

# SUBALTERNS, SIGNIFIERS, AND STATISTICS: Perspectives on Mexican Historiography\*

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*Abstract: This essay comments on the “new cultural history” of Mexico and the debate recently conducted between critics and protagonists of the genre in the Hispanic American Historical Review. After a scene-setting preamble, the essay consists of three substantive parts. First, in considering what the new cultural history is and what degree of novelty it might claim, the essay identifies and critiques seven features of the genre: its concern for subalterns, agency, political engagement, the reinsertion of politics, mentalities, texts, and interdisciplinary influences. Second, the essay addresses the style and semantics of the new cultural history, in particular its penchant for buzzwords and jargon. Third, the article turns to the major critic of the genre, Stephen Haber, and considers his preferred alternative (so-called scientific history). The essay argues that while Haber’s critique is often persuasive, it is also in places misconceived, perhaps exaggerated, and tending toward a narrow positivism. Historiography, the essay unoriginally concludes, need not be falsely polarized between narrow positivism and fashionable postmodernism.*

To present a view of Latin American historiography—the history that has been and is being written about Latin America, whether by Latin Americans or others—is a daunting task. The first reason is that the continent is large and complex, and the output is huge and growing. Second, history, in contrast to the other social sciences, tends to define itself in simple time-and-place terms, hence logical subcategories of analysis tend to be elusive. While economists can be distinguished both by their topics of interest (labor, development, transport) and by theoretical affiliation (neoclassical, neo-Keynesian, Marxist), historians are not so easily categorized. Although theoretical affiliations can be important (as with the English Marxists and the French Annales school), a great many historians would defy such classifications (Marxists might lump their adversaries together as “bourgeois his-

\*This essay was written in response to a request for reflections on current Latin American historiography, which formed part of a cross-disciplinary panel organized by Ruth Berins Collier at the Latin American Studies Association Congress in Miami, 16–18 March 2000. I mention this origin in part to “contextualize” the essay, in part to explain its motivation, which has nothing to do with personal likes and dislikes.

torians," but this is too broad an insult to carry much specificity). And historians' topics of interest, especially when it comes to job descriptions, tend to be spatio-temporal: early modern Europe (with special reference to Spain), colonial Latin America, Brazil in the national period. Useful and straightforward though these labels are, they reveal nothing about the approach taken by these historians.

Therefore, if one seeks to generalize about Latin American historiography, one necessarily confronts a bewildering range of approaches, topics of interest, and theoretical affiliations. It is possible to tease out some of the main concerns and, perhaps, the principal accomplishments of recent historiography: its diversification away from "top-down" national elite history; its critique of some of the old "metanarratives"; its recovery of regional and local history (perhaps the biggest contribution in sheer volume of knowledge); and its efforts, sometimes successful, sometimes not, to "rescue from the enormous condescension of posterity" those groups that traditional history tended to spurn—women, peasants, artisans, Indians.<sup>1</sup> These observations (uncontentious, I would think) could be anchored in some massive bibliographical footnotes, which, although tedious for author and reader alike, could afford the opportunity (in Samuel Gompers's phrase) to "reward your friends and punish your enemies": "Prof. Y's deconstruction of Bourbon fiscal reforms in the *alcaldía* of Nosedonde betrays a naive misunderstanding of Bourbon accounting . . . , but we are greatly indebted to Prof. X for his insightful analysis of the neglected rubber boot industry in Pernambuco." Bibliographical essays, although no doubt useful for graduate students approaching exam time, are a wearisome name-dropping genre. And because I have elsewhere attempted a succinct overview of Latin American historiography, with names dropped as rhythmically as rifle fire (Knight 1997), I do not propose to repeat that exercise.

It would be much more interesting to go beyond these time-and-place categorizations and try to evaluate what Latin American historians are doing in theoretical or "paradigmatic" terms. By that I mean evaluating the paradigms, schools of thought, and theoretical premises that inform recent historiography. We may not have our John Maynard Keynes, Eugen Böhm-Bawerk, or Milton Friedman, but we do have, or share, Karl Marx. And other loosely theoretical approaches can be identified coursing through historiography, like DNA through families and populations. Such a focus will necessarily be selective because a good deal of historiography is not easily defined in terms of theories, paradigms, or approaches. But because the scope of this inquiry is excessive anyway, a few slices of Occam's razor (*entia non sunt multiplicanda*) might be welcome.

There are two final reasons for preferring this tack. First, while a con-

1. E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth, Engl.: Penguin, 1968), 13.

ventional time-and-place focus is unlikely to generate comparisons with the other social sciences under review here (how can we stack up “colonial Brazil” against “neo-Keynesian economics”?), an analysis of recent historiographical theories, some of which (such as cliometrics) enjoy a close kinship with the social sciences, may foster cross-disciplinary interest and debate. Second, the historiographical patch in which I forage—modern Mexico—has recently been the site of some lively debate concerning the nature of historiography, specifically the “new cultural history.” While the debate concerns recent works of history, it actually raises old questions, some the subject of lengthy discussion in the past. Thus just as the “new cultural history” sometimes repackages old and familiar forms of historiography in new neologistic wrapping, so this debate sometimes seems to rehearse old disputes while claiming cutting-edge intellectual novelty. But then political theorists have been recycling Plato and Aristotle for centuries, so perhaps this is no cause for concern.

#### WHAT IS THE NEW CULTURAL HISTORY?

The debate began in a stuffy crowded room at the American History Association convention in New York in January 1997. Stephen Haber launched a critique of the new cultural history, which he followed up with further broadsides in *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* (a journal whose contribution to scholarly debate deserves recognition) and in his introduction to *How Latin America Fell Behind* (Haber 1997a, 1997b). At the AHA panel, three practitioners of or sympathizers with the new cultural history responded: Eric Van Young, Mary Kay Vaughan, and William French. The four contributions have since been published, prefaced by a kid-gloved introduction by Susan Deans-Smith and Gilbert Joseph.<sup>2</sup> They have also been supplemented by three additional comments by Florencia Mallon, Susan Socolow, and Claudio Lomnitz: one pro–new cultural history, one anti-, and one somewhere in between but more pro- than anti- (Van Young 1999; Vaughan 1999; French 1999; Mallon 1999; Socolow 1999; Lomnitz 1999). This roster adds up to a reasonable corpus for dissection. It raises several of the issues surrounding the new cultural history; and although its time-and-space focus is modern Mexico, the questions it provokes are relevant for broader swathes of history, not just Latin American.

