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writing, memory
and the new materialism**

Interview with **Patrick Joyce**,
by **Elisa Lopes da Silva**

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Patrick Joyce is a historian who has been writing about the liberalism and freedom, the state and materiality, mostly in Britain, since the later 1970s. He published, notably, *The rule of freedom* (2003) and *The state of freedom* (2013) several articles on historiography. He is Honorary Professor of History at the University of Edinburgh, and an Emeritus Professor of History at the University of Manchester.

This interview was carried out in Lisbon when professor Patrick Joyce was keynote speaker at the conference *Os Sujeitos da História* [The Subjects of History], organised by the Instituto de História Contemporânea [Institute of Contemporary History] on the 25th and 26th of September 2014.

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LIFE AND RESEARCH

Elisa Lopes da Silva: *I would like to start by asking you about the relation between your life and your research. You have described yourself*

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as an Irish working class child, born in London, in 1945. This serves not only to characterize your life, your identity, but also defines the parameters of your work, to some extent: class and the city as the material ground of liberalism, for example, were key and enduring objects of research. How do you see this link? Or, how can your own personal narrative be related to the choice of your historical research objects?

Patrick Joyce: Well, it is always going to be a fairly close link, with most of us, most academics, historians included. I suppose in my experience it's been very close, and perhaps in the experience of my generation of historians, especially social historians. A general remark first, really, about my generation, who were in turn influenced, by people of an earlier generation like Raphael Samuel, Hobsbawm, Thompson, Perry Anderson, and so on, people who I was not always in agreement with. My generation came more from lower origins and through state education, a number being the first generation in their families to go to university. We came through in the 60s, 70s, when the system was opening up, the kind of liberalization of attitudes and values in Britain, but also the development of a new kind of university system. It was still very much a minority, hardly more than 5%, 6% people of the age range of 18 to 21 going to university, so it was still very small, but for the first time, people from my kind of background, Irish working class (it would be the same for English working class).

And that is quite significant, and that gets me back more directly to my own experience because that educational experience is very much tied up with class in the British case, I think. Because class in Britain, while it is rooted in economic relations and so on, is reproduced very powerfully through the educational system, through the private education, on one hand, through the dominance of Oxford and Cambridge, or Oxbridge, as we call it, and of a couple of other leading universities. So they traditionally reproduced a tripartite division between upper, middle, and lower, and I came in at the lower end in terms of going to a state school which was the lowest calibre of school. I'm not going into the complexities, but I wrote a piece, actually, which is a kind of joke.

I wrote an article called “More Secondary Modern than Post-Modern”¹ and, for people who are not from Britain, they maybe don’t understand what that means. The secondary modern school was the lowest kind of category of school, so I came through the whole educational system, from bottom to top, much more forcibly than other people, because I had to sort of do it myself, I had to make my own way going through. I left school early, at 16. So I was always deeply influenced by that experience I guess. For the first time our generation were able to think, and write, and read, in this case History, but all the other subjects as well. And to think of them in relation to our own experience and our own experience was a progression through the class system, for instance Carolyn Steedman is another example of this experience. She is a very interesting and important historian in establishing gender. Again, she is an historian with a kind of working class background. So, for us the educational system and the social system were opening up and giving us a chance for the first time to reflect and write about situations in which our own experience was embedded. So our trajectories through the class system mattered, in my case the experience of a kind of double separation: on the one hand, there’s class, on the other hand, I suppose ethnicity and religion, the Irish aspect. For me, it was the kind of double distancing, or double set of different complexities.

ELS: Do you think that kind of double, not exclusion, but that double difference, the fact that you were part of the working class but never a fully, marked your work as an historian. You have said in a different interview that you grew up «class sensitized», and also that you always felt part of a working-class world, but with a sense of difference, never fully identified with it. How did this “sensitivity”, or “sensibility”, articulate with a sense of difference, and translate into your historiographical concerns, perhaps as a way to challenge mainstream left-wing social history, its traditional themes and approaches?

PJ: Yes, difference from the working class. Just as much, just as profoundly, I was desperate, you had to get out, you know? It was that

¹ Patrick Joyce, “More Secondary Modern than Post-Modern,” *Rethinking History* 5:3 (2001): 367–382.

kind of choking, that suffocating experience of being hemmed in by what was a very conservative culture in many ways. Class with a small c, *and* with a big C as well sometimes. And that's what started me off in my interest in History. When I started, I was interested in the Nazi period, I was interested in doing German History, but I changed when I went to Oxford. I started to do the History of working class Conservatism. That's the subject that I considered first. And in my first book, *Work, Society and Politics: Culture of the Factory in Later Victorian England* (1981), I was interested in the question of explaining consent, explaining the domination of the powerless, and the way the powerless seemed to be complicit in that domination themselves. It is the question of consent and there were the debates of the time about social deference to the superior. However deference was qualified by inequality and by force it was still there. I explored in the first book a whole area of social relations which the traditional left had not explored, partly because that traditional left had no connection, no lived connection with them, apart from people like Raymond Williams, I suppose. He was something of an exception, but Eric Hobsbawm, E. P. Thompson, they were basically of higher social class level, or often they were public school educated, quite often, or they had gone to Oxbridge. So one made common cause with these people, but also one felt the differences as well. I felt the differences very much. And I became very much interested, and I still am, in trying to explain the operations of power and the ... well, the weapons of the weak, but much less the weapons of the weak than the subordination of the weak, and the self-subordination of the weak as well. And what was in it, you know, what were they getting out of it.

