

Interdisciplinary Studies and Conceptual Eclecticism

On Historical Anthropology, the History of Everyday Life and the Study of Life-Modes

Palle Ove Christiansen

Christiansen, Palle O. 1984: Interdisciplinary Studies and Conceptual Eclecticism. On Historical Anthropology, the History of Everyday Life and the Study of Life-Modes. *Ethnologia Europaea* XIV: 32–43.

Interest in using anthropological concepts and points of view in historical studies, or in practicing a genuine historical anthropology, has been manifested in recent years in numerous publications. Interdisciplinary experiments like these have long been necessary in social studies and the humanities and have proved fruitful in several areas. Many central, but often hidden, cultural and social aspects of the structures of daily life have in this way been brought to light and analysed historically. However, it is pointed out in the article that the uncritical borrowing of concepts based on different theoretical foundations, which so often seems to prevail in much historico-anthropological work, will very soon become a stumbling-block to any further development of this 'new' history. If the new studies of people's many-faceted everyday lives are to have any future as an academic field of research, we must first clarify the social conditions of existence which are fundamental to one way of life or another before we can hope to interpret the content of the symbols, attitudes and consciousness of the various categories. This will create an initial shift of interest away from comparative and cognitive studies of the empirical subcultural phenomena themselves and towards the study of structure in the various daily lives and their social and cultural expression.

Universitetslektor, mag.art. Palle O. Christiansen, University of Copenhagen, Department of European Ethnology, Brede Allé 69, DK-2800 Lyngby.

History + Anthropology = Historical Anthropology?

Given that anthropology has traditionally studied totalities and interrelationships in culture and society, and that history has been concerned with 'the past' in the process of change and in particular states, one would expect what is at the moment termed historical anthropology to focus on change and permanence in an integrated study of systems of society and culture. At first sight this sounds attractive and apt. Yet students of what we call historical anthropology are a very heterogeneous band who really do not *need* to have much to say to one another. Many of the works in this genre that have been written by historians

have suffered the fate (at the hands of anthropologists) of being criticized for borrowing and using social-science concepts that are not very well-defined; while the studies that have been written by anthropologists have often come under hard attack (from historians) for offhand treatment of the historical material. On the other hand, anthropologists have won distinction within their own circles by dealing with their problems diachronically, and historians have claimed the attention of their colleagues by analysing otherwise unnoticed aspects of social life.

Many will perhaps answer this by saying that it is only a matter of time and scholarly interaction until we see a theoretically defensible integration of the two disciplines. Yet it is

doubtful whether the dilemma is due to each discipline's lack of familiarity with the related subject, or whether the obstacles to understanding are constituted by factors at present inherent in the two subjects and their theoretical and methodological traditions. In an article entitled 'History + Anthropology = Historical Anthropology?' I have attempted to focus on the problematical aspects of trying to create a new discipline or field of study by adding together two already-existing, but not particularly well-defined subjects (Christiansen 1983)¹.

Some have even claimed that what we are faced with at present is nothing less than the advent of a new paradigm. It appears to me that if historical anthropology in the proper sense is to have any future, it must become capable of defining an object of study that is other than, or at least better articulated than what the disciplines of history and anthropology normally take as their objects. This is a tall order, and may seem unfair to demand in the present climate of new departures. Yet if in future we are not to jump from one intellectual upheaval to the next on successive waves of scholarly fashion, it is essential that we begin a more fundamental discussion of what, if anything, constitutes or should constitute the new departure.

If we consider the studies that have been published in recent years it is clear that, besides the interest in a more global space inspired by the Marxist-initiated centre/periphery issue, attention is being turned to a new type of intensive investigation of particularized smaller localities or neglected aspects of social life. While many anthropologists have turned their backs on their former present-oriented community studies and come to grips with 'larger systems' and studies of long stretches of time, a considerable number of historians have begun to take an interest in the classic synchronic micro-studies of anthropologists. Notice has been taken of the so-called 'unofficial' groups such as bandits or women, of exotic and at first sight hard-to-understand social forms such as witchcraft and popular revolts, and many aspects of everyday life such as childhood and symbolic rituals. Themes like

these have not often been the objects of academic research in the past. Just as centre/periphery studies almost inevitably must turn their practitioners into historians, insofar as they are interested in the emergence, types and consequences of relations between satellites and metropolises, it makes sense that historians have attempted to build on the mass of ethnographical studies of primitive societies whose aim has been precisely to encapsulate and integrate the various aspects of everyday life that now interest historians. It is in large part thanks to the inspiration from anthropology that we can at present observe the emergence of the 'new' historical studies of diet, sexuality, the body, death, poorhouse inmates, kinship, informal coercion, total institutions, consciousness and the various forms of counterculture.

There seems to have arisen a certain consensus that aspects like those mentioned above have been almost totally lacking in our historical scholarship. Even in what we call social history they have rarely been touched upon. However, it is now considered legitimate to study them, if only because by so doing one is helping to 'fill gaps'. Yet it is apparently an extra incentive even in specialist circles at the moment that one can become the object of flattering attention by writing about the exotic, the remarkable and elements of bourgeois culture otherwise hedged around with tabus. The greatest problem for researchers now seems to be how they can, employing ordinary, meagre, historical sources (often of official provenance), extract facts about non-official groups, daily pursuits, popular traditions, etc. One must learn to read the sources in a new way, or perhaps even find new types of sources. The quest for the so-called 'good archives' might almost be said to entail the claim that fresh archives are a precondition of a new type of historiography².

