

# Introduction: History, Culture, and Text

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In 1961, E. H. Carr announced that “the more sociological history becomes, and the more historical sociology becomes, the better for both.”<sup>1</sup> At the time, the pronouncement was a battle cry directed primarily at Carr’s fellow historians—especially those of the English variety—whom Carr hoped to drag along, however unwillingly, into the new age of a socially oriented history. In retrospect, it seems that Carr was quite right: the cutting edge for both fields was the social-historical. Historical sociology has become one of the most important subfields of sociology, and perhaps the fastest growing; meanwhile, social history has overtaken political history as the most important area of research in history (as evidenced by the quadrupling of American doctoral dissertations in social history between 1958 and 1978, surpassing those in political history).<sup>2</sup>

In history, the move toward the social was fostered by the influence of two dominant paradigms of explanation: Marxism on the one hand and the “Annales” school on the other. Although Marxism was hardly new in the 1950s and 1960s, new

1. Edward Hallett Carr, *What Is History?* (New York, 1965; first published 1961), p. 84.

2. Robert Darnton, “Intellectual and Cultural History,” in *The Past Before Us: Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States*, ed. Michael Kammen (Ithaca, N.Y., 1980), p. 334.

currents were coming to the fore within that explanatory mode that promoted historians' interest in social history. At the end of the 1950s and early in the 1960s, a group of younger Marxist historians began publishing books and articles on "history from below," including the by now canonical studies of George Rudé on the Parisian crowd, Albert Soboul on the Parisian sansculottes, and E. P. Thompson on the English working class.<sup>3</sup> With this inspiration, historians in the 1960s and 1970s turned from more traditional histories of political leaders and political institutions toward investigations of the social composition and daily life of workers, servants, women, ethnic groups, and the like.

The Annales school, though a more recent influence, came to prominence at the same time. The original journal, *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale*, was founded in 1929 by Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre. It moved to Paris from Strasbourg in the 1930s, and took its current name, *Annales: Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, in 1946. The *Annales* became a school—or at least began to be so called—when it was institutionally affiliated with the Sixth Section of the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes after World War II. Fernand Braudel provided a sense of unity and continuity by both presiding over the Sixth Section and directing the *Annales* in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>4</sup> By the 1970s, the prestige of the school was international; the 1979 *International Handbook of Historical Studies* contained more index entries for the Annales school than for any other subject except Marx and Marxism.<sup>5</sup>

But was there really an Annales "paradigm," as Traian Stoianovich insisted in his book by that name? He claimed that the Annales school emphasized serial, functional, and structural approaches to understanding society as a total, integrated organism. "The *Annales* paradigm constitutes an inquiry into

3. George Rudé, *The Crowd in the French Revolution* (Oxford, 1959); Albert Soboul, *Les Sans-culottes parisiens en l'an II*, 2d ed. (Paris, 1962); E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1963).

4. For the history of the Annales school, see Traian Stoianovich, *French Historical Method: The Annales Paradigm* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1976); and Guy Bourdieu and Hervé Martin, *Les Ecoles historiques* (Paris, 1983).

5. Georg G. Iggefs and Harold T. Parker, eds., *International Handbook of Historical Studies* (Westport, Conn., 1979).

how one of the systems of a society functions or how a whole collectivity functions in terms of its multiple temporal, spatial, human, social, economic, cultural, and eventmental dimensions.”<sup>6</sup> Little is left out of this definition; consequently, in its presumed drive toward “total history” it loses all specificity.

Fernand Braudel, the central figure of the *Annales* school in the decades after World War II, laid out an apparently more precise model in his work on the Mediterranean world. He posited three levels of analysis that corresponded to three different units of time: the *structure* or *longue durée*, dominated by the geographical milieu; the *conjoncture* or medium term, oriented toward social life; and the fleeting “event,” which included politics and all that concerned the individual. The structure or long term had priority, whereas events were likened to dust or foam on the sea.<sup>7</sup>

Although Braudel himself was enormously influential (thanks at least in part to his consolidation of important academic positions), his example did not inspire much specifically comparable work. Rather, French historians of the third *Annales* generation—men such as Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie and Pierre Goubert—established an alternative model of total regional history, focusing not on world economic regions but on regions within France. In their work, economic and social history dominated; the *longue durée* certainly got its due, but the geographical dimension, though present, appeared only as a kind of formula at the beginning of each study, not as a guiding spirit. Still, this model of historical explanation was basically similar to Braudel’s: climate, biology, and demography ruled over the long term along with economic trends; social relationships, which were more clearly subject to the fluctuations of the *conjoncture* (defined usually in units of ten, twenty, or even fifty years), constituted a second order of historical reality; and political, cultural, and intellectual life made up a third, largely dependent level of historical experience. The interaction between the first and second levels assumed primacy.