FROM SOCIAL HISTORY TO HISTORY OF THE SOCIAL

ELS: *It seems that, through your early work, you were thinking about, or around, class during Thatcherism, and in a way trying to make sense of the political adherence to Thatcherism in the 1980s. In the social history of Eric Hobsbawm, E.P. Thomson or Raphael Samuel, the notion of "class" was the unifying (??) to attempt to map the so-*

cial field. You challenged this approach by enquiring into working class representations of social order, abandoning notions of class identity or class struggle. This led you, for example, from «class» to «populism». During the 1990s, Michel Foucault and post-structuralism seem to have provided the conceptual tools to make this passage from the (Marxist) social history to a history of the social. In your view, class, and specially history viewed as class struggle, wouldn’t explain fully the phenomenon of conservative, more populist, working class that was politically visible in the 1980s.

PJ: The next books I went on to write were on populism². But it was a long gestation, after the first book, through the ‘80s, and through the Thatcherite period, a period in which Stuart Hall³ and his particular analysis of Thatcherism became very, very influential. He was saying that to explain Thatcherism⁴ you have to understand how it actually articulated a lot of feelings that working class people had, about owning their own property, about stability, about order... The fact that they were anti-establishment, to some extent, and she (Thatcher) was anti-establishment, to some extent, in a kind of qualified, strange way. I think I was going in the same direction as people like Stuart Hall, and the analysis of the «popular», and the will to subordination of people, to put it crudely. But I did not go with the inherent Marxism of Hall and cultural studies, nor did I think much of their ideas about working class “resistance”, the simple two-way, dichotomous idea of the social order, however much they finessed it. I think that is a kind of left romanticism, a left populism, which infects the British left to this day. Hall was influential at the time, indeed may have inadvertently been in part responsible for Blairism.

2 Patrick Joyce, *Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class, c. 1848-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) and Patrick Joyce, *Democratic Subjects: The Self and the Social in Nineteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

3 Stuart Hall, “Notes on Deconstructing the Popular,” *In People’s History and Socialist Theory* (London: Routledge, 1981).

4 Stuart Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left* (London: Verso, 1988).

Now, you are completely right about Foucault, his work did provide me the conceptual tools to make the passage from the (Marxist, Marxisant, and liberal) social history of the time to a history of the social. During the 1990s Michel Foucault and post-structuralism generally did provide me and many others with a kind of liberation. Especially in thinking about the proto-neoliberalism of Britain and elsewhere in the 1990s while at the same times enabling me to look back at the liberal past in a new way. A history of the present this had been called, though I am not comfortable with the title so much, or with genealogy as compared to history. I would say I embrace both, in tension with one another, the history of the present with the history of the past, avoiding the teleological traps of the former.

But before Foucault, with the Visions book, of course I felt that class, but more particularly history viewed as class struggle, wouldn't explain fully the phenomenon of the conservative, more populist, working class that was politically visible in the 1980s and that I think had its roots long before, if often in more radical forms than later. I tried to go beyond existing accounts and orthodoxies by enquiring into how people actually did represent the social order, across work, leisure, literature, abandoning notions of class identity as the motor of class struggle and class struggle as the motor of history.

I realise I am straying from your question and back to your point about the connection between one's life and one's work but I do so because I have very recently tried to talk about a lot of these things in an article I've written called «The Journey West»⁵. This is the first of two long essays, which will form part of a new book.⁶ I've reflected in more depth than previously, in a mixture of memoir, history and intellectual enquiry (an unusual blend I think) on my own background, particularly the Irish side, and the experience of class too. About the Irish side in the sense of the idea of restitution. I pick up on Walter Benjamin, as so many people do these days, but in a much more direct way, I suppose.

⁵ Patrick Joyce, "The Journey West," *Field Day Review* 10 (2014): 62-93.

⁶ Patrick Joyce, "Time Thickens: The Other West," *Field day Review* 11 (2015) forthcoming.

He talks about a kind of redemption in the "Angel of History" essay. So there is a kind of redemptive consciousness of the Jew, you know, strange Jewish Marxist that he was. But I think, you know, there's a certain kind of redemptive aspect to a Catholic upbringing, and an Irish upbringing. So Catholicism, for me, probably distances me from almost all the other British social historians. I'm an Irish working class Catholic. I don't believe in it now, but I'm still ethnically, and kind of culturally Catholic.

ELS: *Were you raised as a believer?*

PJ: I was raised in a profoundly believing situation, you know? So, in this article I've written, I picked up on some of the work of Terry Eagleton...

