CIVILIZATION AND THE STOLEN GIFTS: CAPITAL, KIN, AND CULT IN EASTERN PERU. JACQUES M. CHEVALIER. Foreword by Ernesto Laclau. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982. xvi + 467 pp., tables, maps, figures, bibliography, index. $49.50 (cloth).

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It is certainly difficult in a brief review to do justice to this big, complex book of 467 dense pages and almost US$50. At a time not especially noted for financial or intellectual risk taking, its publisher has surely made a bold venture. Yet the book is permeated with honest toil and good intentions: barely an argument or an author seems to miss an opportunity to make a bold move in the complex, rich terrain of its chapters. First there is Oecology, then Social Relations, and last (but not least?) the fundamentalist practice of representation, contrasts with authorial desire for a more complex articulation of capitalist with non-capitalist practices in the frontier of the once rain-forested foothills of the eastern Andes of a small part of Peru. Thus the book swell the illustrious company of the formidably formalistic Great Debate concerning the "modes of analysis of the modes of articulation of the modes of production." In doing all this the author quite obsessively never lets an opportunity slip to remind us readers that although capitalism dominates, non-capitalist institutions coexist with it, and dogmatic Marxism has to face up to the complexities of social life.

This book is also about complexity. Indeed, that seems to be its main concern, for everything is very complex when you stop to think about it. Take the Catholic Church, as a random example, down there in the Peruvian montaña: "The Catholic Church is by no means in constant harmony with the social forces of capital, science and the state, let alone the traditional practices of non-western societies; nor does it produce an unproblematic, or non-conflictual and non-contradictory, vision of the overall integration of material, intellectual, and spiritual forces, and of culture with nature (as defined by western man)..." (p. 197).

It's all very complex, it seems, because Louis Althusser is as much a problem as a solution: when put together with Claude Lévi-Strauss he generates all sorts of special complexities called "contradictions" vis-à-vis the weighty relationship of "the base" to "the superstructure." Now while it is true that this can be somewhat assuaged by taking, or rather "borrowing critically," from Pierre Bourdieu's "theory of practice," the gargantuan theoretical contraposition to which all this name dropping and contradiction solving has given birth still has to be moved over oceans and along the rivers and into the trees of social life and history of eastern Peru.

Everything is complicated because although you shouldn't separate base from superstructure or mind from action (and therewith cleave a practice), in practice it seems awfully hard not to. Yet in practice everything also seems so well synthesized; automatically one and fusing. But out of obstinate habit one has to wreck it all by analyzing into constituents. Maybe this is more of a problem of theoretical practice than of practice? In any event it is complex—as any one of the book's 467 megapages of clench-fisted prose will show you at a glance.

In practice it seems very hard to break with old practices, and this book depends on all too conventional categories and modes of presentation from its incongruous cover design by a Canadian Indian artist—whose prints, we are informed (lest we dare to think for ourselves), "are appreciated for their vivid colours, elegant lines, a sensitive vision of nature, and the unique stencil or pochoir technique developed by the artist"—to the intellectual scheme determining the organization of its chapters. First there is Oecology, then Social Relations, and last (but not least?) Spirit—nothing more or less than the heady ascent from the base to the superstructure! How oddly and sadly this fundamentalist practice of basic organization of presentation, this practice of representation, contrasts with authorial desire and theory: "Much like elsewhere, economic factors cannot be fully understood without reference to the systemic interpretation of economic and non-economic instances within the social whole" (p. 11).

Is it unfair or daring to point out that a far simpler and convincing manner of capturing the synthetic unity aimed at by the author lies closer to hand, namely, in the fieldwork experience itself? Why is it that a book so clearly aimed at showing the complexity of everyday life and how that complexity upsets and creatively upsets theory, so utterly fails to convey the feel of peoples' lives? Note that the point here is most definitely not description versus theory, in so many ways a silly opposition, but the ways by which description enriches theory, and vice versa. I myself cannot but think that what I find
shallow and even a little pretentious in much of
the author's discussion of topics like slavery,
debt-peonage, shamanism, and Campa conquest-
m mythology (topics in which I have a deep and
long interest in my studies of montaña society and
history) is due precisely to this particular defect.
The author's abstractions prove to be feeble stuff
indeed when confronted with the very real com-
plexity of Upper Amazonian slavery and debt-
peonage, let alone the shamanic representation of
these and other colonialist practices. How far
are we supposed to give our gift of time and trust
as readers to an author who, in the Althusserian
jargon of the mental mortician, states: "At best a
slave is constituted as a contradictory being, that
is a 'human subject and a legal non-subject, a
man-thing' (Hindess and Hurst . . .). The con-
tradictory status that may be attached to the
slave position produces an element of confusion
or complexity that may have a direct effect upon
the enslaved workers' relation to the means of
production" (p. 201). And how! The only thing
worse than this, in my opinion, is the sentimental
bulwark of abstract defense of the Indians that the
author indulges in, worse than the mawkiest Lib-
eral condemning la leyenda negra.

