Historiography . . .

THE HISTORIAN AS POLITICAL ACTOR
in polity, society and academy

J.G.A. Pocock
Johns Hopkins University/Tulane University

It seems a proper enquiry for the Conference for the Study of Political Thought to investigate the character of history, as both a subject and a form of political thought, literature, discourse, or whatever term you may prefer. History—or, more interestingly, histories—are invented (meaning both discovered and constructed) in political societies, as a characteristic and perhaps necessary activity, and are then discussed, and disputed, by participants in those societies, including those specialists in the activity known as being historians. What manner of political action, or reflection, does all this entail? What kind of political institution, or phenomenon, is a history? What is done, to whom, by whom and by what means, when a history is constructed, communicated, debated, criticised, subverted, and subject to all those, written? What kinds of political practices go on and may be the subject matter of theory; what kinds of political reflection, or theory, may the various forms of historiography constitute?

The Journal of Pacific Studies, Volume 20, 1996, 89–112

I proposed these questions—or rather, since they may need all manner of re-stating, this kind of question—to the speakers who have joined us today. It was apparent that they were questions about a great many ways in which history and historiography constituted political practice; and it seemed appropriate therefore—since we are in the first instance an assembly of political theorists—to conclude with a re-examination of Michael Oakeshott's contention that history, properly understood, neither does nor should serve any practical purpose at all. It should be our business as theorists to recognise the importance of practice without subordinating ourselves to it. But the journey towards the philosophical point where practice itself comes under criticism proved to lie through a landscape, both political and historical, in which practice went on under conditions of great cultural diversity and of course cultural change. To consider the politics of history and historiography, therefore, it was necessary to pursue them through a diversity of cultural frameworks in which the very meanings of the words 'politics', 'history', and 'historiography' might change or disappear; with the further consequence that to discuss the cultural diversities of 'history' might itself be to perform a political act and even to reflect upon it.

I should like to begin, then, by proposing a modest programme for studying the politics of historiography in a stable and relatively familiar cultural setting; it being clearly understood from the start that this definition of historiography and its politics is even as I speak being destabilised and rendered problematic. I shall imply that this is not an unprecedented situation, so that the target of destabilisation has already its own means of restoring its stability; and of course, to choose a particular construct as the target for deconstruction is already to privilege it, implying that this and not some other is the thesis in temporary possession of the field. I do not think this gambit will be objectionable, given that I can set up a model of historiography sufficiently familiar to us all, including those who will wish to see it deprivileged. From that point I shall try to proceed in directions along which we may see it being changed.

In this simple situation there is a political society; it has a history; and there is an activity of narrating or otherwise expounding that history. Clearly, this is not to say very much; what we mean when we say 'a political society', and what we mean when we say 'a history', can differ enormously from one cultural situation to another. But we may presume that 'a political

society' displays a distribution of powers and that the 'history' entails some narration of events taking place, or situations existing, in past time. Here it is as well to be careful. In New Zealand, we are assured, the Maori people do not speak of history as behind them, but before them; this, however, does not mean that they think it happens in time future, only that it may happen again or have to be re-enacted or re-experienced, in time now or to come. Whatever the tense structures or structurings of time in diverse cultures, we shall not go far wrong at this stage if we suppose that 'a history' normally entails a 'time of the ancestors' or 'time past'. It is a temptation, therefore**,** in constructing our model, to say that the 'political society' is a distribution of power, and the 'history' the past existence that that power structure ascribes to itself for reasons that have to do with affirming, legitimising and maintaining it. History, we find ourselves saying, is the memory of the state; history is past politics and politics, present history.

That these dicta are now considered obsolete in our understanding of historiography does not mean that they are not useful for analytical or diagnostic purposes. Certainly, not all political societies are or have been states; not all histories have been laid down in the archives of a state's institutions or bureaucracies. The narratives or past-entailing propositions maintained by, let us say, the Yamanamo people of the upper Amazon may have more to do with the sheer existence of the Yamanamo as a people than with any particular power structure existing among them; and the activity of identifying and as it were isolating that structure, and demonstrating how the tribal discourse operates to maintain it, may or may not be a proper thing for the anthropologist to do to the Yamanamo. It depends on how far the Yamanamo have found it necessary or convenient to engage in this critical activity for themselves; the anthropologist is not necessarily entitled to do this for them. Or rather, to them. We find at this point that the activity of verbalising, conceptualising, criticising, erecting a fabric of second-order discourse around a discourse of power, is itself a distribution of power;[1] and this is true whether it takes place 'within' a society, i.e. between its politically accredited members, between those members of the society and those not so accredited, or between the members of a society and those external or 'foreign' to it. The world is now full of people who are tired of having their history written for them by others, whether those others be domestic or foreign; and the entitlements that may exist between those whose history it in some sense is, and those who presume to narrate it, are

disputed in the politics of history, anthropology, and human affairs in general.

The next step in developing our model is to make room for the possibility that this tension has always existed and may be integral to the politics of history. It is easy to say that power structures give power to some and not to others, and to present the 'historian' as telling a narrative that legitimates the power structure in which he is a beneficiary. But it is a little too easy for the intellectual to presuppose that the others are always the hegemons and he always the critic; that he is privileged (and at the same time martyred) to write the critical history that shows how the other histories have been produced by the power structure and have served to authorise it. To understand the politics of history we need to know what relations have existed within the power structure and produced both the construction of history and dispute over its construction, as well as what relations have existed between those within the structure that produced history and those subject or foreign to it. We take the step of supposing a power elite capable of both producing and supporting dispute between its members, and suppose further that within that elite different versions of history will be read and written, so that 'the historian' becomes a specialist in conducting the dispute as well as in authorising the structure. To one subject to the structure things may well seem different; she is more likely to notice the consensus from which she is excluded than the dispute to which she is not admitted; but if we want to know what has been and is going on, we need to see things in both ways and ask whether these are connected.