ELS: *And he links his catholic upbringing with his Marxist views...*

PJ: Well, it didn't work for me. I mean, Terry Eagleton went to a much more upper working class, upper class school. (There it is again, that intense consciousness of class, supposedly very British, but much more widespread, especially when the person is catapulted through the class system by education.) Eagleton went to a grammar school in Manchester, and he is a third generation Irish rather than myself. But he's very interesting, isn't he? On Catholicism and the belief in necessity...and we have the same kind of background and views, so, I think he is the kind of Irish working class catholic literary critic, and I am an Irish working class catholic (although I'm not a catholic) social historian. He articulates very well the sense of how liberalism is, for both of us, extremely problematic. I don't take the Marxist critique of liberalism in the way he does, but I still feel some sympathy to the Marxist ideology, but I certainly feel that I'm not existentially or genetically a liberal, like a lot of my fellow historians, even on the left in Britain.

I don't take to liberalism, I don't take to the balance of both sides, there always being a middle way. This middle way is a very British ideology. So, I think, in the "Journey West" I can historically and

culturally situate myself in relation to his articulation of his situation... In the sense, when you are brought up as a Catholic, this whole force of belief, this way to believe, you have the notion things are shaped by these great forces that are outside you. He was brought by it into Marxism, and those great forces didn't bring me. But they give me a sense of the force of circumstance, the force of necessity, the way in which people were and are shaped at a profound level, genetically almost, by these forces outside of themselves... by religion, by the culture. Coming from an Irish culture, it's very, very strong. Is is, this sense, also in some respects akin to some parts of conservative thinking, a sense of what is beyond the supposedly free person.

ELS: Even if you were not a believer, was the centrality of religion the reason why you wouldn't follow a more mainstream Marxist framework in your work, more attentive to the economic forces?

PJ: I don't know, I don't think so, necessarily. But I was on a similar or parallel path, attracted to ideas that enabled me to articulate this Catholic-Irish sense of necessity's force. I was also pretty much up for argument, rather spikey, a product no doubt of my background but sublimated intellectually. I liked to trail my coat, as the saying has it. Not always wise. I did not buy into the idea of underlying economic forces and sought to liberate myself from English liberalism and ingrained English empiricism, and the parochialism that went with it, not so much these days of course. Nonetheless, I think the attention to deep lying economic forces is rather similar to attention to a deep lying belief in Christ. There's a depth, there's a correspondence between the two. Man and woman are moved by these deep forces. So there's a kinship, I think, between Catholicism and Marxism. There are of course, differences. Of course the Catholic Church in England and Ireland is very anti-Marxist, you know, but... Although I've not taken Eagleton's route, I've always been kind of sympathetic to those positions. Far from Catholicism being the antithesis of Marxism, it's similar in some ways. It's just got this massive weight of faith and belief.

ELS: *For you, the way to understand liberalism was post-structuralist theory, particularly Michel Foucault. Especially during the 1990s, it was a way to look at liberalism in history without falling into the traps, or some traps, of more mainstream Marxism.*

PJ: Yes, and without falling into the traps of liberalism itself, and seeing liberalism as a kind of description of reality, as if it is a kind of self-evident reality. In the English, British situation, the intellectual tradition – the empirical liberal tradition – people are themselves inherently, constitutionally, existentially, liberal, so they also tend to take for granted liberal values, which are very important and very positive in many ways, but they become second nature and unquestioned. So for many, the economy is regarded as a real entity, and society... They actually buy into the kind of distinction between state and society, which I would want to question.

ELS: *Well, It’s the very nature of liberalism, the process of naturalising society and the way it works.*

PJ: Yes, liberalism has been the most profoundly successful and important political force when it comes to, precisely, its own naturalisation. It has achieved that naturalisation in a way that has been phenomenally successful and becomes common sense. One wants to defend it, one wants to be in a greater tolerant society, and so on. But the whole point I was trying to emphasise is that one must, as you put it, denaturalise – show where, historically, liberalism comes from. That is why the governmentality literature inspired by Foucault is so interesting; it is because you get a way of looking at freedom as a mode of government rather than being the absence of government. Liberalism was the *presence* of government, of a very sophisticated, and very successful mode of governance, but one that could be extremely repressive or at least controlling and punitive, coming as it did in the British case with the inheritance of early capitalism and of empire later on.