As I see the situation, however, the overruling problem is situated elsewhere, in the very issue of why and in what context we study, say, vagabonds and the household or death and mentality. The themes are attractive from a literary point of view; but it seems an almost naive stance to claim that we

should investigate them just to render history more 'complete'. Such a view is grounded in an empiricism which is in principle never satisfied until everything has been researched historically and spatially. Everyone knows that this is an illusory and vain objective. So-called 'total everyday life' does not involve a description of everything between heaven and earth (cf. Lüdtke 1982: 42). It must rather be regarded as involving an analysis of essential economic, political and ideological relations in the structures of daily life, as certain French historians have expressed it. And what is essential is not determined by the empirical data *per se*, but by the theoretical conceptions inherent in the researcher's *Problemstellung*. The totality and its interrelations do not emerge automatically when one adds the individual concrete parts together. The totality is something more than the sum of its parts, or perhaps more correctly something *else*. It is a system or principle that the researcher constructs, and which he can later exemplify using the empirical material. If it is claimed that the study of the poor or of death are 'essential' for our understanding of society, or 'revealing' of a particular period-specific view of culture, we must also account for *why* this is so. If one does not do this explicitly, one's propositions become in effect nothing but postulates, and anyone will be able to claim with as much justification that there are other aspects, central for them, that are 'essential' or 'revealing'. It is one man's argument against another's, and what makes one more plausible than the other is not predicated on the nature of either's material, but purely on the logical consistency of the author's conceptual mode of arguing.

Not until we shift the main interest from the more or less exotic empirical phenomena to the principles underlying the social and cultural totality which conditions their realization will we begin to move towards a genuine new departure from much of the older humanistic and social research. The study of the individual 'parts' of society, for example the various sub-cultures, actually prevents the researcher from understanding the totality which we refer to with the very concept of 'society'. Here there seems to have been no change since the days of traditional cultural history.

Most of the historico-anthropological studies appear, however, to be rooted in an anthropological structural-functionalism from which anthropology itself has been struggling to free itself for over a generation. True, historians – and others – need to establish coherence in chaotic material; but at the same time as they take over concepts of function, need and schematic social categories from the old anthropological studies, they also incorporate the functionalist's organic view of social phenomena, which is in fact a precondition of that disciplinary tradition's division of society into individuals, relations and empirical aspects that are seen as parts of the totality. This school has been much criticized for its static conceptions of society and culture, and its concepts will probably soon turn out to be incompatible with much of the 'new' historical interest in conflict-conscious societal analysis that is also capable of explaining change, not only in the many social and cultural forms, but also in the structure itself.

It is laudable, and indispensable for scientific progress, that we burst out of old disciplinary straitjackets that have often been developed in circumstances determined by powerful ideological and politico-historical factors; but even if at first it seems that borrowing from a cognate discipline can provide an enormous boost to one's own, it often happens that one borrows some of the other disciplines' fundamental problems, which in the next phase can constitute obstacles to the whole new departure one thought was within reach. Admittedly the two disciplines can learn from each other; but as far as I can see we must become more sceptical about what we want to learn and why we want to learn it. I cannot therefore quite share in the enthusiasm that exists at present for the 'new' history and integrated historico-anthropological fields of research, even though I have myself – as far as certain areas are concerned – advocated a fusion of approaches from the two disciplines (cf. Christiansen 1978a & b).

In our own subject, European ethnology, we have been witness in recent years to both great interest in the new interdisciplinary cooperation and to a rather critical attitude to the historico-anthropological studies. One group of

critics claims that for ethnologists, who inherit a long tradition of historical studies of culture, there is nothing new in historical anthropology. Ethnology is in itself historical and anthropological. This was true in its culture-historically oriented formative years, and is still true in today's interdisciplinary circles. In practice this criticism is difficult to take quite seriously. Even if ethnology, given its name, ought to be the logical study of human life, we must admit that our discipline has been characterized to a great extent both by unsystematic and atomistic studies. We have followed a pursuit which has sought to turn to account the advances made at various times in linguistics, cultural geography, history and anthropology, without to any appreciable extent developing an independent or (in conjunction with others) coherent conceptual apparatus. Since the days of the historico-geographical school the subject can hardly be said to have been a focus for any major scholarly consensus. Looking at Scandinavian ethnology alone, work is being done on such a variety of themes and in so many different ways that one may legitimately wonder what it is that binds ethnology together. Towards what goal are we actually working? At first it was functionalism that split the discipline, and later various post-functionalistic tendencies questioned whether a science of culture could be practiced at all within the old framework in terms of which ethnology – in the textbook material – is still defined.

