COMMENTING ON LAWRENCE STONE’S ATTEMPT TO MAP RECENT CHANGES
in historical writing in terms of a revival of narrative, Eric Hobsbawm
recommends choosing a quite different point of departure. An obvious
possibility would be to start from the “convergence” of history and
sociology which a number of writers claim to have noticed in the last
few years. Although it would not be absurd to argue that if there has
been such a convergence an important condition for it must have been
the discovery by sociologists of certain cogencies of the narrative mode —
and I shall suggest that that is indeed one of the most important
things that has happened to sociology lately — it is clear that from the
historian’s point of view any real movement towards sociology must,
among other things, have meant a quite definite move away from
narrative. The possibility of describing history as moving simulta-
neously towards narrative and towards sociology is at least enig-
matic enough to invite some discussion.

The argument for convergence tends to cite a range of loosely re-
lated developments and to envisage a marriage of convenience rather
than one of positive choice. Thus the rise of quantitative history and
the possibility of the statistical reconstruction of past societies which it
has permitted has involved a pooling of techniques and forms of analy-
sis, whatever reservations one might have about its substantive results.
The emergence of a range of “subjectivist” sociologies concerned with
personal interaction and everyday experience has been matched by a
shift of interest among historians towards the Weberian problems of
meaning and understanding entailed in efforts to grasp the mentalities
of the past and to explore such unconventional matters as the history
of lunacy, crime, magic, domestic social relations and, generally, the
ordinary cultural worlds of ordinary people. The publication of a
series of very ambitious and overtly sociological works concerned with
the historical processes of such major transitions as the formation
of twentieth-century democracy and dictatorship, the great modern
revolutions and even the construction of “the modern world sys-

1 L. Stone, “The Revival of Narrative: Reflections on a New Old History”, Past
and Present, no. 85 (Nov. 1979), pp. 3-24; E. J. Hobsbawm, “The Revival of Narra-

Sociology and History (London, 1980); G. Stedman Jones, “From Historical Soci-
ology to Theoretic History”, Brit. Jl. Sociology, xxvii (1976), pp. 295-305; K. T. Erik-
son, “Sociology and the Historical Perspective”, in M. Drake, Applied Historical
tem", has renewed serious consideration of the possibility of integrating historical scholarship and highly generalized social analysis and synthesis. A comprehensive crisis in Marxist thought over the nature of historical materialism and the extent to which it is properly historical at all has had the usual effect of such crises: a spill of creative energy into neighbouring fields, specifically in this instance to cultivate a sociologically fertilized history or to protect good historical grain from encroaching sociological weeds. At the very least some historians and some sociologists, faced with challenges to their various knowledge claims from within their own disciplines, have turned respectively to sociology and history to reinforce cases which they have felt the resources of their own disciplines inadequate to defend. There has been mutual, general borrowing of categories and methods — to such an extent that even the unconvinced have had to familiarize themselves with the other side in order to withstand its advances. A few die-hards on either side have held out for the old separations. A few radical critics have deplored the indiscriminate and opportunistic way in which much of the convergence has occurred. But as Stedman Jones has noted, there is a plain and widespread consensus: sociology as a theoretical discipline and history as an empirical discipline have been happily drifting towards one another for several years; a fruitful and contented union may now be expected. Peter Burke is only one of a number of enthusiasts who have offered to officiate at the ceremony.

With Stedman Jones, I am not altogether happy about this image of convergence. It is not just Stedman Jones's own reservations about the poverty of the theory that sociology is likely to bring to history that worry me — as he sees it history needs theory but not sociological theory. Nor is it just the voices from the back pews pointing out that history is already married to narrative and not available for a second union. The whole conception of convergence, of the two disciplines usefully learning from one another and progressively dissolving into a blissful social history, is too simple and too bland to do justice to a tangled, difficult relationship which is actually productive just because it is tense, distanced and complicated, because it is built on antithesis as well as on community of interest. In one sense history and sociology invoke logics of explanation which simply cannot be integrated — although they can constructively be combined. In another sense they have been living together in sin for so long that to proclaim a marriage at this stage can only be faintly absurd. As I see it, there is an emerging common mode of practical explanation. But there are also problems, not just in the disciplines but in the nature of the life they both seek to explain, which separate them forcibly in principle. It is thus possible at

