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The human, the social question [is] always dogging the steps of the ancient contemplative person and making him, before each scene, wish really to get *into* the picture, to cross, as it were, the threshold of the frame. It never lifts, verily, this obsession of the story-seeker, however it may flutter its wings, it may bruise its breast, against surfaces either too hard or too blank. "The *manners*, the manners: where and what are they, and what have they to tell?"—that haunting curiosity, essential to the honor of his office, yet making it much of a burden, fairly buzzes about his head the more pressingly in proportion as the social mystery, the lurking human secret, seems more shy.

—Henry James, *The American Scene*

An anthropology which abdicates the search for explanatory theories of culture and society in favor of particularistic interpretations of specific cultures and societies exclusively is an anthropology whose attraction will . . . become confined to scholars whose intellectual curiosity is limited to, and whose intellectual appetite is nourished by, strange customs of exotic peoples. For the rest . . . that aim produces . . . anexoria curiosa; in a word, boredom.

—Melford Spiro, "Cultural Relativism and the Future of Anthropology"

One day while driving through a beautiful autumn countryside, a man from the city passed by an apple orchard. There a strange sight met his eyes and he slowed his car to observe it more closely. A strapping farmer dressed in overalls was staggering about the orchard, borne down under the weight of an enormous pig, which he carried in his arms. With some difficulty, the man

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saw, the farmer would lift the pig up to the height of the lowest fruit-bearing branch, the animal would daintily nibble an apple, and the farmer would then stagger along to another apple tree, where the process was repeated. Puzzled and fascinated by this, the man from the city stopped his car by the side of the road, hopped the wooden fence into the orchard, and pursued the farmer while he continued to stagger from tree to tree. Addressing the heavily perspiring rustic (for it was an unseasonably warm day), the man from the city asked, "Excuse me, sir. Do you mind my asking what you are doing?" The farmer answered in a friendly way, "Why no, mister, I don't mind tellin' you at all. I'm feedin' the pig his lunch." The city man considered this for a moment while following the farmer and pig to the next tree, then offered, "Well, doesn't feeding him that way waste an awful lot of time?" And the farmer replied, "Why hell, mister, time don't mean nothin' to a pig."

Of Pigs and Promiscuity

Whether the meaning of time for the pig (or more properly, for its owner) fell into a Taylorite register (time as money) or a Thompsonian one (time as culture) is impossible to tell.[1] The larger point of this homely Chayanovian parable, however, is that man the exchanger of calories with the natural environment and man the exchanger of meaning with other men are not easily separable entities, although academic disciplines and subfields of historical writing tend to cleave the two apart as though they were.[2] One of the argu-

1. On Frederick Winslow Taylor (1856–1915), the industrial engineer whose "time and motion studies" in American factories spawned "Taylorism" just after the turn of this century, see Robert Kanigel, *The One Best Way: Frederick Winslow Taylor and the Enigma of Efficiency* (New York: Viking, 1997); and the review by Sean Wilentz, *New York Review of Books*, 20 Nov. 1997; see also E. P. Thompson's seminal article about the cultural stresses attendant upon the transition to a modern work regimen, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," *Past and Present* 38 (1967). Two recent books on time in a cultural and historical perspective that have stimulated my own thinking are G. J. Withrow, *Time in History: The Evolution of Our General Awareness of Time and Temporal Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1988); and Alfred W. Crosby, *The Measure of Reality: Quantification and Western Society, 1250–1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997). The pig story I owe to Dan Foe.

2. The Russian agronomist A. V. Chayanov, a major theorist of peasant economic life writing primarily in the early Soviet era, suggested that traditional peasant farmers may "self-exploit" their family labor to the point of discomfort without apparent regard to obvious criteria of economic utility, for reasons based in a different rationality having to do with family and plot size, the demographic cycle, and so forth; see A. V. Chayanov,

ments I hope to make in this essay is that cultural history and economic history (or other sorts of quantitatively based history, for that matter), though most often thought separate from each other, or even antithetical, because of epistemological, methodological, or boundary distinctions, may usefully be united to the benefit of each. This possibility has partially to do with the principle of overdetermination: that a single effect, such as the action of an individual, say, may have several causes, so that economic and religious motives, for example, might jostle each other in the thinking of one person; and partially with the idea that all human actions and expressions have cultural valences, or meanings. Let us take the example of monetary wages. From a strictly economic point of view, wages may be said to reflect the relationship between the supply and demand of labor in a given market. Wages may simultaneously reflect not only value, however, but individual worth—not just decisions about leisure time, subsistence strategies, and maximization, but about culturally specific normative ideas of work, self-valuation, gender roles, the investment of time in private *versus* public activities, and so on. In his recent magisterial book, for example, Paul Vanderwood writes of the millenarian rebels at Tomochic, in northwestern Mexico in the early 1890s, that their antimodern ideology condemned doctors, priests, and money. Yet the believers awarded themselves extraordinarily high (nominal) money wages for fighting against the Porfirian government. I have found instances of the same thing amongst the insurgents of the independence period nearly a century earlier, but without the anti-modernist ideological baggage.[3] What were these popular rebels thinking of? Paradoxical as such an approach/avoidance to money might appear, they seem to have been saying that although the reigning powers of state and property might control the medium of economic exchange, they themselves knew their own worth and were ready to expropriate the markers of that worth by force, if necessary, replacing their economic value with a moral one. I want to suggest, therefore, that cultural history

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The Theory of Peasant Economy, eds. Daniel Thorner, Basile Kerblay, and R. E. F. Smith, with a foreword by Teodor Shanin (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1986); for useful analyses of Chayanov's thought, see Daniel Thorner, "Chayanov's Concept of Peasant Economy"; and Teodor Shanin, "Chayanov's Message: Illuminations, Miscomprehensions, and the Contemporary 'Development Theory,'" both in ibid.

3. Paul J. Vanderwood, *The Power of God against the Guns of Government: Religious Upheaval in Mexico at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1998); and Eric Van Young, "The Other Rebellion: Popular Violence and Ideology in Mexico, 1810–1821" (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, forthcoming).

should actively colonize economic relations, as it has done political systems, on the imperialist assumption that all history is cultural history. Why this is not a flaccid formulation that dilutes the conceptual precision of culture, but a salutary form of promiscuity, is one of the central points I hope to make. I shall return to these issues below.

This essay does not pretend to survey all, or even a large part, of what has been done in the cultural history of colonial Mexico.[4] The coverage is admittedly spotty, privileging projects such as ethnohistory either because I am more familiar with them, or because they encapsulate certain problems for new cultural historians or embody certain of their successes. Nor does this essay attempt to answer the large questions, such as what culture is, what cultural history is (a history of the production and reproduction of socially constituted meanings will have to do), or what is "new" about the cultural history some scholars are writing for colonial Mexico.[5] Still less does it lay out a sys-

4. In the preparation of this essay I have found particularly suggestive a recent review article by Susan Deans-Smith, "Culture, Power, and Society in Colonial Mexico," *Latin American Research Review* 33, no. 1 (1998); in the same issue see also Cynthia Radding, "Cultural Dialogues: Recent Trends in Mesoamerican Ethnohistory." Within the past few years the *Latin American Research Review* has published a number of useful review articles, among them Janine Gasco, "Recent Trends in Ethnohistoric Research on Postclassic and Colonial Central Mexico," *Latin American Research Review* 29, no. 1 (1994); and John Kicza, "Recent Books on Ethnohistory and Ethnic Relations in Colonial Mexico," *Latin American Research Review* 30, no. 3 (1995). In addition to this journal, the excellent newer journals *Colonial Latin American Review* and *Historia y Grafía* (Universidad Iberoamericana, Mexico City) periodically publish substantive pieces and review articles that air these same issues. However, since the interdisciplinary mix of these journals tilts heavily toward what one *might* call postmodernist historical, anthropological, and literary studies, they tend to preach to the converted, the tone of their treatment of cultural history being more celebratory than critical. For a general discussion of Mexicanist historiography up until about 1990, see Enrique Florescano, *El nuevo pasado mexicano* (Mexico City: Cal y Arena, 1991). My own present essay engages in something of a dialogue with an interlocutor represented in this issue of the *HAHR*, as well: Stephen Haber, whose earlier "The Worst of Both Worlds: The New Cultural History of Mexico," *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 13 (1997), has prompted a good deal of healthy discussion of cultural history's claims and methods; and there is also some cross talk with the essays of Mary Kay Vaughan and William French, at least with earlier versions of their contributions to this issue of the *HAHR*.

5. Certainly much of what has been done in the last 15 years or so is new to the history of colonial Mexico, though hardly new to history as a discipline. Nonetheless, for the sake of consistency with the other authors' offerings and in the spirit of the original scholarly colloquy at which these essays were presented as papers, I will refer throughout to "the new cultural history."

tematic theoretical approach to what we are calling cultural history. Rather, my approach will be to raise a series of questions—questions altogether easier to ask than answer, in most cases—about how cultural history is being done, what its goals and values are, and how it relates to other forms of historical inquiry. I place a particular emphasis on epistemological and methodological issues, many of which have arisen in the course of my own work over the last decade or so. In passing I make reference to various scholarly studies about colonial Mexico already published, and a few unpublished; but it goes without saying that I have left much excellent work aside for lack of space or intimate familiarity with it.

My readers will perhaps permit me a few words of confessional before I undertake my task. Even aside from a certain self-conscious tendency to overly long methodological and theoretical prolegomena because we are perhaps not sure of our own ground, and even apart from a fascination with labyrinthine postmodern cultural studies, the genre of cultural history may tend somewhat toward navel-gazing, as is often remarked even by its own advocates. The premises of cultural history are by no means as yet self-evident or universally accepted in a discipline such as history, long dominated by materialist forms of explanation. This may be especially true in a subfield such as Latin American history, struggling to reinvent itself after the dismantling of dependency theory as a metanarrative.[6] It is for such reasons, for example, that I found Steve Stern's admittedly somewhat compulsive theorizing in his recent book on gender ideology in late colonial Mexico thoughtful rather than self-abusive (as famously alleged), and particularly apt given the strongly hermeneutic approach he took in his microethnographic description of women at risk from male violence and patriarchal repression.[7] Moreover, the cultural history literature often betrays certain autobiographical undertones. Partly this is due to the increasing convergence of cultural history with anthropology, whence we have bleeding into our discipline recent examples of crypto-confessional from eminent practitioners such as Ruth Behar and Paul Friedrich.[8] But partly it just makes sense given the nature of the approach and its

6. Stephen Haber, "Introduction: Economic Growth and Latin American Economic Historiography," in *How Latin America Fell Behind: Essays on the Economic Histories of Brazil and Mexico, 1800–1914*, ed. Stephen Haber (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1997).

