

# YET ANOTHER HISTORY OF HISTORY

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- LA HISTORIA Y LOS HISTORIADORES EN EL PERÚ.* By Manuel Burga. (Lima: Fondo Editorial de la Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, 2005. Pp. 237)
- HOW TO WRITE THE HISTORY OF THE NEW WORLD: HISTORIES, EPISTEMOLOGIES, AND IDENTITIES IN THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ATLANTIC WORLD.* By Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001. Pp. 450. \$55.00 cloth.)
- HISTORIA DE LAS HISTORIAS DE LA NACIÓN MEXICANA.* By Enrique Florescano. (Mexico City: Taurus, 2002. Pp. 530.)
- CONSTRUCCIÓN DE LAS IDENTIDADES LATINOAMERICANAS: ENSAYOS DE HISTORIA INTELECTUAL, SIGLOS XIX–XX.* Edited by Aimer Granados and Carlos Marichal. (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 2004. Pp. 269.)
- LA PRESENCIA DEL PASADO.* By Enrique Krauze. (Mexico City: Bancomer, 2004. Pp. 495.)
- LOS PINCELES DE LA HISTORIA.* By the Museo Nacional de Arte de México. (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, 2000–2003. 4 volumes.)
- LA NACIÓN COMO PROBLEMA: LOS HISTORIADORES Y LA 'CUESTIÓN NACIONAL.'* By Elías José Palti. (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2003. Pp. 157.)
- LA CULTURA MODERNA DE LA HISTORIA: UNA APROXIMACIÓN TEÓRICA E HISTORIOGRÁFICA.* By Guillermo Zermeño Padilla. (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 2002. Pp. 246)

La tarea verdadera consiste ante todo en examinar los orígenes, los prejuicios y los procesos de las verdades recibidas. En una palabra, hacer cuestión expresa de la historia de la historia.<sup>1</sup>

—Edmundo O’Gorman (1947)

1. *Crisis y porvenir de la ciencia histórica* (Mexico: Imprenta Universitaria, 1947), 9, 13.

In the last five years or so a reflexive history of history has begun to take shape in the nations of, or at any rate in some relation to, that grand subject-object of modern history named "Latin America." In a word, this history takes its object of study to be the productions and production of history itself. For some of its practitioners this newer history of history is closely linked to "the new intellectual history." That history, which began to appear in the Latin American field in the 1990s, is not merely a history of what intellectuals have written and thought in the past; it is a history that *is* itself intellectual in the best sense of the term. To hijack Dominick La Capra's witty remarks on the significance for European intellectual history of Hayden White's critical opus, one might say without undue hyperbole that this newer history of history is reopening the possibility of thought in Latin American history.<sup>2</sup>

This is so because in revisiting the ways in which Latin American histories have been researched, written, and read the newer history of history both retraces and—knowingly or not—questions the epistemological foundations and realist regimes of representation that underwrite contemporary understandings of Latin American pasts. That is, the newer history of history, like the new intellectual history, is often reflexive: its subject-object and limits of inquiry are its own *tropos*. As a turning inward that, in one way or another, responds to a general crisis of history, it seeks to get to the bottom of its own practice and knowledge.

What is perhaps most exciting—and intellectually challenging—about this new work is that those received limits (its bottom) now appear to be much less constraining (deeper, wider) than was previously thought. Not so long ago it was dreamed—under the somnic trance of liberal, dependency, and Marxian mantras—that this part of the world had no intellectual history worth thinking and writing about. It was at most a "tragic story": in the first instance, of colonial derivations in the "Scholastic" mode; and in the second (that is, after Independence), of "aping Europe." "Intellectual history," if it could be said to exist, was a province of Europe, not Iberian America. Such dismissals now appear quaint, if not "tragic." The newer history of history in this part of the world now brims with surprises. And yet it is also something of a hall of mirrors, a haunted house of whispering voices, and its historians invite us to linger in its labyrinthine corridors.

