

Introduction

5

I

In the early seventeenth century, England was ruled by kings whose power, they said, came from God. James Stuart and his son Charles governed their largest kingdom with the aid of a national church, a widely accepted legal and administrative apparatus and enormous symbolic authority. Royal power ramified through extensive networks of mostly amateur officers who used their social prestige to enact the Stuarts' dominion. With limited coercive resources, the Stuart regime depended heavily on the collaboration of its subjects to raise funds, administer justice, and perform the tasks of government; mobilizing collaboration can be seen as the early Stuart regime's chief task. Despite these advantages, facing simultaneous revolts between 1638 and 1642, the early Stuart regime collapsed, leading to civil war, the temporary abolition of monarchy, and the fundamental transformation of the British state. Understanding the causes and character of this collapse – understanding why collaboration failed – is one of the classic problems of early modern history and of history more generally.

Despite its importance, early Stuart historiography stands at something of an impasse. Once a vicious battleground, over the past ten years it has become increasingly evident that the debate over 'revisionism' is over. The questions and solutions invented for this debate may have lost some of their urgency, but they have also framed new problems – about the relationship between publicity and subjectivity, politics and narrative – that researchers are only beginning to address.

The debate over revisionism was initiated by a controversy over 'localism'. In the 1960s and 1970s, the main explanation for the fall of the Stuart regime was a phenomenon called 'administrative breakdown' driven by parochial identity. Early Stuart people, scholars claimed, were primarily concerned with their own communities and had little interest or involvement in outside affairs. Parochialism led magistrates to obstruct central regime initiatives in order to insulate their community from the demands of the centre.⁸ Localism helped authorize a characteristic revisionist style of high political narrative. If events at the centre carried little interest for people outside, those events were best understood as infighting among a

⁸ Thomas Garden Barnes, *Somerset 1625–1640: A County's Government during the 'Personal Rule'* (Cambridge, MA, 1961); L.M. Hill, 'County Government in Caroline England 1625–1640', in *The Origins of the English Civil War*, ed. Conrad Russell (London, 1978); John S. Morrill, *Revolt of the Provinces* (London, 1976); Anthony Fletcher, 'National and Local Awareness in the County Communities', in *Before the English Civil War*, ed. Howard Tomlinson (London, 1983). For revisionism's debt to 'local studies', see especially Russell, *Parliaments and English Politics*, 4–8, 64–74.

6 The Invention of Politics in Early Stuart England

tiny group of ‘people who count’. Beyond high political actors – usually encompassing the king, his Privy Council and court, and a few other aristocrats and landowners – what appeared to be deliberate action was really reflexive obstructionism.⁹

Beginning in the 1980s, however, so-called ‘post-revisionist’ scholarship challenged the localism thesis directly.¹⁰ Post-revisionists argued that information and attitudes relating to British and European affairs were more widespread than revisionists had allowed. Scholarship on the circulation of news, verse libel, and the relationship between public politics and foreign policy has shown that early Stuart English people developed a remarkable interest in information about the wider world and that some early modern version of ‘public opinion’ was an important dimension of political life. Affairs that had been understood purely as contests between government officials were shown to have substantial overflow in pamphlets, rumours, and poems. Post-revisionist scholars also devised or borrowed new analytic categories – among them, ‘popularity’, ‘political culture’, and the ‘public sphere’ – to help explain what they had found.¹¹

Post-revisionist interpretations were complemented by work on early modern state formation. This scholarship, growing out of social history, argues that the relationship between early modern central regimes and their subjects was more complex than a simple ‘command-obey-obstruct’ model might allow. Instead, as William Beik argues, even under classical French ‘absolutism’, central regimes were forced to employ a range of techniques to secure collaboration: concessions, threats, enticements, persuasion, and much else besides were continually necessary to make early modern

⁹ Conrad Russell, ‘Parliamentary History in Perspective, 1604–1629’, *History* 61 (1976); Kevin Sharpe, ‘Introduction: Parliamentary History 1603–1629: In or out of Perspective?’, in *Faction and Parliament: Essays on Early Stuart History*, ed. Kevin Sharpe (London, 1985); Peter Lake, ‘Retrospective’, in *The Political World of Thomas Wentworth, Earl of Strafford, 1621–1641*, ed. J.F. Merritt (Cambridge, 1996), esp. 252–69.