7. Steve J. Stern, *The Secret History of Gender: Women, Men, and Power in Late Colonial Mexico* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1995).

8. Ruth Behar, *Translated Woman: Crossing the Border with Esperanza's Story* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993); and Paul Friedrich, *The Princes of Naranja: An Essay in Anthrohistorical Method* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1986).

own coordinates in cultural studies. Whereas we once arrayed ourselves as observer and object, we now have two subjectivities warily circling each other, or even three if the maker of the source-text is distinct from the actors being described. If the observers are in the picture, in other words, perhaps their assumptions and the mode of their gaze warrant some attention.

I used to be a great deal more sanguine about the possibilities of resurrecting and understanding long extinct worldviews and symbolic systems, until I came face-to-face in the latter stages of my own work on the Mexican popular insurgency of 1810–21 with certain apparently intractable problems. In the course of thinking through my research materials, I was increasingly drawn to culture—to the process of meaning formation, the codes by which meanings are stabilized and transmitted, and the ideas in people's minds—through the question of individual motivation for joining in collective political violence. It seemed that the internal images in people's heads that formed the basis of these motives rarely had anything explicitly to do with economic grievances, or with larger, more abstractly structural representations of "interest." Seeing people's behavior as a reflex of class or market relationships, therefore, seemed reductive and out of synch with the evidence. This has thrown me back ever more on the representations themselves—whether of family, community, forms of earthly authority, religious cohesion, cosmic order, and so forth—as being largely at the source of collective action. It is almost insuperably difficult to construct a wholly complete or satisfactory model of motivation on this basis, however, primarily because one cannot get close enough to the actors' thinking. Nor, on the other hand, have I been able to leave behind the economistic forms of explanation prevailing in most studies of early modern collective action, particularly among peasants. This has meant forging a complex circularity between historical-structural (that is to say, essentially materialist) explanations of collective behavior, and culturalist explanations. Many of those who delve into cultural history have followed something of the same trajectory, I suspect, and may find themselves, with me, having one foot on the shore and one in the boat. My imperialist project for cultural history represents in part an attempt to resolve this problem.

Genealogies and Chronologies

The city man in the orchard evoked in my opening passage may be seen to represent (in the sense of "stand in for") an ethnographer, I suppose. Nor is it an accident that my two epigraphs are drawn from the disciplines of literature

and anthropology. Cultural history's near obsessive interest in the problematization of texts (in the literary sense) and in language obviously originated with poststructuralist literary studies; its ethnographoid method, and to some degree its characteristic interests in "subaltern" groups and in forms of community and identity, derives from anthropology.[9] The linguistic turn, especially, and the putatively destructive influence of postmodernism presumed to flow after it like boiling magma through a volcanic vent, have called forth some astute but shrill criticism from more "traditional" historians right and left (both politically and epistemologically).[10]

Whatever its genealogy and the authorities it typically invokes to anchor itself, however, the new cultural history as practiced for colonial Mexico is not in fact a radically postmodernist project, because its practitioners seem to believe in the (at least partial) knowability of past realities, and that there is a difference between the fictive imagining of the novelist and the factual imagining of the historian.[11] Postmodern *weltschmerz* or epistemological anarchism are

9. Lynn Hunt, "Introduction: History, Culture, and Text," in *The New Cultural History: Essays*, ed. Lynn Hunt (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1989), 11, notes the primacy of anthropological influence in cultural history, as does Deans-Smith, "Culture, Power, and Society," 258. See also Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, ed., *Culture through Time: Anthropological Approaches* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1990).

10. For right- and left-wing attacks, see respectively Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The New History and the Old* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1987); and Bryan D. Palmer, *Descent into Discourse: The Reification of Language and the Writing of Social History* (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1990). For a remarkably moderate defense of the new problematic of language and subalternity, see Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth about History* (New York: Norton, 1994); and for an extremely sophisticated but sometimes opaque airing of the central issues, see Robert F. Berkhofer Jr., *Beyond the Great Story: History as Text and Discourse* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1995).

11. This is not a particularly porous boundary for colonialists, it seems to me, perhaps because of the traditionalist, text-anchored (in the limited sense) training most of them receive. Where one does occasionally find the more adventuresome impulse to substitute one's own subjectivity for that of the people one is studying, or at least a willingness to extrapolate from the known without bashfulness, is in more modern history; see, for example, Marjorie Becker, *Setting the Virgin on Fire: Lázaro Cárdenas, Michoacán Peasants, and the Redemption of the Mexican Revolution* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1995). After recently giving a series of lectures touching on some of these issues, I myself was asked the question of what the difference is between fiction and history; my own answer: footnotes. For some discussion of this theme, see Eric Van Young, "The Cuautla Lazarus: Double Subjectives in Reading Texts on Popular Collective Action," *Colonial Latin American Review* 2 (1993); and on historians and footnotes, Anthony Grafton, *The Footnote: A Curious History* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1997).

therefore remarkably absent from this burgeoning literature.[12] Nor, on the other hand, is the new cultural history the half-life product of a deteriorating dependency theory, despite the fact that some of its practitioners fashioned themselves as dependentistas earlier in their careers, or were so described by their critics.[13] This genealogy disavows or ignores the anthropological influences so obvious in the approach, which new cultural historians would never do. As one young historian has observed, attacks upon the new cultural history resemble a "rear-guard action against a paper tiger [or perhaps, better said, a straw man]," because of the actual care and caution with which cultural-historical methods are typically applied.[14] There is, in fact, nothing very radically "decentering" to be found in a methodological/epistemological inventory of this history. Among the major features of the new cultural history would be: 1) the study of mentalities, if by this one means the perduring mental structures that motivate individual or group behaviors, and the symbolic systems people use to explain the world around them; 2) a particular, though by no means exclusive, interest in subordinate groups in history; 3) a certain turn toward inductivism in the writing of history; and 4) a highly critical stance (occasionally, however, regressing to credulity) toward sources and textual interpretation.[15]

Given the interest of the new cultural history in what have been called subaltern groups (a point to which I return below), is there some convincing way of differentiating cultural history from social history ("history with the politics left out")? Or is the study of subalterns, within the cultural dispensation, simply a sort of fizzed-up political history transposed to another register, not very different from older revisionist styles of the social history of working people developed by E. P. Thompson and Eric Hobsbawm, among others? Social and labor history also saw themselves as redemptive projects aimed at

12. See the interesting exchange among Patricia Seed, Hernán Vidal, Walter Mignolo, and Rolena Adorno airing some of these questions in relation to "postcolonial discourses," in *Latin American Research Review* 26, no. 3 (1991) and 27, no. 1 (1992).

13. That particular teratology makes the new cultural history appear even *more* of an abortion to its critics, by the way, because dependency theory itself focused above all on issues of political economy.

14. Matthew O'Hara, "Ascent into Discord: Theory and Latin America's 'New Cultural History'" (unpubl. ms., 1997). It does seem to be the case that the most extreme positions among proponents and critics of the new cultural history tend to be taken in methodological/theoretical debates in print (and on-line) rather than in the monographic literature itself; I owe this observation to Andrew Fisher. One of the functions of critical debate and of criticism more generally, of course, is to denaturalize practice.

15. This is a loose paraphrase of O'Hara, "Ascent into Discord," 2.

restoring voice to historically marginalized groups passed over in canonical accounts. But there is nothing particularly uncultural, as there is nothing particularly unsocial, about plotting the history of elite groups.[16] So it cannot be the downward drift in the gaze of cultural historians that makes cultural history cultural, but rather its particular techniques and goals. This means that not all subaltern history is necessarily cultural history, except to the degree that it attempts to deconstruct hegemonic formations that impinge on the production and reproduction of meanings and the symbols that instantiate them.[17] What differentiates subaltern history in the cultural mode from social history, then, is an attempt to use many of the same sources for different, or complementary, ends: in the one case to arrive at a history of meanings for the partially inscribed, and in the second to situate people socially, primarily with regard to considerations of social class. The cultural history of subaltern groups, however, may attempt to situate people socially within the framework of class while at the same time looking at mental/symbolic processes that may or may not be shaped by class experience, or by it alone. The conquest of Mexico did not create a peasantry, but it made of the existing one an ethnically subordinate underclass. Although the power of ethnicity—or "Indianness" or "caste"—may indeed have been fading with time, it was still very strong by the late colonial period. Understanding subaltern cultural history primarily with relation to class position, therefore, may be something of an anachronism for colonial Mexico, during which forms of ethnic and localist identity may have been as strong or stronger than those of class.

The advent of new cultural history can be accounted for (to borrow a model from the history of science) as much by internalist as externalist explanations. The internal logic of the field of colonial Latin American, and within it colonial Mexican, historiography has been to work its way down the documentary and institutional food chain to the most fragmentary, biographical, and folkloric data, to arrive at a level where the waters are murky and large-

16. For some fine studies in the social history of elite groups in a pre– or para–new cultural history mode, see, for example, John Frederick Schwaller, *The Church and Clergy in Sixteenth-Century Mexico* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1987); Doris M. Ladd, *The Mexican Nobility at Independence, 1780–1826* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1976); John E. Kicza, *Colonial Entrepreneurs: Families and Business in Bourbon Mexico City* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1983); and Louisa Schell Hoberman, *Mexico's Merchant Elite, 1590–1660: Silver, State, and Society* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1991).

17. I tend to agree with Haber's observation that seeing everyone as a subaltern in some circumstances—the King is subaltern to God as the slave to the overseer, and so forth—empties the concept of its utility; Haber, "Worst of Both Worlds."

scale explanations loom like rusted hulks on the teeming ocean floor. To understand what is going on down there has required something like a minor Kuhnian paradigm shift in the face of accumulating puzzles or anomalies cast up by the old metanarratives grown creaky with stress.[18] If the regular evangelizers of central Mexico did their work so well, for example, as in the compellingly Whiggish portrayal of their project rendered by Robert Ricard, how did indigenous culture and lifeways survive to the extent they apparently did?[19] If the hegemony of the colonial state lay so heavily upon the land, why was "bargaining by riot" so common between colonial rural communities and the Spanish regime, and how was there political and ideological (let alone physical) space for recurrent episodes of Indian rebellion?[20] But the paradigm shift has been sly and incremental rather than disjunctive—more an ad hoc, somewhat compressed evolution than the jarring reconfiguration of normative practice Kuhn originally envisioned. It has produced in the new cultural history what might be called an "ironic project," in the sense that much of the new writing stresses the contradictory nature of the explicit and the covert, as in describing state "hegemonic" action and popular cultural "reception" and reappropriation of ideological elements.[21] This sense of irony, where irony is "a contradictory outcome of events as if in mockery of the promise or fitness of things," is what drives most of the colonial-era essays in the recent anthology on ritual and public life by Beezley, Martin, and French, or even Stern's evocation of the colonial system of "gender right."[22]

18. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2d ed. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1970).