Since most of ethnology has neither shown greater concern for what constitutes interrelationships and systems, nor formed any idea of what historical studies, understood as the study of structures and transformations, entail, it is doubtful whether one can take the liberty of criticizing those (i.e. historical anthropologists) among whom we see work being done here and now on studies which at least touch on these problems. Ethnology's traditional historical studies of cultural elements or social institutions are something quite different from what current historical anthropology is working with, although even in this area studies can be found that are strongly reminiscent of classic ethnological results.

Other critics, with whom I am more in sympathy, have questioned whether it is possible to create a new kind of historical, sociocultural science by borrowing often diverse (especially functionalist and structuralist) concepts and elements which at first sight seem to lend coherence to concrete historical work. They have also asked just what history is and how it is practiced when it is structures and their transformations that hold our interest. History cannot simply be defined, in the name of inclusiveness, as the analysis of the past. History must have an object if it is not to end up as a chronological *omnium gatherum* whose practitioners are primarily bound together by the temporal dimension and common disciplinary working techniques. If it is the logic and transformation of societies and cultures that concern us, it will become hard to pinpoint an object that is specifically 'historical', in which case we shall be unable to make a clear scientific distinction between the subject of history and the (traditionally) more present-day oriented social and cultural sciences.

In both the historical and the present-oriented social-science disciplines we are experiencing an ever-greater fragmentation not only in terms of the topics studied, but also of the types of conceptual apparatus employed. Many papers are riddled with concepts which in reality make *disjecta membra* of the studies, as the concepts cannot be logically dovetailed. This means that the framework of the main argument falls apart. For one sub-problem a structural interpretation is perhaps used; for another a need-oriented functionalist explanation; and for a third perhaps a frame of reference taken from social psychology. The author may even perhaps make a virtue of presenting himself as theoretically undogmatical (*sic!*). There is, however, nothing specifically ethnological about such reservations: this dilemma is just as serious in the cognate disciplines as in our subject. It is what Cohn has termed epistemological anarchy (Cohn 1980: 216).

Taking stock: some comments

I am well aware that this objection will be somewhat unpopular, inasmuch as more and

more voices are being raised in favour of the great opportunities accruing from a combination of the two subjects. Yet it seems to be the same arguments that are repeated again and again, explicitly or implicitly, in current writing on the issue. Some of the latest reflections from the international arena are comments from an Italian conference in 1980 on 'Anthropology and History in the 1980s' published in the *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* (XII, 2 (1981)). Despite positive commitment from all the widely recognized contributors, clear differences emerge between the historians Natalie Z. Davis and Carlo Ginzburg on the one side and the anthropologists Bernard S. Cohn and John W. Adams on the other. Even though these researchers do not represent all the points of view exhaustively, their arguments and their work reflect general characteristics of the problem. Davis makes it very clear what she thinks she can learn, as a historian, from anthropology. The advantages are: 1) close observation of living processes of social interaction; 2) ways of translating symbolic behaviour; 3) view of how the parts of a societal system fit together; and 4) knowledge of material from cultures far from her own (Davis 1981: 267). Giving many examples, she mentions how phenomena in the past which historians have hitherto characterized as irrational can be explained if the researcher shows sympathetic insight into how societies of the past have interwoven what we in ordinary present-day language call the social, legal and cultural dimensions, and how anthropological concepts in particular can be used in such investigations. Her own research on popular conflict, violence and ideologies with non-official roots demonstrates fully how an undogmatical, polycultural basic attitude can open up avenues leading to discoveries of new meaningful configurations in old archive material, and how this makes itself felt in new formulations of factual problems and thereby in a new and different type of historiography.

Ginzburg is concerned with several of the same ideas, although they are less concisely formulated (Ginzburg 1981). He also mentions that the new tendency towards the revival of narrative history is directly influenced by the

anthropologists' concentrated case studies and analyses. The fragmentation of history that is the result of these 'thick descriptions' is, he thinks, the price that must be paid for increased understanding of (and feeling for?) the relations between phenomena, studies of which can even take the form of directly individual-oriented descriptions of ideational universes³. In another context Ginzburg has attempted to isolate a paradigm peculiar to the humanist and social sciences, directed towards the qualitative and the unique (Ginzburg 1980).

Davis and Ginzburg are to my mind historians whose works function pre-eminently as disciplinary appetizers, but who, perhaps involuntarily, through their borrowing from anthropology and psychology, have been instrumental in the wholesale incorporation of exceedingly problematical functionalist concepts. If 'the revival of narrative' or the study of the cosmologies of specific individuals are to be understood as anything more than an attempt at some form of engaged, coherent empirical account of states of affairs, processes or experiential relationships etc., then it surely begins to resemble a regression to the historiography of the last century. The author provides us with a sympathetic account of a particular environment or ambience, but allows the analysis itself to vanish into thin air. Precision and understanding are subordinated to the quality of the experience.

