

# Conjuring Evidence for Experience: Imagining a Post-Structuralist History

Barry Shank

After more than fifteen years, attempts to merge the theoretical insights of poststructuralism with the practice of history continue to be fraught with contention, hyperbole, and misunderstanding. Articles by advocates of poststructuralism describe historians as epistemologically naive at best, at worst willfully blind. Defenders of traditional historical practice, on the other hand, castigate poststructuralism as linguistic tyranny, a perverse refusal to recognize the difference between language and reality. Charges of hubris and arrogance devolve on both sides. Even the most clear and even-toned discussions refer to “important and irreconcilable” differences between poststructuralism and history. No grounds seem to exist for bringing together the anti-foundationalist project of poststructuralism with the historical concern for past experience.<sup>1</sup>

As one committed to understanding the past, yet who sees himself neither as a historian—traditionally understood—nor a poststructuralist, I have long been baffled by this intense disciplinary rivalry. From my perspective as one trained in American Studies, these two frameworks of intellectual inquiry share both motive and methodology, and each offers the other complementary strengths.<sup>2</sup> For instance, proponents of both deconstruction and social history proffer devastating critiques of philosophical and cultural idealism.<sup>3</sup> In addition, both poststructuralism and history demand close, careful reading of texts or, if you prefer, documents. On the basis of these shared philosophical and methodological imperatives, I believe that it is possible to imagine a poststructuralist history that would combine the strengths of both endeavors. In this essay, I want to suggest how the reconceptualization of a few key terms and a reconsideration of

the rhetoric of both history and poststructuralism might result in a more self-reflexive history and a strategically grounded and, therefore, more effectively persuasive poststructuralism.

Rather than recapitulate the entire debate, from the early publications of Hayden White and Dominick LaCapra on, let me begin with a more recent discussion.<sup>4</sup> In 1991, Lawrence Stone ignited yet another volatile skirmish over this contested territory with the publication of a brief note in the journal, *Past and Present*. Avowedly defending history from the threats represented by deconstruction, symbolic anthropology and new historicism, Stone defined “the subject matter of history” as “events and behaviors,” the “data” of history as “contemporary texts,” and the “problem” or task of history as “explanation of change over time.” Stone worried that history (defined in this fashion as discrete events, texts, and explanations) was in the process of becoming an “endangered species,” driven out of existence by the above-named linguistic predators.<sup>5</sup>

Two issues later, the same journal printed two replies to Stone’s note. In one of these comments, Patrick Joyce argued that “the major advance of ‘post-modernism’ needs to be registered by historians: namely that the events, structures, and processes of the past are indistinguishable from the forms of documentary representation, the conceptual and political appropriations, and the historical discourses that construct them.”<sup>6</sup> According to Joyce, the chief effect of the “linguistic turn” or “post-modernism”—or what I am calling poststructuralism—is to question the a priori distinction between the subject matter of history and the combination of data and interpretation used to represent it.

In his response to Joyce, Stone worried that eliminating the distinction between the past and its representations would lead to an intolerable condition. “Where [Stone and Joyce] part company...is at the extreme stage, when reality is defined *purely* as language. This is because if there is nothing outside the text, then history as we have known it collapses altogether, and fact and fiction become indistinguishable from one another.” As part of his effort to defend this distinction between fact and fiction, reality and language, text and “outside the text,” Stone listed a set of methodological principles for the traditional practice of history. Included among these principles were the propositions that “historical truth is unattainable, and that any conclusions are provisional and hypothetical;” that “we [that is, historians] are all subject to bias and prejudice because of our race, class and culture,” therefore, the background of the historian is an important factor to consider when evaluating any history; and, finally, that “documents...were written by fallible human beings who made mistakes, asserted false claims, and had their own ideological agenda which guided their compilation,” consequently, these documents ought to be read critically and interpreted carefully.<sup>7</sup>

While very few historians or poststructuralists would disagree with the methodological implications of Stone’s set of principles, the vast majority of practicing historians would balk at Joyce’s insistence on the impossibility of distinguishing between past events and historical discourses, while every self-respecting poststructuralist would reject Stone’s categorical distinction between

reality and representation. It seems to me, therefore, that the important but nevertheless reconcilable differences between traditional historical concerns and methods and the anti-foundationalism of poststructuralism lie in the space mapped out between these boundary-defining positions. To assert that past events are not distinguishable from historical discourses, however, is not to say that reality is nothing but language or that there is no difference between fact and fiction. Rather, it is to suggest that the relationship between language and reality is too complicated and too interactive to allow for any assumption of an immediately evident categorical distinction between the subject matter of history and the data, the language, the discourse, that represent it. A necessary consequence of this belief is that past events, texts, and explanations do not exist as *discrete entities* prior to the work of the historian. Ironically, however, this interactive commingling of language and reality serves not to limit but to reinforce the necessity and importance of the historian's effort to establish both the distinctions and the relevant connections among text, context, and event.<sup>8</sup>