19. Robert Ricard, *The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico: An Essay on the Apostolate and the Evangelizing Methods of the Mendicant Orders in New Spain, 1523–1572*, trans. Lesley Byrd Simpson (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1966).

20. See, for example, William B. Taylor, *Drinking, Homicide, and Rebellion in Colonial Mexican Villages* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1979); Friedrich Katz, ed., *Riot, Rebellion, and Revolution: Rural Social Conflict in Mexico* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1988); Susan Schroeder, ed., *Native Resistance and the Pax Colonial* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1998); and Serge Gruzinski, *Man-Gods in the Mexican Highlands: Indian Power and Colonial Society, 1520–1800*, trans. Eileen Corrigan (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1989).

21. This is surely one of the reasons for the widespread influence of James C. Scott's work, especially his *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1990), although for reasons I have tried to outline elsewhere (Van Young, "Cuautla Lazarus"), Scott deals less than convincingly with culture.

22. William H. Beezley, Cheryl English Martin, and William E. French, eds., *Rituals of Rule, Rituals of Resistance: Public Celebrations and Popular Culture in Mexico* (Wilmington,

Finally, it may be of interest to ask of the new cultural history, How new is "new," and is the newness that of the emperor's new clothes? Well, to some extent (to paraphrase Molière) perhaps we have been speaking cultural history for a long time without being aware of it. One need not bring a particularly overheated reading to Charles Gibson's canonical *The Aztecs under Spanish Rule*, for example, to see it as cultural history, or at least as laying out the elements for a *cultural* approach to the history of central Mexican indigenous peoples, nor to the work of Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán of the 1940s and 1950s to see it as a profound study of systems of social classification, and of the social production and reproduction of meaning. And one could surely go further and further back with such an archaeology.[23] But as a self-conscious subgenre of historical writing on Mexico whose practitioners more or less recognize each other, and which has its own burgeoning corpus of canonical works, theoretical reference points, source and methodological predilections, and—yes—specialized argot, the new cultural history only goes back a decade or so, to about 1990 or slightly earlier. Take, for example, Enrique Florescano's survey of Mexican historiography, *El nuevo pasado mexicano*, published in 1991. In his section on "Revalorización y recuperación del virreinato" (pp. 31–45), Florescano certainly cites a number of historical works that we might construe as exemplars of cultural history, but the vocabulary he employs is that of social history, even in commenting on the ethnohistorical studies of Nancy Farriss and Victoria Bricker, both of whom certainly deal with the historical experience of indigenous peoples from a culturalist perspective, that is, in terms of language, ethnic identity, religious belief, and, above all, systems of symbolic meanings.[24] In the closing pages of his essay (pp. 155–56), Florescano actually mentions cultural history,

Del.: Scholarly Resources, 1994); and Stern, *Secret History of Gender*. The quoted definition of irony is drawn from the *Compact Oxford English Dictionary*, 2d ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 878; complementary definitions include "a figure of speech in which the intended meaning is the opposite of that expressed by the words used," and "a condition of affairs or events opposite to what was, or might naturally be, expected."

23. Charles Gibson, *The Aztecs under Spanish Rule: A History of the Indians of the Valley of Mexico, 1519–1810* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1964); and Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, *La población negra de México: estudio etnohistórico* (Mexico City: Ediciones Fuente Cultural, 1946), *Formas de gobierno indígena* (Mexico City: Impr. Universitario, 1953), and *Medicina y magia* (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional Indigenista, 1963).

24. Nancy M. Farriss, *Maya Society under Colonial Rule: The Collective Enterprise of Survival* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1984); and Victoria Reifler Bricker, *The Indian Christ, the Indian King: The Historical Substrate of Maya Myth and Ritual* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1981).

though only obliquely and somewhat coyly. By contrast, his recent book on ethnicity and the state in the history of Mexico's indigenous peoples is redolent of culturalist jargon and concepts.[25]

Nor is it coincidental that two journals devoted primarily to cultural history (the Mexican journal embraces more than just the colonial period) are relatively new by disciplinary standards, dating from the early 1990s: the Universidad Iberoamericana's *Historia y Grafía*, edited by Guillermo Zermeño; and the City University of New York's *Colonial Latin American Review*, edited by Raquel Chang-Rodríguez. The opening editorial statements of both journals stress their interdisciplinary, "revisionist," and I think (implicitly) culturalist agendas.[26] A glance at the tables of contents over the years demonstrates how this self-mandate has worked out in practice. The very first number of *Historia y Grafía* (1993) was dedicated primarily to the work and influence of the French critic and cultural theorist Michel de Certeau, and of the two additional articles in this first issue, one treated Mexican museums, a hallmark concern of cultural historians. In succeeding years each number was dedicated to a specific theme. For instance, number 4 (1995) was centered on "historia e imagen" and contained articles on the significance of the "royal body" in the French Revolution, on photography, on the interactions between Hollywood and the Mexican cinema, as well as selections from the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Paul Ricouer. The next number (no. 5, 1995) backslid to haciendas and hacendados, while the first issue of 1996 (no. 6) continued with fairly traditional essays on "ruptures and continuities" between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the second (no. 7) examined Jesuit thinking on Mexican culture and history. In the following year (1997), *Historia y Grafía*

25. Enrique Florescano, *Etnia, estado y nación: ensayo sobre las identidades colectivas en México* (Mexico City: Aguilar, 1997).

26. Raquel Chang-Rodríguez, "Foreword," *Colonial Latin American Review* 1 (1992); and Guillermo Zermeño, "Presentación," *Historia y Grafía*, 1 (1993). Wrote Zermeño about the self-reflective (some would doubtless say "intellectually masturbatory" or "navel-gazing") agenda of the journal: "Ahora mejor que nunca sabemos que la construcción del saber y de la ciencia es una cuestión fundamentalmente colectiva. . . . Hay una línea que en especial nos interesa impulsar y promover, para cuyo abordaje el historiador no ha encontrado en general el espacio adecuado: la de la reflexión sobre el sentido y función de su propia práctica. . . . En ese sentido quisieramos ver a la historiografía como parte de un sistema de comunicación, de mayor complejidad, tanto hacia dentro como hacia afuera de sus formas discursivas. . . . De modo que la *historigrafía* es sólo una forma de la representación de la experiencia humana y social transcurrida" (emphasis in original). In the interest of full disclosure, I should mention that I am a member of the editorial boards of both journals.

explored both the theme of "marginados, integrados, y condenados," embracing articles on melancholy, film, and morality (no. 8), and the theme of "bodies in history," with pieces on religion, gender, prostitution, and dance (no. 9).

Since its founding in 1992, the *Colonial Latin American Review* has quite consistently combined historical, anthropological, and literary approaches in its editorial selection policy, typically touching on issues such as mapping and representation; prophetic traditions; textuality; postcolonialism; Indian-Spanish relations; subalternity; academic culture; conqueror historiography; the intersections of race, class, and gender; and carnivals. An entire number in 1995 (vol. 4, no. 2) was devoted to an extravaganza of historical and literary studies of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz; and the first number of 1996 (vol. 5, no. 1) explored "cross-cultural communication and the ambiguity of signs," which seems to say (or signify) it all. But even journals of a relatively traditional (not to say staid) bent reflect the same tendency, if in a more muted fashion. *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* (admittedly interdisciplinary and again not limited to colonial history) published one article of an arguably "cultural historical" approach in 1990, and peaked with six of eleven representing this tendency in 1993, though the proportion had declined to one quarter by 1996. The *HAHR* has always been somewhat more eclectic in its publication profile, interestingly enough, but across wide variations over time (4/17 articles devoted to "cultural historical" themes in 1990, 7/13 in 1991, 5/14 in 1992, 4/14 in 1993, and 1/13 in 1994) it, too, has shown some inclination to drift over into the cultural realm, with about half the total articles reflecting this approach in the 1996 and 1997 volumes (5/10 and 5/11, respectively).[27]

The Emperor's clothes issue branches into two slightly different questions, one of which furnishes the agenda for most of the rest of this essay. First: Does

27. It goes without saying that my "statistics" rest upon an impressionistic perusal of the journals' tables of contents, not upon a careful reading of every contribution or any sort of formal content analysis; in the hands of someone else this same exercise might produce quite different results. About 15 years ago I conducted a similar "survey" of *HAHR* offerings over the period 1960–85 in my article "Recent Anglophone Scholarship on Mexico and Central America in the Age of Revolution (1750–1850)," *HAHR* 65 (1985), but with the somewhat different objective of trying to determine when late colonial/early national studies blossomed. I concluded (pp. 726–30), at least based upon a count of *HAHR* articles, that it must have been about 1970. I also noted, however, that beginning in the early 1960s one tended to see a more sociological language in the journal, and more contributions in the area of social history. An avowedly cultural history has not so much drowned out more established forms of political, economic, intellectual, or social history, but added another voice to the polyphony.

the new cultural history simply consist of a set of terms, a jargon, imported from other disciplines and other historiographies? And, if so, have its advocates simply employed this language to undergird a mild historical revisionism—regarding, say, religious sensibilities, gender constructions, or the role of common people vis-à-vis the state—and to carve out a niche for themselves in the field, while in the process making exaggerated claims for their approach? Is it, in other words, a sort of discursive exoskeleton for a creature whose innards are pretty undefined and squishy, or does it say something new enough to be interesting? The second question is larger and harder to answer: Has the new cultural history generated, or is it likely to generate in the future, some larger understandings about the workings of Mexican society and culture over the long term, or will it simply remain bogged down in the sort of particularistic exoticism skewered by the anthropologist Melford Spiro in my second epigraph? In brief, there are two answers to this question. First, it may be too early to tell. Or, the utility of the approach might well come to depend precisely upon cultural historians working in the promiscuous and imperialist mode suggested at some length in what follows.