The *Annales* emphasis on economic and social history soon

6. Stoianovich, *French Historical Method*, p. 236.

7. Fernand Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l’époque de Philippe II* (Paris, 1949); English translation London, 1972–73.

spread even to the more traditional historical journals. By 1972, economic and social history had replaced biography and religious history as the largest categories after political history in the very conventional *Revue historique*.<sup>8</sup> The number of economic and social history articles in the U.S. journal *French Historical Studies* nearly doubled (from 24 to 46 percent) between 1965 and 1984.<sup>9</sup> Although I have looked carefully only at journals of French history, I suspect that the same trend can be detected in most fields. E. H. Carr was not an *Annales* historian, but his words express the *Annales* position well: "Since the preoccupation with economic and social ends represents a broader and more advanced stage in human development than the preoccupation with political and constitutional ends, so the economic and social interpretation of history may be said to represent a more advanced stage in history than the exclusively political interpretation."<sup>10</sup>

In recent years, however, the very models of explanation that contributed most significantly to the rise of social history have been undergoing a major shift in emphasis as Marxists and *Annales* alike have become increasingly interested in the history of culture. The turn toward culture in Marxist-inspired history was already present in Thompson's work on the English working class. Thompson explicitly rejected the metaphor of base/superstructure and devoted himself to the study of what he called "cultural and moral mediations"—"the way these material experiences are handled . . . in cultural ways."<sup>11</sup> In *The Making of the English Working Class* (p. 10), he described class consciousness as "the way in which these experiences [of productive relations] are handled in cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value-systems, ideas, and institutional forms." Al-

8. Alain Corbin, "La *Revue historique*: Analyse du contenu d'une publication rivale des *Annales*," in *Au Berceau des Annales: Le Milieu strasbourgeois, l'histoire en France au début du XXe siècle*, ed. Charles-Olivier Carbonell and Georges Livet (Toulouse, 1979), p. 136.

9. My figures are drawn from Lynn Hunt, "French History in the Last Twenty Years: The Rise and Fall of the *Annales* Paradigm," *Journal of Contemporary History* 21 (1986): 209–24.

10. Carr, *What is History?* pp. 164–65.

11. Quoted in Ellen Kay Trimberger, "E. P. Thompson: Understanding the Process of History," in *Vision and Method in Historical Sociology*, ed. Theda Skocpol (Cambridge, 1984), p. 219.

though the book provoked great controversy among Marxists, many of whom accused Thompson of a bias toward voluntarism and idealism, it nevertheless had great authority among younger historians.<sup>12</sup>

The most striking instance of Marxist historians' turn toward culture is their growing interest in language. In 1980, the editors of *History Workshop*, in an editorial entitled "Language and History," recognized the growing influence of what they called "structural linguistics" (a misuse of the term, but showing the influence of the interest in language). They argued that attention to language could challenge "reflective theories of knowledge" and affect the practice of "socialist historians" by focusing on the "'semiotic' functions of language."<sup>13</sup> William Sewell's book on the language of labor in the French working class is the best-known product of this interest within French history.<sup>14</sup>

Yet for all their attention to the workings of the "superstructure," most Marxist historians have done little more than fine-tune the fundamental Marxist model of historical explanation. As Thompson put it, "class experience is largely determined by the productive relations into which men are born—or enter involuntarily."<sup>15</sup> In a self-consciously Marxist book on history and linguistics, Régine Robin claimed that sense can be made of political discourse only with reference to an "extralinguistic" level of experience, namely the experience of the social relations of production.<sup>16</sup> In Marxist models, then, the social experience is, by definition, always primary.

The most noteworthy exception to this characterization of

12. Trimberger reviews many of the criticisms of Thompson in *ibid.*

13. *History Workshop* 10 (1980): 1–5; quotes p. 1.

14. William H. Sewell, Jr., *Work and Revolution in France: The Language of Labor from the Old Regime to 1848* (Cambridge, 1980).

15. Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, p. 10. Even Sewell's "dialectic of revolution," despite its emphasis on the role played by contradictions in Enlightenment thought, retains a fundamentally Marxist schema. Workers' consciousness moved forward under the impact of changes in labor organization and the political struggles of the various French revolutionary eras. For a critique of Sewell's position, see Lynn Hunt and George Sheridan, "Corporatism, Association, and the Language of Labor in France, 1750–1850," *Journal of Modern History* 58 (1986): 813–44.

16. For a discussion of Robin's position and those of other Marxist historians of French revolutionary language, see Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1984), p. 22.

Marxist interest in culture may prove the rule. In his path-breaking collection of essays *Languages of Class*, Gareth Stedman Jones tried to grapple with the inadequacies of the Marxist approach. In discussing the Chartist language of class, he observes: "What has not been sufficiently questioned is whether this language can simply be analysed in terms of its expression of, or correspondence to, the putative consciousness of a particular class or social or occupational group." Likewise, he criticizes Thompson for assuming "a relatively direct relationship between 'social being' and 'social consciousness' which leaves little independent space to the ideological context within which the coherence of a particular language of class can be reconstituted." Yet by showing the importance of the ideological tradition of radicalism and of the changing character and policies of the state, Stedman Jones is in effect moving away from a Marxist analysis. As he himself maintains in his introduction, "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."<sup>17</sup> Can such a radical displacement of the Marxist agenda still be considered Marxist?

