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Introduction: entangled trajectories: indigenous and European histories

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Derived in maritime language from the noun ‘tangle’ (a species of sea-weed), the English verb ‘to entangle’ has one of its earliest documented uses in Richard Eden’s 1555 Decades of the New World, a translation of Peter Martyr d’Anghiera’s multi-volume history of European encounters with Native America. In his translation, Eden writes that, during a reconnaissance of Cuba, in the course of the Second Voyage, Columbus’s men attempted to penetrate a great plain in the interior filled with grasses and herbs but became ‘soo entangled and bewrapte therin, that they were scarsely able to passe a myle, the grasse beinge there lyttle lower then owre rype corne’ (Eden 1555, 16v). The word used by Peter Martyr in his original Latin version was in this context ‘offenderunt’ [they stumbled] (Martyr 1530, f. Xv), evoking the sense of impediment and resistance to European conquest offered by an unwieldy American nature and underscored by Eden with his translation. Thus, in another passage Eden reports that Columbus’s men, after being ambushed by powerful Caribbean archers, ‘fledde to warde the shippes, [but] were entangeled in the mudde and maryshes nere vnto the shore. Twentie and two, were slayne with arrowes, and the resydewe for the most parte, wounded’ (Eden 1555, 151v). In America, it seems, nature (‘mudde and maryshes’) and culture (‘arrowes’), rather than being separate, conspire to arrest European progress. Whereas cunning Odysseus of old could choose between Scylla and Charybdis, becoming entangled in America means being swallowed whole. The currents of the sea there clash so violently that the Spanish ships become ‘entangled with whirlepooles’ (Eden 1555, 160r). And the quicksands are so powerful that they are called ‘vypers’ by the Spaniards with good reason: ‘in them many shyppes are entangled, as the lycertes are implicate in the tayles of the vipers’ (Eden 1555, 157r).

But in Eden’s translation, American nature not only physically entangles European conquerors with disastrous consequences; it defies the imposition of a European order of things. In America, fish—which are supposed to live in water—still fly in the air, and the sea is ‘euery where entangeled with Ilandes: by reason whereof, the keeles of the shippes often tymes raised the sandes for shalownes of the water’ (Eden 1555, 16r). In America, it seems, nature was still in a primordial state of Chaos, when the four elements comprising nature were not yet fully separate. For this reason, entangled America not only impedes the European conquest and technologies of transportation but also defies the order of historical narration. Thus, the historian who had set out to offer a chronological account of the European discovery and conquest (neatly organized into ‘decades’) is so bewildered by American nature ‘that I fynde my wytte more entangeled in the description hereof, then is sayde of the henne when shee seeth her younge chekyn inwrapped in towre’ (Eden 1555, 83v). In Richard Eden’s translation, then, to ‘entangle’ means to mingle and
confuse that which should be separate, according to the European order of things—the four elements, nature and culture, subjects and objects, time and space.

In this special issue, we want to adopt Eden’s literary trope as a metaphor for understanding the history of the early modern Atlantic World after Eurasia, Africa, and America came into contact with one another. If the word’s origin in maritime language makes it an appropriate metaphor for the ways in which scholars have recently come to rethink the early modern period, the 25th anniversary of the Quincentenary of 1492 would seem to be an opportune moment to devote a special issue of Colonial Latin American Review to this historiographic current. For, the year of Columbus’s landfall in the Caribbean initiated the sustained ecological and cultural integration of western and eastern hemispheres, whose ecologies and peoples had developed in isolation from each other for at least 10,000 years (see Fiedel 2000, 56).

