A Historian Among the Anthropologists:
Excavating the Field

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INTRODUCTION

Cohn's humorous though seriously outdated 'ethnography' of a small society of historians of India is the backdrop to this essay but its inspiration lies in my own training and professional work as a historian. The dilemmas - practical, epistemological and personal - of working as a historian while learning the tools of social anthropology, have borne hard on me and I take this opportunity to exorcise some of them in the hope that a finely-toned sketch of the two disciplines can be combined with a systematic clearance of the slum-thinking which has been allowed to aggregate within both disciplines for want of some friend from the other.

I spent the academic year 1992-3 as a masters student at the London School of Economics being taught by some of the greatest names and clearest thinkers in contemporary British anthropology. Meanwhile, from my base in South East London I was writing a popular social history of Deptford stretching over 2,000 years, "from the Romans to the Present". The duration and intensity of my 'participant observation' in the communities of Deptford, both in order to write the later chapters of the book and in the process of establishing a community publishing business, could merit the title 'ethnography'. The book itself will be very far from an anthropological monograph.

The intention in this essay is to address both the general relationship between anthropology and history as academic disciplines and the specific position of local history (community-based rather than antiquarian) as a mediator between them.

In order to locate the three subjects (anthropology; history; local/community history) it is necessary to develop a clear framework which avoids the confusion of much current mutual description between the topics. Terms such as aim, method, model, technique, perspective, emphasis, subject-matter have to be defined before they can be of use. That they have been so often deployed in contradictory and confusing ways is a result of the admittedly hazy boundaries between them. Nonetheless, however arbitrary the definitions provided in this essay may be, they are essential for the clarity of its argument.

The term 'excavating' has been overused since Foucault popularised it across academic disciplines, but its range of meanings fits well here. Out in the anthropologist's field, we are digging to see what we find (how does it work); clearing out the accumulated detritus of many years of use (the prejudices of ignorance, envy or dated knowledge); and hoping to prepare the foundation of a joint edifice (historical anthropology or anthropological history). The link with archaeology, another related discipline, perfects the metaphor.
With my working background and split loyalties it would be wrong of me to take up the anthropologists 'we' and accept the Comaroffs' invitation to purge the discipline of the lingering legacy of evolutionism or the (equally non-PC) alterity between western modernity and the primitivism of the Other. These are two of the uses to which 'history' has been put in anthropology, and it is not surprising that the hostility they engendered takes an age to die.
1. A survey of the history of relations between the two disciplines brings out some of the problems.

ANTHROPOLOGISTS

Evolutionism was "the paradigm under which, at least in England, anthropology gained its status as an academic discipline." It is also a convenient starting-point for a survey of the relationship between anthropology and history. Nineteenth century evolutionists used the so-called comparative history method which posited a linear progression from 'the primitive' to 'civilisation' and hoped to assign every known society to its proper position on this temporal grid. For many of these thinkers the ultimate goal was to chart the temporal line which had led to their own present society.

General interest in the origins of everything was an integral part of the nineteenth century construction of the West as the pinnacle of progress and the 'end of history'. The notion of 'the West', whatever its problems now that most of its ascriptive criteria are shared by Japan, immediately introduces the confusion between space and time at the heart of anthropology's evolutionist heritage.

Fabian describes the paradox by which the social utilization of Darwin was possible only with a three-fold rejection of his novel conception of time.

i) Darwin's evolutionism required a quantitative change in the notion of Time; the demise of biblical chronology provided a plausible scope in which to place the unimaginably slow changes of natural selection. Yet the social evolutionists, interested only in the relatively short history of mankind, had no real use for such vastness.

ii) Biblical chronology had to be undermined to allow for a non-sacred, naturalised Time, independent of the events it marks and enabling the plotting of a multitude of uneventful data. Such abstract independence was problematic to evolutionists pre-occupied with the eventful stages leading to civilisation.

ii) This naturalised time was "no longer the vehicle of a continuous, meaningful story; it was a way to order an essentially discontinuous and fragmentary geological and paleontological record." This brutal meaninglessness lent no support to the social evolutionist story of the meaningful movement from savage to savant.

Fabian's work on "the denial of co-evalness" shows that, although Time is a primary theme of the evolutionist project, the latter actually has an atemporal referent: space. Rather than taking up the Darwinian conception of time, many social evolutionists actually discarded temporality altogether, believing with Morgan that "the condition of each [tribe and nation] is the material fact, the time being immaterial". Fabian and Thomas both expose
the ways in which this spatialised time has continued to be used within anthropology to equate difference with distance.

Certainly it has come under attack. Early 20th century diffusionist criticism centred on the obvious fact that culture rarely emerges by spontaneous growth along pre-determined lines. Rather it argued for a plurality of cultures, with complex borrowings and influences uncoverable only by refusing conjectural universalist 'history' and concentrating on specific histories. Despite this apparent sympathy to history, Nicholas Thomas has shown that the Boasian approach was concerned with particularity rather than with historical or current social change.4

The notion of singular histories was not taken up by most British anthropologists who preferred the more radical approach of functionalism. Caught in its earliest struggles to become a self-contained discipline and with Maitland's (1936) warning that it must choose between being history and being nothing, functionalism responded aggressively, condemning evolutionary and diffusionist anthropology. Radcliffe-Brown "eschewed guesswork history (one must add all history)."5 All historical approaches were in vain, not only because they were unworkable in the kinds of societies anthropologists were studying (there was "no evidence") but because the history of a society was irrelevant to the study of it as a natural, integrated system.

Evans-Pritchard himself was famously hostile to this complacency but, even in his work, the structural-functionalist approach was profoundly incompatible with historical analysis. The delineation of integrated social structures and the mechanisms by which these reproduce themselves is a trap. Successful 'equilibrium models' are too powerful, leaving no way to explain the obvious changes their subjects have experienced or are undergoing even at the moment of research.

Although Leach's caricature of structural-functionalism is too harsh on any individual within the school, it identifies the main problems which emerge from the equilibrium approach. It is usually argued that the poverty of anthropological theories of social change is the primary, if not the only, problem facing historians sympathetic to anthropology. In fact, as we will see in this essay, there are many other difficulties to be overcome.

