

Emerging Disciplines: Shaping New Fields of Scholarly Inquiry in and beyond the Humanities

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C O N N E X I O N S

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Chapter 1

Introduction¹

In 2006, the Consortium of Humanities Centers and Institutes, along with the University of Chicago, held a conference entitled “The Fate of Disciplines.” Grounded in the long history of disciplinarity in the academy, the conference sought to theorize relations between residual and emergent disciplines and to contemplate the future shape and texture of disciplinary formations and the university structures that contain (and, some would say, constrain) them.

The conference’s keywords set the terms of discussion. More than fixed “content” or objects of study, and not reducible to a “method,” academic disciplines tend to exist in uneasy relation to the institutional structures, such as departments or schools, created to administer them. Conference speakers concluded that disciplines, neither separable from nor reducible to such institutional moorings, exist in tension with the institutional structures that sustain them, and it is in this tension that their transformative promise lies.

The other keyword, “fate,” signaled a sense of the foreordained, predetermined nature of the disciplines’ future—a future that is in some way a destiny, fixed in the natural order of the cosmos, and a natural outgrowth of the past. As Andrew Abbott observes in *Chaos of Disciplines* (2001), calls for disciplinary change and transformation have been part of the American university system since the 1920s. Indeed, such calls have been one of the academic disciplines’ most enduring characteristics. Over a quarter century ago, Clifford Geertz observed how disciplinary boundaries had dramatically blurred even in his lifetime, and he concluded in 1980 that the procedures then used to analyze our objects of study had merged to the point of forming what he termed “a vast continuous field of interpretation.” The modern American research university came into being from 1880 to 1910, with Johns Hopkins, Chicago, Stanford, and Rice as examples. This event coincided with the emergence of major professional associations governing the disciplines, including the Modern Language Association in 1883, the American Historical Association in 1884, and the American Anthropological Association in 1902.

But challenges to these disciplinary formations of the research university and the professional association were almost immediate. Interdisciplinary committees were common on university campuses by the 1940s, and emendations of the disciplinary system in the form of area studies emerged during the same decade. The enduring intellectual lure of what often were termed “shadow disciplines” has led scholars from Lynn Hunt to Judith Butler to caution against wholesale rejection of traditional disciplinary forms. As Hunt reminds us, it is the certainty of disciplinary borders that makes new disciplinary configurations imaginable. New practices, according to Hunt, will not mean anything if the humanities dissolve into an “undifferentiated pool of cultural studies.” Butler expressed concern that eroding the prominence of well-established disciplinary structures such as departments enables the erosion of professional norms like tenure, academic freedom and faculty dissent.

As “The Fate of the Disciplines” made clear, while relations between residual and emergent fields are anything but settled, these relations are part of larger historical fluctuations that aren’t going to be resolved anytime soon. The fate of disciplines, then, is to be internally bound up in these larger institutional processes.

¹This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m34253/1.5/>>.

The September 2009 symposium “Emerging Disciplines” and this collection of its expanded presentations attend to a slightly different set of concerns. The focus here is less on the waxing and waning of the disciplinary moon and more on those forms of knowledge that do not fit comfortably or even uncomfortably within the disciplinary regimes that have evolved over the last hundred years.

C. P. Snow coined the phrase “two cultures” to capture the idea that there are two cultures in the structure of knowledge that root themselves into different, often opposing camps, with regard to the set of epistemological presuppositions they employ. Snow coined the term in 1959, but the phenomena he was describing are, of course, much older. The idea that there are two cultures was a creation of the modern world; this concept was gradually institutionalized in universities. At the end of the eighteenth century, most scientists, as Eric Mielants observes, did not see religion and science as incompatible knowledge systems; it was transformations within the European university system that gradually isolated knowledge practitioners into different camps. In 1795, the Institut de France, for example, designated the natural sciences, literature and the arts, and the social sciences as belonging to distinct and different intellectual spheres. Meanwhile, the rise of specialized journals and the exclusion of the amateur nobleman from the scientific community after 1850 were part of a reallocation of intellectual resources for the new university, which acquired almost complete monopoly over the production and dissemination of knowledge by the end of the nineteenth century.