The anthropologists Cohn and Adams are considerably more reserved in their enthusiasm, even if they think that the phenomenon known as historical anthropology has come to stay, and consequently both tend to revert to this field of study in their contributions. Cohn very understandably seeks help in the traditions of his own discipline and argues, invoking the better contributions to so-called ethnohistory⁴, that the issues of anthropology necessitate a historical dimension. He also points out, in his usual good-humouredly polemical fashion, not only the ethnocentrism of the classical historical tradition, but also the somewhat naive use of historical material by many anthropologists, and their employment of decontextualized fragments of historical

knowledge as 'proof' or illustration of their own preconceived present-day theses and points of view (Cohn 1981: 234f, 241). At several points he warns historians, citing the historian E. P. Thompson, against making use of old and perhaps problematical concepts from anthropology.

But on this point Adams is considerably more condemnatory. He directly accuses historians of having misused many anthropological concepts that they have wrenched from their contexts, and expresses some disappointment at always seeing C. Geertz, V. Turner and M. Douglas trundled out by historians, whereas many of the anthropologists with most salience in current controversies apparently hold little or no interest (Adams 1981: 253). This means that the two disciplines in fact, in the present state of the theories, have very little to discuss, even if they perhaps draw their inspiration from one and the same scholarly tradition. Adams goes so far as to say that if historians borrow from anthropology, *it should be with the intention of developing the concepts borrowed* and of making, in return, a contribution to the development of the discipline (Adams 1981: 265).

On this point Davis takes an almost completely opposite view, which deserves to be quoted at full length, as it probably covers the points of view of many others. She writes:

"There are, of course, hazards in the historian's drawing upon anthropology. One is sometimes raised by anthropologists themselves: historians are eclectic in their choice of mentors; they mix together indifferently ideas from professional opponents, from demographic and economic determinists and symbolic analysts, from those stressing meaning and language and those stressing function and power, from those who believe in evolutionary stages in culture and from those who do not. This does not seem to be a major problem. Historians will surely want to be aware of the different schools of anthropological interpretation (and of anthropological eclecticism) and integrate them effectively into their own vision of social organization. Surely we must read ethnographical material with enough care to understand the

argument and the evidence for it. But need we import all the special reservations that anthropologists have about each other's work or all their infighting, any more than they need to import ours?" (Davis 1981: 273).

In a well-known interview Davis has also formulated the same theme clearly as follows:

"As for the theories I bring, say, about how the parts of a society fit together or about the sources of change, some of them are inevitably in very great tension with the perceptions of the people of the time. But when I can, I use language that has a resonance for both periods. For example, in my 'Body Social' paper, I introduced some ideas from network theory, but as soon as I could I began talking about Catholic arteries and umbilical cords and Protestant nerves and muscles. Also I guess I am eclectic in the theories I accept. I use the ones that give me the best leverage in a given situation. This means I don't have to worry about stuffing my people into a single scheme." (Davis 1980: 132f).

In the light of the internal debates in the disciplines the two scholars' views must inevitably provide food for thought. Personally I find it hard to follow Davis when she claims that there is no great problem in integrating the views and conceptual apparatuses of different schools of thought, and that historians (and others too, for that matter) are aware of what they are doing in such situations. In practice we see almost the exact opposite. All sorts of things are often jumbled together (this is also true of the borrowing in recent ethnology) and this is one of the reasons why it is impossible to develop the conceptual apparatus Adams calls for. When Davis speaks of integrating the viewpoints of various anthropological schools into the individual historian's own *vision* of a given social organization, it is a clear example of how research in this case is not aimed at the development of the science, but that one vision is as good as another. It is the taste of the individual researcher that decides this, not the inner logic of the concepts. One culls ideas from conceptual bouquets and creates one's *own* vi-

sion. The concepts are used in this type of research to juxtapose elements from the empirical material in a new way, and to admit formerly intractable material so that it can be subsumed within the empirical field of the discipline. This is what has happened with the study of the so-called unofficial groups, in research on *mentalités*, in narrative history, etc. Certainly, we have been presented in this way with many so-called 'stimulating' and 'imaginative' studies, and many seem to be satisfied with that. But in reality we must surely ask ourselves if we really think that scholarship in general or our respective disciplines are moving forward by simply piling up new exotic material or by the serving up of old data by researchers in a new *piquant* dressing.

Academic pursuits like these can in fact be regarded as a form of misuse of conceptual tools, and really also help to sow confusion in the surrounding world. Everything has been reversed, as it now seems to be the empirical material that controls the influx of (more or less arbitrary) concepts, not the theory in which the concepts are grounded that orders the empirical material so that we can specify new problem areas, which in their turn require us to *develop* new concepts. It is on the latter aspect that Adams invites historians and others to join in concentrating attention. We cannot begrudge Adams that his own conceptual apparatus is closest to *his* thoughts; and it is for that matter irrelevant as far as the more fundamental argument is concerned.

If historical anthropology is to be anything more than a passing phenomenon it cannot live on borrowings that often lack consistency, or in a situation where concepts may be imported from several (incompatible) theoretical schools. It must create its own object of research and develop a more or less independent conceptual apparatus to deal with it. Otherwise it will become a new fictive construct built up on old ideological ones such as history, anthropology, ethnology and others. We call them disciplines, but over the years we have experienced greater and greater difficulty in explaining the differences between them. To my mind there are no differences, considering them as sciences, but there are great diffe-

rences in the historical traditions of the disciplines. And it is these differences that help to muddy the picture and enable us to identify ideologically with one or the other sub-discipline.