The structural-functionalist approach encourages the anthropological preference for 'moribund' societies, cultural uniformity, functional integration and social solidarity at the expense of understanding conflict, dynamism, social change, living societies. By accepting the validity of historical study for the west while denying its use in 'primitive' societies, it also contributes to and reinforces the notion that anthropological societies are 'peoples without history'. Rejecting the relevance
of historical factors involves a refusal to see the present as moulded by the specificity of the past. This correlates with evolutionary determinism which imagines all societies proceeding along a single route to civilisation, a tenet still current within Development Studies. Finally, whereas previously the use of the 'ethnographic present' was merely an anthropological convention which could be employed or not as the writer preferred, structural-functionalism made it obligatory. This issue is addressed more fully in the next section.

Despite some very valid criticisms of the structural-functionalist approach, Leach was unable to link up his own Kachin ethnography with any wider historical process. His oscillating model gave the gumsa-gumlao configurations room to move within the framework but not room to change and step beyond it.

Structural-functionalists attempted to show "things as they are" while evading the issue of how they came to be that way. A far more radical temporal surgery is found in Levi-Straussian structuralism. This guaranteed its own internal coherency by disdaining the search for connections between cultural isolates and a reality outside. For Levi-Strauss, anthropology as a science of culture must study the relations between cultural isolates and the patterning laws which govern these relations. This taxonomic study needs no help from history: it has its own "peculiar mixture of lucidity and duplicity" to discuss Time.6 Levi-Strauss appears conciliatory when he calls history and anthropology complementary in that "one of them unfurls the range of human societies in time, the other in space."7 In truth, we are being led into a typical Levi-Straussian maze in which history is substituted by diachrony (not to be privileged as especially human) and 'space' is not the real end-of-a-journey ethnographer's space but what Foucault called 'tabular' space. "Levi-Strauss' thought does not inhabit a world; it lives in a matrix that allows him, not just to place, but to plot any and all cultural isolates in a logical grid." This approach rests on the elimination of Time and of notions of process, genesis, emergence, production, even reproduction. All that remains is the voyeur anthropologist scrutinising "the succession of semiological systems one upon another." This is a naturalisation of time to better any evolutionist scheme. The only 'real' which interests Levi-Strauss lies in the neural organisation of the human brain: here the 'links between things' pre-exist and determine the actualisation of the things themselves. Who needs history? Once Levi-Strauss has squashed it into a specially-prepared taxonomic strait-jacket, who would want it?8

Anthropologists have not been completely blinded by any of these arguments. However, though many have begun to see the excision of history as a critical wound in the side of their discipline there disagreement over the right kind of history to use as bandage. Bourdieu argued for the "time of experience, of foreseeable
futures, of memories and lived expectations", as crucial to structuralist understanding of gift exchange. This would still ignore, however, historic encounters with larger systems. Marshall Sahlins' hybridisation of structure and event was greeted by many as the long-awaited resolution of the conflict. At last culture and history were recognised as mutually constitutive: structure was a historical object. His work faced criticism from both sides on empirical grounds but it offered a potential escape from stagnation. Cultural systems generate action and order events but they cannot entirely encompass what takes place and "in action meanings are always at risk." Sahlins' recommendations for history and anthropology are constructively apocalyptic: the concepts of culture and history must be used to explode each other.

HISTORIANS

Changes in academic history over this century have brought historians into greater contact with the other social sciences and challenged superficial characterisations of history as the study of wars, laws and great men. There has been a trend towards perspectives which could be defined as 'anthropological'. The Annales school, centring around Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre in 1930s Paris, aimed to substitute superficial 'evenemential history' with a long-term 'total history' concerned with continuities and extremely slow changes. Focusing on ecological factors, seeing society as a complex structured organism, and especially the study of "mentalites" these histories were inevitably attractive to anthropologists.

In England the growth of prosopological histories concerned with everyday life from below and the mechanisms of hegemony also led historians into new sources and 'alien' cultures. However, although the Comaroffs are impressed with the way such histories view our own culture through the ethnographic mirror, Thompson was right to point out that the most striking feature of Keith Thomas' Religion and the Decline of Magic is "the extension of a traditional historical discipline into new areas of research." It was not that Thomas had become an anthropologist, only that "the mind of the historian has been informed, his perspectives extended, his awareness of significances aroused, by a reading of anthropology." La Roy Ladurie's Montaillou and Carlo Ginzburg's The Cheese & The Worms are also properly historical works, using documentary evidence to reconstruct the past. The emphasis on the piecing together of world-views owes much to the Annales school but also to the anthropological treatment of societies as unfamiliar. Historians at last understood Hartley's phrase, "the past is another country; they do things differently there."

John Bossy's Christianity in the West is a fine example of the use of Geertz's "thick description" in order to show what it was that
underwent the change of 'Reformation'. His analysis of attitudes towards and representations of the 'community of the dead' captures the essence of two anthropological virtues: destabilising the familiar and illuminating the internal coherence of the apparently odd. Cultural history has gone beyond the limitations of anthropological equilibrium models in 'revealing that all social fields are domains of contest; that 'culture' is often a matter of argument, a confrontation of signs and practices along the fault lines of power.'12

However, some historians have expressed doubts about decreasing the distance between the two disciplines. Historians feel 'the anthropological impulse' more in new questions and perspectives than in model-building. Lawrence Stone does not want to create a hybrid anthropological history in the mould of Cliometrics (economics and history) and let "the tool...become an end in itself". It took the respected and deliberately controversial E P Thompson to express the worry of every historian who has been among the anthropologists: we do not want to be ensnared in the interminable arguments of anthropology. Historians find distasteful the anthropophagous attacks on former masters which are characteristic of the small discipline of British social anthropology.13

This survey depicts the basic mistrust between anthropology and history, explaining why the companionship was never quite realised. Yet it also describes how their independent development led to a convergence. Thomas' plea to use anthropology to widen history’s subject-matter was answered without any true rapprochement: we called it social history and it grew primarily out of labour and other proctological histories. As Thomas had urged, it involved asking new questions, using new sources, and re-working concepts from other disciplines and movements. That anthropology was not primary among these was due to the tardiness of its acceptance of the relevance of history in its own work and the incapacity of its models to deal with temporality and social change.
2. Investigating the relation between history and anthropology involves considering a series of separate but interrelated questions. Some can only be flagged up here.