Thus, as Immanuel Wallerstein and Richard Lee observed, this two-culture formation is itself a product of modernity, and a longer view reveals that knowledge organization did not always fit neatly in the disciplinary boxes we have created in modern times. But such habits of thought are currently being revisited, and epistemological debate about the kind of intellectual-built environment that will most effectively support knowledge production and dissemination has become a topic of central concern.

This is our concern here, and the following papers will, in different ways, ask us to consider the following: What new ways of knowing become available when we leave assumptions about disciplinary order behind? What environmental circumstances give rise to new knowledge practices, and how might these practices alter disciplinary modes of knowledge production? And finally, what knowledge do we need to acquire to think effectively about the disciplinary models, like “two cultures,” that have served as central pillars of modern knowledge systems? While these papers examine a broad range of research questions and approaches, each has unanticipated points of overlap with others. These points of convergence, originating from what our current institutional structures have encouraged us to see as distinct realms, become evident when disciplinary boundaries are pressed upon and when disparate fields are brought together in temporary but potentially far-reaching collaborative exchange.

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Chapter 2

On the Possibilities for a Deep History of Humankind¹

In the mid-nineteenth century, as the great French historian Victor Duruy sat down to revise the general history of the world text used in French schools, he found himself facing a question few historians since antiquity had had to contemplate: when should history begin? “Scarcely twenty or thirty years ago,” he wrote, “unexpected discoveries have forced us to break all the old systems of chronology.”² He was alluding to the time revolution that began in 1859, when the short Biblical chronology, over the space of a decade or so, was abandoned as a geological truth.³ To the new geology was joined the new archaeology, an approach to the past that challenged the very framework of history’s chronology. “A science born yesterday,” Duruy wrote, “has pushed the birth of humanity back to an age where the measure of time is no longer given by means of a few generations of men, as it is today, but instead by hundreds of centuries.”⁴ His predecessors had all written in the comfortable certainty that human history was as old as the earth, and that both began in a moment of creation in 4004 B.C. Not twenty years earlier, Duruy himself had published a new edition of a sacred history according to the Bible.⁵ When he took up the task of revising world history for the French curriculum, he was one of the first historians to stand on the precipice of time, contemplating, in his own words, “an obscure and terrifying antiquity.”⁶

When Duruy’s concise universal history was published in 1873, the field of history stood at a crossroads. What the Comte de Buffon had once called “the dark abyss of time” (*le sombre abîme du temps*), clearly, was not an abyss. It was more like a rift valley, with new land unmistakably visible on the other side. As an awareness of deep human time filtered into the practice of history during the waning decades of the

¹This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m34256/1.4/>>.

²Victor Duruy, *Abrégé d’histoire universelle, comprenant la révision des grandes époques de l’histoire depuis les origines jusqu’à 1848*, nouvelle édition (Paris: Hachette, 1873), 3: “Il y a vingt ou trente années seulement que des découvertes inattendues ont forcé de briser tous les vieux systèmes de chronologie.”

³Important studies of the time revolution include Stephen Toulmin and June Goodfield, *The Discovery of Time* (New York: Harper Row, 1965); Claude Albritton, *The Abyss of Time: Changing Conceptions of the Earth’s Antiquity after the Sixteenth Century* (San Francisco: Freeman, Cooper, 1980); Paolo Rossi, *The Dark Abyss of Time: The History of the Earth and the History of Nations from Hooke to Vico*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); Stephen Jay Gould, *Time’s Arrow, Time’s Cycle: Myth and Metaphor in the Discovery of Geological Time* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987); and Thomas R. Trautmann, *Lewis Henry Morgan and the Invention of Kinship* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), esp. 32-35 and 205-30.

⁴Duruy, *Abrégé*, 4: “Cette science née d’hier a donc reculé la naissance de l’humanité vers une époque où la mesure du temps n’est plus, comme de nos jours, donnée par quelques générations d’hommes, mais où il faut compter par des centaines de siècles.”