If a practitioner of one subject borrows concepts which may in the source discipline be the products of many years of discussion, with all the reservations, limitations on fields of application and codices of use that often grow out of this type of concept-developing work, the 'borrower' must take these reflections seriously. If one attempts to cut corners, without understanding the presuppositions and contexts of the imported material, then one is surely practicing a form of disciplinary ethnocentrism. And how can one join in the developing of something whose preconditions one at bottom does not understand? Even though I have great admiration for Davis' intentions, some of her views will have incalculable consequences for the scientific rigour of research – if one is really to believe what she writes!

Everyday life and the study of life-modes

Cohn concludes his abovementioned article by drawing attention to the fact that it is not difficult to find areas of research of common interest to historians and anthropologists⁵, whereas it is considerably harder to delimit an epistemological space for a true historical anthropology. Historians wish to use anthropology to round out *their* history, and anthropologists to use history to see *their* 'timeless' (primitive) cultures in terms of change. Here he tries to find a common platform by advocating a (structural?) delineation of cultures and their location in historical time through the study of events which affect and transform structures and the explanation of the consequences of these transformations (Cohn 1981: 251f). This is quite a mouthful⁶. In fact it is also a rather vague suggestion, since he apparently considers both events and structures as empirical phenomena, where the former influence (and change) the latter. This is by and large the same hermeneutic-functional con-

struction some of the *Annales* school argued for thirty years ago.

Adams predicts that coming years will see a type of research where the disciplines of history and anthropology will themselves become the objects of critical investigation. Intentions like these have already begun to manifest themselves in several countries, and there can hardly be any doubt that a clarification of the peculiarities of development within one's own discipline, its ideological ballast, and its broadly political shortcomings can be both necessary and liberating for future work. Thereafter Adams visualizes an emerging ethnology that will subject the ordinary and what he calls folklife to an analysis aimed at establishing basic principles. This ethnology should not, like the old disciplines, seek out the exotic, the primitive, the extraordinary or the untypical events. It should describe the common sense of culture and show how and when it was institutionalized. Adams sees this as an extension of Foucault's more particularized studies. As far as I understand his further predictions, anthropologists will be especially interested in a kind of basic history of structures (history without people) and processual history' – however that is to be understood precisely. Social historians are summarily given the choice between becoming anthropologists (in time) or being nothing (Adams 1981: 261, 265).

When Adams speaks of ordinary folklife as a unifying empirical field of research, I imagine that he thus seeks to unite several existing disciplines in the study of one of the most central social and cultural factors, and one which scholars in our Western society have in fact rarely attempted to operationalize coherently either in the social sciences or in the humanities. It is this field of study, integrated at all levels of society, that younger researchers in Germany, England and Denmark, for example, have begun to take an interest in under the general heading of everyday life in the history of society.

This heading refers to the fact that 'the everyday' does not just consist of random happenings, of the general actions of profit-maximizing individuals or of the sum of the day's events. The central focus is the structured and

thereby integrated way of life pursued by certain categories of people, often from birth to death and perhaps through generations. And this way of life, whether in the present or the past, can not be viewed from particular angles such as those which have formed genres like economic, social and cultural history or cultural sociology. This integrated life is a structured totality – not as a self-sufficient morphological entity, but in the society that conditions it and which it also helps to condition. This is what is meant by the term 'history of society'. One might just as well, if one so wished, call it social ethnology.

Yet when one speaks of such a loosely defined entity as 'everyday life' one would do well to recall N. Davis' warnings against ethnocentrism. For we are not confronted, as many modern politicians and social workers would have us believe, with 'the everyday life of the population' or the like. There are many ways of living and many contemporaneous ideologies, and neither today nor during the Renaissance can these be reduced to the new (but in reality old) conception of a popular versus an élite culture. These studies of the *Zeitgeist* or *mentalité* of various periods have not demonstrated much explanatory power when it comes to accounting for clashes of interest and antagonisms within society (especially within the so-called élite culture). First we have to specify clearly what we mean by 'people' and account for the position of the various groups as regards the division of labour, for their conditions of existence and the goals of their endeavours, before we can understand the cultural models by means of which they understand themselves and their society. By so doing we shall see how the hegemonic term 'popular culture' falls to pieces in our hands. It is not what everyone does that is interesting if we seek to understand the totality of a society and its complexity. What we must focus on are those things which distinguish sharply (ideologically and culturally) between different social categories – the specific in the multifarious ways of living. But if we do not wish, as has so often been the case, to turn the statistically less representative modes of everyday life into subcultures (i.e. the untypical) we are

obliged to show how the individual modes are synchronically dependent on other modes; i.e. to explain the background of their existence, both historically and in their own time, and how they can be conditioned by one another. It is studies like these that Copenhagen ethnologists, albeit employing a variety of theoretical approaches, have begun to work with in recent years in the new *life-mode* analyses (Christiansen 1982; Groth & Møllgaard 1982; Møllgaard 1984; Højrup 1983a & b). What is characteristic of these studies, among other things, is that they deal with several contemporaneous life-modes by showing that we can only analyse them as structural forms, not as need-psychological individual forms; and by challenging the evolutionistic view, represented by older research and current social policy, that some of these life-modes are more archaic or non-contemporary than others⁷.