¹⁰ Ann Hughes, ‘Militancy and Localism: Warwickshire Politics and Westminster Politics, 1643–1647’, *TRHS*, fifth series, 31 (1981), 51–68; idem, *Politics, Society and Civil War in Warwickshire, 1620–1660* (Cambridge, 1987); Peter Lake, ‘The Collection of Ship Money in Cheshire during the 1630s: A Case Study of Relations between Central and Local Government’, *Northern History* 17 (1981), 44–71.

¹¹ Cust, ‘News and Politics’; Thomas Cogswell, *The Blessed Revolution* (Cambridge, 1989); Thomas Cogswell, ‘The Politics of Propaganda: Charles I and the People in the 1620s’, *JBS* 29 (1990); Pauline Croft, ‘The Reputation of Robert Cecil: Libels, Political Opinion and Popular Awareness in the Early Seventeenth Century’, *TRHS*, sixth series, 1 (1991); Thomas Cogswell, ‘Underground Verse and the Transformation of Early Stuart Political Culture’, *Huntington Library Quarterly* 60:3 (1997); Bellamy, *Politics of Court Scandal*; Thomas Cogswell, ‘The People’s Love: The Duke of Buckingham and Popularity’, and Richard Cust, ‘Charles I and Popularity’, in *Politics, Religion and Popularity*; Peter Lake and Steven Pincus, eds., *The Politics of the Public Sphere in Early Modern England* (Manchester, 2007).

Introduction

7

monarchies work.¹² One outcome of these negotiations, scholars have suggested, was an incipient ‘civic consciousness’ developing in thousands of members of the ‘unacknowledged republic’ of amateur office-holders.¹³ Like the post-revisionist turn towards ‘popular politics’, the social-historical focus on collaboration and negotiation expanded the number of people involved in early modern government and changed how we understood the mechanics of power.

Over the past two decades, these complementary lines of research have substantially re-framed the problem of early modern politics by suggesting that the key to the early Stuart regime’s fortunes lay in the relationships between ‘high’ political actors and ‘public politics’. These relationships are represented as enormously complex, involving continuous negotiation and confrontation between elements of the early Stuart regime, royal and ecclesiastical officers, and subject populations including Catholics, women, and the poor. Publicity was both a key tool for government and a major site of rivalry and confrontation between actors making contrasting appeals for support. These processes, sometimes inadvertently, helped foster ‘civic consciousness’ or ‘political awareness’ outside the central regime.¹⁴

As a result of this new synthesis, the development of ‘political awareness’ has become one of the main stories of early Stuart history. Yet the story raises more questions than it can comfortably answer. What, exactly, is ‘political awareness’? What was its structure and content? How did it develop? And why? These are not only problems for early Stuart historians. A great deal of early modern political history – from the crisis of the late Italian Renaissance to the French Revolution – has been devoted to understanding how shifts in thinking and subjectivity created the possibility for different forms of action. ‘Political awareness’ is not something to be gestured at: it is a fundamentally important concept for the entire era, and must be addressed explicitly and empirically.

¹² William Beik, *Absolutism and Society in Seventeenth-Century France* (Cambridge, 1985); William Beik, ‘The Absolutism of Louis XIV as Social Collaboration’, *Past and Present* 188 (2005), 195–224; Michael J. Braddick and John Walter, eds., *Negotiating Power in Early Modern Society* (Cambridge, 2001); Steve Hindle, *The State and Social Change in Early Modern England, c.1550–1640* (New York, 2002); John Walter, *Crowds and Popular Politics in Early Modern England* (Manchester, 2006); Peacey, *Print and Public Politics*, 8–13.

¹³ Phil Withington, ‘Public Discourse, Corporate Citizenship, and State Formation in Early Modern England’, *American Historical Review* 112 (2007), 1016–1038; Mark Goldie, ‘The Unacknowledged Republic: Officeholding in Early Modern England’, in *The Politics of the Excluded, c.1500–1850*, ed. Tim Harris (Basingstoke, 2001).

¹⁴ Croft, ‘The Reputation of Robert Cecil’; Cogswell, ‘Underground Verse’.

II

‘Political awareness’ is not the clearest of terms. Alternatives – ‘political subjectivity’, ‘political consciousness’, ‘politicized’ – seem little better. What are these words trying to indicate?

