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Evelyne Cohen, Anaïs Fléchet, Pascale Goetschel, Laurent Martin, and Pascal Ory, eds., *Cultural History in France: Local Debates, Global Perspectives*. New York: Routledge, 2020. xi +332 pp. Annex and contributors. \$160.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 9780367271879.

Review by Jennifer M. Jones, Rutgers University.

The essays in *Cultural History in France: Local Debates, Global Perspectives* provide thought-provoking snapshots of the key questions and debates with which practitioners of cultural history in France have wrestled over the past two decades. Among other virtues, the collection reminds us that historians in France probed a different set of questions about cultural history and faced different stakes than their American counterparts because of each country's distinctive intellectual and institutional culture. English-speaking historians will recognize some familiar territory such as the tension between social history and cultural history, and will also encounter some distinctly French debates produced within the context of French intellectual and scholarly traditions. Whether returning to these debates over the meaning and practice of cultural history or encountering them the first time, many historians in France, the UK, Europe and around the globe will find this collection intellectually, methodologically, and perhaps even politically stimulating.

The book was first published in French in 2011 with essays drawn from keynote addresses and thematic roundtables at the annual conferences organized by the *Association pour le développement de l'histoire culturelle* (ADHC), a French association founded in 2000 "to contribute to the progress of the conceptualization efforts in this field" (p.329).^[1] Five additional essays were added to the revised and augmented 2019 English language edition under review.^[2] The volume's thirty-seven essays are divided into four sections: "Definitions and Frontiers," "Subjects," "Memory and History," and "Perspectives and Transfers." They include essays by the leading historians in the field such as Jean-François Sirinelli, co-editor of *Pour une histoire culturelle* (1997) and Pascal Ory, president of the ADHC and author of *L'histoire culturelle* (2004), as well as many other historians with whom the H-France community will be familiar.^[3] The collection is heavily skewed towards modern and contemporary history, with the exception of essays by medievalist Michel Pastoureau and early modernists Peter Burke, George Vigarello, and Arlette Farge. The majority of essays are by French scholars, with additional contributors from Belgium, the UK, Italy, and Israel. There are no contributors from the United States, underscoring the gulf between the American and French communities of cultural historians that this collection marks and may perhaps help to bridge.

Part one, “Definitions and Frontiers,” traces the animated debate over the definition and boundaries of cultural history within the community of cultural historians in France during the past twenty years. ADHC’s annual conference not only established the legitimacy of cultural history in France but also created a space in which to question the increasing ubiquity of cultural history and its seeming hegemonic “conquest” of the field of historical studies (p.3). The essays in this section probe, in turn, the interface between contemporary cultural history and political history, the distinction between mediology and cultural history, the relationship of cultural history to literary history, the importance of grounding cultural history in economic and social history, the porous boundary between cultural history and media history, the new field of the history of legal cultures, and the potentially beneficial dialog between cultural sociology and cultural history.

Many of the essays embrace a definition of cultural history as the “social history of representations,” a conceptualization suggested originally by Roger Chartier and Pascal Ory (p. 3). As Loïc Vadelorge asserts in his introduction to part one, this expression “seems to have achieved a consensus” (p. 3). Yet, the essays in this section also suggest that “social history of representations” is perhaps *too broad* to illuminate the creative approaches of a number of subfields of cultural history, *too generic* to capture the revolutionary methodology of cultural history, and/or *too limited* to address questions in newer fields such as the history of knowledge. In “What is Mediology?” Régis Debray urges his readers to expand their definition of culture and representation to include “the technical systems and devices that organize [culture and representations], give rise to them, or make them disappear,” so as to avoid the trap of thinking that culture is simply “what happens in people’s heads” (pp. 18-19). Jean-François Sirinelli boldly argues that because cultural history analyzes the process of how reality is perceived, it “finds itself either directly or indirectly at the heart of any historic approach...” (p. 7). Peter Burke’s stimulating address to the 2013 ADHC Congress insists on the necessity of re-connecting cultural history to social history: “Today...a quarter of a century later, we may be in need of a reaction against that reaction [the cultural turn], a return to a harder sort of history.... Long live pluralism!” (p. 46).