In their introduction to a recent collection of essays devoted to exploring new directions in American cultural history, Richard Fox and Jackson Lears assert that “[a]n emphasis on the inescapable textuality of all sources, even census rolls and market research reports, has freed historians from a positivist conception of data retrieval and focused their attention on the fundamental task of interpretation.”<sup>9</sup> This statement appears to push forward from the somewhat static positions of Stone and Joyce. As Fox and Lears see it, unproblematic data are not simply lying in an archive somewhere waiting to be discovered; interpretation has a determinative effect on the material that can be mustered as evidence. Indeed, a recognition of the textuality of all historical sources goes a long way towards operationalizing Patrick Joyce's intermingling of discourse and event. Yet two pages later in the same introduction, a contradictory proposition appears—one that, perhaps, should not be so surprising. Here the editors of *The Power of Culture* underline one of their goals for the collection. “We aim to suggest how historians can, whatever period or group or theme they are studying, attend both to the ‘textual’ —visual as well as verbal— character of our knowing and to the broad structures of power that constitute the ‘real’ social world in which our knowing takes place (though of course that world is known to us only through the social constructions of it that are available to us).”(p.5)

The distinction that is maintained here is chiefly the familiar though discomforting distinction between knowledge and the world. But it is accompanied by a common chain of equivalences that articulates some of the unfortunate consequences that follow from the traditional understanding of this distinction. On one hand we are to acknowledge the undeniable textual character of our knowing. On the other hand stands the real, the social, the world, each of which is constituted by “broad structures of power.” This formulation produces a tragic role for the historian, doomed to a dependence on the inadequacy of textual knowledge when faced with the overwhelming real social world of power.<sup>10</sup> The

editors of *The Power of Culture* want to acknowledge the effects of textuality, but they want to constrain those effects—figured as debilitating—to the realm of the historian, the intellectual, the knower. The real social world of power is not affected by textuality in this formulation.

While the problems inherent in this version of the classic dualism are evident, I want to make it abundantly clear that I am not making the reductive claim that everything is a text. What I am saying is that an a priori distinction between the textual and the real is not productive. Historians cannot afford to operate in a world where textual knowing is assumed to line up on one side, while the real social world of power stands on the other. Distinguishing between and determining the relationships among text and context is the vital rhetorical task of historians. To begin this task with such a fissured conception of the real—with the belief that any context could somehow escape the effects of textuality—simply eviscerates the work of history.

It might be helpful to reconsider this matter using slightly different words, such as the distinction between “meaning” and “experience.” Stepping back from the epistemological quagmire produced by a categorical separation between knowledge and the real, some historians have turned to the concept of experience as a mediating term within which discursive construction can meet material conditions. For instance, Fox and Lears state that “one of the most basic truths of the new cultural history [is] that experience is mediated by language, that our access to experience in the past as in the present is decisively shaped by its encoding in particular rhetorical conventions.”(p.5)

According to historian Joan Scott, however, this way of formulating experience simply introduces a new undefined term that can take the place of the more traditional historical foundation of past events and behaviors. “‘Experience’ is one of the foundations that has been reintroduced into historical writing in the wake of the critique of empiricism,” she writes in an important historiographical essay that was first published in a literary journal. “It has recently emerged as a critical term in debates among historians about the limits of interpretation and especially about the uses and limits of post-structuralist theory for history.” Scott further asserts that “those most open to interpretive innovation”—for example, cultural historians such as Fox and Lears—“are among the most ardent defenders of the need to attend to ‘experience.’” While data and interpretation might have become intermingled and, in practice, quite difficult to distinguish from each other, Scott argues that historians have begun to rely on the concept of experience itself as the subject matter of the historian’s research—the pre-existing object of and foundation for any interpretive meaning.<sup>11</sup>

