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Popular Senses of Time and Place in Tudor and Stuart England

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POPULAR SENSES OF TIME AND PLACE IN
TUDOR AND STUART ENGLAND

This paper[1] presents some early findings of ongoing archival investigation into popular conceptions of time in Tudor and Stuart England. It begins with a critical survey of some of the ways in which historians have understood time. Such accounts have emphasized the emptiness of peasant time, the employment of temporal registers as an irresistible instrument of domination and the significance of changing conceptions of time in the formation of capitalist modernity. The paper challenges such views, arguing from the archival evidence of ordinary people's voices that popular senses of the past in Tudor and Stuart England were complex, multifaceted, and grafted into social relations, labour and distinct readings of the land. Most of all, it is argued that the localism of understandings of time gave them a peculiar richness and vitality. Although it is shown that elites did indeed attempt to employ temporal registers as modes of domination, what is most apparent from the evidence is the significance of popular resistance to such projects, together with the creativity and originality of popular conceptions of time.

Tudor and Stuart people knew that their world had a beginning and an end. The world was thought, by our standards, to be very young. This is apparent from casual asides in ordinary people's testimonies to law courts. One man giving testimony to the Norwich Mayor's Court in May 1552 made reference to 'the begynnyng of the world' (Norfolk Record Office (NRO), Norwich City Records, 16A/6, p. 109). Thirty six years later, the Cornishman Thomas Hellier explained to the court of Star Chamber that 'the river of Foy did runn out the west side of Langourde moore and had so done lx (60) years befor that time to his knowledge and did thinke a thosande years befor. And from the beginninge of the world' (The National Archives (TNA), STAC5/F21/12). If the world had a definite beginning, it also had an imminent end: whereas current-day historians see the early modern epoch as the *start* of something (specifically, of modernity), many contemporaries felt that they were living at the *end* of human history and worried over the possibility of their redemption following an apocalypse which they felt to lie just around the corner. Warden Woodward of New College Oxford noted drily of one sermon he heard in 1674 that 'Mr Budd did preach in the morning upon the subject that the world should have an end, bee burnt up with fire and utterly annhiliated. But whether soe, or noe I doubted' (Rickard, 1957, pp. 16–17).

For Tudor and Stuart people, time itself was not linear: its arrow flew in both directions. Ghosts intruded from the past into the present. As he crossed Cutler's Bridge in 1668, on the boundary of Sheffield, John Bowman was confronted by the ghost of a former lord of the town, George Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury, who had died in 1590. Bowman described the earl's spectre as 'a man lyke unto a prince with a green doublet and ruff' (Raine, 1861, pp. 161–2). The boundary between future and present was permeable. For many poorer and middling people, time only made full sense within a local context: temporal registers were linked to local memory, to the rhythms of communal life and to senses of space and landscape. This point has often evaded historians, who – rather than conceptualizing time as a social construct – have been better

thinking about it as a register of events and processes or as an analytical framework against which to measure human activity. Broadly speaking, the approach taken has developed 'a time framework that is *independent* of the data being studied,' underwriting a generally unreflexive and unstated positivism (Lucas, 2005, p. 3). In contrast, it has become a commonplace amongst anthropologists and archaeologists to observe that time is culturally relative (Rappaport, 1990, p. 11). This latter perspective is the one that shall be adopted in this essay.

The internalization of a linear, uniform and homogeneous sense of clock time has been seen by some historians as a defining characteristic of urban modernity. Thus, Lynn Hunt has suggested that the philosophy of Henri Bergson, like the novels of Marcel Proust and James Joyce, project a modernist 'affirmation of private time,' constituted by 'the radical interiority of experience' (Hunt, 2008, pp. 11, 39). Within this model, the early modern period is seen as the lintel for a great arch of modernization. Hence, a growing 'time-consciousness' (a model based upon an interior/exterior distinction which presumes the objective, ontological certainty of uniform time, of which a culture might become gradually 'conscious') manifest in the invention of watches, increasing clock ownership and a delineated sense of work time, has been linked to intellectual developments elsewhere, including the increasing concern with, and methodological capacity for, quantification (Crosby, 1997).