⁵Victor Duruy, *Histoire sainte d’après la Bible*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Hachette, 1856).

⁶Duruy, *Abrégé*, 4: “une vague et effrayante antiquité.” The question of how French historians responded to the challenge of deep time has been little studied, to my knowledge. For the situation in the United States and England, see Daniel A. Segal, “Western Civ and the Staging of History in American Higher Education,” *American Historical Review* 105 (2000): 770-805, and Doris Goldstein, “Confronting Time: The Oxford School of History and the Non-Darwinian Revolution,” *Storia della Storiografia* 45 (2004): 3-27.

nineteenth century, general historians like Duruy found ways to acknowledge the new findings. But they had no idea what to do with them, because deep human time did not fit the pre-existing frame used in the field of history.

By the 1930s, historians had come to a jury-rigged solution, resolving the problem of narrative by using the idea of the “Neolithic Revolution” to claim that human history itself came into being with the invention of agriculture and civilization.⁷ For the preceding half-century, however, historians floundered. In Duruy’s case, the few token paragraphs he devoted to humanity’s deep time were grafted clumsily onto the front end of the history.⁸

Today, the gulf between history and prehistory is no longer terrifying, but it remains nearly as deep as it was in 1873. The inability to close the breach in time was one of the signal failures of history-writing in the twentieth century. In the decades after 1960, the field of history gradually set about the task of recuperating histories that had been invisible to previous historians writing in the Judeo-Christian tradition: histories of women, peasants and workers, marginals, minorities, subalterns, and all those whom Eric Wolf once called the “people without history.”⁹ These moves have enriched the field. But because the peoples of the Paleolithic “belonged” to another discipline—archaeology—they remained invisible to the historian’s eye. Because their culture is extinct, moreover, the peoples of the Paleolithic aren’t a visibly suffering minority and have no need for justice. This political state of non-being renders them uninteresting to historians moved by advocacy.

If the discipline we call History is a political discipline designed to explain the modern condition, then there is little need for a deep history. But if History is an anthropological discipline designed to explain the human condition, as I believe, there is an urgent need to recuperate the history of Paleolithic peoples, to bring them into the purview of historical studies in the same way that we have brought in Incans, Africans, peasants, and all the peoples who have been denied historicity. This is the task of deep history.

A deep history is any history framed in the full spectrum of the human past, from the present day back to early hominins, australopiths, and beyond. A deep history is not just the study of the Paleolithic era, or everything before the turn to agriculture. Archaeologists and paleoanthropologists already do that. It is instead a philosophical perspective, an invitation to contemplate the entire span of human history within a single frame and treat it as part of the same narrative. For this reason, particular histories focusing on narrower spans of more recent time can contribute to deep history as long as they frame questions in the right way. Deep histories are genealogies. As genealogies, they span the narrow evidentiary bases and the methodological rules that have cut human history into isolated segments.

In the reflections below, I shall begin with a brief historical analysis of why the short chronology typical of the study of history was maintained, with rare exceptions, across the twentieth century. I offer this study on the grounds that the task of designing a deep history will be clearer if we understand why it has taken so long for historians to accept the full implications of the time revolution of the 1860s. Here, I shall focus on trends in the discipline of history, though it is important to acknowledge that for much of the twentieth century, archaeologists were just as interested as historians in clinging to a methodological division of time. According to this division of labor, historians were confined to the short time of written evidence. Archaeologists, in turn, limited themselves to the periods associated with unwritten evidence and had little interest in studying societies that left written records. With this survey in hand, we can more easily appreciate how to move forward in developing a new architecture for the writing and practice of deep history. The key task is to outline a mode of history-writing that escapes the style, much in vogue for thirty years and more, whereby historians plot their histories according to ideas of birth, origins, and revolutions. The use of such metaphors renders deep time invisible. What we need to develop anew is a genealogical instinct.

