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Review of *Politics at the Margin: Historical Studies of Public Expression Outside the Mainstream*, by Susan Herbst

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how to see the past),” as if a researcher could proceed a single step toward the “facts” without developing criteria of selection, interpretation, and methodology by means of which “to see the past” (p. 35).

Philosophy of historical writing, or “narrativism,” Ankersmit believes, has brought the main recent “progress” in philosophy of history, particularly by Hayden White, W. H. Walsh, A. C. Danto, and L. O. Mink (pp. 9, 62, 69). These philosophers see that the historian’s task is essentially interpretative (i.e., to find unity in diversity)” (p. 35). One awaits examples, but Ankersmit’s pages, devoted to debating other philosophers of history about how such discovery should take place, never get around to applying his recommendations. Some thirty historians are mentioned in the book, but Ankersmit does not analyze a single paragraph of their writing. Even when they are quoted with respect to their style or to what they think about narrative, the references are odd enough to cause one to wonder whether the historian’s work has really been perused.

For example, Ankersmit lauds Fernand Braudel’s *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (1973) for its synthesis of a “chaotic manifold,” the “economic and political reality” of the sixteenth-century Mediterranean world. But Braudel’s oxymoronic style (“liquid plains,” “watery Saharas”), he concludes, “undermine[s] any fixed notions about the past,” so that Braudel’s book is not a “paradigm of ‘scientific’ historical writing and . . . of historical synthesis,” as it is “ordinarily seen,” but instead illustrates “the disintegration of a metaphorical, synthetic understanding of the past” (p. 226). These assessments clash with Braudel’s assertions, which emphasized the provisional character of his own research findings, even though he also maintained that the findings, however incomplete, represented “realities.” Ankersmit’s judgments also ignore Braudel’s moves beyond linguistic means of communication. Maps, photographs, pictorial reproductions, statistical tables, graphs, and model-building (especially derived from geography and economics) serve not to undo its narrativity but to enlarge it heuristically beyond any “linguistic turn,” any capturing of historical thought by a single mode of inquiry and representation.

Three assumptions run through Ankersmit’s essays that will give historians pause. First, he argues that history is a special kind of discourse, *sui generis*, quite separable from those produced by the social sciences, philosophical disciplines, and other narrative arts like the novel (pp. 36–41 strive to specify such separations). But historical works have been as often concerned with opening as with closing such disciplinary frontiers, from the time of the anthropological Herodotus to that of the demographic David Herlihy, sociological Georges Duby, and novelistic Carlo Ginzburg. Second, the special kind of discourse called history can be analyzed, Ankersmit believes, without considering the process of production of that discourse. In fact, however, the procedures that he finds

peculiar to historical writing interact progressively and regressively throughout research and writing processes, producing a kind of craftlike tinkering to which Braudel, among others, frequently alludes. Finally, since Ankersmit believes that history is a discourse about “the past,” he concludes that the best historiography is that which builds up “individual statements” into “the historical narrative with the largest scope.” The best history is the grandest: it adds meanings together to provide the widest view of a vast, single realm called “the past” (p. 41). Such a prescription applies to little historiographical practice, which rarely offers a single present-minded view about a single, unified set of bygone times. Historical writing, like the research communicated in it, juxtaposes many past-past, past-present, and past-present-future perspectives in contrastive relation to each other.

Ankersmit’s “belvedere” criterion for historiographical excellence (p. 41) may be profitably applied to the claims of handbooks, textbooks, and popular guides to “the past,” but can it be the prime criterion for historical students and researchers? Historical work requires one to think first and last about how to probe multiply divided, contrastive pasts from the perspectives of multiple presents that are progressively identified as work goes on. Only mediately and secondarily does one think about how to convey that probing. There is, certainly, continuous feedback of representational on investigative techniques, but for most historians the end in view is to establish the best possible, although always temporary, state of the question being looked into, and not to create a narrative with the largest scope.

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SUSAN HERBST. *Politics at the Margin: Historical Studies of Public Expression Outside the Mainstream*. New York: Cambridge University Press. 1994. Pp. x, 231. Cloth \$59.95, paper \$18.95.

In this book Susan Herbst presents four diverse case studies in an attempt to further our theoretical understanding of “politics at the margin.” And diverse they are: the *Salonnières* of the French Enlightenment, the African-American newspaper *The Chicago Defender*, *The Masses* magazine, and the Libertarian Party. Herbst sets out a broad agenda for this brief work, taking on Jürgen Habermas’s notion of the public sphere and how public-opinion polling and survey research (citing Pierre Bourdieu) have ignored the way that opinion is created in smaller groups. In her survey of the relevant thinkers who touch on such questions as community boundaries and power(lessness), Herbst moves with agility through Steven Lukes, Michel Foucault, Robert Bellah, and Ferdinand Tönnies. From this setting of the stage, Herbst jumps to the case studies, where some distillation of the notions of this group of theorists is intended to elucidate the actions of an array of politically marginal groupings. She sees

her contribution as a "template" for other case studies, claiming that a theoretical framework is necessary to understand the nature of these groups.