This is not to say that the kind of writing under review here (by no means an exhaustive sample of recent work) is unprecedented. Far from it. If one cares to glance over one's shoulder, as the history of history

2. What La Capra had observed for the European and Anglo American historical fields could also be said for the Latin American, that is, that the (recent) reign of "social history" has at times bordered on the anti-intellectual. See La Capra, *Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, Contexts, Language* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

constantly does, an eccentric tradition in the history of historical ideas looms in the shadows, where lurk such figures as Edmundo O’Gorman, José Gaos, Antonio Gerbi, Richard Morse, Lewis Hanke, and José de la Riva-Agüero. More recently, British historians David Brading and Anthony Pagden have produced a voluminous history of political and religious ideas (Spanish monarchy, Creole patriotism, classical republicanism, the liberal state, etc.) that shares some of the concerns and methods of the Cambridge School of new intellectual history (whose more prominent figures are Quentin Skinner and P.G.A. Pocock). That “School” moved from ideas to language (the so-called linguistic turn) and particularly to the idioms of politics and religion—keys that might unlock the shadowy figures of discourse that dwell in the epistemic dungeons of history’s castle. Similar moves, that is, from ideas to language and from language to representations and performances, inform a wide range of current historical, anthropological, and critical writing in and on the region. Mauricio Tenorio’s *Mexico at the World’s Fairs: Crafting a Modern Nation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), Claudio Lomnitz’s *Deep Mexico, Silent Mexico: An Anthropology of Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), and Serge Gruzinski’s *The Mestizo Mind* (New York: Routledge, 2002) are only three examples of such writing.

Enrique Krauze’s coffee-table book, *La presencia del pasado*, now in its second edition, makes it abundantly clear that the history of history is not merely of interest to cloistered academics engaged in various forms of navel-gazing and sniping (at least not in Mexico). This book reveals, if for the most part uncritically, important things about the making of high- and middle-brow cultures of remembrance that, often linked to the state, imagine the national past as a living presence. Krauze’s profusely illustrated slab is an art gallery of Mexico’s national historical imaginary, and it is hard to think that it is not intended (at around 1000 pesos) for Mexico’s cultured bourgeoisie and political class. But this is hardly sufficient reason to diminish the importance of such efforts. In Mexico, Krauze is a widely read and respected historian who, along with a cast of other notable historians (posted across the political spectrum and the media) helps keep alive an enviable tradition of public discourse. I refer to the tradition of the historian as public intellectual, voice of the national conscience, and (perhaps) tutor and critic of the political class, if no longer of “the prince” himself (following the renaissance tradition of history as “the science of princes,” the historian in colonial New Spain or Peru tutored the viceroy and his court, providing *Historia magistra vitae* on the virtues of good government and the vices of tyranny).

Krauze relates that his book “narrates, with the word and the image,” the “history of historical ideas” that “burdened the impassioned

and dramatic nineteenth century" (13), but his reach extends beyond that century. Seizing upon two memorable lines, one each from literary giants Jorge Luis Borges and Octavio Paz, Krauze aims to "reconcile" his Mexican readers with "the discordances of their past." In this gesture of national reconciliation (not untypical of those classical nineteenth-century historians whose collective biography he would trace) Krauze marks his own history of history as another kind of artifact—a reflexive and reiterative one—in the museum of Mexican memory.

Squeezed between the full-page or even facing-page color plates are five essays that revolve around archetypal monuments of the Mexican national imaginary (most of which were at one time situated on Mexico City's grand neoclassical avenue of historicism, El Paseo de la Reforma). The essays feature notable quotations excerpted from the letters of past Mexican historians (more often than not written in moments of national crisis and prophecy); these quotations confirm Krauze's chosen theme: "the presence of the past in the present." The effect on the reader is surely cumulative: like the museum-goer, she is overwhelmed by images and looks for refuge in the text, only to find that the text is not of much help as a guide. But this is not Krauze's intention. Rather, the text carries the reader-spectator through a series of past debates and historical interpretations that bear upon those emblematic figures and themes referenced in the images (mainly, historicist monuments to Aztec warrior-kings, Spanish monarchs, and other national heroes, and romanticist paintings of archetypal events, ruins, and landscapes housed in Mexican museums). But the correspondence between image and debate is suggestive at best, and the reader is not provided with any interpretive tools with which to read the images or indeed the historical imagination that produced them. Simply put, the images are the presence and the text is (Krauze's narrative commentary on) the past, and the reader is left to make any associations.