Adam Smith, lecturing at Glasgow in the 1760s, noted that 'modern' (i.e. post-ancient) historiography differed from 'ancient' (i.e. Greek and Roman) in that it was far more litigious (Smith 1985: 102). It was concerned with rival systems of jurisdiction, which based claims to authority on assertions that certain events had occurred and had been of a certain character; so that the historian was condemned to spend much of his time debating both the authenticity of the events and the modes of their authentication. Smith thought it questionable whether this was 'the historian's' business, though he was engaged in altering the meaning of the word 'history' so that it should be; he thought it hard to reconcile with the 'ancient' understanding of the word, meaning the recounting of an exemplary or edifying narrative. But he clearly did not think that Thucydides or Tacitus had been re-telling tales whose factual and moral content had

been beyond dispute. Their business had been to penetrate the springs of action and the relations of cause and effect, to the point where these might have to be left mysterious; this was what was edifying about them, and the role of exemplary narrative might be to display the great difficulty of knowing or of initiating an example.[2] If feudal and ecclesiastical culture had been litigious and disputatious, city-state culture had been agonistic and tragic. 'The historian' had become something other than a functionary or expositor of the ruling values at the point where he appeared in the role of sophist or rhetorician, since it was the business of the latter to know that actions and their value could always be presented in more than one way. This could be a criticism of agonistic values, but it could be part of the *agon* itself. Historians in this sense were not simply divided into functionaries and critics, upholders and subverters of the ruling order; the historian as agonistic citizen was actor in and commentator upon the system whose history he narrated. It was at this point in ancient history that historians went one way and philosophers another; Plato does not mention Thucydides, or Thucydides Socrates. If we ask for the first historian martyred by a political system he loved and honoured, the answer may be Ssu-ma Ch'ien rather than any Greek or Roman.

We enter upon an interesting tension between 'history' and 'historian'. Political societies, we find it easy to say, 'invent' or 'produce' or 'construct' history that legitimises or authenticates or in the last analysis 'invents' their activity and their continued existence; so do groups, both privileged and oppressed, that exist within a political society and may be thought to constitute it. This 'history' commonly takes the form of a narrative, and we have begun considering the politics of what happens when 'the historian' offers to retell that narrative. Before we do so, it seems appropriate to ask more questions about what the political society has been doing in producing that history, and what it offers to the individual privileged by the society to act and reflect up on himself as actor; I shall perform the experiment of calling that individual 'the citizen'. We are encouraged, not to say enjoined, to speak of the history as being or having been 'constructed' or 'invented'. These verbs imply the relative specificity of the actors doing the constructing, and the relative rapidity or instantaneity of the action of doing it. 'The invention of tradition' is a phrase that encourages us to find an original set of inventors, specify their intentions or motives and the circumstances or context in which they acted, and to suppose that we have

thereby reduced the 'tradition' to historicity. So, it may turn out, we have; but we may need also to enquire what relations existed between the inventors and other members of their society who may have been involved in the action, and we need to enquire whether the invention was indeed instantaneous or took place over time. The longer it takes to 'invent' a 'tradition', the more will the words 'invention' and 'tradition' become interchangeable; the greater the number of members of a 'community' who are involved in 'imagining the community', the more will the 'community' and the 'imagination' become indistinguishable.

The value of the terms I have been analysing is that they oblige us to remember the existence, and try if we can to adopt the perceptions, of those who were not party to the 'invention' or the 'imagination', and find themselves its subjects rather than its agents. These, we may say, were not properly members of the political society at all, and we may privilege them (or ourselves acting in their name) to subvert the society or the history it has constructed. But it should seem that, to understand the politics of history, we need to include the actions and perceptions of those who are members of the society, and inventors and imaginers of its history. Otherwise, alienation too easily becomes a privilege we permit ourselves.

At this moment we should remember that there are an enormous and indefinite number and variety of ways in which a political society may be constructed, may generate a culture, and may 'produce' or 'invent' a history; and consequently, that the meaning and content of the term 'history' may vary as widely. In talking about 'the history' of a particular society, therefore, we may have to spend a great deal of time discovering what that term means, perhaps in a cultural and mental world sharply different from our own. This means that there are risks involved in asking, as I mean to do, what the 'history' generated by a 'political society' possessing some stability means to the 'citizen' of that society; in performing the abstraction I intend, I risk carrying over some cultural assumptions not appropriate to every 'political society' and 'history' we shall want to consider. In order to move ahead, however, it seems worth running that risk.

Let us suppose that the citizen is satisfied with his political society to the point where he identifies himself with his membership of it. (I use the masculine pronoun because things are probably biased that way.) It may be that this means of establishing a self is among the principal benefits offered

by the political society, and outweighs the others. Let us further suppose that the society has constructed a history not only legitimates but authenticates its existence, presenting it as existing in an extension of time; and that it offers, not to say imposes, this history as a further means whereby the citizen may identify himself, as a member of the society's history as well as of its other structures. He may accept this invitation, or he may not; the society may be sufficiently plural and complex to satisfy his need of a self by means other than its history**;** or the history it has to offer him may be complex and agonistic to the point where this need is better satisfied without it. Happy, we say in either case, is the society that has no history. Before we consider cases of these kinds, however, it seems important to consider the simple case of the citizen of a polity possessing a history—one somehow constructed—that authenticates both it and him, or that he supposes to do so. What are the politics of his situation with respect to that history? We may say that he possesses it, in which case he may affirm some kind of right or property in or to it. Or we may say that it constructs and defines himself to himself, in which case we may need to ask how far he is, and in history has been, either an agent or a critic in constructing the history and his self. If we decide that he has been neither agent nor critic, we may decide that both the history and the self it invents are inauthentic. There will be a politics of asking what title 'we' have to decide this for him; very different from the politics that will arise if 'he', the citizen, comes to this decision of inauthenticity for himself.