Unfortunately, neither the theoretical framework nor the case studies themselves ever fully emerge. Herbst has the double burden of providing enough description of each group to make sense of it to the reader, then of relating what she has described to the theoretical bits and pieces she has gathered, but not resynthesized. The result is fragmented and leaves the reader skeptical about the entire project.

The juxtaposition of the French salon with the campaigns of an African-American newspaper in Chicago in the 1930s through 1960s to elect a "Mayor of Bronzeville" as an alternative voice for the black community is certainly innovative but it does not work: the differences across centuries and cultures need to be taken into account, as do the boundaries between political and cultural marginalization, before one can start to generalize. Herbst states simply in her third case study that the "salon" of Mabel Dodge at which writers and artists working for *The Masses* were regular guests was "so similar in character to the more liberal eighteenth century salons" (p. 126), without qualification or further explanation. She asserts ahistorical notions about American newspapers while chiding *The Masses* for its racial and sexual attitudes without considering the larger American context. And the author completely dismisses *The Masses* as "in thrall" to the Communist Party, which simply cannot be said of its early days, despite the testimony of Max Eastman. By emphasizing selected aspects of each marginal group, Herbst must leave out the rich detail necessary to do comparative history.

The lack of historical specificity in the earlier chapters leaves the author ill equipped to explain the contemporary Libertarian Party. This case study seems to be a plea for attention to this specific group rather than explication of why this party is and may remain marginal in the American political spectrum. Had the historical chapters that preceded it been more successful in fashioning the "template" that Herbst proposed to provide, perhaps it could have been possible to better understand marginalization.

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CHRISTOPHER J. BERRY. *The Idea of Luxury: A Conceptual and Historical Investigation*. (Ideas in Context.) New York: Cambridge University Press. 1994. Pp. xiv, 271. Cloth \$69.95, paper \$24.95.

In this wide-ranging and insightful study, Christopher J. Berry seeks to show that the idea of luxury is deeply implicated in the broader political question of the nature of the social order and changing conceptions of the "good society" from Greek antiquity to the present. Drawing on philosophy, political and economic theory, and intellectual history, Berry argues for the persistence and central importance of the category of luxury

in every society's self-understanding. His analysis suggests that luxury goods do not constitute a separate category distinct from necessities but instead relate to basic human needs and fall into four categories in which needs and desire interact: sustenance, shelter, clothing, and leisure. Berry grounds his conceptual scheme in a historical account that shows how luxury has changed from being a negative term, conceived as threatening to social virtue in classical antiquity and salvation in medieval Christendom, to a positive term in modern times, sanctioning insatiable desire and consumption.

The main reason for the negative evaluation of luxury in classical thought, according to Berry, is that it makes men soft and effeminate and hence incapable of defending themselves and their communities against external enemies and internal conflict. For Plato in particular, desire, unlike need, is insatiable and, if left unchecked, leads to the ruin of society and its citizens. The Romans, too, notably Cato the Elder and Seneca, denounced luxury because it represented the use of wealth to promote private interests at the expense of *virtus*, or the public interest. Christian thinkers in turn, from Augustine to Thomas Aquinas, although they rejected the this-worldly political ideal of classical writers, shared the view that luxury, which they associated principally with carnal lust, was negative because it threatened salvation. What classical and Christian thinkers held in common, Berry emphasizes, and what distinguished both from modern thinkers, was their view of human needs as fixed and the fixed natural life as normative, subject to corruption by change.

This view was first seriously challenged in the seventeenth century by, among others, Thomas Hobbes, Thomas Mun, and Nicholas Barbon, who formulated the characteristically modern position that desires are infinite and that the proliferation of desires is not a cause of corruption but instead the "natural" way of things. Thus Barbon, for example, could argue that fashion and luxury goods can be justified by their promotion of trade and their positive effect on social well-being. This celebration of *homo oeconomicus* followed from what Berry calls the "de-moralisation of luxury" (p. 101), and the new perspective became central to the thinking of Bernard Mandeville, David Hume, and, above all, Adam Smith. Berry emphasizes in their work the depoliticization of the idea of the "public good" that luxury had formerly been presumed to corrupt and the loss of the transindividual character of the public good. As the new era of liberal politics proceeded to give priority to unfettered private economic activity, morality became a matter of private choice and human nature was thought to manifest itself in the material motivations underlying these choices.

Berry devotes an intelligent chapter to the historicist critique of the age-old assumption of the fixity and permanence of human needs by G. W. F. Hegel and Karl Marx. They constructed new temporal teleolo-