Institutional tensions and academic boundaries haunted the debate over cultural history at the ADHC Congress in the 2000s. Paul Aron’s 2004 address calls for greater institutional openness in France to newer approaches to literary history. In Aron’s talk, as in many others in the collection, we sense academics straining against the institutional constraints in French higher education and scholarship. Essays by both Sirinelli and Anne-Claude Ambroise-Rendu address the particular challenges of defining cultural history within the field of contemporary history. Vadelorge observes that historians of contemporary French culture found that grounding the new cultural history in social history kept “academic doors open” to them in France (p. 3). But, as Sirinelli argues, within contemporary history, cultural history is actually closer to the approaches of political history than to social history. Another challenge, which Vadelorge notes is probably specific to France, consists in distinguishing cultural history from cultural studies, the history of ideas, and studies of iconography. Sociology is the discipline many of the collection’s participants turn to for theoretical insights and institutional models, and Pierre Bourdieu’s ideas are cited most frequently in discussions of theory, concepts, and methods. The considerable weight of sociology and contemporary history in the construction of French cultural history may explain one mysterious lacuna in the collection: None of the contributors directly and comprehensively address the relationship of the history of mentalities to cultural history.

Part two, "Subjects," offers a collection of insights on the practice of cultural history, ranging from Michael Pastoureau's essay on the epistemological and methodological challenges historians confront when encountering color in history, to George Vigarello's charting of changing sensibilities of the inner body, to Alain Corbin's overview of approaches to the somatic experience of the weather, to Michelle Perrot's reflections on how she came to study George Sand's hometown of Nohant. For students and scholars new to the field of cultural history, this section provides a valuable sampler of different approaches. Pascal Ory's essay on the relation of popular culture to mass culture explores key French conceptual categories (such as consumer society and youth culture) with keen attention to differences in terminology in Anglophone and Francophone contexts. Anaïs Fléchet addresses the critical question of why some subjects, such as the history of music, have been neglected by historians and have largely been researched from the perspectives of scholars in adjacent disciplines such as musicology. A self-reflective essay by Arlette Farge includes a moving description of how she writes to capture the fragmentations and discontinuities in history (p. 123).

The devotion of part three to essays on memory and history evinces the foundational role of Pierre Nora's work in shaping modern cultural history in France and in Europe.[4] In his introduction to part three, Laurent Martin reminds readers of the important role the field played in deconstructing the "centralized, chronological history of France" by exploring the conflicting memories in French culture (p. 204). The question of whether Nora's approach, so solidly grounded in the continuities of French national culture, can be applied to other national contexts, provides the focus for several essays. Mario Isnenghi discusses the distinctive challenges of studying history and memory in the context of Italy in his three-volume work, *I luoghi della memoria nell'Italia unita*. [5] Manuela Martini reflects on the subjective and collective nature of history and memory projects as thrown into relief by the translation of Isnenghi's book into French as *L'Italie par elle-même*. Étienne François's 2007 address to the ADHC Congress reported on the success of his application of the history and memory approach to German cultural history, resulting in his historicization of 120 German sites of memory. Annette Becker's thought-provoking essay on how the memory of alleged atrocities during WWI led to disbelief about the Holocaust and Avner Ben-Amos's essay on Israeli national memory round out this section on history and memory. Ben-Amos's essay is particularly useful for a non-specialist audience and the overall project of the volume because he clearly links his particular topic to broader questions concerning memory and cultural history, arguing that "From a disciplinary perspective, the study of collective memory is part of cultural history. One of the areas of cultural history is the representation of the worlds, and the search for collective memory is, actually, the study of the representation of the past in a particular community" (p. 242).

The ten essays in the final section, "Perspectives and Transfers," extend the conversation outward from France to the UK, Europe, and the world. Several of the essays explore the perception that France was "late" to the cultural turn vis à vis the UK and the US (p. 255). In the introduction to part four, Laurent Martin notes the paradox that many of the theorists adopted by Anglophone scholars to pioneer cultural history were in fact French, while French cultural historians often ignored the insights of "French Theory." In his essay, "Disciplinary Smuggling," Denis Saint-Jacques explains that the "advances" of cultural history and cultural studies in the UK were a product of England's own homegrown academic turf wars. Historians at the Center for Cultural Studies at Birmingham, created in 1963 by Stuart Hall and Richard Hoggart, turned to Barthes and Foucault and used literary analysis to study texts because Parsonian functionalist sociologists dominant in England at the time blocked their access to the funding required for

fieldwork (p. 275). Érik Neveu argues in “The Paris-London Line of Cultural Studies: A One-Way Track” that French cultural historians paid little attention to British cultural studies and the “cephalopod monster” the British created “that is *French Theory*” (p. 282), because they asked fundamentally different questions than their British colleagues: “French cultural history privileges the study of the instituted and *institutionalized* over that of practices” (p. 287). In one of the most compelling essays in the section, Emmanuelle Sibeud observes that the divide between French and Anglophone cultural studies has repercussions for colonial and postcolonial studies. French cultural history “has not adhered to the culturalist hypotheses that are very influential in English-speaking networks” (p. 298). A forward-looking essay by Chloé Maurel makes the case that cultural history defined as “the social history of representations” can burst past its national horizons and make the global turn. The key, Maurel argues, is to embrace the new spatial framework offered by the terms “transnational,” “circulations,” and “connected histories” (pp. 308-309). While open to the insights of cultural studies and subaltern studies, Maurel emphasizes, as do many contributors to the collection, the utility of quantitative methods and the benefits of making “a connection between economic stakes and cultural stakes” (p. 311).