POST-MODERNISM

ELS – *I have a question on post-modernism. Post-modern seems to have endured as a derogatory term, a particularly acrimonious one within the historiographical field. You employed the term in your historical battles in the mid90s, against, simultaneously, Marxist and liberal historians. Later on, in 2003, you wrote about the «quiet victory» of post-modernism. By this you meant, the victory of a «critique of objectivity», the inscription of the observer in what is observed. An anti-foundationalist or anti-essentialist framework has indeed gained ground (notably, within feminist history). However, it seems that historical writing, on the whole, has yet to absorb the post-structuralist critique in the sense of being conscious of its narrative strategies and categories, of History as a form of writing, in the wake by Hayden White. Historical writing is still very much a realist genre. How do you position yourself towards this debate focused on the “linguistic procedures” of historical writing?*

PJ: Despite my reference to quiet victory, well, I’m not so sure about that quiet victory. What I meant, really, I suppose was the question of reflexivity, that has become much more recognized in British and especially in American academic publishing, and more widely too. That one is in the picture: you can’t describe the world without locating yourself as the observer, to some extent. You can have too much of this, and so called reflexivity is not the most important aspect of so-called post-modernism, a term that has been so widely and variously used that it is now meaningless. I would not want to go too far into ego-histoire, and in the *Field Day* essays I want to create a kind of memoir without the author having too much of an interior, being to the fore only when he catches the tide of an idea or a historical phenomenon, a kind of quiet witness. In terms of history writing more generally it has become much more difficult for people to simply adopt the old positions, but at the same time the way history gets written is still often in these older frameworks. And in a way that is not a bad thing: great history is produced. So, if you look at the sort of Oxford-Cambridge systems of teaching, they are still quite conservative. So it takes a long time

for these changes to work their way through, and when they do as in cultural history and gender history they sometimes become routinised and predictable.

The (neoliberal) British university assessment system only adds to this – the pressure to publish gives no time to think and mature a project, unlike the gentlemanly days of the old professional order that precede it, which had its own drawbacks. At Oxford I was told in my first year to go away and read for a year and then come back with a research subject! Now the poor student’s time is carefully monitored. But the sense in which historians like myself were reluctant, previously, to talk about their own experiences, that’s become I think less apparent. Carolyn Steedman is another example. And she did it very early, in *Landscape for a Good Woman*, in terms of gender, she wrote very directly about that. Although she is more someone who is interested in psychoanalysis than in so called post-modernism. But it depends what one is talking about. The question of awareness, self-awareness, reflexivity, is only one of the things one means by post-modernism. There’s also the whole question of power, and how you analyse power, and the work of Michel Foucault. For me the important thing has not been White and narrative. It has been Foucault and power, government, and especially in the later Foucault the turn to truth from knowledge and from power to governmentality. This turn is reflected in those amazing College de France lectures, relatively recently published and not yet fully digested by historians, the second wave Foucault if you like.

ELS: *You have mentioned – I think on Manifestos for History – W G. Sebald, which is one of the late interests of Hayden White. The literature of W G. Sebald is the example given by Hayden White as a way to go beyond the realistic paradigm of writing history.*

PJ: Well, yes, I agree with White here. I think Sebald is very interesting, it’s a kind of bearing witness oneself, but doing so in a way that combines different sorts of genres. Sebald deals with this business of bearing witness – and again I go back to Benjamin – this moral obliga-

tion to follow the past, to connect the past and the present. Benjamin talks about our coming being expected on Earth. Our coming was expected; it was expected by those who were there before us, who sacrificed for us, or who awaited our coming with hope and expectation. I find that very powerful, you know? So I was saying earlier about the idea of redemption in Catholicism, and in Judaism. I like that sense of the redemptive, of returning, of making atonement for the inequalities and injustices of the past. It's very old fashioned in many ways, but it informed me in getting away from liberalism and kind of trying to understand the basis of power. Then Michel Foucault was, for me as I say, terrifically important but I was and am interested in other figures as well: Michel De Certeau, Deleuze less so, and the whole range of French theorists who were thinking about the social and about society, and what it was, in their different ways. But also outside this I found the work of Zygmunt Bauman very important too, in helping me think about present and past society in relation. And then you've got somebody like Bruno Latour, who doesn't quite fit into certain of those trajectories. The kind of anti-humanism evident there is what partly drew me to them (Callon, Law) and then to a new fix on materialism. The human is only part of what is in the world, and is only part of what needs to be included in historical explanation.

NEW MATERIALISM

ELS: *In the last few years, at least since the edition of *The Rule of Freedom* (2003), you have been interested in redefining the materiality of history, with special emphasis on the agency of materiality, influenced by Bruno Latour's actor-network-theory and your readings in the field of the History of Science. Do you see it as a way of displacing agency in History? Can we make sense of them as ways of grasping historical subjects in a post-humanist age? Was that a kind of deepening of your thoughts about agency in history?*

PJ: It's a deepening of thoughts about agency, and a deepening of how we explain power as well. But also how we might explain the shaping of identity, not least political identity, or the lack of it today. There is a link