\[ \text{\textsuperscript{3} Stedman Jones, "From Historical Sociology to Theoretic History", pp. 299-301.} \]

\[ \text{\textsuperscript{4} Burke, Sociology and History, p. 30.} \]
the present time both to see history and sociology as exploring common
ground and to see them as distinct ventures each possessed of its own
peculiar “discourse of proof”. If I emphasize the common ground it is
not because it is the whole story but because it allows me to put “the re-
vival of narrative” where I think it properly belongs.
The common ground is not as yet very extensive but it is perhaps
fundamental. It involves what an increasing number of scholars in
both disciplines seem to have come to understand as the central prob-
lematic of their work and which I shall call the problematic of structur-
ing. Such a sense of what the study of the social world is about is
thoroughly serious, penetrating and fully justified by the past practice
of both historians and sociologists. And from such a point of view
history and sociology are effectively the same enterprise. Both seek to
understand the puzzle of human agency and both seek to do so in terms
of processes of social structuring. Both are impelled to conceive of
those processes both chronologically and logically, as both empirical
sequence and abstract form; in this context neither the diachrony-
synchrony distinction nor the ideographic-nomothetic distinction
carry weight. Sociology must be concerned with eventuation because
that is how structuring happens. History must be theoretical because
that is how structuring is apprehended. History has no privileged
access to the empirical evidence relevant to the common explanatory
project. And sociology has no privileged theoretical access.
It must be admitted nevertheless that even those who have been
most active and influential in clearing this ground have not always
seen this particular significance of their work. A backlog of inter-
disciplinary scepticism has inhibited co-operation. Some familiar
passages from Edward Thompson provide an apt illustration. On a
number of occasions and in a number of widely-quoted statements
Edward Thompson has sought to advance the claim that class is to be
understood as a relationship, not as a thing; specifically as a historical
relationship, an event not an object. Sociologists in general and some
Marxists in particular are singled out by him as purveyors of the con-
trary view. Mistaken Marxists, he has argued, try to discover class as a
thing; sociologists, equally mistaken, claim that class does not exist
because they cannot discover it as a thing. Against both versions of the
heresy he maintains the thesis that “the notion of class entails the
notion of historical relationship”. And so, like any relationship, “it is
a fluency which evades analysis if we attempt to stop it dead at any
given moment and anatomise its structure”. Hence, “the finest-

5 Or perhaps, following Edward Thompson, its discourse of “disproof”: E. P.
p. 9.
7 Ibid.
meshed sociological net cannot give us a pure specimen of class . . . the relationship must always be embodied in real people and in a real context". Many sociologists might have to be forgiven for being puzzled to know just what he expects them to find controversial in such a statement. But let us leave them puzzling for a moment and consider the fuller and more famous version of his argument. Here again the withdrawal from sociology is achieved in quite general terms:

Sociologists who have stopped the time-machine and, with a good deal of conceptual huffing and puffing, have gone down to the engine-room to look, tell us that nowhere at all have they been able to locate and classify a class. They can find only a multitude of people with different occupations, incomes, status-hierarchies and the rest. Of course they are right, since class is not this or that part of the machine, but the way the machine works once it is set in motion — not this interest and that interest, but the friction of interests — the movement itself, the heat, the thundering noise. Class is a social and cultural formation (often finding institutional expression) which cannot be defined abstractly or in isolation, but only in terms of relationship with other classes; and ultimately the definition can only be made in the medium of time — that is, action and reaction, change and conflict . . . class itself is not a thing, it is a happening.

The main argument here is also "of course . . . right" — and it should be extended from class to most other supposed social "things". But it is not an argument which divides historians from sociologists in any generic way. Some sociologists, but also some historians, have indeed tried to treat class as a bit of the machine (and some of them have actually emerged from the engine-room waving what they claimed was the relevant piece of machinery). But some sociologists, as well as some historians, have insisted that, as a social relationship, class must be understood historically, in action. Weber's analysis, elaborated by Parkin, of the transparency and closure of classes is just such a treatment. So surely is the work of Lockwood in The Black-Coated Worker, of Willis in Learning to Labour, of Mallet in The New Working Class, of Sennett and Cobb in The Hidden Injuries of Class, of Westergaard and Resler in Class in a Capitalist Society, of Barrington Moore in Injustice, of Wolf in Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century and, of course, of Marx in The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte. Appreciation of the historicity of class, of class as a relation-

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8 Ibid.
10 Which is not to deny that in another respect it is also seriously one-sided. Treated thus, "class" is the cultural category counterpointing the structural category "mode of production". The task of a synthetic analysis of structuring (as distinct from action and structure) is to accommodate both.
ship enacted in time (with equal weight placed on all four of those words) is simply not a form of wisdom private to the historian. Nor are the larger insights that time exists in motion and that society is the time-machine working. Sociologists and historians are equally likely now to seek their solutions to the problem of human agency through an understanding of the workings of that maddeningly non-mechanical machine.

