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Editorial Foreword

FIVE YEARS IN If you make a habit of reading *CSSH* forewords, you know that they adhere to a time-honored format. Written in the third person by an unnamed author, the foreword creates the impression that seven to nine essays, whose subject matter spills widely across space and time, are in fact related in fascinating ways. The "comparative" in comparative studies comes as much from the juxtaposition of our essays as it does from their individual content. The editor's special mission is to convince you that each article in the issue is worth reading because it speaks to a larger pattern. Often, our authors are surprised to see how their essay is grouped with others; they are unaware of the pattern we place them in, and they see their own scholarship differently as a result.

To mark my fifth anniversary as editor of *CSSH*, I would like to step out of character and address you directly. I do this because I have now written twenty editorial forewords, describing over 170 articles and concocting integrative sketches for about eighty comparative frames—we call them "rubrics," the little headings that grace each table of contents—and some of you might be curious to know if I have learned anything from all this effort. I think I have. Each foreword I write is commentary on a new intellectual world made possible for me, and perhaps for you, by a particular combination of essays and ideas. If you are interested in dominant trends in our submissions over the last five years, I have commented on them in our fiftieth anniversary issue (50–1: 1–8) and in recent *CSSH* Conversations (51–4: 927–40; 53–3: 692–707). The lessons I would like to consider here are instead the kind one learns while putting together a journal, a job that produces insights and investments I could not have understood when I first sat in the editor's chair.

METHOD AND MINDSET A journal, I now realize, is blessed and cursed by its own name. Comparison is a versatile methodology, but it is easy to do it badly. Some of our worst manuscripts are the most explicitly comparative, and I sometimes fantasize about how our submission pool would immediately improve if *CSSH* were simply called *Society and History*. Essays that compare X in settings Y and Z, taking for granted the uniformity of X across space and time, and making little effort to explain why Z and Y are important sites for comparison—such essays are doomed at our doorstep. Yet many scholars around the world still think comparative analysis is best done in this way. Many of our peer reviewers agree. An excellent argument with wide-ranging significance is sometimes dismissed by a reader who cannot imagine how a paper on Levantine immigrants in Argentina might speak to scholars at work

in Europe or North America. "The comparative dimension is weak" is a stock criticism at *CSSH*. It might describe a real flaw, but it often means the reviewer wants to be walked through the comparison, using examples that interest her. As judge in these matters, I decide in favor of authors who see comparison not as a method, but as a mindset. The ideal *CSSH* manuscript is one written by a scholar who *thinks* comparatively, who concocts an argument not in order to compare but because he has come to understand his subject matter through constant reference to other places and times, to other possibilities. Papers shaped by this sensibility can be linked to scholarship of diverse sorts, and they are likely to survive our review process as a result.

I have also learned that good comparative work is not subservient to genre; indeed, it tends to work beyond the limits of disciplinary codes and theoretical orthodoxies, even when the author is addressing these forms. It is true that some essays "read like" *CSSH* essays—even before our managing editor, David Akin, gives them an artful adjustment—but when they do, it is often because the author's disciplinary background is hard to guess. Is she an anthropologist? Is he a political scientist? One cannot always be sure, and that is a good thing. This interdisciplinary effect is enhanced by dozens of savvy reviewers, whom I routinely put to work across borders: the historian must please the anthropologists who evaluate his manuscript; the sociologist must answer to the political economist. Commensurability is the outcome, and good comparison depends on it, but uniformity (in style or interpretive approach) is seldom expected.

The allure of *CSSH* is the diversity of the materials and topics it covers. In this issue, for instance, I have brought together four papers by authors who deal with urban life (**Jon Adams** and **Edmund Ramsden**, **Matthew Hull**, **Heather Sutherland**, and **Karen Isaksen Leonard**). These studies range temporally from the seventeenth century to the present day, from Delhi, Hyderabad, and Makasser to the modern Western city writ large, from human social forms (such as banks and neighborhoods) to the analogous life forms created by rats and bees. It is a broad platform for comparison, but reading the papers together brings into relief the centrality of planning, resistance to planning, customary practices (such as adoption, marriage, and inheritance) that pervade urban space, and the enduring role of the state in creating and destroying the social forms that constitute cities over time.

From cities, we move to the hinterland, where two of our authors (**Gastón Gordillo** and **Kathleen Lowrey**) explore how Guarani communities in Bolivia, Paraguay, and Argentina lay claims to space. Known internationally as "indigenous people," Guarani must organize around and against this popular motif. That they do not always have deep roots in the lands they claim—but are more accurately characterized as diasporic or dispossessed populations—makes their struggle to inhabit and hold territory even more difficult. The romantic attraction of the agrarian countryside is central to these movements,

yet everyday social life in some Guarani villages is shaped by a productive resistance to design, by an aversion to regimentation, that can also be seen as a persistent aspect of urban life. Of all social life.

The connections between these two sets of papers, which I have called **City Logics** and **Claiming Space**, are obvious and unexpected. They can be traced across ethnic and religious groups, continents, historical periods, political ideologies, and animal species. It is highly unlikely that one discipline could produce them all.

