historians—Geoffrey Roberts prominent amongst them—have been keen to engage the debate on the philosophical level, arguing that 'a large and sophisticated set of theoretical resources are available to narrative historians wishing to defend their craft'.[20] These resources—stressing, for example, the narrative character of human existence—tend to be drawn from an analytical philosophy tradition which stands in opposition to the continental philosophy animating 'postmodernism', in what may be just the latest round in a two thousand year struggle within Western culture between 'the Scientific Attitude' and 'the Rhetorical Attitude'.[21]

Bundled up with these two broad arguments are a host of other more specific objections. New critical approaches are accused of being fundamentally unhistorical in imposing theory and interpretation on the evidence, reading the past through presentist lenses and thus failing to see it on its own terms.[22] This argument echoes older objections to the deployment of abstract social science theories within the empirical domain of international history,[23] and typically depends upon the positing of an opposition between 'data-based' traditional approaches and 'theoretical' 'postmodernist' ones.[24] Within the latter, it is contended, closely-argued and documented proofs are supplanted by tendentious, loose and ideologically-driven assertions ('grandiose claims on the basis of little or no data').[25] Moreover, this shoddy scholarship constitutes an elitist, jargon-ridden field of competitive obfuscation, in which 'clarity of expression [is] sacrificed on the altar of highly technical language'.[26] It is also incoherent and self-refuting in its rejection of 'truth and

[18] Tony Bennett, 'Outside Literature', in Keith Jenkins (ed.), *The Postmodern History Reader* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 222. A similar line is taken in Gérard Noiriel, *Sur la 'crise' de l'histoire* (Paris: Belin, 1996).

[19] Harlan, *Degradation of American History*, p. xxiii.

[20] Geoffrey Roberts, 'Narrative History as a Way of Life', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 31 (1996), pp. 221–28, quote at p. 223. See also Geoffrey Roberts, 'Postmodernism versus the Standpoint of Action', *History and Theory*, 36 (1997), pp. 249–60.

[21] Brian Fay, 'Introduction', in Brian Fay, Philip Pomper and Richard Vann (eds.), *History and Theory: Contemporary Readings* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 1–12.

[22] This sentence paraphrases numerous contributions to the discussion on 'gendered discourse' archived at http://www.h-net.msu.edu/~diplo/Costigliola.htm sparked off by Frank Costigliola, 'The Nuclear Family: Tropes of Gender and Pathology in the Western Alliance', *Diplomatic History*, 21 (1997), pp. 163–83.

[23] Donald Watt, *What about the People? Abstraction and Reality in History and the Social Sciences* (London: LSE, 1983).

[24] David Kaiser, H-DIPLO post, 29 April 1998 (in the thread 'Revisiting Dollar Diplomacy', following Emily Rosenberg 'Revisiting Dollar Diplomacy: Narratives of Money and Manliness', *Diplomatic History*, 22 (1998), pp. 155–76). The opposition is of course spurious given the inseparability of 'data' from 'theory'.

[25] Sally Marks, H-DIPLO post, 9 October 1998.

[26] Diane Labrosse, H-DIPLO post, 26 April 1998. As Emily Rosenberg riposted (H-DIPLO post, 8 May 1998), if 'jargon' were to be proscribed she would have to purge her work not only of cultural history 'jargon', but also the 'jargon' of economics; the objection here is actually to a particular type of complexity, not complexity *per se*.

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verification', since it relies precisely on the deployment of traditional 'logic and empiricism to prove that one cannot be logical or empirical'.[27] Finally, even where the legitimacy or coherence of new approaches is conceded, their contribution is typically characterized as 'trivial'. Although they may offer some useful insights into the role of language and representation in international relations, these are peripheral when compared to the 'fundamental issues of strategy, national security, and military and economic power' with which mainstream practitioners are concerned: 'so what?' is the question damningly deployed as a trump card to impose closure upon debate.[28] There is nothing strikingly distinctive about any of these views, since they are of a piece with sentiments voiced by wary traditionalists across a discipline that has generally proved resistant to the allure of 'postmodernism'.[29] It may be difficult to gauge with precision whether international historians have been relatively more antipathetic—either in quantitative or qualitative terms—than their colleagues in other sub-disciplines. But in fields such as social history the issues have been debated for far longer and with much greater intensity, which makes arguable the case that aversion to theory in international history is both more prevalent and entrenched.[30]

This point is further demonstrated on occasions when these new theoretical challenges are connected to the shifting fortunes of particular subject areas. This has been especially evident in the United States, where antipathy to 'postmodernism' is often yoked together with resentment at the perceived marginalization of traditional specialisms by imperialist hordes of cultural and gender historians now rising to positions of dominance within the profession. Such anxieties lay behind the formation in 1998 of The Historical Society, a group designed as a refuge for those alienated by the alleged politicization and PC bigotry of the American Historical Association and in whose formation international historians—such as Marc Trachtenberg and Paul Schroeder—played a key role.[31] Cognate concerns are regularly voiced in electronic discussions of the 'state of the field', such as those held on H-DIPLO in the autumn of 1997 and by the *Chronicle of Higher Education* in the autumn of 1999.[32]

[27] Jeffrey Kimball, H-DIPLO post, 18 October 2000. This and many other charges are defused in Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Belief and Resistance: Dynamics of Contemporary Intellectual Controversy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), especially pp. 73–87.