The problem of human agency is not a new discovery, although from Hobbes onwards people have repeatedly unveiled it as solemnly as though it were. In effect it is the persistent focus of a great body of social analysis which has always obstinately refused to be relegated or confined to any single formal academic discipline. We find it at the very origins of historical materialism in the work of Vico, pervasively in the writings of Marx and Engels. It is Schiller's problem of alienation, Hegel's problem of estrangement, Lukacs's problem of reification. It is celebrated as the intellectual pivot of sociology by Herbert Spencer. It is a recurrent nightmare in the work of Weber. We find it tamed as the problem of unintended consequences and latent functions by R. K. Merton, reinvigorated as the "awesome" paradox of the social construction of reality by Berger and Luckmann, strenuously wrestled with by Alvin Gouldner and Alan Dawe, claimed as the defining concern of historians by Edward Thompson. It is the problem of finding a way of accounting for human experience which recognizes simultaneously and in equal measure that history and society are made by constant, more or less purposeful, individual action and that individual action, however purposeful, is made by history and society. How do we as active subjects make a world of social objects which then, as it were, become subjects making us their objects? It is the problem of

(note 11 cont.)

Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Selected Works, 2 vols. (Moscow, 1962 edn.), i, pp. 247-344, which for all its amazing substantive inconsistency remains a classic of the genre so far as the method of unmasking class historically is concerned.


15 As his widow was to testify: Marianne Weber, Max Weber: A Biography (New York, 1975), p. 337.

individual and society, of consciousness and being, action and structure. It is easily and endlessly formulated but, it seems, stupifyingly difficult to resolve. People make their own history — but only under definite circumstances and conditions; we act through a world of rules which our action makes, breaks and renews — we are creatures of the rules, the rules are our creations; we make our own world — the world confronts us as an implacable order of social facts set over against us. The variations on the theme are innumerable; and the failures of the human sciences to work the theme to a satisfactory conclusion are inscribed on page after page of their literature. The estranged symbiosis of action and structure is both a commonplace of everyday life and the persistent fulcrum of social analysis.

In sociology one distinctive product of the problem of agency is the "two sociologies", the coexistence of a sociology of action and a sociology of system which never manage to master their respective residual problems of system and action. I suspect that the two sociologies are matched in historical work by "two histories", reflected perhaps in the polarization of science and narrative as images of sound historical method. Be that as it may, the history of sociology is, as Dawe has stressed, a history of repeated attempts to give the concept of action central importance in interpretations of the relationship of individual and society which repeatedly end up negating themselves and producing a sociology in which action is subordinated to system. By many devious routes sociology seems to have spent much time rediscovering the dismal paradox that Dawe ascribes to Weber: "human agency becomes human bondage because of the very nature of human agency". Works like Gardiner's *Theories of History* remind us that historians (or at least philosophers of history) have spent even more time ensnared in their own versions of the same difficulty. The two sociologies and the two histories express a similar bafflement in the face of the same dilemma.

What has happened recently, and forcefully, is that significant numbers of both historians and sociologists have begun to move beyond the traditional terms in which they encountered the dilemma of agency (Durkheim or Weber perhaps for sociologists, and perhaps Plekhanov or Collingwood for historians) and to reconstitute it in new and somewhat less polarized terms. It is perhaps this shift which both Lawrence Stone's "revival of narrative" (which as exemplified by him is certainly not a revival of narrative in any traditional sense of the

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19 Ibid., p. 398.
term) and the supposed convergence of history and sociology really reflect. What seems to be going on is that some historians and some sociologists are now making fairly sustained and self-conscious efforts to hammer out ways of analysing process which transcend the exhausted modes of narrative history and scientific history just as they transcend the exhausted modes of the two sociologies. The crux of this disparate but common venture is a steadily more articulate elaboration of the problematic of structuring.