Among the “experiential foundationalists” Scott discusses is John Toews. In his oft-cited review essay, “Intellectual History after the Linguistic Turn,” Toews distinguishes between meaning and experience, presenting the construction of meaning as a response to “changing worlds of experience ultimately irreducible to the linguistic forms in which they appear.” Scott reads this formulation as the assertion of experience prior to meaning and, therefore, the construction of

experience as a foundationalist term, an absolute ground, an unquestioned and unquestionable transcendental signified. It seems clear to me that Scott has misread Toews here, just as Stone misread Joyce above. At another point in his essay, Toews characterizes the relationship between meaning and experience as follows: “[E]xperience is not simply given but already worked over and mediated by language and thus as much an object of interpretation as the texts in the history of discourse.” While Toews stands on the irreducibility of experience to meaning, Scott suggests that historians should acknowledge “the discursive nature of ‘experience,’” asserting that: “Experience is at once always already an interpretation and something that needs to be interpreted.” These two positions—equally true and equally partial—narrow further the focus on the point where I believe the differences between history and poststructuralism can be usefully reconciled.<sup>12</sup>

Both poststructuralism and history would benefit from acknowledging that while there might be aspects to any experiential moment that resist meaningful analysis, even that situation of resistance is a discursively enabled and textually interpreted condition, deriving, for example, from the distance (discursively as well as materially produced) between the lived subjective experience of the historian or analyst and the moment of past experience being described. For example, as the material conditions and the disciplinary rules that enable and legitimate historical practice change, the process of translating past knowledge into present knowledge changes, and, in effect, produces transformations in the qualities or aspects of the past that are knowable or unknowable. The result of these ongoing changes is that what we call “the real” in history is often that which resists our understanding, not by virtue of some categorical distinction (as with some a priori difference, say, between power and knowledge or language and life), but as an effect of the unending development of our attempts to understand the past.<sup>13</sup> The question remains: why do historians, time and again, insist on repeating this philosophically problematic distinction between meaning and experience, knowledge and power, text and context, or language and life?

The short answer is, for the purpose of argument. Reference to some version of a non-textualized real has long been a rhetorical strategy common to the practice of history. Within traditional historical writings, this distinction between text and a non-textualized real stands as the basis for determining the legitimacy of the interpretive work of the historian—the necessary means of determining the difference between “fact” and “fiction.” An insistence on the real status of past events and behaviors is the definitive mark of history for Lawrence Stone. An emphasis on a real that is irreducible to meaning forms the basis of John Toews’s call for a “renewed focus on the experiential component in the dynamic, mutually implicated polarities of meaningful experience.” The editors of *The Power of Culture* find a reference to the real social world of power to be a necessary means towards legitimating their essays as history.<sup>14</sup>

As Scott points out, this distinction between textualized knowledge and the real social world of power becomes even more important for those historians for whom the distinction between data and interpretation is no longer clear cut. For

one example of the increased rhetorical importance of the insistence on a nontextualized real, let us turn to Saul Cornell's critique of Michael Warner. In a crucial section of his *Letters of the Republic*, Warner argues that the Antifederalist Amos Singletary misunderstood the relationship between Federalist discourse and the technological and ideological conditions within which this discourse was being formed and distributed. Asserting that the structure of the bourgeois public sphere, not individual greed, was the determinative condition for Federalist rhetoric, Warner brings to his late twentieth-century interpretation a perspective that an eighteenth century Antifederalist could not have consciously shared. Rather than disagreeing with this interpretation or raising an argument about the relative value of differing textualized contexts, Cornell insists that Warner has failed to understand a more fundamental distinction. "By failing to distinguish between textual/discursive reality (the rhetoric of Singletary's attack on the Federalists) and social reality (the class relations in Massachusetts during ratification as identified by Singletary) Warner prevents us from appreciating the way that Antifederalist discourse sought to comprehend an extradiscursive reality." In an analogy quite common in historical writings, the distinction between rhetoric and class relations has become equivalent to the distinction between discourse and extradiscursive reality. The analytical construct of class is misunderstood as an extradiscursive social reality, and the rhetorical force of Cornell's critique of Warner is inflated by this unnecessary categorical distinction between language and a non-textualized real.<sup>15</sup>

Nevertheless, in terms of its argumentative power, reference to the real is obviously a useful move. Poststructuralists might applaud the philosophical rigor of thinking and writing without such a strategy, but the persuasiveness of their arguments (outside of the discourse of philosophy itself) suffers from its absence. References to "experience" or any other figure for the real must be understood as the means whereby the work of historians acknowledges its necessary textuality while still indicating the limits of the knowledge it produces. "The real" is an unreachable limit; the gestures used to point towards that limit indicate the historian's awareness of that limit. The importance of these moves, however, does not obviate the necessity of submitting them to rigorous critical examination. Determining the effectiveness of this rhetorical reference to the real enables relative evaluations of the persuasiveness of the historical argument. And it is precisely the basis and the validity of any such claims on the real that will be strengthened by the self-reflexive rhetorics of a poststructuralist history.