In his 1962 work, *The Idea of Prehistory*, the archaeologist Glyn Daniel posed this rather plaintive question: “Why do historians in a general way pay so little attention to this fourth division of the study of the human past; while recognizing ancient history [why] do they not give more recognition to prehistory?...”

⁷V. Gordon Childe, *Man Makes Himself* (London: Watts, 1936).

⁸I have explored some of these issues at greater length in *On Deep History and the Brain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

⁹Eric R. Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

Historians are taking a long time to integrate prehistory into their general view of man.”¹⁰

To answer this question, we need to go back more than a century and consider the trends afoot as the modern practices of history and archaeology took shape. When History formed as a discipline in the late nineteenth century around the three divisions of History’s short chronology—ancient, medieval, and modern—it adopted as its signature method the analysis of written sources. In a manual of historical studies published in 1897, probably the most influential of its kind, the historians Charles Langlois and Charles Seignobos argued, “the historian works with documents. Documents are the traces which have been left by the thoughts and actions of men of former times. . . For want of documents the history of immense periods in the past of humanity is destined to remain for ever unknown. For there is no substitute for documents: no documents, no history.”¹¹ Or in the words of V.A. Renouf, “historians get their knowledge from written documents. No history of any country can be written unless its people have left some such record of their activities.”¹²

This seems logical enough. Yet it is important to realize that this claim represents a significant departure from previous understandings of historical evidence. Universal history, as practiced in the Judeo-Christian tradition, was never defined by methodology. It was defined as a subject: the genealogy of humankind. By way of example, consider the *History of the Franks*, written by Gregory of Tours around 590 CE.¹³ Though the work was a particular history devoted to the lineage of the Frankish kings of Gaul, Gregory began his account with Genesis and continued through the Flood, the generations of Noah, and the story of Moses and the Children of Israel wandering in the deserts of Sinai. His account of the Hebrew race gradually leads up to the Romans and then, by stages, back down to the race of the Franks. Particular histories like Gregory’s ended up focusing on the twigs and branches of the family tree, but the genealogical instinct was common in works of history in medieval and early modern Europe.

Since history was a subject and not a methodology, rules of evidence mattered little. As late as 1885, as all academia was beginning to fragment into disciplines, the American historian George Park Fisher recommended that young historians learn how to use written documents such as registers, chronicles, inscriptions, and literature, but he also advised them to consult oral tradition; material structures such as altars, tombs, and private dwellings; and language, using the techniques of comparative philology. History, in Fisher’s view, was written from a broad spectrum of evidence. To this, Fisher added a recommendation to use indirect evidence, to tease historical conclusions out of an array of recalcitrant sources.¹⁴

So in 1897, why did Langlois and Seignobos narrow down the sources of history so radically to documents alone? History, in trying to recast itself as a methodologically rigorous science, was undoubtedly keeping up with the fashions of the day. But the narrowing of evidence had a second consequence, for it helped to exclude prehistory from the ambit of history. As Langlois and Seignobos put it, “for want of documents the history of immense periods in the past of humanity is destined to remain for ever unknown.”¹⁵ Writing in 1897, they knew that this was untrue. Their famous contemporary, the French archaeologist Gabriel de Mortillet, had already used the substantial evidence at hand to classify the phases of the Stone Age by tool type. Perhaps, then, their insistence on documentary evidence was an epistemological sleight-of-hand, a ruse, motivated by their pre-existing desire to preserve the realm of history from the vague and terrifying antiquity of which Victor Duruy had spoken. Whatever the motivation, we can see how humanity’s deep history broke apart at practically the same moment that it became thinkable.

So here we have an initial answer to the question posed by Glyn Daniel. In the centuries leading up to the time revolution of 1859, human history was whole and genealogical. In the decades following the time revolution, the subject of history was fragmented along disciplinary lines. Nowadays, history is housed in at least two departments, History and Anthropology. Disciplines, much like cubist paintings, take a unified subject and fracture it on methodological lines. Where the subject of human history is concerned,

¹⁰Glyn E. Daniel, *The Idea of Prehistory* (London: Watts, 1962), 134.