The challenge to old models has been especially dramatic within the *Annales* school. Although economic, social, and demographic history have remained dominant in the *Annales* itself (accounting for more than half the articles from 1965 to 1984), intellectual and cultural history have taken a strong second place (claiming some 35 percent of the articles, as opposed to 11–14 percent on political history).<sup>18</sup> As the fourth generation of *Annales* historians have become increasingly preoccupied with what the French rather enigmatically term *mentalités*, economic and social history have receded in importance.<sup>19</sup> This deepening interest in *mentalités* (even among the older generation of *Annales* historians) has likewise led to new challenges to the *Annales* paradigm.

17. Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History, 1832–1982* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 94, 101, and 22.

18. Hunt, "The Last Twenty Years," table 1.

19. Volker Sellin traces the history of the word and of the concept in "Mentalität und Mentalitätsgeschichte," *Historische Zeitschrift* 241 (1985): 555–98.

Fourth-generation *Annales* historians such as Roger Chartier and Jacques Revel reject the characterization of *mentalités* as being part of the so-called third level of historical experience. For them, the third level is not a level at all but a primary determinant of historical reality. 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."<sup>20</sup> 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.<sup>21</sup>

In turning to the investigation of cultural practices, *Annales* historians such as Chartier and Revel have been influenced by Foucault's criticism of the fundamental assumptions of social history. Foucault demonstrated that there are no "natural" intellectual objects. As Chartier explained, "Madness, medicine, and the state are not categories that can be conceptualized in terms of universals whose contents each epoch particularizes";<sup>22</sup> they are historically given as "discursive objects," and since they are historically grounded and by implication always changing, they cannot provide a transcendent or universal foundation for historical method.

Certain similarities exist between Foucault and even the first- and second-generation *Annales* historians; all these scholars were looking for anonymous rules governing collective practices, and all participated in displacing the individual "subject" from history. Unlike the first generations of *Annales* historians, however, Foucault was fundamentally antipositivist. He did

20. Roger Chartier, "Intellectual History or Sociocultural History? The French Trajectories," in *Modern European Intellectual History: Reappraisals and New Perspectives*, ed. Dominick LaCapra and Steven L. Kaplan (Ithaca, N.Y., 1982), p. 30.

21. As Foucault explained in his work on discourse, he was not interested in determining the "underlying" causes of discursive formations but rather in seeing "historically how truth-effects are produced inside discourses which are not in themselves either true or false" (quoted in Mark Poster, "Foucault and History," *Social Research* 49 [1982]: 116–42; quote p. 128).

22. Chartier, "Intellectual History," p. 43.

not believe that the social sciences could be united in investigating the nature of man, precisely because he disavowed the very concept of "man" and the very possibility of method in the social sciences. Indeed, some commentators have called his "genealogies" an "antimethod."<sup>23</sup>

Although historians have been intrigued by Foucault's trenchant criticisms, they have not taken his method—or anti-method—as a model for their practice. Foucault refused to offer causal analysis and denied the validity of any reductive relationship between discursive formations and their socio-political contexts—between changes in views of madness, for example, and social and political changes in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France. He vehemently argued against research into origins, and his "genealogies" required none of the usual grounding in economics, society, or politics. As a consequence, though his local insights into the functioning of particular institutions and types of discourse have generated considerable research (much of it aiming to correct Foucault's own often jerry-built constructions), his overall agenda remains idiosyncratic. And how could it be otherwise, when Foucault described his version of history as one that "disturbs what was previously considered immobile; . . . fragments what was thought unified; . . . shows the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with itself," and when he proclaimed that "I am well aware that I have never written anything but fictions"? Admittedly, he went on to say: "I do not mean to go so far as to say that fictions are beyond truth [*hors vérité*]. It seems to me that it is possible to make fiction work inside of truth."<sup>24</sup> Yet he never

23. For a useful discussion of Foucault's methods, see Larry Shiner, "Reading Foucault: Anti-Method and the Genealogy of Power-Knowledge," *History and Theory* 21 (1982): 382–97; and Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago, 1982). The difference between the Annales school and "structuralism" is discussed in Stuart Clark, "The Annales Historians," in *The Return of Grand Theory in the Human Sciences*, ed. Quentin Skinner (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 177–98. Clark observes that "the structural history of Braudel and the Annales owes more to their hostility to any form of phenomenology than to their anticipation of structuralism" (p. 195). Braudel's determinism was based on a preference for a natural rather than a cultural account of experience (p. 192).

24. Quoted in Allan Megill, *Prophets of Extremity: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1985), pp. 235, 234.



specifies how he can determine this "truth," or even what its epistemological status might be.