Within the historical text, any reference to the real provides the key moment at which to begin to evaluate the persuasiveness of the argument. In this way, the status of the claim on the historical real does lay the foundation for the interpretive work of the historian. To this extent, Joan Scott's critique is correct. Where her critique errs, however, is in the assumption that these claims on the historical real always go unquestioned, always function as a transcendental signified. Despite overt statements to the contrary by some of its practitioners, the methodology of

history recognizes the tentative nature of these claims. In fact, much historical debate centers on their validity. One notorious example of a debate of this type concerns the controversy over the economic analysis of slavery delivered in Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman's *Time on the Cross*.<sup>16</sup>

*Time on the Cross* was released in 1974 in two volumes, and the division between the two emphasized the distinction between data and interpretation. The first volume, subtitled *The Economics of American Negro Slavery*, contains the bulk of the historical argument and interpretation. Throughout this first volume, however, the authors refer to the second volume, *Evidence and Methods*, which contains a mass of cliometric data—statistical analyses of information derived from the disciplines of demography and economics. The persuasiveness of Fogel and Engerman's historical work was based on a privileged claim on the real that was represented by means of the social scientific data and analyses its authors had mustered. A brief introduction to this second volume spelled out the authors' belief in the greater representative accuracy of their work.

The battle to disentangle private prejudices and objective knowledge is unending...The problem of disentangling knowledge from belief is still more acute in the discipline of history...If we had confined our consideration of the economics of slavery purely to what can be achieved with the methods of the social sciences, this book would have been limited to appendix B [which] brings together many of the principal findings of cliometricians regarding slavery... Where hard evidence was lacking on issues vital to the interpretation of slavery, we, like historians who preceded us, were forced into speculation. By taking advantage of the extensive quantitative work of the cliometricians, however, we have been able to reduce significantly the number of issues on which speculation was the only option.<sup>17</sup>

The principal findings of cliometricians equal hard evidence, objective knowledge, the opposite of speculation, a privileged claim on the real. This objective knowledge, then, stood as the basis for the arguments found in *Time on the Cross*.

This privileged claim on the real also became the basis of a book-length review of the work written by Herbert Gutman and originally published in the *Journal of Negro History* in 1975. In his review, Gutman insisted that "detailed examination of T/C—its major arguments and the evidence supporting them—shows convincingly that it is poor social history."<sup>18</sup> It is important to make clear that Gutman was *not* arguing against the validity of social scientific data or analyses in historical writings. Gutman's acceptance of and familiarity with social scientific methods for constructing historical evidence, rather, enabled him to critique the methods whereby the data were compiled, the models of behavior

that marked off certain bodies of data as immediately relevant to the argument, as well as the interpretations that Fogel and Engerman drew from their analyses. Gutman's attack on *Time on the Cross* was considered to be so devastating not because he dismissed their evidence as categorically inaccurate, but because he respected that particular type of evidence and therefore focused his critique precisely on the validity of the argument based on it. In other words, for Gutman's critique to have the force it did, it had to begin from the textualized nature of the claim on the real that had been produced through the disciplinary discourse of cliometrics. As the controversy over *Time on the Cross* makes clear, any "real" that a work of history refers to—whether figured as economic statistics or "broad structures of power"—is already textualized in this fashion. That is, the very possibility of referring to this necessarily textualized real as extratextual, as "real," is an effect of a certain way of making knowledge and constructing arguments—strategies which are crucial to the practice of history.

