The New Cultural History
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Texts, Printing, Readings

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Abstract and Keywords

This chapter presents a good introduction to Roger Chartier's, The Cultural Uses of Print in Early Modern France. Fernando de Rojas' prologue clearly indicates the central tension of every history of reading—and this is why he is worthy of consideration. Reading is a creative practice, which invents singular meanings and significations that are not reducible to the intentions of authors of texts or producers of books. Rojas also implies that the history of genres, both textual and typographical, could provide the underpinnings for the history of discourse as formulated by Michel Foucault. Printing lowers the cost of the book's manufacture and shortens the time of production. Cultural history might find a new niche at the crossroads of textual criticism, the history of the book, and cultural sociology.

Keywords: printing, reading, Fernando de Rojas, Michel Foucault, cultural history, textual criticism, book, cultural sociology

In the prologue to his *Celestina*, published in Saragossa in 1507, Fernando de Rojas asked himself why the work had been understood, appreciated, and used in so many different ways since its first appearance in 1499 at Burgos.[1] The question is simple: how can a text that is the same for everyone who reads it become an “instrument of discord and battle between its readers, creating divergences between them, with each reader having an opinion depending on his own taste?” (instrumento de lid o contienda a sus lectores para ponerlos en diferencias, dando cada una sentencia sabre ella a sabor de su voluntad?) I will use this question, formulated by a classical author about an old text, as my point of departure in delineating basic hypotheses

for a history of practices of reading. These practices will be defined to include relationships to printed objects (which are by no means limited to books) and to the texts that readers thus encounter.

For Rojas, the contrasting receptions of the text he presented to the public are due first to the readers themselves, whose **(p.155)** contradictory judgments can be traced not only to their diversity of characters and dispositions (“tantas y tan differentes condiciones”) but also to their multiplicity of abilities and expectations. Abilities and expectations are differentiated according to age: *niños, mozos, mancebos, viejos* (little children, schoolboys, young fellows, old men) do not approach writing in the same way; some do not know how to read, while others have no desire to or no longer can. Abilities and expectations are also differentiated according to the highly distinct uses readers make of the same text.

Rojas notes at least three readings of the *tragicomedia*. The first focuses not on the story as a whole but rather on certain detached episodes. It reduces the text to the status of a *cuentode camino* (travelers' tale), to a story told for passing time, much like the one that Sancho tells his master in part One, chapter 20, of *Don Quixote*. The second reading retains from the tragicomedy nothing more than easily memorized formulas, those *donaires y refranes* (pleasantries and proverbs) that provide cliches and ready-made expressions. These formulas are collected in the course of a reading that establishes absolutely no intimate relationship, no individual rapport, between the reader and what is read. To these practices, which mutilate the work and miss its true meaning, the author opposes the correct, profitable reading. This third reading is the one that grasps the text in its complex totality without reducing it to mere episodes of a plot or a collection of impersonal maxims. Those who read the *comedia* properly “will understand its essential matter and profit from it, they will be amused at its wit, and they will store away in their memories the maxims and sayings of the philosophers, in order, when the proper time comes, to use them to advantage” (coligen la surna para su provecho, ríen 10 donoso, las sentencias y diehos de filósofos guardan en su memoria para trasponer en lugares convenibles a sus aetasy propósitos). They thus put into operation a plural reading that distinguishes the comic from the serious, and that extracts the moral that best illuminates each person's life, whose “first person” is applicable to everyone.

In its way, Rojas's prologue clearly indicates the central tension of every history of reading—and this is why he is worthy **(p.156)** of our consideration.

Should we place at the center of such a history the text given to be read or the reader who takes it up? The reader is, in effect, always thought by the author (or the commentator) to be necessarily subjugated to a single meaning, to a correct interpretation, to an authorized reading. To understand reading, in this view, would be above all to identify the discursive arrangements that constrain it and that impose on it a signification that is intrinsic and independent of any deciphering. But in thus postulating the absolute efficacy of the text tyrannically to dictate the meaning of the work to the reader, do we not in fact deny all autonomy in the act of reading? The latter is virtually absorbed and annihilated in both the explicit protocols and the implicit devices that are intended to regulate or control it. In this manner, reading is thought of as inscribed in the text, all effect automatically produced by the very strategy of writing peculiar to the work or its genre.

Nevertheless, experience shows that reading is not simply submission to textual machinery. Whatever it may be, reading is a creative practice, which invents singular meanings and significations that are not reducible to the intentions of authors of texts or producers of books. Reading is a response, a labor, or, as Michel de Certeau puts it, an act of "poaching" *(braconnage)*.[2] But how do we make sense of this living, personal, striking experience? If each reading by each reader is actually a secret, singular creation, is it still possible to organize this indistinguishable plurality of individual acts according to shared regularities? Is it even possible to envision knowing anything certain about it? How can we consider at one and the same time the irreducible freedom of readers and the constraints meant to curb this freedom?