INTELLECTUAL CURRENTS As editor, I deal in bulk, processing over three hundred manuscripts a year. Fads and crazes hit the journal like swarms of locusts, and they make it easier to spot original thought amid piles of like-minded and similarly phrased arguments. It is hard to convince young scholars that another awestruck deliberation on "the state of exception" or "homo sacer" or "biopower" or "social capital" is not what the world needs now. The best authors tend not to be sucked into these intellectual whirlpools—although they have been known to start them spinning—and the healthy tendency among those who do find themselves caught up in strong intellectual currents is to use the momentum to head off in new directions. If I have inherited a bias from former *CSSH* editors, it is a taste for scholarship that is alert to intellectual trends, and open to them, but which is primarily concerned to understand the factors that give certain trends their power.

In this issue, I have juxtaposed three essays (by **Elizabeth Emma Ferry**, **Matthew Wolf-Meyer**, and **David Arnold** and **Erich DeWald**) that draw their force from very influential currents: materiality studies, science studies, colonial studies, and new approaches to consumption and commodification. In each case, objects (minerals, bicycles) or behaviors (sleep) are analyzed against variable backdrops. The intention is to use mineral collecting to explain patterns of gender in Mexico and the United States; to use shifts in sleep science to interpret changes in allopathic medicine and the relationships it poses between nature and culture; and to use the bicycle, as a simple, everyday technology, to explore changing conceptions of class, race, and empowerment in colonial Vietnam and India. Although each of these papers is associated with genre-heavy approaches known for their key terms and formulaic tendencies, the authors share a more basic desire to follow ideas and things across contexts to see what happens, and why. The method is straightforward, yet it produces fascinating results, and in keeping with this analytical simplicity, I call this set of essays **Object/Field**.

SHARED ANALYTICAL SPACE Because our best writers and reviewers are always attuned to other times and spaces, *CSSH* is well protected from the doctrinal uniformities that are the trademark of many leading journals. Analytical mobility is critical to the way *CSSH* works, and the inclusion of multiple

perspectives, drawn from diverse locations, keeps us in motion. One of the most challenging obligations of editorship is to deal fairly not only with individual contributors, but with the schools, traditions, and (let's face it) the intellectual mafias our contributors and reviewers belong to. These interest groups often respond to each other predictably, and they must be carefully managed, like reindeer herds or packs of wolves, to insure that they do not destroy each other or the ecosystem that, at *CSSH*, we would like them to share.

Authors and readers who can agree to share intellectual space are essential to the editorial process at *CSSH*. The amount of collaboration that goes into each *CSSH* essay is great, and the authors we publish will soon be reviewing new submissions themselves. I have been deeply impressed by the intellectual generosity of our reviewers, most of whom offer helpful and abundant advice. Building a good editorial machine consists primarily of finding scholars who are discerning, insightful, and willing to help others improve their work. This helping impulse is crucial, especially when the review process ends in rejection for most authors and nearly all manuscripts undergo at least one round of revision.

The work of our peer reviewers is invisible by design, but the ethos that motivates it is on prominent display in the review essays we feature occasionally in *CSSH*. **Ilana Gershon's** review in this issue focuses on three books that explore online identities and how they intersect with offline social worlds. It is an appreciation of productive themes, an endorsement of interdisciplinary work, and a nudge in new directions. In short, it is the way our reviewers so often engage with promising research, even when anonymity opens the way to less genial behavior. It is reassuring to see collegiality so consistently and thoughtfully applied; editorial work would be unbearable without it.

DIGITAL REALITIES After several years of denial, I am reluctantly coming to terms with the gap between my ideal image of *CSSH*, the knowledge assembled in the journal, and the practical means by which the journal's content is distributed and consumed. I sometimes wonder how many people actually read the forewords I write—a vain thought, I admit—and I do so because putting an issue together is an illuminating experience, one that can be had only if particular essays are read together; that is, only if they are studied comparatively. Most *CSSH* consumers, the tens of thousands who view our articles on line each year, are not aware of how fascinating the connections between our essays can be, largely because they do not read *CSSH* as a whole. The digital revolution has put an end to the journal as an integral object even as it has increased the spread and accessibility of the information stored in journals. Apart from a stalwart core of individual subscribers, and the lucky few who chance upon a hard copy of *CSSH*, the issues we produce are consumed mostly by students and scholars who arrive at a particular article via on-line word searches. We are confident that our articles are worth

reading in isolation and that they will flourish in the new environments individual users create for them. The sheer number of downloads (averaging over three thousand per month) is proof of their appeal.

But *CSSH* does have a distinctive agenda, and this agenda is strengthened by the associations, contrasts, and epiphanies that come from juxtaposition. Everything about the journal is oriented toward this goal. A contributor to a recent issue told me, after he read the editorial foreword to see how I described his piece, that he found my contextualization of his work so stimulating that he wondered why he did not read editorial forewords more often. That brought a smile to my face, since I often wonder why I write them at all. It is a lonely craft, rooted in an old way of reading and synthesizing, but it does encapsulate the creative logic behind each issue we produce. That logic has taught me a great deal about society and history, and it has made my tenure at *CSSH* vastly rewarding. It is worth saying that, after five years, in my own voice.

———Andrew Shryock, *CSSH* Editor

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