For historians who use cultural evidence in their arguments, the advances of poststructuralist theory are a necessary means toward achieving a sufficiently subtle and nuanced reference to a textualized real. Yet many of those who profess a desire to "grapple with the implications of poststructuralist theory" and whose work does indeed show the effects of this grappling find it necessary to mark off some territory as safe from the effects of textualization. Jackson Lears introduces his contribution to *The Power of Culture*, "Sherwood Anderson—Looking for the White Spot," by describing his position on the intersection of poststructuralism and history. Although he finds much of value in the "antifoundationalist movements in philosophy and literary criticism," Lears is impatient with poststructuralism's "reflex dismissal of any concern with authentic experience as little more than vestigial essentialism."<sup>19</sup>

Lears then allows authentic experience to function as the central motif within the essay, but he does so with a curious double purpose. On the one hand, Lears suggests that a discourse of authenticity might function as an "honorable standpoint"(15) for cultural critics in the late twentieth century. On the other hand, he anchors this theoretical possibility in the way this discourse operates in the early twentieth-century writings of Sherwood Anderson. In the rhetoric of the essay, then, Anderson's longing for authentic experience links the work of late twentieth-century cultural critics to a "persistent search for some reliable ontological bedrock"(16) from which can safely be viewed the swirling mists of a textualized world. In a wonderfully deft yet wide-ranging argument, Lears constructs a genealogy of this discourse of authenticity, showing how it has been part of an American resistance to modernization shared by seventeenth-century Calvinist divines and eighteenth-century republican propagandists as well as twentieth-century modernist writers. Anderson's specific use of this discourse is then shown to have been shaped by his "immersion in a particular historical situation that accounted for [his] interpretive power."<sup>(37)</sup> Throughout the piece, Lears carefully and persuasively distinguishes the complex relationships among



multiple texts and diverse contexts, refraining from privileging either Anderson's published fiction or his private letters and reminiscences, always reading each against the other.

When the article comes to an end, however, at the very moment when I wanted him to link explicitly his own search for authenticity to this same religious, republican, and bohemian discourse, Lears chooses instead to repeat a troubling image from Anderson's writings. As he does so, Lears puts forth the possibility that Anderson's

fascination with "the dance of life" in his Italian neighbors' garden suggests the centrality of a biological or ecological dimension to that desire for connectedness. As he stared out from his bedroom window, losing himself in contemplation of the yard next door, Anderson may have glimpsed a fundamental insight: all our cultural constructions—our longings for the white spot of eternal harmony, our dances of life and death—are rooted in the earth, the ground of being. That may be one reality that, try as we might, we cannot contain in quotation marks.(37)

This conclusion confirms the tragic view of history derived from an insistence on the categorical distinction between the real and the textual. In line with the discourse of authenticity, biology becomes the ontological bedrock of a reality that cannot be contained in quotation marks. Ethnic difference is then ranked by means of the classic opposition between nature and culture, where the more natural becomes the more real while greater social power is reserved for the more cultural—the man longing for the white spot who stands staring out the window. As Lears uses this image to anchor the discourse of authenticity, Anderson's longing becomes "our longings"; we are encouraged to identify with Lears who is identifying with Anderson. In the process, we are positioned to assent to a rhetorical construct that represents the pleasures of an Italian family as more real because they are more natural, more biological, less cultural, less textual.

In the process of arguing for the validity of the discourse of authenticity as an honorable standpoint for late twentieth century cultural critics, Jackson Lears has shown us exactly why it cannot function in that way. The discourse of authenticity places the real outside of culture. It then bewails its own culture which is defined as incapable of being real. It then imagines a more real culture which, according to the terms of its discourse, must be more natural. Finally, it manages to feel superior to this more natural culture (a very common trope signifying this superiority is that of looking down from a window onto the pleasures of the other) by virtue of the classical opposition between culture and nature. Within the discourse of authenticity, the longing for an untextualized real masks the real social power that textual mastery provides.<sup>20</sup>

To return to Lawrence Stone's definition of history, the project of explaining change over time is not forwarded by the maintenance of past events and behaviors, or of any other "real," as sterile entities, prophylactically protected from the virus of textual interpretation. The production of knowledge regarding past events and behaviors, even the lived experience of past events and behaviors, is radically dependent upon the determinedly textualized effects of interpretation.

All references to a past real are the result of a claimed privileged relation between one mode of signifying and a past mode of being. Following from his familiarity with poststructuralist thought, the privileged mode for Lears is figured as a discourse (unfortunately, a discourse based on a certain biological determinism and a corresponding ethnic romanticism). Traditionally, however, this privileged mode of signifying has been termed "primary documents." Within the past thirty years, social and economic statistics have achieved this privileged status. Historians working with material culture are developing new ways of interpreting artifacts that bring them into the sacred circle. Current movements in cultural history are developing arguments for including novels, films, even radio and television programs, and popular music within the realm of historical evidence—always and only as textualized representations of a past mode of being. Historical training traditionally has and continues to focus on the ability to read, interpret, and critique such privileged modes of signifying. We are trained in the practice of conjuring evidence for experience.