[28] Reid Rozen, H-DIPLO post, 21 April 1997; James Perry, H-DIPLO post, 25 April 1997; Reid Rozen, H-DIPLO post, 2 May 1997. Even these 'fundamental' 'realities' are, of course, perceived (and therefore in a sense constituted) in and through language.

[29] Cf. Patrick O'Brien, 'An Engagement with Postmodern Foes, Literary Theorists and Friends on the Borders of History', *Institute of Historical Research Reviews in History*, http://ihr.sas.ac.uk/ihr/reviews/discourse1.html and the responses at the same site. For other samples of international historians' responses to 'postmodernism', see, for example, David Gress, 'The "End" of History?', *Orbis*, 43 (1999), pp. 314–36; Michael J. Hogan (ed.), *America in the World. The Historiography of American Foreign Relations since 1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

[30] Witness the debates in the early 1990s in *Social History*, the leading journal in the field, which are excerpted in Jenkins, *Reader*, pp. 313–83.

[31] See the announcement posted on H-DIPLO on 16 September 1998 containing an article by Marc Trachtenberg and a response from Jim Banner, their follow-up posts of 26 September 1998, and the post of 30 September containing a comment from Paul Schroeder. The Historical Society has a website at http://www.bu.edu/historic/ and its publications include *The Journal of the Historical Society* (from 2000) and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Elisabeth Lasch-Quinn (eds.), *Reconstructing History: The Emergence of a New Historical Society* (London: Routledge, 1999).

[32] The H-DIPLO debate is archived at http://www.h-net.msu.edu/~diplo/StateofField.htm and http://www.h-net.msu.edu/~diplo/AHA.htm. For the *Chronicle* debate, see n. 11 above.

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Much could be said about the arguments typically encountered in these contexts. There is of course justification for the apprehension that new forms of historical inquiry may over time edge out established specialisms: a milestone was surely passed when the 1998 Institute of Historical Research survey of the top ten interests of UK historians revealed that 387 respondents identified their main interest as 'gender/women' where only 386 expressed a similar concern with international relations.[33] But international historians have been bemoaning the marginalization of their specialism for decades—certainly since at least the 1960s—and for most of that time the threatening new approaches—social and economic history, for example—'were still operating in naive-empiricist mode', so it seems a little illogical to make 'postmodernism' the prime culprit here.[34] More revealing is the manner in which participants in these discussions who defend the utility of the historical study of international relations typically assume or assert that traditional methodologies constitute the only valid means through which to conduct such study.[35] The legitimacy of trying to insinuate a prescription of methodology into a defence of subject matter seems rather doubtful, given that the past can scarcely stipulate the means by which it should be studied. But this manoeuvre (usually accompanied by a corollary denouncing those receptive to new methodologies as traitors within the gates) is nonetheless suggestive of how deeply ingrained are the conservative theoretical commitments of many international historians.

The critical question therefore is: what is it that makes international historians collectively so resistant to attempts to rethink history through these ideas? Assuming that explanation simply at the level of personal temperament and individual predilection is unlikely to take us very far, I want to suggest that we need to probe the culture of international history as it has been shaped through the sub-discipline's historical evolution as a distinctive branch of knowledge creation. The origins of international history lie in the nineteenth-century Rankean historical revolution when, as a result of a concatenation of circumstances, the study of political relations between states was established at the heart of the new, archive-oriented, scientific discipline: indeed, it was the very field 'on which history cut its scientific teeth'.[36] In many respects, this diplomatic history was unrecognizable from the international history practised today: it was narrowly focused on diplomatic exchanges, marginalizing the broader political, social, economic and strategic forces which now loom so large; and it was strongly nationalist in cast, not surprisingly in an era when historiography was intimately implicated with nation-building and given the grave political issues at stake in controversies about the international past at the time, particularly between the wars.[37] But despite the expansion of the field, and

[33] Tony Durham, 'God Still in History's Top Ten', *The Times Higher*, 19 February 1999, p. 18.
[34] Frederic Paul Smoler, H-DIPLO post, 8 October 1997.
[35] David Kaiser, H-DIPLO post, 6 October 1997 (asserting in defence of the field that 'government decisions about war and peace … are extremely significant to the whole world, and thus worthy of study in and of themselves'); Patrick Finney, H-DIPLO post, 8 October 1997 (pointing out that this assertion could certainly be admitted, but that it did not constitute a defence of traditional methodologies, nor could it be used as a means of delegitimating experimental ones); David Kaiser, H-DIPLO post, 8 October 1997. The same assumption is built into Stephen Haber et al., 'Brothers Under the Skin: Diplomatic History and International Relations', *International Security*, 22 (1997), pp. 34–43, and indeed the whole forum on 'History and Theory' (pp. 5–85) of which it is part.
[36] Paul Schroeder, H-DIPLO post, 30 September 1998.
[37] See the forum on 'What is Diplomatic History?', *History Today*, 35 (July 1985), pp. 33–42. On historiography and nation building, see Stefan Berger, Mark Donovan and Kevin Passmore (eds.), *Writing National Histories: Western Europe since 1800* (London: Routledge, 1999).

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increasing conceptual sophistication, the attachment of international historians to a fundamental realist epistemology and particular forms of empiricist methodology has endured; and indeed has been sharpened and continually reaffirmed in the course of a long succession of 'turf wars' fought against other disciplines (especially IR) and myriad modish new approaches within history.