But I am already presupposing the contestability of the history that offers authentication to the structure of the society and the identity of the citizen. This contestability may arise in either or both of two ways. It may arise from competition, conflict, or agonistic relations among the citizens themselves, in which case there will exist more than one version of history, in contest one with another. Given that the political society possesses some capacity to present itself as an exercise in conflict resolution, or in ruling and being ruled, this need not prove intolerably disturbing to the citizen; he is presumed capable of recognising himself as an agonistic being and his society as possessing a past and a present of agonistic relationships; he may recognise this society, and himself in it, as continuingly capable of conducting contestation, and the continuing contest between more than one version of its history as part of the politics that affords him a political identity. We ourselves, as critical intellectuals, have to recognise the

terrifying power of universal and hegemonic constructs without presuming the citizen other than ourselves capable of living only within one of these constructs; since if we do so, we presume neither him nor ourselves capable of citizenship at all; he can only be a subject and we can only be critics. There are cases, however, where our presumption that he can sustain the burden of living in a conflicted society becomes the demand that he set about living in a society where there will always be two histories incommensurable with one another. This seems to be the case of New Zealand, which I mention because you are probably unfamiliar with it and we are to hear more of it; and because we need to ask ourselves in what circumstances, and with what entitlement, we find ourselves making this demand of the citizen.

A second possible genesis for the contestability of history resides in the mere presence in the scenario of the actor we call 'the historian'. This term denotes someone who has made it his particular concern, his independent, autonomous or specialised activity, to retell histories, which may include those the polity has authorised because they authenticate itself; and a point is reached where he begins to tell them in terms not identical with those in which the citizen is used to hearing them told or to telling them himself. This does not happen simply because the historian as citizen becomes aware that the same story can be differently told by the protagonist and the antagonist; we are assuming that the citizen as agonist is capable of knowing this for himself. It happens also because the historian, as sophist, as rhetor, as critic or as philosopher—the last case is rather rare—becomes aware for reasons ultimately linguistic that there is always more than one way of telling the same story, and that this is indefinitely extensible, to the point, perhaps, where it feeds back into his awareness as citizen that the springs of human conduct in agonistic relationships are arcane, mysterious and capable of no final retelling. But he may also make this assertion as specialist intellectual; and I seem to have suggested that historians are the heirs of the sophists rather than the philosophers. Their pedigree is Latin rather than Greek, however, and it is safe to say that they are the heirs of the rhetoricians. At a later moment in the history of historiography, the term 'history' ceases to be confined to the narrative of past political actions and begins to denote the archaeology of past states of culture and society, achieved through the interpretations of the vast archives of texts—literary, legal, governmental, ecclesiastical—accumulated in scribal societies like those of late antique and medieval Europe. 'The historian' now acquires the capacity to declare that

the actions of authenticated history can and must be interpreted in the 'contexts' of past states of culture which he is able to reconstruct, and that these are indefinite in number, so that—once again—there are an indefinite number of ways of telling and retelling any story. A further stage is reached when the historians enter the academies, and their activity becomes professionalised, and within fairly severe limits cosmopolitan, so that there exists a guild, estate or republic of historians, whose business is to discuss with one another, and in their own autonomously generated language, the terms in which they are constantly telling and retelling both the histories that have been the property of the citizens and, interwoven with these, histories of which the citizen has not previously heard and in which he is not accustomed to recognise and authenticate himself. This does not mean that the historian has acquired complete autonomy; his involvement in both society and state has almost certainly increased with the general increase of specialisation; but it does mean that he is in a position to claim autonomy, or to find it ascribed to him by those who may very well resent his supposed possession of it.

Up to this point I have been considering the relation between the historian and the citizen, that is to say the historian's fellow member of political society. The situation will alter sharply if we consider his relation to the state: if we suppose that entity to have intervened in the authorisation of narratives that support its authority. Will the historian be a functionary, a dependent, a beneficiary of the state; will the state enjoin its readings of history on the citizen and the historian; in what ways will the state look upon its authority as contingent upon certain readings or structurings of history? This is as good a moment as any to point out that the 'histories' generated and authenticated by political societies do not consist only in narratives and interpretations, but entail structurings of experience, memory and time—worldviews as it is perhaps too easy to call them—reflection upon which may carry us rapidly into the realm we term that of philosophy; the relations between political history and political philosophy may be more intimate than the apparent mutual indifference of Thucydides and Plato (speaking for Socrates) would suggest. Perhaps, however, it will be convenient to return to the citizen, as a means to understanding the politics produced by the advent of the historian.

