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# **HISTORY'S IMPASSE**

## **RADICAL HISTORIOGRAPHY, LEFTIST ELITES, AND THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF HISTORICISM IN SOUTHERN FRANCE**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The ‘historic turn’ marked a new era of convergence between anthropology and history. However, recent research proposes that this anthro-historical field is informed by a latent cultural ‘historicism’. When studying historical consciousness, and deploying history in analysis, theorists argue, we must clarify how historicism—the ideology and practices underpinning ‘Western’ historical understanding—informs anthropological theory, or risk ethnocentrism. Historicist ‘regimes of truth’ also demand anthropological study, given their pervasive influence in the social sciences and wider society. This article develops a comparative ‘anthropology of historicism’, drawing on historical anthropology, and ethnographic fieldwork. First, I analyse the ‘history practices’ of a network of leftist historians, the Forum-Histoire, based at l’Université de Paris VII, and their role in an influential protest movement against the state; secondly, I assess the work of a socialist public historian in his efforts to refashion historical consciousness in Mediterranean France. The article analyses the role of historicism in French ‘history practices’, and its conflict and synthesis with ‘nonhistoricist’ ways of knowing the past during an influential period (1975-2005) for relations between history and anthropology. In a genealogical vein, this facilitates analysis of anthropology’s relationship to historicism, and indicates how to better deploy historicist analysis within anthropological discourse.

[200 words]

## **PROBLEMATIZING HISTORY: LEFTIST ELITES AND HISTORICIST REGIMES**

In 1984, the founding of the journal *History and Anthropology* signalled a new moment in relations between two disciplines marked by a broad front of intellectual exchange.<sup>1</sup> This convergence lay in shared questions, borrowed methodologies, and mutual influence. But it also acknowledged the importance of ethnography and ‘microhistory’ (Ginzburg 1993) to analyzing historical processes; the new centrality of processual analysis; and for many, the importance of historical knowledge to the struggle of memory against forgetting under ‘late capitalism’. Europeans and North American elites were not the only people with History—as Wolf (1982) influentially argued. Other histories demanded to be told, and their investigation was central at a time when belonging at multiple levels was increasingly moulded in terms of well-wrought narratives about the past (Tonkin, McDonald, and Chapman 1989). For leftist anthropologists, critical historical consciousness was also a key step on the route to radical political change (Roseberry 1989). The vital insight that relations with the past and wider historical processes are culturally mediated (Sahlins 1985) was also central to international debates (Delacroix 2009).<sup>2</sup> Such convictions about history ran deep in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. They had roots in leftist paradigms and political movements, and reflected a broader shift in the Western academy (McDonald 1996). This ‘historic turn’ remains central to both disciplines to this day.

The contribution of this work to the social sciences is not in doubt. But in recent years, its key tenets have come under scrutiny. This is partly due to advances in understanding of lived history and the extent to which local historicities can differ from academic paradigms for knowing the past.<sup>3</sup> Theorists have also identified this ‘anthro-historical’ field (Bhimull et al. 2011) as informed by a latent cultural ‘historicism’. For the contemporary anthropologist and historian, it is a truism to state that ‘history’s cultures’ take multiple forms. Anthropologists

have pursued ethnographies of ‘other histories’ since the 1990s, and lately the ‘exotica’ of dreaming, spirit possession and prayer have firmly entered the ethnographic record as genres of historical consciousness (e.g. Lambek 2002). But to grasp such practices ethnographically, and make better anthropological use of ‘history’, theorists argue, we must unpick the ways in which ‘historicism’—the ideology and practices underpinning ‘Western’ historical understanding—informs theory (Hirsch and Stewart 2005:263-67; Palmié and Stewart 2016:209–10; Stewart 2012:1-9).<sup>4</sup>

Benjamin (1999) famously termed historicism the ‘strongest narcotic of the [19<sup>th</sup>] century’ (463). Such is its influence, however, that its cultural origins are often overlooked. Historicism’s emergence is tied to the ‘historical revolt’ of the 16<sup>th</sup> century against the Papacy and Holy Roman Emperors, which laid the foundations for secular critique of Christian doctrine and emergence of the historicist worldview (Fasolt 2004:16-22). The term (*historismus*) dates to 1797 and Schlegel’s *Fragments about Poetry and Literature* (Harloe and Morley 2012:81). For many, it is intrinsically linked to the 19<sup>th</sup> century historian Leopold von Ranke; for anthropologists, Boas’s historical particularism might be the key reference. Yet while early historicist paradigms are surpassed, recent conceptions are endorsed by historians and social scientists, and are *doxa* to many disciplines. What should a contemporary definition of historicism include? A first tenet is the concern to ‘situate any [event] ... in its historical context’ (Hamilton 1996:3) including (reflexively) the work of the historian and social scientist (cf. Strathern 1990:28; Hirsch and Stewart 2005:265; Mandelbaum 1971:42). Secondly, the past must be accessed via the rationalizing methodologies of historiography and reported via impersonal narrative to attain validity, even if it is acknowledged that the past cannot be accessed *wie es eigentlich gewesen* (‘as it really was’), to recall Ranke’s dictum (White 1973). Thirdly, historicism is grounded in a set of

ontological assumptions about relations between past, present and future. These are usually informed by a linear (chronological) temporal fabric, where ‘current happenings may be seen as outcomes of prior events and present events as belonging to the past as time flows on’ (Stewart 2012:2), even if this framework is nuanced or differential (Chakrabarty 2000:23; Braudel 1989). Methodical study of historical context thus lays the ground for the complicated matter of analysing and narrating causal connectivity. Finally, the historicist past is conceptualized as ‘finished’, a view enabled by linguistic tropes that place it spatially ‘behind’. In this way, the ‘past’ is framed as ontologically distinct from the present, and existing ‘elsewhere’.<sup>5</sup> If the first two tenets are openly acknowledged by historians and social scientists, the others are rarely commented on. In sum, contemporary historicism is ‘suspicious of the stories that the past tells about itself ... and equally suspicious of its own partisanship’ (Hamilton 1996:3), but such suspicions are selective in focus.

Historicism is ‘the paradigm governing academic historiography and [is] widely shared as a form of common sense in Western societies’ (Stewart 2012:1). Anthropologists and historians now acknowledge that other historicities exist with different ontologies of past, present and future that do not invoke the historicist paradigm (Gorman 2013). Yet historicism remains dominant within and beyond academia and is infrequently problematized or historicized.<sup>6</sup> In postmodernist and contemporary historical paradigms, it continues to play a central epistemological and methodological role (Budd 2009:343-378). In this sense, it can be productively viewed as a regime of historicity—in Foucault’s (1977) sense of a dominant set of cultural practices productive of a discourse (history) that assumes the doxic guise of truth.<sup>7</sup> Foucault’s concept frames historicism as both ideology and cultural practice, and so open to critical social analysis, a vital move if one is to address historicism ethnographically (Hodges 2015:524). It also recognizes historicism’s polythetic manifestations in valuable

contemporary research by historians, archaeologists, and others, alongside its hegemonic agency beyond academia. Importantly, this historicist regime is shared by academics and dominant cultural forces in the West and beyond, whatever their political persuasion, and wields considerable legitimacy.

Leftist variants of the historicist regime have a further dimension. In brief, leftist engagement with historical discourse dates to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the era of history's ascendancy as an academic practice and regime of historicity. It is often associated to the work of Marx and Engels—but bears comparison to broader uses of historicism in Western societies (Blackledge 2011). A goal of much leftist historical discourse is to challenge or deconstruct dominant representations of the past, and expose the oppressive nature of political economic and class relations that they conceal. Realization of 'historical consciousness' is cast as historicist perception of the 'true face' of a mystified reality grounded in social hierarchy and its concealment by cultural elites. One influential legacy of Marxist thought is the proposition that the working classes are most likely to perceive the true face of historical reality and so drive social and revolutionary change, given their disadvantaged position in society. But this must be catalysed by the work of critical intellectuals, who demystify hegemonic ideologies that conceal structures of exploitation and communicate this to the oppressed (cf. Jameson 1974:160–206). If contemporary leftist thought is diverse and nuanced, this historicist unmasking of reality and its translation into popular consciousness remains central to much leftist history and political projects for realizing progressive social change (Strathausen 2006).