This fundamental tension runs through literary criticism, which is torn between two fundamentally different approaches. On the one hand there are the approaches that deduce the reading or the reader from the text's own internal structures; on the other there are approaches—such as the phenomenology of the act of reading or "reception aesthetics"—that attempt to **(p.157)** locate individual or shared determinations which govern modes of interpretation from outside of the text.[3] Tile tension is also central in philosophical endeavors that, like the work of Ricoeur, consider how the narrative configurations that form stories (of fiction or history) remodel the private consciousness and the temporal experience of subjects. In such a perspective, the act of reading is strategically situated at the point of "application" *(Anwendurzg*, in the hermeneutic lexicon) where the world of the text meets that of the reader, where the interpretation of the work ends in the interpretation of the self. Reading is to be understood as an

“appropriation” of the text, both because it actualizes the text's semantic potential and because it creates a mediation for knowledge of the self through comprehension of the text.[4]

In what way can a historical perspective help to resolve the contradictions in literary theory or the difficulties of phenomenological philosophy, which while defining reading as a concrete act does not consider pertinent the multiple variations that at different times and places organize its contrasting forms? History offers two approaches that are necessarily linked: reconstructing the diversity of older readings from their sparse and multiple traces, and recognizing the strategies by which authors and publishers tried to impose an orthodoxy or a prescribed reading on the text. Among these strategies, some are explicit and rely on discourse (ill prefaces, prologues, commentaries, notes), and others implicit, making of the text a machinery that by necessity must impose a comprehension held to be legitimate. Guided or trapped, the reader invariably finds himself inscribed in the text, but in turn the text is itself inscribed variously in its different readers. Thus it is necessary to bring together two perspectives that are often disjointed: on the one hand, the study of the way in which texts and the printed works that convey them organize the prescribed reading; **(p.158)** and on the other, the collection of actual readings tracked down in individual confessions or reconstructed on the level of communities of readers—those “interpretive communities” whose members share the same reading styles and the same strategies of interpretation.[5]

Let us return to our Spanish master. For. Rojas. the diverse opinions on the *Celestina* are to be linked first to the many differences in abilities, expectations, and predispositions of its readers. But the opinions also depend on how the readers “read” the text. It is clear that Rojas addresses a reader who reads the prologue to himself, in silence, in private. Yet not all readings of the tragicomedy are of this nature: "So then, when ten persons congregate to hear this play there will naturally be a variety of reactions among them. Who will deny that there will arise dissension about something which may be understood in so many different ways?" (Así que cuando diez personas se juntaren a oír esta comedia, en quien quepa esta diferencia de condiciones, come suele acaecer, ¿quién negará que haya contienda en cosa que de tantas maneras se entienda?). Ten listeners gathered around a text read out loud: here “reading” is actually listening to speech that is read. The practice was common, for in the edition of 1500 the “corrector de la irnpresian” tells how the text should be read aloud. One of the stanzas that he adds to the work is entitled “On the way to read this

tragicomedy" (Dice el modo que se ha de tener leyendo esta tragicomedia). The "lector" he envisions must know how to vary the tone, play the parts of all the characters, convey asides by speaking through his teeth—in short, mobilize "a thousand arts and methods" (mil artes y modos) of reading in order to capture the attention of "los oyentes," the listeners. Along with the *Celestina*, other texts such as pastorals or chivalric romances are the favored texts of these readings, where, for a few people, the spoken word offers a written text even to those who could read it themselves.

Rojas's notation opens several paths of inquiry. The first concerns the sociability of reading, a fundamental counterpoint to the privatization of the act of reading, to its retreat into the intimacy **(p.159)** of solitude. From the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, reading out loud survived in the tavern and the coach, the salon and the café, in high society and in the household. This history remains to be written.[6]. A second path leads to the analysis of the relationship between textuality and orality. To be sure, between the culture of the tale and of storytelling on the one hand and that of writing on the other the differences are great, and aptly characterized by Cervantes in the passage from *Don Quixote* cited above.[7] To pass the time while standing gllard one night, Sancho undertakes to tell stories to his master. But his method—interrupting the account with commentaries and digressions that result in repetition upon repetition and that project the narrator into the story and relate the story back to the present situation-makes his listener wildly impatient: "If thou tellest thy tale in this manner, cried Don Quixote, repeating every circumstance twice over, it will not be finished these two days; proceed therefore, connectedly, and rehearse it, like a man of understanding: otherwise, thou hadst better hold thy tongue" (Si desa manera cuentas tu cuento, Sancho—dijo don Quijote—, repitiendo dos veces lo que vas diciendo, no acabarás ell dos días; dilo seguidamente, y cuéntalo como hombre de entendimiento, y si no, no digas nada.) A man of books par excellence, even to crazy excess, Don Quixote becomes irritated by a story that lacks the form of those he ordinarily reads; Quixote really wants Sancho's recitation to conform to the rules of linear, objective, hierarchical writing. The distance between these expectations of a reader and the oral practice as Sancho learned it is insurmountable: "In my country, answered Sancho, all the old stories are told in this manner, neither can I tell it in any other; nor is it civil in your worship, to desire I should change the custom" (De la misma manera que yo lo cuento—respondi6 Sancho—se cuentan en mi tierra todas las consejas, **(p.160)** y yo no sé contarlo de otra, ni es bien que vuestra merced me pide que haga usos nuevos). Resigned, Don Quixote reluctantly agrees to listen to this text that is so different from

those contained in his precious books: “Take thy own way, said the Knight, and since it is the will of fate, that I should hear thee, pray go on” (Di como quisieres—respondió don Quijote—; que pues la suerte quiere que no pueda dejar de escucharte, prosigue).