between my interest in materiality and the sort of quasi-memoir form of writing I am also doing now. In this more “literary” form of discourse, the physical specificity of particular places is very much in evidence – the west of Ireland, London. And the way these places configure time and are configured by time in return. This new vein of writing, more reflective, aiming to move people, as well as just to ask intellectual questions, is also if you like part of the so-called new materialism, though unusual I suppose. For instance, I am greatly interested in the theme of the home; but more especially the material form of the home which is the house. I write about houses I have known and how they structure memory and our sense of who we are, and how they shape us below the level of our conscious awareness, in the habitus, in enforcing on us the necessities of what they are, delimiting us and creating our possibilities at the same time. I think of the, for me, key sites of the house, the road and the grave – the sense of stability, the sense of movement, the sense of an ending. I relate these three aspects to Irish and British post-1945 history, especially as this concerns the experience of the immigrant. I’m interested in the experience of what kind of house people had, the meaning of the house in their culture, the physical forms of the house, and the road, and the grave, in terms of burial customs around death, resurrection, redemption. So I supposed the Catholic is coming through very powerfully, the repressed Catholic. I don’t want to go into this at too much length as I am digressing again, but it is not just about the Irish. It’s about the role of the house in Jamaica, West India, Caribbean culture, in African culture. Their understanding of what it is to have a habitation, to have security; or not to have these things, because in post-war London, where I grew up, the housing situation was appalling. We lived in the most overcrowded conditions.

However to return to your point more directly this work also crosses over into the academic writing especially the theme of the house in my recent state book⁷. The house, the road and the grave. I analyse the house as a kind of *locus* of power, in terms of the British public school system. The high bourgeois house/household is a sort of mate-

⁷ Patrick Joyce, *The State of Freedom: A Social History of the British State since 1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

rial template of power, and this extends beyond elite schooling (the interest in education again!) to government institutions, the great departments of state in Britain and the empire, India above all. I have collaborated with the very fine historical sociologist Chandra Mukerji, who writes on 17th century France, on an article on the materialities of state power, called “The state of things”⁸.

ELS: *Strangely enough, in regard to your remarks on London, even if there’s urban history about the capital, Lisbon seems to be, in a sense, still awaiting to be historicised, in many ways...*

PJ: Really? Because it seems to carry different sorts of time, Lisbon. You feel as if you just have to go a few blocks and you are in a different decade, and living in the same place you feel the sense of different time, because the infrastructure, the logistics of living, are still very similar in some ways, even if, of course, they change as well. This is how everything is the same, and everything different at the same time, which is so often our experience, and it’s that I write about. West London is totally different now; property values have escalated. But it is still the same. It is still London, just pulling people in and then pushing them out. It eats its children, like all great cities. I fear we are neglecting the new materialism, which is very important to me, but my mind is currently occupied by the other sort of writing.

ELS: *I don’t know where I have read that, but I remember that I read you stating that it was necessary to have a history of the present, but a history of the present past, as a way to put these temporalities together, these being alive at the same time.*

PJ: You put it very well, these temporalities being alive, feeling the vivacity, the livingness of the past. How does one articulate that? The present doesn’t make much sense, because the present is always undergoing change, so... how do you think about past, present and future,

⁸ Chandra Mukerji and Patrick Joyce, “The State of Things: Reconfiguring State History and Theory”, *Theory and Society*, forthcoming 2016.

as a kind of single entity, in some ways, rather than different things? Again, this is in the piece I’ve been writing⁹. I’ve been trying to articulate a sense of the way in which the past continually unfolds in what we do, and getting hold of how that happens is difficult. That takes me into a form of writing in which I experience time through the way in which landscape in the west of Ireland, or the continuing sense of the first home, the first house in London, how these have got into me, how they are still alive in me. In the *The State of Freedom: A Social History of the British State since 1800* (2013), I briefly talk about Gaston Bachelard and his poetics of space, and I have developed this. This sense that that the past is physical as well, it makes physical impressions on our bodies, and we never lose that first impression. So, it is a kind of materialism, again, but with a different sort of take on it.

ELS: *I was going to ask you about the literary figures that shaped your way of thinking, or you usually don’t think of that? You have mentioned W. B. Yeats and James Joyce, a little bit.*

PJ – I think always of the Irish writers, above all Joyce and Beckett. But I think of Leo Tolstoy too, in whose historical vision everything is somehow connected. In *War and Peace*, the characters have a history, and history happens through them. This is going back to when I was a young man, reading Tolstoy. At the time this made me think about that sense of the connectedness of things, as it were, the sense in which we’re embedded in the social world, and we reproduce it and it reproduces us. I think I’ve always tried to reveal what’s going on in that respect. So the kind of exploring how categories become naturalised, it has always been on some level what I’ve been interested in doing, unpicking common sense, unpicking the taken for granted world, and trying to go deeper and deeper into that.

For me, as I mentioned, the sociologist Zygmund Bauman was very important at one time because of his particular kind of sociologi-

⁹ Patrick Joyce, “The Journey West,” *Field Day Review* 10 (2014): 62-93 and “Time Thickens: the Other West,” *Field Day Review* 11, (2015) forthcoming.

cal vision and his work on post-modernity. I was interested in the sociological condition, in the sense that we were moving into a new kind of social situation, and people like Bauman were really putting their finger on it. I think he exaggerates change in many ways, and it doesn't all work as successfully as it should. Basically, Bauman writes the same book over and over again, but it is a very important and interesting book at the same time. I've worked with sociologists over the years, and they've nearly all been of an empirical cast of mind, but I still have a very warm feeling for that older tradition, the Frankfurt school tradition and critique of the big picture sort.