Founding works of historical anthropology are also historicist, and often leftist in political orientation, tracing a genealogy to political economy, cultural Marxism, and critical

anthropology.<sup>8</sup> The first wave of anthropological studies of ‘lived history’, dating from the 1980s, acknowledged alterity in indigenous historical consciousness, but implied that such practices retained narrative or conceptual features that are recognizably historicist (Hastrup 1992). Recently, anthropologists have moved beyond these assumptions, arguing that invocations of the past can take embodied, non-narrative, unstructured (e.g. a-chronological), and affective forms (Stewart 2012:3-9; cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 1992:157ff.). A critical, leftist orientation also informs many of these later studies. Importantly, such ‘nonhistoricist’ historicities can be founded in local ontological schema for the relationship of past, present and future that differ from historicism, and form a key component of ethnographic analysis. Following such insights comes realization that historicist regimes are now a key topic for critical study. Yet, interestingly, historicist ideology continues to unreflexively inform a significant proportion of anthropological engagement with history, and, arguably, many anthropologists’ expectations of informants’ invocations of the past, and comprises a dominant analytical framework for the discipline.<sup>9</sup>

In what follows, I present a comparative analysis of leftist history practices in rural France, drawing on both historical anthropological study, and an ‘ethnography of history’ produced from ongoing ethnographic study in Languedoc over a fifteen-year period. I furnish two portraits: first, of the ‘history practices’ of a group of leftist French historians and activists, the Forum-Histoire (‘History-Forum’), based at l’Université de Paris VII, as they took part in an influential protest against the state during the 1970s; and secondly, of the work of Jean Dupont and his collaborators’ socialist project to refashion historical consciousness on the coast of Languedoc between the 1970s and 2000s.

One goal is to analyse the role of ‘historicism’ in French ‘history practices’, and its conflict



and synthesis with nonhistoricist ways of knowing the past. Study of historians' efforts to encourage the popular historicization of French cultural practices have value as part of this necessary ethnography of 'historicist regimes'.<sup>10</sup> It also facilitates nuanced assessment of analytical generalizations about historicism via ethnographic contextualization. Secondly, following Herzfeld's observation that one aim of the anthropology of Western societies is to analyse 'where "our" [anthropological] ideas come from' (Asad et al. 1997:713), and working in a genealogical spirit (Foucault 1977), I assess the implications for anthropology's foundations in historicism. The late 1970s and 1980s are significant for relations between anthropology and history—encounters between leftist anthropologists and historians shaped debate in foundational ways. Both case studies document ethnographic variants of the historicist regime of historicity that leftist elites advocated at the time—among them anthropologists—and which remain central to the human and social sciences; both act as a crucible for raising questions about the uses and disadvantages of historicism for anthropological analysis. If anthropology is to effectively study historicist regimes, or 'nonhistoricist historicities', with their distinct temporal ontologies and practices for invoking the past, and capture the 'history-less penumbra' (Rabinow 2011:61) that surrounds novel forms of contemporary cultural practice, then its relationship to historicism must be reassessed.

### **FORUM-HISTOIRE: RADICAL HISTORIANS AND THE 'PEOPLE'S HISTORY'**

At the Institut Charles V in the historic Marais district of Paris, on the week-end of 24-25 May 1975, some 200 history teachers, students and historians gathered to assess the political and educational value of the past in the light of the fall-out from the uprising of May 1968.<sup>11</sup> In the courtyard and labyrinthine rooms of this former hotel, so distinct from the new

buildings of the University, participants held two intense days of meetings. Inspired by the heady politics of anarchism, Maoism and radical communism that thrived in French leftist circles, they convened a 'Forum-Histoire' ('History Forum') network to realize their goals. Based at l'Université de Paris VII, and animated by the radical historian, specialist in Chinese peasant revolts, and sometime Maoist, Jean Chesneaux, the Forum-Histoire embarked on an intensive critique of historiography's role in French society. A journal, Cahiers du Forum-Histoire [CdFH] or 'Notebooks of the History-Forum', was founded in 1976. With a print-run of 4,000 copies, it ran to 10 issues, and served as a mouthpiece for theoretical debate and dissemination of their views. Chief among the Forum-Histoire's ambitions was critique of the relationship between historians and those they study.

Forum-Histoire activists viewed this relationship as defined by a crippling professionalism that restricted popular engagement with historical discourse, and ultimately served the political ends of 'French capitalism'. As Chesneaux wrote pithily: 'We want to finish with the formula "I am working on" ... In our view, we need to work with ...' (Dosse 1989:47).<sup>12</sup> Such a project, Chesneaux argued, demands new forms of historical knowledge and academic praxis to subvert the intellectual's established role:

The past is both a stake in current struggles and an essential factor in the political relationship of forces ... Historians, like other intellectuals, cannot passively wait until capitalist culture and society have disappeared to raise questions about their own speciality and its place in the political struggle ... History is an intellectual discipline that touches an extremely broad audience [but] the invisible doors of our universities are ... hermetically sealed. (Chesneaux 1978:2-3)

As for the Forum-Histoire's project:

We accept too easily the chronological slicing-up of past experience, the taste for narratives in the past tense, the authority of the printed word, the isolation of documents ... the uncritical use of the specialist's work. My hope is to encourage those engaged in ongoing social and political struggles ... to reject the Establishment version of historical knowledge. Let them build their own relationship to the past on the basis of what they have gone through together ... taking their own past as the starting-point for this fundamental rethinking. Let us reverse the hierarchical relationship between past and present, between historical specialist and non-specialists, in our quest for the type of history the revolutionary struggle needs. (Chesneaux 1978:3)

The historian-activist, then, needed to subvert the politically conservative division of labour between historian and the public, and refocalize this via forging local relationships with oppressed groups within society, chiefly among the working classes and French 'peasantry'.<sup>13</sup> In this way, the historian-activist becomes both collaborator, and facilitator of a novel engagement with the past that is not predetermined by academic research agendas, or the values and goals of professionals. In theory, at least, knowledge of the past can be shaped by the political struggles of oppressed groups, 'to link the open-ended present, with all its potentialities, to the ... past [and] base the work on the demands of social practice and the political struggle' (Chesneaux 1978:136). The modus operandi of historicist objectivity and the 'history establishment' is suspended, in order to forge 'a history for the revolution' (Chesneaux 1978:135-147).

The inspiration for this project lay to the East. With Mao Tse-Tung as his muse, Chesneaux's

historian stages enquêtes ('field investigations') whose objectives are open-ended and emergent, with the goal of catalysing novel, potentially revolutionary local relations to the past as part of the class struggle.<sup>14</sup> An agenda existed—to mobilize these engagements with the past in line with the 'needs of the workers' struggle' (CdFH 5:1). And despite Chesneaux's qualms, the product of such enquêtes remained largely textual in both theoretical and practical terms, comprising hybrid forms of local history and professional historical discourse with its historicist tenets largely intact (e.g. Anon. 1977a, 1977b; Chesneaux 1978). But the nature of the engagement and content of the 'history' produced are generated via dialogical praxis, with the professional tools of the historian put at the disposal of subject-collaborators who assume the role of 'amateur' historians in the process. Importantly, the enquête is also an engagement that requires time and commitment. The spirit of the enquête informed other sites of engagement between Maoist and other gauchiste<sup>15</sup> activists and the French working classes during the 1970s, and echoes politically-motivated fieldwork practised farther afield by critical anthropologists and public historians.<sup>16</sup>

The Forum-Histoire was one of several radical leftist history groups that operated in the late 1970s. Alongside *Le Peuple Français* and *Les Revoltes Logiques*, they aimed to redefine historiography's role in French politics and cultural practice. Diffusion of critical historical consciousness remained central to the Forum-Histoire project, in keeping with other Western leftist movements, although they pursued it in a distinctively practice-based format. 'Taking one's own past as a starting point' (Chesneaux 1978:3) had a clear ideological goal. It is important to note, then, that Chesneaux and others borrowed from a broader leftist tradition, and in turn, influenced the work of later leftist historians and philosophers. Historian-activists such as Jacques Rancière, theoretician of *Les Revoltes Logiques*, went on to influential careers.

## Reinventing History on the Larzac Plateau

Let us now consider how the Forum-Histoire mobilized its theoretical goals in praxis. It was an unlikely stage for the next showdown between gauchistes and the state after May '68. The isolated plateau of Larzac straddles the Aveyron and Hérault départements of southwest France—1,000 square kilometres of land given over largely to shepherding. Yet Larzac became a cause célèbre among French leftists. On 28 October 1971, Michel Debré, Defence Minister for the Gaullist government of Chaban-Delmas, announced the extension of the military 'camp de Larzac'. Debré argued that its expansion would enhance France's defence infrastructure and provide an economic boost to the region, which had suffered extensive depopulation linked to agricultural modernization programmes.

The project required the expulsion of 100 farming families from their lands, and a significant increase in the army's share of the plateau—from 3% to 17%. It met with immediate and strong resistance from local farmers, who comprised a number of social groups. They included farmers who had recently come to Larzac, known as *néo-ruraux*, including leftists in the wake of May 1968; wealthier farmers with larger landholdings; and indigenous 'peasants'. These were small-holders, conservative in religious and political outlook, who formed the majority and a group apart, with cultural links to the wider Occitan peasantry. Most farmers opposed the extension, and the first protests took place within days of the announcement, organized by the FDSEA.<sup>17</sup> These gathered momentum and over the following years, confrontations between the army and farmers, protest marches to Paris, and campaigns of civil disobedience captured the support of gauchistes. This was particularly the case for French Maoists, influenced by Mao's conception of the revolutionary role of the peasantry. The campaign was also endorsed by a range of leftist political figures, including

François Mitterand, leader of the Parti socialiste, who cancelled the military extension in a gesture of solidarity soon after his election on 10 May 1981. It was the beginning of a long history of activism on the plateau. By the new Millennium, local ‘peasant-activists’ led by José Bové linked to the Confédération Paysanne trade union would rise to international prominence with their protests against globalization, and play an influential role in European politics.