The discrepancy, then, between the spoken recitation and the printed script is great. We must bear in mind, however, that the links between the two are numerous. For one thing, formulas of oral culture are often inscribed in texts destined for a large public. *Occasionnels* (ephemera, yet having perhaps a longer life than the English term implies) that use in written form the storytellers' methods of recitation or the variations introduced in the popular editions. of fairy tales by borrowing from folkloric traditions are good examples of these joinings of the spoken with the printed word.[8] Moreover, this continuing dependence assures the return of multiple texts into oral forms, where they are destined to be read aloud: for example, in monastic. exercises or preaching, in reading for pleasure or family teaching.

But for Rojas there is another reason that could confound the understanding of the text he offered to his readers: the unfortunate intervention of the printers themselves. He in effect deplores the additions they felt they could make, against his will and against the recommendations of the ancients: “The very printers have wounded the text: they have put unnecessary headings and summaries at the beginning of the acts, which was a custom not followed by ancient authors” (Que aun los impresores han dado sus pinturas, poniendo rubricas a sumarios al principia de cada acto, narrando en breve lo que dentro contenia: una cosa bien escusada, segun lo que los antiguos escritores usaron).

(p.161) This observation can establish a fundamental distinction between the text and print, between the work of writing and that of making the book. As an American bibliographer justly observed, “Whatever they may do, authors do *not* write books. Books are not written at all. They are manufactured by scribes and other artisans, by mechanics and other engineers, and by printing presses and other machines.”[9] In contrast to the representation of the ideal, abstract text—which is stable because it is detached from all materiality, a representation elaborated by literature itself—it is essential to remember that no text exists outside of the support that enables it to be read; any comprehension of a writing, no matter what kind it is, depends on the forms in which it reaches its reader. Thus a sorting out of two types of apparatus becomes necessary, between those entailed by the putting into text, the strategies of writing, the intentions of the “author,” and those

resulting from the manufacture of the book or publication, produced by editorial decision or through workshop procedures, which are aimed at readers or readings that may not be at all like those the author intended, This gap, which is the space in which meaning is constructed, has too often been overlooked, not only by the classical approaches, which consider the work itself as a pure text whose typographical forms do not matter, but also by reception theory *(Rezeptionstheorie)*, which postulates a direct, immediate relationship between the "text" and the reader, between the "textual signals" used by the author and the "horizon of expectation" of those he addresses.

Here, it seems to me, we find an illegitimate simplification of the process by which works take on meaning. Restoration of its true complexity requires consideration of the close-knit relationship among three poles: the text itself, the object that conveys the text, and the act that grasps it. Variations in this triangular relationship produce in effect changes in meaning, which can be organized in a few models. First, there is the case of a stable text presented for reading in printed forms that themselves change. In studying the variations in the printing of **(p.162)** William Congreve's plays in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, D. F. MacKenzie was able to show how apparently small and limited typographical transformations (the shift from a format of quarto to octavo, the use of an ornament to separate scenes, the numbering of episodes with roman numerals, the list of characters' names at the beginning of each scene, the mention of who enters and who exits, the indication of the speaker's name) had major effects on the status given to the work, on how it was read, even on the way the author himself considered it. A new readability was created by the format, which made the book easier to carry, and by the layout, which restored something of the dramatic sense of movement and of time in print. A new readability, but also a new horizon of reception, for the forms used in the 1710 octavo edition had seemingly "classicized" the text—which might be what led Congreve to purify the writing here and there, in order to make it conform to the text's new legitimacy.[10]

In the same way, it seems to me that the editorial history of Moliere's comedies has a significant impact on the reconstruction of contemporary understandings of them. With *George Dundin*, for example, four changes must be taken into account. First, there was a shift from separate editions of the play in the form of small books that were closely linked with performances, to its publication as part of edited series, individually or in continuous pagination, whereby the play was inscribed in a corpus and its

meaning contaminated by its proximity to other comedies. Second, as print became theatricalized, beginning with the 1682 edition the number of stage directions, particularly the cues, progressively multiplied, thus allowing Molière's sense of the scene to be preserved in readings detached from the immediacy of the performance. Third, the introduction of illustrations, also in 1682, required a series of choices to be made (which scene to illustrate, how to represent characters and interpret stage directions) and constituted a protocol of reading **(p.163)** for the text that it accompanied. And fourth, after 1734 a single edition appeared, containing the comedy itself, the text of the pastoral in which the comedy had been inserted, and the account of the 1668 festival at Versailles where both had been included during the first performance—as if at the beginning of tile eighteenth century the play, now situated at a historical distance, was supposed to be restored to the context of its creation. Thus tile text, unchanged since the first editions in 1669, now changes because the apparatus ill which it is to be read has changed.[11]

The second model concerns the way in which changes in the printed form of a text govern the transformations in its meaning. This is the case, for example, with the titles in tile corpus of French chapbooks (the “Bibliothèque bleue”), an editorial formula aimed at winning over the most numerous (and most popular) readership between 1700 and the mid 1800s. The common characteristics of these editions are above all material and commercial. The material side of publication involved paperbound books, covered generally with blue paper (but also red or marbled), printed with type that was old and mismatched, illustrated with second-hand woodcuts, and with a picture frequently taking the place of the publisher's insignia on the title page. Commercially, even if the length of the works varied, their prices always remained low, much lower than those books that were produced for a more refined and thus more expensive market. Thus, the Bibliothèque bleue required that costs be calculated quite precisely so that a book could be sold at the lowest possible price.