All researchers are familiar with the experience of finding, in archive material or in the field, ways of living that are divergent and perhaps even remarkable at first glance. Some choose perhaps to turn a blind eye to them as so-called 'atypical' modes of life; others perhaps seek them out deliberately. However this may be, there seems to exist an ever-greater schism between the intent to produce conflict-conscious societal descriptions and the current community-study oriented documentation of various subcultures which are analysed 'anthropologically'. How can a link be established between them? In this case it is as far as I can see fruitless to believe that the link lies buried in collections of material that we have as yet to discover. Links are not things that simply 'exist', but things that we construct on the basis of our conceptual approach. After so doing we can then exemplify the relations using our factual material.

If ethnologists in recent years have moved beyond their traditional fields of work, it is not because they have abandoned their former interests, but because the theoretical issue of coherence has forced them to do so. In his monumental work *Det glemte folk (The Forgotten People)* for example, T. Højrup begins his detailed account of three life-modes with an analysis of why and how there *can* be different but

equally logical ways of living in the same society (Højrup 1983). Internal coherence is thus established conceptually and explicitly interpreted.

Such an interpretation can afford us in the first instance an overview of the social scope for the existence of fundamentally different (major) life-modes. It can then tell us which life-modes (classes, categories) the social structure in question is predicated on in order to exist in the form in which we find it. Only in this way can terms like aristocracy, workers, peasants, travellers, or aspects such as the family, work, wages or tabus be given precise meaning, inasmuch as they do not represent universals, but categories and aspects that exist in quite definite structural situations and which can have different culture-specific content for different life-modes.

Yet from this one cannot deduce how each of the various life-modes is organized internally. We are then obliged to analyse how the individual life-modes themselves structure certain activities and ideological and cultural conceptions in quite specific ways. Only then do those features which seem strange to people who live in other ways become comprehensible. And it is only against such a background that we can begin to understand those conflicts, political or ideological in nature, of which every society – past or present – provides such clear examples. These conflicts manifest themselves in many ways: as power struggles, revolts, demonstrations; in contempt, indulgence, passive resistance, administrative dominance, propaganda, 'public information campaigns'; through linguistic codes, the semiotics of dress, etc. But if we operate with simplistic dichotomies like 'people' and 'élite' or with monocultural concepts like 'living conditions' many of these activities and signs will simply be incomprehensible.

This type of study of the many varieties of daily life is not a revolt against the so-called 'sterile theoretical studies' of the 1970s, which bring into profile the interest within some of our sister disciplines in the everyday life of ordinary people. In a difficult situation where existing theories are not initially able to capture the multiplicity of cultural forms, the answer is

not to abandon the theoretical task, but to develop the theory. Otherwise the result is some form of chaos, or mere empiricism or phenomenology. The analysis of society and the study of culture are not two distinct academic fields. They are one and the same thing, as long as one remembers that society is in culture and culture exists within society. They are, so to speak, two angles from which we can analyse the same factors. Life-mode analyses are characterized precisely by the fact that the researchers proceed from quite definite assumptions (which are rooted in definite theoretical presuppositions) about the nature of the social interrelations that form the matrices for our life-modes. Here, then, it is the life-modes themselves which 'come out different', so to speak, from the same analysis; not, as with Davis, the theories that vary according to how 'fruitful' they are when applied to varying empirical forms. If anyone is in any doubt about the hazards of ill-considered and theoretically eclectic interpretations of everyday life, the history of ethnology itself probably supplies the most voluminous corpus of examples. Here it can be clearly seen what happens when the empirical material is given primacy over theory instead of the opposite.

There is no reason to feel ashamed that ethnology has been through almost every kind of problem related to the borrowing of concepts and parts of theories which seemed promising at first, only to prove in the end fateful rather than fruitful. Now, when researchers from many disciplines are interested in closely related fields of study, it should be unnecessary for others to have to experience the same problems. If I speak of these things as problems we have in common, it is still because our respective disciplines are not different sciences. Yet this does not necessarily mean that faculties or departments should be merged or that everyone should be doing the same things. There is every reason to preserve good institutional disciplinary settings, even though their present form may seem arbitrary in some respects. But now that it looks as if our studies will oblige us to cross traditional disciplinary boundaries, we shall be faced with the challenge of having to explain ourselves to a much

greater extent in this inter-institutional context, in which case we cannot expect to understand one another on the basis of a purely factual presentation of the material, where the implicit theoretical content is only detectable by the closed circle of our disciplinary colleagues, or through the use of concepts whose content is defined very differently by each of us. If we really are serious about wanting to establish communication with people from other disciplines, we must be much more ready to account for – and perhaps to rethink – the conceptual grounding that structures our material. Only against this background can terms like mentality, daily life and popular culture have any real content.