The Larzac movement was also the subject of extensive theorization and engagement. One notable experiment was the founding by intellectuals, activists, and interested local farmers, of a ‘Larzac-Université’ on 19 May 1975. This interdisciplinary initiative aimed to foster educational instruction and collaboration between professional academics, the ‘peasantry’ and the working class (Alland 2013:50), and had a high profile among Parisian academics. Chesneaux was among its founders, and the Forum-Histoire developed its own project to engage with the Larzac struggle. The explicit goal was to realize a collaborative history of the indigenous Larzac peasantry that ‘spoke directly to their experiences’, enabling them to reappropriate their past as part of the struggle against the French state, and become, in activists’ terms, ‘alternative historians’. Forum-Histoire activists believed that this would ignite their revolutionary potential in Maoist terms. But the ‘Larzac-Université’ served to highlight the differences between historians and indigenous peasants, who had little interest, it emerged, in defining themselves as ‘alternative historians’ or recasting their knowledge of the past in historicist terms for political ends (Ahmad and Dominique 1978:57). Indeed, it could even be proposed that they lived ‘outside history’, in Nandy’s (1995:44) polemical sense, in that their dominant cultural modes for relating to the past were not historicist in nature, and ‘different from that constructed by historians and historical consciousness’.<sup>18</sup>

Forum-Histoire activists undertook preparatory work with local historians from the region, and scheduled a collaborative history seminar for indigenous peasants, néo-ruraux, local and professional historians, workers from nearby Millau, and leftist activists at Larzac from 24 March to 3 April 1976.<sup>19</sup> That said, plans for the seminar were largely formulated by historians from Millau and Paris. Chesneaux was the principal liaison, and later regretted that the organizing committee was not more representative (Chesneaux 1977:3-5). Historian-activists from Millau prioritized the following goals:

- To define a popular regional history that is founded on both objective data (enquêtes, statistics, archival research and interviews) and the oral history of a people fighting for their very existence;
- To transcend traditional conflicts between indigenous and colonial workers, French and Occitan speakers, ‘Indians’ and anthropologists [sic.], lived history and written history, teachers and the taught;
- To convert historical reflection into a weapon of resistance and unity, capable of galvanising our identity, and recapturing what the system with its confusion has taken away from us ... (CdFH 1977:10)

Forum-Histoire activists had distinct goals:

- To rethink the past from the perspective of the present [peasant and workers’] struggle;
- To expose the dangers of treating historical knowledge as an end in itself;
- To help the popular masses to reappropriate their own past, without having to rely on professional historians ... (Chesneaux 1977:3)

Differences were apparent from the start of the seminar, as were the challenges of debating across cultural and intellectual divides. According to a heavily self-critical report in the CdFH, Forum-Histoire participants ‘tended to stick together’, Larzac activists found it challenging to engage with historians, local historians did not engage with their professional counterparts, and divisions also existed between workers and trade unionists. As for indigenous peasants, they were interviewed by researchers during enquêtes, but did not fully participate in the seminar or public meetings arranged to communicate findings, due to scheduling conflicts with their working hours (Chesneaux 1977:5-8). In some respects, then, Forum-Histoire activists encountered similar challenges to later public and ‘collaborative’ anthropologists (Lassiter 2005). Another division concerned attitudes towards the ‘class struggle’, which was particularly acute between Forum-Histoire activists, néo-ruraux and peasants. Farmers were exhausted by five years of activism against the state, and in the mood for compromise. Smaller farmers were also dominated by landowners who acted as self-nominated spokespeople for the campaign. Such differences left Forum-Histoire activists ‘confused’ and ‘angry’ at the lack of political will in the fight against the state’s plans (Chesneaux 1977:4).

There was progress, nevertheless, on historical projects. 52 people were interviewed, and oral history and ethnographic data on the past was collected, in particular on labour disputes, which, in the case of Millau, consisted of important strikes in the 1930s. Uncovering this history of conflict, for Forum-Histoire activists, was central to restructuring the local past in terms of contemporary political concerns. Participation was also high: 500 people came to the seminar, which included public talks, presentations of findings to local farmers and inhabitants of Millau, and the rapid publication of written reports which sold well during and



after the seminar. Profits went towards the purchase of premises for the Larzac-Université. Seminar participants also took part in acts of civil disobedience, as part of the Larzac campaign. Finally, there were a number of key outcomes, including plans for a history of the Larzac movement; research on Millau labour disputes; an ethnographic survey of the plateau; and importantly, in November 1976, instruction for farmers at their request on the history of the French countryside since the 1940s—a period of great turbulence driven by the Marshall Plan. Oral history material was also published in a special issue of the CdFH.

The special issue analyses differences in attitudes towards the past among participants. While local historians, workers from Millau, and Forum-Histoire activists perceived a value in researching and rethinking the past in terms of its value for contemporary struggles, as did some *néo-ruraux*, this approach was of little interest to indigenous peasants, who were its focus. One assessment comes from the Forum-Histoire:

The peasants did not want to take ownership of their past and link it to the political struggle. By contrast, the desire to know more about past disputes in Millau, notably the strike of 1934-35 ... was important to the middle classes and the young, but also to the working classes of Millau [who attended] ... The peasants had a different relationship with the past [which] was a private thing for them, that outsiders shouldn't meddle with. For example, the old peasant who knew the past of Larzac like the back of his hand, but whose account was filtered, selective, oriented towards everyday life, almost a-political. He would make ... the Le Roi Laduries of the world happy, and other 'ethnographers', but he hardly spoke of the peasant struggles of the past, or Vichy and the problems between peasants and the military camp since it was set up in 1903. (Chesneaux 1977:4-5)

Chesneaux's account merits further contextualization. At the time of the Forum-Histoire seminar, sources indicate that peasant social life remained largely oriented towards nonhistoricist historicities (Bonniol 2001:28–46; cf. Alland 2013; Terral 2011; Williams 2008). These were characterized by the memory of lived experiences, and their transmission by descendants (Bonniol 2001:36–38). Local people were exposed to historicism via schooling (Hery 1999:83–189), for example, and there existed the potential for historicist discourse to be assimilated into local historicities as a form of 'historical memory' (cf. Ricoeur 2004:394). But sources suggest that assimilation was not widespread in the mid-1970s. As an emblematic example of 'nonhistoricist historicities', one can point to communal processes of knowing the past, which would take place via storytelling about the exploits of relatives or local figures, often focalized around the family in pastoralist communities. The ethnographic record suggests that historicist schema such as chronology, objectivism, and historical contextualization were not foregrounded in such performative practices, and narratives normally located persons in a timeless but familiar landscape (cf. Fabre and Lacroix 1974).<sup>20</sup> There is also evidence for the prevalence of oral myths about Gargantua and other figures in Larzac, characteristic of the Occitan-speaking region (Bonniol 2001:38; Coulomb and Castell 1986). Such stories might be narrated in the countryside, inscribing the local ruiniform landscape with mythological and affective historicity, but also in family company.

Although indigenous peasants were acquainted with historicist discourse, this was not the principal idiom for temporalization of the past among the majority. One exception was an annual memorial to victims of the Germans at la Pezade, supported by the wider presence of war memorials (Bonniol 2001:38). In this case, the nationalist war memorial and lieu de

mémoire fused with peasant historicities. Historicist schema were also used to identify key moments in the lifespan of individuals, and even if dates were not explicitly incorporated into everyday practice, they were usually known. Calendars were used for time reckoning and televisions were increasingly common, which diffused historicist outlooks (cf. Rogers 1991:12), as did selected religious practices, while some place names possessed an historical penumbra. And the historicist idiom was invoked during the Larzac campaign by a range of people, including local historians and some activist peasants, which catalyzed its prominence.<sup>21</sup> This is not to romanticize indigenous peasants, and, clearly, some individuals were more familiar with historicist idioms, as were teachers and historians (Bonniol 2001:39–43). But sources suggest that in 1976, peasant historicities remained largely nonhistoricist, an observation echoed elsewhere in influential anthropological studies (e.g. Zonabend 1984).