The semantic field associated with ‘entanglement’ makes it an apt metaphor for thinking methodologically about Atlantic history. According to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), the verb ‘to entangle’ means ‘to intertwist (threads, branches, or the like) complicatedly or confusedly together; to intertwist the threads or parts of (a thing) in this way’ (OED). Its etymological origin in seaweed reminds us of the need to transcend epistemologically indefensible nature-culture binaries (Latour 1993; Descola 2013) that arose in tandem with European colonial ideologies legitimating conquests of indigenous people. The OED’s definition of ‘intertwist[ing] threads’ also evokes textiles, reminding us of sophisticated technologies allowing the transformation of plant material into things with stunning aesthetic properties as well as a multitude of other uses (clothing, baskets, hammocks, quipu, wampum belts, among many) which were developed in a multitude of Native American and African, as well as European, societies over millennia. In turn, textiles—whether webs woven by spiders or cloth and quipu woven by people—themselves became a source of powerful metaphors for understanding the nature of existence (Díaz et al. 1993, pl. 33–34; Tedlock and Tedlock 1985; Maffie 2014; Brokaw 2010). A sustained focus on these technologies and interlinked ontologies holds the promise of a more equitable and pluralistic perspective when approaching the disparate cultures that came into contact after 1492, a perspective that foregoes Eurocentric paradigms of stagist developmental progress that have summarily been called the ‘denial of coevalness’ and according to which any historical pattern that does not follow a European prototype must be seen as aberrant, ‘backward’, or insignificant (Fabian 1983, 31). Moreover, the connotations of ‘obstruction’ and ‘confusion’ associated with the verb ‘to entangle’ help us keep in mind the destructive, confounding, and generative nature of the entanglements as well as the radical asymmetries of power that have often accompanied early modern globalization. Finally, the metaphor of multiple threads forming a new, complex, inextricable, and often intimate web of relations connoted by the sixteenth-century meaning of ‘entangle’ encourages a genealogical, rather than a teleological, approach to early modern Atlantic history, reminding us of the impossibility of keeping separate various kinds of agency in an interdependent world. When twenty-first-century physicists now speak of ‘quantum entanglement’ to describe how certain pairs or group of particles continued to affect one another, even after they are physically separated by vast distances (Grant 2015), they encourage us to think about how seemingly disparate persons, places, things, and events can be inextricably connected.1
Writing entangled histories of the early modern Atlantic World requires paying attention to the agentive capacities of all actors, particularly those whose stories and agencies that have traditionally been ignored as a result of both Eurocentric historiographic paradigms and the nature of the sources, which are most often ‘written by the winners.’ Unlike some global and trans-national histories that continue to focus exclusively on the impact that Europeans had on ‘others,’ or on the formers’ ‘representations’ of the latter, entangled histories attend to the multiplicity of sources, agencies, directions of influence, and modalities of intercultural connectedness. While entangled histories of the early modern Atlantic World can focus on single or multiple sites of historical transformation—whether in Africa, Europe or America—they require a hermeneutics that attend to the permeability of borders; the negotiations of power in colonial relations; the dynamism of intercultural processes; and the inextricability of material and symbolic factors.

In addition to its genealogical relationship with the history of the New World encounters, ‘entangled’ and its variants belong to the zeitgeist of contemporary academic discourse, appearing in titles of books, articles, and conferences across fields and disciplines. Yet, the word evokes different, even conflicting, paradigms, methodologies and priorities. A foundational text—which title marks the word’s first appearance in contemporary academic publications—is anthropologist Nicholas Thomas’s *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific* (1991), a study of the ‘processes of mutual appropriation and unequal exchange on colonial peripheries’ by Pacific Islanders and Europeans. For many historians of the Atlantic World, however, the term ‘entanglement’ is perhaps more closely associated with the forum entitled ‘Entangled Empires in the Atlantic World,’ published in 2007 by the *American Historical Review*. The forum featured essays by James Epstein, Rafe Blaubarb, Eliga Gould, and Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, fittingly followed by a ‘featured review’ of J. H. Elliott’s *Empires of the Atlantic World* (2006) by Ian Steele. But while Thomas’s book and the *AHR* forum were both seminal in the development of entangled frameworks and methodologies, their differences are as important as their similarities. For the editors and contributors to the *AHR* forum on ‘Entangled Empires,’ the notion of ‘entanglement’ referred primarily to intersections and connections among and within European empires. Thus, the introductory note asserted that the essays ‘remin[d] us that the history of the Atlantic World is in large measure the history of empires and imperial aspirations.’

In this tradition of ‘entanglement’ the focus is on Europeans and settler colonials—albeit with much needed attention to the formerly neglected non-Anglo powers in Atlantic history (Cañizares-Esguerra 2007; Gould 2007)—rather than on the relationships between settler-colonists (or creoles) and subaltern subjects. By contrast, Thomas had resisted the notion that ‘indigenous responses or practices are to be explained through some clarification of an alternate cultural order’ (Thomas 1991, 3). More central to the concerns of this present volume, he was on the forefront of scholars who debunked ‘unitary conceptions’ of indigenous societies and who attended to the mutual, albeit asymmetrical, effects of contact between colonizing and indigenous societies, such as (in his case) the ‘entanglement’ of Pacific Islander trade with Western capitalism (Thomas 1991, 4). In other words, Thomas entangled the ‘West’ and the ‘Rest,’ particularly by focusing on materiality, and the 2007 *AHR* forum entangled the Atlantic empires of competing European powers.
It could be said that the 2013 seminar and 2015 conference out of which this special issue emerges were informed by a desire to bring the sense of ‘entanglement’ foregrounded in Thomas’s work in dialog with that featured in the AHR forum. The seed that generated the seminar was the recognition of an emerging scholarship that has brought ethno-history and Native American studies into broader Atlantic or global histories. In articles and books published in a variety of disciplines, often with quite different intellectual genealogies, one can increasingly find the explicit or implicit claim that Native American Studies and ethno-history—fields which have long shown the way that native peoples across the hemispheres in different times and places exerted agency in adapting to circumstances both of their making and not of their making—challenges Eurocentric Atlantic and even global history frameworks. The Folger Shakespeare Library—an institution at the center of early modern European, and more particularly early modern British studies—was suitably the site of a 2013 indigenous- and Ibero-centric seminar that became the launching ground for the 2015 conference ‘Entangled Trajectories: Integrating European and Native American Histories.’ We invited a diverse group of scholars, from the fields of history, art history, literary studies, Native American studies, anthropology, religious studies, whose research encompassed sites stretching from the Amazon to Alaska, and London and to Andalucía. However, in this CLAR venue, we prioritized pushing the boundaries of Latin American ethno-history eastward towards Europe rather than northward towards Anglo-America—without losing sight of the entanglements located within Latin America—as part of the broader effort to decolonize both European and ‘global history.’ Accordingly, the essays in this issue focus on the entangled histories of indigenous, European and African-descended peoples, of Native American and Iberian cultures, in South America, in Mesoamerica, and in the Iberian Peninsula.