Within this formulation, the arrival of Newtonian physics represented a key moment in the transformation of fuzzy pre-modern temporal fogginess into modern, quantifiable machine-time: as Newton put it, time is 'Absolute, true, and mathematical time, of itself, and from its own nature flows equally without relation to anything external' (Gosden, 1994, pp. 2–3). Perhaps more important still was the relationship between the development of an increasingly sensitive temporal barometer and mercantile capitalism. For the Soviet historian A. J. Gurevich, the origins of this shift lay in the late-medieval period, in which the 'upsurge of the urban class, whose economic practice and whose style and rhythm of life marked them off from the way of life of the rural classes […][this meant that] categories of time and space began to be transformed' (Gurevich, 1985, p. 34). Jacques Le Goff saw things in similar terms, distinguishing a coherent, proto-capitalist 'merchant's time' from communal 'church time.' The growing domination of capitalism led ultimately, in this analysis, to the 'triumph of linear time,' a temporal measure that was uniform and commodified, in which 'time had to be saved, used prudently, filled with activities useful to man' (Le Goff, 1988). Rotenberg sums up this transition as follows: 'Entrepreneurs, and later workers, erased the premodern schedule and instituted a more rigid, specialized routine in its place. At the same time, the public schedule increased in its scope, expanding the number of work, market, and administrative institutions that subscribed to industrial patterns of time organization' (Rotenberg, 1992, p. 8). The emergence of modern, western, commodified, time enabled the domination of a capitalist mode of production. For Nigel Thrift, the 'capitalist order takes the form of a new hegemony based upon routinized, reciprocally confirming, calculative practices and projects grounded in a functional, social and temporal differentiation of production and consumption, thus increasing the division not only of labour but also of time and space' (Thrift, 1981).

This, then, is the modernization narrative: in it, hazy peasant time is marginalized by a precociously modern mercantile capitalism which produces a temporal register that leads irreducibly to urban modernity. Yet, for all the certainty of the proponents of this model, very little is known about popular conceptions of time before the Industrial Revolution.[2] The approach taken by Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie in his study of the medieval mountain village of Montaillou stands for much of the literature. He argues that 'History was absent or almost absent from Montaillou culture,' such that there was an 'absence of a historical dimension' to village culture. Hence, 'The people of Montaillou lived in a kind of "island in time", even more cut off from the past than from the

future' (Le Roy Ladurie, 1978, pp. 281–2). Importantly, no evidence is deployed in support of this claim. Similarly, Le Goff's discussion of conceptions of time in the high-medieval period, while it has much to say about theologians and intellectuals, offers no empirical insight into how peasants understood time. On peasant time, Le Goff offers the following unsupported insight: 'Farming or peasant time entailed waiting, putting up with things, unchanging circumstances, starting things over again, slowness, and, if not ultraconservatism, at any rate resistance to change. It lacked events and did not need dates, or rather its dates were ones that fluctuated gently according to the rhythm of nature' (Le Goff, 1988, pp. 177–8). Thrift's account is just as empirically impoverished: in medieval rural society, Thrift thought, 'punctuality would be almost unknown […] perception of the past and future would be truncated or blurred. There would be a general use in speech of the present indicative tense. History would be almost unknown' (Thrift, 1981). How he knows all of this remains unclear.

There is, then, a need not just for a historicist interpretation of popular senses of time, but also for some elementary empirical research. In this paper, I adopt the bottom-up perspective of the new social history, one that assumes that working people could be just as articulate and intelligent as their rulers and that they were capable of asserting themselves, imprinting their voices, attitudes and actions in the historical record.[3] Such a new social history of time requires a phenomenological reading of its subject, foregrounding perceptions, senses and readings of time. The embedding of the sensory and the experiential in distinct patterns of social relations ought to lie at the heart of this project (Gingrich, 1994, p. 169). Recent work by prehistorians, for instance, suggests that time 'must not be treated separately from social life, for it is culturally constructed and must be understood in terms of local practices' (Bradley, 2002, p. 5).

For now, from ongoing archival work into popular senses of time, I want to suggest some rough outlines to the subject. First of all, perhaps most importantly, the distant past – what early modern people called 'ancient time,' or 'time whereof the memory of man is not to the contrary' – was an enormously powerful concept. In providing legal legitimacy to local rights (manorial, borough and parochial custom), this appeal to the past locked together economic activity, social relations and perceptions of the world (Wood, 2013). Senses of distant time could be quite subjective: what to a 45-year-old man was some time 'long agoe' was to his 70-year-old neighbour more specific – it was measurable, as 65 years in the past (TNA, DL4/57/57).