The first chapter takes off with a sketch of the Porfirian unveiling of the pyramidal monument to the Aztec warrior-prince, symbol of Mexican "Hispanophobia." The second chapter, entitled "Cuauhtemoc's Progenie," traces the disputed and shifting political place of the indigenous in the various national narratives of origins and heroes, from Bernardino Sahagún to Justo Sierra. Subsequent chapters revolve around other central icons: "The Mestizo Family," or the "Legacy of New Spain" (the latter opens, like the first, with a discussion of an inaugural ceremony, in this case for the equestrian monument "El Caballito" to Carlos IV, also formerly situated on the Paseo de la Reforma). Throughout these chapters Krauze is concerned less with the monuments themselves than the genealogical line of great preservers of Mexico's memory. This lineage of sword and pen includes such luminaries as Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora and Lorenzo Boturini and, in the nineteenth century, Lucas

Alamán and José Fernando Ramírez. It is for the author “thanks to the labor of that fistful of heroes of history and historiography” that nineteenth-century Mexico partially recovered her *antigua regla de vida*. And so, like the 1887 pyramidal monument to Cuauhtemoc, *La presencia del pasado* takes its place among the monuments of Mexican memory as a labor that recovers in readable and visible form the nation’s noble lineage of memory-makers and history-writers.

*Los pinceles de la historia* is the four-volume fruit of collective labors by younger Mexican scholars associated with Mexico’s National Museum of Art. By assembling short but insightful critical essays on the history of the painting of Mexican history, *Los pinceles* takes the genre of the art museum catalog to another level. At the same time, this series contributes to the newer history of history by moving the language of images to the center of its critical purview. It does so in a far more sophisticated manner than does Krauze’s heroic “narrative of words and images.” As Fausto Ramírez and Esther Acevedo note in their introduction to the third volume of the series, “*Los pinceles de la historia* seeks to make a panoramic revision of the genre of historical painting in Mexico...from the colonial to post-revolutionary periods” (17). Historical painting, as Renato González Mello notes in his introduction to the fourth volume, “was for centuries the most important genre of academic painting in the West. It was a method for determining the truth of the past...a method that debated the question of whether the truth was located in the world of ideas or in the fidelity to details” (18). In a word, the history of academy-based history painting registers in visual form the history of academic debates in historiography about the nature of the true and its revelation and representation in history. The collective revision of Mexican historical painting in *Los pinceles* is hermeneutic and analytical, an enlightening trespass between the domains of art history and history proper, a cross-fertilization of the idioms of art criticism and historiography. Here historical painting is read not only as the artist’s inspiration and the patron’s whim, but as the dense, pedagogical performance of ideologies, as the conscious and unconscious projection of imperial, national, and class imaginaries, and as the battleground of competing visions sublime and satirical—in short, as the stuff of history and the stuff that makes history.

The four volumes correspond to the exhibition halls in the National Museum of Art: *El origen del reino de Nueva España, 1680–1750*; *De la patria criolla a la nación mexicana, 1750–1860*; *La fabricación del estado, 1864–1910*; and *La arqueología del régimen, 1910–1955*. There are brilliant essays and scores of fine illustrations in all of these, but volumes two and three constitute the central and most coherent critical contribution to the history of history in Latin America. These two core volumes deal with the historical painting of Mexico’s national imaginary. The master

subject of this art is, of course, unsurprising given that the art collected in The National Museum of Art is necessarily national, and given that the period 1750–1910 was the most quintessentially national period of Mexican—if not world—history. Mexican historical painting, like Mexican historiography, was (and for the most part is still) nationalist, that is, its object and measure of truth is the nation, variously conceived as an idea (bloodline, symbol, project) or as a diagnostic set of details that together configure *lo mexicano*. The essays in these two volumes are consciously and often brilliantly critical of the ways and means by which the national imaginary was configured and debated in historical painting. Unfortunately, and reserving a small handful of proverbial exceptions, one cannot say the same for Mexican historians' understanding of the ways and means by which the national imaginary was—and continues to be—configured and debated in historiography.