¹¹Charles V. Langlois and Charles Seignobos, *Introduction aux études historiques* (Paris: Hachette, 1897). I used the English translation, *Introduction to the Study of History*, trans. G.G. Berry (New York: Holt, 1898), 17.

¹²V.A. Renouf, *Outlines of General History*, 2nd ed., ed. William Starr Myers (New York, 1909), 2.

¹³Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks*, trans. Lewis Thorpe (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974).

¹⁴George Park Fisher, *Outlines of Universal History, Designed as a Text-Book and for Private Reading* (New York, 1885), 3.

¹⁵Langlois and Seignobos, *Introduction*, 17.

the methodological division doubles as a chronological division. Archaeologists and anthropologists take responsibility for the Great Before. Historians limit themselves to the Everything After. Despite the enthusiasm for interdisciplinarity these past few decades, there has been very little thought devoted to bringing interdisciplinarity to the study of human history.

Accompanying the disciplinary turn was the well-known shift in subject from the genealogy of kings and battles to the rise of nations. The genealogical mode of writing history used by Gregory of Tours and others is a style of thinking that naturally creates an interest in “first things.” The new mode of history writing that emerged in the later nineteenth century, in sharp contrast, was historically myopic. Metaphorically, it took the form of what biologists would call an ontogeny: a developmental history describing the birth and maturation of a single organism. Where a genealogy describes the deep history of a lineage, an ontogeny writes the biography of a single entity cut adrift from its lineage. The new mode of history writing, in this vein, took form as the biography of nations, a fitting subject for an age that saw the rise of nationalism and the emergence of universal education. Through the metaphor of ontogeny, it became possible to imagine that national histories have founding moments and key transitions. Surveying the histories written in France, England, the United States, and elsewhere in the West in the decades leading up to 1900, it is striking how histories written in a semi-genealogical mode gave way, over the space of several decades, to histories rife with metaphors of origin and birth.¹⁶

All national history curricula have their own roots in the late nineteenth century, in the work of figures like Victor Duruy, George Park Fisher, and other historians who were instrumental in defining the patterns of history instruction. It is understandable that history curricula, then as now, should emphasize moments of national origins. Nations, after all, are bodies. But leaving aside nations, what was the birth date for history as a whole? In the first half of the twentieth century, this was an issue of some moment in the United States, as many universities adopted “Western Civ” as their basic history course. In the 1920s, the Australian archaeologist Gordon Childe offered historians the twin ideas of the Neolithic Revolution and the Urban Revolution in Mesopotamia, and his style of periodization spread rapidly through U.S. textbooks, general histories, and curricula from the 1930s onward. The current Social Studies curriculum in New York State, for example, begins officially in Mesopotamia in 4,000 B.C. In Texas, no dates are given for some of the early happenings, but the earliest subject covered is the “Neolithic Agricultural Revolution.”¹⁷ In almost all Western Civ and World History textbooks today, history comes into being in the Neolithic.

The Paleolithic, in this mode of writing, is a historyless period: a prologue. The idea that some human societies could exist outside of history intrigued nineteenth-century German historical philosophers. In Leopold von Ranke’s famous phrase, Asians were the “people of the eternal standstill.”¹⁸ So were Africans, Australian Aborigines, American Indians: indeed, practically everyone who wasn’t of European origin. It was an odd feature of the new history that historicity, if it was to be accorded to some peoples, had to be denied others.

The idea that only some peoples have history is blatantly erroneous. You don’t have to have much acquaintance with Paleolithic and Neolithic archaeology, let alone Incan and African archaeology, to realize that all human societies are full of history, even those whose histories we must reconstruct with the most fragmentary unwritten evidence. Thanks to the ontogenetic style of writing history, however, the idea that there is a time before history, and then a history, has worked its way into our curricula and our habits of thinking about the past. The errors into which this has led us have been legion. In recent years, we have swept away the instinct to deny historicity to non-Europeans; except, of course, where Paleolithic peoples are concerned.