Of course, one possible response to this observation is 'yes, and a damn good thing too!' The current predominant argument—shaped by and perpetuating this culture—seems to be that these attributes—together with our other particular habits, preferences and practices—should be preserved since they constitute the very essence of international history; and this is a position which can be held either with great conviction, out of a sincere belief that these practices offer privileged insights into the past, or pragmatically, on the grounds that all disciplines constitute themselves through ultimately arbitrary acts of inclusion and exclusion, in opposition to others, and that these barriers have to be maintained if international history is to retain a distinctive existence and claim to legitimacy. But it is too seldom recognized that this is a position that can only be occupied at some cost. It is not just that it entails missing out on the creative possibilities available through experimentation with new approaches and running the risk of marginalization within the broader disciplinary community. Maintaining this attitude, continuing to conceive of our work primarily as a craft, also involves a fairly systematic suppression or marginalization of its subjective dimensions, which obscures its manifold political and ideological ramifications in a manner that, it could be argued, perhaps matters a great deal.

International history as text and discourse

The critique that I want to run here is rooted in broadly post-structuralist ideas about power and knowledge, and language and representation. My point of departure is the contention that representation is never innocent: 'all cultural forms of representation … are ideologically-grounded, [in] that they cannot avoid involvement with social and political relations and apparatuses'.[38] The politics of historical representation can be interrogated on at least three different levels. First, there is the matter of what historians explicitly say, the visions of the world and its workings that they propagate, together with the deeper ideological connotations embedded in the tropes, metaphors and emplotments that they deploy. Historical texts are 'structured representations that, like literary texts, both silence as well as reveal, encode as well as decode, assign voice and authority to some and deny it to others'.[39] Whatever the subject matter, historians 'cannot avoid taking positions on topics vital to the foundations of any political ideology' since they presume models of things such as human behaviour, agency and nature 'and they offer them

[38] Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 3.
[39] Rosenberg, 'Revisiting Dollar Diplomacy', p. 155.

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implicitly if not explicitly as the lessons of history for today's understanding of the world'.[40]

The second and third levels engage different dimensions of the fact that historians are in a position to say anything at all. On the one hand, there is the politics of the discipline, meaning both the conventions and procedures for determining what counts as a valid textualization and the power relationships interfusing professional careers, patronage and publishing. The former have been debated extensively while the latter have only recently begun to be integrated into the literature: this is perhaps not surprising since they constitute one part of what Michel de Certeau termed the 'social place' of historical writing which the discipline itself has to mask in order to preserve 'the status of historiographical discourse'.[41] On the other hand, there is the question of 'the socially based rules that make such a discipline and its mode of textualization possible in the first place'. This means not just the social and institutional arrangements that facilitate the existence of academic disciplines, but also the 'regime of truth' operative within a society, 'the types of discourse it accepts and makes function as true'.[42]

This conceptualization of the nature of historical representation presents a profound challenge to the discipline's traditional aspirations to generate reasonably secure and objective knowledge about the past. Hence it has been one of the key factors prompting historians to become much more reflexive about their own practices, making them today 'self-conscious to a degree and to a level of sophistication that no previous generation can match with the partial exception of that of Carlyle and Humboldt'.[43] Moreover, those who are persuaded that historical representation is inherently and necessarily ideological—who have heeded Hayden White's injunction always to ask in whose interests the disciplining order of narrative closure is being imposed upon the sublime, manifest confusion of the past[44]—are accordingly developing new strategies and approaches both for reading and writing. On the one hand, this entails a new attentiveness towards analysing not only the contexts within which historical interpretations were produced and which conditioned them but also the ideological connotations encoded within narratives of

[40] Robert Berkhofer, *Beyond the Great Story. History as Text and Discourse* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 213–14, and more generally pp. 202–42. 'Texts are transformative, not merely reflective. They are continually "re-presenting"–not only doing cultural work as themselves the products of cultural struggles, but also continuing without end to do cultural work as each reader, each hearer, each viewer recasts them in the act of reception': Martin Weiner, 'Treating "Historical" Sources as Literary Texts: Literary Historicism and Modern British History', *Journal of Modern History*, 70 (1998), p. 621.

[41] Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 62, and more generally pp. 56–113. Ludmilla Jordanova, *History in Practice* (London: Arnold, 2000) integrates these issues into her survey of the discipline in an innovative, accessible and arguably subversive manner.

[42] Berkhofer, *Beyond the Great Story*, pp. 203–4, latterly quoting Michel Foucault.

[43] Michael Bentley, *Modern Historiography. An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 148. In achieving this in the United Kingdom, 'postmodernism' has been somewhat curiously allied with a new management regime in higher education 'concerned to render public expenditure transparent and accountable in the name of efficiency': James Vernon, 'Thoughts on the Present "Crisis of History" in Britain', *Institute of Historical Research Reviews in History*, http://ihr.sas.ac.uk/ihr/reviews/discourse1.html.

[44] Hayden White, 'The Politics of Historical Interpretation: Discipline and De-Sublimation', in *The Content of the Form* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), pp. 58–82.

