

Point critique

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“Traditional History” and “new History”: Lucien Febvre’s Assessment of the Struggle between the two

In this text, Lucien Febvre is called upon not so much to analyse French historiography between the wars as to explain the challenges and factors involved in the confrontation between two forms of history: traditional history and a new type of history oriented towards synthesis. The main interest of this text lies in recalling that, immediately after the end of World War I, L. Febvre began taking actions in view of “re-politicising” the social sciences, focusing on redefining the discipline in scientific terms and reformulating the social function of history. His critical action must be grasped in this context, especially his polemical reports against Charles Seignobos who was neither his sole, nor even his favourite, target.

Point critique

■ Gérard Mauger: Écrits, lecteurs, lectures

Si le débat qu’a suscité l’esthétique de la réception au sein des disciplines littéraires, s’est cantonné, à de rares exceptions près, au domaine des concepts et des esquisses théoriques, la nouvelle histoire sociale de la lecture a entrepris de rendre raison des variations des appropriations d’un même texte ou d’un même ensemble de textes d’un pôle à l’autre de l’espace social, d’une époque à

une autre ou encore d’une société à l’autre. Quant aux résultats des enquêtes accumulées depuis le début des années soixante-dix, l’hypothèse d’une triple homologie entre division du travail – entre « monde des choses matérielles » et « monde des choses humaines » – division scolaire – entre filières scientifiques et filières littéraires – et division entre les sexes, permet de rendre compte des exceptions apparentes à la relation très étroite qui unit les pratiques de lecture et le capital culturel détenu.

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Writings, Readers and Readings

While the debate generated within literary disciplines concerning the aesthetics of reception has, with few exceptions, been confined to domain of concepts and theoretical outlines, the new social history of reading has attempted to account for the varied ways in which a single text or even a group of texts is appropriated from one end of society to the other of society, from one historical period to another or from one society to the next. As for the results of surveys accumulated since the early 1970s, the hypothesis of a threefold equivalence of the division of labour – between a “world of material things” and a “world of human things” – the academic division between scientific and literary paths – and division of the sexes, accounts for the apparent exceptions to the very close relationship linking reading practices and the possession of cultural assets.