

Another promising approach would be to compare the Saint-Simonians and a radical youth group of another period such as the French Maoists of the late 1960s and early 1970s. (This particular pairing can be seen as the underlying premise of Rancière's work.) For the Maoists, the *École normale supérieure* played a somewhat analogous role to the *École polytechnique* for the Saint-Simonians; their ambivalent relationship to the events of May 1968 is reminiscent of the Saint-Simonians' attitude to the Revolution of 1830. As with the Saint-Simonians of the Second Empire, one can also see the post-Maoist careers of many one-time Maoists as rooted in the exhilarating aspirations and painful "lessons" of their groupuscule years. And several former Maoists, including Serge July of *Libération*, have been successful in pioneering new types of cultural dissemination, arguably the late twentieth-century parallel to the nineteenth-century Saint-Simonians' enthusiasm for new forms of communication through canals and railways.

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Richard Flacks — *Making History: The Radical Tradition in American Life*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988. Pp. xii, 313.

Out of the chasm between History and our own lives grows the fantasy that we can escape History or the dream that we can make it for ourselves. For each person, each morning, the hope of escape is the more rational one, because it is far more manageable...Accordingly, the alternative dream — that today we can make History — is inescapably not going to be spontaneously experienced or readily accepted by very many (especially if, as is often the case, entertaining that alternative might actually ruin your day.) Yet, that alternative is at the heart of the left tradition (284).

The strength and the appeal of this sociologist's commentary on the current political situation in the United States is a readiness to get to human basics. As this excerpt will show, we are led to think political reality through until we are able to see it as daily life. "History" in this book really means what Aristotle meant by "Politics". And like Aristotle, Flacks sees everything mundane in its political dimension.

It fits this vision that Flacks has given us generous portions of autobiography. He tells us that he was one of those "red-diaper" babies of the 30s, raised in "that peculiar New York Jewish milieu...in which one took for granted a concern for politics" (vi). His parents were American Communists, who, of course, lost their teaching jobs in the 1950s. By the time that national politics turned radical again, Flacks was a young academic, in place to be a mentor to the founders of the Students for a Democratic Society. Though he admits to strong nostalgia about the SDS days, he says he does not regret the withering away of all of the "institutional left". He accepts that the New Deal, which his parents in their time taught him to despise, and the Great Society, which he in turn taught the youth of the Sixties to despise, in fact accomplished so much real "democratization" of American life that the masses cannot be led anymore by Parties, nor by any other kind of institution.

There is much talk in these pages about the scandals of continuing privilege and inequality, and of unfairness, and even of “bossess”; and there is a good deal about the need to take control of our lives. It is archaic and protean radical talk of the kind that one hears more and more in sociologically-based political commentary, and supremely in the Kingdom of Social Work. It is post-Marxist. But it is equally pre-diluvian. It is Wobblyism: lemonade springs and cigarette trees. But we have to picture the resuscitated Wobblies preaching in a world where they are forced to begin with the admission that “Each American today has more control over his or her life” and that, therefore, “the left as an organization is barely visible” (191). The New Wobblyism accepts as given that basics and luxuries and leisure and entertainment are so abundantly provided that to turn one’s attention to public issues is bound to “ruin your day”. In this setting, the hope for radical change lies not in the appeal of ideas or programs, and not in leaders, but in the strengthening of “a continual ‘adversarial’ thread in our culture that has counterbalanced cultural themes that promote conformity to the logics of capitalism and the nation-state” (190). This “adversarial” (or “counter-”) culture took root in the “elitist”, Bohemian soil of Greenwich Village prior to World War I, but has been successfully generalized and democratized through infiltration of popular entertainment. The radicalizing of the American consciousness owes virtually nothing to Debs and Thomas and Browder, and everything to Pete Seegar and Bob Dylan. The result is that “anti-authoritarianism” is today the most conspicuous theme in culture and consciousness. In fact: the surest way of distinguishing the radicals from the rest of us seems to be that the rest of us regret this.