An initial problem that lurks in all the thickets of this debate is the nature of the new cultural history. As Deans-Smith and Joseph observe, “Perhaps the greatest divergence among the contributors emerges in their assessments of what the new cultural history is, what it does, and how it

2. They admit to being “excessively diplomatic” and possibly “overstating the consensual dimension of the forum,” a mea culpa with the ring of truth (Deans-Smith and Joseph 1999, 208).

does it" (Deans-Smith and Joseph 1999, 205; see also Van Young 1999, 214). This lack of agreement makes debating its utility somewhat difficult: we are trying to home in on a moving target. We can probably agree as to what history (historiography) is and can shelve for the moment the question of "new" (which does not affect the content of the work, rather its relationship to earlier work). But we are still left with the vexatious qualifier "cultural." Several of the (pro-) contributors make little attempt to define the term (semantic precision is not their strong suit). But Van Young, in a spirit of "salutary . . . promiscuity," offers a definition (actually, he calls it, correctly, "an imperialist assumption"): "All history is cultural history" because "all human actions and expressions have cultural valences or meanings," and "culture" denotes "the process of meaning formation, the codes by which meanings are stabilized and transmitted, and the ideas in people's minds" (Van Young 1999, 213–14, 216).

This definition seems to me trivially wrong, substantially right, but ultimately self-defeating. It is trivially wrong because not all human actions have cultural meaning: consider involuntary muscle reflexes and rapid eye movements, and recall Geertz's discussion of winking, derived from Ryle (Geertz 1973, 6–7). It is substantially right because if we approach the question of culture from a broad scientific angle, the most encompassing and unequivocal definition would be something like Daniel Dennett's: "People ache to believe that we humans are vastly different from all other species—and they are right! We are different. We are the only species that has an *extra* medium of design preservation and design communication: culture" (Dennett 1995, 338, his emphasis). Once this definition is accepted, virtually all human activities (barring involuntary physical activities such as reflexes and twitches) fall into the cultural domain. Money (Van Young's illustrative example) certainly does (1999, 213). But so does everything else. Thucydides and Herodotus therefore wrote cultural history. Lytton Strachey's elite biographies are "cultural history." Stephen Haber writes very good (somewhat quantitative) cultural history. It happens to be classified as economic history, but then economics are as much a part of culture (the "extra medium of design preservation and design communication") as anything else. Van Young rebuts the notion (which may be nagging at the back of his head) that this broad definition is a "flaccid formulation that dilutes the conceptual precision of culture" (Van Young 1999, 214). In fact, the definition is precise enough (more so than any other definition in the debate that I have found). But it leads to the inescapable conclusion that all history is cultural history, hence *cultural history* (old or new) cannot denote a particular subcategory. Consequently, Van Young's imperialist rallying cry—"cultural history should actively colonize economic relations as it has done political systems"—becomes redundant because the cultural history empire already spans the entire globe (Van Young 1999, 214).

Van Young and others might reasonably respond that I am logic-

chopping. They should concede, however, that I am using a hatchet of their own making, namely the definition of cultural history as the “history of the production and reproduction of socially constituted meanings” (Van Young 1999, 214). In reality, the new cultural history is more specific, and although modesty may not be its prime virtue, its aims are indeed more modest (which is why Van Young would like it to become more ambitiously imperialist). To define the new cultural history “in reality,” we have to abandon the broad, semantically precise approach I adopted just now and proceed in a more piecemeal empirical way: that is, we have to examine what practitioners of the new cultural history do and what it entails. Here we encounter another problem: our definition will reflect the group we examine. Nor is it clear what criteria should be used to select the group—if we try to select the group by noting who conforms to a checklist of new cultural history practices, we have created our definition already! This is a genuine problem, evident in the debate: several historians (myself included) are, if not pulled limb from limb, at least gently tugged to and fro, while their new cultural history credentials are judiciously inspected. Several footnotes cite supposed practitioners of the new cultural history who, it seems to me, do not qualify for that accolade, John Schwaller and Elinor Melville, to take two random examples (Van Young 1999, 219, n. 16; 243 n. 71). Even Deans-Smith’s work is hardly an example of quintessential new cultural history because it stands in a distinguished line of late-colonial institutional and economic historiography (Van Young 1999, 239 n. 61).

While the members of the team may be hard to pin down, there is a very rough consensus on the playbook. Pros and antis alike discern some common features of the new cultural history. I have picked out seven that I list, along with some brief interrogatory comments.

### *Subalterns*

The first common feature is a concern for “subaltern history,” that is, the study of *los de abajo* (the underdogs), the poor, oppressed, disempowered, deviant, inarticulate, and marginal (Deans-Smith and Joseph 1999, 205; Van Young 1999, 219; Haber 1999, 323). Four relevant observations occur to me.

First, is *subaltern* a useful term or merely gratuitous jargon? I shall return to that later. But two particular aspects of this question should be flagged.

Second, if the term is to be useful, how should it be defined? Haber rightly points to the vagueness of the concept (1999, 323–24). But Haber goes too far in dismissing it on the grounds that if everyone is in some respect subaltern, then the term loses all specificity.<sup>3</sup> In fact, there are plenty of col-

3. “The king being subaltern to God . . . and so forth,” as Van Young puts it (1999, 219, n. 17).

lective nouns that are fuzzy at the edges and have to be defined in “relational” terms but are not necessarily useless: consider *landlords*, *peasants*, *workers*, and *capitalists*.

Third, is the notion of “subalternity” new or merely a repackaging of older concepts? If E. P. Thompson had entitled his masterpiece “The Making of the English Subaltern Class,” would it have made much difference? (It would have misled some prospective readers, who might have expected some kind of composite regimental history.)

Fourth, is the new cultural history at all interested in non-subalterns (be they “elites,” “superordinates,” or “ruling classes”)? Several of the supposed features of the new cultural history that I will list (such as the interest in mentalities and representations) would seem to be entirely suitable for elite studies. One book cited, Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo’s *Mexico at the World Fairs*, focuses on a project that French correctly calls “a matter for elites” (Tenorio-Trillo 1996; French 1999, 153). Fernando Cervantes’s *The Devil in the New World* addresses religious beliefs (which equal culture or cultural history?), but because its focus is “high theology and its complexities, rather than the *carne y hueso* of popular indigenous belief systems,” it is said to display a “‘top-down’ approach to cultural history, at odds with the new cultural history agenda” (Cervantes 1994; Van Young 1999, 235–36).<sup>4</sup> Is elite (“high”) cultural history not really cultural history? Or should we conclude that 100 percent new cultural history involves culture plus subalterns, while culture plus elites is a kind of watered-down version, like the “small beer” given to callow novices in medieval monasteries?