Well before the signifier ‘entangled’ appeared in contemporary academic discourse, one can find precursors and practitioners of this kind of entangled approach in ethno-historical and African diaspora scholarship. Some of the most nuanced treatments of cultural dynamism have come from the field of ethno-history, which integrates (at its best) approaches from history, anthropology, philology, linguistics, and literary criticism. To take the one case: since the philological work of Ángel María Garibay (1953) and the Annales-inspired social history of Charles Gibson (1964), scholars of Mesoamerican ethno-history have demonstrated how indigenous peoples responded to colonial conditions in diverse ways and, far from ‘disappearing’ after conquest, were chief protagonists in everything from colonial art, as in the lyric poetry of the ‘Cantares mexicanos,’ to the colonial institutions and labor regimes that relied upon native resources for the means to implement them.4 While the intention in such histories may have been to write histories of native peoples under colonial rule, they often reveal as much about how creoles were entangled in indigenous societies, such as the ‘creole children [who] spent their infancy, literally from birth and their early childhood in almost the sole company of Maya women, suckled by Maya wet nurses commandeered from the villages, reared by Maya nurses, and surrounded by Maya servants’ (Farriss 1984, 112).

Likewise, since the seminal work of Carter G. Woodson (1936), W. E. B. DuBois, (1939), and Melville J. Herskovits (1941), scholars of the African diaspora have developed methodologies for writing entangled histories of modernity. As they have moved away from Herskovits’s model of African ‘cultural survivals’ and towards a focus on creolization or circulation, scholars in this field have provided models for re-thinking spatial relations
in the Atlantic World by offering multi-sited analysis, and considering multi-directional influence.\(^5\) For instance, Stephan Palmié argues that ‘a valid explanation for’ Ekpe (a male secret sodality) ‘cannot be found on one single side of those waters which, for a time, brought the bay of Havana into intimate alignment with the landings and beaches of the Cross River and its slave-supplying hinterland’ and that it was ‘in effect an “Atlantic”—“creole”, if you will—institution before it even arrived in Cuba’ (Palmié 2010, 19). Moreover, indigenous, black and Asian histories in Latin America are often themselves inextricably entangled. Blind spots in the scholarship of both black Atlantic and indigenous ethno-history have contributed to its occlusion,\(^6\) but recent scholarship—including the essay in this special issue by Nancy van Deusen—is now illuminating the centrality of these entanglements (Lewis 2003; Restall 2005; Langfur 2006; Bristol 2007; Vinson and Restall 2009; O’Toole 2012; Lowe 2015).

If the ‘Black Atlantic’ scholarship was shaped, if not invented, by politically engaged scholars of African descent, the fields of ethno-history and related disciplines have a rather different history in regards to the respective roles of native and non-native intellectuals.\(^7\) The relationship between native and non-native producers of knowledge inside and outside academia is well beyond the scope of this introduction and is characterized by enormous diversity depending on time, place, and field. Yet the issue cannot be ignored, as it not only is a primary form of European and indigenous entanglement historically but also continues to have profound methodological and ethic implications—particularly in this moment of Ayotzinapa, Standing Rock Sioux, and the efforts of indigenous activists across South America to protect the environment and their communities from mining, logging, damming interests, etc. (sometimes with fatal consequences as in the case of Berta Cáceres).