In proposing a deep history there is a temptation to prescribe. We *ought* to have historians, archaeologists,

¹⁶In general, see Ernest Breisach, *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval and Modern*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). The shift in patterns of historical writing, and in particular the transformation in the underlying biological metaphors used to describe the pattern of history, merit further research. For a preliminary study, see my “Genealogy, Ontogeny, and the Narrative Arc of Origins,” forthcoming.

¹⁷See <http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/ciai/socst/pub/sscore2.pdf> (<<http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/ciai/socst/pub/sscore2.pdf>>), page 94, accessed 28 December 2009; Texas Administrative Code, Title 19, Part II, Chapter 113, Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for Social Studies, Subchapter C, High School, p. C-15; see <http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/rules/tac/chapter113/index.html> (<<http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/rules/tac/chapter113/index.html>>), accessed 11 September 2009.

¹⁸See Arthur F. Wright, “The Study of Chinese Civilization,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 21 (1960): 233-55, here 245.

and anthropologists in a single department. We *ought* to work in teams so as to bridge the methodological divisions that break human history into pieces. Most of this is so obvious as to need no comment; it's the implementation that would be complicated. Before we set about the task of restructuring academic space, the intellectual architecture must be solidly constructed. The first task is to define the narrative arc of a deep history, something that clearly baffled Duruy and generations of textbook authors after him.

The narrative arc of modern history-writing, as noted above, follows the arc of ontogeny. As a practical matter, what this means is that histories—especially but not exclusively works of synthesis such as textbooks, general histories, and introductory survey lectures—frame their subjects using metaphors of origin, birth, roots, revolution, invention, and the like. The key feature of the ontogenetic metaphor is that it proposes a shift from nothingness to being or from stasis to change, a shift projected onto a moment of birth or conception. The nation was an early target for the ontogenetic metaphor: by the late nineteenth century, the idea of the birth of nations was making its way into chapter titles, section headings, and book prologues. The metaphor eventually found its way into book titles, such as Ferdinand Lot's famous 1948 work, *The Birth of France*.¹⁹ But the metaphor was readily exported for use in other areas. Western Civilization (via the Neolithic Revolution) was an early beneficiary, and the metaphor soon spread beyond this to other entities, ideas, and systems. Over the last fifty years, the list has become long indeed: for medieval Europe alone, claims have been made identifying the period as the point of origin for civil society, the state, commerce and trade, banking, cities, individualism, universities, the modern nuclear family, scientific method, law and justice, human rights, citizenship, colonialism, fashion, and even persecution.

The ontogenetic metaphor struck a chord in the historical imagination of the latter half of the twentieth century. Books using ontogenetic metaphors became foundational texts. For medieval European history, such works as Robert S. Lopez's *The Birth of Europe* and Joseph Strayer's *On the Medieval Origins of the Modern State* spring to mind.²⁰ Even a cursory bibliographic examination will show that recourse to talk of birth and origins has become dense in all fields of history in recent decades.²¹ Used in titles or massaged into the architecture of arguments, ontogenetic metaphors help create the energy that can drive whole fields of historical inquiry, as scholars engage in fierce debates about the points of origins of human rights, intolerance, or the modern world system. Yet the use of the metaphor comes with a price. An evocation of birth can project nothingness or historylessness onto the other side of the divide. It flattens the long tail of history before the origin into an inconsequential prelude.

Ontogeny, clearly, is anathema to a deep history of humankind. More to the point, if we must have origins, they ought to be human origins rather than the ersatz and self-congratulatory origins associated with modernity. The modern practice of history has borrowed its signature metaphors from biology, and biology, once again, provides a metaphorical alternative: that of phylogeny. Where ontogeny is a biographical vision, focusing on the life history of organisms or systems, phylogeny is a lineal vision describing a succession of changing forms. Ontogeny generates historical myopias and illusions of novelty. Historians who incautiously retail metaphors of birth and origin are liable to imagine that world trade systems were insignificant before the sixteenth century, that mass consumption did not exist before the eighteenth century, that egalitarian and democratic ideas could not have existed before 1789, and so on. Phylogenetic styles of writing history, in contrast, see broad continuities in various domains even while acknowledging that the Paleolithic amber trade was not as vast as the modern diamond trade, that patterns of consumption in ancient Rome took

¹⁹Victor Henri Ferdinand Lot, *Naissance de la France* (Paris: Fayard, 1948).