Culture as Text and Text as Culture

To begin my substantive and methodological discussion proper, let me place on the table the palindromoid statement "Culture is to text as text is to culture," which must figure centrally in any project to study culture in past time.[28] This takes us back to the influence of anthropological thinkers on the new cultural history, since this is basically a paraphrase of Clifford Geertz (and behind him, of literary and cultural studies scholars). As an aphoristic pronouncement this reads reasonably well; as a research programme for doing what we are calling new cultural history in general, and for colonial Mexico in particular, however, it is very treacherous. The terms of this statement, which in part encapsulates the relationship between anthropology and history, are not reversible because cultural historians are mostly asking anthropologists' questions without access to anthropologists' tools, by which I mean primarily fieldwork techniques in the ethnographic present. Victor Turner may well liken pilgrimages or initiation ceremonies to theater, for example, or Geertz and other anthropologists treat culturally expressive phenomena—whether cockfights or pup-

28. Basic to any discussion of text and action is the work of Paul Ricouer; see, for example, his *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action, and Interpretation*, ed. and trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1981).

pet shows—as texts.[29] In doing this they are themselves "reading" them as performances or narratives expressing, among other things, who the actors are and what they are saying about themselves and their worlds, while at the same time producing rendered-down or condensed versions of a larger, more chaotic, richer reality. Ethnographers, let us remember, order the ritual or other behavior as a text, superimposing their own readings over those of the actors themselves; in the process they doubly distill a "text" from the buzz of reality, and then essentialize from it. Cultural historians do the opposite, since typically they seek to resurrect the entire culture from a fragment. The two methods, then—the ethnographer's seeing "culture as text" and the cultural historian's seeing "text as culture"—work in exactly opposite ways, the one through condensation and selection, the other through expansion and rehydration.[30] The problems here for historians in mimicking what ethnographers do consist not only in the pastness of the past, but in the textuality of the text and the narrativity of the narrative.[31] While ethnographers do a writing of their own readings, therefore, historians do a reading of a writing of a reading of a fragmented record or partial experience.

The peculiarly open-ended and arbitrary nature of this procedure, absent the ethnographically present native against whose account the scholar's wilder projective liberties may be checked, is one of the reasons for the apparently flaccid methodology of which avowedly cultural historians, or those working along parallel lines and whose studies claim some cultural component, are sometimes guilty, and which raises eyebrows among nonbelievers and new cul-

29. Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969), and *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1974); and Clifford Geertz, "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight," in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973). For examples of ritual behaviors "read" this way, see Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Basic Books, 1984); and for colonial and modern Mexico, see Beezley, Martin, and French, *Rituals of Rule*.

30. There is a certain parallelism here, it seems to me, with what goes on in dreaming and the recovery and interpretation of dreams, at least according to classical psychoanalytic theory.

31. I have discussed these issues at somewhat greater length in my essay, "Conclusion: The State as Vampire—Hegemonic Projects, Public Ritual, and Popular Culture in Mexico, 1600–1990," in Beezley, Martin, and French, *Rituals of Rule*. For some interesting observations along these same lines, and the multilayered approach the cultural historian might adopt both to construct a coherent narrative and to break open the false coherence of a narrative account, see Paul A. Cohen, *History in Three Keys: The Boxers as Event, Experience, and Myth* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1997).

ture history advocates alike. Among these distortive techniques are overinterpretation, ethnographic upstreaming, and the importation of anachronistic analytical categories or forms of experience from one temporal/cultural setting to another. All of these techniques may slingshot through the primary sources and back out again, injecting in their passage things that are not there. What goes in as "interrogation," in other words, comes out as interpretive conclusion, sometimes without hitting any vital organs or resistant material at all. As an example of overinterpretation, Inga Clendinnen's lyrical and riveting evocation of precolonial Aztec life seems to me to make claims for the existence of a societywide Mexica culture based on exceedingly shaky extrapolations from elite-generated forms of discourse that may or may not have represented the thinking of common people.[32] Nathan Wachtel's classic study of conquest- and early colonial-era Spanish-Andean contact, which at times embraced Mesoamerica as well as the Andean region, prominently employed the technique of ethnographic upstreaming, relying upon descriptions of modern ritual behaviors such as "Danzas de la Conquista" as an interpretive axis along which to understand the cultural content of early European-native interactions.[33] But this method requires so many ceteris paribus assumptions about the relationship of contemporary to centuries-old practices that it immediately becomes highly suspect. How are we to blot out or otherwise factor in, for example, the effects of two or three centuries of evangelization, state- and nation-building, and rural commercialization, or more recently the effects of modern media, civil strife, and global capitalism? Finally, let me offer as an example of the anachronistic importation of conceptual frameworks Doris Ladd's book on eighteenth-century mine laborers in the Pachuca silver mines.[34] In her attempt to find a relatively advanced syndicalist mentality (arguably a "cultural" arti-

32. Inga Clendinnen, *Aztecs: An Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991); the author undertakes an eloquent defense of her interpretive techniques in both her introduction and closing methodological essay, "A Question of Sources." Comments Clendinnen: "It is possible that the carrier squatting back on his heels in the marketplace waiting for hire, and watching the great lord and his entourage stalk by, sustained a very different view of the workings of the world they both inhabited. I do not intend to assume so" (p. 4). By contrast, Clendinnen's earlier *Ambivalent Conquests: Maya and Spaniard in Yucatán, 1517–1570* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987), an avatar of the cultural history of Spanish-indigenous contact and misapprehension, though no less bold conceptually, is much more restrained in its claims and more convincing in its conclusions.

33. Nathan Wachtel, *The Vision of the Vanquished*, trans. Burt and Sian Reynolds (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1977).

34. Doris M. Ladd, *The Making of a Strike: Mexican Silver Workers' Struggles in the Real del Monte, 1766–1775* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1989).

fact) among the workers in the Conde de Regla's silver mines at the famous Real del Monte complex at Pachuca, Ladd continually forces the evidence to her own ends, traducing the very authentic voices of the workers that she seeks to amplify. Her attempt to map onto late colonial Mexican laborers E. P. Thompson's conclusions on burgeoning English working-class mentality ignores the history of capitalism, of colonialism, and of ethnically stratified societies.[35] That she did not find a Mexican Francis Place is little short of miraculous.

Examples of all these questionable techniques can be found in Richard Trexler's recent *Sex and Conquest*.[36] A very widely respected historian of Renaissance Florence, Trexler has in this work of admirably dense scholarship turned to the Europeans' interpretation of the berdache of American indigenous peoples, a permanently transvested (usually young) male who lived as a woman, fulfilling traditionally female domestic and other responsibilities, and taking the passive (i.e., nonpenetrative) role in sexual activities with other males. During and after the conquest of the native American peoples, Trexler argues, the Spanish conquerors, churchmen, and chroniclers turned their ethnographic observation of the berdache to ideological advantage in "feminizing" the conquered by generalizing sodomy and associated vices to the entire subject population, thus laying the basis for violent repression of "unnatural" practices and for the imposition of Christianity and European rule. At first glance this is not an uninteresting argument. But whatever else may be shaping the politics of his interpretation, Trexler has certainly succumbed to the temptation to fill in the gaps in the historical record with untoward speculation, reliance upon apocryphal evidence, tortured readings of his sources, questionable ethnohistory (referring to the Aztecs and Incas, for example, as "tribal" peoples), and a reliance upon "upstreaming" and historically transcendent categories that violates the very spirit of cultural particularism that this

35. E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Pantheon, 1963).

36. Richard C. Trexler, *Sex and Conquest: Gendered Violence, Political Order, and the European Conquest of the Americas* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1995). On the other hand, I have personally found other of Trexler's work, a bit more circumspect and modest in its claims, to be very stimulating; see, for example, "Dressing and Undressing the Saints in the Old World and the New," Bronowski Renaissance Symposium dedicated to the memory of Michel de Certeau, Univ. of California, San Diego, November 1988; and "We Think, They Act: Clerical Readings of Missionary Theatre in Sixteenth-Century New Spain," in *Understanding Popular Culture: Europe from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Stephen L. Kaplan (Berlin: Mouton, 1984).

sort of history is meant to embody. Cultural history like this will do as little to demonstrate the virtues of the approach as Sigmund Freud's and William Bullitt's hatchet job on Woodrow Wilson did for psychohistory.[37]

To return to the text-as-culture paradigm, what most often shows up in the documents, as we all know, are the institutional aspects of colonial life—traces of formal structures such as property systems, judicial and administrative structures, or kinship relations; or if we are lucky, freeze-dried versions of rituals, episodes of collective action, conflict situations, and so forth. In the fluid and inclusive approach to culture that I have found most useful, these social artifacts play a major role, of course. But culture, and therefore the object of the cultural historian, also resides in the way these things, particularly stable institutional complexes—religious thinking and political practice, for example—are connected and the meaning that cultural practitioners impute to them through these connections. It is this "soft tissue" that is the first to go with the passage of time and the hardest to recover for the historian. It is precisely in these connections that meaning, the most important element of culture, resides, since meaning is a relational property, an understanding of one thing in terms of another: it forges the path from one system, institution, practice, or set of ideas to another. Ethnographic fieldwork, as I understand it, and more specifically the dialogic relationship that in the best of circumstances it presumably engenders between the observer (a culturally constituted subject) and the native practitioner (another culturally constituted subject), is in itself no guarantee of transparency in the study of a given culture; the controversy over Margaret Mead's ethnographic work or the perusal of some of Bronislaw Malinowski's field journals and letters attest to this.[38] Nor is the question resolved whether cultural distance from the culture under observation, or cultural proximity to it, provides a better ethnographic vantage point, as the recent heated exchanges between Marshall Sahlins and Gananath Obeyesekere over the former's historical ethnography of the Hawaiian cultures and Captain James Cook's intersection with island history make plain.[39]

37. Sigmund Freud and William C. Bullitt, *Thomas Woodrow Wilson, Twenty-Eighth President of the United States: A Psychological Study* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967).

38. At risk of becoming too confessional, I should say that my own very brief ethnographic fieldwork in Mexico, among Otomi peasants in the Mezquital Valley around 1970, was among the most valuable research experiences I have ever had, since it taught me the myriad sorts of daily cultural events (the "soft tissue" of meaning and practice, I have been calling it) that are missing from documents.

39. Marshall Sahlins, *How "Natives" Think: About Captain Cook, for Example* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1995); and Gananath Obeyesekere, *The Apotheosis of Captain Cook:*

But in fieldwork in the ethnographic present, "native" practitioners of a culture can at least expand on the meanings of ritual behavior or spatial organization, for example, in dialogue with the ethnographer, so that the living context of a behavior or discursive element becomes much clearer (or paradoxically, more overdetermined and ambiguous) than it ever is in a document.

The greater part of what practitioners of the new cultural history are doing, and much of their historiographical success, is based upon the peculiarity that the documentary islands rising from whole continents and subcontinents of past experience are thrust to the surface of the historical record by forms of conflict or deviance that we then take as a starting point to recover "normal" life.[40] Most of this documentation was generated by the crossing of individual biographies with public life, typically by the action of the state—in this case, the colonial state. Indeed, it is not too much to say that had there been no colonial state, there would now be no possibility of doing cultural history of the "newer" sort, at least.[41] Though by no means is what follows an exhaustive catalogue, let me cite the work of a few scholars that I consider innovative and that ultimately depends upon the intersection of private and public life.