The first question is whether anthropologists should study historical societies. As Macfarlane has written "one year of Elizabethan Star Chamber proceedings probably contains more detailed case material than has been gathered by all social anthropologists up to the present." Turner’s notion of the 'social drama’, a transparent area through which to observe the crucial features of social structure in operation and their relative dominance at successive temporal points, is amply provided for in the historical archives. My own study of the church rate scandal in Deptford’s parishes during the 1830s and 1840s has produced a wealth of 'ethnographic' information about interpersonal relations, specific 'action-sets' (Mayer), networks (Barnes) and the social aspects of the dialectic between two opposed politico-religious cultures (conservative churchmen and liberal dissenters).

I have an intuition that an anthropologist with no historical training would find it difficult to access this information. I took it from ballads and political parables, posters advertising polling dates and contemporary newspaper reports of vestry meeting speeches. Understanding these local sources required a background knowledge of national religious conflict during this period. This is an argument for the inclusion of a historical aspect to anthropological training, both at the general level and focusing on issues around the use of historical sources.

If historical societies can be investigated to produce 'anthropological' information which can contribute to long-standing debates within the field, what is the role of knowledge of the past of social systems already under study in the present? As we have seen, Radcliffe-Brown professed that the historical development of a society had no relevance to its present form. This unlikely proposition has been discredited by numerous writers, including his own student Evans-Pritchard who insisted that "neglect of the history of institutions prevents the functionalist anthropologist not only from studying diachronic problems but also from testing the very functional constructions to which he attaches most importance, for it is precisely history which provides him with an experimental situation."15

One of the ways anthropology has managed to avoid writing a sense of change into their accounts has been through the device of the ethnographic present which allows for work done in 1930 to remain 'present' in the 1990s without further explanation or updating. The structural-functionalist attempt to evade the issue of social change promoted this abuse of tense to the core of a deception. It is not true that the social structure of the Nuer remained the same from the beginning of Evans-Pritchard's field work in the early...
1930s to the last student essay of 1993. Yet this is what anthropology claims, over and over again.

The Comaroffs describe a piece of graffiti in an LSE toilet in 1968: "Is Raymond Firth real, or just a figment of the Tikopian imagination?" The humour in this rests upon the opposite understanding that the Nuer, the Tiv and the Tikopia as we know them are only sketches from their respective fieldworkers' notebooks. Yet we cannot accept the full implications of such a wry understanding without dropping entirely into self-indulgence. Bloch and others insist that we do not write for our subjects but for our colleagues. Nonetheless, given the precision of spatial location in ethnography, and anthropology's pretensions to scientific accuracy, the abuse of tense is absurd.

Keith Thomas evades this most pressing of antipathies between the disciplines by comparing the ethnographic present to the historic present. This is unconvincing: the historic present is a literary device allowing for free-flowing description of an event or a social grouping which is first carefully located. Charles Nicholl's expert reconstruction of the murder of Christopher Marlowe plays the line between tenses expertly. He uses the present tense to bring the characters close ("This is Ingram Frizer as one might know him in the year 1593") and drive home the drama of events ("Time is running out. Persuasion becomes threat, and threat flares up into anger...In the heat of the night, in the irrecoverable fleeting logic of the moment, the situation resolves itself. Someone pulls a knife. There is a brief struggle, and Marlowe is killed by a savage blow to the head."). We never lose sight of where we are and who we are with: the under-belly of Elizabethan intelligence meeting fatally at Deptford in May 1593.

The Comaroffs idealise ethnography as "a historically situated mode of understanding historically situated contexts." Without a clear denunciation of the use of the ethnographic present from within the anthropological professoriate, their vision will never be realised.

Bloch's analysis of the Merina circumcision ritual in history serves on one level to tease anthropologists with what they are missing when they ignore history. He shows how consideration of the ritual over time (through as many records as are discoverable) can illuminate something crucial within the nature of ritual itself. His theory of ritual relates to its formalised quality. His discussion of the history of the Merina ritual shows how this formalisation allows for an astonishing 'recoverability'. The basic features of the ritual remain the same despite enormous changes in the political power-holders who administer and make use of it. Yet Bloch is manipulating his findings. He is using 'history' (the past forms of an institution), to prove his point about the implications of formalisation. Historical evidence shows that the ritual has been used in the same way by many different leaders: the ritual is
recoverable. It is a leap of theory to postulate that it is recoverable because it is formalised.20

Another reaction when anthropologists are forced to consider the vexed question of their relationship to history and to change, is to call up a characteristic but unnecessary relativism. The people we study have a different attitude to the past and the passing of time. Of course they do: Gell has shown how time perceptions are intimately related to the social and physical environment.21 How should anthropology deal with indigenous ideas about the past and attitudes to time? These issues fall not within historical anthropology but within the anthropology of time. Bloch describes how the respected Malagasy historian, Arthur Besy, used the formal and extremely time-consuming language of kabary to present the history of Tamatave to an academic conference. Asking questions about this is productive (it contributes to general debates around literacy and specific depictions of Merina personhood and provides source material for a comparative anthropology of the past). Nonetheless, Bloch would hardly suggest that we should use kabary ourselves in writing a historical anthropology of Madagascar.22

The failure of anthropologists from Durkheim, through Firth, Leach and the Marxists to Bloch himself, to produce any reputable theory of social change is beyond the scope of this essay though it would need to be addressed in any full study of the relationship between history and anthropology. To the historian among them it seems that they are caught by the terms of their models which always focus on constraint (whether social, metaphysical or ecological) rather than creativity of the kind Gell describes in language,23 or which the community historian feels when perched on the ledge between past choices and future potentialities.
3. What are the differences and similarities between the two
disciplines?

"While there are...many differences between social
anthropology and historiography they are differences of
technique, of emphasis and of perspective, and not
differences of method and aim."