If the goals of the Forum-Histoire were political engagement, collaboration, and hybridization between different knowledge practices and historicities, then, the project was only a partial success. An important obstacle was the different ways in which indigenous peasants and historians related to the local past (Ross 2004:123). Likewise, Parisian historians did not possess a differentiated set of knowledge practices that could produce historicist accounts of the local past, enable collaborative study of nonhistoricist and affective ‘peasant’ historicities, and mediate the differences. As Chesneaux stated: ‘We didn’t know how to define an alternative historical research, nourished by the present, and yet exigent and rigorous’ (Ross 2004:124). Meanwhile, reports in the CdFH indicate that peasants did not wish to become ‘alternative historians’ (in activists’ terms), despite sharing similar political goals as historians and activists. This was manifested in their lack of engagement with the Forum-Histoire’s historicist project, and adherence to their own idioms for invoking the past, as reported by Chesneaux.<sup>22</sup>

What was the role of ‘historicism’ in the Forum-Histoire’s projects? On the one hand, there is rejection of two key aspects of the historicist agenda—notably, the delivery of historical knowledge in ‘objectivist’, depersonalized academic discourse constructed by a solitary professional; and the historicist axiom that historical discourse should not be explicitly shaped by political struggles in the present. However, in other respects, the tenets of historicism are upheld in Forum-Histoire praxis. This is the case for historicist goals of interpreting contingent experience in its ‘historical context’; the aim to seek out historical truths that undermine tales of ideological mystification spun by ‘establishment’ historians (Chesneaux 1978:45-55); and the historicist idiom utilized by activists (cf. Gorman 2013:156). The centrality of the written historical text to knowing the past is also maintained, despite occasional use of public presentations, while nonhistoricist and affective genres of historicity are largely overlooked or misunderstood, as are their theoretical implications. While the practice of historical research was radically theorized, then, and contained ‘posthistoricist’ elements of critique, ‘history practice’ remained grounded in the historicist regime.

In sum, the Forum-Histoire sought ways to move beyond historiography and the historicist regime. However, it was largely unable to do so. This arguably stemmed from a lack of reflexive insight into how the historicist regime informed Forum-Histoire praxis; and the related lack of a theoretical framework for studying nonhistoricist forms of historicity. Ethnographic study of nonhistoricist historicities in Larzac, for example, targeting oral practices and affective genres for knowing the past with distinct ideological and ontological orientations, could have facilitated collaboration. It is evident that, at the time, anthropology too did not have the means to theorize nonhistoricist historicities, and it would be thirty years

before an anthropological critique of historicism appeared (Hirsch and Stewart 2005). Other factors also had a role—such as logistical failures involving scheduling conflicts for meetings. But if such an approach was available, the Forum-Histoire might have forged a stronger basis for generating a hybrid historicity with farmers and activists to realize Chesneaux’s collaborative programme. This impasse contributed to the demise of the Forum-Histoire several years later. As activists acknowledged:

[C]ontribution by ‘savage historians’ [in Lévi-Straussian terms] was very important in fuelling our critique of dominant history and its professional elitism ... But it was we who called them ‘alternative historians’; it wasn’t of any interest to them to define themselves in this way ... (CdFH 10:57)

Chesneaux, reflecting in 1997, was more specific, identifying Benjamin’s critique of historicism as a crucial absence from the Forum-Histoire’s arsenal (Chesneaux 2004:190), and suggesting that a lack of theoretical reflexivity about historicism undermined the project—an analysis that echoes our critique.

## **REFUSING HISTORY: SOCIALIST HISTORICISM AND POPULAR HISTORICITIES**

For French socialists, the late 1970s and 1980s was a time to renew social engagement with history after several decades of turbulent modernization, when the past had slipped its moorings both sociologically, and in terms of its priority in national education. This coincided with the election of France’s first socialist president, François Mitterand, in 1981. One of Mitterand’s campaign promises was to reform the teaching of history in French

schools, and his comments at the Conseil de Ministres on 31 August 1983 reflected a realization that progress had been slow. He declared himself “‘scandalised’ by the ignorance of history among young people, and “anguished by the harm that the loss of collective memory could cause our country” which constituted in his eyes a “national danger” (Lelièvre and Nique 1995:341). History and collective memory, in this sense, were explicitly conflated, and his solution was to change how history should be taught in French schools. In the event, Mitterrand turned to academics at the prestigious Collège de France for guidance, on the recommendation of Pierre Bourdieu. The role of history, then, was less politically radical for socialist activists than gauchistes, but no less important, and similarly entangled with academic discourses.

In this second study, I address a socialist history-project carried out some 100km to the south of Larzac. Villeneuve is a peri-urban village of approximately 600 permanent inhabitants, located 10 kilometres from the city of Narbonne in Southern France. It sits on a lagoon alongside the Mediterranean, which sustains one of the economic practices for which the village is known—the artisanal fishing of eels and fish—while most of Villeneuve’s land is used to grow grapes for Corbières wine. That said, its inhabitants do not comprise an holistic population of fishermen and wine-growers. About 45% of permanent residents are from the locality, but the remaining 55% are recent immigrants. In addition, 30% of the housing stock in the village is owned by second-home owners.<sup>23</sup> The village community is fragmented, and tensions exist—many long-term inhabitants (known as Villeneuvois) view incomers in a negative light, and see them to blame for why the children of long-term residents can no longer afford to live in the village. As for the employment market, only 13% of the labour force make a living from fishing and viticulture, whereas in 1946, this figure was 75%. Wine-growers and fishermen tend to supplement their income with jobs in Narbonne, and more

than 70% of villagers work in the city's service industries, factories, and commercial centres.<sup>24</sup> Heritage tourism has become a dominant economic interest of many incomers, and the 'intangible cultural heritage' of indigenous villagers is often 'poached' for their heritage projects, which is a further source of tension.

In previous decades, however, life was very different. Looking back, the population of 367 in 1968 was almost half the current figure, and more than 50% of the population worked in fishing and agriculture. Within a generation, then, we have a significant reversal. Only one-third of women were in paid employment, versus 70% by the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. As for housing, 20% consisted of second homes, and a small minority of the population were 'incomers'. Local people were the dominant cultural and political force. Communal rituals during the year also reflected economic practices. The *fête de la vendange* ('harvest fête') in Autumn, and the *fête des pêcheurs* ('fishermen's fête') in July, were the focus of festivities. By the late 1970s, these events were atrophying, and by the 2000s, they were replaced by fêtes oriented to a dominant regional economy: tourism.

The turbulent political economy of viticultural capitalism shook the plain of Languedoc from the 19<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. But regional historians have argued that this period of turbulence did not make a clean sweep of the peasant cultural fabric. Indeed, many features of life in the 1970s were clearly rooted in the 'deep time' of Languedoc—from artisanal fishing, with its Occitan terminology and festivals, to the production of food, communal storytelling, and other core symbols of belonging. The viticultural working class never relinquished many of the idioms of pre-capitalist 'peasant' life (Fabre and Lacroix 1973). Importantly, this continuity applied to genres of historicity, which retained an affective, mythological, chiefly 'nonhistoricist' character rooted in oral history, Occitan traditions of storytelling, and

kinship-related practices. School-taught narratives of the national past and related historicist conceptions were marginalized, according to key informants. They can be theorized as cultural impositions of ‘externality’ that were not easily assimilated to local historicities.<sup>25</sup> Local life in the 1970s, then, comprised conflictive temporalities and living traditions, some ruptured and torn by a convulsive viticultural economy, others vital and retaining the potential for symbolization in terms of the *longue durée*.

Come the 1980s, a new era of change would revolutionize socio-economic and cultural life. Viticulture was no longer a principal employer. Erratic forms of timespace gained the upper hand (cf. Gurvitch 1964:32-33). Cultural horizons and identities also became unstable. Mass media and television brought the world beyond the village into living rooms and imaginations—of the young, in particular. Regional, French and European imagined communities were privileged above local co-ordinates of belonging. Such transformations had important consequences for relations with the past, which retained an oral, affective hue, but slipped its local moorings, to be increasingly conjured from televised history, newspapers, and the heritage industry—informed by common sense historicist frameworks (cf. Stewart 2012:1-2). This rupture in the local temporal fabric (Gell 1992:118-126) ushered in a new framework for relations between past, present and future, and a local historicity that articulated with the dominant French historicist regime.

Let us now address local historicities in more detail. Interviews with long-term residents of Villeneuve indicate that, until the early 1980s, a key focus of nonhistoricit local historicities was the telling of stories in Occitan about family members. These sometimes took a humorous narrative form, which focalized male protagonists. Such stories would frequently be narrated in the evening *veillées* that still took place. These would be complemented by



tales of family life with a wider gender basis, and when men were not present, for example, women might speak exclusively of female experience. Affective historicities conjured the locality's enduring landscape with reminscences of family and other associations. At other times, mythological tall tales would be told, often focused on the exploits of fishermen. Local people also invoked the past in a form of popular 'historical periodization'. Increasingly, this indexed a set of changes to local life in the 1960s and 1970s, and was 'quasi-mythological' in nature, as it was not reflective of the 'historicist facts' but shaped by political or moral concerns linked to the local impact of tourism and incomers (see Hodges 2010).