Even though Foucault may not have entirely succeeded in blazing a third path through the terrain of cultural history, beside Marxism and the *Annales* school, his influence on the conceptualization of the field has been undeniably tremendous. In her essay in this volume, "Michel Foucault's History of Culture" (chapter 1), Patricia O'Brien examines both Foucault's influence and his practices as a historian of culture. She argues convincingly that Foucault studied culture through the prism of the technologies of power, which he located strategically in discourse. He did not try to trace the workings of power to the state, the legislative process, or the class struggle; rather, he looked for them in "the most unpromising places"—in the operations of feelings, love, conscience, instinct, and in prison blueprints, doctors' observations, and far-reaching changes in disciplines such as biology and linguistics.

What, then, is the agenda for the "new cultural history"? Like Foucault's work, the broader history of *mentalités* has been criticized as lacking clear focus. François Furet denounced this lack of definition for fostering an "unending pursuit of new topics" whose choice was governed only by the fashion of the day.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, Robert Darnton has charged that, "despite a spate of prolegomena and discourses on method . . . , the French have not developed a coherent conception of *mentalités* as a field of study."<sup>26</sup>

The criticisms of Furet and Darnton 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, 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.<sup>27</sup>

25. François Furet, "Beyond the *Annales*," *Journal of Modern History* 55 (1983): 389–410; quote p. 405.

26. Darnton, "Intellectual and Cultural History," p. 346.

27. For a rather sanguine view on social history, but one that at least recognizes the existence of criticisms, see Peter N. Stearns, "Social History and

But Furet and Darnton are in some ways unfair in their criticism, not least because they themselves work in the genre they attack. Historians such as Chartier and Revel have not simply proposed a new set of topics for investigation; they have gone beyond *mentalités* to question the methods and goals of history generally (which is why their work is so filled with prolegomena on method). They have endorsed Foucault's judgment that the very topics of the human sciences—man, madness, punishment, and sexuality, for instance—are the product of historically contingent discursive formations. This radical critique has a basic problem, however, and that is its nihilistic strain. Where will we be when every practice, be it economic, intellectual, social, or political, has been shown to be culturally conditioned? To put it another way, can a history of culture work if it is shorn of all theoretical assumptions about culture's relationship to the social world—if, indeed, its agenda is conceived as the undermining of all assumptions about the relationship between culture and the social world?

The essays in this volume are devoted to an exploration of just such questions. Part One examines, critically and appreciatively, the models that have already been proposed for the history of culture. Part Two presents concrete examples of the new kinds of work that are currently under way. The reader will find little in the way of sociological theorizing in these pages because the rise of the new cultural history has been marked by a decline of intense debate over the role of sociological theory within history (at least among historians of culture in America). For this reason, the 1960s pronouncements of E. H. Carr on the subject seem very dated. Now, in place of sociology, the influential disciplines are anthropology and liter-

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History: A Progress Report," *Journal of Social History* 19 (1985): 319–34. As Stearns himself admitted in an earlier essay, "Topical social history has an inherently centrifugal tendency. The topical approach thus not only reflects a lack of broader conceptualization but also positively hinders the development of an appropriate sociohistorical periodization" ("Toward a Wider Vision: Trends in Social History," in *The Past Before Us*, ed. Kammen, p. 224). It is noteworthy that cultural history appeared in *The Past Before Us* in tandem with intellectual history (Darnton, "Intellectual and Cultural History") rather than with social history. But of course, Darnton himself is the most social history-oriented of intellectual historians.

ary theory, fields in which social explanation is not taken for granted; nevertheless, cultural history must wrestle with new tensions within and between the models they offer. We hope that the essays in this volume will give some sense of both the prospects and the potential problems of using insights from these neighboring disciplines.

At the moment, the anthropological model reigns supreme in cultural approaches. Rituals, carnivalesque inversions, and rites of passage are being found in every country and almost every century. The quantitative study of *mentalités* as the "third level" of social experience never had many followers outside of France. The influence in Anglo-Saxon and especially American approaches to the history of culture came as much (or even more) from English and English-trained social anthropologists as from an *Annales*-style history of *mentalités*. In her pioneering essays in *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, Natalie Z. Davis showed the relevance of concepts borrowed from Max Gluckman, Mary Douglas, and Victor Turner, as well as the French anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep. Her work, along with that of E. P. Thompson in "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," promoted widespread interest in the motive power of "community."<sup>28</sup> As Davis explained in "The Reasons of Misrule," she hoped "to show that rather than being a mere 'safety valve,' deflecting attention from social reality, festive life can . . . perpetuate certain values of the community." Similarly, in interpreting rites of violence during the French religious wars, she concluded that "they can be reduced to a repertory of actions . . . intended to purify the religious community."<sup>29</sup> A straightforward social interpretation seemed much less fruitful than concepts introduced from the anthropological literature. In her essay in this volume, "Crowds, Community, and Ritual in the Work of E. P. Thompson and Natalie Davis" (chapter 2), Suzanne Desan explores the virtues as well as the problematic aspects of this notion of community. She concludes that historians of culture must develop a more differentiated notion of community and ritual, one more sen-

28. Thompson's seminal article is in *Past and Present* 50 (1971): 76–136.

29. Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford, Calif., 1975), pp. 97, 178.

sitive to the ways in which different groups, including women, use ritual and community to foster their own separate positions. Violence, in her view, can transform and redefine community as much as it defines and consolidates it.

