

Comptes rendus / Book Reviews

Victoria E. Bonnell and Lynn Hunt, eds. — *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999. Pp. xi, 350.

No one in the human sciences today can avoid coming to grips with the idea of culture. It insinuates itself everywhere, in practically every discipline. In the past decade, one of the most exciting and oft-quoted collections of essays on method and theory has been *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), edited by Lynn Hunt. These essays have become standard reading for a generation of graduate students, a way to acquaint them with the field. Senior scholars use the book just as much. At the same time, a number of sociologists have made their own cultural turn. One of the best is Victoria Bonnell, whose *Iconography of Power* (1997), a study of Soviet political posters, has provided some of the sharper recent insights on the subject of visual culture and state power in the twentieth century. Now Bonnell and Hunt have teamed up to edit a new collection on cultural theory. The essays in *Beyond the Cultural Turn* all evaluate what was gained and lost in the last 20 years of writing on culture.

Most of the essays in one way or another ruminate on the previous generation of cultural analysis, one often associated with the thinking of Clifford Geertz. Building on Geertz's breakthrough essays, a whole generation of cultural analysts read rituals as "texts" and unpacked the "thick" meaning of surface events. Cultural norms, in general, were seen as shaping behaviour. If Geertz, more than any other single individual, provided the frame for so much cultural analysis, his ideas have been under sharp attack since the mid-1980s. The authors in *Beyond the Cultural Turn* are acutely aware of this criticism. They look to a variety of trends in the human sciences — ranging from deconstruction to subaltern studies to the preoccupation with the body — and ask how these new ways of thinking affect the culture concept.

There are a number of excellent essays in this book. William Sewall, Jr.'s essay on the various notions of the culture concept is an exceptionally good introduction to current thought on the subject. It covers recent literature lucidly and adds an intelligent argument of its own. Karen Hattunen's essay on narrativity is her usual performance, insightful and carefully thought out. She argues that postmodern

reflexivity has influenced what historians study far more than how they write, for historians, in the end, “remain more or less happily caught in the web of narrative” (p. 177). The editors’ own introduction does a fine job of laying out the historical background in history and sociology that led both to the initial turn and to this new rethinking. Jerrold Seigal surveys recent thinking on the self, providing pithy and insightful comparisons of Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, and Derrida.

There is a definite theoretical centre to this collection. The authors, first of all, overwhelmingly accept the last decade’s criticisms of the earlier culture-project. Yes, those ideas of culture idealized norms and values to the exclusion of more nitty-gritty explanations for behaviour. They tended to ignore power. They assumed that cultures were neat and packaged into integrated wholes and that cultures had a “natural” tendency to try to smooth out conflict. While accepting all of these criticisms, however, the authors in *Beyond the Cultural Turn* do not want to throw out the culture-concept altogether. Instead, they argue for a more supple approach to the subject. “Practice” is a central word in many of the essays. Practices refer to the sorts of things people actually do from day to day. For someone like me, characteristic cultural practices would be teaching classes, writing book reviews, scrounging for dinner for the kids. Culture might be thought of as patterned action, but thinking of culture in this way does not mean that one ignores reading meaning. Instead, the two should be blended together. Sonya Rose, for example, calls for a “more flexible approach to symbolizing, one that begins with the idea that cultural practices and patterned social practices are indelibly interwoven” (p. 228). Looking at culture as practice actually allows us to see a more intimate connection between action and meaning than is revealed by a sense of culture that simply assumes things happen because cultural attitudes so dictate. It can allow us to see choices made in action, help define gender and racial differences, show how cultural meanings constantly shift at the boundaries, and explain how culture is connected to authority and power.

This sort of summary invariably sounds too sweeping. The authors, as a group, are generally sceptical that anyone, including themselves, can provide the “key” to social analysis. Rather, they pragmatically look to blend the best insights of symbolic anthropology, deconstruction, the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu, and various other recent writings on power. It is a point of view that, according to the editors, is both “resolutely empirical” and “rejecting positions that claim to explain either everything (as the positivist and Marxist paradigms once hoped to do) or nothing at all (as postmodernists sometimes seem to imply)” (p. 25).