### Agency

The concern for subalterns sits and (as several commentators point out) sits a little uneasily alongside a concern for agency. Subalterns may be at the bottom of the heap, but they are not inert, passive, or ineffectual. Van Young’s endorsement of this emphasis is well taken: “We would probably all agree that a good dollop of agency was a salutary ingredient in taming the juggernaut of structuralism” (Van Young 1999, 243). We would probably all agree that we would all agree. But three points might be made.

First, stressing subaltern (or lower-class or popular) agency is not entirely new. Even stressing subaltern (or lower-class or popular) agency that is associated with ideas, projects, and programs rather than simple material stimuli is not entirely new. We can go back to Thompson and the English Marxist historians of both the medieval period and the civil war; and we can cite the ample literature on the French Revolution harking back to Albert

4. It is not clear to me why the qualifier *indigenous* appears because it seems to imply that the new cultural history is concerned not just with subaltern but with subaltern *Indian* religiosity, another arbitrary assumption.

Soboul, Georges Lefebvre, and even Jules Michelet. Perhaps the point is that this emphasis is new for Mexico or Latin America. Such an argument could be made, but it should be made specifically, not couched in spuriously global terms, as it often is. Here, as elsewhere, the Mexican new cultural history exudes a slightly parochial air.

But a second problem arises with agency. From the possibility of agency, practitioners of the new cultural history leap to the ubiquity and efficacy of agency, or what Van Young, with his aptitude for apposite alliteration, calls “the apotheosis of agency” (Van Young 1999, 243–44; compare Wolf 2001, 410–11). We arrive at the paradox that subalterns, who are defined precisely by their subordinate and disempowered status, are seen to be calling the shots. The inmates have taken over the asylum: literally in the case of Cristina Rivera-Garza’s thesis on public health in Porfirian Mexico (cited by French) in which the author shows how prostitutes and the insane “fully participated not simply in the rejection or the refashioning, but in the very creation of medicalized discourses within the hospital and insane asylum” (French 1999, 264). To put it simply, if we overemphasize agency, we no longer have subalterns. We have shifting collectivities engaged in bargaining, “negotiating,” “appropriating,” and thus codetermining outcomes. This seems to get us uncomfortably close to classic North American functionalist political science.

Nor is this kinship entirely spurious. Consider the third problem with agency, the way that in much of the new cultural history, agency involves processes of conscious, instrumental, *Zweckrationalität* activity (Weber 1964, 14, 115). What is more, this activity relates not to discrete “tradable items,” like votes or money, but to broad cultural attributes and identities. Apropos of Florencia Mallon, French refers to “local interpretations of history” as “arenas in which the official tenets of nationalism can be inspected, accepted, refashioned, or rejected” (French 1999, 255).<sup>5</sup> Van Young notes how in some new cultural history, groups are found “‘using culture’ as though it were a discrete substance, separable and residual” (1999, 236–37). He is referring to “dominant groups,” but I do not think this instrumentality in the new cultural history is confined to elites. We find subalterns exercising their agency in similarly instrumental fashion. Thus as Van Young rightly observes, we reach the paradox that new cultural historians—by definition proponents of a “culturalist perspective” on the world—start to sound like rational-choice political scientists, the sworn enemies of culturalism (Van Young 1999, 244; Chong 1996). The paradox arises because agency has been inflated and “culture” has been turned into a tradable commodity.

5. Perhaps *market* rather than *arena* would be the appropriate spatial metaphor? Markets typically involve inspection, acceptance, and rejection; arenas are places where quarterbacks get sacked and Christians are thrown to the lions.

*Political Engagement*

The concern for subalterns also seems to imply a measure of contemporary political engagement. According to French, Mallon's "historical research forms part of her own concern with simultaneously remaking the present" (French 1999, 235). Mallon, I think, agrees. She not only affirms her radical commitment to the present but admits her emotional engagement with the past (Mallon 1994). She favors a telling of history that is "respectful and empathetic" (with regard to certain groups and individuals, at any rate), and she confides that "sometimes that means staying inside, maybe even allowing the tearstains to remain on the page" (Mallon 1999, 349). By "staying inside," I assume she means that as a historian, she does not make an effort to detach herself from the narrative or context but accepts and even welcomes empathetic engagement. This approach and the criticism it elicits seem to me to be largely irrelevant to the real debate (see Haber 1999, 316–17, 328). It is a commonplace that historians, like everyone else, have political attitudes that cannot be ruthlessly separated from the work they do (Collingwood 1999, 210–11). Such attitudes may influence the choice of topic (revolutions and peasant movements as against banks and business cycles). They may also influence the way these topics are addressed. The same is true, *mutatis mutandis*, of the natural sciences: some green activists are biologists and vice versa. But we should not judge the value of a piece or a school of history in terms of its political provenance (Nagel 1974, 486). We should judge it in terms of the strength of its arguments and their empirical foundation. There is, I think, good and bad radical history, good and bad conservative history. If we have no time for, say, "revisionist studies" that deny the Holocaust, it is because we know they are historiographical trash. If, as Haber claims, exponents of the new cultural history see truth as "contingent on the ideological prejudices of the reader" (Haber 1999, 317), hence see themselves as engaged in polemical preaching rather than sober empirical inquiry, then indeed they deserve criticism. But I am sure they would dispute the point; and I am not sure whether Haber could prove his assertion in the face of such a denial.

I would add a minor thought: while parading one's politics in historiography does not invalidate the research, it can turn people off. Preachers of the Left or the Right can get pretty tedious. And if the goal of historians is to convince—and thus to use the right rhetoric to achieve conviction—the parading of politics can be counterproductive. It may appeal to readers who probably already agree with writer; it may put off those havoring in uncertainty; it will almost certainly alienate those whose politics differ. It seems to me that the smart thing is to achieve discrete conversions, by force of fact and argument, rather than by historiographical hectoring.