There have been two main answers to this question. First, some have argued that in Renaissance monarchies, most people were supposed to be passive, obedient subjects. During the early modern period, however, people came to see themselves instead as active participants in the making of political life – as ‘citizens’ rather than subjects. Empowered by an intellectual scheme that allowed ordinary persons to participate in history (in some accounts, Puritanism; in others, ‘classical republicanism’), the ‘people’ smashed the old order. This revolutionary romance has deep roots: early modern republicans from Milton to Robespierre insisted that replacing monarchy with republic meant replacing passive monarchical subjects with active republican citizens.¹⁵ However, current scholarship on collaborative monarchy renders the notion of passive, obedient monarchical ‘subjects’ rather unpersuasive. Indeed, the whole concept of the passive monarchical subject now seems greatly indebted to the hostile, polemical caricatures produced by early modern republicans themselves. As Johann Sommerville shows, King James – neither Puritan nor republican – regularly exhorted his subjects to active participation in government.¹⁶ Consequently, this model of republican awakening seems more and more like a solution in search of a problem. Subjects did not need to be transformed into citizens; participation and collaboration were simply how monarchical government worked.

Second, some scholars have used the terminology of ‘political awareness’ or ‘politicization’ to describe an intensification of plebeian or provincial interest in the disputes of the kingdom’s governors, often appearing as an alignment between local and national divisions. For example, Clive

¹⁵ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago, 1998); Arthur B. Ferguson, *The Articulate Citizen and the English Renaissance* (Durham, NC, 1965); Michael Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints* (New York, 1974); J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment* (Princeton, 1975); Patrick Collinson, ‘*De Republica Anglorum*: or, history with the politics put back’, in *Elizabethan Essays* (London, 1994); Markku Peltonen, *Classical Humanism and Republicanism in English Political Thought 1570–1640* (Cambridge, 1995); Peltonen, ‘Rhetoric and Citizenship in the Monarchical Republic of Queen Elizabeth I’, in *The Monarchical Republic of Early Modern England*, ed. John F. McDiarmid (Aldershot, 2007); Quentin Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism* (Cambridge, 1998).

¹⁶ Johann P. Sommerville, ‘England and Roman Liberty in the Monarchical Republic of Early Stuart England’, in *The Monarchical Republic*, ed. McDiarmid; see also Blair Worden, ‘Republicanism, Regicide and Republic: The English Experience’, in *Republicanism: A Shared European Heritage*, ed. Martin van Gelderen and Quentin Skinner, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 2002).

Introduction

9

Holmes has argued that in trying to prevent the expropriation of their land through drainage, the inhabitants of the eastern fens came to associate their local struggles with the larger ‘legal and constitutional concerns’ that preoccupied ‘the national rulers at Westminster’.¹⁷ Those who manage to align local developments with national ones are said to develop ‘political consciousness’, while those who fail remain ‘sub-political’. This phenomenon of mapping local conflicts onto larger religious, dynastic, or factional divisions is both very real and very important, and the debate between revisionists and post-revisionists was largely conducted in these terms.¹⁸

However, as an account of political awareness, the isomorphic model suffers from serious weaknesses. As social historians often argue, the isomorphic model valorizes an arbitrary and narrow sense of what it means to be political. In contrast, social historians have developed a powerful case for expanding the terminology of ‘politics’ into humbler and more everyday contexts – villages, parishes, families, and neighbourhoods. This work upsets traditional pictures of everyday life as static and stable, figuring it instead as dynamic and agonistic. As Keith Wrightson observes, this approach expands the arena of politics by defining as ‘political’ anything to do with power.¹⁹

While attractive, the maximalist reading makes politics so ubiquitous that it can be found everywhere and always, emptying political analysis of any historical specificity or sense of change. Indeed, timeless notions of the political, implicit or explicit, have come to play crucial roles in historical analysis and explanation. Scholars working through complex textual, ideological, and religious problems have often invoked ‘politics’ as a fulcrum around which their explanations can be arranged. Philippe Buc’s brilliant historicist critique of medieval ritual rests on an entirely traditional sense of politics as the power struggles of great men, while Ethan

¹⁷ C. Holmes, ‘Drainers and Fenmen: the Problem of Popular Political Consciousness in the Seventeenth Century’, in *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England*, ed. Anthony Fletcher and John Stevenson (Cambridge, 1985). Similar usage prevails in works as different as Steve Pincus, *1688: The First Modern Revolution* (New Haven, 2009), 39–40; John Walter, “‘Affronts & Insolencies’: The Voices of Radwinter and Popular Opposition to Laudianism”, *EHR* 122 (2007), 35–60; and Mark Kishlansky, *Parliamentary Selection* (Cambridge, 1986), esp. chapter 5.