In recent years, the most visible anthropologist in cultural historical work has been Clifford Geertz. His collection of essays *The Interpretation of Cultures* has been cited by historians working in a wide variety of chronological and geographical settings.<sup>30</sup> In *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*, for example, Robert Darnton clearly stated the advantages of Geertzian interpretive strategies. Cultural history, he announced, is "history in the ethnographic grain. . . . The anthropological mode of history . . . begins from the premise that individual expression takes place within a general idiom." As such, it is an interpretive science: its aim is to read "for meaning—the meaning inscribed by contemporaries."<sup>31</sup> The deciphering of meaning, then, rather than the inference of causal laws of explanation, is taken to be the central task of cultural history, just as it was posed by Geertz to be the central task of cultural anthropology.

Some of the problems associated with the Geertzian approach have been discussed by Roger Chartier in a long review in the *Journal of Modern History*. He questions the assumption that "symbolic forms are organized into a 'system' . . . [for] this would suppose coherence among them and interdependence, which in turn supposes the existence of a shared and unified symbolic universe."<sup>32</sup> How, in particular, can a "general idiom" be capable of accounting for all expressions of culture? In other words, Chartier questions the validity of a search for meaning in the Geertzian interpretive mode because it tends to efface differences in the appropriation or uses of cultural forms. The

30. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1973).

31. Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York, 1984), pp. 3, 6, 5.

32. Roger Chartier, "Text, Symbols, and Frenchness," *Journal of Modern History* 57 (1985): 682–95; quote p. 690. Darnton replied at length in "The Symbolic Element in History," *Journal of Modern History* 58 (1986): 218–34. See also the exchange of Pierre Bourdieu, Roger Chartier, and Robert Darnton in "Dialogue à propos de l'histoire culturelle," *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 59 (1985): 86–93.

urge to see order and meaning obscures the existence of conflict and struggle.

In her essay "Local Knowledge, Local History: Geertz and Beyond" (chapter 3), Aletta Biersack echoes some of these criticisms. She suggests that a dose of Marshall Sahlins might be salutary for future work on the history of culture, given his "re-thinking" of structure and event, or structure and history, in dialectical terms that rejuvenate both halves. It should be noted, however, that Geertz's own increasingly literary understanding of meaning (the construing of cultural meaning as a text to be read) has fundamentally reshaped current directions in anthropological self-reflection. In the final section of her essay, Biersack traces Geertz's influence on this textualizing move in anthropology and shows how the concerns of anthropologists are intersecting increasingly with those of historians of culture.

Chartier himself advocates "a definition of history primarily sensitive to inequalities in the appropriation of common materials or practices."<sup>33</sup> In proposing this reorientation away from community and toward difference, Chartier shows the influence of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (also discussed in Biersack's wide-ranging essay). Bourdieu recast the Marxist explanatory model of social life by giving much more attention to culture; though he insisted that "the mode of expression characteristic of a cultural production always depends on the laws of the market in which it is offered," he directed his own work to the uncovering of the "specific logic" of "cultural goods." Central to that logic are the ways and means of appropriating cultural objects. Now that Bourdieu's most influential work, *Distinction*, has been translated into English, his influence on historians of culture will likely grow.<sup>34</sup>

Chartier insists that historians of culture must not replace a reductive theory of culture as reflective of social reality with an equally reductive assumption that rituals and other forms of

33. Chartier, "Texts, Symbols, and Frenchness," p. 688.

34. Bourdieu is perhaps best known for his concept of "habitus," which he defined in difficult but nonetheless influential terms as follows: "The habitus is not only a structuring structure, which organizes practices and the perception of practices, but also a structured structure: the principle of division

symbolic action simply express a central, coherent, communal meaning. Nor must they forget that the texts they work with affect the reader in varying and individual ways. Documents describing past symbolic actions are not innocent, transparent texts; they were written by authors with various intentions and strategies, and historians of culture must devise their own strategies for reading them. Historians have always been critical about their documents: therein lies the foundation of historical method. Chartier goes further by advocating a criticism of documents based on a new kind of history of reading. He offers an example, with its emphasis on difference, in his essay "Texts, Printing, Readings" (chapter 6). Taking the sixteenth-century prologue to the *Celestina* as his point of departure, Chartier shows that the meaning of texts in early modern Europe depended on a variety of factors, ranging from the age of readers to typographical innovations such as the multiplication of stage directions. His focus on the triangular relationship between the text as conceived by the author, as printed by the publisher, and as read (or heard) by the reader throws into doubt some of the canonical conceptions of the history of culture, in particular the dichotomy between popular and educated or elite culture.