The definition of what might be considered ancient was influenced by decisive moments in the history of a locality – the dissolution of a monastic house or chantry; a rebellion; large-scale and sudden enclosure; or the civil wars. Witnesses from Wakefield giving evidence to the York consistory court in 1678 provide testimony to this effect. The dispute of which they spoke concerned the layout of their parish church as it had been 'time immemorial.' By this, the deponents meant 'in form[e]r times before the wars,' as 'anciently' had been (Borthwick Institute for Archives, CP/H/3344). In disputes over customary law, witnesses routinely referred to landscapes, entitlements or customary arrangements as existing in 'tymes past'; in 'anncyent tyme'; in 'old ant[iq]uitie' or 'in old tyme before but not wthin the memory of man' (TNA, DL4/42/28; DL4/66/6; DL4/67/59; STAC2/14/1). Time was not a neutral record of past history. Stories about the past could be deliberately manipulated. A generation might seem like 'ancient time.' In the High Peak of Derbyshire, for example, the local laws governing lead mining had only been introduced in the 1580s. But by 1617, miners of that region talked of how their industry was governed by 'an auncient Custome upon the Myne.'

In the north Norfolk villages that clustered around the Glaven Ports, working time fed into calendrical, liturgical and festive time, the sheep-corn husbandry of the area laying down a rhythm to the year. Thus, in 1576, witnesses to the Duchy Court talked about 'shacke tyme';

'the latter end of harvest'; the end of harvest; 'somer tyme'; 'tathinge tyme'; the Annunciation of Our Lady (TNA, DL4/18/19). Later witnesses spoke about the time 'about the latter ende of barley harvest.' Under manorial custom, lords' foldcourse rights (under which they could set their sheep flocks on their tenants' land) began at Lammastide, shortly after the harvest (TNA, DL4/31/38; DL4/31/47). This was often a time of conflict between tenants and lords, as farmers struggled to complete the harvest before Lammas Day (TNA, DL4/54/37; DL4/55/10; DL4/23/48; DL4/23/75). The sheep-farming economy left its mark on people's memories, as they dated time by 'shack tyme' and 'laming tyme', otherwise called the 'falinge of the Lambes' (TNA, DL4/40/49; Allison, 1957). In terms of daily time, witnesses dated daily events around the folding of sheep in the evening, which some specified as occurring between six and seven o'clock (TNA, DL4/30/28). Time was sensory as well as social: one witness spoke of an event as having occurred 'a good while after candles lightinge' (TNA, DL4/35/8). Bleak Norfolk wintertime, the rain blowing in from the North Sea, left its mark on people's memories: in 1598, Edmund Framlingham remembered an event as occurring 'in wynter tyme [...] in stormye weather' (TNA, DL4/40/49). The church left its imprint as well: some people dated events as occurring on Michaelmas, after evening prayer (TNA, DL4/46/8). Others dated time by All Hallows, Candlemas, Shrovetide, Christmas, Easter and the Annunciation.

Similar heterogeneity was evident in the Derbyshire Peak Country. Festivity, sociability, work time and church time were all mixed up. 'Wakes day' in Matlock coincided with the 'wheate harvest last.' The price of wool fluctuated between Candlemas and 'Clippinge time' (British Library, Add Ms 6704, fol. 4r). Just like in North Norfolk, access to land and resources was subject to a yearly rhythm. In the hamlet of Maystonefield, land which was maintained in the summer as pasture became, between Michaelmas and May Day, subject to the right of turbary – that is, to 'digge or delve' peat as fuel (TNA, DL4/77/3). In other Peak villages, sheep were kept on common land between Martlemas and May Day (TNA, C21/D1/13). Thereafter, commons were employed to pasture horses and cattle. Around the Feast of Annunciation, a 'pynner' was appointed to govern the common. At Overend, that officer was elected at the Feast of the Pentecost (TNA, DL4/27/67). In Castleton, the harsh climate combined with the sheep economy to structure the working year: sheep were wintered in the fields in the valley around the village from Michaelmas to Annunciation, after which they were set upon the high moorland (Lichfield Joint Record Office, B/C/5/1600 Castleton). The lead industry in that village also had its rhythms. Twice-yearly sums of money were paid by the lead miners to the minister of Castleton in lieu of a one-tenth tithe, the payments made on Michaelmas and Lady's Day (John Rylands Library, Bagshaw Muniments, B24/2/12). The exact nature of these rhythms varied from one village to another, dictated by local ecology as well as by manorial and parochial custom. In Elton and Brassington, for instance, sheep were set on the moors on Lady Day and remained there until 'All Holly Day' (TNA, DL4/123/1685/2). The lord took his right to 'lot ore' (a one-thirteenth of the lead miners' produce) on Christmas and Michaelmas (TNA, DL4/71/36).