I hope my use of the term "problematic" will not damn me as sectarian. Although the word has become a term of art in some quarters its reference is actually quite vulgar, alluding simply to that rudimentary organization of phenomena which yields problems for investigation. And it seems to me that it is just at that level that such important changes as are occurring in history and sociology at present are to be found, the level at which assumptions and principles and a sense of significance are applied to phenomena in order to constitute inquiry. Johnson speaks of a problematic as a "definite theoretical structure", a "field of concepts, which organizes a particular science or individual text by making it possible to ask some kinds of questions and by suppressing others". But he allows too that the fact that one is moving within "a field of concepts" may or may not be overtly conceded and understood. Some disciplines are more forthcoming than others. Some seek to persuade through the rhetoric of a seemingly artless empiricism. Thus: "In works of history the organizing ideas and presuppositions may lie very deep. They none the less exist". For whatever reason — a prolonged experience of fairly unprofitable controversy would be my own explanation — the organizing ideas and presuppositions of works of history seem today to be much nearer the surface of many historians' minds than Johnson's remark would imply. And one concomitant of that is that narrative has lost its old innocence. It is less and less likely to be offered as merely the record of what happened. It is more and more likely to be understood as an attempt to recover the movement of human agency as structuring. Consciousness of the problematic of structuring as a primary concern of the historian does not displace narrative as an appropriate mode of professional discourse. On the contrary it is likely to emphasize the special force of narrative as a rhetoric adapted to what one is trying to say — which is one reason why many sociologists have embraced narrative recently. But it does transform one's sense of the explanatory scope of narrative, urging one towards a way of writing in which narrative is deliberately engaged in

22 Ibid.
dialogue with other rhetorics and more overt forms of explanation. The new narrative is thus, in principle, quite unlike the old.

Scriven has drawn a suggestive analogy between "explanatory narrative in history and the development of the dramatic plot in a play" which is perhaps relevant here. In each case the author adopts a rhetoric which is not that of formal proof but rather that of "plausibility in depth". Explanation resides in an achieved sense of dramatic inevitability, an appreciation that, however surprising particular episodes in the drama may have been as they were presented, the plot as a whole viewed in retrospect rings true as a structuring. Actually, however, very few historians are good enough story-tellers or dramatists simply to leave matters there. To a greater or lesser degree they also feel impelled to formalize the processes that their narratives have captured more or less fully and with more or less explanatory force. Le Roy Ladurie sets Montaillou in the context of a protracted anthropological commentary; Keith Thomas makes sure that his readers are directly seized of the "pregnant principle" informing Religion and the Decline of Magic; Lawrence Stone concludes his discussion of social mobility in early modern England by spelling out the social process carried and achieved in the biographies of individuals and groups. What is new in recent historical writing is not this sort of recognition of the limits of narrative as a mode of apprehending structuring but a great increase in the interpretative ambition, scope and self-consciousness with which narrative and formal modes of explanation are counterpointed. It is in that sense that works like Bond Men Made Free or Injustice, Lineages of the Absolutist State or Roll Jordan, Roll, taken together represent a distinctive and increasingly dominant thrust in historical writing, a move not so much beyond narrative as towards a much more theoretically deliberate use of narrative as part of a type of explanation which plainly seeks more than plausibility in depth. Douglas Hay's opening contribution to Albion's Fatal Tree exemplifies the type of work very well. The appalling chronicle of the brutalities of English justice in the eighteenth century is the essential matter for a complex argument about the structuring of a certain kind of class domination. The process resided in the chronicle, the structuring was in the action as it were, but the chronicle itself does not reveal

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23 M. Scriven, "Truisms as the Grounds for Historical Explanations", in Gardiner, Theories of History, pp. 443-75.
or demonstrate the process. To reveal it to us the author has to organize his argument in terms of a continuous confrontation and interweaving of narrative and theoretical matter. The power of the essay springs from the systematic skill with which that dialectic is accomplished.