Unlike Roger Chartier, most historians of culture have been relatively reluctant to use literary theory in any direct way. In his essay "Literature, Criticism, and Historical Imagination: The Literary Challenge of Hayden White and Dominick LaCapra" (chapter 4), Lloyd Kramer surveys the work of the two historians most closely associated with literary theory. His essay shows clearly how literary approaches have enabled White and LaCapra to expand the boundaries of cultural history, yet it remains sensitive to the reasons for the continued marginalization of such work. It is no accident that, in America, literary influences first emerged in intellectual history, with its

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into logical classes which organizes the perception of the social world is itself the product of internalization of the division into social classes" (*Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice [Cambridge, Mass., 1984], pp. xiii, 1, 170). This quote captures very well Bourdieu's relationship to Marxism: the habitus is both determined by the social world and determining of the perception of it.

focus on documents that are texts in the literary sense, but cultural historians who work with documents other than great books have not found literary theory to be especially relevant. One of the purposes of this volume is to show how a new generation of historians of culture use literary techniques and approaches to develop new materials and methods of analysis.

Kramer's essay also demonstrates the great variety of literary influences at work. The writings of White and LaCapra alone display significant divergences in emphasis—White aligns himself with Foucault and Frye, LaCapra with Bakhtin and Derrida. There are, after all, theories that emphasize the reception, or reading, of texts and those that emphasize their production, or writing, those that emphasize the unity and coherence of meaning and those that emphasize the play of difference and the ways in which texts work to subvert their apparent goals.<sup>35</sup> Just as Geertz and Sahlins represent two poles in anthropological writing—Geertz emphasizing unity, Sahlins difference—so too does literary criticism have its similarly dichotomized approaches: in Fredric Jameson's words, "old-fashioned 'interpretation,' which still asks the text what it *means*, and the newer kinds of analysis which . . . ask how it *works*" (that is, in particular, deconstruction, a critical approach closely associated with Jacques Derrida).<sup>36</sup> The former emphasizes unity; the latter, difference.

Unity is made possible in "interpretation" by what Jameson calls "an allegorical operation in which a text is systematically *rewritten* in terms of some fundamental master code or 'ultimately determining instance.'" Following this line of reasoning, we might say that in Davis and Thompson the rituals of violence are read—or rewritten—as allegories for community. It is precisely this allegorizing that Jameson finds objectionable in literary criticism. As he insists, "The discredit into which interpretation has fallen is thus at one with the disrepute visited on allegory itself."<sup>37</sup>

35. A brief review of literary theories currently in vogue can be found in Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis, 1983).

36. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1981), p. 108.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 58.

Yet at the same time, Jameson concludes that the tension between the analysis of what a text means and how it works is a tension inherent in language itself.<sup>38</sup> Unity is not possible without a sense of difference; difference is certainly not graspable without an opposing sense of unity. Thus, historians of culture really do not have to choose (or really cannot choose) between the two—between unity and difference, between meaning and working, between interpretation and deconstruction. Just as historians need not choose between sociology and anthropology or between anthropology and literary theory in conducting their investigations, neither must they choose once and for all between interpretive strategies based on uncovering meaning on the one hand and deconstructive strategies based on uncovering the text's modes of production on the other. Historians do not have to ally themselves single-mindedly with either Clifford Geertz or Pierre Bourdieu, with either Northrop Frye or Jacques Derrida.

Although there are many differences within and between anthropological and literary models, one central tendency in both seems currently to fascinate historians of culture: the use of language as metaphor. Symbolic actions such as riots or cat massacres are framed as texts to be read or languages to be decoded. In his criticism of Darnton, Chartier has drawn attention to the problems caused by the "metaphorical use of the vocabulary of linguistics": it obliterates the difference between symbolic actions and written texts, it defines symbolic forms so broadly that nothing is excluded, and it tends to consider symbols as fixed in their meaning.<sup>39</sup> Yet, though these warnings are certainly well taken, the use of language as metaphor or model has proved undeniably significant and, I would argue, critical to the formulation of a cultural approach to history. In short, the linguistic analogy establishes representation as a problem which historians can no longer avoid.

In both art history and literary criticism, representation has long been recognized as the central problem in the discipline:

38. *Ibid.*, pp. 108–9. I do not have the space here to comment more extensively on Jameson's own particular variety of Marxist, poststructuralist literary criticism. Until now, it has had little influence on historical writing.

39. Chartier, "Text, Symbols, and Frenchness," p. 690.



what does a picture or novel do, and how does it do it? What is the relation between the picture or novel and the world it purports to represent? The new cultural history asks the same kinds of questions; first, though, it has to establish the objects of historical study as being like those of literature and art. An example of this endeavor can be seen in Thomas Laqueur's essay in Part Two, "Bodies, Details, and Humanitarian Narrative" (chapter 7), in which autopsy reports are shown to constitute a kind of literary canon.