The texts of the Bibliothèque bleue were not written for such editorial ends. The politics of the inventors of the formula (the printers of Troyes, later copied in Rouen, Caen. Limoges, and Avignon) consisted of picking out from a repertoire of already published texts those works that seemed to them to meet the expectations and abilities of the vast public they hoped to attract. From this formula, two essential corollaries followed: the texts published as chapbooks were not “popular” in and of **(p.164)** themselves but came from all genres, from all eras, and from all kinds of literature, and all had already enjoyed a relatively long editorial life in classic published

form before becoming a part of the Bibliothèque bleue. Thus devotional literature and religious exercises, fairy tales and novels, and handbooks all were included. Between publication of the original text and manufacture of the chapbook edition, the gap could be great and was always marked by a series of editions with nothing “popular” about them.

The cultural specificity of the materials published in the Bibliothèque bleue, then, stemmed not from the erudite and diverse texts themselves but from editorial intervention intended to make them conform to the reading ability of the buyers whom the publishers wanted to attract. This work of adaptation modified the text as it was given in the previous edition, which in turn served as copy for the printers of “popular” books. The adaptation was informed by the image the printers had of the competence and cultural expectations of readers who were unfamiliar with books. The printers undertook three kinds of transformations of the text: they shortened the texts, removed chapters, episodes, or digressions deemed superfluous, and simplified the wording by stripping sentences of their relative and incidental clauses; they broke up the text by creating new chapters and adding paragraphs, titles, and summaries: and they censored allusions deemed to be blasphemous or sacrilegious, descriptions considered licentious, and scatological or indecent expressions. The logic behind this adaptive work was thus twofold: it aimed to control the texts by submitting them to the demands of Counter-Reform religion and morals, while at the same time intending to make them more accessible to inexperienced readers.

The implicit reading that such a work sought to create can be characterized as a reading that required visible landmarks (hence anticipatory titles and summary recapitulations, or even woodcuts functioning as protocols of reading or mnemonic devices). This kind of reading was comfortable only with brief, self-contained, often disjointed sequences and apparently was satisfied with minimal global coherence. This manner of reading **(p.165)** was not at all that of the literate elites, who were familiar with books and adept at deciphering and mastering texts in their entirety. Unlike the scholar, the rudimentary reader could tolerate the dross left in the text by hasty and cheap manufacturing processes (for example, the countless misprints, cuts in the wrong places, confusions of names and words, multiple errors). Chapbook readers (or at least the majority of them, for notables too bought the books for pleasure, curiosity, or collecting) read in what seems to have been a discontinuous, fragmented way that accommodated gaps and incoherences.

The rudimentary reader was also comfortable with books that included texts he already knew, at least partially or approximately. Often read out loud—but not only (or perhaps not at all) during those evenings devoted to public readings called *veillées—the* chapbooks could be memorized by listeners who, when actually faced with the books, recognized them more than they discovered them. And more generally, even outside of this direct listening, most people read books with a previously gained knowledge that was easily evoked in the act of reading. This knowledge was gained from the recurrence of coded forms, from the repetition of themes, and from the books' images (even if these originally had no relation to the text they illustrated). This "preknowledge," as it were, was mobilized to produce comprehension of what was read—a comprehension not necessarily in conformity with that desired by the producer of the text or the maker of the book, or with that which a sharp and well-informed reading could construct. "Popular" reading can thus be traced to these particularities, both formal and typographic (taking the latter in the largest sense of the term, as found, for example, in MacKenzie), of the publication of the chapbooks and to the modifications they imposed on the texts on which they were based. In this context, then, popular reading is understood as a relation to the text unlike that of literate culture.

A third model of this relationship among text, book, and understanding appears when a text that is stable in content and fixed in form becomes the object of contrasting readings. "A book is changed by the fact that it does not change even when **(p.166)** the world changes," declared Pierre Bourdieu.[12] To make the proposition compatible with the smaller scale of this essay, let us add: "even when its mode of reading changes." We need to develop indicators of the major divisions that can organize a history of reading practices (of the use of texts, even the uses of the *same* text)—for example between reading out loud, for oneself or for others, and reading in silence; between reading inwardly and privately and reading publicly; between religious reading and lay reading; and between "intensive" reading and "extensive" reading (to borrow the terminology of R. Engelsing).[13] eyond these macroscopic cleavages, the historian must seek to determine the dominant paradigms of reading in a community of readers in a given time and place. These include, for example, the Puritan readings of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries or the "Rousseauist" reading of the Enlightenment or, yet again, the "agical" reading of traditional peasant societies. Each of these "manners of reading" has its own specific gestures, its proper uses of the book, and its particular referential text (the Bible, the *Nouvelle Héloise*, the Grand and Petit Albert). The mode of reading, which is

dictated by the book itself or by its interpreters, provides the archetype of all reading, whatever kind it may be.[14] Characterization of these modes of reading is therefore indispensable to any approach that aims to. reconstruct how texts could be apprehended, understood, and handled.