In interviews conducted in the late 1990s with older villagers in their 80s and 90s, there remained little reference to historicist frameworks in their accounts of this period. This is not to suggest that there was no hybridization between nonhistoricist and historicist practices. As in Larzac, state-driven processes such as remembrance of the world wars, bureaucratic practices, and the mass media, catalyzed engagement with historicism. But until the 1980s, historicist historicity was marginalized. Instead, the contours of an enduring cultural order are apparent, encompassing both Villeneuve and Larzac, whose 'nonhistoricist' historicities were rooted in the *longue durée* of the Occitan peasantry (cf. Fabre and Lacroix 1974). And even if, by the 2000s, popular historicism had made significant inroads into Villeneuvois historicities, contemporary rural historicities remain a hybrid of the historicist and nonhistoricist. This analysis thus traces the features of nonhistoricist historicities and their gradual hybridization with historicist practices, rather than making the case for the existence of other European 'histories' (Hastrup 1992). It thus opens up such hybrid historicities to more nuanced anthropological analysis.

## Local History and Socialist Politics

Jean Dupont was a faculty member at the University of Nantes and history teacher at a prestigious lycée in the city. His work is informed by a concern with ‘public history’, he specializes in Ireland, and has authored a well-known study. Since the late 1990s, his narratives have become increasingly visible in Languedoc as an authoritative reference point on the local past. Dupont first visited Villeneuve in 1960 and has visited every year since then. His wife Monique’s family were among the first incomers to buy a second home in 1959. Among villagers, he is publicly acknowledged as un historien, with special knowledge about the local past, and this was often acknowledged by older working people as a prestigious profession. He is also well-integrated, to the extent that he was previously encouraged to run for mayor. Among long-term residents, the Duponts were known as *familiers*, referring to a small group of incomers viewed in similar terms to indigenous family members who had moved away, and visited for the holidays.

Dupont’s interests in the past of Villeneuve date from the 1970s, when he began collecting Roman artefacts—pottery shards, fragments of amphorae, roof tiles—scattered across the countryside, which intrigued local people (see Hodges 2013). During the late 1970s and 1980s, his interests diversified into two strands: the production of a hybrid work of local history informed by historicist analysis, published in 1979, and its use as a resource for renaming the village streets, at the invitation of the socialist council. He has published a further two local history books since 2007—one of which is an extensively revised and extended version of the 1979 text. All three are informed by historicist analysis, but are pitched at a general audience, and influenced by leftist and French socialist politics. I focus on the 1970s publication here.

Dupont played an influential role in the development of the socialist party in Western France during the 1970s, and was also an adviser of Jean Chevrier, the first socialist mayor of Villeneuve in the late 1970s and 1980s. The key influence on Dupont's project, however, was a close friend. René Castan was a committed communist and member of the socialist council. He was also passionate about the village past, even though he was born on the other side of Narbonne. At the time, there was no historicist local history of the village, which was unusual for France. When they came to power, the socialist mayor and Castan set out to forge a new collective identity for Villeneuve informed by a left-wing, historiographically-informed narrative of the locality's past. As Dupont told me:

Castan hadn't much formal education but he was very intelligent and inquisitive. He learned a lot at *l'école du parti*—he was communist and in France, from 1945 to the end of the 1950s, when the P.C.F. was very strong, it educated its militants in an impressive manner.<sup>26</sup> And it was through politics that he became interested in the area and its history. Knowing I was Breton and interested in the Breton regionalist movement, he found out about the Occitan movement that got going after 1968. Chevrier was also interested in the Occitan problem for political reasons ...

Knowing that Dupont was an historian and a socialist, Castan encouraged him to get to work. The wider political context was important. Regional and local history was important to the French left at the time, particularly Mitterand's Parti socialiste. The *Volem viure al país* ['We want to live in our country'] movement—a powerful Occitan regionalist force—was also leftist and aimed to support regional cultures, and oppose the hegemony of the French state. Similar political orientations informed the work of prominent French historians and anthropologists working on Languedoc (Fabre and Lacroix 1973; Le Roy Ladurie 1980). In

sum, socialist activists in Villeneuve wanted to inspire a communal identity for local people informed by an historicist narrative aligned on leftist, regionalist principles. This reflected wider concerns with creating historical narratives that reinterpreted the past in socialist and regionalist terms as a force for political mobilization, including those of Mitterand. The project involved historicization of local cultural and economic life in terms of a socialist, and historicist critique of the status quo—objectives confirmed by Dupont in interview.<sup>27</sup>

Dupont was keen to highlight, for example, that he wrote about the working-class viticultural riots in 1907, in which the villager Gaston Pagès was killed by troops who fired on the crowds. The memory of 1907 had been passed down through Pagès's family, but was not well-known, and Dupont's book put it in the spotlight at a time when relations between wine-growers and the state were tense after fatal shootings at a riot in nearby Montredon. Dupont also aimed to expose the improprieties of the local ruling classes. He revealed that an influential mayor and president of Narbonne archaeological association during the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, whose family still owned an estate in the village, ordered the destruction of a Gallo-Roman mosaic uncovered by a day labourer, so as not to jeopardize income from his vineyard. Dupont also emphasized how the book's narrative scope and the events it highlighted were pitched at the Villeneuvois—those inhabitants associated with long-term residence of two or more generations—and geared to validate their experience. The explicit objective, Dupont stated, was to construct a 'history from below' of local working people, and a leftist exposé and critique of class relations, in a hybrid form. In this sense, he crafted the narrative for a 'model reader'—long-term village residents—who were not necessarily the book's actual readers, as we will see.<sup>28</sup> The book was printed and distributed by the *Service occitan d'imprimerie* (the 'Occitan Printing Service'), a local regionalist press.

## The Text and Its Reception: Refusing the Historicist Past

Villeneuve et son étang is 45,000 words in length, and Dupont characterizes it as a *monographie villageoise* ('village monograph'). This term references the village-based studies that dominated the anthropological field during the 1960s and 1970s, and also informed historical studies (Le Roy Ladurie 1980). The book is primarily an account of the social and political economic development of the village in the *longue durée*. Villeneuve holds detailed municipal archives dating to the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, which served as primary sources alongside oral history. A contemporary reviewer and noted historian of France praised the book's 'accessible, interested style and abundant and well-chosen photographs' (Poussou 1980:105)—in keeping with the hybrid concerns of a public history—but was clearly wrong-footed by the book's intended audience, lamenting the lack of extended historicist analysis.

Chapters on antiquity open the book, assessing archaeological and historical evidence, and mention of Villeneuve in the historical record. Two chapters then address the Middle Ages and 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries, with commentaries on the indigenous inhabitants, and Mediterranean polycultural economy. Yet this is not a dry, academic account. Contemporary patronyms are prominently cited from archival records for the 1500s and 1600s, enabling the reader to interpret the book as the tale of the historical continuity of indigenous families, and the narrative gradually becomes focalized as their story. The final four chapters are the most detailed, dating from 1697, when municipal records began, until 1914. The economy is a key theme, as are historical transformations in France, but these are once again oriented to the activities of named individuals. A chapter focuses on wine growing, and to conclude, there is a detailed analysis of 1914-1979, noting the population decline, employment challenges, agricultural mechanization, and the negative impact of second home ownership.

Indigenous inhabitants, in this sense, are the book's protagonists and reflectors.<sup>29</sup> From a textual perspective, the narrative traces their activities, often referring to this group by their name, the Villeneuvois; the reality depicted is recounted in objective 3<sup>rd</sup> person, but geared to their point of view. As it converges on the contemporary era, for Dupont's 'model reader', the Villeneuvois, named individuals become known relatives; today's institutions enter the narrative; historical events become lived-through events or accessible via oral history; and traditions evoked are still in existence. An emerging continuity with the present is thereby embedded in the narrative. At a stylistic level, proper names are the key tropes, and facilitate this imagined continuity.

This personalised, humanist narrative—contrasting, for example, with the *Annales* focus on climate or weather (Braudel 1989)—enables the retrospective projection of identity. It renders the past available for temporalization as the critical history of long-term residents, focalized via known individuals, with the political objective, one can propose, of realizing a 'socialist' class consciousness. Residence claims are central to the identity of Villeneuvois, but in the 1970s, oral genealogies only extended to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The book thus proved Villeneuvois long-term residence with reference to an historicist framework, which took place at a time when the number of incomers began to dramatically rise, and enabled Villeneuvois to reinforce claims to moral sovereignty over housing and land as these became subject to conflict. In sum, the narrative combined elements of *l'histoire locale*—the village monograph—characteristic of ethnography and historiography; the use of historical contextualization, temporal historicist ontology, and 'data'; and refracts this via a named and individualized social grouping or 'model reader'. In sum, Dupont's leftist perspective is present throughout, and his historicist approach reflects the schema presented earlier in this article.