Notes

1. The first third of the present paper is a short summary of the article in question, which only exists in Danish. Otherwise this article is a revised version of a lecture given at the 23rd Scandinavian Congress of Folklorists and Ethnologists in 1983 with the theme 'New roads, new horizons, new fields of work'. For an overview of the historico-anthropological field of study see Gaunt 1982.
2. There are many researchers who hope their fortunes are made if they too, like Carlo Ginzburg, can find their own Menocchio, or like Le Roy Ladurie can produce an archive like the one on which *Montaillou* is based. As I see it, there are no scientific grounds for such expectations. To take Ladurie's impressive works as an example, it is less *Montaillou* than *The Peasants of Languedoc* (written at the beginning of the 1960s) that has helped to further the course of research. The Languedoc study was a pioneering work in its approach, which attempted to integrate a regional history of ecology, demography, social groups and cultural forms while also wanting to account for (cyclical) change over a period of great transformations. The problem was to study function and change at the same time. Compared with this, *Montaillou* is a rather loosely synchronic, functionalist ethnographic study (partly inspired by the anthropology of the 50s) of a small medieval town in the South of France, which is primarily determined by a lively body of archive material. One must obviously admit that the material in each section is presented in a stimulating manner, but the author's aim was not to contribute to any current discussion or develop any new coherent method of analysis that his colleagues could use in other studies. The reader is

only given the opportunity to concentrate on the unique material and the style. Considered as an academic treatise, I have difficulty in seeing how the study can take us any further. Ladurie himself maintains that he considers the book as a history of ordinary people, but that is something quite different from a history of society and culture.

3. It should be noted that these studies of *mentalité* – i.e. what J. Le Goff partly following Durkheim calls the impersonal in the conceptual world of the individual – are arousing great interest at the moment, especially among many historians of ideas, literary scholars and psychologists. It is characteristic that those researchers who are not professional historians or anthropologists often seem to wish to deal with *mentalité* 'in its own right' – as a form of unwritten history of ideas. As an explanatory tool they often use a quite problematical psychoanalytical framework for their studies, and some even attempt to establish a disciplinary continuity going back to L. Febvre's early interest in the psychological perspective on historical personalities' cognitive social limits of the possible. If the first and second generations of *Annales* historians were concerned with *mentalité*, it was not just because they found this topic, among others, interesting, but because the study of people's ideological conceptual worlds was *necessary* to understand the everyday economic and social patterns in which French historians were among the first to take an interest. They wanted to conceive society as a totality which had to be described from the inside in order to gain understanding of the integrating nature of the environment. Originally *mentalité* was identical with what anthropologists call culture. Later the *Annales* tradition was split into several factions and the content of the word *mentalité* became extremely difficult to deal with. P. Ariès says in a very informative and revealing article that the *new* studies of *mentalité*, concerned with older, collective 'popular' ideational worlds and institutions, have become as popular as they have because of the unconscious frustrations of historians over their failure to understand the genesis of modern society (Ariès 1978). If this is true, *mentalité* studies serve a purpose that is more social-therapeutic than scientific.
4. The concept of ethnohistory was first used by American anthropologists in the 1940s. It refers in particular to a combination of present-day ethnographical studies of non-European societies with historical investigations of colonial government archives, local administration material, oral tradition, written records and where necessary archaeological findings (Cohn 1968: 440f; 1981: 234). For an example of a more recent initiative see Sider 1980.
5. With further reference to Cohn 1980, we can mention a number of aspects such as the sym-

bolism of public places, the idioms of power, honour, authority, exchange systems, the construction of time and space, rituals, social classification systems, and representations in general.

6. I do not know whether Cohn is trying here to accommodate offshoots of the centre/periphery controversy, or whether the argument should be seen as more isolated. To my mind the three following tendencies are the most striking:

- i) Very generally, it can be said that the interest of the anthropological disciplines in a new historical anthropology is grounded in a new 'awareness' that all present-day (or contemporaneous) local conditions cannot be explained on the basis of other present-day (or contemporaneous) circumstances. This is why the wish has arisen to study these factors again in time or through time, yet in a much more total (societally integrated) way than before. The boundaries of the static community-oriented approach are broken down and a specific local culture is analysed, for example in relation to the historical (or global) domination – and the response to it – which the locality in question has been subjected to by a powerful colonial state. Such studies *can* lead to a radical rethinking of evolutionary processes in primitive societies, the genesis of civilization and the regional structures of global cultural systems. But often we are presented more with external history's effect on a given society than with the society's own (integrated) history.

Here many anthropologists often refer to the Schneider family's analysis of *mafia* and cultural codes in Sicily (Schneider and Schneider 1976). Throughout an exposition covering over 500 years they try to show the development of local social and cultural forms and their adaptation to Sicily's marginal position in the perspective of a world system, as a complete parallel to Wallerstein's research. Here history is introduced by means of a theoretical perspective, but in a very simple and often rather inflexible form. The specification of the theory according to Sicilian conditions is not very explicit, so the use of rather dubious secondary historical accounts of local conditions is not particularly convincing. An alternative use of this type of empirical material would require an extraordinarily specific theoretical analysis for the reader to be convinced of the consistency of the arguments. The authors' intention with the study is clear and fully acceptable, but both theoretically and empirically the reasoning and demonstrations are not very exemplary for a new history or anthropology.