The final remarks of Rojas in the prologue of the *Celestina* concern the very genre of the text: “Others have made quite a to-do about the name of the play, saying it was not a comedy **(p.167)** but a tragedy, since it ended so sadly. The first author wished to give it a description that would reflect what happens in the beginning, and so he called it a comedy. I have found myself in a dilemma, and I have cut the Gordian knot by calling the playa tragicomedy” (Otros han litigado sobre el nombre, diciendo que no se había de llamar comedia, pues acababa en tristeza, sino que se llamase tragedia. E1 primer auctor quiso dar denominación del principio, que fue placer, y llamóla comedia. Yo, viendo estas discordias, entre estos estremos partí agora por medio la porfía, y llarnéla tragicomedia). The notation leads to two series of reflections. First and foremost, it reminds us that the explicit indicators by which texts are designated and classified create expectations of the reading and anticipations of understanding. That is the case as well for the indication of the genre, which links the text to be read to other texts that have already been read and which signals to the reader the appropriate “preknowledge” in which to locate the text.

A similar process takes place with purely formal or material indicators—the format and the image, for example. From the folio to smaller formats, a hierarchy exists that links the format of the book, the genre of the text, and the moment and mode of reading. In the eighteenth century Lord Chesterfield bore witness to this fact: “Solid folios are the people of business with whom I converse in the morning. Quartos are the easier mixed company with whom I sit after dinner; and I pass my evenings ill the light, and often frivolous chitchat of small octavos and duodecimos.”[15] Such a hierarchy is, moreover, directly inherited from the days when books were copied by hand. This hierarchy distinguished the book that had to be laid flat in order to be read; the humanist book, which was more manageable in its medium format and suitable for both classic and newer texts; and the portable book, the *libellus*, a pocketbook and bedside book with multiple uses and more numerous readers.[16] The image **(p.168)** on the frontispiece or title page, along the border of the text, or on the last page also classified the text and suggested a reading. It provided the protocol of the reading, the identifying index.

Rojas also leads us to think that the history of genres, both textual and, typographical, could provide the underpinnings for the history of discourse as formulated by Foucault.[17] Understanding the series of discourses in their discontinuity, stripping principles of their regularity, and identifying their particular rationalities all presuppose, I believe, that the constraints and demands of the very forms in which they are to be read be taken into account. Hence we must pay attention to the laws of production and to the obligatory devices governing every class or series of texts that have become books—the lives of saints as well as the books of hours, the *occasionnels* and Bibliothèque bleue, the *folhetos de cordel* and chapbooks, the emblem books and programs of civic processions, and so on. Hence, moreover, we must trace the shifts from one genre to another, when a given form becomes invested with issues that are normally foreign to it or with themes that are generally expressed elsewhere and in other ways. In the seventeenth century, for example, at the time of the acute crisis known as the Fronde, the "general politicization of printing" placed all textual and typographic genres of large circulation and public reading (from the letter to the gazette, from the song to the narrative account) at the disposal of the conflicting parties.[18] The critical and genealogical study of discourses in series can thus find support in a project that takes each text or collection of texts and considers the intersections between the history of the variations in their content and the history of the transformations they undergo when being put into print.

These working hypotheses are backed by several critical reevaluations that call into question the certainties and habits of French cultural history. The first concerns the classic uses of the **(p.169)** notion of popular culture. This notion no longer appears to hold up against three fundamental doubts. First and foremost, it 110 longer seems tenable to try to establish strict correspondences between cultural cleavages and social hierarchies, creating simplistic relationships between particular cultural objects or forms and specific social groups. On the contrary, it is necessary to recognize the fluid circulation and shared practices that cross social boundaries. Numerous examples exist of the "popular" uses of objects, ideas, and codes that were not considered as such (think of the readings of Menocchio, the Friulian miller):[19] conversely, the rejection by the dominant culture of forms rooted ill the common culture came late. Second, it does not seem possible to identify the absolute difference and the radical specificity of popular culture on the basis of its own texts, beliefs, or codes. The materials that convey the practices and thoughts of ordinary people are always mixed, blending forms and themes, invention and tradition, literate culture and folklore.

Finally, the macroscopic opposition between “popular” and “high” culture has lost its pertinence. An inventory of the multiple divisions that fragment the social body is preferable to this massive partition, which often defines the common people by default as the collection of those outside elite society. Their ordering follows several principles that make manifest the divergences or oppositions between men and women, townspeople and rural folk, Protestants and Catholics, but also between generations, occupations, and neighborhoods. For far too long, French sociocultural history has accepted a reductive definition of the social, identified only with the hierarchy of wealth and its conditions. This approach has lost sight of the fact that other differences, based on gender as well as on territorial or religious affiliations, were also clearly social. Such differences could make sense of the plurality of cultural practices, proving at least as and perhaps more effective than the opposition of dominant/dominated or the socioprofessional hierarchy. **(p.170)** Thus, because it ignores borrowings and exchanges, because it masks the multiplicity of differences, because it presupposes a priori the validity of a set of divisions that remains to be established, the concept of popular culture—which provided the foundation for the first pioneering studies about chapbooks—must now be called into question.