The history of madness, for example—whom societies think mad, how those ideas change over time, the symptoms and content of psychopathological formations, and social and medical responses to insanity—continues to be a growth industry in North American and European historiography and a now-classic terrain for cultural historians, since it deals centrally with socially constructed meanings and their distortive mirroring in the minds of the disturbed.[42] María Cristina Sacristán has almost single-handedly opened up the

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European Mythmaking in the Pacific (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1992). One of the main points of debate here is whether Obeyeskere, himself a Sri Lankan, is any closer to the Hawaiians than Sahlins.

40. I leave aside here the issue of what was "normal" in colonial society and what "abnormal"—in terms of criminal behavior, psychopathology, judicial conflict, and so forth.

41. Eloquent on this conjunction of state power and the cultural and political history of popular protest are Allen Wells and Gilbert M. Joseph, *Summer of Discontent, Seasons of Upheaval: Elite Politics and Rural Insurgency in Yucatán, 1876–1915* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1996), especially 1–17; and Gilbert M. Joseph, "On the Trail of Latin American Bandits: A Reexamination of Peasant Resistance," *Latin American Research Review* 25, no. 3 (1990). My own doubts regarding this possibly distorting conjunction are worked through in Van Young, "Cuautla Lazarus."

42. See, for example, Roy Porter, *Mind-Forg'd Manacles: A History of Madness in England from the Restoration to the Regency* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1987); Andrew

field of the history of Mexican psychiatry with a pair of recent books on madness and society, in the more developed and later of which she shows a clear trend toward the secularization of attitudes, both on the part of social arbiters and mad people, in the *siglo de las luces*.[43] Her work is based almost exclusively on Inquisition and criminal records that would never have come to exist had the individuals she studies not fallen into the toils of the state apparatus in some way. In relation to the Church authorities and the documentation left behind by their encounter with the Mexican population, the same is true of Solange Alberro's book on the Mexican Inquisition during an extended seventeenth century; of Sergio Ortega's interesting anthology on marriage and on bigamy, sexual perversity, and other acts of socially deviant sexual behavior; of Richard Boyer's lovely book on bigamy and family life; of Juan Pedro Viqueira's fascinating look at public entertainments in Mexico City during the eighteenth century; and even of William Taylor's monumental study of late colonial parish clergy, much of whose basic data arose out of conflicts between curates and parishioners.[44] Steve Stern's illuminating study of the ideas and practices of gender relations among common people in three regions of New Spain during the late colonial period depends almost exclusively for its central documentation upon criminal records, while other works on gender—one of the new cultural history's success stories—by Patricia Seed, Silvia

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T. Scull, *Social Order/Mental Disorder: Anglo-American Psychiatry in Historical Perspective* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1989); Gerald N. Grob, *The Mad among Us: A History of the Care of America's Mentally Ill* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1994); and Robert Castel, *The Regulation of Madness: The Origins of Incarceration in France*, trans. W. D. Halls (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1988).

43. María Cristina Sacristán, *Locura e Inquisición en Nueva España, 1571–1760* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica; Zamora: El Colegio de Michoacán, 1992), and *Locura y disidencia en el México ilustrado, 1760–1810* (Zamora: El Colegio de Michoacán; Mexico City: Instituto Mora, 1994); and for a later period, Cristina Rivera-Garza, "Morally Insane Women: Negotiating Gender and Class at the General Asylum in Early-Twentieth-Century Mexico" (unpubl. ms., 1997).

44. Solange Alberro, *Inquisition et société au Mexique, 1571–1700* (Mexico City: Centre d'Etudes Mexicaines et Centraméricaines, 1988); Sergio Ortega, ed., *De la santidad a la perversión: o de porqué no se cumplía la ley de Dios en la sociedad novohispana* (Mexico City: Ed. Grijalbo, 1986); Richard Boyer, *Lives of the Bigamists: Marriage, Family, and Community in Colonial Mexico* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1995); Juan Pedro Viqueira Albán, *¿Relajados o reprimidos? Diversiones públicas y vida social en la ciudad de México durante el Siglo de las Luces* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1987), soon to appear in an English translation from Scholarly Resources; and William B. Taylor, *Magistrates of the Sacred: Priests and Parishioners in Eighteenth-Century Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1996).

Arrom, and Asunción Lavrin, among others, also rest upon varieties of documentation generated by "deviance" and contention under the gaze of the state.[45] Garden-variety deviance and crime have been interestingly treated by Carmen Castañeda, Carlos Valdés, and Teresa Lozano on the basis of primarily local or regional criminal archives.[46] Finally, Susan Kellogg's work on Indian litigation, resistance, and acculturation depends almost exclusively upon judicial records, as did Woodrow Borah's pre–new cultural history study of the General Indian Court, and Charles Cutter's book on the judicial culture of the Mexican north in the late colonial period.[47]

Another great success story of the new cultural history of colonial Mexico is the continuing wave of ethnohistorical works treating indigenous groups. The documentation undergirding these studies was for the most part generated by the colonial and successor states in their efforts to control, exploit, acculturate, and punish for their recalcitrance colonized Indian peoples, and must therefore be read with many of the same caveats as texts on other characteristically "cultural" themes. Since ethnohistory is by now a fairly venerable genre of historical writing on colonial Mexico, however, and has always been influenced by our sister discipline of anthropology, it was by no means "invented" or even significantly reshaped by the new cultural history in quite the same ways as studies of "deviance," religious sensibility, or gender, for example. Here the influence of the new cultural history has been more diffuse and incremental, but still powerful in a number of ways. For one thing, old periodizations have been called into question, to be replaced with a *longue durée* sort of approach, presumably due to the fact that cultural change is a much slower process than political change and less subject to the contingen-

45. Stern, *Secret History of Gender*; Patricia Seed, *To Love, Honor, and Obey in Colonial Mexico: Conflicts over Marriage Choice, 1574–1821* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1988); Silvia M. Arrom, *The Women of Mexico City, 1790–1857* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1985); and Asunción Lavrin, ed., *Sexuality and Marriage in Colonial Latin America* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1989).

46. Carmen Castañeda, *Violación, estupro y sexualidad: Nueva Galicia, 1790–1821* (Guadalajara: Ed. Hexágono, 1989); Carlos Manuel Valdés Dávila, *Aux marges de l'empire: société et delinquance a Saltillo à l'epoque coloniale* (Perpignan: Université de Perpignan, 1995); and Teresa Lozano Armendares, *La criminalidad en la ciudad de México, 1800–1821* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1987).

47. Susan Kellogg, *Law and the Transformation of Aztec Culture, 1500–1700* (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1995); Woodrow W. Borah, *Justice by Insurance: The General Indian Court of Colonial Mexico and the Legal Aides of the Half-Real* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1983); and Charles Cutter, *The Legal Culture of Northern New Spain, 1700–1810* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1995).

cies of political epiphenomena that typically drive periodizations.[48] In some cases ethnohistorical studies beginning or anchored in the colonial period edge well into the nineteenth or even the twentieth centuries, as exemplified most recently in the work of David Frye, Cynthia Radding, Pedro Bracamonte, and Antonio Escobar.[49] In addition, under the new dispensation indigenous peoples have shifted from the position of objects—even if empathetically treated ones, as one sees them in Gibson's *Aztecs under Spanish Rule*, for example—to that of subjects, as when Frye and Radding speak of ethnic and localist identities from the actors' points of view. Still, the refiguration by new cultural historians of indigenous actors from objects to fully realized subjects has been, and is likely to remain, a difficult and incomplete one because of the sources available. This is why the occasional biographical study, even though not cut consciously in the new cultural historical mold, and even when focused on members of the indigenous elite rather than subalterns, can be so valuable in illuminating Indian culture, as with Susan Schroeder's study of the Chalco chronicler Chimalpahin.[50]

It is probably fair to say, in fact, that as good and plentiful as ethnohistory has become for colonial Mexico, much of it is strictly speaking parallel to the new cultural history rather than of it. It claims its culturalist credentials more from its somewhat traditional ethnographic tendencies than from any postmodernist or cultural studies genealogy, so that it has to be *read for* the cultural meanings and symbolic exegeses one would suppose typical of the new cultural

48. For recent work on the reperiodization of colonial and early national Mexican and Spanish American history, see Jaime E. Rodríguez O., ed., *Mexico in the Age of Democratic Revolutions, 1750–1850* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1994); Kenneth J. Andrien and Lyman L. Johnson, eds., *The Political Economy of Spanish America in the Age of Revolution, 1750–1850* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1994); and Victor Uribe, ed., *State and Society in Spanish America during the "Age of Revolution": New Research on Historical Continuities and Changes, ca. 1750s–1850s* (forthcoming).

49. David L. Frye, *Indians into Mexicans: History and Identity in a Mexican Town* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1996); Cynthia Radding, *Wandering Peoples: Colonialism, Ethnic Spaces, and Ecological Frontiers in Northwestern Mexico, 1700–1850* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1997); Pedro Bracamonte y Sosa, *La memoria enclaustrada: historia indígena de Yucatán, 1750–1915* (Mexico City: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social; Instituto Nacional Indigenista, 1994); and Antonio Escobar, *De la costa a la sierra: los pueblos indios de las huastecas, 1750–1900* (Mexico City: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social; Instituto Nacional Indigenista, in press).

50. Susan Schroeder, *Chimalpahin and the Kingdoms of Chalco* (Tucson: Univ. of Arizona Press, 1991).

history, rather than supplying them intentionally and overtly. Unexotic as this genre of colonial history is, it can still be of very high quality, indeed. Among the recent monuments to this sort of careful ethnohistorical reconstruction are the volumes of the series *Historia de los pueblos indígenas de México*, edited by Teresa Rojas Rabiela and Mario Humberto Ruz for the Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social and the Instituto Nacional Indigenista, and organized (for the most part) by state within the Mexican union. Although apparently pitched to an educated general audience, most of the volumes in this collection are better than solid and some are outstanding. All bear some of the hallmarks of the new cultural history. Among the volumes are studies of Oaxaca by María de los Angeles Romero Frizzi, Guerrero by Danièle Dehouve, Sonora by Cynthia Radding, Tabasco by Mario Humberto Ruz, the greater northeast by Carlos Manuel Valdés Dávila, the Yaquis by Evelyn Hu-DeHart (one of the few studies in the series that hews to ethnic rather than state lines), and Chiapas by Jan de Vos.[51]