²⁰Robert S. Lopez, *The Birth of Europe* (New York: M. Evans, 1962); Joseph S. Strayer, *On the Medieval Origins of the Modern State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970).

²¹Typical titles include Immanuel M. Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Academic Press, 1974); Neil McKendrick, Jon Brewer, and J.H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982); Christopher A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003); Lynn Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights: A History* (New York: Norton, 2007). Ontogenetic metaphors don't always appear in book titles, though they are evident in arguments, e.g. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989); Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990); Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Gregory Clark, *A Farewell to Alms: A Brief Economic History of the World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

different forms than they do today, and that forager egalitarianism is not like modern democracy. Change is always more visible, and more interesting, when viewed against an invariant background. The most significant difference between ontogeny and phylogeny lies in the fact that phylogeny presupposes a constant dialogue between humans and the ecosystems of which they form a part. In this view, many of the events and trends that pass as novelties in the ontogenetic style of writing history turn out to be normal ecological processes dependent on things like population density and the distribution of resources. Deep histories coalesce easily around the narrative spiral that emerges when one imagines a constant evolutionary dialogue between organism and ecosystem, where the organism itself is constantly shaping and reshaping the very ecosystem of which it is a part, and the ecosystem, in turn, constantly shapes the organism.

Since an example might help explain what I mean by this narrative spiral, let us reflect for a moment on the human body, one of many domains of inquiry that provide a ready base for a deep historical perspective. Animal bodies are always undergoing physical changes, as natural selection tunes the body to a changing environment; if the changes are substantial enough, a new species results. Contemplating the human body from *Homo habilis* forward, physical anthropologists have described a set of transformations that resulted from the growing human propensity to use tools, where tool-use, by changing the way in which humans released calories from foodstuffs, generated feedback effects on the body itself.²² The human evolutionary biologist Richard Wrangham has vividly argued that the harnessing of fire (a special kind of tool) some 1.8 million years ago explains an especially important cascade of transformations that dramatically reshaped the body of *Homo erectus* and altered human sociality.²³ As digestion increasingly took place outside the stomach, through cutting, pounding, and especially cooking, the gut itself shrank, along with the jaw, the teeth, and the muscles associated with biting. The body itself became less robust. Strikingly, many of the bodily devices that primates use to send social signals atrophied or vanished in hominins at around the same time: canines and bristly hair, for example, used by dominant males to maintain social hierarchies and (probably) the pheromones or swellings that indicate oestrus in females. The new human body suited the egalitarian social structure that was itself a product of fire and tool use.²⁴

This doesn't mean that displays disappeared. One of the most striking features of the archaeological record since the Upper Paleolithic (ca. 50,000 years ago) has been the growing density of human-made devices for extending or redefining the edges of the human body through ornaments, clothes, weapons, and (probably) tattoos; later, these devices extended to shoes, armor, pierced ears, smoothly shaven faces and legs, perfumes, wigs, and, eventually, plastic surgery. The changing forms of display and the transformations in material culture that underpin them are the result of many factors, one of which was the return of social hierarchy, albeit in a different form. Hierarchy, in turn, was a product of increasing population densities, an ecological factor linked to changing patterns of food production as well as climate change.

Sketched out above is just a glimpse of how we might write a history narrating the long phylogenetic dance among body, society, and ecosystem. Developed in a more robust form, this kind of narrative spiral could link the physical anthropology of the hominin body to postmodern studies of the body as a social construct. In a sense, what the history reveals is that the body has *always* been a social construct, regardless of whether culture's influence operated indirectly, via transformations in the genotype, or directly on the body itself. The idea of a deep history is that a similar approach, eschewing ontogeny, can apply in a wide array of human domains, such as patterns of migration and colonization, material culture, foodways, family, gender and sexuality, communication, political forms, economic exchange, music, religion, and so on.