What was the book's impact on local historicities? How was it received by actual, rather than model readers? This is the point at which we can qualify ethnographically Dupont's leftist historicist project. The book launch took place at the mairie ('village hall') in July 1979, attended by a crowd of residents, testifying to the curiosity surrounding its publication. Over the following years, extracts were republished in local newspapers, and the book's run of 1,500 copies quickly sold out. Interviews suggest that 45% of Villeneuvois read it during the 1980s, and a larger percentage of incomers and second home owners. That said, its adoption as a reference point for the local past was problematic and limited. The most common unsolicited reference to the book emerged in the context of political claims to residence and sovereignty by indigenous residents, and invokes the anecdote that original surnames of inhabitants dated to the 1600s. At the turn of the century, few if any members of the older generation referred to events in the book, or its chronological schema, when recounting oral history. In other respects, the book was viewed as a hard read and uninteresting by Villeneuvois, suggesting that its historicist format was challenging to assimilate into their predominantly oral and affective historicities. Some critical readers also commented that the book lacked insight into village life. Ricoeur (2004:393–97) characterizes the discourse of historians as external and uncanny, linked to the fact that it does not directly reference collective or personal memory. The subject assimilates it to the self via key processes such as 'discovery of the historical [historicist] past by means of the memory of ancestors' (ibid.:394). But the cultural idiom of invocation also defines the external. Importantly, in Villeneuve the historicist idiom marked Dupont's narrative as external and problematized its assimilation, even though it referred to the locality and events that were invoked in local historicities (e.g. family members and their actions). Interestingly, a novel, *Les Oranges de la Mer*, set in nearby Leucate, was often cited as more life-like, suggesting that the affective

qualities of literature were more in tune with local historicities.

Existing oral reference to family and collective histories thus remained dominant in village historicities at the millennium—although the book was valued in other ways. As Dupont said: ‘When the book came out, Villeneuvois were very proud that there was at last a book on their village—especially as their rival [neighbouring village] already had two.’ In sum, between publication and the early 2000s, Dupont’s narrative of the past was either ‘refused’, or selectively adapted for invocation in predominantly oral, affective, popular local historicities with long-term Languedocian roots.<sup>30</sup> The book’s contents did not significantly enter local historicities during the 1980s and 1990s, and interviews suggest that those who read it soon forgot much of its content or even disposed of it. As for the socialist project of historicization of which it was a part, socialism has been significantly less influential in Villeneuve than other local communes since the 1980s, which was partly linked to the increasing population of middle class immigrants.

However, from the 2000s, attitudes towards Dupont’s work changed. The book was transposed into practice-based activities, which extended its uptake into popular historicities and divorced it from a socialist agenda. For example, historical knowledge was adapted from the book’s historicist format for local heritage quizzes at summer fêtes (predominantly for children), which involved collecting clues from around the village. It was also used for teaching local history at the local primary school, and in tourism leaflets and advertising. In this way, for children, the book’s content became a resource for temporalizing the local past. For recent immigrants and second home owners, and some heritage tourists, it was also of interest. These individuals read the book to construct a self-conscious relationship to place, and inform their walks or conversations about the village. In such ways, involving expressive



uses of the book's content, and predicated on the growing influence of popular historicism on local historicities, Dupont's narrative has become influential. The book is now mentioned on the commune's website, and publication of a revised edition in 2007 introduced it to a new generation who through education and exposure to wider cultural practices are more open to historicist discourse. If its leftist political agenda has become invisible, its historicist framework for invoking the past is now widely diffused through performative practices. Local historicities have changed accordingly, although this assimilation of local people and pasts into the wider historicist regime has only partly addressed Mitterrand's fears of a loss of collective memory, given that Dupont's critical socialist agenda has been undermined. In this sense, the pasts invoked in local heritage tourist practices are in accord with pastoral myths of rural life identified by Williams (1973), and contrast significantly with leftist variants of 'historical consciousness'.

## **HISTORY'S IMPASSE: TRANSVERSAL ANALYSIS AND THE LIMITS OF HISTORICISM**

The historian Jacques Le Goff (1992:81-90) viewed the production and distribution of historiographical narratives as part of a long revolution in human relations with the past. This unfolded gradually as printing and literacy developed from the Renaissance, but has accelerated since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Such narratives can be viewed as the product of a key sociological feature of modernity, which Foucault (1977) terms 'disciplinary programmes'. Such programmes identify a field of social reality to convert into an object of rational knowledge. This knowledge is mobilized via appropriately designed practices and strategies, often as part of regimes of truth. In the case of historicist regimes of historicity, they involve a disembedding of past-related 'materials' from second order resources (e.g. archives), and at

times, primary sources (e.g. the production of oral history), and their ‘disclosure’ into new forms for use in historicizing practices, in line with the historicist tenets detailed above. In our studies, such programmes were pursued by professional historians, linked to leftist political formations, interacting with rural populations in the French Midi, at a time of upheaval. Their common aim was to produce hybrid forms of popular historical consciousness that adapted historicist discourse for novel, leftist political ends.

It is no secret that ‘history’ itself is as a dominant, elite discourse. Its historical roots are entangled with its influential role in the emergence of nationalism, and in various forms it enables elites to ‘mobilize ... tradition and “heritage” to shroud themselves with the veil of legitimacy’ (Shore 2002:16). Legitimization of professional historical discourse hinges on the ideology of historicism, which underwrites its status, and differentiates it from ‘unofficial’ strategies for temporalizing the past (Samuel 1994). In one sense, then, history comprises the cultural and social capital of the leftist elites in our studies, and the key medium for their interaction with and positioning vis-à-vis local groups. It formed part of that ‘particularistic set of interests, norms and practices [an elite uses] to differentiate itself from the masses’ (Shore 2002:2-3) and maintain authority and status. But historicist discourse was also viewed by historians in our studies as a ‘migratory technology’, intended to serve local interests and emancipatory political ends. For reasons discussed above, the projects did not succeed. This was partly due to the character of historicist knowledge practices, which prevented historian-activists from engaging with, valuing, and understanding local, nonhistoricist practices for temporalizing the past. It also prevented them from producing historical knowledge in cultural forms conducive to temporalization in local historicities. This failure was no doubt supported by differences with target groups, who did not all share the same leftist goals, despite similarities in their criticisms of the status quo. But it is clear that the increasing

familiarity of local people with historicist discourse in Villeneuve and Larzac over subsequent decades coincided with adaptation of the work of historians for different ends, including its assimilation into local historical memory and heritage tourism. One can therefore propose that the cultural ‘externality’ of historicist discourse encouraged its ‘refusal’ by local people (cf. Ricoeur 2004:394). In this regard, the close relations of historians’ projects with the ‘historicist regime’ undermined their objectives. ‘History’ reached an impasse in both cases.

The comparative history of both initiatives provides further insight. At the root of their reception are the historicities of rural populations in Larzac and Villeneuve, and the ways in which these engaged with Le Goff’s ‘long revolution’. It is clear that both local historicities, and this engagement, are more complex than assumed by the historians concerned, and arguably, many historians and social scientists working today. What is most relevant to our analysis of historicism is that historiographers, local historians, and socialist activists, underestimated the extent to which the everyday life of rural populations remained grounded in nonhistoricist historicities with historical roots in the French peasantry. Indeed, they seemed unable to theorize and engage significantly with such historicities beyond acknowledging that ‘peasants perhaps have a different relationship with their past ... almost a-political’ (Chesneaux 1977:4). Dupont, in interview, expressed a similar bafflement and disappointment that many Villeneuveois had not read his book.

Jacques Rancière, writing in Samuel’s edited volume *People’s History and Socialist Theory*, reflected on the attempts of leftist intellectuals such as the Forum-Histoire to reshape historical consciousness:

... perhaps we overestimate history as a form of memory ... Those workers wanted to gain their identity through other means than history or memory, and even the history of their own struggles ... did not serve their purpose. (Rancière 1981:268)

Building on these comments, the proposal that leftist projects should impart a historicist historical consciousness to oppressed groups does not reflexively assess whether such an endeavour—involving the articulation of distinct historicities—will be welcomed, or successful. This was also the case for other leftist history projects of the time, including that of the ‘History Workshop’ movement, whose legacy has passed to a ‘public history’ movement that pays closer attention to such issues (e.g. Kean and Martin 2013). It is not the aim of this article to theorize how progressive change should be advocated, or the role of history in such projects. Critical historical consciousness may play an important role. But change does not follow automatically, as history abundantly testifies—and can happen without critical historical consciousness, as the ultimate success of the Larzac movement demonstrates. Change is, by contrast, often led by those whose identities have become unstable (Graeber 2013). In this regard, ‘refusing history’ can constitute resistance to historicist regimes of truth—this was arguably the case in Villeneuve. Resistance to historicist conceptions of the past proposed by leftist historians does not necessarily imply resistance to progressive change.