Here we come to a discussion which forms the core of most
examination questions on the subject. Those who write of the
relationship, from either side, are often looking to distil a
perfect one-line solution. This usually relates to oppositions such
as general/particular; theory/narrative; structure/event. None of
these are satisfactory and their inadequacies are most blatant when
they are used without supporting definitions.

To delve more deeply into this question we can use Collingwood and
Evans-Pritchard as master philosophers of their subjects to provide
a framework for analysis. A number of terms are employed to
differentiate between various aspects within each discipline:
subject-matter; emphasis; aims; methods; techniques; language.

A Subject-matter

Both anthropology and history consider themselves to be involved
in the 'study of man' (a long-standing formulation which the
challenge of feminism has undermined more seriously than is usually
thought). They both study humans as sociable creatures; living in
socially-constituted groups, co-operating and conflicting over the
production and reproduction of specific cultures.

Unlike sister subject sociology, the primary subject societies of
anthropology and history share a basic characteristic: they are
remote from the analyst, distanced by space and time respectively.
This simple statement becomes clouded, not because both disciplines
have shown that it is possible to bring their methodologies to bear
on close-up societies, but because the evolutionary strand in our
epistemological heritage has equated a second, highly-charged
opposition with the neutral one of Space/Time. This is the notion
that anthropologists study the present of primitive societies while
historians study the past of advanced nations. The spatialisation
of (unconvincing) temporal developmental schema locates primitivism
in the remote place and slides anthropology into its trap: we from
this place (civilisation) study other places (which must be
primitive because they are not Us). Dening makes this slippage
clear: "Anthropology's vision is built not on the 'primitivism' of
the native but on the advantage of the dialectic between distance
and familiarity." This dialectic is also at the core of
historical study, although it could be argued that anthropologists
have understood it better and developed it into a more explicit
methodology with the tools of paradox and counter-intuition ("you would have thought x, but actually y"). Collingwood's concern that the familiarity gap between the historian and her subject can be so wide as to be unbridgeable, rendering parts of the past incomprehensible, indicates a difficulty beyond the question of adequate evidence. Presumably we could understand Roman religion, despite our distance from it, if only we could spend time living with it. Without this opportunity, Collingwood insists, even a plethora of data cannot bridge the gap.25 I would dispute this claim without denying that some pasts are more problematic than others for 20th century British historians: the historical imagination (see below) is undeniably culturally constituted.

If historians and anthropologists both study social life, what aspects of society do they choose? A narrow pre-occupation with political process has been history's troublesome heritage from positivism. The positivist annexing of all knowledge to natural science was based on a superficial notion of such science as a two-stage process involving ascertaining facts through direct perception, then framing laws by inductive generalisation. Positivist historians threw themselves enthusiastically into the first goal and "the historical conscience identified itself with an infinite scrupulosity about any and every isolated matter of fact."26 This cult of the detail allowed the avoidance of big questions which were actually unanswerable under the method since the important question is not whether a statement or source is true or false but what it means. Change in political and ecclesiastical fields could be (unsatisfactorily) described through the discovery and listing of the 'true facts'; the history of art, religion, science, cultural and social life were more or less impervious to such a method. Merged with what Butterfield called 'the Whig interpretation of history' (a kind of political evolutionism) the minutiae of historical process fell into place in the grand scheme of ideological progress. Whig history provided a facile framework into which almost any aspect of the past could be slotted in order to tell the only 'meaningful' story: the relentless march of civilisation.

These methods and interpretations have been long discredited, although, as in anthropology, old explanatory frameworks live on as sub-texts in too much historical writing. Certainly it is no longer true that history's subject-matter is confined to the political. It is beyond the scope of this essay (and probably impossible) to trace the many paths along which social history emerged. One of them, relevant here though in no sense primary, was Keith Thomas' 1963 appeal for a widening of the historical gaze under the influence of anthropology. In that article, formative for many of the social historians emerging from the University of Oxford in that decade (including Macfarlane), Thomas contrasted the anthropological focus on domestic and community relations with their fringe status in academic history. In 1963 the historical
study of the family had "simply not begun". Since then it has formed an important, if controversial, growth-field. Thomas urged historians to consider the histories of sexual morality, romantic love, the education of children, clothes, and changing social attitudes to life-stages, pain, madness, the treatment of animals, drunkenness and so on. He admitted that many of these issues were not being discussed by contemporary anthropologists and that an initial encounter with British social anthropology was likely to be "something of a disappointment". Since then social history has taken on the study of many of Thomas' list of possibles. Social anthropology, despite its own advances in some of these fields, remains disappointing in its inability to properly theorise human affections and emotions.27

There is a contention that while anthropologists study 'total' societies or cultures, historians study single threads within them. Thomas says it would be "highly eccentric" for a historian to write about both 16th century religion and 16th century agriculture. This is less convincing in the light of the 'new histories' which make up social history, where these kinds of connections across fields are crucial. Newer versions of art history may identify probable contemporary 'readings' of pieces of art with reference to the customary practices of everyday life (from farming to breast-feeding) and to the iconography of popular culture (from saints' lives to the cuckold's horn). Reconstructing women's history requires a certain iconoclasm with regard to the boundaries of established sub-topics and conventional periodisations. As we shall see later, local history also demands an ability to understand seemingly divergent historic fields as they congregate on the local level.