We supposed the citizen to know and to value certain accounts of history, as authenticating and authorising the political society of which he

is a member. If we suppose that society to be a certain distribution of authority, or of power, we may suppose that it assigns some measure of either to the citizen, and that he sees the authorised history of his society as underwriting whatever power or authority he exercises. There are other ways in which he may derive reassurance and value from his society; we have considered the possibility that it may offer him assurance of his social and even his personal identity; but I have emphasised the component of power because it conveniently dramatises what may occur when the historian appears and sets about retelling the authenticating histories in terms that are unfamiliar to the citizen and over which the latter may have no control. Let us suppose, as we have already, that the historian does not appear simply in the role of one citizen propounding to others a version of history other than that they accept and find familiar. The historians are plural and they are professional. They have organised themselves into a guild or academy, in which they constantly retell and reinterpret histories including those that citizens and state employ to authenticate themselves. Their dedication is to the proposition that stories can always be retold and reinterpreted, that there are always new contexts in which they can be situated and new meanings that they can acquire, that each new meaning is a potential criticism of some other, and that there is a similar diversity of value judgments that may be implied or pronounced. They are carrying to extremes the requirement that the state be a liberal state, that is, one capable of operating on the assumption that all its institutions and values shall be contestable, contextualisable, and interpretable in more than one way. In order to continue a process of historisation that appears to be ongoing and without any possibility of closure, they have created a specialised but still public space within the public space of the polity, in which they conduct a discussion of history couched in a highly professional language, one made up of the second-order terms in which a language conducts discussion of itself; one esoteric not in the sense that it is kept secret, but in the sense that in order to speak it you must learn it well enough to qualify as a member of the guild. This space is the academy. Its inhabitants—who are not of course exclusively historians—require of the polity that it be considered both free and privileged to speak in its own ways, but at the same time continue to regard it as public. The historians discuss matters of public concern, and consider their debate part of the debate among citizens. They assume—often without very close examination—that there will be communication of

some kind between their specialised academic speech and the speech in which the citizens seek to maintain their understanding of history, so that any changes in that understanding that the historians may advocate will trickle down to the citizens sooner or later, having been translated into the language that the latter find appropriate for their concerns. But their commitment is not solely to the proposition that a self-determining society shall be capable of rewriting its history at need; it is also to the proposition that no matter how the society chooses to tell or retell its history, there will always be some other way of telling it. They have enlarged the liberal proposition that no decision be considered final into the Socratic proposition that anything may be subjected to question and that any question may expect an answer. They do this as historians, not as philosophers, but they have joined the philosophers in establishing the academy: that space in which anything may be questioned and the language spoken is a second-order speech in which the questions may themselves be questioned, but that is assumed to be open on all sides to two-way communication with the space in which the citizens use language in their own way. We have returned to the problem of the academy and the character of its speech, a problem posed at the beginning of Greek political philosophy and again at the beginning of German; and I suggest that many of our discussions may have to do with the political preconditions that must be met before the Socratic proposition can hold good.

The received histories that a polity may decide to regard as authoritative at a given moment—'four score and seven years ago', or however they may begin—have in the last analysis to do with autonomy. Not only do they assure the citizen that his autonomy and that of his polity are established and legitimate; they give effect to that autonomy, in the act of determining what past history the polity shall deem itself to have had. Why should we consider this slightly ridiculous? If it is the mark of an autonomous or sovereign polity that it can determine, or have voice in determining, what is to be its future, it is no less necessary that it be free to determine its past. Out of the multiple choices that must be made in constructing a history, it is both reasonable and necessary that a society or an individual be free to situate the self in a certain history, to declare where one thinks one has come from in the act of declaring where one is going. Choices of this kind may be incoherent or even immoral, and it is important to be able to say so; and there is the question of the authority exerted in making such statements. In New

Zealand once again, a certain narrative of a historical event in the past has just been enacted by a parliamentary statute, and one must ask just what is the force and binding power of such a statement. But if we regard all public determination of history as tending to be absurd, it is because we are situating ourselves in the academy first and the polity second; and it may further be because we have mistakenly moved from considering all decisions criticisable to regarding all attempts at autonomy as absurd. The world we live in encourages us to make this move, for reasons not as conducive to the liberty of thought as we may suppose.

I am saying that the citizen is concerned, and has a stake, in what happens when he finds historians rewriting his history for him. If his history is part of his autonomy, such a rewriting entails some reconstruction of his autonomy, and he is entitled to ask whether this is being done to, for, or by him. If he finds his discursive world being reconstructed by forms of discourse to which he does not have access, his situation is analogous to that of those whom we now call subaltern,[3] as finding themselves included in worlds to whose discourse they have no access at all; but it is not identical with theirs, for the obvious reasons that (a) the academy exercises no manner of state power or coercive authority; (b) there is a world of political language that the citizens share with the academy, but within which the academy has erected itself as discoursing in a second-order language or metalanguage so far specialised that the citizen must learn it, and to that extent join the academy, before taking part in a conversation that may have consequences for him. There are public spaces in which the two languages meet, and here they may collide; the citizen, feeling that the language of the academy is being intruded upon him, may try in response to intrude his language on that of the academy.

There have been recent cases of this order, some of which raise the interesting question of how the discursive spaces, or theatres, in which these language collisions take place are constituted when the subject matter of public discourse is history. It may be said that the citizen is not much disturbed when authenticated history is reconstructed by someone writing a book; is it the case that the medium of print creates a public space that is easier to join or leave alone, so that the citizen is less likely to feel threatened by a discourse in which he has no part? In United States culture it has recently been exhibitions and monuments that have been involved in collisions; does this mean that the installation or visible arrangement of real