In U.S. academia, Native scholars have been on the forefront of scholarship related to early modern indigenous and entangled histories, often connected explicitly or implicitly to political concerns of the present (e.g. Blackhawk 2006; Byrd 2011; Witgen 2013). Divergent colonial and national histories have led the relationship between native and non-native intellectuals to take a great range of forms in Latin America. Arguably, the history of outsider scholarship in relationship to indigenous intellectuals begins with the Jeronymite friar Ramon Pané’s relationships with the Arawak-speaking men who shared with him their understanding of cosmology and history of the Greater Antilles in the last decade of the fifteenth century (Pané 1999), and continues with the indigenous intellectuals of sixteenth-century Mesoamerica and Andes discussed in the book edited by Gabriela Ramos and Yanna Yannakakis (2014). In the era of modern scholarship, a pivotal figure is native Nahuatl speaker Luis Reyes García. Though recognized for his unsurpassed philological erudition and critical role in translations of classical Nahuatl (e.g. 1978, 2001), his analysis of the central Mexican structures of calpulli, for instance, was also a foundational contribution to the history of colonial Mexico (1996). Significantly, his scholarly work was not separate from political work on behalf of indigenous communities, and he put his philological and archival erudition to work in legal battles to help indigenous communities protect their lands from seizure. For Reyes García these academic and activist endeavors were mutually informing: ‘Quizá para algunos el estudio de la organización social de los tenochca es un problema puramente académico, sin embargo está íntimamente vinculado con la política que el Estado mexicano debe seguir con respecto a la población indígena actual.’\(^8\) Anthropologists and others sensitive to the history of their
disciplines in which scholars treated those they studied as if they had no history and were unable to contribute to scholarship in their own right have developed new models in the hope of creating a more equal exchange between scholars and the people they study. Joanne Rappaport, in *Intercultural Utopias: Public Intellectuals, Cultural Experimentation, and Ethnic Pluralism in Colombia* (2005), has argued for ‘interculturalism’ as a method for this new form of research and collaboration that ‘is a utopian political philosophy aimed at achieving interethnic dialogue based on relations of equivalence and at constructing a particular mode of indigenous citizenship in a plural nation’ and ‘poses a challenge to traditional forms of ethnographic research, replacing classic thick description with engaged conversation and collaboration’ (Rappaport 2005, 7; see also Bruchac 2016). Rappaport and other anthropologists and historians have collaborated with indigenous experts throughout Latin America in a variety of creative ways that have benefited native communities in both legal efforts and projects to recover cultural patrimony such as indigenous language literacy (e.g. Rappaport 2005; Ruiz Medrano 2010; Fausto 2012; Farriss with Vásquez Vásquez 2014).

Yet, creative and mutually beneficial collaborations such as these should not obscure the fact that colonialism continues to profoundly shape the current academic landscape. It does so in forms of systemic racism and impoverishment that mean that in both the southern and northern hemispheres, native peoples have dramatically fewer opportunities to access educational opportunities than members of more privileged ethnic groups. In the words of Reyes García, ‘me parece importante continuar con la formación de los propios indios a nivel de maestría y doctorado. Tenemos que abandonar la lingüística colonial que se hace desde afuera y poner en manos indias el conocimiento lingüístico y antropológico para que les sean herramientas útiles en la planeación del futuro que decidan para sus idiomas, ahora oprimidos,’ a goal which he saw as being related to the ‘discriminación y la opresión de las lenguas indias de México’ (1989, 448). Colonialism also lingers due to the fact that the parent disciplines of ethno-history—anthropology and history—were themselves shaped by colonialism (Chakrabarty 2000; Zimmerman 2001). The colonialist legacy of this parentage continues to haunt these fields, particularly in terms of unacknowledged appropriation of indigenous knowledge (Rivera Cusicanqui 2010).

At this point, it is also important to consider some of the seminal publications that have interrogated the meaning and impact of the Early Modern Atlantic encounters in the aftermath of the Quincentenary of 1492.9 Well before but reaching a fever pitch after this anniversary, scholars across the disciplines of the humanities wrestling with the complexities of entanglements were magnetized by debates about terminology (syncretism, transculturation, mestizaje, hybridity, creolization etc.). Given the abundance of excellent analysis of these issues,10 there is no need here to rehearse them comprehensively. However, there are still several vexing issues that endure and that are worth highlighting, to the extent that they are germane to the present focus on the notion of entanglement. First, there has been a tendency to reify a particular moment in the ongoing and infinite process of cultural dynamism. For this very reason, many scholars now reject the notion of ‘syncretism,’ since the term has been associated with a holistic, essentialist, and static view of culture, with little room to conceptualize change and flexibility. As William Taylor has observed, the notion of syncretism has often led scholars to ‘miss the loose ends, reworkings, conflicts, and contradictions,’ as well as the likelihood that change is ongoing and that great changes may come late. In general, he argues that studies employing a syncretist paradigm
‘have focused on an end state of completion and wholeness’ (1996, 56, 59; see also Figueiredo Ferretti 1995; Gruzinski 2002). A similar criticism has recently been leveled against the term ‘hybridity,’ which had been associated with South Asian subaltern and postcolonial theory by colonial Latin Americanists since the 1990s. Like syncretism, hybridity seems to lack the conceptual precision and specificity necessary adequately to describe the cultural exchanges taking place in early modern colonial encounters. Indeed, as Carolyn Dean and Dana Leibsohn have pointed out, almost all cultures ‘are inherently heterogeneous’ due to ‘millennia of travel and trade [that] have insured that mixing and interaction is the norm.’ In light of this, they ask why it is that ‘certain mixtures become naturalized over time, losing their visibility and potency as mixtures, while others continue to be marked as such?’ (Dean and Leibsohn 2003, 5). They apply the phrase the ‘deception of visibility’ to the notion that ‘native peoples have to be culturally pre-Hispanic, and their works have to look pre-Hispanic, to be recognized as indigenous,’ which, they argue, ‘denies the radical transformations of the lives of indigenous peoples brought about as a result of colonization’ and ‘betray[s] desires to freeze indigenous people in the past, turning them (or aspects of their lives) into artifacts or relics of a bygone, romanticized era’ (Dean and Leibsohn 2003, 14–15).11