B Emphasis (ie emphasis within the subject-matter)

"The fact that the anthropologist's problems are generally synchronic while the historian's problems are generally diachronic is a difference of emphasis in the rather peculiar conditions prevailing and not a real divergence of interest."28

Evans-Pritchard demotes this posited difference between the disciplines to a question of emphasis by narrowing the gap from both positions. He says "history is not a chronological relation of events but a descriptive integration of them...the task is not to record sequences of events but to establish connections between them." From the other side, anthropologists write "cross-sections of history, integrative descriptive accounts of primitive peoples at a moment of time."29

Gell's exposure of the falsity of the synchronic/diachronic opposition itself offers a more radical approach. What Levi-Strauss
attributes to the synchronic, for example the exchange of women in a circle, may be 'cyclic' but the fact of its repetition in time is crucial to its very essence. Most anthropological models rely not on the immobile synchronic which captures 'essence' at a single moment (like a photograph) but the "diachronic recurrence of structurally identical but numerically and chronologically distinct exchange-events" (that is, diachronic non-change). With this insight, and in the knowledge that historians have become increasingly interested in enduring relationships and continuities, we can address Evans-Pritchard's comment more readily. There are two aspects to the study of human societies: the study of change over time and the study of continuity over time. Neither has any relation to synchrony. The 'synchronic' is not a type of time but a function of analytical models. Synchrony/diachrony does not describe an anthropology/history distinction but contrasts models with reality, the depiction of essences with the description of their production and reproduction. Both history and anthropology are interested in both these aspects and neither is very impressed with the outputs of the other. Structural-functionalism hoped to build models which captured essences but the complexity of the actualities under study cannot be 'photographed' in this way. Historians hope that their cumulative narratives will help the reader to piece together "the cloth of epoch". I believe that this is possible but it is above all a literary rather than scientific approach and unlikely to appeal to anthropologists.

C Aims (ie ultimate purpose)

All seem to agree that the aim of both history and anthropology is to enhance self-knowledge through knowledge of others. For history this is often justified (explicitly or otherwise) in terms of origins and processes; "know thyself" becomes "know where you came from and how you got here". Collingwood has some rather grand additional claims to make for history. He asserts that it is only in the historical process that thought exists at all, "historical knowledge is no luxury or mere amusement of a mind at leisure...it is a prime duty...essential to the maintenance of reason itself". Rejecting the idea of progress as a natural law, the confusion of evolutionary succession (idealised as improvement) with historical change (ideologued as its equivalent), he produces a properly limited notion of historical progress. New systems (political, social, economic, religious, scientific, philosophical, moral) which continue to solve the old problems while finding new solutions for the new problems could be said to be progressive in the sense of improvement. Producing them demands historical thought, a re-enactment of the old in the here and now together with a development towards the new that is "partly constructive or positive and partly critical or negative."
For anthropology the issue is more stark and more ideologically charged. It is always a question of Self and Other, of the hoped-for dialogue between stranger and native. Studies of the privative mechanisms of alterity show that the (monologous) discourse of the West upon the Rest has often been constitutive rather than descriptive, that the Self creates both Self and Other through oppositions and analogies of its own devising.35

That anthropologists set themselves to 'learn' the unfamiliar land of the Other may help the individual ethnographer to overcome such closed binary thinking. Reading in social anthropology does provide one with a breath-taking vision of the diversity of humanity unequalled in the other disciplines. Sadly, this huge databank of human potentiality has rarely been used as an antidote to the futile search for 'human nature'. The universalist temptation remains but universals are only found either in the Levi-Straussian mysticism of 'fundamental structures of the human mind' or by discarding from the grand matrix of distinctiveness all that is of genuine fascination to leave only the mundanities which do not differ. A cascade of work by cultural historians and anthropologists is systematically removing even these from the field of the natural 'given'.

D Method (ie. general overall approach to problems)

Evans-Pritchard described the general methodology of anthropology as a three-stage process. First the ethnographer studies the significant overt features of a society and translates them into terms from the home society.37 Then comes the abstraction of an underlying form or structure, and finally the anthropologist compares the revealed social structures in a wide range of societies.

Collingwood insisted that the first stage of the historian's work was the framing of a problem and the search for data bearing on it. Perhaps Evans-Pritchard has left out this most obvious of issues: is there no thought given by ethnographers in their choice of 'a society'? The historian's data aid the discovery of the 'outside' of an action or event. It is then necessary to investigate the 'inside' (or 'thought-side') by re-thinking the event. Finally the historian must test the construction against the historical imagination.

We will see whether these two methodologies are fundamentally different or simply expressed differently by taking a closer look at the techniques used to fulfil them in each case.
Techniques (ie how to do your method)

OVERT FEATURES/OUTSIDE
Evans-Pritchard accepted that the techniques by which anthropologists and historians discover the overt features (or 'outside') of their subjects differ. Anthropologists make a direct study of social life in the field while historians must approach it indirectly through archival sources. As Natalie Davis describes it, the ethnographer's daily encounters with their subjects contrast with historians "who must slice into a culture through texts, pictures and artifacts." Cohn shows vividly how these different techniques of study have a powerful impact on the lifestyles of historians and anthropologists.

Cohn distinguishes between historians who 'find' their data and anthropologists who 'create' theirs. At first this seems like common-sense. Historians' sources are already there in an objective sense as documents or artifacts; the questions of the anthropologist draw out information which may never have been actualised otherwise. Yet sources and data are not the same thing: a census return will not tell us the prevalence of overcrowding or female-headed households until we 'ask' it. If the census is the source it is equivalent to an individual informant. The data 'created' from the source may be the number of female-headed households or a description of a ritual. In both cases the analyst will require additional sources (newspaper reports, parish registers; additional informants, participant observation) in order to interpret the data. The creative process is at work in both cases.

Both historians and anthropologists are selective about their sources. Collingwood insists that historical sources do not have authority. Every historian selects what she considers important and omits the rest, infers where the source is not explicit, rejects or amends what she regards as misinformation of some form. The criteria of relevance for the selection process are chosen by the historian. Anthropologists engage in the same process, using what they know about the informant or the information to modify what is actually being said. In observing an activity they are constantly making judgements about what is actually going on. We are all familiar with this selection-and-criticism process; it is an integral part of everyday social interaction. It is not only historians and anthropologists who try to discover the 'true story'. We are all detectives and both professional and everyday lie-detectors work by measuring new information against what we already hold to be true.

UNDERLYING STRUCTURE
Evans-Pritchard has anthropologists making their findings sociologically intelligible via "a set of abstractions" to make a single whole. Collingwood shows that rethinking the 'thought side'
is an act of interpolation. Are abstraction and interpolation the same? The question leads us into the thorny issue of theoretical models which is the subject of the next section.