and symbolic objects creates a form of space in which the citizen feels more directly situated, and so exposed or threatened, and in which it is harder to establish a dialogue that comforts him by the existence of its rules? Such spaces, moreover, are—more obviously than those created by print—maintained at the public expense, and there arises a question including but exceeding that of freedom of expression: whether the citizen or the state is required to subsidise a discourse in which some of the participants claim freedom to disregard the practical consequences of what they may say for others. We find a politics of space, a politics of medium, a politics of maintenance; and behind them, what looks like the historian's variation upon the politics of philosophy and practice, with which we are already familiar. Like the philosophers, the historians have set up an academy, in which they may discuss the histories of their society without any limits other than those imposed by the rules of their discourse, retelling, reinterpreting and recontextualising them without any limits for which they will answer to any but those obeying the rules of the academy. Yet they do not deny that their speech is public, or that it has consequences in the world of political practice; on the contrary, the politics of discourse within the academy, the politics arising from its second-order speech or metalanguage, are intensively predicated on the practical consequences of historical interpretation, some of which are such that only historians perceive them. It would be easier for all if the historians could say, with Michael Oakeshott, that historiography is a purely contemplative or aesthetic discourse that can or should have no practical consequences whatever. But there seems to be a practical world, which the historians do not even desire to escape, since much of the subject-matter of their discourse is public property, which concerns others, and in which others—in this case the other political beings—are affected by discourse and have a claim to speak. It would also be easier if the citizens could dismiss historical discourse—as they can always, but never quite successfully, dismiss it—as conducted in a language or a universe that deprived it of practical significance. It is conceivable that recent debates could lead history in America to being treated as Americans treat religion: to being publicly guaranteed its freedom so long as it is not expressed or debated in spaces so public that the polity is responsible for their maintenance. This solution to the problem of religion, however, is based on the Enlightenment assumption that the state does not have to generate a religion, or sacred dimension of its own existence.

Whether it can escape generating a history, or secular dimension of its existence, seems less certain; the problem is one for postmodernists to confront.

* * *

There are then extensive fields in which to discuss the politics of historiography in established and functioning political societies, supposed to have generated authorised and authenticating histories, to have rendered them discussable within parameters compatible with the polity's continued functioning, and to have generated an academy in which they may be discussed without regard to political practice. I could clearly have spent very much more, indeed all, of my time analysing ways in which such societies (usually but not always states) have generated histories (both narratives and larger orderings of the historical universe) and invested them with political significance; and of ways in which the discussion, contestation and interpretation of these histories, increasingly by those termed in some special sense historians, have generated discourse perceived as being of both political and philosophical significance. I chose, however, to lay emphasis on the relations between citizen and historian as separated beings, because it afforded a bridge to the second part of my paper, which attempts to look at the politics that arise when a history is affirmed, or claimed, or demanded and constructed by those who declare that they have not been members, either fully or at all, of the polity that has generated the history by which they are confronted. What will be the history such voices construct? Will it be a political history, or the history of an anti-politics? What will be the politics of confronting it with the history so far maintained by a political society, and with the political society that has maintained that history? In pursuing these matters, we may find ourselves disposed at times both to employ the feminine pronoun, and to take up the historiography of multiple and postcolonial cultures.

We have been supposing a society whose inhabitants possess, in some degree of commonality, a set of political institutions and practices that generate histories. They will also possess a shared culture of some kind compatible with their politics; and the moment has come to say what should have been obvious all along, that their authenticating histories will relate their culture as well as their politics. It may also be worth repeating that their

history may be one of contestation between alternative political forms and competing cultural groups supporting these alternatives, and that the politics it narrates may be the story of how those contests have been managed; histories generated by the ruling structure may be dialogic as well as monolingual. Let us now suppose the discursive world to be entered and challenged by persons who affirm that they and those for whom they speak have been excluded from the political structure on grounds including the cultural; the usual triad of religion, race and gender will do as a first definition. We now ask: what kind of history may we expect such persons to construct? What will be the politics of constructing it, in particular the politics of its relations with the historiography of the politics from which its constructors have been excluded? They have had no politics, at least in the sense in which we have been using the word; what kind of history will they construct in the attempt to acquire one?

Prima facie, it might seem that, having no history, they will proceed without one, on the basis of some claim to pure right, pure will or pure identity. But such claims are hard to construct without alleging some history—even Sieyes's Third Estate, which was nothing and might be everything, was said to be driving out the descendants of the conquering Franks—and the more our insurgent group is conscious of an identity, the more likely it is to furnish itself with a past and use history as a means to authority in the present. Much will now depend on its programme with respect to the political structure from which it has been excluded; does it seek to join that structure, to modify it, to destroy it, to replace it? At one end of the spectrum it is content to renarrate the existing historiography; at the other to subvert and delete it; but to the extent that the insurgent group has been excluded from politics, it has no political history to narrate except that of the politics of its exclusion, and must look elsewhere for the materials of a history that will authenticate it. The next question to ask is whether and to what extent the group excluded from the political structure and its history has also been excluded from the culture that accompanies the politics. In the case of gender, it is easy to imagine that women display a high level of participation in the culture that confines their role within it, though we must pay attention to those who contend that they have maintained an autonomous culture alongside it. I mention the case because it dramatises the alternatives we have to consider. The more the politically excluded share the culture of those who have excluded them—let us now propose—the likelier it is that

they will adopt the strategy of shifting the focus of historiography from the political to the social or the cultural, finding in the extra-political the basis both of a history that authenticates their existence and of a claim to admission into the political structure on revised or reversed cultural grounds.

This move from political to cultural or social history is one of the oldest tactics in the politics of modern historiography. It may be said to recur every time there is a call for a 'new history', as happens about every thirty years and is traceable back to 1751, when Voltaire declared that the history of monarchy was worth studying only in so far—which was in fact very far indeed—as it formed part of the history of *les mœurs et l'esprit des nations*, and d'Alembert went further in declaring that the only histories worth studying were those of kings, most of whose actions were destructive, and of *les gens de lettres*, who did most to preserve what was constructive.[4] Just who they were, and what d'Alembert intended by thus privileging them, need not detain us; the point is that this outward movement, this broadening of the field from the history of state to the history of society, has often been the work of historians challenging the political structure in order to broaden its membership, though it has just as often been the work of those strengthening the political structure by connecting it with the culture and society it maintains and governs. The dichotomy continues to this day; I expect we all have colleagues who hold that political history is politically incorrect, and that everything that is not 'cultural history' (the buzzword of the moment) is 'traditional history' and therefore to be discouraged. If we have, I know what we reply to them.