51. María de los Angeles Romero Frizzi, *El sol y la cruz: los pueblos indios de Oaxaca colonial* (Mexico City: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social; Instituto Nacional Indigenista, 1996); Danièle Dehouve, *Entre el caimán y el jaguar: los pueblos indios de Guerrero* (Mexico City: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social; Instituto Nacional Indigenista, 1994); Cynthia Radding, *Entre el desierto y la sierra: las naciones o'odham y tegüima de Sonora, 1530–1840* (Mexico City: Centro de Investigaciónes y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social; Instituto Nacional Indigenista, 1995); Mario Humberto Ruz, *Un rostro encubierto: los indios del Tabasco colonial* (Mexico City: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social; Instituto Nacional Indigenista, 1994); Carlos Manuel Valdés Dávila, *La gente del mezquite: los nómadas del noreste en la colonia* (Mexico City: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social; Instituto Nacional Indigenista, 1995); and Evelyn Hu-DeHart, *Adaptación y resistencia en el Yaquimi: los yaquis durante la colonia* (Mexico City: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social; Instituto Nacional Indigenista, 1995). Other volumes in the series are forthcoming, and still others already published deal with the nineteenth century. A significant number of works on colonial ethnohistory have appeared from various regional research entities, such as the Archivo Municipal de Saltillo, directed by Carlos Valdés; see, for example, David B. Adams, *Las colonias tlaxcaltecas de Coahuila y Nuevo León en la Nueva España* (Saltillo: Archivo Municipal de Saltillo, 1991); Leslie Scott Offutt, *Una sociedad urbana y rural en el norte de México: Saltillo a fines de la época colonial* (Saltillo: Archivo Municipal de Saltillo, 1993); and José Cuello, *El norte, el noreste y Saltillo en la historia colonial de México* (Saltillo: Archivo Municipal de Saltillo, 1990). Still other works of a similar genre, typically focused on more limited geographical venues, are Bernardo García Martínez, *Los pueblos de la sierra: el poder y el espacio entre los indios del norte de Puebla hasta 1700* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1987); Margarita Menegus Bornemann, *Del señorío a la república de indios: el caso de*

A second discernible current within the ample stream of ethnohistory can be identified with James Lockhart's Nahuatl-based scholarship and the work of his students, among them Sarah (Susan) Cline, Susan Schroeder, Robert Haskett, Rebecca Horn, and others.[52] This impressive, dense, and detailed work exalts a principle of reliance upon close readings of indigenous language sources. Admittedly this brings it closer into line with the new cultural history, and its virtual obsession with recovering the subaltern voice, than most exemplars of the more traditional sort of ethnohistory cited above, even if it is the voice of an indigenous elite that speaks loudest because of inevitable documentary biases. Nonetheless, the Lockhartian school generally eschews the new cultural historians' emphasis on "mentalities," the attempt to decode symbolic systems, the tendency to look upon cultural expressions of all kinds as texts, and the linguistic hypertrophy associated with cultural studies. In this scholarship, language is extremely important, it is true, but as Lockhart himself has insisted, the axis is philology rather than power. There is an inclination, in fact, to feel that the work is done when the philology is done. This accords ill with the new cultural history, which often sees language as an artifact of power, not a transparent medium. But as a whole, the work of Lockhart and his students has opened the interior of colonial indigenous society in ways fundamental to any understanding of culture, while it lays reasonable claim to being the most innovative and recognizable "school" of colonial history to yet emerge.

Finally, a third tendency within colonial-era ethnohistory sits squarely within the new cultural history framework; perhaps its best known exemplars are works dealing with "the conquest of the imaginary," as Serge Gruzinski

Toluca, 1500–1600 (Madrid: Ministerio de Agricultura, Pesca y Alimentación, Secretaría General Técnica, 1991); and Rik Hoekstra, *Two Worlds Merging: The Transformation of Society in the Valley of Puebla, 1570–1640* (Amsterdam: Centro de Estudios de Latinoamérica, 1993).

52. James Lockhart, *Nahuas and Spaniards: Postconquest Central Mexican History and Philology* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press; [Los Angeles]: UCLA Latin American Center Publications, 1991), and *The Nahuas after the Conquest: A Social and Cultural History of the Indians of Central Mexico, Sixteenth through Eighteenth Centuries* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1992); S. L. Cline, *Colonial Culhuacán, 1580–1600: A Social History of an Aztec Town* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1986); Schroeder, *Chimalpahin*; Robert Haskett, *Indigenous Rulers: An Ethnohistory of Town Government in Colonial Cuernavaca* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1991); and Rebecca Horn, *Postconquest Coyoacán: Nahua-Spanish Relations in Central Mexico, 1519–1650* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1997).

has put it. Notable here would be studies by Gruzinski, Walter Mignolo, Christian Duverger, Enrique Florescano, Louise Burkhart, Fernando Cervantes, and Jeanette Peterson, among others.[53] Many of these works concentrate primarily, though by no means exclusively, on the early colonial period, in the era of initial cultural contact between Europeans and indigenous peoples, and purport to deal with the colonization of forms of representation—of how people think of and talk to themselves, and to other people about themselves. The representational forms emphasized—written and spoken language, painting and other visual media, historical memory—are seen as venues of domination, resistance, and accommodation. Such studies tend to privilege religious thought and sensibility as the most illuminating site for revealing what colonization meant to both colonizers and colonized; and they are altogether of a more speculative bent than less flashy ethnohistory, which can lead to the overinterpretation I noted in my discussion of Richard Trexler's work. Furthermore, one sometimes loses the distinction in this style of scholarship between the new cultural history and a more traditional sort of intellectual history exemplified with great eloquence and panache by David Brading's recent *The First America*.[54] Fernando Cervantes's fascinating study of diabolism in the sixteenth century, for example, traces one root of Indian attraction to the Christian Devil to his association by the friars with complex Mesoamerican deities utilized as a proxy for the Evil One. This created a sort of theological reflux in which the Devil became validated rather than the indigenous deities invalidated. Still, one finds Cervantes focusing primarily on high theology and its complexities, rather than the *carne y hueso* of popular

53. Serge Gruzinski, *The Conquest of Mexico: The Incorporation of Indian Societies into the Western World, 16th–18th Centuries*, trans. Eileen Corrigan (Cambridge, Eng.: Polity Press, 1993); Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1995); Christian Duverger, *La conversión de los indios de Nueva España: con el texto de los "Coloquios de los doce" de Bernardino de Sahagún (1564)*, trans. María Dolores de la Peña (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1993); Enrique Florescano, *Memory, Myth, and Time in Mexico: From the Aztecs to Independence*, trans. Albert G. Bork, with the assistance of Kathryn R. Bork (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1994); Louise M. Burkhart, *The Slippery Earth: Nahua-Christian Moral Dialogue in Sixteenth-Century Mexico* (Tucson: Univ. of Arizona Press, 1989); Fernando Cervantes, *The Devil in the New World: The Impact of Diabolism in the New World* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1994); and from an art historical point of view, Jeanette Favrot Peterson, *The Paradise Garden Murals of Malinalco: Utopia and Empire in Sixteenth-Century Mexico* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1993).

54. David A. Brading, *The First America: The Spanish Monarchy, Creole Patriots, and the Liberal State, 1492–1867* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991).

indigenous belief systems.[55] This often produces a "top-down" approach to cultural history at odds with the new cultural history agenda, since high theology and other sorts of elite thought are presumed to have occupied a hegemonic status they may not in fact have enjoyed, or that at least remains to be proved.[56]

Diffusion and Colonization

The "culture as text and text as culture" issue—the methodological problem of recovering culture in past time from a flotsam of historical record—overlaps with another problem, the definitional one. Given the anthropological origins of the concept of culture, and even with the recent expansion of its domain and the advent of cultural history, it still retains more than a hint of the exotic, the quaint, the folkloric. Relatedly, we find a widespread tendency in discussions of culture not only to see it instantiated in specific events or behavioral subsets, which is understandable, but also to reify and commodify it, which is understandable but ill advised. We hear about dominant groups—paternalistic employers, for example, or the Church—"using culture" as though it were a

55. I owe this observation in part to O'Hara, "Ascent into Discord," 21–22.

56. In her gloss on Stafford Poole's impressive study of the cult of the Virgin of Guadalupe, *Our Lady of Guadalupe: The Origins and Sources of a Mexican National Symbol, 1531–1797* (Tucson: Univ. of Arizona Press, 1995), Susan Deans-Smith comments that Poole's approach "precludes his asking questions that would require deeper exploration of popular religious devotion"; Deans-Smith, "Culture, Power, and Society," 265 n. 15; the same observation would hold for Jacques Lafaye's *Quetzalcóatl and Guadalupe: The Formation of Mexican National Consciousness, 1531–1813*, trans. Benjamin Keen (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1976). One developing subfield related to ethnohistory to which I have only alluded, but which deserves a separate treatment of its own, is the theme of resistance and rebellion, specifically among colonial indigenous peoples. Depending upon how such studies are approached, they can tell us much about the contested meanings that are central to the experience of colonial domination and negotiation. See, for example, Felipe Castro, *La rebelión de los indios y la paz de los españoles* (Mexico City: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social; Instituto Nacional Indigenista, 1996); Alicia M. Barabas, *Utopías indias: movimientos sociorreligiosos en México* (Mexico City: Ed. Grijalbo, 1989); Antonio García de León, *Resistencia y utopía: memorial de agravios y crónica de revueltas y profecías acaecidas en la provincia de Chiapas durante los últimos quinientos años de su historia*, 2 vols. (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1985), esp. vol. 1; Grant D. Jones, *Maya Resistance to Spanish Rule: Time and History on a Colonial Frontier* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1989); and Kevin Gosner, *Soldiers of the Virgin: The Moral Economy of a Colonial Maya Rebellion* (Tucson: Univ. of Arizona Press, 1992).

discrete substance, separable, and residual.[57] This tendency to the reification and commodification of culture has multiple origins. One of these is that scholars need to study *something*, not *everything*; that is, there is an analytic imperative. In the process of yielding to this imperative we tend to cut cultural practices or complexes out of their contexts, making them into somewhat static objects—"things" or "commodities"—rather than processes woven into larger webs of meaning. Another is that the development of a specialization responds to an ecological imperative in our profession, that each of us dominate some sort of "studies": "representation studies," "Indian studies," "Mexican Revolution studies," and so forth. And a third arises from the application of Gramscian hegemony to the understanding of cultural formations, by which we understand that cultural artifacts, or clusters of ideas or practices, flow in a stream from the top of society downward.

Despite my falling in with this scheme in presenting above a catalogish discussion of some of the new cultural history's characteristic themes, I believe that cultural history should not be sited in a particular venue or specific set of phenomena to be examined exclusively and in isolation, but should rather be seen as an *approach*, as a way of looking at things, the most important of which is socially constituted meaning, always a relational property. A parade, a mass, or even a major rebellion is after all only a "window" onto a society (to employ a trope that has gained perhaps too much currency); it is not the entire house. Such an event or institutionalized expression cannot be made to stand in for an entire culture; it is not a proxy for it.[58] We ghettoize culture in this fashion only at the risk of misapprehending or overlooking the most important part of what we study. In glossing the ideas of François Furet and Robert Darnton, Lynn Hunt observes in this connection that they

> strongly warn us against developing a cultural history defined only in terms of topics of inquiry. Just as social history sometimes moved from one group to another (workers, women, children, ethnic groups, the old,

57. This seems to me implicit, for example, in Linda Curcio-Nagy's thoughtful introductory essay, "Introduction: Spectacle in Colonial Mexico," to *The Americas* 52 (1996), a special number dedicated to colonial cultural history. In her discussion of the "grand fete" (viceregal entries and other public celebrations), Curcio-Nagy writes in a distinctly instrumentalist vein of the "functions" of large-scale spectacle. This viewpoint also seems implicit in a number of the essays in Beezley, Martin, and French, *Rituals of Rule*, but is clearly not limited to colonialists.