Partly in response to the critique of the tendency of those who used these terms of treating culture as a static entity, scholars from various fields have also adopted the term ‘transculturation’ (Pratt 1992; Spitta 1995; Hernández et al. 2005; Arrízón 2006; Parkinson and Kaup 2010). The term had originally been proposed by anthropologist Fernando Ortiz largely in critique of the Anglo-academic ‘acculturation’ model dominant in mid-twentieth-century anthropology that favored one-way models of cultural change. ‘Transculturation,’ he argued, ‘better expresses the different phases of the process of transition from one culture to another.’ Whereas acculturation implied the mere acquisition of another culture, transculturation ‘carries with it the consequent creation of new cultural phenomena’ (Ortiz 1995, 102–3). Similarly, Serge Gruzinski (and other scholars skeptical of terminology imported from the Anglo-American context) has put forward the terminology of mid-twentieth-century Latin American scholars such as Brazilian Gilberto Freyre and Mexican Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán who use ‘mestizaje’ to describe the cultural phenomena that emerged in and beyond the Americas (Gruzinski 2002; also Russo 2014). Crucially, mestizaje—unlike ‘syncretism’ or ‘hybridity’—has a genealogical relationship to the world scholars are investigating. Linguistically the term derived from the Spanish word mestizo, which was originally used to describe the progeny of different animal species and took on a new meaning in colonial America. There, it came to denote the mixed offspring of (usually male) Spanish colonists and (usually female) Native Americans, who were viewed as straddling the boundary between the república de españoles and the república de indios. Mestizos were therefore often regarded as disruptive to an ideological and legal caste system implemented by the imperial state to facilitate the colonial extraction of tribute and labor (Martínez 2008, 163–64; Rappaport 2014).

But despite its rootedness in Latin American history, the concept of ‘mestizaje’ is also not unproblematic in its inextricable genealogical relationship to nationalist discourses that are both racialist and oppressive to indigenous people and those of African descent. In the words of Florencia Mallon, ‘mestizaje emerges as an official discourse of nation formation, a new claim to authenticity that denies colonial forms of racial and ethnic oppression by creating an intermediate subject and interpellating him as “the
citizen” (qtd. in Wade 2005, 241). In this regard, the history of the concept of mestizaje uncannily mirrors that of ‘hybridity,’ though in the context of Iberian rather than British colonialism. Webster defined 'hybrid' in 1828 as ‘a mongrel or mule; an animal or plant, produced from the mixture of two species’ and several decades later it was used to ‘denote the crossing of people of different races’ (Young 1995, 5; see also Cornejo Polar 1997). Both ‘mestizo’ and ‘hybrid’ were associated with nomenclature used to describe animal reproduction, appropriated in colonial contexts in the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries (respectively seminal centuries in Iberian and Anglo imperialism) to pejoratively refer to offspring of mixed racial heritage before they were later recuperated by theorists seeking to break out of essentialist ways of thinking about identity and cultural change. However, the concepts ‘mestizo’ and ‘hybrid’ ultimately fail to move beyond the notion of ‘syncreticism’ and remain beholden to the idea of a natural fusion of previously separate species or entities into a new organic whole (such as the nation), despite occasional internal tensions and conflicts.

While the concepts of hybridity and mestizaje thus connote cultural states of being—the products of cultural fusion—entanglement emphasizes the dynamic processes of intercultural exchange and conflict that are neither static nor complete. As Karen Graubart puts it in her essay in this issue, ‘Rather than name an outcome, entanglement suggests ongoing confrontations, shifts, and revisions: a state of mutual learning and pushback which does not dissolve into a final product’ (Graubart 2017). Indeed, since the Quincentenary (and picking up speed in the new millennium) scholars of the Black and Red Atlantics have begun to offer accounts that emphasize intercultural process and practice multi-sited analysis, hereby transcending accounts of unilateral influence and weaving together symbolic and material factors. Similarly, a growing body of Latin Americanist and Iberian Atlantic scholarship has developed innovative and diverse methodologies that are inclusive of subaltern actors and resist the reification of identities or institutions, such as Christianity, slavery, or cuisine.