TOWARDS A CRITICAL HISTORY?

ELS: In the wake of the Frankfurt theory, do you think that to call critical history instead of post-modern history, of post-structural history, would be a better label to describe your historiography?

PJ: I think post-modern history is a term that means everything and nothing, because it means everything it means nothing. It is meaningless because it is used by so many different people to mean different things. It has lost any kind of real purpose except when it is used in a very narrow sense, say in the history of architecture, or maybe in the history of the novel. But the way in which historians throw these things around, it is really stupid. They don't know what they are talking about half the time. They have often hardly read the people involved. It's all second hand. So I don't think the term post-modernism is very helpful. Post-structuralist is better, but I wouldn't use it. I like critical history...

ELS: Maybe the term «critical history» could be employed as a substitute to the «ugly» term «post-modern history», or even «post-structuralist history», giving it a more positive spin, as it were, and leaving behind some of the more violent debates, so as to name an anti-foundationalist history, conscious of its role in the construction of knowledge... Is that

*what Joan W. Scott*¹⁰ *and you*¹¹, *although rather differently, are suggesting in the book Manifestos for history?*

PJ: The danger with «critical history» is that it would get mixed up with «critical theory». And while I respect and value that kind of Frankfurt school Marxism, I would not associate myself completely, by any means. I’d be much more sympathetic to Foucault’s approach.

ELS: *In your essay in that book, «The gift of the past: towards a critical history», you describe critical history as «inherently theoretical and irreducibly empirical, the former because it is always structured by different sorts of intellectual framework, and the latter because it is concerned with developing theory through practice, and regenerating and refining practice through theory» (95). You sum this up by reformulating Clifford Geertz’s term «thick description» as «tough description». Could you explain the choice of this phrase?*

PJ: I suppose I mean that the theoretical needs always to be sort of worked through in a very scrupulous way, with attention to the rigours of traditional historical practice, trying to verify documents and compare documents. So I suppose I just simply meant tough in this sense of rigorous and sceptical. I meant tough in the sense of intellectually tough, demanding and challenging. In a sense it’s theory animating the empirical world, but theory being judged in the light of whether it enables the empirical to actually work successfully, enables one to do this kind of practice, so the theory that was useful was the kind of theory that made one engaged in this kind of practice. So it is in Foucault’s writings that I find this kind of really strong suggestiveness that brings together the philosopher and the historian, the theoretician. I suppose that’s the real reason why I like Foucault so much, because he is both. I’m not the kind of historian he is, or a philosopher, but he is one of

¹⁰ Joan W. Scott, “History-Writing as Critique,” in *Manifestoes for History*, ed. Keith Jenkins, Sue Morgan, Alun Munslow (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 19-38.

¹¹ Patrick Joyce, “The Gift of the Past: Towards a Critical History,” *Manifestoes for History*, ed. Keith Jenkins, Sue Morgan, Alun Munslow. (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 88-97.

the few examples of a kind of a philosophically inclined historian **who is good at building this connection**, within his own terms of reference. He knows the texts and reads them very closely.

There's this whole new second wave of literature, produced by Foucault, the lectures given at the Collège de France. I've neglected these for a number of years but I'm going back to that now. Myself and the eminent Foucault scholar Colin Gordon have been corresponding and meeting up recently and have formed a discussion circle in London (with which there are Portuguese connections), and I'm beginning to have a better understanding of the second and the third waves of Foucault scholarship through him. This is called "Foucault, political life and history". I think I still have a lot to learn. This group assembles many disciplines together, and we have begun to further historicise the Foucault lectures, while pointing up what a new wave history of the present might look like – the exploration/critique of "neoliberalism" is very high on our agenda and that phenomenon enables us to develop the two tracks I mention, historicising and the history of the present. We are concerned with the idea of what a left governmentality might be also. The lectures are a great stimulus to this.

It's not as if Foucault was the only figure, but he's been the exemplary figure in bringing together the theoretical and the empirical. You see, I'm a British historian and I suppose American historians are internally more aware of these currents. There's a tradition of historical sociology, interactions with disciplines, and our discipline is more embedded in others over there. So the American environment would have been better for me in this sense than the British one. I never quite felt at home in the UK intellectual environment.

GOVERNMENTALITY AND ITS ADJECTIVES

*ELS: One of my last questions, it's about governmentality, or governmentality studies, that you are part of. You have contributed to construct the academic field of governmentality studies that took form in the 1990s but especially after the Foucault editions of *Securité*, ter-*

ritoire, population et Naissance de la Biopolitique in 2004. You have been using the lens of governmentality to read liberalism in a way that almost defines it, to put it very briefly and schematically, as a way of governing through freedom. I wanted to shift the point of view of governmentality away from liberalism, by asking you whether we can think of other modes of governmentality? The question rises from the fact that Anglo-saxon reception on late Foucault have been focusing on liberalism (and neo-liberalism) and have some analytic difficulty in recognising other historic governmentalities operating in the last two centuries. Could or should we adjectivise governmentality – as colonial or authoritarian governmentality – and argue that, while also operating through the powers of freedom, in these political rationalities disciplinary and sovereign modalities of the exercise of power are prominent?