ADHC’s vice-president and distinguished scholar of the history of publishing, Jean-Yves Mollier, concludes the volume. He deploys a telling anecdote about the challenge of trying to translate “cultural history” to a group of Chinese scholars at the Beijing Institute for World History in 1997 to remind his readers of the almost impossible task of tightly defining cultural history. Through the help of Gu Liang, a gifted translator of Fernand Braudel into Chinese, Mollier came to understand that “cultural history” was simply untranslatable into Mandarin Chinese. For Mollier this raises a broader issue that haunts the discussions in the volume: the translation of cultural history across and between distinctive national academic cultures. Mollier highlights the centrality of “those Brits gathered around Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall, and E. P. Thompson, who...opened up an immense space for reflection for proponents of a third path between Marxism and liberalism” (p. 323), while also noting the importance of the creation of the EHESS, the University of Nanterre, and the Institut d’histoire du temps présent (IHTP) for stimulating the turn in France towards the cultural dimension of history. Mollier’s conclusion calls for future research on the institutional and ideological reasons for the turn toward cultural history so that historians themselves can better understand, as he phrases it with a distinctly Gallic tongue-in-cheek twist, “the subversion of the quantitative approach by the qualitative one, inevitably preferable as it is subjective and unconventional, but also the motivations of those who, trained in the harsh discipline of numbers, series, and the asceticism of extended forays into archives, have in turn come to swell the ranks of the infantry or the cavalry of cultural historians (p. 325).

For those historians who desire to take up Mollier’s challenge to write the history of modern cultural history, this volume provides a useful starting place. The collection not only introduces a wide variety of approaches to cultural history but also examines the intellectual, methodological, and institutional tensions that have shaped the field. The collection does not, however, provide a smooth synthesis or tidy overview of the field. The essays are uneven, with some reading like “reports” on their subfield or research topic, while others probe deeper theoretical questions that shape the entire field of cultural history. The conversational tone of essays originally delivered as conference presentations can be a liability for readers who seek an in-depth and sustained argument, but the generous endnotes that accompany each essay allow readers to explore particular points in greater depth. The collection also does not reveal where the field of French cultural history stands in 2021, since so many of the essays are drawn from

ADHC addresses in the 2000s. Instead, it offers a Rorschach test of the fissures, issues, and approaches at the particular moment the talks were given. Yet, the collection is valuable for revealing to an English-speaking audience the distinct trajectory of cultural history in France. In light of debates currently raging in France over the implication of an “American turn” toward scholarship on gender, ethnicity, race, and identity, the collection provides a timely reminder that while French cultural history and American cultural history are certainly “sister revolutions,” the “cultural turn” in France was never exactly the same revolution experienced by scholars in the United States.

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Jean-Yves Mollier, “General Conclusion”

Evelyne Cohen, “Annex: About ADHC”

NOTES

[1] Évelyne Cohen, Pascale Goetschel, Laurent Martin, and Pascal Ory, eds., *Dix Ans d’Histoire Culturelle* (Villeurbanne: Culturelle Presses de l’Enssib, 2011).

[2] New essays by Annette Becker, Avner Ben-Amos, Peter Burke, Anaïs Fléchet, and Jean-Louis Halpérin were added to the 2019 revised edition under review. This English-language revised edition was published in a series edited by the International Society for Cultural History, the most prominent international society devoted to cultural history. See <http://www.culthist.net>

[3] Jean-Pierre Rioux and Jean-François Sirinelli, sous la direction de., *Pour une histoire culturelle* (Paris: Seuil, 1997); Pascal Ory, *L’histoire culturelle* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2004). See also, Pascal Ory, “L’histoire culturelle a une histoire,” in Martin Laurent and Venayre Sylvain eds, *L’histoire culturelle du contemporain* (Paris: Nouveau monde, 2005), pp. 55-74.

[4] Pierre Nora, *Les Lieux de mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984-1992).

[5] Mario Isnenghi, *I luoghi della memoria nell’Italia unita* (Rome: Latorza, 1998).

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