Unlike Le Goff's account of the organization of time in medieval French towns, which he saw as separated into 'merchant time' and 'church time,' there was no strict separation between devotional and economic time. The ordinary people of early modern England lived in a state of 'pluritemporalism,' one dependent upon a 'heterochronous' view of the world (Gingrich, 1994, p. 166). For Tudor and Stuart labourers, farmers, miners and cottagers, 'social time [was][...] intrinsically manifold [...] multiple and heterogeneous' (Glennie and Thrift, 1996, p. 278). This diversity, in which seasons, working patterns, modes of production and exploitation, devotion, festivity, ecology and environment folded into one another, measured perceptions of time that were themselves far from uniform. In place of a single popular sense of time, we are presented with a temporal plurality: just as popular beliefs in magic, the divine and the supernatural

challenged clear boundaries between past, present and future, so linear senses of time operated alongside ones that were cyclical and seasonally driven.

The affairs of the great left their mark on popular memory. Old people in Thetford well remembered the Howards, dating time according to the 'tyme of the late duke,' and recalling the point at which the fourth Duke of Norfolk 'fell into troble.' These events marked an important point in local memory not least because lands which the Duke had held in Thetford came onto the land market following his attainder. Similar intertwining of local and national events can be found elsewhere. In 1578, tenants of former church lands spoke of how their woods had first been chopped down 'in Bisshop Cranmer his tyme' (TNA, E134/20 Eliz/East7). In the Peak, witnesses of 1598 spoke of 'the time of Sir George Vernon,' who had been lord of Haddon until 1565; likewise, in 1618, old men from Sheldon looked back on the troublesome times between George, Earl of Shrewsbury (whose ghost we have already encountered, on Cutler's Bridge in 1668), and his wife, Bess of Hardwick (TNA, DL4/41/44; DL4/67/59). Royal authority left its mark. In 1566, the 70-year-old Thomas Corbet of Longden (Shropshire) remembered the death of a neighbour as having occurred in the thirty-first year of the reign of Henry VIII, that being 'A thinge 55 yeres past' (Shropshire Archives, 6001/377). In 1576, a Derbyshire witness dated an event as occurring five years before the death of Henry VIII (TNA, DL4/18/38). Perhaps because of its turmoil, the short reign of Edward VI was well remembered. In 1584, Thomas Wood of Wighton (Norfolk) gave an account of the use of the village common 'as he remembreth was in kinge Edward the Vith daies' (TNA, DL4/26/37). In 1605, Thomas Culwick of Orton (Staffordshire) remembered how, before the death of Edward VI, he had moved into a cottage the tenure of which, in 1605, was a matter of contention (TNA, E134/2JasI/East4). The inhabitants of Boxley (Kent) who gave evidence to the Exchequer Court in 1589 concerning the history of enclosure in the area had good reason to recall the mid sixteenth century. They dated events in their locality to the days of Edward VI and Mary not least because they had taken part in insurrections during the short-lived reigns of both monarchs (TNA, E134/30&31Eliz/Mich19).

