

I have had trouble writing a statement primarily because I have always thought of myself first as an analyst of politics, and second as a literary critic. Criticism, for me, has generally been an instrument for coming to understand political orders and phenomena and then for intervening in them. As I read it, the call for statements is addressed rather to those who are critics first. So what can somebody who approaches the question of the future of criticism from my more resolutely political perspective add to the conversation?

Perhaps I can offer the small confession that, for my work, I have always found Foucault more interesting than Derrida and that the Foucauldian project still points, I believe, to a vast number of still-unexplored avenues of inquiry. Foucault's genius lay in coupling a sociological imagination—concerned with how whole societies work and the structuring principles of their operations—with a remarkably astute sensitivity to the texture and effects of sign systems. Derrida is no less astute on the latter point but lacks (in my view) the sociological imagination, which is fundamentally necessary for any effort to give criticism serious political relevance.

If one wishes to know how language is working and shaping our world, one needs to know not just how it plays, obscures, reveals, and subverts, but also where human social orders are explicitly (and not just implicitly) held together by words: the realms of law and punishment, of value and the division of labor (gender and sexuality come in here), of religion, of organized strife (from athletic events to war), of membership in imagined communities like “the people,” and of generational transition. Words not only tell, but also do, but some words are asked to do more work than others, and Foucault was more sensitive to this, in my view, than Derrida has been. Whereas Foucault's work has inspired much valuable scholarship in the areas of punishment and sexuality, the other areas I mention remain to be explored. I would love for *Critical Inquiry* to find some of way of tackling/critiquing economic theory, for instance, or the intersections of religion and culture (Bruce Lincoln's work comes to mind here), and to expand the work it has done on the psychology of modern citizenship.

My focus on the political is not meant to put aesthetic or ethical questions in the back seat. Rather, aesthetic and ethical terms are central to the functioning of each of the elements of social organization I listed above. As for aesthetics, form matters not only because it is part of content but because it especially affects transmission. A second virtue of the Foucauldian approach to critical inquiry is that it established a frame for seeing the terms of politics, literature, sociology, history, psychology, art, and so on, as all mutually implicated. This provided an impetus for setting interdisciplinary work at the forefront of the humanities. But in at least my home discipline of classics, interdisciplinarity is slipping off again and with it the glimmerings of the sociological imagination that I think should be the basis of critical inquiry. It is my hope that *Critical Inquiry* might be able to help secure purposeful interdisciplinarity for the future and to cultivate within the discipline the sort of sociological imagination that Foucault showed could be such a rich basis for inquiry. It is also my hope that criticism will become bolder about tackling economic theory and drawing it, too, back within the provinces of the humanities. These Foucault-oriented remarks may seem backward looking but, given that the world changes, a sociological imagination, if it is to be what it intends to be, is obliged to change with the world.

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