PJ: I have taken governmentality up in this particular way, partly because I interacted with a number of the scholars who mediated between Foucault’s work and the British intellectual situation, partly because they developed it in that sense. They did so because it seemed to fit what was happening in the early stages of what we now call neo-liberalism. It is very odd why that term has arisen when ten or fifteen years ago it was hardly used, and I want to explore this also. So people like Colin Gordon or Nikolas Rose or Tom Osborne, and so on, tended to articulate governmentality in the sense of that liberal government, and I have looked at it through that lens. My collaborations have been with those kinds of people, with Nikolas Rose and Tony Bennett, the cultural sociologist, who wrote one of the early books using Foucault, a very good book, *The birth of the museum*¹². Recently, I co-edited with him *Material Powers: Cultural Studies, History and the Material Turn*¹³.

But I agree completely with you. The group I mention has sensitised me to non-western governmentalities, for instance the long term history of India and the empire, and empire more generally. To forms of governmentality preceding the colonial presence, with which colo-

12 Tony Bennet, *The Birth of the Museum* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995).

13 Tony Bennet, Patrick Joyce, *Material Powers: Cultural Studies, History and the Material Turn* (New York and London: Routledge, 2010).

nial governmentaities are then always mixed up. Partha Chatterjee has written about this recently. The London group has several experts in colonial governmentalities, and of course the governmentality approach cannot but conceive of the gestation of liberalism in the colony as well as the metropole, and the interactions between the two. I touched on this in *The Rule of Freedom*, and on what you refer to as authoritarian governmentality. Actually the field of Russian, Soviet and pre-Soviet, governmentalities was high on Foucault's agenda and we should not forget that Kotkin's magnificent work on Russia, also the work of Kharkhordin, owed much to Foucault, and Kotkin directly collaborated with Foucault at Berkeley. But you are right, many have been slow to pick up on non-liberal modes, though that is changing now, and the govermentality approach is going through something of a renaissance. Even the Marxists are getting in on the act! After fighting shy for so long, Wendy Brown, for instance, has done interesting work but pretty incoherent as you cannot marry Marx and Foucault that easily. Also, she misreads Foucault badly, seemingly unaware of his many writings on the political.

Personally I am also interested in the subject of new political history. How does politics emerge? What do we mean by politics, in the first place? It is a kind of space, of agonistic difference and of conflict, and of course then there is Foucault's work on the relation between war and politics, and that opens up, as you're indicating yourself, a whole set of questions, that are the questions I am now exploring. There is also the matter of the study of law, something that *Securité, territoire, population et Naissance de la Biopolitique* takes up. But also the other Lectures are important for the study of "the multiple births of politics", and personally I find much in his study of the ancient and early Christian worlds. The study of pastoral power needs to be developed more into that of the pastoral as governmentality, where it deeply shapes modern power, including liberalism, and its "neo" forms. I am interested, given my background, in exploring the governmentalities of the Roman Catholicism, and of course Portugal and Ireland are very interesting places to do this. So, expanding the understanding of

governmentality. Seeing how and if neoliberalism actually does mean the disenchantment of politics by economics, as some have it, rightly in many respects but by no means all.

In this new initiative with Gordon we look at other kinds of governmentality, and consider the nature of the politics itself, the limits of politics and what different cultures regard as politics. Hence my interest in the Bielefeld people, who have been saying ‘well how does the sphere of the political become differentiated from the economic and the social?’¹⁴ What are the origins of politics? But, again, there are limitations to those approaches, which are concept-bound and language-bound, although they’re trying to get beyond those. It is still Begriffsgeschichte, and not an account that fully integrates the new materialism, but still very interesting..

Again, it’s interesting, these kinds of depth explanations – so thick description and tough description take in as many different kind of factors as one possibly can into account. That’s my attraction to the materialisties aspect, because you then bring in a much fuller range of elements acting on situations, so you get a deeper, richer explanation. It is more satisfying and we get more sensible connections between things. So, I’m going back to Tolstoy perhaps. I don’t know whether I’d get the same sense out of it now, but I think I still would. Great traditions, you know, the literary ones.

ELS: *On the relation between power and freedom in Britain, you have announced a forthcoming book, The Children of Freedom, which will complete the series inaugurated with the Rule of freedom (2002) and The State of Freedom (2013). Could you expand a little more on this project?*

PJ: I’ll explain, although I’m not quite sure where it’s going yet. I’m trying this new kind of writing as I say. I think at the moment my aim would be to make that writing project into *The Children of Freedom*.

14 Willibald Steinmetz, et al., *Writing Political History Today* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2013).