At this point it may be desirable to introduce the concept of alienation. There is an impressive body of literature explaining that we write history not because it authenticates us but because we are alienated from and by it; that the very act of writing, thinking or living history alienates us from the past and from our former selves. This is the consequence of the process of historiography as we have been describing it: the discovery that the past can be interpreted in many ways besides those that make it relevant to the present, including those that may have made it relevant to itself. This is the point at which we discover *The Death of the Past* (Plumb 1973) and that *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (Lowenthal 1985); or Oakeshott's dictum that to study the past for practical purposes is to engage in necromancy (1955:137–57; 1983)—to which he seemed to have left no alternative but

necrophily. The politics of a historiography viewed as self-alienation very easily became a politics of self, and there were many strange and disastrous consequences of this development. But in my present attempt to establish a fairly simple politics of historiography as a relation between selves, it is sufficient to point out that a history written out of exclusion from the political entails to that extent a historiography of alienation. How is one to write the history of an activity from which one was excluded, in which one was subject or subaltern but not actor? How is one to write oneself into a history that is that of the diminution or alienation of one's self by exclusion from action? One solution, as we have seen, is to discover or invent an activity possessing a history other than that of politics, in which one has been an actor and which forms a context for the activity of politics, conditioning the latter's nature. This activity may be culture; if we have not been Romans we may have been Greeks. But this does not quite do away with the problem that the activity of politics has already narrated its own history, and that as historian one has to face the question of how to narrate it. One may have recourse to a kind of counter-history, in which one narrates the action as it looks when one was excluded from it and it was done to rather than by one; or narrates those actions to which one was a party as defined by one's exclusion from the full selflhood of politics; or narrates the actions of the political masters as if they were qualified at all times by the act of excluding one from them. One has moved into writing history as the narrative of a master–slave relationship, and it is a tempting strategy for the not-altogether-emancipated slave to perpetuate that relationship in writing, so as to deny the master the chance of emancipating himself from it. (All my life I have been listening to the charge that liberals are fascists in disguise.) But the flaw in this strategy is that the author remains self-cast in the role of slave; those who are forever emancipating themselves will never be free.

If the masters are to recognise that the slaves made themselves a world in which they were not altogether slaves, the slaves must perform a reciprocal recognition for the masters. (It was after all easy for the masters to be free and equal with one another; freedom was what slavery was for.) Historians who narrate a history from which they were excluded with no intent but to subvert it will necessarily deny it autonomy; whereas historians constantly retelling the story will know both that the slaves were not only slaves and that the masters were not only masters—that they possess a

history not all of which the slaves may condemn. The diversity of history helps to legitimise it; but here we risk discovering that the genocides were not only genocides. To contextualise may be to palliate, even to legitimise; we are on treacherous ground, where the historian may be a danger to all parties. Meanwhile, the polarisation into masters and slaves has disrupted the culture that we were supposing those excluded from the political structure shared with those included in it; Caliban is at the point of telling Prospero that his consciousness is a false consciousness because it can only be the consciousness of a master. This charge may be true or itself false; Prospero will seek to narrate his history in reply to it.

Let us turn back from this extreme to the case of one excluded from politics who affirms membership of a cultural group of the kind we call ethnic, and can claim that it possesses a history that can be narrated. This actor—who may be placed in a postcolonial situation—may be talking self-authentication, self-alienation, or some mixture of the two. That is, one may affirm that one still possesses one's culture, that it has a present and lays claim to a future, that it possesses a past from which one derives authority for acts and speeches in the present; or one may affirm that all this once existed but has been destroyed, that one's condition is anomie, and that one has no choice but to subvert the existing structure through the violence that arises from one's lack of a civic personality, until—somehow—political and cultural personality is restored to one. Caliban imposes on Prospero the information that he can only curse until he finds a new language. The role and even the meaning of 'history' will clearly be very different at these two extremes, and there will be many intermediate conditions.

We shall be discussing two of the positions along this spectrum: first, that occupied by the kind of people we term 'indigenous', who can claim to recollect a precolonial identity and culture, and to reconstruct its history under postcolonial and indeed postmodern conditions; second, that occupied by a people whose past is entirely circumscribed by enslavement and transplantation, and whose history must consequently be written in quite a different way. The former typically operate by claiming to be indigenous, autochthonous, in Maori *tangata whenua*: people possessing a relation to the land that antedates European colonial settlement and was not established by the mechanisms of appropriation fundamental to the European sense of property, polity, economy, and history as established in the early modern

classics. From this relationship and its narrative—very often both established and expressed in terms rather poetic than prosaic—they derive an authority, a legitimacy, a history, and a claim to what they challengingly call sovereignty, initially incommensurate with those expressed by Europeans, in particular with European settlers. These, however, claim to have been living in the land and occupying it in their own way — which includes but is not limited to the expropriation of the indigenous people—with the result that there is established an adjudication, and very commonly a treaty relationship, between the two, whose politics become the politics of the bicultural relation (Kawhara 1989; Sharp 1990; McHugh 1991). It is now found that two histories are being written, of which each authenticates a different set of actions in the past and present and between which negotiation must take place if there is to be negotiation in the present; but that each authenticates a different set of legitimacies, so that the negotiation must be between two different perceptions of what negotiation is—since histories authenticate politics, different histories may authenticate different politics. It further appears that the negotiating peoples, who have been interacting since their first encounter, have been living in a minimum of two histories, even in two perceptions of what history is and what it means to live in it; and that actions in the past, which one owns as one's own and performed in one's own history, have been performed at the same time in another's history and must be interpreted as that history offers means of interpretation. It may very well be that the colonised know this already and the colonisers have still to learn it.