We must likewise question the long-recognized contrast between the completely oral and gestural forms of so-called traditional cultures on the one hand and the circulation of writing, first in manuscript and then in printed form, on the other, a contrast that delimits a separate, minority culture. The division has encouraged the partitioning of the approaches to these two modes of cultural acquisition and transmission; it has rigidly separated historical anthropology (which, even if it works with texts, is attached to systems of gestures, to the use of words, and to ritual apparatuses) from a more classic cultural history dedicated to studying the production and circulation of writing. Thus formulated, the opposition of oral and written fails to account for the situation that existed from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century when media and multiple practices still overlapped.

Some of these overlaps associate the spoken word and writing: either a spoken word fixes itself in writing or, conversely, a text returns in oral form through the mediation of reading out loud. Other overlaps connect writings and gestures. Numerous texts overtly aim to negate their own status as discourse in order to produce, at the practical level, behavior or practices held to be legitimate or useful. Manuals on how to prepare for death, books on religious exercises, guides to good manners, and handbooks

are among many examples of genres that attempt to internalize necessary or appropriate gestures. Furthermore, writing is installed at the very heart of the most central forms of traditional culture; festivals or entries, for instance, are surrounded by written notices of all kinds and commented on in programs that explain their meaning, and ecclesiastical rituals often require written objects to be placed at the center of the ceremony. The history of cultural practices must consider these interpenetrations and restore some of the complex trajectories that run from the spoken word to the written text, from **(p.171)** writing that is read to gestures that are performed, from the printed book to reading aloud.

One concept seems useful here, that of appropriation: because, understood more sociologically than phenomenologically, the notion of appropriation makes it possible to appreciate the differences in cultural apportionment, in the creative invention that lies at the very heart of the reception process. A retrospective sociology that has long made the unequal distribution of objects the primary criterion of the cultural hierarchy must be replaced by a different approach that focuses attention on differentiated and contrasting uses of the same goods, the same texts, and the same ideas. Such a perspective does not preclude identifying differences (including socially rooted differences), but it displaces the very arena of their identification because it no longer involves social qualification of tile works as a whole (for example, designation of Bibliothèque bleue texts as “popular literature”). Instead, it characterizes the practices that differentially appropriate the materials circulating in a given society.

The statistical approach that once seemed to dominate French cultural history and that sought to weigh the unequal social distribution of serializable objects, discourses, and acts therefore no longer suffices. By presuming overly simplistic correspondences between social levels and cultural boundaries and seizing upon the most repetitive and reductionist expressions of ideas and behaviors, such a course misses the essential, that is, the contrasting manner in which groups or individuals utilize shared themes or forms. Without abandoning the measures and the series, the history of texts and of books must be above all a reconstitution of variations in practices—in other words, a history of reading.

Thought of in this way, the emphasis on cultural appropriations also enables us to see that texts or words intended to mold thoughts and actions are never wholly effective and radically acculturating. The practices of appropriation always create uses or representations that are hardly reducible

to the wills or intentions of those who produce discourse and norms. During the Catholic reform, for instance, the imposition of new devotions was accompanied by recastings and reinterpretations **(p.172)** that profoundly transformed them. The devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, which was central in post-Tridentine pastoral work and iconography, was strongly contaminated by the ancient cult of relics and subverted by a demand for exteriorization that insisted on public and spectacular practices (the exposition of the sacrament, the benediction, and the procession) no longer easily accepted by ecclesiastical authority. And the devotion to the Rosary often reasserted the gestures and meanings traditionally attached to the cult of the Virgin of Mercy.[20] Between the institution and the community, between the normative model and the collective experience, the game was always two way. So-called popular religion was at once acculturated and acculturating: neither totally controlled nor absolutely free, it affirmed the specific modes of belief at the very core of the acceptance of new models of spirituality.

By the same token, the act of reading cannot be effaced in the text itself, nor can significations be annihilated in imposed meanings. The acceptance of messages and models always operates through adjustments, arrangements, or resistances. That is the lesson of Richard Hoggart's book *The Uses of Literacy*.[21] In 1950S England, the culture of the popular classes, far from being reduced to that embodied in the productions of mass culture, was characterized by a relationship of defiance and defensiveness vis-á-vis the messages it received and consumed. Large-circulation newspapers, tabloids, advertisements, horoscopes, and songs are always the object of an oblique or distracted attention that reads or understands them with pleasure and suspicion, at once fascinated and distanced. Belief and disbelief go together, and the acceptance of the truth in what one reads or hears does not diminish the fundamental doubts retained about this presumed authenticity. Does Haggart in fact provide a key for understanding the particularity of the relationship between the least literate public and the texts that aim to govern and distract them, from the Bibliothèque bleue to the **(p.173)** soap opera? Or is it better to place this characterization within the *longue durée* of differential modes of belief that can ascertain similar ambivalences at completely other social levels in other historical situations?[22] At any rate, Hoggart's work reminds us of the reader's creative autonomy in the face of the machineries that try to control him.