¹⁸ Mark Kishlansky, ‘Turning Frogs into Princes: Aesop’s *Fables* and the Political Culture of Early Modern England’, in *Political Culture and Cultural Politics in Early Modern England*, ed. Susan D. Amussen and Mark A. Kishlansky (Manchester, 1995), 338–9; Roger Howell, Jr, *Newcastle upon Tyne and the Puritan Revolution* (Oxford, 1967), 336–42; P.A. Slack, ‘An Election to the Short Parliament’, *BIHR* 46 (1973), 108–14, 112.

¹⁹ Keith Wrightson, ‘The Politics of the Parish in Early Modern England’, in *The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England*, ed. Paul Griffiths, Adam Fox and Steve Hindle (Basingstoke, 1996).

Shagan's revelatory account of the English Reformation often invokes 'popular' politics to explain the progress of reform.²⁰ For Wrightson as well as for Buc and Shagan, the trans-historical character of the political performs a crucial function in the argument. Precisely because the nature of the political does not change over time, politics provides a stable base for explicating other phenomena, from parish disputes to intellectual controversies.

This book proposes an alternative: putting the concept of 'the political' itself back into motion. If ahistorical concepts of the political sometimes prove useful, abandoning them may prove useful as well; after all, historicizing the political field was one of the major contributions of early Stuart revisionism.²¹ One might go farther, and suggest that holding the category 'politics' constant in the early modern era is a baffling choice precisely because the vocabulary and practices associated with politics were fundamentally transformed during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The word 'politic' itself took on new meanings in several European languages. To be 'political' meant something very different to the fifteenth-century judge Sir John Fortescue than it meant to Shakespeare's audiences. For Fortescue, following Giles of Rome, political rule meant government limited by law and ruled by virtue, embodying the values of the Aristotelian *polis*. By the end of the sixteenth century, when Henry Howard described Queen Elizabeth as 'pollitick', he meant not that Elizabeth was limited by law, but rather that she was prudent and wise.²² In the comedies of Dekker, Webster, Chapman, and Shakespeare, 'politic' prudence came to mean little more than craftiness and cunning.²³

In the sixteenth century, 'politic' also became a term of opprobrium to describe someone who valued worldly over spiritual ends.²⁴ Such men and

²⁰ Martin Jay, *The Virtues of Mendacity: On Lying in Politics* (Charlottesville, 2010), 76–113; Philippe Buc, *The Dangers of Ritual* (Princeton, 2001); Ethan H. Shagan, *Popular Politics and the English Reformation* (Cambridge, 2002).

²¹ Mark Kishlansky, 'The Emergence of Adversary Politics in the Long Parliament', *JMH* 49 (1977), 617–40; Kishlansky, *Parliamentary Selection*; William J. Bulman, 'The Practice of Politics: The English Civil War and the 'Resolution' of Henrietta Maria and Charles I', *Past and Present* 206 (2010), 43–79.

²² All Souls College (Oxford) MS 190, vr [Howard's dedication to Elizabeth]; Nicolai Rubinstein, 'The History of the Word *Politikus* in Early-Modern Europe', in *The Languages of Political Theory in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Anthony Pagden (Cambridge, 1987); Maurizio Viroli, *From Politics to Reason of State* (Cambridge, 1992).

²³ William Shakespeare, *A Most Pleasant and Excellent Conceited Comedie, of Syr Iohn Falstaffe; and the merrie Wives of Windsor* (London, 1602) [STC 22299], D3v; George Chapman, *Al Fooles A Comody* (London, 1605) [STC 4963], C2r; Thomas Dekker and John Webster, *North-Ward Hoe* (London, 1607) [STC 6539], D4v.

²⁴ For example, Thomas Cooper, *Certaine Sermons* (London, 1580) [STC 5685], Biir; [Richard Broughton], *The First Part of the Resolution of Religion* (n.p., 1603) [STC 3897], 108/G6v.