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particular events, processes and actors.[45] On the other hand, authors in various corners of the discipline are experimenting with new forms of writing, building in to representations analysis of the contingencies that have shaped them, thus producing 'texts that refer to their own construction as they go about it'.[46]

To date, these approaches have not commended themselves to many international historians. Too often, our historiographical discussions consist solely of narrowly contested iterations of what 'the documents' mean, with participants only invoking ideology or other extra-empirical factors in order to account for an opponent's lamentable or wilful failure to read them properly and accept the self-evident truth they purvey.[47] Efforts to persuade colleagues to incorporate consideration of 'the politics of history writing' into such debates—'how competing narratives … have been shaped by their political context'—usually end up forlornly unheeded.[48] The very most that can be expected is that in historiographical commentaries the political, cultural and disciplinary contingencies that have affected past historical writing may be unpicked, but this seldom presages serious examination of the ideological baggage with which our writing today is—however subtly or implicitly—undoubtedly freighted.[49] Needless to say, in this context, the opportunity to incorporate more reflexive approaches into our 'substantive' contributions is also rarely exploited. Hence while we like to posit some fundamental distinctions between ourselves and our forebears—for example those whose work was blighted by nationalist blinkers—in perpetuating their epistemological and methodological assumptions we arguably continue to commit the same 'sins'. The precept 'know thyself' is surely a sound (and not particularly 'postmodernist') one, but the dominant self-understanding of the sub-discipline requires that these important dimensions of our work remain suppressed, or at the very least largely unexamined.

Of course, it could be argued that this attitude is quite in keeping with the 'practical realist' position dominant in the discipline at large. From this perspective, close attention to the empirical record, carefully honed professional procedures and peer scrutiny are sufficient to establish a domain of 'proper history' largely immune to the influence of context or interest. But a blindness to the ideological nature of historical representation is arguably the crucial weakness and internal inconsistency

[45] Debates about how to conceptualize the relationship between texts and contexts have been prominent in the literature and can be followed in Jenkins, *Reader*, passim.

[46] Berkhofer, *Beyond the Great Story*, p. 287. Elsewhere, Berkhofer argues that 'any new historical textualization must show how it goes about achieving its representation at the same time as it represents the past as history' (p. 282), and he offers extensive discussions of examples of this new genre of writing.

[47] See, for example, the debate conducted on H-DIPLO between February and March 2000 about Michael Jabara Carley's account of Anglo-Franco-Soviet relations, *1939: The Alliance That Never Was and the Coming of World War II* (Chicago: Ivan Dee, 1999). This characterization slightly over-simplifies since the question of which documents are most germane to the problem in hand is also an important element in this debate.

[48] Peter Jackson, review of Joel Blatt (ed.), *The French Defeat of 1940: Reassessments* (Oxford: Berghahn, 1998), posted on H-DIPLO, 1 November 2000. Note, however, that Jackson refers to 'politicisation' as something that can happen to history, implying that ideology is essentially extrinsic to it.

[49] Cf. the tensions between historians' own practice and their autobiographical reflections upon it: Michael Dintenfass, 'Crafting Historians' Lives: Autobiographical Constructions and Disciplinary Discourses after the Linguistic Turn', *Journal of Modern History*, 71 (1999), pp. 150–65.

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of this pragmatic position.[50] It has been aptly observed that the expansive discussions of the methodological and interpretive errors of predecessors offered by the likes of Richard Evans, while intended as cautionary tales, in fact point towards the conclusion that 'political, moral and theoretical bias and accompanying epistemological failure is unavoidable, and cannot be prevented by rigorous self-consciousness and self-criticism'.[51] Politics and scholarship are always inextricably intertwined, which is why interpretive disputes cannot be settled with reference to 'the evidence' alone.

Moreover, this issue is particularly important for international historians since our sub-discipline is so peculiarly vulnerable to a critique of its complicity with political power. The links between international history and the 'real worlds' of politics and international relations have been, and are, manifold and complex. A short list could include: the teaching of diplomatic history as a training for future statesmen in the nineteenth century and beyond; the control exerted by governments over access to archives and published source material; prominent and influential practitioners who have operated both as historians and policymakers (from E. H. Carr to Henry Kissinger); the roles played by international historians in advising governments; and government funding and promotion of international history, particularly through the direct and indirect fostering of think-tanks and institutes to study international affairs. A further component of our prevailing self-understanding is to construe this relationship in oppositional terms, as, for example, in Keith Wilson's study of the antagonistic relationship between governments and international historians through two world wars, in which historians seeking objective truth were continually frustrated by politicians and officials aiming to conceal or distort it for reasons of state.[52] (This opposition is reproduced in milder form in the perennial lament about the attenuated, over-simplified understandings of the past which policymakers possess and base their actions upon.) This characterization is powerful, but there must lurk a suspicion that it is so appealing to us because it is heroicizing, contrasting our scholarly virtue with worldly vice, and it scarcely seems to do justice to the multiplicity and complexity of the interconnections between the two realms. Indeed, there is arguably a whole secret history of the sub-discipline—from the founding of the Royal Institute of International Affairs after the First World War through to the influence of the military-industrial complex and national security state on the American humanities and social sciences in the Cold War and beyond[53]—which in the interests of reflexivity needs to be

[50] It is a profound irony, given how 'practical realists' valorize their own views as being based on what practising historians (as opposed to mere theorists) actually do, that sustaining their position forces them to deny legitimacy not just to some of the most vibrant historiographical movements of recent decades (such as women's history) but to almost all the classic works that they analyse: witness John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, 3rd edn. (London: Longman, 1999), pp. 1–35.

[51] Wulf Kansteiner, 'Mad History Disease Contained? Postmodern Excess Management Advice from the UK', *History and Theory*, 39 (2000), p. 223.