Here, the idea of appropriation is not taken in the sense defined by Foucauit in *Discourse on Language*. Foucault considered the “social appropriation

of discourses" as a procedure that controls them and an apparatus that limits their distribution—in other words, as one of the grand systems of the subjugation of discourse.[23] My perspective is different without being contradictory, because it focuses attention not on exclusions by confiscation but on the differences within shared usage, such as those indicated by Pierre Bourdieu: "The taste, propensity and aptitude for appropriation (material and/or symbolic) of a specific class of objects or of classified or classifying practices, is the generating formula behind style of life. It is a unitary ensemble of distinctive preferences which express the same intention in the specific logic of each one of the symbolic subspaces."[24] Which is to say that contrasting practices must be understood as competitions, that their differences are organized by strategies of distinction or imitation, and that the diverse uses of the same cultural goods are rooted in the stable predispositions proper to each group.

Consequently, we have a choice between two models for making sense of texts, books, and their readers. The first contrasts discipline and invention, presenting these categories not as antagonistic but as an interrelated pair. Every textual or typographic arrangement that aims to create control and constraint always secretes tactics that tame or subvert it; conversely, there is no production or cultural practice that does not rely on materials imposed by tradition, authority, or the market and **(p.174)** that is not subjected to surveillance and censures from those who have power over words or gestures. Thus, a presumed "popular" spontaneity cannot be simply opposed to the coercions imposed by the authorities; what must be recognized is how liberties that are always restrained (by conventions, codes, constraints) and disciplines that are always upset articulate with each other.

Discipline and invention must be considered, but so must distinction and divulgation. This second pair of interdependent ideas enables us to posit an understanding of the circulation of objects and cultural models that is not reductive to a simple process of diffusion, one generally thought to descend along the social ladder. The processes of imitation or vulgarization are more complex and more dynamic and must be considered, above all, as struggles of competition. In these struggles every divulgation, conceded or won, produces simultaneously the search for a new distinction. Thus, once the book became a more common object and less distinctive by its being merely possessed, the manners of reading took over the task of showing variations, of making manifest differences in the social hierarchy. Simplistic, rigid representations of social domination or cultural diffusion must thus be replaced. Following Elias and Bourdieu, we can develop a means of

understanding that recognizes the reproduction of distances at the very interior of the mechanisms of imitation, competition in the midst of sharing, and the constitution of new distinctions in the very processes of disclosure.[25]

These hypotheses and ideas enable us to attempt the study of print practices in former societies. These practices are a good entry point into European culture of the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries for two reasons. First, they fix or convey speech, which means that they cement sociabilities and prescribe behavior, cross into both private and public space, and give rise to belief, imagination, and action. They overturn the whole culture, coming to terms with traditional forms of communication **(p.175)** and establishing new distinctions. Second, they permit the circulation of writing on an unprecedented scale. Printing lowers the cost of the book's manufacture because the cost is distributed among all the copies of an edition rather than being supported by a single copy. In addition, printing shortens the time of production, which was very long for books in manuscript. After Gutenberg, the entire culture of the West could be considered a culture of print, because the products of presses and typographical composition, rather than being reserved for administrative and ecclesiastical uses as in China or Korea, themselves influenced all relations and practices.

We are left with a twofold ambition and a twofold task. On a small scale, we must understand the multiple, differentiated, contradictory uses of print, because competing authorities had faith in its powers and readers handled it according to their abilities or their expectations.[26] From a larger perspective, we must reinscribe the emergence of the printing press in the long-term history of the forms of the book or the supports of texts (from the *volumen* to the *codex*, from the book to the screen) and in the history of reading practices. Here, cultural history might find a new niche at the crossroads of textual criticism, the history of the book, and cultural sociology.

Notes:

(1.) Rojas citations are translated from the bilingual Spanish-French edition *La Celestina, Tragicomedia de Calistoy Melibea/La Célestine ou Tragicomédie de Calixte et Mélibée*, attributed to Fernando Rojas (Paris, 1980), pp. 116–19. An English translation of the prologue can be found in Guadalupe Martinez Lacalle, ed., *Celestine or the Tragick-Comedie of Calisto and Melibea*, trans. James Mabbe (London, 1972), pp. 111–14.

(2.) Michel de Certeau, “Lire: un braconnage,” in *L'lnuention du quotidien, L'Arts de Faire* (Paris, 1980), PP.279–96; English translation *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1984).

(3.) Wolfgang Iser, *DerAkt des Lesens, Theorie ästhetischer Wirkung* (Munich, 1976); English translation *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore, 1978). Hans Robert Jauss. *Literaturgeschichte als Provokation* (Frankfurtam-Main, 1974).

(4.) Paul Ricoeur, *Temps et récit*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1983–85), vol. 3, esp. pp. 228#63. Volumes 1 and 2 published in English as *Time and Narrative*, trans. Cathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago, 1984).

(5.) Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, Mass., 1980), pp. 167–73.

(6.) Cf. Roger Chartier, “Les Pratiques de l'écrit,” in *Hisioire de la vie priuée*, ed. Philippe Aries and Georges Duby, vol. 3: *De la Renaissance aux Lumières*, ed. Roger Chartier (Paris, 1986), pp. 113–61; and idem, “Leisure and Sociability: Reading Aloud in Modern Europe,” in *Urban Life in the Renaissance*, ed. Susan Zimerman and Ronald Weissman (London, 1988).