Enrique Florescano's *Historia de las historias de la nación mexicana* reviews the canons of historical interpretation that have served to crystallize ideas about the past at various points in the nation's history. For Florescano these ideas are of cosmological, political, and scholarly provenances. This relatively inexpensive paperback is perhaps more consciously analytical than Krauze's glossy narrative of words and images, but it is also decidedly accessible and nationalist in its style and appeal (it avoids excessive footnoting and presents its subject in an amenable prose set in a large font size). Like Krauze, Florescano is an eminent and highly visible historian in the eyes of the Mexican media. Florescano studied in Paris and, under the influence of the Annales School, made his reputation in economic history; more recently, however, he has churned out a series of books on the popular theme of Mexican memory. His *Memoria mexicana* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2000) is also something of a national museum of memory in book form. *Historia de las historias* presents punctual summaries of the canons or dominant historical interpretations of the nation, from precolonial times to the present. Florescano begins his account with what he calls "the Mesoamerican canon"; that canon is contrasted with "the Christian canon" that arrived with Conquest, the subject of the second chapter. Subsequent chapters are devoted to "the origin of the Mestizo chronicle"; the "Títulos primordiales" (colonial indigenous historical and juridical narratives); the late colonial and early republican Creole patriotic histories; the post-revolutionary indigenist narrative; and, finally, "the history constructed by the professionals of history." Florescano is not pleased with the labors of the professionals, so he ends on a sour note. For Florescano, Mexico's founding, mid-twentieth-century generation of professional historians—busily dedicated to national history and the resolution of the nation's social problems—is now gone; today's professional historians barricade themselves in a Tower of Babel, writing

only for one another, publishing in obscure journals; their scholarship, as a result, is no longer resonant with Mexico's collective memory. For Florescano this is the crux of the great intellectual crisis of history today: "the historical discipline is no longer capable of offering to the nation a history of the nation" (447). Florescano would right this wrong. His canonical indexing of past histories of the nation is an attempt to bridge the gulf that separates Babel from Mexico's collective memory. It is this desire to return to the fold of national history that animates his history of histories of the nation. Perhaps more significantly, what this national history of national histories reveals is that this national historian's long view of the nation (as a series of canonical histories) is closely aligned and complicit with the collective memory of those eighteenth-century Creole patriots and twentieth-century nativists who invented deep native pasts for the postcolonial nation they so ardently desired. Like Krauze, Florescano inscribes himself and his work in a national lineage of memory-makers.

Manuel Burga's *La historia y los historiadores en el Perú* is also motivated by concerns about the decline of national history, but his essays and commentaries (most of which were written and published in the 1990s) are less reconstructive and more reflexive about the task of his own generation. Like the Mexicans Krauze and Florescano, Burga (ex-Rector of Lima's San Marcos University and who, like Florescano, also studied in Paris in the 1960s) responds to a crisis of history that is perhaps better understood as the crisis of nation or, more precisely, the crisis of national history in Latin America. Rather than see history as the accumulation of canons and memory-keepers, Burga finds Peruvian history to be "a cemetery of oligarchies" that is nevertheless worth rethinking since it "helps us decipher the logic and meaning of modern Peru's path [of development]" (15). Burga is inspired in these pages at turns by his mentor, the Italian historian and former associate of the French Annales School Ruggiero Romano, Benedetto Croce (an inspiration for Romano), Edward H. Carr, Jacques Le Goff (with whom Burga also studied), Benedict Anderson, Alberto Flores Galindo (Burga's late associate), Pablo Macera, and the pioneers of Andean ethnohistory, including Paul Rivet, Luis Valcárcel, Ella Dunbar Temple, Maria Rostworowski, Nathan Wachtel, Tom Zuidema, and John H. Rowe. The result is a strong heterodoxy that eludes dogmatisms. Although this collection is a series of essays and reviews, certain themes and threads are visible. Among these is the notion that national historical discourse on Peru has moved from a genealogical and Creole concept of Peru as a potentially unified nation to that of a multiple Peru (multiple in the sense that it would contain several nationalities and nationalisms) that despite its heterogeneity is nevertheless to be conceived of as one nation in Anderson's sense of imagined community. Yet it is precisely this



imagined sense that now appears to be so elusive to historians. Burga notes that since the monumental history of Jorge Basadre (1903–1980) Peruvians no longer write “national history.”

Berkeley-trained Argentine historian Elías José Palti’s *La nación como problema: Los historiadores y la ‘cuestión nacional’* responds to the ongoing crisis of national history not by indexing its genealogy, but rather by retracing, in critical fashion, (1) the genealogical narrative of nation itself, elaborated in the eighteenth century and carried through the nineteenth, and (2) what the author calls the “anti-genealogical” critique of nation in Europe that took shape, in the author’s view, only in the twentieth. Save for an awkward appendix (which appears almost as an afterthought) Palti’s critical or “polemological” history (a term coined by Pierre-André Taguieff) takes its subject to be a series of polemics in northwestern European historical thought (German, English, and French) on the subject of the nation. At the same time, his reading appears to be conscious of a somewhat different history of historical thought on the nation in nineteenth-century Mexico and Argentina (relegated to the appendix). Palti’s polemology is a subtle manner of new intellectual history that seeks to identify the shared assumptions and aporias of ostensibly opposite positions (in this case, between genealogical nationalism and its anti-genealogical and anti-nationalist critique). He has developed this approach with success in previous articles and essays on key European intellectual figures, usefully collected in revised form in *Aporias: Tiempo, modernidad, historia, sujeto, nación, ley* (Buenos Aires: Alianza, 2001).