*History with the Politics Put Back In*

If social history was, according to an old formulation, “history with the politics left out,” the new cultural history is clearly history with the politics put back in. As Vaughan’s intelligent resumé of twentieth-century Mexican rural history makes clear, grappling with the state and state–“civil society” relations has been a major and productive field of recent inquiry (Vaughan 1999). It has reshaped our understanding, probably for the better. If this outcome is due to the new cultural history, good luck to it. But as Van Young suggests, this reshaping is not exactly evidence of a paradigm shift. In Vaughan’s account, “the NCH appears little more than a refiguration of political history” (Van Young 1999, 245). Now, it all depends what you mean by “a refiguration.” We cannot provide hard quantitative measurement of historiographical shifts, and this inability prejudices the entire debate and ensures that it will run and run until boredom, rather than resolution, ensues. I would qualify the reshaping or rethinking of twentieth-century political history as rather more than a refiguration (which carries the connotation of merely rearranging the deck chairs), although certainly far less than a paradigm shift. It has come about partly because historians interested in politics have adopted “cultural” and “bottom-up” approaches. But that does not, I think, make those historians consumers or producers of the new cultural history, certainly not in its hundred-proof form (Lomnitz 1999, 371).

Two related observations. Recent historians’ attempts to blend “culture” and politics have their counterparts in political science. Since the 1980s, political scientists critical of the old pluralist and Marxist paradigms have made efforts to “bring the state back in,” that is, to stress the state as an independent variable (Evans, Rueschmeyer, and Skocpol 1985). And a few have done so with a distinctly cultural thrust (such as Rubin 1997). So these trends are not confined to historiography. Nor again are they entirely new, at least in the greater scheme of things. Mexican political studies may lack a cultural dimension, but the fusion of politics and culture in other historiographical traditions (as in Europe) is hardly new.

*Mentalities*

The new cultural history is concerned with mentalities, signifiers, representations, imaginings, discourses, and manners and morality (Van Young 1999, 216, 218, 239; French 1999, 257). Again, one could respond that this concern is not so new. Mentalities provided the leitmotiv of the Annales school decades ago, while the study of morals goes back to the Enlightenment. Two other queries arise. First, to the extent that the mentalities or imaginings are those of subalterns (which seems likely), the practitioners of the new cultural history set themselves formidable problems, as Van

Young is ruefully aware (1999, 216). However much we may want to penetrate peasant skulls in order to find out what they were thinking when they rebelled, the task may prove “insuperably difficult” (Van Young 1999, 216). The result is a standing temptation to resort to guesswork, empathy, “ethnographic upstreaming” (retroactively applying recent ethnographic findings to the distant past), and “imagining the imaginings” of remote, inarticulate, people (Van Young 1999, 226). A safer course might be to comply with Ludwig Wittgenstein’s pithy injunction: “Whereof thou cannot speak, do not speak.” Or, at least, rely on “behavioral” or “phenomenological” evidence—these peasants rebelled here, those did not rebel there—and present suitably cautious inferences that do not presume (in the words of Queen Elizabeth I) to “open windows into men’s souls.”

Second and rather oddly, the very uncertainty of the evidence seems to encourage a kind of bullish hermeneutical confidence. Haber suggests that this is precisely because the statements being made are vague and “non-falsifiable,” hence they place a premium on “ambiguity and the virtuosity of the interpretive act” (Haber 1999, 320). Practitioners of the new cultural history seem keen to assert the primacy of mental states and motivations. This approach can lead to a fairly extreme form of idealism (reminiscent of Collingwood) whereby the elusive activity of cogitation becomes the explanatory key. At least, that seems to be the case: the exact hierarchy or relationship of causes (or variables) is often a bit murky. To Van Young, who combines intelligence and integrity, “it seemed that the internal images in people’s heads . . . formed the basis of these motives” for joining collective political violence and “rarely had anything explicitly to do with economic grievances or with larger, more abstractly structural representations of ‘interest’” (Van Young 1999, 116). Again, “social conflict that at first appeared exclusively or primarily economic in origin might well have had deeper roots of a more symbolic and ideational nature” (Van Young 1999, 141). Where the new cultural history tries “to arrive at a history of meanings for the partially inscribed,” (the old?) social history, in contrast, tries “to situate people socially, primarily with regard to considerations of social class” (Van Young 1999, 219). Van Young seems to be saying that where the old social history was concerned with class, which has its roots in economic production, the new cultural history is preoccupied with culture, that is, “internal images” that in fact have “deeper roots.”<sup>6</sup>

The relative balance of these factors—class, ideas, and interest (if

6. The passing reference to “interest” is significant because it suggests an explanatory approach, one familiar to generations of historians and perhaps best exemplified by Lewis Namier. This approach stressed not socioeconomic class but political interest, advantage, and clientele. I am not sure what function “abstractly structural representations” serve, but I am sure that interest offers some real mileage in dealing with popular, as well as elite, political culture and behavior. And it is not reducible either to class or to “internal images.” In other words, these economic and idealist alternatives do not exhaust the explanatory repertoire.

one wishes to include it)—is essentially an empirical question that relates to particular circumstances and problems. Only the most hidebound economic reductionist (of whom there are nowadays few) would insist on the “exclusivity of class.” But the “primacy of class” or economic causality is another matter and may well offer a perfectly sound basis of explanation—of Zapatismo, for example. That does not mean that Zapatismo was a simple, Pavlovian, materialist movement or that the Zapatistas marched around without a single idea in their heads. Few or no historians would accept that travesty. But the proposition that Zapatismo was a movement of dispossessed peasants directed against dispossessing landlords and the state that represented them seems entirely plausible to me. In contrast, an idealist or ideational thesis that stresses the primacy or exclusivity of ideas as causal factors seems to me useless as an explanation of Zapatismo. Other popular movements—the Cristeros, for example—may be a different matter, given that their rebellion was, *prima facie*, a religious rather than agrarian insurrection. It is pointless to propose an interpretive template, be it materialist or idealist, that fits all cases. The whole point of history is to investigate the cases and to frame appropriate (lower- to middle-range) hypotheses that explain them.