Once this process of reading and interpreting begins, however, it becomes theoretically unending. The endless deferral of meaning suggested by poststructuralism and made evident in the antifoundational process of reading and interpreting historical evidence is, however, deeply unsatisfying. For the purposes of argument and persuasion, some closure must be reached and some conclusions must be, however tentatively, drawn. This is the purpose of the concept of the real in historical writing. However it might be metaphorically represented—whether as class relations, cliometric statistics, or biological determinism—reference to the real becomes a rhetorical tool used to justify and buttress a particular mode of interpretation of already existing textualized interpretations, with the aim of producing a persuasive argument.

Persuasive claims about a past real are the goal and the purpose of historical work. But insofar as this is true, such claims must always be subject to a rigorous critique, not only of the historical text, but of the very practice of history that stands behind the historical text. Any such critique will be refined and sharpened by an insistence, not only on the textuality of all evidence, but also on the textuality of all experience—past and present. The autonomy of history as a discipline depends upon its concern with past experience, which in turn justifies its methodological procedures. In order to create more persuasive discussions of past experience, however, historians ought to acknowledge that any claims about the real are grounded not **in the real**, but indeed and wholly in other textualized statements of interpretation which have then been re-interpreted by the historian. The curious result of this turning of the philosophical spiral is not the abandon-

ment of history as a meaningless project. It is not the conflation of text and context. It is not the refusal to recognize the difference between language and life. Rather, the acknowledgment of the fundamental work of interpretation reinforces the vital importance of history as a primary discipline for constructing persuasive claims about the social real.

Recognizing the anti-foundational status of historical interpretation results in a necessary intensification of the existing methodological principles which already undergird the practice of history. Not only must historians remember that "truth is unattainable," we must continue to hold persuasive argumentation as our goal. Not only must historians consider the effect of the "biases and prejudices" of other historians, we have to take into account the relations between our own discursively produced subject positions and our subject matter. Not only must historians acknowledge the ideological construction of our evidence, but we have to account for the ideological construction of our own approach to that evidence and whatever disciplinary rules allow that evidence to appear and to function as such. Finally, historians must recognize that all we have to work with is textualized interpretation, but this in itself does not differentiate our work from that of government workers, corporate executives, automobile mechanics, medical doctors, or primary care-givers. In other words, the world is not divided into textualized knowledge and real structures of power, language and life. The nearly impossible task of the historian is to create so persuasive a presentation of past experience that it appears "real" to the reader's mind. The only means to the accomplishment of this end is through a powerful devotion to craft—one that is not afraid to acknowledge the virtually molecular bonding of the textual and the real.

## Notes

1. Saul Cornell, "Early American History in a Postmodern Age," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 50:2 (April 1993). In addition to Saul, I would like to thank the following individuals for contributing to the process of thinking about the issues discussed in this paper: Philip Barnard, Lisa Bitel, Susan Garfinkel, Cheryl Lester, Peter Mancall, Ann Schofield, and Shirley Wajda. This paper was initially delivered to the 1994 meetings of the American Historical Association, where it benefitted from the comments of Jonathan Arac. The editors of *American Studies* and an anonymous reviewer also aided the clarification of these ideas. While each of these individuals helped me avoid serious mistakes, none of them ought to be held responsible for any of those which remain.

2. Which is not to say that all practitioners of American Studies would agree with me. For examples of the debates within American Studies, see Steven Watts, "The Idiocy of American Studies: Poststructuralism, Language, and Politics in the Age of Self-Fulfillment," *American Quarterly* 43 (December 1991), 625-60; Barry Shank, "A Reply to Steven Watts's 'Idiocy,'" *American Quarterly* 44 (September 1992), 439-48; Nancy Isenberg, "The Personal is Political: Gender, Feminism, and the Politics of Discourse Theory," *American Quarterly* 44 (September 1992), 449-58; Steven Watts, "Reply to the Critics," *American Quarterly* 44 (September 1992), 459-62; Jeffrey Louis Decker, "Dis-Assembling the Machine in the Garden: Antihumanism and the Critique of American Studies," *New Literary History* 23 (1992), 281-306; Bruce Kuklick, "Reply to Decker," *New Literary History* 23 (1992), 307-10; T.J. Jackson Lears, "Reply to Jeffrey Decker," *New Literary History* 23 (1992), 311-12; Jeffrey Louis Decker, "American Studies—Toward and Beyond an Antihumanist Method: A Reply to Bruce Kuklick and T.J. Jackson Lears," *New Literary History* 23 (1992), 313-17.