Problems now arise that go beyond the simple problems of double-standard judgment. These may be severe enough. It is an obvious strategy, and by no means an unreasonable one, for the colonised to declare that history as they perceive and have suffered it invalidates history as the colonisers have perceived it: that the latter is based on bad faith and has no meaning beyond its use for their expropriation. The colonisers may reply that they are being told that they have no history and consequently no culture of their own; but that there is more to their history than their expropriation of the colonised, which they are now prepared to admit only to be told that they have no moral foothold from which even to admit it. It may further be the case that the culture of the colonisers is a guilt culture, well equipped to condemn itself; and that the historians of this culture, being among its intellectuals, carry their function of rewriting its history so far as to

delegitimise it altogether. In declining—of course quite rightly—to delegitimise the culture of the colonised, they may go so far as to represent it as guiltless, and even without the capacity for guilt and self-condemnation. This propensity may be traced, in the history of our culture, as far back as Rousseau and Diderot and the opposition between history and innocence. It raises the problem that to ascribe all guilt to ourselves and all innocence to the others is not to establish an equality between the two; yet how is this to be done?

We have to consider the politics of histories in encounter. In an important work, recently published, Judith Binney has shown Te Kooti Arikirangi, a Maori prophet and warleader of the 19th century, singing into existence as he enacted it a prophetic history in which he and his followers thenceforth acted, and in which the actions of others, both Maori and Pakeha, have to be understood if we are to know how they appeared to others though not to themselves (Binney 1995). Binney, who is herself Pakeha, has consulted the elders of the Ringatu church Te Kooti founded to ensure that her representation of their history is authentic to them; they are not unanimous about that history themselves. It is a remarkable achievement; yet it gives rise to the thought that Te Kooti was not the only prophet re-creating Maori in histories of their own, and that others—Pakeha as well as Maori—created histories in which Te Kooti, like any other, must be interpreted in scenarios not of his own making. What is to be the society, the conversation, among such a multiplicity of histories? To take an illustration from another recent work of importance, let us consider the crew of shapechanging mythical beings who occupy the Haida ship on the cover of James Tully's book on the constitutionalism of multicultural situations (1995). Each of these has a myth to recount, a song to sing, and there is a priestly figure who hears all the songs together. But we must suppose that they desire to debate as well as to sing, to require one another to see themselves in each other's histories; there is more to this than singing one's song and reciting one's genealogy, since one must criticise one's song and hear it as others hear it, as well as singing it. The relation between histories in encounter has political prerequisites, and at this point the till recently colonised will certainly tell the till recently colonisers that these prerequisites have not been met yet. Cases have occurred in which 'indigenous' students in 'multicultural' universities have demanded the establishment of courses in their culture in which they will determine who

gets to be admitted to the class and how much of the content of the course may be disclosed outside the classroom. Universities have rightly replied that esoteric learning must be conducted off campus, since the university operates on the Socratic premise that anything may be questioned and any question may expect an answer. The indigenous have as rightly replied that the Socratic premise presupposes a political equality between questioner and answerer—that something is done to a culture when you ask questions about it—and that they are declaring that such an equality does not yet exist. When it does not, the difference between comprehension and appropriation becomes elusive and perhaps illusory. Judith Binney is scrupulous in refusing to interpret Ringatu history in Pakeha terms; yet in rendering both Maori and pakeha historiography historically visible, she may be situating both in a history that up to now only pakeha historians have attempted to construct. Reciprocity and equality will not be achieved until a Maori historian appears who attempts a sympathetic understanding of pakeha historiography in the context of history as postcolonial Maori understand it. The politics of that situation are not easy to predict, and there can be no guarantee that it is going to happen. An Irish writer has remarked that you have to be fairly sure of yourself before you can afford self-doubt;[5] and we are in fact presupposing that a decolonised people will reach a point where there appears in their culture the academy, the space occupied by historians free to reinterpret their society's history, in the assurance that the society can and will endure the restatement of its history for purposes independent of authentication.

The appearance of the academy is guaranteed by neither politics nor history, and we cannot be too sure that it is a prerequisite of that noble dream of reciprocity (as it might be called) that we are imagining: that relationship in which two incommensurate cultures, of which one has hitherto dominated the other and driven it to alienation, become capable each of writing the other's history and situating its historiography in the context of history as the speaking culture constructs it. In theory, the political negotiation we have imagined—the negotiation of sovereignties and identities by means including the affirmation of histories by both parties—might be thought capable of generating this relationship by its own workings; and certainly the academy is not going to generate it, for the reason that its inhabitants are hitherto all on one side of the negotiation, and their capacity to interpret the indigenous culture as well as their own has hitherto been an aspect of the

latter's power over and appropriation of the former. But for this reason in turn, the political negotiation is hitherto at an impasse; the indigenous culture, seeking sovereignty over and by means of its own history, is likely to be interested in the dominant culture's history only to delegitimise it—in which the intellectuals of the dominant culture are all too anxious to join—and is likely to make its own history a monologue in which others are not permitted to speak. Negotiation, notoriously, consists largely of a jockeying for power by repeated refusals to negotiate; in this case, refusal of dialogue of the kind we are imagining.