COMPARISON

Evans-Pritchard's third stage is the comparison of social structures in a range of societies. This activity is basic to anthropology (rather than ethnography). It is also crucial to history in a number of ways. Firstly, change cannot be conceived without comparing before and after. To study Deptford over 2,000 years means looking for the impact and implication of change: on an 1829 map I see the market gardens stretching far and wide. By 1840 the first urban railway in the world has cut a swathe across them. This is a before-and-after series which must be investigated. Secondly, the character of an age (Postan's "cloth of epoch") also requires comparison with before and after. To understand anything about the 13th century involves looking back and forth to the 12th and the 14th centuries. Additionally, there is an implicit and constant comparison with the 20th century. We may not always need to remark on this, but we can rest assured that it is in the mind of readers as well as our own.

Historians compare places as well as times. This is because they are interested in the specificity of historicity (different rates of change, the play of the contingent and accidental, the consequences of causal elements appearing in different clusters.)

Thus although both history and anthropology are comparative, it is for different reasons. Anthropologists make comparisons in an attempt to understand the essences of characteristics and to construct typologies of forms whereas (at least temporal) comparison is integral to the historical process itself which is why it is rarely explicit and our work is less frequently organised around such comparisons.

Two other issues fall under this section.

Language

History has been both proud and defensive of its ability to minimise the use of jargon. In part this is a result of the tradition of amateur historiography. It also owes something to the interest of the general public in history. Although the public as audience was largely abandoned by academic historians in the 1920s in favour of intra-disciplinary journals, history remains the most popular of the academic disciplines.

There are more specific differences between the language used in written history and anthropology which would repay closer study. The device of the 'ethnographic present' and the anthropological abuse of tense has already been discussed. I would like to see a comparative study of what it is acceptable to say in each discipline. Quantification of the words probably and possibly and the
notions of causality, structure and meaning, literary analysis of the 'plots' (the means of unfolding the argument) of essays or monographs and a survey of the use of diagrams and tabular techniques would all show the trademarks anthropology and history have developed in their isolation from one another.

Relexivity
This is the level of awareness practitioners show of what they are doing, how they are doing it and what effects their method has on their work. Collingwood believed that any valid theory of historical knowledge must uncover the rules and assumptions behind the search for appropriate data and ask whether they are necessary and what effects they have on the historian's work. Positivists could never ask such questions because of their false analogy between scientific and historical facts. It is possible that natural scientists could make good use of a smidgen of reflexivity, but many would agree it is a duty of the social scientist. Anthropologists have tended to be more interested in the theoretical underpinning of their discipline than working historians have in the philosophy of history. This may relate directly to the relative youth of anthropology as an academic discipline and to its marginal status in the majority of universities.
4. Theoretical models

Are 'abstraction' and 'interpolation' the same? This question emerged from our discussion of the techniques by which anthropology and history attain the second level of Evans-Pritchard's mutual methodology. Anthropologists make a series of abstractions which render the underlying structure of a society into a single, sociologically intelligible whole. Historians, according to Collingwood, produce by interpolation a "web of imaginative construction stretched between certain...points".40

At first sight it would seem that abstraction expands the particular to the level of the general while interpolation uses the general to fill in between known (though not given, see n.40) particulars. Two questions present themselves. Do anthropologists work by abstraction defined in this way? What is the 'general' which historians use to fill in?

Cohn, the anthropologist among historians, draws a sharply pejorative distinction between the movement of historical compared to anthropological study. Historians, he says, begin with a broad idea of the known course of events and then look for particular information to draw a picture of how the events took place. They work from the general to the particular. Anthropologists, properly suspicious of the general, learn about the particular first. They observe detail and then mentally construct an abstraction under which to subsume the observed phenomena. The abstraction is then tested with more specific information. They work from the particular to the general. The implication of superiority is grating and invites rejoinder.41

Cohn says anthropologists derive their models from the specifics of ethnography. This may have some truth in that ethnographers arriving in the field do not necessarily 'go with a model' (although see below), but at the second stage of Evans-Pritchard's scheme anthropological work on underlying structures is always judged and only justifiable in terms of how far it illuminates the theory or debate it addresses.

Something different is happening in historical work. Cohn and others imply that historians have general theories which they take to the archives but then deliberately hide in the write-up. I would argue that historians have only one basic 'model'. This is what Collingwood calls the a priori imagination, the picture of the past which produces and justifies historical truth, the idea of history itself. This would explain why it is 'hidden': integral to the work of historical reconstruction, it is self-authorising and autonomous.42

The only one way to peg this rather high-falutin notion down to earth is to reclaim the concept of chronology. By allocating dates,
chronology avoids the problems of what Gell calls A-series time (past-present-future) by dividing time into a lasting B-series of before and after. In theory, since every 'event' can be placed in a valid B-series relation to every other, it would be possible to produce a universal chronology. This would be both useless and meaningless. For the purposes of historical study chronology offers us a multitude of meaningful linear schemes which characterise the salient events and structures of any historical sub-theme in relation to each other. This kind of dating provides room for the continuities of history as well as the changes: "x reigned from 1509 until 1527, y remained in place until 1800, z is still surviving in 1993". Paradoxically, it even allows us to provide support for Geertz's "relatively continuous social and cultural process...[without] sharp breaks", since it is only by looking for sharp breaks that we may conclude there are none. Chronology is not in itself an understanding, it is history's tool for ordering what must be understood.

The historical imagination cannot work in the completely generalised form implied by Collingwood, or it would be nothing more than a de-historicised theory of human nature. I would not feel equipped to make judgements about 6th century England. Rather it works, via chronology, by dividing up the past into sections which are not arbitrary in themselves though the placing of their (spatial as well as temporal) boundaries is always a choice based on theories and arguments from outside chronology. The historian then gets to work on one or more of these sections, building a historical imagination appropriate to the period which can then make judgements. The primary criteria for judging historical work is therefore related to its internal consistency. This is why Collingwood can say it is self-authorising.

When Keith Thomas gives an identical formulation as the only test of an anthropological monograph's reliability, he pre-empts historians' criticism with an over-generous claim that "anthropologists do not generalise lightly", offering the dullness and unpretentiousness of anthropological writing as evidence! In fact, although re-tracing sources for factual detail is an important technical checking mechanism and causes different problems in each discipline, it is not relevant when discussing the constructive work of historical interpolation.