In recent times, historicist discourse has a greater stake in the ensemble of repertoires for invoking the past in Villeneuve and Larzac, and the scope of the historicist regime has extended. The media is one disseminator, as is education; Le Goff’s revolution has gathered pace. But historicism remains only one dimension of these local idioms. When assessing the extent of its influence, it is necessary to acknowledge the nonhistoricist character of other

facets of this differential set of practices for invoking the past, and examine how they interrelate. Samuel makes this point forcefully:

[T]he point of address in any discussion of historiography should not be the work of the individual scholar, nor yet rival schools of interpretation, but rather the ensemble of activities and practices in which ideas of history are embedded ... [T]extual exegesis, of the kind practised by Hayden White i.e. the close reading of a limited number of well-thumbed books, would be less germane than a study of readership ... Still more pertinent would be an attempt to follow the imaginative dislocations which take place when historical knowledge is transferred from one learning circuit to another ... (Samuel 1994:8)

Samuel does not develop an explicit critique of historicism, or a practice-based theory of historicity. For historians—and anthropologists—to grasp this differential ensemble and its inter-relationships, the complexity of hybrid historicities—including their ontological and temporal idioms—must be better theorized. In this regard, I draw on Leibniz’s notion of the impossible, as developed by Deleuze (2006:67-85), to acknowledge the co-existing and at times contradictory existence of different pasts (ostensibly referencing the ‘same event’), rather than reduce them to different representations of the same past that can be qualified as more or less accurate via historicist verification (hence ‘explaining’ the discrepancies). The past, it is proposed, is multiple and co-existent with the present (Deleuze 1991; Roth 2012). As it is only ever accessible via our contingent invocations, there is no sense in which any original point of reference for the past exists—each invocation always constitutes an eternal return in which difference and novelty are central. This project of differential, ethnographic soundings of at times impossible pasts is one that the ethnography of historicity—and

history—is ideally suited to pursue (cf. Hodges 2008:413).

In considering our case studies, a ‘history of the anthropological present’ also comes into focus (Rabinow 2011). The tools utilized by both Forum-Histoire and Dupont are those of professional historians adapted or democratized for other ends. Parallels can be drawn with the work of anthropologists adapting historical techniques at the interface with local populations during the same period. Anthropologists were often driven by the desire to ‘give voice’ to those who had been historically silenced, or whose ‘history’ was not recognized in dominant historical narratives (e.g. Hastrup 1992). They were motivated by similar leftist positioning and theory as historians in this article. Likewise, developments in anthropology during the 1980s and 1990s contributed to the hybridization of historical discourse, but, importantly, they did not reflexively theorize historicism. As a result, anthropologists ran into similar challenges studying nonhistoricist historicities, and despite advances, they focused on features of local historicities that could be interpreted as historicist in character (e.g. Tonkin, McDonald, and Chapman 1989; Wolf 1982). Theorization of the historicist regime alerts us to the hidden complicities of anthropological ‘elites’, and encourages us to open analysis to nonhistoricist ways of knowing the past. It facilitates a reflexive sense of the limitations of our anthropological tools. In this way, nonhistoricist analysis and historical discourse can be simultaneously deployed in what one might term an encompassing posthistoricist social scientific analysis, which integrates different historical and ethnographic techniques to build a differential portrait of the multiplicity of ethnographic pasts that co-exist and are invoked for specific ends. The image of an Aristotelian multi-disciplinary invocation of the past shimmers into view, advanced by historians (Macfie 2014; White 2005:147), with anthropologists now contributing (e.g. Stewart 2012).

Finally, let us draw out the theoretical implications of this study for the anthropology of history. A key innovation was to advance from the anthropological insight that historical analysis is informed by an historicist ideology (Stewart 2012) to an approach that embeds this in an ‘historicist regime of historicity’. Historicism is a dominant regime of truth, but it is not necessarily a pervasive, homogeneous one, in Europe and beyond (cf. Palmié and Stewart 2016:210). In this sense, our disciplinary conceptions of ‘history’ can be cast as abstractions from complex European traditions of historicization—where the past is invoked in a range of affective and intellectualized genres, including those adapted from dominant historicist regimes. History as a discipline is the discursive edifice of a globalized historicist regime with extensive hegemonic influence. But if historicism has the upper hand, our engagement with the past remains multiple and draws on many idioms, even in regions where historicism is dominant.

The evidence in this article, it is clear, reinforces the conclusion that experience does not exist within a monological historicity. Rather, cultural practice is embedded in multiple historicities, which can conflict and hybridize, as recent theorists have proposed for temporality (e.g. Bear 2014). In turn, these ‘historicities’ are folds in the temporal fabric of cultural practice, where past, present and future fuse, whose boundaries are porous, and which can invoke and combine events, real and imagined, from multiple temporal regions of the past in diverse conceptual or affective registers (cf. Knight and Stewart 2016:6-9). When Forum-Histoire militated in Larzac, attempts to radicalize peasant-workers overlooked the fact that historicist discourse was one minor facet of an ensemble of repertoires for invoking the past. When Dupont wrote a history of Villeneuve, he met with the same impasse. In this sense, the imposition of dominant historicities—such as the ‘historicist regime’—involves a process of mediation between different historicities, and in many cases, their eradication or

subordination. Disciplining the past within the historicist regime may also subsume it within wider programmes seeking to co-ordinate hegemonic past and futures—such as nationalism.

In this regard, much of the project of an anthropology of history since the historic turn has focused on acknowledgement that ‘the different cultural orders studied by anthropology have their own historicities’ (Sahlins 1985:53), and their continued subordination to a doxic historicism, whether this takes the form of Wolf’s (1982) political economy, or Sahlins’ culturalist endeavour and its descendants. Sahlins’ (1985:72) ambition to ‘explode the concept of history by the anthropological experience of culture’ did not extend far enough. Perhaps this is because what has not been ethnographically analysed is the historicist regime itself. Placing historicism within an anthropological frame does not negate the value of contemporary historicist analysis. But it does require a rethinking of how historicist discourse is deployed. The ‘conjunctures’ (Sahlins 1985) detailed here between historicist and nonhistoricist cultural practices can be analysed by suspending key historicist tenets as overarching principles of analysis, and employing a posthistoricist approach informed by a reflexive temporal ontology which facilitates transversality between analytical frames.<sup>31</sup>

What are the tenets of such a transversal analysis? Rather than grading the pasts of social life in relation to an historicist baseline, with its culturally-specific temporal ontology, drive for historical contextualization, and principles of causality and evidence, the anthropologist’s goal is to conjure social pasts ethnographically in a cross-cutting analysis, as in this article (cf. Nandy 1995:44–46). Where appropriate, such pasts can be articulated transversally with a critical historicism, in line with strategic, pragmatic goals.<sup>32</sup> In terms of historical perspectives, analysis would incorporate an anthropology of historicity, an ethnography of history, an anthropology of historicism, and historical anthropology as required. Perhaps the



critical anthropologist also seeks out passages of becoming, interstices or intervals, sideshadows and counter-factuals, in order to destabilize dominant regimes of historicity, and simultaneously invoke the sublimity of historical time, and its resistance to historicist knowledge practices (Lyotard 1984). Such an approach affirms the value and limits of contemporary historicism, and its implication in wider regimes of truth which anthropology must seek to problematize.<sup>33</sup> In this vein, we can grasp how singular concepts such as historicity can be adapted to address the complex, conflictive, and at times impossible historyscapes of contemporary worlds, and pursue critique through strategic, pragmatic, transversal analysis—including ‘public’ dissemination and hybridization—rather than historicist totalization. A totalizing historicist viewpoint on ‘history’ is thereby replaced with a composite anthropological analysis that enfolds rather than assimilates multiplicity, and traces the relational contours of different historicities which co-exist. On such a road, more measured and self-aware in its vision of historicism’s utility, lies the emancipatory and dialogical work of ‘history’ to which Chesneaux, the Forum-Histoire, Dupont, and leftist anthropologists aspired, and recent theorists of ‘anthropological historicities’ point the way.

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<sup>1</sup> Interchange between anthropology and history is complex, and at times, overlapped. See Kalb and Tak 2005; Budd 2009:421-461; Hodges 2015; Iggers 1997:101-133. ‘Leftist’ designates political movements and ideologies on the left of the political spectrum.

<sup>2</sup> It was also a key influence on *History and Anthropology*’s founding editor, François Hartog (1983).

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<sup>3</sup> Hirsch and Stewart (2005) define the anthropological concept of ‘historicity’ as ‘the manner in which persons operating under the constraints of social ideologies make sense of the past, while anticipating the future ... Whereas ‘history’ [e.g. Western ‘historicism’] isolates the past, historicity focuses on the complex temporal nexus of past-present-future ... To understand historicity in any particular ethnographic context, then, is to know the relevant ways in which (social) pasts and futures are implicated in present circumstances’ (262-263). I also draw on related theorizations (Lambek 2002:11-14; Delacroix 2009).