58. I have discussed this issue of "encapsulation" at some length in Van Young, "Conclusion: The State as Vampire."

the young) without developing much sense of cohesion or interaction between topics, so too a cultural history defined topically could degenerate into an endless search for new cultural practices to describe, whether carnivals, cat massacres, or impotence trials.[59]

If people really live suspended in webs of significance they themselves construct, as Geertz has written, then culture must be in many places where we cannot see it, or where it does not occur to us to look, or where it might appear as background to the central social action.[60] It is finally more useful to take culture and cultural practice this way, as a medium that pervades social orders and part social orders, rather than as exotic lumps for decoding. This promiscuity, as I have called it—the idea that culture is to be found everywhere, and that the new cultural history is an approach rather than a specific set of topics—has several interesting implications. Let me explore three of these in my closing pages.

The first is that we might take another look at economic history as cultural history, and at economic relations as the sites of generation of cultural meanings, which is not the prevailing approach. As a practical matter, the cultural history of colonial Mexico is most readily recoverable at those points where private lives crossed the public record, as I have suggested. Along with political rebellion, crime, and other sorts of "deviance," including religious heterodoxy, economic life has long been acknowledged as such a privileged site because the interests of even a relatively weak colonial state demanded that forms of property be recorded, regulated, and taxed. There are other reasons why the colonization of economic life by cultural history is likely to be fruitful. For one thing, the relatively underdeveloped state of civil society and the episodic reach of a Western lettered tradition in Mexico even in the late colonial period meant that documents that might have been generated by civil corporations, citizens groups, newspapers, memoirists, letter-writers, and so on, are relatively rare, and therefore sources of an overtly "cultural" nature concomitantly scarce. For another thing, the low degree of differentiation between residence and workplace in the colonial era, among rural and urban people alike, meant that the boundary between work life and private life—between "economy" and "culture," to put it more crudely—was porous or nonexistent.[61]

59. Hunt, "Introduction: History, Culture, and Text," 9.

60. Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 5.

61. This would be most obvious for peasants, whose working and living patterns were completely miscible, but I am also thinking of patterns of protoindustrialization and early

But there are also theoretical reasons for the colonization of economic history by cultural historians. Space limitations preclude my entering at length here into the complex but oft-rehearsed debate between materialist and culturalist points of view, but I shall allude to it at least briefly. In commenting on the reorientation of "fourth-generation" *Annales* school historians toward language and the autonomous, nonreflexive nature of culture, Lynn Hunt writes:

> As Chartier claimed, "the relationship thus established is not one of dependence of the mental structures on their material determinations. The representations of the social world themselves are the constituents of social reality." Economic and social relations are not prior to or determining of cultural ones; they are themselves fields of cultural practice and cultural production—which cannot be explained deductively by reference to an extracultural dimension of experience.[62]

The colonization of economic activity by the new cultural history rests on assumptions quite different, therefore, from the economistic ones that often prevail in studies of collective behavior and expression. These latter assumptions support the reverse colonization movement—that of culture by economy—reducing discourse, ideology, and meaning to reflexive products of economic forces. The way in which this semiotic or hermeneutic approach constitutes a counterpoise to the essentially economistic position that one still sees even in the new cultural history has been expressed eloquently by Marshall Sahlins in the opening pages of his *Culture and Practical Reason*, worth quoting at length:

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industrial establishments, in which the distinction between workplace and homeplace was not clear. On extensive "homework" in the late colonial Mexico City tobacco manufactory see, for example, Susan Deans-Smith, *Bureaucrats, Planters, and Workers: The Making of the Tobacco Monopoly in Bourbon Mexico* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1992); and on protoindustrialization in the textile industry, Manuel Miño Grijalva, *Obrajes y tejedores de Nueva España, 1700–1810* (Madrid: Instituto de Cooperación Iberoamericana; Quinto Centenario; Instituto de Estudios Fiscales, Ministerio de Economía y Hacienda, 1990), and *La protoindustria colonial hispanoamericana* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1993); and Arij Ouweneel, *Shadows over Anáhuac: An Ecological Interpretation of Crisis and Development in Central Mexico, 1730–1800* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1996).

62. Hunt, "Introduction: History, Culture, and Text," 7; she is quoting Roger Chartier, "Intellectual History or Sociocultural History? The French Trajectories," in *Modern European Intellectual History: Reappraisals and New Perspectives*, eds. Dominick LaCapra and Steven L. Kaplan (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1982), 30.

> For some, however, it is clear that culture is precipitated from the rational activity of individuals pursuing their own best interests. This is "utilitarianism" proper; its logic is the maximization of means-ends relations. The objective utility theories are naturalistic or ecological; for them, the determinant material wisdom substantialized in cultural form is the survival of the human population or the given social order. The precise logic is adaptive advantage, or maintenance of the system within natural limits of viability. As opposed to all these genera and species of practical reason, [I propose] a reason of another kind, the symbolic or meaningful. It takes as the distinctive quality of man not that he must live in a material world, circumstance [sic] he shares with all organisms, but that he does so according to a meaningful scheme of his own devising, in which capacity mankind is unique. It therefore takes as the decisive quality of culture—as giving each mode of life the properties that characterize it—not that this culture must conform to material constraints but that it does so according to a definite symbolic scheme which is never the only one possible. Hence it is culture which constitutes utility.[63]

To put it somewhat crudely, while in the economistic formulation (in Sahlins's terminology sometimes "utilitarian," sometimes "materialistic") "interest" would be antecedent to "cultural expression," in the semiotic/hermeneutic formulation the reverse is the case—cultural ideas would be antecedent to interest, interpretation to social object.[64] This radically idealist position is so far uncom-

63. Marshall Sahlins, *Culture and Practical Reason* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1976), vii–viii.

64. See, for example, the remarks of Gareth Stedman Jones on the relationship of ideas and discourse to material interest: "We cannot therefore decode political language to reach a primal and material expression of interest since it is the discursive structure of political language which conceives and defines interest in the first place"; Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History, 1832–1982* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1983), 22. Even more to the point is Marshall Sahlins's gloss on the anthropologist Meyer Fortes's treatment of Tallensi kinship: "Fortes does not deny the ecological constraint or the economic interests; he points them out. But he does insist that *the social effects of practical interest—not to mention the nature of that interest—depend on the structure in place*. Again the economic logic is socially constituted"; Sahlins, *Culture and Practical Reason*, 12 (emphasis in original). On the other hand, anthropologist William Roseberry frames a powerful critique of Geertz and Sahlins from an historical materialist perspective, but in my view his claim that a historical political economy, after the manner of Eric R. Wolf's *Europe and the People Without History* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1982), ultimately provides a better explanation of the links among economic structures,

mon in the new cultural history of colonial Mexico (except possibly for the above-cited work of Gruzinski and Mignolo), and may well remain so. But even if cultural historians were to shift somewhat in this direction, while avoiding going overboard into the particularistic hermeneutic relativism against which the anthropologist Melford Spiro warns, it might produce interesting results.[65]

I have experimented with this sort of project myself in revisiting in cultural terms some earlier work of my own on colonial land conflicts in the Guadalajara region in the late colonial period, which primarily pitted indigenous communities against nonindigenous landowners.[66] That is, I stood my earlier analysis on its head and looked at these detailed legal records not primarily for data on economic relationships that generated social conflict, but as expressions of cultural ideas among indigenous villagers, mainly having to do with the community as a primordial locus of identity and loyalty. This does not mean that economic struggles did not have real-world causes or implications —for access to resources, livelihoods, market position, and so forth. But it does suggest that social conflict that at first appeared exclusively or primarily economic in origin might well have had deeper roots of a symbolic and ideational nature. In other words, people were not just (or primarily) arguing over calories, or over control of other people's calories, but also over meanings; and moreover, that ways of getting calories themselves generated meanings.

Recently I encountered an impressive exemplar of this sort of approach not for colonial Mexico, but for eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe,

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meaning, and human action is not completely convincing; William Roseberry, *Anthropologies and Histories: Essays in Culture, History, and Political Economy* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1989), esp. 1–29.

65. Spiro, "Cultural Relativism and the Future of Anthropology," *Cultural Anthropology* 1 (1986). I thank Andrew Fisher for bringing this article to my attention and for a discussion of its significance.

66. The original work appeared in Van Young, *Hacienda and Market in Eighteenth-Century Mexico: The Rural Economy of the Guadalajara Region, 1675–1820* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1981); the revision is Van Young, "Dreamscape with Figures and Fences: Cultural Contention and Discourse in the Late Colonial Mexican Countryside," in *Le Nouveau Monde—mondes nouveaux: l'expérience Américaine*, eds. Serge Gruzinski and Nathan Wachtel (Paris: Editions de l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 1996), which appeared in Spanish as "Paisaje de ensueños con figuras y vallados: disputa y discurso cultural en el campo mexicano de fines de la colonia," in *Paisajes rebeldes: una larga noche de rebelión indígena*, eds. Jane-Dale Lloyd and Laura Pérez Rosales (Mexico City: Universidad Iberoamericana, 1995).

in David Sabean's book on rural Germany; the European historiography is replete with such works.[67] Sabean argues generally that property and the mode of its production mediated, but did not solely determine, human relationships, and that the putative contrast between a "traditional" social order based upon kinship and face-to-face contact, and a "modern" one based upon contractual relationships is considerably overdrawn. In looking at Sabean's dense sources and data, by the way, I realized that the invidious comparison I drew some years ago between the Latin American and European historiography of the early modern period was in part misguided because we may never discover the sort of documentation produced by the burgeoning German, French, or English states.[68] There are a number of possible reasons for this, including the relative weakness of the Spanish state generally, the nature of the colonial situation in particular, and the long-enduring ethnic divisions in New Spain itself.