The Wars of the Roses also left their mark. In 1524, the 48-year-old William Ryllison referred to the lordly imparkment in Rothwell (Yorkshire) as having begun in 'in kynge Edwards daye,' a reference to Edward IV (TNA, DL3/25/D1). Lancashire men giving testimony in Edward VI's reign dated events in relation to 'Kinge Ricards Field' – that is, the Battle of Bosworth (Fishwick, 1897; TNA, DL1/55/H2–3). Others dated events in relation to the Battle of Blackheath in 1497 (McGlynn, 2009, p. 684.) In 1565, a Gloucestershire man dated his remembrance of his locality 'sence the tyme of Skottyshe feld' (TNA, E134/7Eliz/East1). Yorkshire folk recalled in 1575 how an enclosure had been erected 'after the Scottishe felde called Floddam felde' (TNA, E134/17Eliz/East6). Perhaps thanks to the presence of a large Lancashire contingent at the battle, memories of Flodden seem to have been especially strong in that county (TNA, DL44/196; Cheshire Record Office, EDC5 (1664) 69). Due to the severity of their suppression as much as to the excitement of involvement in popular rebellion, episodes of insurrection also served as markers in time. In the Elizabethan West Country, there remained clear memories of the events of 1549. Giving evidence concerning the lord of the manor's right to a monopoly over corn mills in the village of Lustleigh (Devon) in 1602, the 90-year-old yeoman Richard Clannaborough noted that he had known the village for 80 of his years and that, in particular, he had known the mills in the village 'ever synce the Commotion in the tyme of the Raigne of the late Kinge Edward the Sixth' (Torr, 1910, p. 92). Similarly, in Kent, Sussex, Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk the 'commotion time' and the 'rising of commonwealth' still represented markers in time in the early seventeenth century (Wood, 2007, chapter 6). National economic events such as dearth and the currency devaluation left their mark (TNA, DL4/9/35). But the most frequent national events to serve as a marker for local time were the civil wars – variously referred to by

aged witnesses in the later seventeenth century as 'the troublesome tymes,' the 'late warr tyme,' the 'late unhappy warres' and 'the souldering tymes' (Cambridgeshire Archives [Cambridge], P109/28/4; TNA, DL4/123/1684/4; DL4/109/8; DL4/122/1683/1).

The diversity, local specificity and vernacular characteristics of early modern working people's senses of time give the lie to top-down visions of temporal order. Time, it has been argued, 'is an extraordinary instrument of power and domination precisely because it appears so conventional' (Rotenberg, 1992, p. 2). Its power seems to lie in its everydayness – its embedding in habitus concealing its arbitrary and sometimes political nature. In this way, a particular ordering of social relations is naturalized. Modern historical approaches to the subject have tended to take a top-down view, perceiving in the imposition and internalization of dominant temporal registers little more than the imposition and internalization of a dominant ideology. Thus, Rotenberg's study of modern Vienna observes that 'Urban residents relate to time in an intensely egocentric fashion. They ignore the remarkable level of temporal patterning inherent in metropolitan life and underestimate its constraining effect on their daily lives. They appear to be unaware of how the activities they choose to perform are timed. They see themselves exercising choice in their activities when in fact these choices are inconsequential in the face of the constraints of the city's schedule' (p. 2). Prominent medievalists have followed suit. Le Goff suggested that in high-medieval Europe, 'Measures of time and space were an exceptionally important instrument of social domination. […] Like writing, the measurement of time remained for much of the middle ages the monopoly of the powerful, an element of their power. The masses did not own their own time and were incapable of measuring it. They obeyed the time imposed on them by bells, trumpets and horns' (Le Goff, 1988, pp. 177–8).

Such analyses both overstate the efficacy of ruling ideas and erase the possibility that ordinary people might carve for themselves a cultural world that was at least semi-autonomous, one within which subalterns fostered temporal registers by which they ordered their world and regulated their communities. That said, it would be foolish to ignore attempts by governors to deploy temporal registers as a governmental mechanism. Rules drawn up in 1697 for the government of Gallantry Bank copper mine (Cheshire), for instance, interlaced a rigorous application of clock time with other forms of regulation. Workers were to precede labour by praying that God will bless their work; all were to obey the supervisor; none was to murmur against him; all were to stick to their labours; no worker should 'make more holy days in the year besides the Sunday' or they 'shall be punished'; finally, 'He that turned the hour glass the wrong way shall loose one shilling' (Carlon, 1981, pp. 41–3, 45). But in the face of the desire of elites to project their own versions of time as a means of disciplining a labour force or asserting a particular doctrinal position, ordinary people continued to measure time in their own ways. Senses of time, like other cultural categories, thereby constitute a field of subaltern creativity. Christopher Gosden's insights have some value here: Gosden suggests that 'time is not an abstract entity, but a quality of human involvement with the world: we do not pass through time, time passes through us. […] we cannot understand time by looking at time alone, but rather through considering the nature of involvement people have with the world' (Gosden, 1994, p. 1).