The academy, then, if present in this situation, cannot do much more than rectify its language, maintain the Socratic premise while trying not to falsify it by imposing it on others, and make itself useful by holding out the image of dialogue and reciprocity as we have depicted them. If we sustain the definition of the historian as one committed to the principle that there is always another way of telling the story, it is not too much to add a recognition that this requires a society of story-tellers—who must however share the historian's premise that there are ways other than their own—and that no one voice or chorus is going to speak for all of them. The historian thus defined is not going to be unduly alarmed by the prospect of the academy's becoming an intercultural dialogue of interpretation; it will have to be a dialogue, not a collision of monologues, but the academy is defined as dialogue. The difficulties are intimidating because they are metacultural and metahistorical; the academy has been invaded by those alienated from their own historical speech, and any one of the positions from which the historian may attempt to empathise with the construction of history by others may be pervaded by a perception of history that one ought not to be imposing on those others. But the historian as defined is not unaccustomed to evaluating one's own position; one knows the hermeneutic cycle fairly well from the inside; one never did share the noble dream of objectivity; and one's purpose is not to be a philosopher king, but to take part in the intelligent dialogues that may be instituted inside the cave (see Novick 1988). I return to that starting point of historiography among the sophists and the rhetors, who understood paradiastole and had no wish to abandon it.

Let me then conclude with the politics of history considered as politics of the academy, that erratically self-steering fifth wheel on the political hearse. I have defined the historian as one committed to the proposition that there is always something more to be said about the past, conceived as the

subject of an open-ended discourse. To maintain this commitment one need entertain neither a noble dream of objectivity nor a solipsistic vision in which interpretation has no limits; the historian is also committed to the proposition that others beside oneself have in fact existed, and is anxious to draw as close to objectivity as the nature of one's subject permits, by setting up and observing canons of criticism and falsification made as tight as they can be. One may justify one's pursuit by alleging values that are aesthetic: the delight and instruction to be derived from multiplying one's interpretations of a historical occurrence, and knowing that there will always be more interpretations that can be constructed and vindicated. 'The one duty that we owe to history', Oscar Wilde apparently said, 'is to rewrite it'.[6] Wilde was an aesthete, but he did say it was a duty. The historian—far from alone in this—offers this delight and duty to one's fellow citizens in the open society. But one does not escape politics; one only diversifies them. Any reinterpretation the historian offers will have political consequences and effects, which one may or may not intend; the premises from which one offers it will be informed by all manner of political implications, of which one may or may not be aware. Speaking from within the cave, the historian tries to be as conscious of one's assumptions and intentions as one can be, and aims or should aim to attend to inputs of all kinds, received from fellow-historians, fellow citizens, and often resentful subalterns and strangers.

There are kinds of histories constructed to authenticate, to legitimise, to subvert, and otherwise to perform upon one's fellow beings. There are no historical statements that may not have effects of this kind, including those that the historian may make without any thought of producing such effects. In a universe of practice, even the statement 'this statement has no practical consequences' is self-falsifying; there will be practical consequences if one says that. The historian, however, does intend to make statements that have unintended consequences. and that situate practice in the unintended and unpredicted universe of history, where there is always 'more in this than meets the eye'. The purpose of making them is more than prudential; more even than that of supplying the practitioner with irrelevant information, in order to remind him of the limited relevance of what he is doing himself. It is to make statements that are not merely practical, though they never cease to be such; and to consider the aesthetic and perhaps philosophical, and the political as well as the practical, consequences of making them in historical and political conditions.

Notes

This paper was originally prepared for a conference on 'The Politics of Political Thought', the 1996 annual meeting of the Conference for the Study of Political Thought, Tulane University, 22–24 March 1996, which I organised.

1. I do not know, though I suspect there exists, a close analysis of the politics of person, case and preposition: of speaking 'for', 'to', or 'about' others. I attempted something of the kind in Pocock 1970–71.

2. It may be further observed that they were writing history not for the winners, but for the losers. The Athenians had lost the war with Sparta; the senatorial aristocracy were losing the struggle with the principate.

3. I stress the word as 'subáltern', since 'súbaltern' calls up the image of a young man in a pith helmet, inappropriate to the situation being discussed.

4. Voltaire, introduction to the *Siècle de Louis XIV* (1751) and the *Essai sur l'Histoire Générale* (1756); d'Alembert, *Discours Préliminaire B l'Encyclopédie* (1751).

5. Frank McGuinness, in *The Economist*, 10 Feb 1996:83.

6. I owe this information to a bookmarker distributed by my former colleagues in the History Department of the University of Otago.

References

BINNEY, Judith, 1995, *Redemption Songs: a life of Te Kooti Arikirangi Te Turuki*, Auckland University Press with Bridget Williams Books, Auckland.

KAWHARA, Hugh, 1989, *Waitangi: Maori and Pakeha perspectives on the Treaty of Waitangi*, Oxford University Press, Auckland.

LOWENTHAL, David, 1985, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

McHUGH, Paul, 1991, *The Maori Magna Carta: New Zealand and the Treaty of Waitangi*, Auckland University Press, Auckland.

NOVICK, Peter, 1988, *That Noble Dream: the 'objectivity question' and the American historical profession*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

OAKESHOTT, Michael, 1955, 'The Activity of Being an Historian', in his *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays*, Methuen, London.

OAKESHOTT, Michael, 1983, *On History and Other Essays*, Blackwell, Oxford.

PLUMB, J. H., 1973, *The Death of the Past*, Penguin, Harmondsworth (first publ. 1969).

POCOCK, J. G. A., 1970–71, 'Verbalising a Political Act: towards a politics of speech', *Political Theory*, 1(1):27–45.

SHARP, Andrew, 1990, *Justice and the Maori: Maori claims in New Zealand political argument*, Auckland University Press, Auckland.

SMITH, Adam, 1985, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belle-Lettres*, Liberty Classics, Indianapolis.

TULLY, James, 1995, *Strange Multiplicity: constitutionalism in an age of diversity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.