It would be about the present and the recent past of these two liberal societies, Ireland and Britain, if you can call the Irish a liberal society. It would deserve the title *The Children of Freedom* because of how we have inherited the 19th century and the early 20th century past since the time that I've belonged to this planet, 1945; it's «children» in the sense of those who inherit, and so it would be the history of the present and the not-so-distant past. We are the inheritors of liberalism, what we do with it, especially as we may well be moving into a post-liberal society. Whereas once the left contended liberalism it may now have to rescue it! The project would also be about children as well, literally, in the sense of my own childhood, and young manhood, and those of others. Also about the formation of people through educational systems. I have in the state book a lot to say about elite education about the formation of those who would govern, now I want to extend this.

So it would be bringing different times together as I talked about earlier, making them interact with places also. I'm interested in the way in which different times come together and the long duration of the Irish-English connection. Just to simplify, I think what I would be trying to do is something about Ireland, London and the north of England. The latter in relation to the end of industrial society, one of the greatest changes of our time, its passing, though this passing has too often been too quiet an affair, little remarked on, taken for granted. Like Sebald, there should be some mourning, some witnessing for this. I've lived in these three places; well... I'd be trying to root out what is it that's been inherited, in terms of the changing nature of the liberal nation(s), so freedom again, a new way of narrating neoliberalism perhaps, around places and times, in terms of the mix of memoir and history I have indicated. And around nation and its fate, something very evident in the English-Irish dynamic.

I want to continue my narrative of liberalism from the 1940s. *The State of Freedom* has got that long last chapter on developments up to the present, but that is *in lieu* of a proper study. The new book is then a continuation of those on liberalism, and liberal society, but in a very different way. Literary but also concerned with materialities so that I

would have to concern myself with the new communications revolution, the internet, and this would be a continuation of my interest in communications and state power, in the recent state book. Too many things! Enough time to do them?

Just to go back a step, on education another thing would be to look at the continual reinvention of private education in Britain, as a kind of driver of privilege, and the way in which elites have continuously re-embedded themselves in a way which astonishes me. There are now in inner London more kids privately than public educated. This private education divide has become more and more apparent from the 1960s onwards. Education matters so much to me because it was the kind of thing that brought me through. My wife has also a very similar kind of background, as she is an Irish immigrant. She trained as a teacher and she was put in a channel: ‘Oh university is not for you. You can train to be a teacher, you can’t go to university’. This was partly because she didn’t come from the right social background.

I’d also like to continue those strands of argument laid out in the last chapter of *The State of Freedom*, which have to do with communications and connectivity, on one hand, and with the education strand, and the nature of bureaucracy, on the other. The state has been privatized. We talk now about the franchise state as the state gives out great chunks of itself to private industry. The British system is almost like tax farming in 18th century France. Vast areas of the state are just put out to tender, put out to bidding for one private corporation or the other, and it’s becoming a complete scandal. These companies are making vast profits and many of them are extremely inefficient. So the state has been hollowed out from within. That’s why I’m also politically interested in defending the state and getting a much more positive idea of it on the agenda. In the British context there is this deep connection to the state through the NHS and through the education system. Defending the state is still absolutely central to me, but to defend it politically is a dreadfully difficult task.

ELS: *One of the things that was unexpected to me, in your last book, was the way you criticised so severely social democracy in Britain after the Second World War...*

PJ: perhaps too severely...

ELS: *You call it the myth of social democracy. You distinguish very clearly what was a perception of social inequality, part of the social democracy worldview, so that social democracy governed through the social, but it left out of governing the critique of authority and hierarchy.*

PJ: Yes, Foucault is part of this too, his remarks on the left in France having no governmentality, sharing the liberal one, albeit in a different form, at least sometimes. But as to Britain, yes, no real critique of authority and thought about how a left should govern, what institutions. We see this today with the British left, one side not moving beyond neoliberalism; the left as much as the right has been its vehicle by the way. On the other side that ridiculous moralistic leftism, very English I should say, not able to think about what power is, what needs to be done. In Britain there is no participation, no real democracy, and no basic questioning of the institutions of power. This is why the whole Scottish devolution thing has been so exciting. Because, if the Scots had gone for independence I think it really would have changed things in England. It would have pushed England towards a much more devolved system. As it is, I think the change may be quite important. It's a kind of moderate, gradualist, liberal position, but we need constitutional change! We do! These institutions matter. They are embedded in the power structures. The power structures work through institutions which have their own ways, their own traditions and their own capacity to absorb and change the behaviour of elites and of those who participate in them, in what is not now a democratic way though mostly they do not participate at all. So it is absolutely essential to change the institutions, especially the British ones, that have been there for so long, and served the vested interests of power very effectively. So we have the House of Lords, and it's our second chamber, but it's insane

that we have such, and rather degrading I think. We need devolution, we need a whole set of practices which are much more democratic. We have a hyper-centralised system because Britain is even more centralised than France. It’s *laissez faire*, neoliberal, but a centralised state. It’s a weird combination. The point I was making in that last chapter, the idea that economic equality is enough, it’s just not the case. One needs something like political equality, proper political equality, which would involve changing political institutions. Politics matters, it has to be reinvented, through the design of institutions as well as in the more obvious ways.

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