Palti’s complex argument in *La nación como problema* may be roughly summarized as follows. Following trends in the natural sciences, eighteenth-century historicists (among whom Leibniz and Herder were key figures) turned against Enlightenment notions of man in general and developed “preformist” evolutionary concepts of the nation as the genetic unfolding of a singular potentiality; subsequently, historians developed more dynamic, epigenetic, and transformist or embryological concepts of the nation’s (and the people’s) singular evolution. During the nineteenth century such genealogical and immanentist or historicist concepts governed all discourse on the nation, including the anti-genealogical critique of nation that began to emerge at the close of that century. Key to this genealogical concept was the notion of the singular, unified historical subject. Palti locates Ernest Renan’s spiritual concept of nation at the limit of the genealogical view because it introduced an element of indeterminacy: the nation’s origins were unknowable. But it was Otto Bauer who, in Palti’s view, undermined the genealogical concept of nation by introducing a constructivist notion of the nation’s becoming as a process susceptible to intentional action. Bauer suggested that the national subject (the people) was not singular and preformed, but rather the nation’s condition of possibility. Nations were



now the product not of providence, reason, or evolutionary processes but of the intentional action of the people and its leaders. Doubt was cast on the very existence and viability of nations; the nation became a problem and a project rather than an inheritance. Soon historians and politicians began to speak of fostering national myths that could marshal the people for the political task of forging strong nations. Fascism was but one example; Soviet communism was another. Critics now spoke of the cynical reason of nationalism. Nationalism—now seen as a powerful artifice both by its promoters and critics—earned a bad name. Palti then turns to the late twentieth-century emergence of fissures in the anti-genealogical view of nation and nationalism, mostly by way of a critical discussion of Hobsbawm and Habermas. In Palti's view these new critics of genealogical nationalism merely recycle certain key notions of the anti-genealogical critique of earlier historians (Renan, Bauer) who in turn shared basic assumptions with the genealogists of nation. Palti closes with a provocative reading of the political conditions that underwrite Anderson and Bhabha's respective critiques of nation and nationalism, suggesting that all conceptualizations of or against the nation—conceived as a deeply organic or historically invented reality—are grounded in politics. Finally, in an appendix Palti turns briefly to nineteenth-century narratives of nation in Mexico and Argentina and notes that conservative historians like Mexico's Lucas Alamán had perceived the political nature of the nation by the late 1840s.

Although Palti does not draw the obvious conclusion, the reader is left with the nagging suspicion that Latin American historical debates on the nation may have anticipated European polemics by a century or more, in part because the crisis of nation was, in the colonial context, always close at hand. It is worth thinking about why Palti's polemological approach is (in this thin book at least) incapable of integrating into its account those Latin American historians who are so often seen to be behind the curve of (a mere appendix to?) the European intellectual beat. Could it be that those polemics were, for them, already "history"? No doubt Palti will address such questions in a future work. For now, and as brilliant as it is, *La nación como problema* remains only suggestive as a model for the history of the history of the concept of nation in Latin America. That history remains to be written.

Nevertheless, Palti's reading of European historical thought on the nation seems to find its echo in today's so-called crisis of history, at least as that crisis is perceived by some historians in the region. If the crisis of history in Latin America today may be understood in part as an expression of the fissures in the anti-genealogical or constructivist concept of nation (Krauze's and Florescano's histories of the history of the nation would, in this view, be constructivist or anti-genealogical recoveries of the people's collective memory, made in the image of, and