3. Perhaps the most striking comparison from the two camps that demonstrates this shared motive brings together Jacques Derrida and Bryan Palmer. See the Preface to Palmer's *Descent into*

*Discourse* (Philadelphia, 1990), xi-xvii and Derrida's explication of his anticipated encounter with Marxism in *Positions* trans. Alan Bass, (Chicago, 1981), 60-67.

4. See Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore, 1978); *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore, 1987); Dominick LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, Contexts, Language* (Ithaca, 1983); *History and Criticism* (Ithaca, 1985); a helpful review essay on White and LaCapra is Lloyd Kramer, "Literature, Criticism, Historical Imagination: The Literary Challenge of Hayden White and Dominick LaCapra," in Lynn Hunt ed., *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley, 1989), the remainder of part one of this book is also useful; see also John Toews, "Intellectual History after the Linguistic Turn: The Autonomy of Meaning and the Irreducibility of Experience," *American Historical Review* 92 (October 1987), 879-907.

5. Lawrence Stone, "History and Post-Modernism," *Past and Present* no.131 (May 1991), 217-18.

6. "History and Post-Modernism I," *Past and Present* No. 133, (November 1991), 208.

7. "History and Post-Modernism III," *Past and Present* No. 135 (1992), 189-194.

8. On the responsibility of historians to account for evidence found in the present, and in the process make persuasive claims about the past see Murray G. Murphey, *Our Knowledge of the Historical Past* (Indianapolis, 1973).

9. Richard Fox and T. J. Jackson Lears, *The Power of Culture: Essays in American Cultural History* (Chicago, 1993), 2-3.

10. I discuss some of the more disturbing effects of this tragic view of the historian's work in a later section of the paper.

11. "The Evidence of Experience," *Critical Inquiry* 17 (Summer 1991), 780-81.

12. Toews, 892; Scott, 797.

13. Which is not intended to imply a progressive development toward an ever more accurate knowledge. For a more complete explication of this intertwining of knowledge, power, and discourse, and the consequent need for intensive, principled, and precise statements of position, see any of the following works by Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York, 1972); "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (Ithaca, 1977) 139-164; *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York, 1979); *The History of Sexuality, Vol.1* (New York, 1980) especially 92-102.

14. Stone (1992); Toews, 907; Fox and Lears, 5.

15. Cornell, 337; Michael Warner, *Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge, 1990). Warner's argument involves an application of Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, 1991).

16. *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery* and *Time on the Cross: Evidence and Methods* (Boston, 1974).

17. Robert William Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, *Time on the Cross: Evidence and Methods—A Supplement* (Boston and Toronto, 1974), 3-4.

18. Herbert G. Gutman, *Slavery and the Numbers Game: A Critique of Time on the Cross* (Urbana, 1975), 2. "T/C" is Gutman's playful way of referring to *Time on the Cross*, a takeoff on the prevalence of mathematical formulae in the book.

19. T.J. Jackson Lears, "Sherwood Anderson: Looking for the White Spot," in Fox and Lears, *op.cit.*, 15; further page references will be found in the text.

20. Theodor Adorno puts it this way: "Allegedly hale life is opposed to damaged life, on whose socialized consciousness, on whose 'malaise,' the jargon speculates. Through the ingrained language form of the jargon, that hale life is equated with agrarian conditions, or at least with simple commodity economy, far from all social considerations...Past forms of societalization, prior to the division of labor, are surreptitiously adopted as if they were eternal. Their reflections falls upon later conditions which have already been victimized by progressive rationalization, and in contrast to those the earlier states seem more human." *The Jargon of Authenticity* (Evanston, 1973), 59. See also the discussion of Levi-Strauss and Rousseau in Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* trans., Gayatri Spivak, (Baltimore, 1974), 101-268, esp. 216-229. For a classic example of the discourse of authenticity see Goethe's description of the pleasures of the Italian people in Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe, "The Roman Carnival," Alessandro Falassi, ed., *Time Out of Time: Essays on the Festival* (Albuquerque, 1987), 13-34.