(7.) Miguel de Cervantes, *E1 ingenioso hidalgo Don Quijote de la Mancha*, ed. John Jay Allen (Madrid, 1984), 1:237–39; English translation from *The Adventures of Don Quixote de fa Mancha*, trans. Tobias Smollett, intro. Carlos Fuentes (New York, 1986).

(8.) See, for example, Roger Chartier, “La Pendue miraculeusement sauvée. Etude d'un occasionnel,” and Catherine Velay-Vallantin, “Le Miroir des contes. Perrault dans les Bibliothèques bleues,” in *Les Usages de l'imprimé (XVe-XIX esiècle)*, ed. Roger Chartier (Paris, 1987), pp. 83–127 and 129–55; English translation *The Culture of Print*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Cambridge, 1989).

(9.) Roger E. Stoddard, “Morphology and the Book from an American Perspective,” *Printing History* 17 (1987): 2–14.

(10.) Donald F. MacKenzie, “Topography and Meaning: The Case of William Congreve,” in *Buch und Buchhandel in Europa im achtzehnten Jahrhundert*, ed. Giles Barber and Bernhard Fabian (Hamburg, 1981), pp.81–126; see also idem, “The Book as an Expressive Form,” *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts*, The Panizzi Lectures, 1985 (London, 1986), pp. 1–21.

(11.) I am in the process of doing a study of this comedy under the provisional title *Le Social en représentation. Lectures de George Dandin* (Paris, forthcoming).

(12.) Pierre Bourdieu and Roger Chartier, “La Lecture: une pratique culturelle,” in *Pratiques de la lecture*, ed. Roger Chartier (Marseille, 1985), pp. 217–39.

(13.) Rolf Engelsing, “Die Perioden der Lesergeschichte in der Neuzeit. Das statistische Ausmass und die soziokulturelle Bedeutung der Lekture,” *Archio für Geschichte des Buchwesens* 10 (1969): 946–1002.

(14.) David Hall, “Introduction: The Uses of Literacy in New England, 1500–1850,” in *Printing and Society in Early Modern America*, ed. William L. Joyce et al. (Worcester, Mass., 1983), pp. 1–47; Robert Darnton, “Readers Respond to Rousseau: The Fabrication of Romantic Sensitivity,” in *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York, 1984), pp. 214–56; Daniel Fabre, “Le Livre et sa magie,” in *Pratiques de la lecture*, ed. Chartier, pp. 182–206.

(15.) Cited in Stoddard, “Morphology and the Book.”

(16.) Alphonse Petrucci, “Aile origine dellibro moderno: libri de banco, libri da bisaccia, libretti da mano,” in *Libri, scrittura e pubblico nel Rinascimenio: Guida storica e critica*, ed. Alphonse Petrucci (Rome, 1979), pp. 137–56; and idem, “Illibro manoscritto,” in *Letteratura italiana*, vol. 2: *Produzione e consumo* (Turin, 1983), pp. 499–524.

(17.) Michel Foucault, *L'Ordre du discours* (Paris, 1970); English translation “The Discourse on Language,” trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith, in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York, 1972).

(18.) Christian Jouhaud, *Mazarinades, La Fronde des mots* (Paris, 1985); and the critical note of Michel de Certeau, “L' Expérimentation d'une méthode: les mazarinades de Christian Jouhaud,” *Annales, E.S.C*. 41 (1986): 507–12.

(19.) Carlo Ginzburg, *Il formaggio e i vermi. Il cosmo di un mugnaio del' 1500* (Turin, 1976); English translation *TheCheese and the Worrns: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, trans. John Tedeschi and Anne Tedeschi (New York, 1982).

(20.) Alphonse Dupront, “De la religion populaire,” in *Du Sacré, croisades et pèlerinages, images et langages* (Paris, 1987), Pp.419–66; and the preface in

Marie-Hélène Froeschlé-Chopard. *LaReligion populaire en Provence orientale au XVIIIe siecle* (Paris, 1980), pp. 5–31.

(21.) Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* (London, 1971).

(22.) Paul Veyne, *Les Grecs oni-ils cru à leurs muthes? Essai sur l'imaginaiion constituante* (Paris, 1983); English translation *Did the Greeks Believe in Their Myths? An Essay on the Constitutive Imagination*, trans. Paula Wissing (Chicago, 1988).

(23.) Foucault, *L'Ordre du discours*, pp. 45–47.

(24.) As quoted in Pierre Bourdieu, *La Distinction. Critique sociale du jugement* (Paris, 1979), p. 193; English translation *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, Mass., 1984).

(25.) Norbert Elias, *tiberden Prozess derZivilisation. Soziogenetische und psychogeneiische Untersuchungen*, 2 vols, (Frankfurtam-Main, 1979; first published Basel, 1939), 2: 312–454; English translation *The Civilizing Process*, 2 vols., trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York, 1982).

(26.) See the studies collected in Roger Chartier, *The Cuiturai Uses of Print in Early Modern France* (Princeton, N.J., 1987), and in *Les Usages de l'imprimé*.