Introduction

11

women were often accused of concocting an outward show of devotion to better achieve their secret goals. Much of the religious polemic of the early modern era consisted of this accusation. In his 1592 attack on the Presbyterian ‘Conspiracie’, Richard Cosin invoked the opinion of ‘Macchiavel’ (the ‘prophane politique of our age’), ‘that shewe of pietie and religion was the readiest and surest way, to blinde and seduce a multitude’. For the separatist Henry Barrow, it was conformist clerics such as Cosin who were the real ‘pollitike divines’. Catholic texts described ostensibly Protestant courtiers as secret atheists and Machiavels, while Protestant writers persistently depicted ‘popery’ as a politic fraud disguised as a religion.²⁵ What the prudent prince and the religious hypocrite had in common – what made them both ‘politic’ – were hidden intentions. The prudent prince put on ‘shows’ to mislead his enemies while keeping his real plans secret; the hypocrite feigned piety while secretly pursuing worldly ends. The central theme of this particular early modern version of the political was the hiddenness of human intentions.²⁶

I do not mean to claim this was the only version of the political available in the early modern era; I do not even mean to claim it was dominant. Instead of imagining the political as a field prefigured by the hiddenness of human intentions, early moderns imagined it sometimes as a theatre of virtue, sometimes as a microcosm of the divine order, sometimes as a field defined by privileges and liberties. In early Stuart England, many different versions of the political coexisted. Sometimes they overlapped, and sometimes they were readily distinguishable. Each was partial; each emphasized something different about the structure of the world; each encouraged a different sort of conduct, taught people to understand events in a different way, and had its own style of discourse and its own practices of representation. What these forms of ‘political awareness’ offered the early moderns, as Jason Peacey has recently argued, was *practical competency*: a set of categories for understanding cause and effect, for evaluating persons and events, and ultimately for choosing courses of action.²⁷

Admitting different forms of the political has two advantages. First, it allows for a richer and more historicized understanding of the styles of

²⁵ Richard Cosin, *Conspiracie, for Pretended Reformation* (London, 1592) [STC 5823], b2r–v; [Henry Barrow,] *A Brief Discoverie of the False Church* (Dordrecht? 1590) [STC 1517], 244/112v; [Barrow,] *A Collection of Certaine Sclaunderous Articles Gyven Out by the Bishops against Such Faithfull Christians as They Now Unjustly Deteyne in Their Prisons* (Dordrecht? 1590) [STC 1518], G1r; Lake, ‘Republic as Conspiracy’.

²⁶ Millstone, ‘Seeing like a Statesman in Early Stuart England’.

²⁷ Peacey, *Print and Public Politics*, 392.

perception, description, and action available to the early moderns, which in turn ought to help us produce better explanations of their choices and conduct. Second, if we create space for different forms of the political, then the development of ‘political awareness’ becomes not a linear progression from less to more but rather a series of transformations. Through tracking the efforts of early modern persons to perceive, interpret, and act in what they deem the political field, we can watch these transformations as they unfold.

III

In early Stuart history, questions about political awareness have arisen mainly through studies of political culture, and some of the difficulties with existing accounts of political awareness can be traced to weaknesses in the concept of political culture itself. If a study of manuscript pamphlets is to contribute to a satisfactory account of political awareness, it may require a slightly different set of tools.

From a very early stage, early modern political historians embraced the cultural turn, often to extraordinary effect. Political culture meant expanding political history in new directions, and especially to new sources – poems, paintings, masques, plays – often interrogated with rigour and imagination. Historians of political culture found symbolic resonances in unlikely places, recovering a robust world rich with meaning. Alastair Bellany opened his masterly *Politics of Court Scandal* (2004) with something of a manifesto, explaining that his work was meant to be ‘an ethnography of early Stuart political culture’, part of a larger effort ‘to rewrite early Stuart political history as cultural history’, and therefore focussing on the ‘cultural’ construction of ‘legitimacy’ through texts, rituals, art, sermons, and stories.²⁸ Political culture was so powerful that it sometimes seemed like the method to end method, the technique of historical analysis that would finally solve the mysteries of the past.

Nevertheless, the cultural turn had its share of critics, and not only among dust bowl empiricists. Just as every history is selective, so is every approach partial, foregrounding some questions while foreclosing others. Three major concerns have been raised about political culture, which we

²⁸ Bellany, *Politics of Court Scandal*, 22–24; Lake, ‘Retrospective’, 270–8; Kevin Sharpe and Peter Lake, ‘Introduction’, *Culture and Politics in Early Stuart England*, ed. Kevin Sharpe and Peter Lake (Stanford, 1993).

Introduction

13

might label materiality, temporality, and intersubjectivity. I will also raise a fourth: intentionality.