### *Textual Criticism*

The penultimate feature of the new cultural history is textual criticism. Perhaps because of the influence of postmodernism, the new cultural history is given to the pondering of texts. After all, as Van Young points out, “culture is to text as text is to culture” (Van Young 1999, 224). I am unsure what that means, but Van Young also notes, I think correctly, that this concern for textual provenance can lead to quite contrasting responses: a ferociously critical deconstruction on the one hand or a “regression to credulity” on the other (1999, 218). The influence of postmodernism can be debated; certainly, the influence is not uniform and pervasive. Nor can we say whether this slightly schizoid approach to texts—part Oedipal rage, part Confucian deference—derives from postmodernism or not. It may matter to intellectual historians or philosophers, but it is of less consequence for workaday historians of Mexico or Latin America. Perhaps, once again, the intractability of the topic—submerged popular cultures—encourages a somewhat cavalier “source-mining” approach. If data are scarce, make the most of what you have, embellish as best you can, discount what does not fit. Perhaps we all do this, to a degree. Certainly, we have all been taught, long before graduate school, that texts should be viewed critically, interrogated, and forced to answer questions that were never put at the time.<sup>7</sup> Therefore

7. Consider Michel Vovelle’s use of wills to chart the rise of secularism in eighteenth-century France.

the new cultural history is merely updating old best practice. Whether such history is doing it well again depends on the question at hand and the quality of its treatment.

### *Interdisciplinary Influences*

My last diagnostic aspect of the new cultural history is something of a ragbag. We can define schools of thought by their interests and approaches but also by their mentors, ancestors, and consorts. In disciplinary terms, the new cultural history acknowledges a debt to anthropology, ethnography, and literary criticism (its odd relationship to rational-choice theory is rarely acknowledged and may be unwitting). Given the new cultural history's interest in culture, the subaltern, and perhaps the exotic, these disciplinary ties are unsurprising. It should be noted, however, that these relationships are quite variable. Plenty of ethnographic studies (of colonial Mexico, for example) fall outside the new cultural history category, including what is probably the most prolific and productive school, that associated with James Lockhart (Van Young 1999, 234).

When it comes to individual mentors and influences, the list is long, and any canon will be open to question. Obvious contenders would include Antonio Gramsci, E. P. Thompson, Michel Foucault, Roger Chartier, Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall, Jacques Derrida, Clifford Geertz, Pierre Bourdieu, Ranajit Guha, Mikhail Bakhtin, Jürgen Habermas, and James Scott (Lomnitz 1999, 368). The fact that they are a rather disparate lot, who by no means agreed with each other, is not necessarily a problem. After all, Marx cobbled together a pretty impressive and internally consistent system by blending German Hegelianism, French radical politics, and British political economy and adding some extra condiments. The problem of eclecticism arises, however, when the diversity and incompatibility of these sources go unrecognized: when sources are mined or plundered for their obiter dicta, with scant regard for consistency or logic.<sup>8</sup> Gramsci and Scott, for example, do not sit comfortably together. Foucault himself went through several stages and made rather a virtue of inconsistency (Megill 1985, 187, 191). Guha and his subalterns school have, I believe, fissured into disparate subgroups. Geertz's reflections on culture seem to serve as a point of departure for a good deal of the new cultural history ("webs of significance" is a favorite citation, "inscribe" a favorite verb). Yet his thoughts on the matter bear quotation. Geertz explicitly rejected the notion that "culture is composed of psychological structures by means of which individuals or groups of indi-

8. Some of the new cultural history follows a kind of scholastic methodology, which involves recurrent quotations, long and short, germane and tangential, drawn from the approved canon. Rhetorical force derives as much from canonical citation as from empirical evidence.

viduals guide their behavior." He criticized the notion that "culture is . . . a symbolic system [embodying] the core symbols around which it is organized, the underlying structures of which it is a surface expression, or the ideological principles upon which it is based." And he has argued for anthropology being a science and objectivity a worthy and practical goal (Geertz 1973, 11, 17, 24, 30).

#### STYLE AND SEMANTICS

Having sketched some of the supposed attributes of the new cultural history, I want to address a couple of criticisms. The first is familiar, the second less obvious. The first centers on rhetoric or style. Rhetoric is important for historiography in three respects. First, a good style can seduce the reader, while a bad style offends and wearies. Edward Gibbon is still read long after his substantive arguments about the Roman Empire have been superseded. E. P. Thompson's diatribe against Methodism convinces, in part, because of the force of the invective. Because historians presumably want to convince their readers, a good style helps. Second, as a feature of style, metaphors and other "tropes" can help convey the sense of the argument or narrative. This practice involves no literary sleight-of-hand: natural scientists sometimes use metaphors too. But metaphors have to be carefully chosen and controlled. Oddly, practitioners of the new cultural history often seem to be the least able to control their tropes and the most likely to mix their metaphors. It would be easy but invidious to cite examples. Certainly, the literary turn does not seem to have conferred literary skills.

The third failing is the most serious: the style of some of the new cultural history is so bad as to be obscure. As Haber rightly argues, clarity of exposition is the first requisite of good history, without which the reader is unsure of the sense and the critic is unable to test the propositions. There is no obvious reason why the new cultural history should prove deficient in this fashion, but I can think of some possible reasons. First (in a bid for instant popularity), I would suggest that the bulk of the new cultural history is written in the United States (an interesting fact that I will not pursue), and in the United States, academic command of good, clear, elegant English is not all it might be.<sup>9</sup> Second, the very quest for literary flourishes and embellishments can prove counterproductive. It is a case of "vaulting ambition o'erleaping itself," of prosaic mutton dressed up as literary lamb. But the third and most important contributor to stylistic opacity is the taste for jargon (Socolow 1999).

Now there is nothing wrong with jargon in some contexts. Academic disciplines, professions, enthusiasts of this sport or that hobby all resort to

9. Whether the United States is any worse than other English-speaking communities I would not presume to judge.

jargon, and for very good reason. Jargon offers a means to communicate fairly detailed information rapidly and precisely to an informed audience. It helps to maximize “consensibility” (Ziman 1991, 6). American football would be impossible without the dense jargon of the playbook; econometrics, the law, and nuclear physics are all similarly “encoded.” But the purpose of these jargons is to facilitate swift and precise communication. The jargon of the new cultural history is sometimes similarly justifiable. Even historians, whose discipline is less technical and whose terminology is (generally) less arcane, use their own argot, and with justification: cliometrics, prosopography, the “longue durée,” the “gentry controversy,” the “Brenner thesis,” and so on. Some of the staple terms and concepts of the new cultural history are inoffensive, useful, and perhaps essential: *hegemony*, *gender*, *ethnicity*, even *subaltern* (Lomnitz 1999, 375, n. 16). But practitioners of the new cultural history sometimes seem to muddy the waters unnecessarily. For example, defining hegemony as both “process” and “end point” seems to me gratuitous muddying (Mallon 1999, 339–40). Practitioners also procreate new tropes and neologisms with scant sense of parental responsibility. I collected a series of buzzwords that populate the new cultural history like drones in a hive:<sup>10</sup> *nested*, *negotiated*, *embedded*, *deconstructed*, *decentered*, *inscribed*, *nuanced*, *decoded*, *codified*, *transcoded*. Plus *modernity*, *space*, *trope*, *archaeology*, and *the body*. A new one in the literature, both pro- and anti-, whose sense I cannot fathom, is *inductivism*, which seems to mean something quite different from the practice of drawing conclusions from empirical data (Socolow 1999, 357). And structuralism is deemed “fundamentally materialist,” even in its anthropological form, which would seem to make Claude Lévi-Strauss a Marxist (Vaughan 1999, 287).