[52] Keith Wilson (ed.), *Forging the Collective Memory* (Oxford: Berghahn, 1996), especially the editor's introduction at pp. 1–27.

[53] A. Bosco and C. Navari (eds.), *Chatham House and British Foreign Policy, 1919–1945* (London: Lothian Foundation, 1994) is a fairly conventional study that contains a wealth of useful information that could be incorporated into this kind of analysis. Christopher Simpson (ed.), *Universities and Empire: Money and Politics in the Social Sciences during the Cold War* (New York: New Press, 1998) is more theoretically orientated, but says less about history than other related discursive fields. DeConde, 'Nature of International History', pp. 282–301 also contains some suggestive material relevant here.

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probed, and for which purpose recent critical thinking about the inter-relationship between power and knowledge will be particularly helpful.

Obviously, it would be a paranoid fantasy to suggest that all international history is a Central Intelligence Agency-funded conspiracy, and clearly the modalities of the relationship—the impacts which politics has had on the content of international historical work—have varied dramatically from time to time and place to place. But it is impossible to divorce these structural issues from the epistemological and methodological questions in play here regarding the sub-discipline's theoretical investments. It is at the very least a striking coincidence that the characteristics valorized within our discourse are so often also prized within the discourses of policymaking: the suppression of epistemological uncertainty and ambivalence, the predilection for hard evidence and documentary proof, the preoccupation with 'realities' rather than representation, the premium placed on experience and expertise, the lauding of (masculine) rationality, realism and pragmatism. There is, in other words, a pronounced coincidence of temperament or world-view between international historians and many policymakers, an intimacy that has had a profound structural influence upon our practice and the content and form of our work.

The two groups share the same discursive field—the same assumptions structuring perception, the same textual and linguistic practices through which knowledge of the world is constructed[54]—and this is a congruence of perspective which is both the product of and reinforced by our dominant theoretical commitment: precisely because our practice valorizes the ability to see the past on its own terms, and to get inside the discourses of policymakers in order to view the world through their eyes, we have too rarely subjected them to systematic scrutiny ('we tend in our own writing to reinscribe, with little comment, the discourses of policymaking'[55]). Here lies, of course, the greatest strength of our practice—indeed perhaps its very condition of possibility—but also a source of profound weakness, since it yields the agenda to the objects of historical inquiry, and blinds us to other ways of analysing policymaking.[56] This helps to explain, for example, why our interpretive debates so often entail merely elaborating and refining competing arguments that derive from the original rhetoric of policymakers themselves.[57] Of course, it would be absurd to imply that our work has not contained criticisms of policymakers, but these are very often predicated precisely on the fact that those policymakers have deviated from the *realpolitik* norms of conduct idealized by both communities. By the same token, the analysis that I am advocating here has of course been foreshadowed in different registers by work on unspoken assumptions,

[54] Obviously, I am here generalizing rather grandly about the complementary logics of policy and mainstream historiography. One of this paper's referees made the point—which I accept—that contemporary policymakers often deploy arguments that are in fact rather more in tune with the theoretical themes of continental philosophy, and which are thus really only susceptible to analysis through critical interpretative methods.

[55] Costigliola, 'Tropes of Gender and Pathology', p. 183; cf. Anders Stephanson, 'Ideology and Neorealist Mirrors', *Diplomatic History*, 17 (1993), pp. 285–95.

[56] Wesley Wark's critique of the historiography of appeasement 'Appeasement Revisited', *The International History Review*, 17 (1995), pp. 545–62 broadly chimes with what I am arguing here.

[57] This is an important theme in my study, forthcoming from Routledge, of the historiography of the origins of the Second World War. For suggestive ideas about how historians are constrained by the narrative traditions that they inherit, see Kevin Platt, 'History and Despotism, or: Hayden White vs. Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great', *Rethinking History*, 3 (1999), pp. 247–69.

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mental maps and ideology, factors that are now an integral part of sophisticated international history accounts.[58] But this work has typically tended to engage with policymakers on their own terms (why else would new critical work attempting to step outside of these parameters and assumptions have been met with such hostility?) to the extent that it is possible to understand the charge—though it is overdrawn—that international history has been 'court history', unwilling to critically appraise 'the great men who make decisions'.[59]

Why else would it have taken us so long to begin rigorous analysis of the ways in which policymakers render unequal power relationships explicable and legitimate in gendered terms?[60] To deconstruct the basic binary oppositions—such as realism versus idealism—which have structured their and our mappings of the field of international relations? To explore the role of myths and other cultural narratives which, while often undocumented, nonetheless critically shape policy formulation?[61] To do justice to the role of emotional language and rhetorics of persuasion in diplomatic exchanges? To unpick the narratives which policymakers construct to make contingencies intelligible, and the stereotypes and notions of national and other identities which are brought to bear in this process?[62] None of these issues has hitherto been considered particularly important because, assuming the existence of a knowable, stable, empirical domain (that is, 'what actually happened') beyond perception, and the transparency and representational adequacy of language, we have looked through policymakers' representation of events to probe the supposed 'realities' beyond, ignoring 'the systems of thought that underlie constructions of power and knowledge'.[63]

Again, this might not matter greatly were this a purely 'academic' exercise, but attending to the cultural politics of historical knowledge means acknowledging the ideological—and the 'real world'—implications of what we produce. Recent critical scholarship on the Bosnian war has made clear the contribution made to disastrous

[58] Note that some recent work on these kinds of issues explicitly positions itself as conservative in theoretical intent in relation to recent trends in the sub-discipline: for instance, T. G. Otte and C. A. Pagedas (eds.), *Personalities, War and Diplomacy* (London: Frank Cass, 1997), especially the Introduction at pp. 1–13.