First, scholars have struggled to relate political culture to socio-economic structures and conditions. One of the first interventions proposed by the cultural turn was discovering that early modern categories did not refer transparently to objective facts: being a ‘gentleman’ meant occupying a cultural construct rather than having a certain number of pounds per annum. However, after an initial flight from social and economic life, cultural historians have found it surprisingly difficult to work their way back. Cultural and socio-economic histories have fragmented, sometimes forming separate disciplines even when practised by the same historian. Few would regard this as satisfactory. What is needed is not simply a turn towards material culture, but rather a cultural materialism that would, in Raymond Williams’s terms, explain ‘the social creation of meanings’ as ‘a practical material activity’. A materialist approach takes meaning-making neither as dependent nor as autonomous, but rather as inhabiting the same world as other social and material practices.²⁹

Second, political culture’s difficulty grappling with changing material conditions is only a special case of a larger problem: the political culture concept is simply ill suited to discuss change over time. This is an artefact of the method of exposition pioneered by Clifford Geertz and executed by his admirers. As William Sewell notes, Geertz does not simply freeze time; he abolishes it.³⁰ Geertz’s most celebrated essays take a single problematic event and explicate the symbolism using examples drawn from other parts of the same culture. When imported to history, this technique has two contradictory effects. First, the drive to explicate particular problematic events draws scholars into focussing on short time spans or ‘moments’. Consequently, the time horizons of historical analysis are often quite brief, briefer even than the horizons of the historical actors themselves. Second, to explicate a moment or event (say, a royal entry), scholars draw on other uses of those same symbols (other royal entries, other appearances of the

²⁹ Peter Lake and Steven Pincus, ‘The Strange Death of Political History’ (unpublished working paper). I am grateful to Steve Pincus for permission to cite this work in progress. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford, 1977). Rather than treating discourse and practice as antithetical (as de Certeau and Chartier attempt), I treat discourse as a form of practice. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley, 1998); Roger Chartier, *On the Edge of the Cliff: History, Languages and Practices*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Baltimore, 1997); William H. Sewell, Jr, ‘Language and Practice in Cultural History: Backing Away from the Edge of the Cliff’, *French Historical Studies* 21 (1998), 241–54.

³⁰ William H. Sewell, Jr, *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation* (Chicago, 2005), 182.

same themes). This constructs the era from which examples are gathered as a unity. Shifts in ‘culture’, when documented, appear implausibly as wholesale shifts from one unity to another. Ideally, historical analysis would make room for *sequence*, allowing that one use of a symbol might be different than another because it comes later in time.

Third, studies of political culture tend to presume that symbolic utterances were transparent and easily legible to contemporaries; in Geertz’s terminology, culture is thought to work through the ‘intersubjective world of common understandings’.³¹ In other words, we might not understand a painting, a ritual, or a joke from the past, but contemporaries surely did; our task is to recover painfully what was obvious to them.³² This presumption is sometimes fruitful, and sometimes valid. But it is also worth asking about instances when the symbolic world was imperfectly legible: legible only to some, and difficult for others to make out. Put simply, sometimes early moderns were confused by what they heard, saw, and read; sometimes they found texts, emblems, or ceremonies perplexing; sometimes they did not get the joke. In many circumstances, meaning was not self-evident even to contemporary observers but had to be constructed or deciphered. In such situations, what can be studied are not intersubjective orders of meaning but instead socially and historically specific techniques for the construction of meaning.³³

Finally, part of the appeal of cultural analysis was how deftly it avoided questions of intentionality. Whatever her inner intentions, an actor had to speak, write, or act in ways other people could understand.³⁴ This approach allowed scholars to bracket intention and focus instead on how people invoked shared symbolic systems. This is certainly a valid approach: after all, human intentions are gossamer and difficult to recover under the best of conditions, and their very existence is doubtful. However, systematically avoiding the question of intention has been particularly debilitating for scholars working in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The late

³¹ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1973), 92.

³² ‘When you realize that you are not getting something – a joke, a proverb, a ceremony – that is particularly meaningful to the natives, you can see where to grasp a foreign system of meaning in order to unravel it.’ Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York, 1999), 77–78.

³³ Christian Jouhaud, ‘Les Libelles en France dans le premier XVII^e siècle: Lecteurs, Auteurs, Commanditaires, Historiens’, *XVII^e Siècle* 49 (1997), 203–18.

³⁴ Quentin Skinner, ‘Some Problems in the Analysis of Political Thought and Action’, *Political Theory* 2 (1974), 277–303, especially 295–9; Michael Braddick, *State Formation in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2000), esp. 70–77; and Braddick and Walter, ‘Introduction. Grids of Power’, in *Negotiating Authority*, ed. Braddick and Walter, esp. 9–10.