So, we have this “ironic” situation: that while the “left” is weaker in American politics than virtually anywhere else in the world, the effects of American culture at home and everywhere else in the world are “quasi-anarchistic” (190-191). The good news for the radicals is that “left-influenced cultural expression has encouraged mainstream skepticism towards established institutions, helped the continuous reinvigoration of criticism, promoted tolerance for nonconformity, and extended both the definition of and the space for free expression” — all helping to realize “Americans’ quest for freedom defined in terms of self-development”. The bad (or at least worrying) news for the radical is that the cultural left has had much less success in stimulating popular concern for the common good” (191).

If all of this is true, radicals have to take much on faith. The withering-away of the parties of the left; the total electoral failure of the left in the U.S.; the universally-conceded failure of Marxism, Leninism, Maoism, and indeed all forms of Socialism when called upon to govern (207-209) — none of this, says Flacks, really discredits the message of the left, but raises it to the higher plane of popular culture. The radical has to believe that the masses have only apparently retreated into full-time material gratification. The radical must take heart from the fact that left-criticism is thriving among the intellectuals, and that some way will be found to “connect their work to historical transformation” (280); some way will be found to spoil the people’s day. The key to Flacks’ program seems to be the conviction that if left-intellectuals can immerse themselves sufficiently in the “daily life” of people, infiltrating and giving direction to all those thousands of community organizations which have been spawned by Great Society programs, they can teach people how to work up the grievances towards life which are encouraged by the “quasi-anarchistic” popular culture, and which only seem to be about personal and psychic problems and things that need scratching, into a consciousness of the primacy of economic power.

Those who, like myself, regret rather than celebrate the undoubted truth that “anti-authoritarianism” is today the whole content of “culture and consciousness”, will quickly concede that Flacks is onto perhaps the deepest truth about contemporary politics. There is an impressive and clarifying integrity about this book. There is no way to miss the seriousness of the political commitment and the honest linkage of personal experience and theory. The arguments about the present and the future are accompanied by a thoughtful survey of American political experience since 1900. It is not easy reading, but well worth it.

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Peter Fry and Fiona Somerset Fry — *A History of Ireland*. London and New York: Routledge, 1988. Pp. x, 366.

Insofar as this book begins with a review of the first 6,000 years B.C. of Irish history within the space of twenty pages, one is not surprised to find a highly selective chronology of events. But many, if not most, of the important names and places are included. Moreover, the narrative is written in the style of an accomplished storyteller that results in a reasonably comprehensible account of the often vague and complex strands of early Celtic history. Where this book is woefully deficient, however, is in its interpretation of events. There is very little critical analysis, and much of the text covering the more recent centuries of the Irish historical experience appears to have been written without the benefit of any reference to the existing historiography. The notes, for example, refer to less than a dozen sources, most of which are not monographs or specialized studies, but rather general works of reference. Even the list of suggested readings contains none of the important titles that have been published outside the British Isles, including, as it does, little more than general histories.

Yet, even if the people and places of Celtic Ireland are presented in a bewildering succession of family and regional names, the reader cannot help but appreciate how the tribal rivalries and topographical landscape conspired to frustrate all early attempts at establishing a viable nation-state. And that same disunity, of course, made the Irish vulnerable to interlopers, plunderers and conquerors.

Roman Christianity came to Ireland in the 5th century and the pastoral tendencies and tribal values of the native population made the territory inhospitable to the episcopal and parochial church systems that flourished in more bureaucratic and urban societies. Monasticism became the predominant and nearly exclusive expression of Irish Christian belief, the appeal of which was perhaps partly attributable to the individualistic temperament of the Celts. The authors remind us, of course, that St. Patrick is said to have built as many as fifty churches, some of which were staffed by women priests who were an accepted part of the early Irish clergy.

The Vikings arrived during the 8th century, sacking monasteries and terrorizing the indigenous population. But they never succeeded in conquering the country and their lasting contributions to Irish life were developing the towns and cities, and accelerating the secularization of the Church. The Normans, however, who first came to Ireland in the 12th century to aid one Irish tribe against another, decided instead to