Several recent studies that focus on material culture in very different ways can illustrate the progress being made in the writing of entangled histories. Alessandra Russo has demonstrated how ‘mestizo’ artifacts can become vehicles for entangled aesthetics and ontology. Indigenous featherworkers [amanteca], employing pre-conquest technologies and artistic ethos, produced Christian liturgical objects from feathers, often destined for export to Europe. These stunning objects intertwined Christian and Mesoamerican ideas about creation and sacrifice, as well as evinced Mesoamerican notions of the relationship between aesthetics, material objects, and theology; and they connected the experiences of ‘spectators who looked at them during liturgies whether in New Spain, Milan, Florence, or the Iberian Peninsula’ (Russo 2002, 242; see also Russo 2014). Marcy Norton focused on the interplay of two kinds of materiality—that of things (tobacco and chocolate and their accessories) and that of the body (Norton 2008). In doing so, she put embodied experience at the center of Atlantic history, suggesting that creoles and Europeans learned from indigenous peoples new ways to apprehend the world sensorially and that these somatic transformations had repercussions for the inter-connected histories of aesthetics, science, religion and secularization in not only the western hemisphere but Europe as well. Byron Hamann uses yet another material approach to illuminate entangled relationships in Europe and Latin America, responding directly to Dean and Leibsohn’s warning about the ‘deception of visibility’ (Hamann 2010). By providing
a genealogical interpretation of canonical art of seventeenth-century Spain, and by looking at it through 'lenses of materialist and postcolonial theory,' Hamann argues that Diego Velázquez’s Las Meninas ‘reveals the transatlantic connections linking Amerindian laborers in the New World to Spanish courtiers in Madrid’ by showing how traces of the colonized worlds—here, a silver tray, a ceramic vessel and cochineal-dyed curtains depicted in the painting—are ‘already present within the canon itself,’ though the indigenous knowledge and labor regimes that made these entangled things possible are hidden from the painting itself (Hamann 2010). As with the feather-works produced by the amanteca, entangled histories such as these help us see the distinct phenomena—the ‘feathers’—of indigenous-originating aesthetics, sensory complexes, knowledge, labor, etc., as well as the new mosaic constituted by their entanglement with European structures.

In these entangled material histories, the artifacts, aesthetics, and sensorium are first located in their Native American or African context and then creole or European elements are considered, allowing the scholars to push back against the tradition of focusing on European ‘representations of the other.’ Similarly powerful models of entangled history can be found in recent scholarship on topics such as conquest, religion, legal regimes, literacies, slavery, and gender and women’s history. But one reason to highlight the work in material history in the introduction to this volume is that this is a particular area in which it is clear that entanglements exerted transformative effects on European, as well as Latin American, societies. Indeed, these examples suggest that, rather than focus on ‘contact zones’ restricted to a particular time or place, entanglement happens in Europe and Africa as well as in Latin America and calls into question designations such as ‘peripheries’ and ‘borderlands.’

Collectively, the essays assembled below seek to explore the multiple implications of attending to the principle of entanglement in the history of the early modern Atlantic World. In the opening essay, Marcy Norton reflects critically on some of the governing paradigms in modern historiography—such as J. H. Elliott’s seminal notion of a ‘blunted impact’ of the New World upon the Old—that have all too often resulted in an understanding of Atlantic history in terms of the history of European expansionism, as well as of European technological progress and modernization. Norton, by contrast, adopts recent insights from postcolonial theory, cultural anthropology, and the history of science in order to propose ‘subaltern technologies’ (in an extended sense) as an analytic category for laying bare the entangled history of early Atlantic modernity. Like a modern computer program, subaltern technologies such as cultivation of chocolate and the South American and Caribbean domestication of iegue (a tamed animal or person) are both modular and mobile, set in motion through contact and adapting to new contexts, transforming in cultural meaning and generating new technologies as they move within trans-regional and even global networks. However, in order to appreciate subaltern technologies as technology, Norton argues, it is necessary to look beyond the nature/culture binary—manifested in Peter Martyr’s Decades—that has structured Western metaphysics.