Historians of memory have sometimes invoked the idea that the past is 'usable' – that what and how we remember is tied into objective interests in the present. Time was 'usable' as well, structuring patterns of work, exploitation, movement, resource distribution, senses of the numinous, underwriting community, belonging. Temporal registers could also define people's senses of space. This was most obvious in the yearly custom of Rogationtide, in which parishioners would perambulate the bounds of their parish, noting key landmarks that denoted the limits of their community. In depositions recorded in 1594 and 1596, old men who had been brought up in New Buckenham (Norfolk) well remembered the days when they had gone on

Rogationtide processions in that village. Richard Sturdinance recalled how 'in auncyent tyme' the parishioners used to process with their neighbours from Old Buckenham to the gardens of Buckenham castle, 'and there drinkinge went to dambridge togither and there p[ar]ted.' He well remembered how, when he had been a 'scoller' 60 years before, he had taken part in these processions. Others remembered their own youthful role in the ecclesiastical aspects of the ritual: Bartholomew Dabbes had carried the parish banner; Thomas Neave had been a 'singing boye and was used to helpe to singe the p[ro]cession.' The 68-year-old Thomas Rutland recalled how he had combined alcoholic good fellowship with pious bell-ringing, explaining that 'he better remembreth' the route of the procession 'for that he hath druncke beare out of an hande bell' while on the procession. Peter Underwood remembered that 'the drinkinge in that p[er]ambulacon were made att a field end called the hawehead neare to sheepmeare uppon the comon there.' For John Roberts, downing a few cups of beer formed an especially memorable part of the ritual: he recalled how 'there was usuallye sett a firkin of bere for the p[ro]cession of Newe Buckenham to drinke.' Underwood added that his knowledge of the bounds was validated by what he had heard years ago from 'ould and auncyent men' (NRO, PD254/171; TNA, E133/8/1234).

The New Buckenham depositions highlight some fundamental aspects of Rogationtide. Most obviously, the beating of the bounds was a ritual of belonging. Celebrating good cheer – drinking beer and eating cakes – while singing psalms and marching behind the minister, choirboys and parish banner linked Christian amity with communal fellowship, reinforcing social bonds. In everyday cycles of ritual, time was employed not as an instrument of a ruling class but as a means of drawing people together, of articulating common bonds. It knitted these feelings of communal solidarity into the landscape, creating place out of space (Thomas, 1996, p. 83).

Finally, time could form a field of conflict. We have seen how important a system of saints' days and moments in the agricultural cycle were to the maintenance of collective systems of agriculture, in particular the preservation of the commons. That temporal register was disrupted by shifts in property relations – most importantly, the enclosure of commons. Enclosure swept away practices such as nutting, collecting berries, pannage (autumnal practices), or collecting dead wood (autumn and winter). In continuing to assert such entitlements despite the erection of hedges and fences across former common land, poorer people reasserted that older temporal register. The same was true of the enduring importance of feasts such as Lammastide and May Day, both of which were common times at which enclosure riots might occur.

A new social history of time might offer the possibility of more fully understanding the ways in which temporal registers allowed ordinary people in the historical past to understand themselves and their communities. That understanding was written in the landscape, and was productive of powerful senses of place. Critically, popular conceptions of time were far from the sluggish mindlessness of a thick-headed, subordinated peasantry. For sure, their rulers attempted to enforce new systems of time measurement upon poorer people; but in return, subordinates often responded by reasserting their traditional temporal registers. Time, in positivist accounts a mere neutral indicator against which the passage of events is marked, emerges as historically distinct, full of life and meaning, shot through with conflicting interests and built into deeply felt senses of landscape and place.

[1] An earlier version of this paper was delivered as an IAS public lecture at University College, Durham University, in October 2012. I am grateful to Keith Wrightson for his comments.

[2] Although see the perceptive comments in Palliser, 1982, pp. 78–87.

[3] For a succinct discussion of this historiographical perspective, and of the contribution of one leading social historian to it, see the editors' introduction to Hindle et al., 2013.

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