usually longwinded letters, they tell us they have obtained information from books, newspapers, magazines and –very importantly– their own imagination. They are very independent and creative, consider themselves Gallo's equals, and want to debate their theories with him. The authors of this group typically wrote to Gallo more than once. The extreme case is that of Emilio Nolte, who corresponded with the director of the Observatory for more than thirteen years. They exchanged more than thirty letters in this period.

The authors of the third group of letters, which I refer to as representatives of folklore, have obtained their knowledge from close contact with nature, through received tradition, or from what we would call superstition. Generally speaking, they want to know what effect the heavenly bodies have on their daily life, such as the relation between eclipses and their health or the moon and their crops. Given the source of their knowledge, it is puzzling that they should ask an astronomer.

3. CONCLUSIONS

As we can see from this very brief review, the people who wrote Gallo were not simply passive receivers of his "high" knowledge (Sheets-Pyenson 1985). Not only did they initiate the communication, but they all had previous conceptions of the subject of their queries. Even in the case of amateurs, who seem to want to imitate astronomers, they do it in order to participate. Although many of their sources are actually "high" science, the poachers have constructed their own visions of the universe by creatively combining very disparate information. The representatives of folklore bring with them the empirical or traditional knowledge of their cultures. Thus, following Chartier (1984), we must accept that popular astronomy itself, and its relationship with professional astronomy are complex. The members of the three sub-cultures detected are quite different and can best be described as appropriating, and not simply receiving knowledge from professional astronomy.

Because we are looking at a communicative event, it is interesting at this point to ask whether Gallo and the Mexican public actually communicated and if each one obtained their goals. Since the amateurs asked specific questions, and they shared some knowledge and vocabulary with Gallo, it is probably safe to say that this group did communicate with him and he was able satisfy their requests. In many cases, however, the poachers and those with folk knowledge went away empty-handed; because the things that each side knew and wanted were too different, they did not actually communicate. A better understanding to this problem can probably be extracted by a detailed study of the case of the long term correspondence between Nolte and Gallo.

Despite the time that separates us from Gallo and his audiences, the same interests and attitudes exist today. Understanding the identity, goals, and motivation of his audiences can help to improve communication today.

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