In his famous formulation, the biologist Ernst Haeckel proposed that "ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny," namely, that the biological history of a species is mirrored in the successive forms taken by one of its members as the organism develops from fetus to adult. The theory itself was suggested by fish-like gill slits found in human and other tetrapod fetuses. Though recapitulation in this sense has long since been abandoned as a plausible biological theory, it has had a strangely persistent after-life in the discipline of history. History's continuing reliance on ontogenetic metaphors of birth, origins, and roots, which have become increasingly

²²A standard work here is Richard G. Klein, *The Human Career: Human Biological and Cultural Origins*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

²³Richard G. Wrangham, *Catching Fire: How Cooking Made Us Human* (New York: Basic Books, 2009).

²⁴In general, see Christopher Boehm, *Hierarchy in the Forest: The Evolution of Egalitarian Behavior* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999).

common in recent historical writing, suggests how the field as a whole operates under the belief that the only history worth telling is the biography of the most recent organism within the lineage, such as the nation or the modern world system. A deep history is an antidote to this strangely compressed and shallow understanding of human historical time, a view of history that seeks to make history historical again.

Chapter 3

From Transatlantic Histories of “Intoxication” to a Hemispheric “War on Affect”: Paradoxes Unbound¹

Together with the eastern slopes of the Andes, the Amazonas and Orinoco regions offer the greatest richness of psychoactive plants in the world. They have been enlightening and tormenting conquerors, colonizers, chroniclers, merchants, the Catholic Church, transatlantic trading companies, chemists, biologists, artists, and writers for more than five hundred years—long before the twentieth century (culminating in the so-called “war on drugs”) introduced its international system for distinguishing illicit narcotics from licit ones.

Psychoactive substances provide a revealing postcolonial lens for looking into humans’ ecological and social relationships with plants and for reexamining the colonization of the New World. The prominence of these substances in history—substances eventually turned into transatlantic commodities and catalysts for new ways of life in the centers of “progress”—indicates the shifting conflict scenarios that bind modernity to a colonial past and a global present. Meanwhile, the Western hemisphere has become the center of controversy over narcotics.

Why, then, has critical cultural reflection (or, more specifically, such disciplines as Latin American literary and cultural studies, area studies, postcolonial or subaltern studies, and political philosophy) paid only fitful attention to the matter? While cultural critics are accustomed to thinking of globalization in terms of power configurations related to capitalism, coloniality, the nation-state, Otherness, gender, immigration, and the mass media, most have neglected the formative role of modern struggles over drugs in these regards.

As far as omissions in Hispanic literary and cultural studies are concerned, are we perhaps dealing with a phenomenon of disavowal—as, for example, the inclusion of Fernando Ortiz’s famous *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar* into the academic canon might suggest? Ortiz’s 1940 book, labeled an anthropological and historical masterpiece by Malinowski,² became a cornerstone in the 1970s and 1980s for the reorientation of Latin Americanist literary scholars. At issue was the search for a new, non-metropolitan branch of cultural studies: transculturation studies (or the popularization of the anthropological term “transculturation,” as discussed in Ortiz’s book, in U.S. literary and cultural studies of Latin America), inspired by Angel Rama’s *Transculturación narrativa en América Latina* (1982).³ However, there was one thing missing in numerous post-traditional approaches to the work of the Cuban anthropologist and his narrative reinvention of tobacco and sugar as “cultural personae”: an awareness that Ortiz’s declaration of tobacco and sugar as the allegorical couple representing a locally and globally informed, transcultural identity of Cubans and other Caribbean peoples was actually a reflection on two of modernity’s powerful psychoactive substances. His was an interest

¹This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m34250/1.4/>>.

²Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995); Bronislaw Malinowski, “Introduction,” in Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, lvii-lxiv.

³Angel Rama, *Transculturación Narrativa en América Latina*, (México, D.F.: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1982).

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