interest of, the nation), this same crisis is leading some historians of history back to the regional or supranational concept of Latin America once championed by José Martí. The collection of essays edited by Aimar Granados and Carlos Marichal exemplifies this move and renewed interest. The introduction by Granados and Marichal is a useful survey of the new intellectual history in Latin America (which appears to have more traction in Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico than elsewhere). The individual chapter contributions, some written by doctoral students at El Colegio de México, explore historical articulations of such concepts as Hispanic America, Latin America, or Indoamerica. These concepts are traced in congresses, periodicals, or in the works of influential Latin American intellectuals (Justo Sierra, Francisco García Calderón, José Vasconcelos, Francisco Bulnes, Manuel Ugarte). The result is a heterodox vision of the metamorphoses that such concepts have suffered, in different hands, over time. The editors conclude that the retrospective and critical eye of the new intellectual history enriches our understanding of present options. Such options, notes the publisher, seem ever more critical given the “processes of globalization and current projects of regional economic integration” (33).

Of course, historians will observe that such processes are not new, although they do assume different forms and velocities. Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra’s *How to Write the History of the New World* is necessarily transatlantic and regional in scope, for in the eighteenth century historical discourse in the Spanish Americas was closely linked to developments both in Spain and in Europe at large. His transatlantic approach is aligned more with the critical methods of the new history of science (Cañizares-Esguerra was trained at the University of Wisconsin’s History of Science and Medicine graduate program) than intellectual history per se, although the boundaries that once separated these fields have become blurred. In part because of his connective approach and method of reading, Cañizares-Esguerra is able to place Spanish American historical thought firmly on the eighteenth-century’s cutting edge. Indeed, after *How to Write* it should be harder for historians to get away with brandishing such grand historical concepts as the Enlightenment and the Counter-Enlightenment (Isaiah Berlin’s concept) without at least some reference to colonial Spanish America and late imperial Spain.

Because the historical thought associated with the Enlightenment and the Counter-Enlightenment in Europe was so central to the development of genealogical concepts of the nation (as Palti’s book makes clear), *How to Write* is of singular significance for that “crisis of national history” that passes today as a generic crisis of history in certain Latin American circles. Cañizares-Esguerra’s history of eighteenth-century historical thought and methods in Spanish America (mainly New Spain) and Spain makes possible a rethinking of the colonial origins of historical

concepts of the nation. In certain ways eighteenth-century Creole patriotic epistemology was a colonial species of Counter-Enlightenment that pioneered the source-critical and multidisciplinary methods of historical anthropology. Responding both to the enlightened, northwestern European denunciations of Spain and its Empire *and* to the pressing colonial crises of the eighteenth century, Creole and Peninsular historians embarked upon rigorous research and writing projects that would reveal the historical achievements of Spanish, Creole, and Native American civilizations and peoples. In the process, Cañizares-Esguerra notes, they developed empirical methods and rules of exposition nearly a century before Ranke. However, Germany, England, and France won the publishing war as Spanish and Spanish American historical knowledge was filed away in the archive—that grand dustbin of history that is the historian’s bittersweet delight.

Rereading the musty contents of that dustbin of history may help us to anticipate the coming shape of Latin Americanist historical discourse. Now that the newer history of history has placed previously undervalued historical representations on the radar screen, we can be sure that that discourse will find new bearings among the old. Crisis, historians have long contended, has its critical fruits. Indeed, and following the insights of German historian Reinhart Koselleck, we may say that the wedding of crisis and critique is precisely what has defined history as a particularly modern form of representing modernity. It is this concept of history as a repeating and largely self-referential culture of modernity that informs Guillermo Zermeño Padilla’s *La cultura moderna de la historia*. Zermeño is interested in the question of “how to understand the functionality of historiography in modern societies” (231), albeit with particular reference to Mexico. Zermeño traces the effects for Mexican professional historiography of the dispute of 1940, when the “difficulties of the historian as judge of the past and master of life” (231) became apparent and gave way to an accentuation among Mexican historians of the Rankean distinction between realism and fiction. The triumph of Rankean professional historiography, that is, the anti-philosophical history of what actually happened, coincided with the crisis of historicism or decline of philosophical history, whose principal champion in Mexico was the Heideggerian Edmundo O’Gorman, a figure who looms large in Zermeño’s own reading. Modern professional history in Mexico, notes Zermeño, nevertheless retained *ancien régime* techniques and concepts, including “the critical redaction of ancient texts that founded its operation in the development of a philosophy of consciousness of Cartesian design” (229). For Zermeño, then, what is needed is not a return to origins but rather, glossing Kant, a new look (*volver a mirar*) at the history of history. The work reviewed in this essay does just that.