Problems with Chronology

Chronology, as developed by European evolutionists, posits time as progressive. Placed alongside a series of privative mechanisms of alterity (West = complex, rational, enlightened; Other = opposite), all history is assumed to be the progress of complexity, rationality, enlightenment. It was anthropologists who mapped these temporal stages onto spatial/social co-ordinates based on an index of subsistence techniques. This unpleasant heritage mars our work.
in both fields, but there is no reason to reject the tool of chronology because it has been so misused.

Conventional periodisation has been blown apart by gender and other 'proctological' histories. However, this certainly does not mean that these other histories do not have their own relevant periodic schemes and chronologies. Chronology as a tool provides not one linear series but an infinite number. Each specific time-line is associated with a canon of relevant dated points, arising from the sources but always contestable and open to addition. In formulating 'new histories' we tend to turn to the time-lines of previous usages. It is in the splicing of these previously meaningful chronologies that we make our arguments as to their inadequacies.

Returning to the question of generality versus specificity in the light of the notion of the historical imagination, we can introduce an obvious yet usually unmentioned aspect of academic life: it starts at school. History is taught in schools, even to very young children. It is taught as a succession of facts and stories. Concentrating on the unique and the particular begins to provide the building-blocks of the historical imagination. Anthropology as we know it cannot be taught in schools because it is too theoretical. Ethnography could be taught but is not. In the move to higher education historians continue to learn their historical imagination from a build-up of specifics. Yet anthropologists are trained in the general. This important point is always left out of the discussion. It is assumed that the college-learning stage is irrelevant, that somehow the PhD student arrives in the field as an innocent ethnographer with a limitless curiosity for detail, all their general theoretical essays and seminars left behind at LSE to be incorporated later in the theory-finding stage. Ethnography is not taught in schools because anthropologists know that their discipline requires general models to plot ethnographic detail. Anthropologists work, like all academics, with both the general and the particular: all else is story-telling. Of all the 'social sciences', only history (having rejected positivism and accepted the literary tradition) has a use for both the temporal content and the cumulative narrative of stories.

Another approach to the question of the general and the particular is taken by Levi-Strauss. The researcher's role, in the field or the archive, is "to enlarge a specific experience to the dimensions of a more general one" accessible to the remote metropolis (the west, the present). This progression from the specific to the general is linked with and achieved by a transition from the conscious expressions of social life to its unconscious foundations. Interestingly, it is just this difference which represents the division Levi-Strauss assigns between history and anthropology themselves. From the original mutuality of purpose and complementarity of productive work, we have come to Levi-Strauss' triumphant end-point. History is a record of conscious particulars,
anthropology finds their 'true' basis in the general unconscious. If one rejects the truth-potential of the "fundamental structures of the human mind", structuralist 'generality' has nothing to offer.
5. The place of community history as median of history and anthropology.

Where does local history fit into the anthropology-history continuum? Its subject is the small-scale community and its practitioners must face, even if they cannot answer, the nebulous and elusive character of 'community' with its minimum of 94 distinct definitions! They must read the social science literature which proclaims the death of community but unless they can continue to believe in the notion (even if only to the extent that it means something important in the minds of their 'informants') they will give up the project.

Community studies, historical or otherwise, must also recognise the boundary problems Leach identified in Political Systems of Highland Burma. However, as long as we have no delusions of containment or uniformity we need not be disabled by them. Local history has to take account of mobility, migration and fluid populations, all of whom have a right to be considered as part of the contemporary community, all of whom have a history which belongs to the locality though it originates far away and may end there. In a modern inner city context there will be questions about housing policies which brought people to the area or decanted them elsewhere.

Community history takes not one aspect or sub-theme of historical process but many, in an effort to understand how they have related to each other to produce the present form of the locality. Local history emphasises diachrony, focusing on both change and continuity over time. At appropriate moments of its story, it provides vignettes of specific institutions, events and characters.

The ultimate goal of community or local history depends on whether it is popular or academic. It would require another essay to draw out the differences between popular and academic versions of anthropology, history and local history. Yet in general, popular local history tends to be more impressionistic, to tell more stories and include more incidental detail. Less explicitly theoretical, it will employ a different kind of language and make no presumptions of a common body of specialist knowledge. Its aims will probably include the development of community pride and a historical understanding which can help people to participate in the changes occurring around them in the present. Academic studies of the history of local areas are more often a way to provide a microscopic example or refutation of a broader hypothesis within national or international historical debates. They tend to cover shorter time-spans in more detail and they show their interest in the area with more subtlety.

The overall method of study will be broadly similar to that outlined above for both anthropology and history. With the help of a chronology (which must often be constructed from scratch) and a
map, one looks first for the 'obvious' features. What are the main topographic features? How have these been utilised? What kinds of people have lived in this area at different times? Why have they come? Why have they left? What has been the relationship with other areas? Intertwined with the growing knowledge this research brings is the emergence of an appropriately localised 'historical imagination' with its own consistency in making connections between various aspects of the locality's past. Comparisons with other places are often crucial to academic local history and also play a role in the popular version. People are very mobile, they have plenty of information about other places and they need to know why their own area is important. The community historian also makes inferences from known facts about national or regional histories in the light of known aspects of the local.

Technically the method of the local historian lies mid-way between that of the field-worker and that of the historian. I would argue that community history can only be properly written after (and possibly during) intensive participant observation. Even if the period under study does not extend into the time of living memory, local history has to include some 'history on the ground'. Topographic features provide a background continuity on which historical development is overlain.

The technique involves a mixture of direct and indirect experience of the subject, of interviews and archival research. Although there may be only a limited range of documentary source material, Macfarlane has shown the enormous amount of information such sources (parish registers, wills and deeds, diaries, council minutes) can provide with intensive research. This is a great advantage but, even after 20 years of innovation and improvement in computer technology, Macfarlane's assertion of the impossibility of fully utilising these sources still holds true. Their biases remain as much of a problem as their enormous potential. It is necessary then to be very selective and critical of documentary sources. Historians are used to this.