If Norton suggests how early modern Atlantic history is entangled with Native American technologies, Elizabeth Hill Boone shows how European technologies, in turn, became entangled in the intercultural encounter with the Americas. In ‘Seeking Indian-ness: Christoph Weiditz, the Aztecs, and feathered Amerindians,’ she offers a close
examination of the *Trachtenbuch* [costume book], produced by the German painter Christoph Weiditz (1498–1559), which ostensibly portrays certain Aztec lords whom Weiditz had allegedly encountered during his visit to the court of Charles V. In fact, Boone shows, the ‘Aztecs’ depicted in Weiditz’s *Trachtenbuch* wear feathers that seem to derive not from the memory of his own eye-witness experience but rather from pictorial representations of Brazilians that circulated in contemporary travel literature. Weiditz’s ‘Tupinambization’ of his Mexican subjects, Boone argues, reveals the historical entanglements that would sustain the amorphous European category of the ‘Indian’ and the extent to which perceptions and representations of the ‘new’—albeit often cloaked in the authority of eye-witness testimony—were entangled with representational conventions and intertextual relations. Finally, to the extent that Weiditz’s *Trachtenbuch* represents an early example of a genre—the costume book—that chronicles an incipient modern interest in the particular, the local, the vernacular, the different, and even the deviant, its American subject matter suggests the extent to which the history of early modern European representational practices was entangled with the history of technologies of bodily adornment in multiple indigenous cultures.

Arguably, the Tupinambization of Native Americans throughout the continent by Europeans was not an entirely innocent stylistic device. For while there could be little doubt in the European mind, as already observed by Francisco de Vitoria in the sixteenth century, that the Mexica lords were ‘ueri domini’ of their lands and possessions (qtd. in Graubart, below), the Tupinamba of Brazil had entered the European imagination, via the letters of Vespucci, as a people who knew no private property ‘but own everything in common’ (Vespucci 1992, 49). Indeed, as Karen Graubart shows in ‘Shifting landscapes: heterogeneous conceptions of land use and tenure in the Lima valley,’ one of the most momentous, contentious, and complex ways in which indigenous and European cultures became entangled was with regard to conceptions of land use and tenure. Whereas historians have traditionally assumed that the encounter between Andean and European conceptions of land tenure can be understood in binary terms—as a difference between Andean ‘collective’ ownership and European ‘private’ ownership—she shows that the story was in fact far more complex, that each culture had several conceptions of land tenure that subsequently became entangled with those of the other culture, resulting in various hybrid forms that were new to both parties. Despite a gradual standardization of land holding practices, Graubart shows, alternative characterizations of property continued to exist, entangling legal definitions and local practice in unexpected ways during the first hundred years of colonial development.

The boundaries between the cultures that became entangled during the early modern period were extremely porous with regard to not only land holding practices but also social identities, as Nancy van Deusen shows in ‘Passing in sixteenth-century Castile.’ But whereas historians of the Iberian Atlantic have typically focused on how social identities and ideologies are exported from the imperial ‘center’ in Castile to the ‘periphery’ in the Americas—there to be hybridized, creolized, or transculturated—van Deusen, like Norton, investigates how the colonial encounter entangled cultures and identities not only in the Americas but also in Europe—even in the heart of the Spanish Empire. Thus, van Deusen offers the life story of two early modern women living in Spain whose lives became entangled and almost fused (though not quite). In the aftermath of the New Laws of 1542 (which prohibited the enslavement of Indians), the *mulatta* slave
Violante shrewdly attempted to elude slavery by assuming the identity of the deceased Beatriz, an India from Puerto Rico. Although Violante went to considerable lengths in her attempt to pass as Beatriz—even having her face mutilated by a branding iron—her attempts were ultimately frustrated, as her impersonation was exposed and she permanently returned to her owner. Nevertheless, her case reveals, van Deusen argues, how social boundaries, differences, and identities were by no means rigid, clear-cut, and objective but often subjective and embedded in complex social and historical situations.

In the final essay included here, ‘Masked observers and mask collectors: entangled visions from the eighteenth-century Amazon,’ Neil Safier focuses on the 1785 scientific expedition of Alexandre Rodrigues Ferreira (1756–1815) in the Amazon in order to raise methodological questions about how to approach the ethno-historical study of eighteenth-century indigenous artifacts, in this case Amazonian masks and skulls. Attending to what Fernando Santos-Granero has called ‘the occult life of things,’ Safier envisions an ethno-historical approach of entanglement that he calls ‘participatory representation,’ which would begin with the recognition that ‘native actors regularly functioned as participants in the identities that they created.’ Once we accept the relevance of native cosmologies for understanding the scientific practices of early modern European naturalists, he argues, it becomes possible to turn around the instruments of observation and ask what eighteenth-century Amazonian masks can tell us about how native peoples might have imagined themselves. Thus, working across multiple temporalities, he attends to historical source materials, material objects, and anthropological fieldwork, proposing that the modern ethno-historian must avail him- or herself of a dialog with contemporary indigenous communities in order to open ‘new opportunities to demonstrate the sometimes muffled voices of indigenous actors by raising their own participation—and evidentiary production through material artistry—to the level of mimesis.’