It would be tedious to review all these semantic drones. Some seem to me to derive from a kind of conceptual hypertrophy: an idea or concept possessed of a certain limited utility (even one that is known and familiar) rapidly acquires a kind of spurious superutility. It (supposedly) opens new vistas and reconfigures old problems. Like the latest dot.com stock, its reputation soars, and buyers queue to buy with bullish enthusiasm. The recent attention given to “space” (and “sites”) is a case in point. Again, this focus is not wholly new. The intellectual kinship of history and geography is ancient and was another key item in the *Annales* project. Architectural history is also an established discipline (recall the pioneering work of George Kubler). Mexican historiography is familiar with the notion of space (Vaughan 1999, 276, n. 18), and there is every reason to continue this fruitful association. Yet the word *space* in the lexicon of the new cultural history, sometimes suffers a kind of runaway inflation: it is churned out promiscuously, like Weimar Reichsmarks, to the point where it loses specificity and hence value. Some-

10. I chose that “trope” because the buzzwords in question seem to me to be largely redundant: they take up space and claim attention out of all proportion to their semantic contribution.

times the word denotes merely the fact that because events happen in four-dimensional time and space, every event has a spatial location. Sometimes, *space* is used in ways that are part literal (physical spaces), part metaphorical (political openings, cultural opportunities): hence the secular, civil spaces opened up by liberal anticlerical reforms, such as the 1856 Ley Lerdo (Vaughan 1999, 251). This usage seems reasonable, even though the mixture of literal and metaphorical may be potentially confusing. In other contexts, however, *space* becomes (literally) a blank, an empty pigeonhole in which to slot anyone and anything (Haber 1999, 325).

So too with “the body,” the vogue for which no doubt derives in large measure from Foucault.<sup>11</sup> Renewed interest in the body as both a physical item of research (medical history) and as a social or political metaphor (à la Ernst Kantorowicz) is perfectly acceptable, even welcome. But again inflation takes off. Just as things happen in space, so people are bodies. By a kind of *reductio ad absurdum*, any number of processes can be related back to the body, simply because processes involve corporeal persons. When Ana María Alonso concludes that “power inserts itself into bodies and selves and finds its alibi in the very ‘natures’ it configures,” she is (I think) making the reasonable and unoriginal point that power is “not just external, but internal, not just repressive but also productive,” which could be taken as a gloss on the Gramscian notion of hegemony (Alonso 1995, 237). But why this Cartesian split between bodies and selves? I take *selves* to mean minds or identities or psyches, what in the old days were called “souls.” Hegemonic power “inserts itself” into minds by creating or fostering a belief in its legitimacy, justice, or (in Scott’s “thin sense”) inevitability (Scott 1990, 72). How does power “insert itself into bodies,” unless we mean by direct physical punishment of the kind that Foucault delighted to write about? Direct physical punishment, however, is not hegemonic power but brute coercion, in the style of the *ancien régime*. Did the Argentine Dirty War indicate the hegemony of the military regime? French, in glossing Foucault and Alonso, refers to sundry “dispersed sites” of power, including “the hospital, the university and the school.” “No overarching general theory,” he states (following David Harvey), “explains what happens at each site.” “The one thing they all have in common . . . is the human body—the site at which all forms of repression are ultimately registered” (French 1999, 262). Most readers of this journal work or study in universities. Universities certainly have power structures. They even have power-hungry would-be despots. But when did anyone last experience a deployment of university power—a resort to repression—that was “registered” on the body, that is, which involved physical coercion? As a Mexicanist, I am well aware that universities and repression are no strangers to each other. But U.S. and Euro-

11. This is true even though earlier studies (perhaps fuddy-duddy in comparison) pioneered this approach, such as Kantorowicz (1957).

pean universities are a different matter, and I have yet to see tenure committees resorting to the hot tongs.

"Space" and "the body" are big organizing concepts—or as I would suggest, disorganizing concepts. The rest of the new cultural history vocabulary, the verbs in particular, carry less conceptual clout. But they can certainly bore and confuse. Examples are the varieties of *code*: *decode*, *encode*, *transcode*. *Code* is a particularly slippery term because it can mean two things that are almost diametrically opposed. A cryptographic code, a cypher, is meant to disguise information; a legal or criminal code is meant to publicize and clarify it (whether either does the job is a different matter). Hence, talk of "coded" and "encoded" information begs an elementary question that no one seems ready to answer: is the information discreet, disguised, and arcane; or open, public, and accessible? Context will often answer the question, but it arises only because historians persist in using a term they have not thought through. Likewise, *decenter* has become a generic label for *revise*, *rethink*, *subvert*, and *reconceptualize* (usually by means of questioning old "metanarratives"). *Inscribe* (owed to Geertz?) is a fancy way of saying *write*; and *negotiate*, as in collective groups "negotiating" with the state, has spread beyond its initial and perfectly acceptable meaning to embrace all manner of contestation and conflict that go far beyond negotiation in the conventional sense. *Archaeology* (from Foucault) refers to research into something that the author wishes to suggest is unusually intractable and for which the researcher perhaps claims special credit. Finally, *complex* is used to describe anything that the author has difficulty grasping; it is often a way of seeming to say something measured, judicious, and even flattering to the referent ("the peasants possessed a complex, dynamic, and creative culture") when the author cannot think of anything else to say. It is safe, and it sounds, well, sound. Again, no attempt is ever made to assess complexity in quantitative or other terms. It is a throwaway line. Yet when used sparingly, *complexity* can be a useful and meaningful concept. Mexico is more complex than Michoacán. I would urge a moratorium on *complex* save in those proven cases where it means something and can be substantiated.