[59] Robert Buzzanco, H-DIPLO post, 20 October 1997. Buzzanco has published an extended critique of the state of the field from a materialist, neo-New Left position; some of his criticisms fit with mine, though since his position is just as realist as that of the traditionalists he critiques he is sceptical of 'postmodernist' forms of discourse analysis: Robert Buzzanco, 'What Happened to the New Left? Toward a Radical Reading of American Foreign Relations', *Diplomatic History*, 23 (1999), pp. 575–607.

[60] The literature on this is now too vast to briefly footnote, but see for examples and references Costigliola, 'Tropes of Gender and Pathology'; Robert Dean, 'Masculinity as Ideology: John F. Kennedy and the Domestic Politics of Foreign Policy', *Diplomatic History*, 22 (1998), pp. 29–62; Kristin Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), and Rosenberg, 'Revisiting Dollar Diplomacy'.

[61] See Emily Rosenberg, *Financial Missionaries to the World. The Politics and Culture of Dollar Diplomacy, 1900–1930* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999). Cf. C. Buffet and B. Heuser (eds.), *Haunted by History: Myths in International Relations* (Providence, RI: Berghahn, 1998) and B. Heuser, *Nuclear Mentalities? Strategies and Beliefs in Britain, France and the FRG* (London: Macmillan, 1998) for more mainstream but nonetheless suggestive engagements with similar issues.

[62] For example (again from the mainstream), David Chuter, *Humanity's Soldier: France and International Security, 1919–2001* (Oxford: Berghahn, 1996). See also Andrew Rotter, 'Saidism Without Said: *Orientalism* and US Diplomatic History', *American Historical Review*, 105 (2000), pp. 1205–17.

[63] Emily Rosenberg, 'Gender', *Journal of American History*, 77 (1990), pp. 119–21.

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policy outcomes by historical and other commentaries predicated upon essentialist notions of ethnic difference and the persistence into the modern era of ancient irreconcilable tribal hatreds. It was not necessary for a particular text to have been read by a policymaker for it to contribute to a discourse and an outcome: 'the narrativisation of events into stories with moral purposes partake[s] in the constitution of realities that have political effects, even as those narratives claim the status of dispassionate and descriptive observer'.[64] Doubtless this was an extreme case, but if all representation is political, then all historical writing on international relations conveys and perpetuates assumptions about their nature and the desirable conduct of policy which contributes, albeit diffusely, to making 'some policies likely and others unlikely': 'conceptions of history and identity are not descriptive but constitutive of a terrain of possibility through which events are framed and responses debated'.[65] There is a widespread sentiment amongst international historians protective of our distinctive brand of common sense realist historiography that the subject matter with which we deal is too grave for us to allow ourselves to indulge in abstraction and theoretical speculation. The impulses underpinning this sentiment are utterly laudable, but if we construe matters as here then it can arguably be turned right around: if it is only through some species of 'theoretical speculation' that we can comprehend the ideological dimension and import of our work or the manner in which particular ways of thinking delimit the possibilities of policy, can we afford not to interrogate them on this level?[66] Do we not have an ethical and political responsibility to do so?[67]

Getting the story crooked/reading discourse

I have attempted here to explore the roots of international historians' antipathy to recent critical thinking in the culture and practices of the sub-discipline, and to open up discussion of the possible costs of maintaining this attitude. Since this is an analysis enabled by broadly post-structuralist insights, it should come as no surprise that I believe such thinking can also serve as part of the solution through offering ways to reconfigure our practice. The possibilities here are potentially limitless. For example, any full account of the engagement between international history and

[64] David Campbell, 'Contra Wight: the Errors of a Premature Writing', *Review of International Studies*, 25 (1999), pp. 320–21. Campbell's book *National Deconstruction: Violence, Identity and Justice in Bosnia* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1998) offers instructive examples both of critical historiography and discourse analysis and develops and justifies the arguments excerpted here. See also two important recent studies of 'Balkanism', Vesna Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998) and Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

[65] Campbell, 'Contra Wight', p. 321.

[66] Cf. Frank Ninkovich, 'No Postmortems for Postmodernism, Please', *Diplomatic History*, 22 (1998), pp. 451–66, here p. 466.

[67] The ethical claims of critical interpretative methods have recently begun to be clearly articulated: see, for example, Robert Eaglestone and Susan Pitt (eds.), 'The Good of History: Ethics, Post-Structuralism and the Representation of the Past', theme issue of *Rethinking History*, 2 (1998), pp. 309–424. See also Michael Dintenfass, 'Truth's Other: Ethics, the History of the Holocaust, and Historiographical Theory after the Linguistic Turn', *History and Theory*, 39 (2000), pp. 1–20, who argues—*pace* Richard Evans—that it is only by moving beyond traditional historical methodology that we can counter the menace of Holocaust denial.

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theory would also have to consider the role played by 'postmodernism' in precipitating the recent resurgence of interest in ideas, ideology and cultural perception in policymaking.[68] But I have alluded above to the two broad potential avenues of inquiry which most demand serious consideration at this point in time, namely critical historiography and discourse analysis.