For the history of colonial Mexico, one finds some precedent for this cultural colonization of economic life in the history of traditional elite groups elaborated in the prosopographical or biographical style, even though they have not been written explicitly in the new cultural history mode, as well as in the beginnings of environmental history. In addition to the books I have already mentioned by Schwaller, Ladd, Kicza, and Hoberman, I would point to work by Charles H. Harris III on the Sánchez Navarro family, Richard Lindley on the merchant-landowner elite of late colonial Guadalajara, John Tutino on Valley of Mexico landowners, and David Brading on silver mining and landowning families, to mention just a few of the studies in this genre.[69] Arij Ouweneel's recent book on the ecological and economic history of central

67. David Warren Sabean, *Property, Production, and Family in Neckerhausen, 1700–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990). See also, for example, by Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, not only his *Montaillou: The Promised Land of Error*, trans. Barbara Bray (New York: G. Braziller, 1978), but also his earlier *Les paysans de Languedoc*, 2 vols. (Paris, S.E.V.P.E.N., 1966).

68. Van Young, "Recent Anglophone Scholarship."

69. Charles H. Harris III, *A Mexican Family Empire: The Latifundio of the Sánchez Navarros, 1765–1867* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1975); Richard B. Lindley, *Haciendas and Economic Development: Guadalajara, Mexico, at Independence* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1983); John M. Tutino, "Creole Mexico: Spanish Elites, Haciendas, and Indian Towns, 1750–1810" (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Texas, Austin, 1976); and D. A. Brading, *Miners and Merchants in Bourbon Mexico, 1763–1810* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1971), and *Haciendas and Ranchos in the Mexican Bajío: León, 1700–1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1978). For a later period, see Larissa Adler Lomnitz and Marisol Pérez-Lizaur, *A Mexican Elite Family, 1820–1980: Kinship, Class, and Culture*, trans. Cinna Lomnitz (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1987).

Mexico in the eighteenth century is definitely attuned to cultural issues in terms of his treatment of economic paths pursued by indigenous communities, but for him cultural factors play the role more of constraints or idealized models for action than sites of meaning generation and worldview.[70] More obviously in the new cultural history camp at the moment, interestingly enough, are works that assume an avowedly ecological perspective on regional history and ethnohistory and in which, moreover, environments are socially constructed not only by economic action, but by human perception. Although these studies are not plentiful as yet, one expects to see more of them in future. An outstanding example of this mode of inquiry is Elinor Melville's account of environmental degradation in the Mezquital Valley under the impact of overgrazing by sheep in the early colonial period.[71] Although her emphasis is clearly on changes in the environment—in its economic carrying capacity, in the last analysis—she shows the influence of habitual modes of environmental exploitation that were culturally determined. Even more in the cultural history style is Cynthia Radding's *Wandering Peoples* (already mentioned above), in which the author weaves together the logics of Spanish colonial penetration, indigenous resistance, and an unforgiving environment in a tapestry of encounters over time in which economic formations are clearly shown to be effects of cultural "choices," as much or more than their causes. Danièle Dehouve's study of indigenous groups in colonial Guerrero does much the same thing for a somewhat smaller venue.[72]

The second implication for cultural history of utilizing a more inclusive concept of culture has to do with the notion of agency, in turn a central issue in discussions of resistance and the study of subaltern groups. We would probably all agree that a good dollop of agency was a salutary ingredient in taming the juggernaut of structuralism and in putting common people, especially, back into history by making actors of them. However, when we ghettoize or exoticize culture in the way that I have suggested is common, seeing it as limited to discrete social sites or events only, we in fact facilitate what might be called the "apotheosis of agency" by adding too many degrees of freedom to individual

70. Ouweneel, *Shadows over Anáhuac.*

71. Elinor G. K. Melville, *A Plague of Sheep: Environmental Consequences of the Conquest of Mexico* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1994).

72. See the remarks on Dehouve's work in Radding, "Cultural Dialogues," 204; and for an earlier, cautiously "culturalist" reading of greater Southwestern history in terms of environmental factors, see Michael C. Meyer, *Water in the Hispanic Southwest: A Social and Legal History, 1550–1850* (Tucson: Univ. of Arizona Press, 1984).

thinking and action. That is, if the cultural matrix within which dominant and subordinate groups are embedded is only a hegemonic relationship; and if the locus of hegemony is seen to be limited to multiple but discrete sites only (say, protonationalist mythification or religious thought); and, furthermore, if subaltern agency manifests itself in consciously denying, appropriating, inverting, subverting, or otherwise rearranging the flow of readily identifiable hegemonic "quanta"; then all subalterns (as also every member of a dominant elite) are pretty much free to do what they like. Cultural "targets" are always ready at hand, standing out unambiguously on the ideational landscape and largely unsupported by other "targets" or more generalized attitudes. This conception of thinking and behavior clearly derives from rational actor theories and the microeconomic modeling from which they arose, rather ironic in view of the way the literature on rational actors and moral economists has developed.[73] It is thus difficult to square the apotheosis of agency, in some ways an *a*culturalist or *anti*culturalist position, with a denser, more inclusive notion of culture, so that culture is not just a sort of hobby in which historical actors engage when they are not off negotiating or resistently adapting or expanding their spaces.[74] The constraints represented (often unconsciously) by culture, therefore, are just as important as the degrees of freedom vouchsafed by a theory of historical agency. To take but one example, Steve Stern's portrayal of the constraints imposed upon colonial women's freedom by the prevailing patriarchalist ideology has the balance just about right. Just as history is said to be nature's way of making sure that everything does not happen all at once, culture is nature's way of making sure that all meanings are not possible simultaneously.

In exoticizing or ghettoizing culture in the way we habitually seem to do, and superimposing upon it romanticized notions of agency, we deny the sheer weight of culture in mapping the world for human beings. This comports very well with rational actor models, as I have suggested, but very ill with anything most of us see about the way people really behave. To take but one example, Cheryl Martin's recent study of eighteenth-century Chihuahua is a

73. For a recent sharp critique of rational choice theory, see Donald P. Green and Ian Shapiro, *Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory: A Critique of Applications in Political Science* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1994).

74. This more inclusive notion of culture, by the way, takes cultural history even further away from Steve Haber's social science specification model, since it makes of culture even *more* a sort of blanket covering everything with signs, less susceptible of the sort of interested rationality, and concomitantly countable behaviors, posited as the basis for provable hypotheses, replicable methods, and causal statements; Haber, "Worst of Both Worlds."

very thoughtful, clearly written, and deeply researched work coming about as close as anything on the historiographical horizon to a community study in the new cultural history mode.[75] But it does share the tendency of much recent work in social and cultural history to apotheosize historical agency and discount culture, so that in essence all the subalterns become rational actors. In my view this finally produces an altogether overly romanticized view of evolving society on New Spain's northern frontier, and may unjustifiably minimize some of its resemblances to central Mexico. And why agency should generally be called into play, by the way, only in explaining subaltern resistance, or sly forms of adaptation, rather than in explaining why people allow themselves to be co-opted into a given social configuration or become active practitioners of prevailing cultural usages, is not clear to me. One compelling reason may be that it is forms of resistance rather than cooperation that often show up in the documentation, for reasons suggested above.

The last implication of pursuing an expansionist strategy in cultural history can be discussed very briefly; it is raised by the fine essays in this issue of the *HAHR* by Mary Kay Vaughan and William French. I suggested at the start of this essay that politics had been colonized by the new cultural history, but in large measure it has been the other way around: the history of politics (in the more restricted sense) and of the state have captured culture. Admittedly this "statolatry," as Alan Knight has dubbed it, shows up more obviously in the historiography of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries than in that of the colonial period.[76] In Vaughan's and French's hands, in fact, the new cultural history appears little more than a refiguration of political history. Partly this emphasis on the Mexican state and its doings is an effect of the peculiarities of Mexican history itself; partly it is the result of the deformation introduced into both political and cultural history by Gramscian hegemony as a widely employed theoretical framework; and partly it is the consequence of the sources available to historians—the detritus of private lives and civil society bumping up against the state.[77] This is true in large measure, although less markedly so, for colo-

75. Cheryl English Martin, *Governance and Society in Colonial Mexico: Chihuahua in the Eighteenth Century* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1996).

76. Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1986), 1:315, 559 n. 386.

77. Deans-Smith alludes to the colonial state's sneaking in through the back door of cultural history via a shift from culture and the politics of resistance to culture and the politics of hegemony, and suggests that the state-society relationship is one of three growth areas in the colonial historiography of the last decade; Deans-Smith, "Culture, Power, and Society," 257–58, 260.

nial history, even leaving behind the enormous number of traditional studies describing the colonial regime and its workings, some of which can actually lend themselves to approaches to cultural history.[78] Even where the colonial state is not the central object of the account, there is some tendency to project cultural phenomena or ideologies into the political realm in order to validate the enterprise of cultural history, as in Steve Stern's epilogic discussion of gender and politics, Patricia Seed's treatment of the Bourbon state, and Susan Deans-Smith's considerable attention to the colonial regime in what is more profitably seen as a study in the history of petty commodity production, gender, and the culture of labor. Thus cultural history becomes a biography of the state by other means, centrally concerned with a metanarrative of power, as opposed to questions of how people lived their lives on a daily basis, or what they believed about the world around them or about the next world, for that matter. But are political questions the only interesting ones to be asked, or political answers the only interesting resolutions? Why not elbow aside these teleologies for a more diffuse cultural history of "being Mexican"?

I close these observations with a return to the dilemma posed by the two epigraphs with which I opened, one transposed to cultural history from fiction, the other from anthropology. They are the eloquent views, respectively, of the novelist Henry James glorifying particularity, the "social mystery, the lurking human secret," and by implication the insight, empathy, and imagination required to penetrate them; and of the anthropologist Melford Spiro, a Cassandra warning against a research strategy of excessive granularity, and decrying the mutation of anthropology from a scientific into a hermeneutic discipline. I have no solution to offer to this dilemma. It does seem to be true that in Mexican cultural history we are well into a pendulum swing away from the confident generalizing of structuralist explanations, and toward the hermeneutic systems of symbols and meanings. This should not be an exclusive stance, however, since the usefulness of the approach depends upon what sources one has at hand, what question one is asking, and in what realm of experience one is likely to find the answer. The test of the explicatory power of an interpretation is still likely to be parsimony, replicability, and breadth, however. A Polonian moderation (some would call it fence-sitting) and reasonableness are easy to recommend, harder to achieve. Furthermore, although I have

78. For example, D. S. Chandler, *Social Assistance and Bureaucratic Politics: The Montepíos of Colonial Mexico, 1767–1821* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1991); and Linda Arnold, *Bureaucracy and Bureaucrats in Mexico City, 1742–1835* (Tucson: Univ. of Arizona Press, 1988).

been in my remarks mainly critical of work in the field, and may have offered a somewhat more reserved than unalloyedly positive view of the possibilities for working on the cultural history of colonial Mexico, in the final analysis these are caveats, not objections. The cultural approach is rich in potential and accomplishment to date, and promises more in the future. In the end I think its strategy should be to subsume rather than supplant other traditional genres of historical inquiry on the imperialist assumption that all history is cultural history.