These semantic points are not new—I am in part repeating Socolow (1999). I suspect, furthermore, that they are points to which some will readily assent and that others will peremptorily reject, resulting in no conversion, no meeting of minds. But I would finally ask the question, why have semantics become so important? Historians have often argued over meanings: some of the major historical controversies (over the rise of the gentry or the origins of the Second World War) have hinged on the meanings of particular words (*gentry*, *origins*, *plans*, *blueprints*). But the participants in those debates, for example, A. J. P. Taylor and Hugh Trevor-Roper, wrote the same kind of English and in the case of Taylor and Trevor-Roper, wrote it very well. The debate concerned specific words, not a recurring vocabulary. Maybe the combined literary and linguistic turns have brought this upon



us. But if so, it is ironic that “turns” that promised greater appreciation of language seem to have produced debasement. Mallon, recognizing a problem, justifies the use of “prohibitive language, abstract categories, and broad-ranging claims . . . as battering rams against the fortress of perceived positivism” (Mallon 1999, 337).<sup>12</sup> Yet I am not sure that the dull and repetitive thud of new cultural history is likely to batter down any walls, although it may help put the defenders to sleep.

I am more inclined to think that the jargon in question serves less to clarify and inform—as “good jargon” should—and more to flag and demarcate. The recurrent use of certain buzzwords marks a kind of territorial “space” (metaphor).<sup>13</sup> Buzzwords function like Fredrik Barth’s “symbolic ‘border guards’ and ‘boundary mechanisms’ that separate and differentiate social groups in their attitudes and perceptions” (Smith 1986, 10). Deploying the jargon is like beating the bounds of the village at Rogationtide: it resembles a Masonic handshake or recalls a dog pissing on the perimeter of its territory.<sup>14</sup>

Such semantic signaling is not, of course, confined to new cultural historians. Stephen Haber, seeking to rub his opponents’ noses in their methodological ignorance, reminds them that they have overlooked available “tests for normality and heteroskedasticity . . . , collinearity . . . , and autocorrelation” (Haber 1999, 314). He is, I think, making a valid point, but I suspect he is also flaunting his methodological expertise with a view not only to confounding his opponents but also to impressing his economist colleagues.<sup>15</sup> But if semantic signalling is common, it seems to be a particularly salient feature of the new cultural history. This association may have something to do with the linguistic-literary turn, and it may also represent the functional response of a new, or self-styled new, school that is trying to define, demarcate, and defend itself. However explicable, the trend unfortunately encourages waffle, imprecision, and confusion. Metaphors get hopelessly mixed, and prose becomes a collage of recycled dross. As George Orwell wrote in 1946, “As soon as certain topics are raised, the concrete melts into the abstract and no one seems able to think of turns of speech that are not hackneyed: prose consists less and less of *words* chosen for the

12. Does the word *perceived* imply that the fortress may be a myth, like Quixote’s windmills?

13. I am not sure I would wish to follow Socolow and call it “pomo-speak” (Socolow 1999, 359).

14. The debate in question has elicited some red-blooded metaphors, and this one is by no means the most offensive.

15. Economic historians of cliometric persuasion have a deep need to be valued by their economist colleagues and a corresponding fear of being bracketed with “soft,” “impressionistic,” and “anecdotal” historians, new cultural historians worst of all. It would be tempting to explore the causality of this entire debate in these terms. But as with peasants, I am not sure we can “open windows into men’s souls,” especially those of economists.

sake of their meaning and more and more of phrases tacked together like the sections of a prefabricated henhouse" (Orwell 1962, 145, his emphasis).

#### THE PERILS OF POSITIVISM

Finally, let me turn to the other side. It may seem that I have aligned myself unequivocally with the Haber critique, but that would not be quite true. Some of the new cultural history is good, innovative stuff (often in spite of its terminology). And the influence of the new cultural history—defined in polemical Haberman terms as lax, politically motivated, postmodern rant—is probably less than he supposes.<sup>16</sup> The supposed kinship between the new cultural history and dependency theory, which Haber raises in his book introduction but not his *HAHR* article, is doubly mistaken: first, because many of his supposed *dependista* historians are nothing of the sort (Haber 1997b, 24, n. 30); and second, because the new cultural history, to the extent that it conforms to the loosely postmodern norm, has little time for any grand theory or "metanarrative" like dependency (whether that is a good or bad thing is another matter). The problem of political partisanship is something of a red herring: it may raise a stink, but it does not prevent us from reading, evaluating, and even benefiting from supposedly politically partisan historiography. And it is hard to establish whether proponents of the new cultural history really are "ambivalent about the notion that there are objective facts," such that "anything goes" (Haber 1999, 310). Most of them, to my knowledge, have not penned a forthright methodological mission statement. Mallon declares in her riposte to Haber that "the debate is not about the existence of objective facts" but rather whether we can "determine [facts] *regardless* of the subjectivities" of authors and sources (Mallon 1999, 333, her emphasis). Would Haber assert that facts can be determined regardless of subjectivities? His advice that we should "systematically constrain subjective beliefs from influencing substantive conclusions" seems to imply that he would not (1999, 330). On the other hand, Mallon denies that "the much-vaunted scientific method is the best way to assess most interpretations," and she writes of the need to distinguish fact from fiction, "even as we abandon the claim to science and accept the inevitably blurry line between objective and subjective" (Mallon 1999, 350, 345). In the absence of clearer statements, we would have to infer the corrosive subjectivism of the new cultural history from the work itself. In many cases, it would be difficult to tell whether supposed deficiencies (of the kind that Haber criticizes) are the product of a consciously subjectivist philosophy, of the authors' sheer woolly-mindedness, or of Haber's own suspicious mind.