<sup>4</sup> See Hirsch and Stewart 2005; Stewart 2012; and a special section of HAU (Vol. 6, no. 1, 2016), edited by Palmié and Stewart, for important discussion on anthropology and historicism. Lambek 2002 and Hodges 2013 provide complementary studies.

<sup>5</sup> See Fasolt 2004:222 for a parallel account. Philosophers such as Deleuze and Koselleck (1985:255-275) argue that past and present co-exist: ‘The past would never be constituted if it did not coexist with the present whose past it is. The past and the present do not denote two successive moments, but two elements which coexist: One is the present, which does not cease to pass, and the other is the past, which does not cease to be but through which all presents pass’ (Deleuze 1991:59).

<sup>6</sup> Gorman (2013) concludes, ‘[I]t is fair to say that the concept of ‘the past’, and the associated distinctions between the categories of ‘the past’, ‘the present’ and ‘the future’, in the way historians use those notions, have seldom been reflected upon by historians’ (156).

<sup>7</sup> My use of ‘regime of historicity’ differs from Hartog’s (2015) formulation, combining a Foucauldian approach with the anthropological study of historicity. Hartog (2015:xv), an historian, defines historicity as ‘how individuals or groups situate themselves and develop in time, that is, the forms taken by their historical condition’. His use of the term ‘regime’ alludes to Foucault’s concept, but does not pursue this parallel. Hartog (2009:136) explains

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how the expression was inspired by Sahlins' (1985) work, but it also echoes Ricoeur and Koselleck. It encompasses both the culturally specific ways in which people invoke the past, and an historicist sense of how this relates to a society's temporal modality, i.e. dominant configurations of past-present-future such as Koselleck's (1985) identification of modernity as oriented towards a horizon of expectation. Hartog's conception of 'regime of historicity' is therefore cultural, but also 'objectivist' (by contrast with Foucault), and for anthropologists, requires development to facilitate cultural analysis. See Delacroix 2009 for a review of the term's genealogy.

<sup>8</sup> See Mintz and Wolf 1989 for a dispute regarding anthropology's historicism.

<sup>9</sup> In this article, I utilize a heuristic distinction between 'historicist' and 'nonhistoricist' historicities to maintain a focus on historicism, although it is clear that historicist historicity co-exists and hybridizes with other historicities, as we will see. In another context, one could typologize 'nonhistoricist' historicities in affirmative terms— e.g. 'affective' historicities (see Stewart 2012:189–206).

<sup>10</sup> Historians have already embarked on this path (Kalela 2012). Daniel Fabre and colleagues at the CNRS have pursued an 'ethnologie de l'histoire' since the 2000s. Handler 2016 and Harmann 2016 study historicism in Western societies from an historical perspective.

<sup>11</sup> Primary sources comprise a detailed dossier published in *Les Cahiers du Forum-Histoire* 5 (1977) including ethnographic analysis of Forum-Histoire's activities in Larzac by Chesneaux, research proposals, accounts by participants, and oral history from farmers. Secondary sources for Forum-Histoire include Chesneaux 1978; Ross 2004; and for Larzac include Alland 2013; Bonniol 2001; Heller 2013; Terral 2011; Williams 2008.

<sup>12</sup> Translations are by the author unless indicated.

<sup>13</sup> This term was used loosely to invoke class belonging in the context of French identity

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politics (Rogers 1987), rather than a strict socio-economic category, and I reflect that usage in this article.

<sup>14</sup> ‘The only way to know conditions is to make social investigations ... such investigation is especially necessary for those who know theory but do not know the actual conditions, for otherwise they will not be able to link theory with practice ... [W]ithout investigation there cannot possibly be any right to speak’ (Mao 1941:11,13).

<sup>15</sup> The term *gauchiste* was used to positively differentiate leftist movements (usually ‘far left’) from the Soviet-inspired communism practised by the P.C.F. [French Communist Party]. Prior to the 1960s, following Lenin’s lead, the term had pejorative connotations, and still does in many political circles.

<sup>16</sup> For example, the ‘History Workshop Movement’, that itself drew on anthropological theory and methods. The ‘History Workshops’ were an inspiration and members were invited to the Forum-Histoire’s founding meeting, including Raphael Samuel (Summers, Davin, and Samuel 1976).

<sup>17</sup> *Fédérations Départementales des Syndicats d'Exploitants Agricoles* or ‘Departmental Federations of Farmers’ Unions’. It is beyond the scope of this article to review in detail the social composition of Larzac, and groupings identified here inevitably simplify this (see Alland 2013).

<sup>18</sup> ‘At one time,’ Nandy (1995:46) writes, ‘historical consciousness had to coexist with other modes of experiencing and constructing the past, even within the modern world. The conquest of the past was still incomplete in the late nineteenth century ... [but h]istorical consciousness now owns the globe.’

<sup>19</sup> Historiography in France is a prestigious and influential activity, as is, to a lesser degree, the tradition of ‘scholarly local history’, to which these local historians, and the protagonist of

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my second case study, were associated. ‘Amateur’ local history is a less well-defined field of practice. The Forum-Histoire was interested in breaking down such hierarchies. See Papailias 2005:43–92, Thiesse 1991 for further discussion of ‘local history’.

<sup>20</sup> Nearby in the Aveyron, Rogers (1991:11) notes that among farming communities, ‘a construction of the past [was also used during the 1970s] to measure an inferior present or to legitimate present activities’, which was likely to be the case in Larzac too. Such popular periodizations are generated by present needs rather than historicist principles and usually comprise instances of historical ‘mythologization’ (Hodges 2010).

<sup>21</sup> Some néo-ruraux and Larzac militants were ‘conscious from the beginning that they were involved in making history’ (Alland 2013:102), such as the well-known Catholic priest, Pierre Bonnefous, who collected data and adapting historicist practices to write a collaborative history of the campaign (Bonnefous and Martin 1984).

<sup>22</sup> Clearly, in years to come, the historicist idiom entered more fully into local life, driven by the mass media and heritage tourism, and néo-ruraux, activists and incomers who brought historicist practices with them. For example, the campaign gave rise to an ‘invented tradition’ among militants that invoked continuity with the ‘peasantry’, and eventually, an ‘eco-museum’ (Bonniol 2001:29,31). The curiosity and changing lives of peasant farmers was also important to this process.

<sup>23</sup> This survey masks complexity and difference among social groupings.

<sup>24</sup> French censuses of 1946, 1999 and 2007.

<sup>25</sup> I refer to Ricoeur’s notion of the ‘externality’ of historical discourse to which subjects can become ‘acculturated’. Ricoeur writes: ‘The discovery of historical memory consists of a genuine acculturation to externality. This acculturation is that of a gradual familiarization with the unfamiliar, with the uncanniness of the historical past’ (2004:394).

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<sup>26</sup> *L'école du parti* (Party school) were meetings where the ideology of the P.C.F. (French Communist Party) was disseminated and debated.

<sup>27</sup> This account is based on interviews and letters exchanged between 1997-2005.

<sup>28</sup> I adapt narratology's concept of the 'model' or 'implied reader' (e.g. Eco 1979) to refer to ethnographically documented authorial intention in the construction of texts, rather than what is inferred from the text by the semiotic analyst.

<sup>29</sup> Leech and Short (2007) define reflector: '[C]orresponding to the impersonal function of style, there is the slanting of the fictional world towards "reality" as apprehended by a particular participant, or set of participants in the fiction. We shall call this fictional point of view ... and we shall call the person whose point of view is represented a reflector of the fiction' (139). Reflectors are also operative in narrative non-fiction.

<sup>30</sup> This was also the case for new names given to the village streets by the socialist council in the early 1980s, which drew on the book's historical findings—these were largely ignored by local people in favour of existing names. More recently they have been revalued by residents.

<sup>31</sup> The 'transversal' can be read in a literal sense to signify 'cross-cutting'. For Deleuze, it refers to the assembly of 'heterogeneous components under a unifying viewpoint [or narrator] ... [which] draws a line of communication through heterogeneous pieces and fragments that refuse to belong to a whole, that are parts of different wholes' (Parr 2010:291–92). In theoretical and political terms, 'the function of transversals is to assemble multiplicities, yet in such a way that the differences among entities are not effaced but intensified' (Bogue 2016:2).

<sup>32</sup> These goals might emerge in response to questions such as: from what situated positionalities are anthropologists writing? To what political ends? With what impact on those whose historicities are studied and at stake?

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<sup>33</sup> Fasolt (2004:41) comments: ‘History is a limited form of knowledge. Within those limits it can do good work ... If history is to do well what it can do, its limits need to be affirmed.’

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