If the turn to theory in literary studies involved, in J. Hillis Miller's words, shifting the focus from 'the meaning of texts' to 'the way meaning is conveyed',[69] in history an analogous reorientation involves downplaying the quest for the 'correct' meaning of past events in favour of exploring the shifting significances attributed to them over time. Hence the emergence in recent years of various kinds of critical historiography, exploring the manner in which history writing has been shaped by the contexts of its production, and reading it against the grain to decipher the ideological forces and tensions at work within it: unfocusing it 'in order to put into the foreground the constructed, rhetorical nature of our knowledge of the past, and to bring out the purposes, often hidden and unrecognized, of our retrospective creations'.[70] These projects are not all based on identical theoretical underpinnings—some distance themselves from 'postmodernism' while others are more inclined to foreground their theoretical intent[71]—and there remain tensions between the twin aims of linking texts to their social contexts on the one hand and engaging them purely as linguistic artefacts on the other, but this is nonetheless an approach which can prove particularly enlightening within international history.[72]

Doubters sometimes imply that critical historiography constitutes nothing more than a retreat into self-referential navel-gazing, or 'an infinite regress, because the historians who investigate the premises and politics of historical interpretations will need … to have their own politics of interpretation investigated by other historians, and so on ad infinitum'.[73] But no one is suggesting that all historians should suddenly abandon all other projects to devote themselves entirely to critical historiography. By the same token, historical texts will of course remain intelligible according to how they negotiate the empirical record—and can continue to be judged by that criterion—but there is much more to them than that, and

[68] On this trend, see Melvyn Leffler, 'The Cold War: What Do "We Now Know"?', *American Historical Review*, 104 (1999), pp. 501–24, and Zara Steiner, 'International History: Where has it Been and Where is it Going?', unpublished paper delivered to the Twelfth Annual British International History Group Conference at Gregynog, September 2000.

[69] Quoted in Zammito, 'Theoretical Yet?', p. 784.

[70] Hans Kellner, 'Language and Historical Representation', in Jenkins, *Reader*, p. 134.

[71] For example, Richard Bosworth, *Explaining Auschwitz and Hiroshima: History Writing and the Second World War* (London: Routledge, 1993) and Robert Gildea, *The Past in French History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994) on the one hand, and John Baxendale and Chris Pawling, *Narrating the Thirties: A Decade in the Making* (London: Macmillan, 1996) on the other.

[72] See, for example, Paul Cohen, *History in Three Keys: The Boxers as Event, Experience, and Myth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), Patrick Finney, 'The Romance of Decline: the Historiography of Appeasement and British National Identity', *electronic Journal of International History*, 1 (2000), http://ihr.sas.ac.uk/publications/ejihart1.html, and Louis A. Perez, *The War of 1898: The United States and Cuba in History and Historiography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998). Anders Stephanson's forthcoming book on six diplomatic historians should also make a key contribution here.

[73] Perez Zagorin, 'History, the Referent and Narrative: Reflections on Postmodernism Now', *History and Theory*, 38 (1999), p. 15.

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supplementing conventional readings with deconstructive ones will enable us to gauge these extra dimensions.[74]

Discourse analysis approaches within international history—adapted from other disciplines but as yet most fruitfully used within ours in the new cultural history[75]—deploy similar techniques to read the texts produced by policymakers. Engaging these texts both as literary artefacts and as products of broader social and cultural systems of meaning permits us to explore thoroughly how policymakers endowed the world with meaning and imbued it with emotion, the rhetorical constructs which they employed to enable particular lines of action, and the limits of what it was possible for them to think. Such readings not only pose fundamental questions about the sources of foreign policy, they can also connect fruitfully with thinking on the narrative dimensions of identity to explore the cultural construction of subjectivities, how policymaking discourse and policy itself served as a performative means whereby the identities of nations and other actors (both self and other) were constituted, negotiated and sustained.[76] As Frank Ninkovich perceptively summarizes the matter:

> diplomacy is self-referential. … [I]f states do not possess stable, prediscursive identities, if there is no such thing as an essential 'we' to defend, it would seem that mobilisation against the other in the name of national security is more a way of constituting the nation, of conjuring up and preserving the illusion of oneness, than a matter of defense against external threats. … [A]t the very least, the inside/outside problematic that comes with any consideration of identity provides a new way of looking at some old debates about where foreign policy is generated and opens up cultural questions about how community is defined.[77]

Admittedly, there remains a tension as to the status that proponents of these new approaches are claiming for them. On the one hand, some advocates resist the notion that they offer the single best way to understand policymaking, in accord not only with scholarly modesty but also with a theoretical position that preaches the infinite contestability of any description or narrativization. From this perspective, culturalist approaches are supplementary, useful and appropriate in some cases but not in others.[78] Mild embarrassment is consequently occasioned when observers

[74] On the variety of criteria which can be used to analyse interpretations, see Lampeter Archaeology Workshop, 'Relativism, Objectivity and the Politics of the Past', *Archaeological Dialogues*, 4 (1997), pp. 164–98. Campbell makes an eloquent claim for the prime importance of morality as the criterion according to which competing narratives should be judged, but this is not to dismiss the many alternative criteria that his own account alludes to or employs (*National Deconstruction*, especially ch. 3).