There is such a painful need for something like
the extended case method in this work. But amid
such much theoretically contrived complexity it is
difficult to know what the author's problematic is
meant to be. Nor does Ernesto Laclau's strangely
incongruous introduction in praise of deconstruc-
tion provide enough of an excuse for this confu-
sion—which is how Laclau seems to understand
decomposition; anything goes.

In the final analysis, as a particular and also
Marxist view of language ranging from Mikhail
Bakhtin to Raymond Williams would contend,
language and style are not separate from, sec-
ondary to, or a mere instrument of reality; to the
contrary, language and style are constitutive of
reality. Hence, poorly written works such as this
do more than offend against etiquette. They of-
fend, and grievously so, against the constituting
of everyday life. From which it surely follows that
a theory of practice has as its pressing obligation
to attend first to its own chief practice—writing.

Civilization and the Stolen Gift makes me
reflect how the gift of intelllection was bestowed
and fought about so as to simplify complexities
with which our forms of life unreasonably con-
fuse, hurt, and occasionally delight us, and on the
other hand, how this gift is also a weapon with
which we fight the vicious simplicities (such as
racism, sexism, and reification . . .) that disguise
complexity and exploitation. To create complexi-
ity may be often no less a politically oppressive
act than to simplify in these ways, and the
responsibility of intellectuals, as of university
presses, guardians of this gift of intelllection, is
to constantly foster the critical eye with this in
mind. But if this publication is a guide, it is to
remind us that academic culture thrives on prac-
tices which are deeply invested in being complex
and not critical. Or is that too simple?

The Invention of Tradition. ERIC
HOBSBAW and TERENCE RANGER, eds.
vii + 300 pp., tables, Index. n.p.

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If there is a unifying theme in this collection, it
is that history is very likely not what we think it is
but has quite probably been invented by individ-
uals to serve some political, ethnic, or personal
end. This idea, as it recurs in the various chapters,
is sometimes significant and alarming, as when
Terence Ranger argues persuasively that much of
what passes for African precolonial history is the
result of "invented traditions" imposed by Euro-
pean colonies to legitimize their rule to
themselves and to their colonized subordinates.

The other chapters, such as Hugh Trevor-
Roper's dissection of the Highland tradition in
Scotland or Prys Morgan's account of the fabrica-
tion of a Welsh past, the idea appears more the
arch and slightly supercilious demonstration by
the learned that both the masses and most schol-
ars entertain amusingly mistaken notions about
the origins of the kilt or the antiquity of folk
festivities. Both of these latter authors seem most
concerned with the personalities and foibles of
the colorful individuals who invented these tradi-
tions and with the naivety of those who accepted
them. Ranger and Bernard S. Cohn, in his analysis
of rituals of incorporation and dominance in Vic-
torian India, are far more concerned with the
ways that traditions are invented as instruments
of power and legitimacy. They both show clearly
how such traditions, once invented, may be in-
voked by the people they were designed to in-
timidate or control, ultimately serving as a
mobilizing ideology against their original inven-
tors. David Cannadine's analysis of monarchical
ritual in England falls somewhere between these
two extremes. His attempt to do "thick descrip-
tion" of ritual diminishes the comparability the
book appears to call for, but he does attend as
well to the questions of the changing relations of
power that ritual change emerges from and
serves to modulate.

Hobsbawm's introductory chapter is a tantaliz-
ing statement of what he hopes the book can do
to open a field of inquiry he admits is still
relatively unformed, but his concluding chapter
is a hodgepodge of things he labels "tradition"—
ranging from monarchy, democracy, and polit-
ical party through the organization of public
education to the proletarian wearing of caps and
the class basis of public sport. While it is possible
to see how he would like to relate all of this to
the broader questions of nationality, social order
and control, political struggle, and class identity
and mobilization, it comes out as little more than
bits and pieces of social history from different
times and places.

Cohn's and Ranger's topics do, it is true, offer
them easier cases for demonstrating how history
as tradition is created by specific individuals and