In the end, these essays do not really move “beyond” the cultural turn at all. The title of this excellent collection is a misnomer. These essays reflect something else: the maturation of the cultural turn, or, less invitingly, the cultural turn now middle-aged. The culture concept had become flabby and lazy, trying to do too much with too little effort. The middle-aged paunch, the flabby thighs, could no longer be ignored. But as these authors tell it, all is manageable. There is no mid-life crisis for culture here, as there has been for some anthropologists more resolutely hostile to the idea. The authors in *Beyond the Cultural Turn* do not toss out culture for flashy deconstructive sports cars or elaborate body piercings, courtesy of cultural studies.

Instead, they would have the culture-concept respond to middle age more cautiously. There might be a bit of new makeup from Judy Butler, and the minivan might be gone thanks to Foucault, but for the most part these writers want the culture-concept to get to the gym, get to work, and lose the flab. Theirs is a leaner, more wiry sense of culture: a culture-concept ready to do more work. It's not a bad way at all to manage middle age.

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G rard Bouchard et Yvan Lamonde, dir. — *La nation dans tous ses  tats. Le Qu bec en comparaison*, Montr al, Harmattan, 1997, 350 p.

La collection des communications faites en 1996 lors du colloque de l'Institut inter-universitaire de recherches sur les populations intitul  « Mythes fondateurs et citoyennet . Perspectives compar es » veut attirer l'attention sur « l'id e et le fait national dans toute leur diversit , sous diverses latitudes et   diverses p riodes » et sur les promesses d' clairages neufs qu'offre l'approche comparative pour l' tude de la « collectivit  qu b coise » (p. 337).

La teneur des essais varie, de l'article pol mique et personnel du sociologue Gary Caldwell sur la vacuit  de la notion canadienne de citoyennet  promue par « les nationalistes pan-canadiens n o-lib raux » (p. 309), au rappel th orique « [d]es connaissances et [d]es d bats entourant les formes historiques de la "nation" » (p. 312) sign  par l'historienne de l'immigration et des relations interethniques au Qu bec Denyse Helly, en passant par la lecture des synth ses sur l'histoire des « consciences nationales » latino-am ricaines propos e par le directeur-fondateur de l'Institut, G rard Bouchard, et la revue de l'histoire intellectuelle des conceptions nationales latino-am ricaines  crite par le politologue montr alais Andr  J. B langer.

Le recueil contient des monographies originales. L' tude compar e que propose Ronald Rudin de la comm moration des r voltes de 1798 en Irlande et de la fondation de Qu bec en 1908  claire non seulement l' pisode qu b cois, mais il remet en question l'historiographie de « lieux de m moire » en attirant l'attention sur la diversit  des objets de comm moration et sur la nature conflictuelle des motivations entourant une m me c r monie. Son excursion irlandaise montre comment les relations entre clerg  catholique et nationalisme n'adoptent pas la nature symbiotique   laquelle les historiens du cas qu b cois sont habitu s. Attentif aux d bats historiographiques dans les deux pays, Rudin montre   quel point un travail rigoureux de comparaison exige patience et discernement. L'examen conjugu  du r le de l' glise catholique en Pologne et au Qu bec depuis le XIX^e si cle men e par Genevi ve Zubrzycki, chercheure   l'Universit  de Chicago, se termine par la constatation que si la marginalisation du clerg  men e par le gouvernement de la R volution tranquille se retrouve dans la Pologne d'apr s le communisme, le ph nom ne ne semble pas irr vocable, une possibilit  qui appelle   son tour une nouvelle s rie d'explications sur le Qu bec. Enfin, l'analyse fine de l' volution de la nature des all geances   la France et   la Grande-Bretagne au sein de l' lite politique francophone entre