It is impossible to interview a 'representative' section of any urban community and the results of those interviews which are undertaken must be treated with the same vigour demanded by written sources. Community history has to find the stories which were never written. It seeks out everyday life in the nostalgic and methodologically troublesome memories of the elderly; the frustration or self-congratulation of the activist; the bureaucratic exculpation of generations of power-holders; the first impressions of newly-arrived refugees; the racist scape-goating of the dispossessed, and a hundred other special perspectives which make up the patterns of community life. Anthropologists are used to this.

24
Local historians are usually involved in the creation of data. They record interviews, take photographs, draft maps, tabulate census figures. Their work often has an impact on the contemporary development of their subject in a way quite common for anthropologists but very rare with national history. Borofsky describes how he worked with a group of Pukapukan teachers to produce an English-Pukapukan dictionary. During the process, and he describes similar ones for previous anthropologists on Pukapuka, traditions were both invented and revived. Preservation is also a transformation.

In some ways community historians are not like historians or anthropologists. Community historians, especially in the inner city context, are also community workers and not only through popularising history. We find ourselves involved in campaigning to save buildings or modify development plans, fundraising for museums or to produce newspapers or exhibitions which record the present as it slides into the past, running projects with children which emphasise local pride and give them a stake in neighbourhood resources. Collingwood's view that progress depends on historical thought becomes very clear to the local historian. We cannot help but feel concerned that those who are planning our community's future have no understanding of its past or about-to-be-bulldozed present.

I will be accused of over-involvement and romanticism. So be it. My towers are made of concrete not ivory and that makes a difference. Living on a four-lane highway which is also the Roman road from Dover to London, one can mimic the ethnographer's smugness and say one knows the world outside in a 'concrete' fashion. After years of historical research there is no desire to ignore the processes by which that world was formed. When the field is also home and the sounds of police sirens permeate the write-up, the distancing tactic is avoided and the dichotomy of Self and Other is resolved.
CONCLUSIONS

This essay has been a running battle between the loyal historian and the budding anthropologist. I find their hostilities quieted only in the field of community history where the anthropologist’s techniques emerge in their full splendour but interpretation continues to rely on a historical imagination based on chronology rather than a constraining model with an -ism suffix.

There have been trouble-makers on both sides. Radcliffe-Brown and Levi-Strauss attack with different weapons but both of them are rusty with their long immersion in anti-historical models. On the other hand, Adams is understandably irritated by historians who “scrutinise all behaviour for its potential relationship to the eventful.” Historians are eclectic in their choice of mentors from the other side. Mixing ideas from professional opponents should not be problematic; applying them too readily to any and every historical case is deadly.

Anthropology is trying hard to disentangle itself from the strands of its heritage which keep it from becoming historicised. As yet this has not been achieved. Work like Bloch’s on the circumcision ritual is fascinating but it involves the use of historical information to further an anthropological theory; it is not historical anthropology. History has gained by its contact with anthropology, but this has been in the field of new perspectives and questions not theories and models. Macfarlane urged historians to re-think anthropology’s concepts and put “the flimsy functional and structural models of society to real tests.” Few have taken up the challenge.

I would make two critical recommendations:
i) the use of the ethnographic present must be discarded;
ii) serious thought should be given to institutionalising history modules in academic anthropological training and vice versa. This kind of ‘participant observation’ will undermine the platitudes and render comprehensible the strange world of the Other.
NOTES

1. Fabian, p11
2. Fabian, p14
3. Morgan, 1877, quoted in Fabian, p15
4. N Thomas, p18
5. Evans-Pritchard, 1981, quoted in N Thomas, p18
6. Fabian, p53
7. Levi-Strauss 1966, p256
8. Fabian, p54-6.
   Yet Levi-Strauss astonishes modern anthropologists by his easy use of early (discredited) ethnography. "Luckily," he confides, "structural analysis makes up for the dubiousness of historical reconstructions". Quoted in Fabian, p59
9. N Thomas, p102
10. Sahlins 1985, pix
11. Thompson 1972, p47-8
12. J & J Comaroff, p18
14. Macfarlane, p637
15. Evans-Pritchard 1962, p21
16. J & J Comaroff, p9. "Ethnography...does not speak for others, but about them."
17. K Thomas 1963, p5
18. Nicholl, p25
21. Gell, p84-92
22. Bloch 1989, p18-21
23. Gell, p131: "Language and discourse are continually poised between convention and discovery."
24. Dening, p375
25. Collingwood, p329
26. Collingwood, p127
28. Evans-Pritchard 1962, p24
29. Evans-Pritchard 1962, p24
30. Gell, involved in clearing the confusion in his own field, also shows how such 'cyclical time' can only truly be represented as linear since it is the 'again-ness' of repeating events which is important and this depends on the "indexicality of events strung out along a linear time-axis", p35

31. Even the apparently static metaphor of a photograph is complicated. A large part of our enjoyment of a snapshot, for example, lies in our mental extrapolation of movement and context from the inert moment depicted. Only a posed photograph of unknown figures with an inserted background and no dating could stand as metaphor for the truly synchronic.

32. Gell, p25

33. Postan, quoted in K Thomas 1963, p19

34. Collingwood, p227-8

35. There is also evidence to show that such constructions are an inevitable feature of the encounter itself and not limited to the western side of the confrontation. It is then an issue of the relative power which the representations can call upon to institutionalise their hegemony.

36. Collingwood, p321-34

37. Issues around translation and incommensurability, to which historians would be advised to give more thought, have been addressed much more systematically within anthropology than history.

38. Davis, p272


40. Collingwood, p242. I have removed Collingwood's word 'fixed' because it is part of his argument that the web is not pegged down by the sources: there are no authorities. The historian is responsible for the nodal points as well as for the fabric itself.

41. Cohn 1962, p6-7

42. Collingwood, p245-6 and passim.

43. Geertz, quoted in Rosebery, p7

44. K Thomas 1963, p6

45. As shown by Fabian and N Thomas

46. Levi-Strauss 1968, p17-18

47. eg. Crossick's study of Kentish London shows how the social mix of a given locality affected its involvement in specific types of nineteenth century radical politics.

48. Maefarlane, p639, 643-5

49. Borofsky, p142, 144-7

28
50. Adams, p262
51. Macfarlane, p652
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