- ii) Concurrently with intentions like these we also note an interest in an integrated historical dimension in locally or regionally based investigations in literate societies. It is once again the appreciation of present-day problem-complexes that has obliged anthropologists to resort to 'historical explanations' and thus also to diachronic studies

of the history of these localities themselves. The central methodical focus here is the awareness that, if one really has to explain a phenomenon diachronically, the explanatory vocabulary (i.e. the theory and its conceptual apparatus) must be the same in the historical account as in the present-day study. Practice proves, however, that it is sociologically very difficult to analyse, for example, a locality diachronically using the same concepts as anthropology employs in its present-day fieldwork. And it is absolutely necessary, if the study is to be methodically coherent. Otherwise the result will simply be a book that falls into separate sections: a local-historical and a synchronic ethnographical one. For a fruitful attempt at a historical explanation of a present-day lifestyle and collective consciousness (*civiltà*) in an Italian town see Silverman 1975. Silverman has also excellently demonstrated elsewhere the fundamental role of history for the understanding of present-day social phenomena. However it is difficult to follow her when she claims that the anthropologist should neither cite obsolete historical accounts nor attempt to be a historian in his/her own right. If one is unwilling to use others' (poor) explanations and wishes to work for oneself with historical material in a professionally competent way, one must in my opinion simply learn the trade (Silverman 1979: 423).

iii) Finally there are quite a few researchers who simply think that anthropological history is identical with the history of *mentalités*. Burguière defines it as 'the logic of everyday life and of the history of collective representations' (Burguière 1982: 434). As far as I can see, the main emphasis is laid on the representational systems, not on the logic of the interpretational models applied to this everyday life.

7. With the partial exception of Møllgaard 1984, none of the hitherto published studies are based on primary historical material, but the approach itself is eminently suitable for applying to historical circumstances. J. Møllgaard is thus working at the moment with conditions from the 17th century onwards; P. Christiansen with the 18th century until the present day; and K. Schousboe with the transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance.

References

- Adams, J. W. 1981: Anthropology and History in the 1980's: Consensus, Community and Exotism, in *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* (J.I.H.) XII, 2.
- Ariès, P. 1978: L'histoire des mentalités, in J. le Goff (ed.), *La Nouvelle Histoire*, Paris.
- Burguière, A. 1982: The Fate of History and *Mentalités* in the Annales, in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, XXIV, 3.
- Christiansen, P.O. 1978a.: Forms of Peasant Dependency in a Danish Estate 1775–1975, in *Peasant Studies*. VII, 1.
- Christiansen, P.O. 1978b: Peasant Adaptation to Bourgeois Culture?, in *Ethnologia Scandinavica*.
- Christiansen, P.O. 1982: *En livsform på tvangsauktion?* Gyldendal.
- Christiansen, P.O. 1983: Historie + antropology = historisk antropologi?, in *Fortid og Nutid*, XXX, 1.
- Cohn, B. S. 1968: Ethnohistory, in *IESS*.
- Cohn, B. S. 1980: History and Anthropology: The state of Play, in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, XXII, 2.
- Cohn, B. S. 1981: Anthropology and History in the 1980's: Toward a Rapprochement, in *J.I.H.*, XII, 2.
- Davis, N. Z. 1980: Politics, Progeny and French History: An Interview with Natalie Zemon Davis [by J. Coffin & R. Harding], in *Radical History Review*, 24.
- Davis, N. Z. 1981: Anthropology and History in the 1980's: The Possibilities of the Past, in *J.I.H.*, XII, 2.
- Gaunt, D. 1982: *Memoir on History and Anthropology*, HSFR (Sweden).
- Ginzburg, C. 1979. Clues. Roots of a Scientific Paradigm, in *Theory and Society*, VII.
- Ginzburg, C. 1981: Anthropology and History in the 1980'es: A Comment, in *J.I.H.*, XII, 2.
- Groth, N. B. & J. Møllgaard, 1982: *Byplanlægning, kulturlandskab og livsformer*, Miljøministeriet.
- Højrup, T. 1983a: *Det glemte folk. Livsformer og centraldirigering*, IEF & SBI.
- Højrup, T. 1983b: The Concept of Life-Mode, in *Ethnologia Scandinavica*.
- Lüdtke, A. 1982: The Historiography of Everyday Life: The Personal and the Political, in R. Samuel and G. S. Jones (eds). *Culture, Ideology and Politics. Essays for Eric Hobsbawm*, London.
- Møllgaard, J. 1984: *Byens sociale geografi. Studier af Skive*, SBI 1984.
- Schneider, J. & P. Schneider 1976: *Culture and Political Economy in Western Sicily*, Academic Press.
- Sider, G. M. 1980: The Ties that Bind: Culture and Agriculture, Property and Propriety in the Newfoundland Village Fishery, in *Social History*, V, 1.
- Silverman, S. 1975: *Three Bells of Civilization*, New York.
- Silverman, S. 1979: On the Uses of History in Anthropology: The *Palio* of Siena, in *American Ethnologist*, VI.