While Haber is, I think, right to criticize the conceptual imprecision and laxity of language evident in a good deal of the new cultural history,

16. Here I agree with Van Young (1999, 217–18).

his call for a more scientific approach raises the question of what a “scientific approach” would be. In his *HHR* piece, Haber stresses the need for “logic, reason, and clear specification” (Haber 1999, 330). This broad recommendation, consonant with the classic statements of Max Weber (1964, 9) and Geertz (1973), seems entirely appropriate. Any historian who roundly rejected it (and presumably argued for illogicality, unreason, and vague or nonexistent specification) should indeed be consigned to the mythical asylum of loony postmodernists. But does a “scientific approach” demand more? In his preface to his economic history *How Latin America Fell Behind*, Haber makes a pitch for “the dispassionate analysis of systematically gathered quantitative data” as one of his key desiderata (Haber 1997b, 7). That is fine so long as there is no presumption that quantitative data are superior to qualitative, or that topics that lend themselves to quantitative data should be preferred. Thus, *scientific* cannot be equated with *quantitative* (Ziman 1991, 14). Numbers are all very nice because they afford precision and facilitate comparison. But there is a vast universe of history that cannot be quantified, either because the data do not exist or because the concepts (including many in the new cultural history) are inherently nonquantifiable. Can hegemony be measured? How do we calibrate identity? The precision demanded by terms such as these is conceptual and semantic, not numerical. Economists and economic historians often display ingenuity in seeking numerical proxies for elusive categories. Sometimes they work and sometimes they do not. In this respect, quantitative history is no different from qualitative: there is good and bad, successful and unsuccessful. The proof of the pudding is in the eating.

Should history generate “testable hypotheses”? At the risk of seeming to caricature Oxford philosophy, I would say that depends on what we mean by *test* and by *hypotheses*. On the first count, historiography is clearly not experimental, so historians cannot test a hypothesis about the Mexican Revolution by rerunning it. That has no bearing on the scientific or nonscientific status of history because there are social sciences that can usefully experiment (such as psychology), and there are natural sciences that cannot (such as geology and cosmology). We can, however, test a hypothesis by collecting data, framing a clear argument, and submitting it for consideration to experts in the field, which is roughly the way natural scientists proceed. It may be harder to achieve consensus in the historical field, although we can all agree on some objective facts: that Díaz fell in 1911, that Zapata came from Morelos, that the Constitution of 1917 included a provision for land reform. But the procedure for prompting debate and seeking consensus does not differ radically.<sup>17</sup> Last, as regards the testing of hypotheses, Haber’s invocation of the “Popperian falsificationist epistemology” seems

17. This point applies to both of Haber’s supposed “dominant paradigms in the writing of history”: the “social scientific” and the “traditional” (Haber 1999, 310–11).

to me to be mistaken. I do not think it works in practice even in the natural sciences (Ziman 1991, 35). It certainly does not work in historiography. Neither natural nor social scientists spend a great deal of their time trying to falsify hypotheses. Some “hypotheses” are taken for granted, that is, they are close to axioms (such as Newtonian and Einsteinian mechanics, for most purposes). Some are exposed to both falsificationist and verificationist tests. In history, we do not go around looking for evidence that Díaz fell in 1910, or that Zapata came from Yucatán, or that the Constitution of 1917 said nothing about land reform. Even when we try to frame broader or higher-level hypotheses (for example, the Mexican Revolution was a “peasant war”), there is no way a single evidential bolt from the blue is going to falsify (or prove) such a contention. We should weigh the evidence for and against, but there is nothing Popperian about that familiar forensic principle. Indeed, it is hard to see why Haber, hardheaded cliometrician that he is, should be so enamored of Karl Popper, who believed that “history . . . has no unifying theories,” that the “laws”—or generalizations—of history “are practically without interest and totally unable to bring order into the subject matter,” and that “in the absence of specifically universal historical laws, most historical explanations are merely interpretations which cannot be tested” (Leff 1969, 81–82).

Finally, what of “hypotheses”? I do not think Haber’s two paradigms help much.<sup>18</sup> Narrative or “traditional history” contains hypotheses, both explicit and implicit, like discussions of individual motives, usually those of Great Men, or implied causal relationships, often buried in narrative. Economists, as Donald McCloskey has emphasized, spend a lot of time telling stories (McCloskey 1990). What is different, apart from the greater transparency of social-scientific hypothesizing, is that “traditional” hypotheses are usually of a lower level than social-scientific ones. Explaining why Caesar crossed the Rubicon is rather different from explaining the decline of slavery in the Late Roman Empire. Likewise, explaining why Porfirio Díaz gave “the Creelman interview” in 1908 differs from explaining the rationale of Mexican debt peonage. But these are differences of degree; they do not presuppose some radically different methodology.

While questioning this schizoid approach to history, I would also reject Haber’s contention that “the goal of social scientific history is to test theories that make general statements about human behavior” (Haber 1999, 311). I have two reasons for this rejection, one solid and “objective” and the other rather more loosely subjective. First, I am very doubtful as to what those “general statements about human behavior” might be. We may be able to generalize about Roman behavior, or Roman slave owners’ behavior, or Roman slave owners’ behavior in the Late Empire—or about their Por-

18. Judging by the source, Robert Fogel and Geoffrey Elton, it looks like a schizoid theory, produced by a very odd couple.

firian counterparts. But “human behavior”? Whatever constants might appear under that heading are a matter for biologists and anthropologists (or biological anthropologists), not historians (or cultural anthropologists). To posit “general statements about human behavior” seems to go the way of Collingwood’s “crypto-history,” which is not altogether surprising in Haber’s case, given that Collingwood’s prime example of crypto-history was “so-called classical economics” that “describes a certain set of transient historical conditions under the belief that it was stating eternal truths” (Collingwood 1999, 244).

Second, I do not consider it the chief task of history to test general statements or theories (that is, high-level hypotheses such as inflation follows the money supply or revolutions pass through discrete and patterned stages). Testing such hypotheses falls to other social scientists, economists or sociologists in these cases. They profit from our historical findings, and we as historians may pick up on their conclusions and see if they help us in our historical inquiries. Roughly, therefore, some social scientists produce higher-level hypotheses (including “grand theory”) that historians can, if they wish, consume, while historians produce lower-level hypotheses (sometimes called “empirical findings” or “myopic nit-picking”) that social scientists can, if they wish, consume. The activities are different in scale and, one hopes, occasionally mutually supportive. Certainly ahistorical social scientists are a liability, as are historians irrationally hostile to social science. But the methodology—framing clear statements and hypotheses while adducing clear evidence—is essentially the same. It is against these criteria that the new cultural history, like any history, should be judged. I am inclined to agree with Haber that the new cultural history, when put to the test, fails more often than it should. That does not mean that the enterprise should be abandoned or that the only alternative is a narrow, number-crunching, positivistic historiographical equivalent of Thomas Carlyle’s “dismal science.” Fortunately, we do not have to choose between the pomo funny farm and the positivistic prison. There are plenty of green fields in between.

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