[75] For contrasting overviews of discourse analysis, see Miguel Cabrera, 'Linguistic Approach or Return to Subjectivism? In Search of an Alternative to Social History', *Social History*, 24 (1999), pp. 74–89, and Adrian Jones, 'Word *and* Deed: Why a *Post*-Poststructural History is Needed and How it Might Look', *The Historical Journal*, 43 (2000), pp. 517–41.

[76] A pioneering work here is David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*, 2nd edn. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998). See also Henrik Larsen, *Foreign Policy and Discourse Analysis: France, Britain and Europe* (London: Routledge, 1997). On various different formulations of discourse analysis and the identity problematic, see Iver Neumann, 'Self and Other in International Relations', *European Journal of International Relations*, 2 (1996), pp. 139–74. Patrick Salmon, 'How to Write International History: Reflections on *Norsk Utenrikspolitikks Historie*', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 9 (1998), pp. 208–23 argues that mainstream practitioners are also exploring these issues.

[77] Ninkovich, 'Postmortems', pp. 456, 464.

[78] Laura Belmonte, H-DIPLO post, 10 October 1997.

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receive them enthusiastically as providing a more accurate or full account of policymaking than conventional approaches, permitting us to get closer to the Rankean ideal of capturing 'how things actually were'.[79] This is a claim, on the other hand, which some proponents seem not to shy away from (however ironic this might appear): thus David Campbell's deconstructive account of the 'ontopological' assumptions dominating Western policymaking in the Bosnian war makes a powerful case that his own analysis not only offers a deeper level of insight but is morally and ethically superior to alternative readings.

This piece was framed by Maier's assertion that international history was a static field of inquiry, behind the pace being set in other parts of the discipline and beyond. As it stands, this metaphor is rather unsophisticated, and mainstream practitioners are entitled to feel that it does an injustice to the diversity, complexity and sophistication of the work that they now do. But it seems incontestable that international historians have been one of the communities within the discipline who have generally resisted opening up to the challenges of recent critical thinking. It would be unrealistic (and therefore an act of futile grandstanding) to issue a revolutionary clarion call for all practitioners to adopt the new approaches foreshadowed above. Although my conviction as to the ethical, political and intellectual cogency of the challenge new theoretical thinking poses to international history should have become manifest, I do not expect—or necessarily desire—that fellow practitioners will cease to craft the careful narrative renderings of policy 'from the inside' which hallmark the field. *Inter alia*, it might even be theoretically misguided to seek to resolve or transcend the current profound tension between 'modernist' and 'counter-modernist' histories which some characterize as not merely creative but also necessary.[80] What is now at stake here in practical terms is not the supplanting of traditional approaches but their supplementation by innovative ones that can, by illuminating blind spots and supplying a critical political edge, enrich our practice.

In contrast to the costs of closure, the costs of openness are very small. What is not at stake in critical historiography is the simple assimilation of history to fiction: though, 'once narrated, they enter a discourse that necessarily overlaps with the fictional',[81] even post-structuralists can agree that on some level—however problematic it might be to theorize this satisfactorily—historical events as refracted through the documentary traces constrain our interpretations.[82] Equally, what is not at stake is whether we continue to work in archives and use documents or devote ourselves entirely to philosophical reflection; where discourse analysis is concerned, the issue is rather what kinds of questions do we want to pose to the documents. Theory today is preoccupied precisely with trying to move beyond the unhelpful binaries (truth versus fiction; objectivity versus relativism) that have so long structured the debate. Engagement with 'postmodernism' does not necessarily portend a descent into nihilism. Though it would be wrong to deny that 'the end of

[79] Ronald Granieri, H-DIPLO post, 14 May 1997; cf. Ninkovich, 'Postmortems', pp. 462–3.
[80] Fay, 'Introduction', pp. 7–11; Rosenberg, 'Revisiting Dollar Diplomacy', pp. 155–8, 176; Peter Brickley, 'On Whether Time Tells …', *Rethinking History*, 3 (1999), pp. 345–8.
[81] James Young, 'Toward a Received History of the Holocaust', *History and Theory*, 36, Theme Issue (1997), p. 25.
[82] Susan Pitt, 'Representing Otherness', *Rethinking History*, 2 (1998), p. 400: 'The traces we work with give us the chance to brush up against otherness and contain resistances which constrain the interpretations of anyone approaching them with honesty and integrity'.

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history' is one destination to which recent critical thinking can take us,[83] much thoughtful theoretical work today is precisely concerned with the ethics of historical representation, attempting to rethink it in order to do justice rather than violence to the alterity of the past.[84] Adopting the kinds of approaches which I have outlined above would invigorate international history, enabling practitioners to escape from what some currently bemoan as a 'feeble and alienated position within their own discipline' and to command a place at the heart of this project.[85]

[83] Keith Jenkins, *Why History? Ethics and Postmodernity* (London: Routledge, 1999).
[84] Robert Eaglestone, 'The "Fine Risk" of History: Post-Structuralism, the Past and the Work of Emmanuel Levinas', *Rethinking History*, 2 (1998), pp. 313–20; Torbjörn Wandel, 'Michel de Certeau's Place in History', *Rethinking History*, 4 (2000), pp. 55–76.
[85] Haber et al., 'Brothers Under the Skin', p. 43. See also Robert Dean, 'Tradition, Cause and Effect, and the Cultural History of International Relations', *Diplomatic History*, 24 (2000), pp. 621–2.

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