I attempted a similar task in the first chapter of my recent book on the French Revolution when I claimed to treat "the diverse utterances of revolutionary politicians . . . as constituting one text."<sup>40</sup> The only basis for this claim was its potential fruitfulness for analysis and explanation, and the claim must stand or fall on those grounds. My aim was not to reduce revolutionary discourse to one stable system of meaning (the reflection of community, for example) but rather to show how political language could be used rhetorically to build a sense of community and at the same time to establish new fields of social, political, and cultural struggle—that is, make possible unity and difference at the same time. The point of the endeavor was to examine the ways in which linguistic practice, rather than simply reflecting social reality, could actively be an instrument of (or constitute) power. When national guardsmen asked, "Are you of the Nation?" they were not trying merely to identify their friends in troubled times; they were actually helping to create a sense of national community—and, at the same time, they were establishing new ways to oppose that sense of community. Words did not just reflect social and political reality; they were instruments for transforming reality.

Mary Ryan makes a similar point in her essay in Part Two, "The American Parade: Representations of the Nineteenth-Century Social Order" (chapter 5). This essay brings the unity-and-difference theme into sharp relief. Parades created a sense of community (pluralist democracy) in American cities precisely by expressing important lines of social and gender division. Ryan shows how critical a historical understanding of rit-

40. Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class*, p. 25.

ual can be by demonstrating how parading changed in function over time: whereas in the 1820s, 1830s, and 1840s the parading of differences under a unifying banner of civic pride served to foster civic unity, after mid century the parade was transformed into an ethnic festival that more exclusively emphasized differences. Ryan also points to the role of gender in these constructions of civic identity, and, like Desan in her piece on Davis and Thompson, she reminds us that gender was one of the most critical lines of differentiation in culture and society. No account of cultural unity and difference can be complete without some discussion of gender.

The importance of gender goes beyond its undeniably central positioning in social and cultural life, however; studies of women's history in the 1960s and 1970s and the more recent emphasis on gender differentiation played a significant role in the development of the methods of the history of culture more generally. In the United States in particular (and perhaps uniquely), women's history and gender studies have been at the forefront of the new cultural history. Natalie Davis, for example, relies on the distinctions between men and women to illuminate the workings of early modern culture. The work of Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, too, is exemplary of the ways in which women's or gender history can advance the history of culture as a style of investigation and writing. In the essays collected in the volume *Disorderly Conduct*, for example, Smith-Rosenberg brings to bear both anthropological and literary styles of analysis, ranging from the work of Mary Douglas to that of Roland Barthes. As she describes her project, "By tracing differences between nineteenth-century women's and men's mythic constructs, I sought to re-create the way gender channeled the impact of social change and the experience and exercise of power. The dialectic between language as social mirror and language as social agent formed the core of my analysis."<sup>41</sup> Here gender as a system of cultural representation that is at once social, literary, and linguistic is especially in view.

The methodological implications of the study of gender have

41. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York, 1985), p. 45.

been most forcefully explicated by Joan Wallach Scott in her essay collection *Gender and the Politics of History* (which includes critiques of E. P. Thompson and Gareth Stedman Jones, among others).<sup>42</sup> Scott has been particularly influential in linking gender history with the analysis of discourse. In the work of Joan Scott, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, and Natalie Zemon Davis, the rising influence of literary techniques of reading and literary theories can be clearly seen. Natalie Davis's most recent book, *Fiction in the Archives*, puts the "fictional" aspect of the documents at the center of the analysis. Rather than reading letters of pardon as sources reflective of contemporary social norms, she focuses on "how sixteenth-century people told stories . . . , what they thought a good story was, how they accounted for motive, and how through narrative they made sense of the unexpected and built coherence into immediate experience."<sup>43</sup>

The essays by Roger Chartier and Thomas Laqueur in Part Two of this volume are striking examples of the trend toward the literary. Readers will find in Chartier's essay, "Texts, Printing, Readings," a good introduction to his important new book, *The Cultural Uses of Print in Early Modern France*. No one has done more than Chartier to move the history of the book into the mainstream of cultural history. In *The Cultural Uses of Print*, Chartier reiterates his conviction that "culture is not over and above economic and social relations, nor can it be ranged beside them."<sup>44</sup> All practices, whether economic or cultural, depend on the representations individuals use to make sense of their world.

Laqueur's essay, "Bodies, Details, and Humanitarian Narrative," demonstrates the potential of new literary techniques in cultural history for enriching more traditional social history topics. He argues that humanitarianism depended in part on the development of a constellation of narrative forms—the realistic novel, the enquiry, and the medical case history—which created a sense of veracity and sympathy through narrative de-

42. Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York, 1988).

43. Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Stanford, Calif., 1987), p. 4.

44. Roger Chartier, *The Cultural Uses of Print*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Princeton, N.J., 1987), p. 11.

tail. By focusing on the narrative techniques of the autopsy report, Laqueur does not aim to avoid the traditional questions of class and power, nor to remove humanitarianism from the domain of social history; rather, he hopes to expand social history to include the sociology of narrative form.

The final essay, Randolph Starn's "Seeing Culture in a Room for a Renaissance Prince" (chapter 8), takes us back in time but forward into new questions about the techniques of cultural history. Although Starn's essay shows the influence of literary theory in its analysis of the fifteenth-century frescoes of Mantegna, it also takes us into the domain of "seeing" as opposed to "reading." Here, the linguistic analogy is no longer preeminent. Instead, Starn lays out a new typology of seeing that includes what he terms the glance, the measured view, and the scan. In this way Starn is able not only to show the relevance of art-historical documentation for cultural history but also, and more surprisingly, to recast the terms of art-historical debate itself. He historicizes the process of seeing by showing that even forms have historical content. This approach is tremendously exciting because it pushes cultural history beyond the stage of incorporating insights from other disciplines and into a position of refashioning adjacent disciplines in its turn.

All of the essays in Part Two are centrally concerned with the mechanics of representation. This concern almost necessarily entails a simultaneous reflection on the methods of history as new techniques of analysis are brought into use. And perhaps *methods* is too narrow a word in this context. For as historians learn to analyze their subjects' representations of their worlds, they inevitably begin to reflect on the nature of their own efforts to represent history; the practice of history is, after all, a process of text creating and of "seeing," that is, giving form to subjects. Historians of culture, in particular, are bound to become more aware of the consequences of their often unselfconscious literary and formal choices. The master narratives, or codes of unity or difference; the choice of allegories, analogies, or tropes; the structures of narrative—these have weighty consequences for the writing of history.

In the 1960s, great emphasis was placed on the identification

of an author's political bias, on trying to situate oneself as a historian in the broader social and political world. The questions are now more subtle, but no less important. Historians are becoming more aware that their supposedly matter-of-fact choices of narrative techniques and analytical forms also have social and political implications. What is this introductory chapter, for example? Essays on the state of the discipline often have a canonical form all their own: first a narrative on the rise of new kinds of history, then a long moment for exploring the problems posed by new kinds of history, and finally either a jeremiad on the evils of new practices or a celebration of the potential overcoming of all obstacles. My story line is quite different from Carr's: where he saw the epic advance of social and economic history, the heroic historian marching hand in hand with the forces of progress, I tell the perpetual romance, the quest without end, the ironic doubling back over territory already presumably covered. By implication, history has been treated here as a branch of aesthetics rather than as the handmaiden of social theory.<sup>45</sup>

Reflection on such issues is not always pleasant for historians. As Nancy Partner said recently about the writing of history, "language-model epistemology" (as she termed it) has been "smuggled out of linguistics and philosophy departments by literary critics and free-ranging or metacritics, and lobbed like grenades into unsuspecting history departments."<sup>46</sup> The products of such an explosion will not fit neatly together as though preplanned, for there is no single agreed-upon method. As Clifford Geertz argued in his essay "Blurred Genres" (the very title indicating, I think, the ambiguity he felt about the situation), "The text analogy now taken up by social scientists is, in some ways, the broadest of the recent refigura-

45. The implications of this aestheticizing of history are very important, but too complex to develop in an essay of this length. See my "History Beyond Social Theory," to be published in a collection edited by David Carroll for Columbia University Press, for a fuller, but by no means definitive, discussion.

46. Nancy F. Partner, "Making Up Lost Time: Writing on the Writing of History," *Speculum* 61 (1986): 90-117; quote p. 95.

tions of social theory, the most venturesome, and the least well developed."<sup>47</sup>

For the moment, as this volume shows, the accent in cultural history is on close examination—of texts, of pictures, and of actions—and on open-mindedness to what those examinations will reveal, rather than on elaboration of new master narratives or social theories to replace the materialist reductionism of Marxism and the *Annales* school. (Are we headed here for a “comic” ending in literary terms? An ending that promises reconciliation of all contradictions and tensions in the pluralist manner most congenial to American historians?) Historians working in the cultural mode should not be discouraged by theoretical diversity, for we are just entering a remarkable new phase when the other human sciences (including especially literary studies but also anthropology and sociology) are discovering us anew. The very use of the term *new historicism* in literary studies, for example, shows this development. The emphasis on representation in literature, art history, anthropology, and sociology has caused more and more of our counterparts to be concerned with the historical webs in which their objects of study are caught. Someday soon, presumably, another E. H. Carr will announce that the more cultural historical studies become and the more historical cultural studies become, the better for both.

47. Clifford Geertz, “Blurred Genres: The Refiguration of Social Thought,” in *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York, 1983), pp. 19–35; quote p. 30.