In their sum, the essays assembled here explore the conceptual possibilities of entangled historiography as a principle underlying the dynamic processes of intercultural exchange, conflict, and transformation in the early modern Atlantic World. Rather than try to account for the unilateral impact of one culture upon another resulting in the birth of new imperial, colonial, or postcolonial forms of religion, science, culture, society, or political organization, they offer multi-sited analyses that emphasize the continuous and unresolved tensions, appropriations, interactions, and intercultural exchanges as multiple agencies, historical temporalities, symbolic orders, and ontologies become entangled beginning with the Columbian encounter of 1492.

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Notes

1. Although recent historiography has also been increasingly attentive to the inter-connectedness of Latin America and the Pacific (e.g. Leibsohn and Priyadarshini 2016), the essays assembled here focus on the early modern Atlantic World, which was the focus of the conference from which this special issue originated. However, similar methodological considerations would be applicable to more global geographic perspectives. In addition, work done by scholars such as James McCann (2005) on maize in Africa, Carol Benedict (2011) on tobacco, and Charles Mann (2011) on potatoes in China is suggestive of the way that American indigenous history is entangled with other parts of the world.
2. Introduction to AHR Forum Entangled Empires in the Atlantic World 2007, 740. The benefits and drawbacks of ‘Atlantic World’ as a conceptual framework has been a topic of vigorous debate (Greene and Morgan 2009) and scholars have long been aware of tendencies toward Eurocentrism and aphasia concerning its origins in the ‘Black Atlantic’ scholarship (e.g. Coclanis 2002; Games 2006; Sweet 2011). The phrase ‘Black Atlantic’ originated with Gilroy (1993). For Atlantic history as a framework that focuses on European and African Atlantic-crossers and their creole descendants and not indigenous people, see Bushnell 2009.
3. In addition to the works mentioned in the bibliography, many other foundational and important recent works in Mesoamerican, Andean, and Amazonian fields of ethno-history are cited in the articles included in this special issue.
4. Of course Mesoamerican ethno-history is also indebted to seminal work of Alfredo López Austin and Miguel León Portilla but their own interests lie more with reconstructing pre-Hispanic civilization of central Mexico rather than on native history after 1521.
6. For the former, see Byrd 2011, and also Jackson 2012; for the latter see Bennett 2009; also Vinson and Vaughn 2004.
7. It should be noted here that definitions of ‘intellectual’ are subjective and politically charged (Rappaport 2005) and that there are many other, often superior, ways—song, poetry, painting, film-making, etc.—to apprehend the world than the ones found in academia, and that indigenous artists and the communities that support them are found throughout the Americas.
8. Quoted in Castillo Palma and González-Hermosillo Adams 2004, 156. For a brief overview of his contributions, see Castillo Palma and González-Hermosillo Adams 2004. We are grateful for Ethelia Ruiz Medrano’s presentation about Reyes García during the NEH summer institute on ‘Pictorial Histories and Myth Histories: Graphic Novels of the Mixtecs and Aztecs,’ organized by Laraine Fletcher and George Schep in Mexico in the summer of 2014, and for further reflections offered by Michael Swanton.
10. For useful overviews of the issues, see Figueiredo Ferretti 1995; Taylor 1996; Cornejo Polar 1997; Gruzinski 2002; Dean and Leibsohn 2003; Wade 2005; and Adorno 2007.
11. Another problem with current usage of hybridity in the context of Latin America and the Atlantic World is that scholars are often not clear to what degree they are importing the full conceptual apparatus associated with ‘hybridity.’ In his seminal The Location of Culture (1994), which was informed by deconstructionist and psychoanalytic theory, Homi Bhabha defined hybridity as ‘a problematic of colonial representation and individuation that reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other “denied” knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority’ (Bhabha 1994, 114). In this definition there is a notion of resistance that often does not appear intended in the usage of scholars writing about Latin America. Indeed, their usage seems closer to the meanings of the often disavowed syncretism.
12. Works illuminating these various forms of entanglement in the Iberian Atlantic published within the past decade include Barr 2007; Graubart 2007; Owensby 2008; Schwartz 2009; Sigal 2011; Ruiz Medrano and Kellogg 2010; Rappaport and Cummins 2011; Matthew 2012; Mangan and Owens 2012; Seijas 2014; Remensynder 2014; Van Deusen 2015; and Cook 2016. In her essay in this special issue, Norton discusses other recent works, particularly those related to history of science and the environment, that demonstrate entangled processes in the Atlantic World.

13. Rolena Adorno described ‘contact zones’ as colonial spaces ‘in which the simple line between Spaniards and Andean that defined native experience at the moment of conquest no longer existed with such clarity’ (Adorno 2007, 23; see also Adorno 1987). Pratt re-defined it as ‘social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relation of domination and subordination,’ places that produce Ortiz’s ‘transculturation’ (Pratt 1992, 4).

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