What is involved in works like this, and they could be cited indefinitely, is a breaking of the bounds of conventional distinctions between types of explanation. It seems that the attempt to move beyond action and structure to process impels neglect of such restrictions. What, for example, are we to make of J. W. N. Watkins's celebrated distinction between colligation, explanation in detail and explanation in principle in the light of the contemporary practice of many historians whose work is manifestly a practical integration of all three? Elsewhere I have traced in some detail the way in which in the course of debate both historical argument (starting often from a preference for colligation) and sociological argument (setting out no less often from a preferred explanation in principle) tend to move towards a practical procedure in which all three of Watkins's types are obliged both to interrogate and to sustain one another. Reviews of work on the French Revolution by Lucas and on popular uprisings during the ancien régime by Salmon nicely illustrate the retreat from colligation and explanation in principle towards the new mode in the experience of historians. Perhaps the most familiar matching instance on the side of sociology is the transformation of the sociology of deviance achieved by Goffman and Matza — the transformation of a sociology of being into a sociology of becoming in which the narrative of becoming, the "moral career of the mental patient" as a story, is both the reality to be explained and the structuring in terms of which explanation can be achieved. Here I would only stress the extent to which there does seem to have been cumulative movement on both sides towards a sensible intellectual pluralism in which theory and narrative cease to stand over against one another as principled alternatives and are instead locked together in a unified project of explanation. And the extent to which much of the movement on both sides has turned on an increasing sense of the need to incorporate close accounts of the consciousness of individuals into the explanatory package. It is not just that the story-tellers have realized in the face of disbelief that their

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26 J. W. N. Watkins, "Ideal Types and Historical Explanation", in H. Feigl and M. Brodbeck (eds.), Readings in the Philosophy of Science (New York, 1953), pp. 723-44.
stories need to be validated not by yet more facts but by a reasoned elaboration of the grounds of principle in terms of which their facts are selected, constructed and judged significant. Nor is it just that the model-builders have been forced by incredulity to modify, complicate and qualify their abstractions in order to accommodate other people's empirical evidence. Over and above both of those tendencies there has been a marked appreciation of the need to establish the cogency of both narrative and theory at the level of the subjectivity (both the consciousness and relationships) of the people whose lives are to be explained; to give them what Weber would have called adequacy on the level of meaning. Hence some of the new narratives, hence work on mentalité, hence debates about the class nature of revolutions turn into debates about what the times meant to those who lived them. All of which is not to be judged as a retreat to an irresponsible subjectivism or culturalism, any more than it is to be seen as a mere revival of narrative. Rather it is an appreciation of the fact that structuring, the flow of action, structure and action, is mediated by consciousness and that it is in narratives about consciousness that an essential item of evidence about the way process is constituted must be found. Excursions into the study of mentalité are not a withdrawal from the explanation of history as process; they are a necessary detour in order to arrive there safely.

Among historians the great leap forward has been the realization that the analysis of structuring demands a dialogue between theory and narrative — in Edward Thompson's terms, a mutual interrogation of concept and evidence. Among sociologists it has involved not only that realization but also an effective appreciation of time as the medium of social structuring. It was not the relevance of history as "the past" that sociologists failed to see, but specifically its relevance as time. Even when interest in the analysis of past societies and in such problems as the transition to industrialism was at its highest, and even among those who were themselves working on such questions, sociologists retained an impressive ability to ignore the fact that history happens in time. Accordingly they also managed not to see either the

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30 Broadly, the body of work Johnson identifies as "culturalist" history: R. Johnson, "Socialist-Humanist History", History Workshop, vi (1978), pp. 79-100; R. Johnson, "Culture and the Historians", in Clarke, Critcher and Johnson (eds.), Working-Class Culture, pp. 41-71.

31 Which is not to say that the journey will not be a prolonged and wandering one. But at least the point of the detour is now quite often appreciated. See, for example, R. Darnton, "The History of mentalités", in R. H. Brown and S. M. Lyman (eds.), Structure, Consciousness and History (Cambridge, 1978), pp. 106-38.

32 Thompson, Poverty of Theory, pp. 230-1.

possibility or the need to reconstitute the action and structure antinomy as a matter of process in time, to reorganize their investigations in terms of the dialectics of structuring. There were indeed some general appeals for a recognition of the importance of historical time in social analysis and some adumbrations of how the rethinking of sociology on that basis might proceed. Such encouragements came, moreover, from quite diverse sources. C. Wright Mills regularly insisted on the inseparability of history and sociology.\textsuperscript{34} E. A. Shils more than once urged his colleagues to see that "time is also a constitutive property of society".\textsuperscript{35} John Barnes valuably directed attention to issues of duration and succession.\textsuperscript{36} Pierre Bourdieu was to establish the power of the notion of reproduction as a way of conceiving the social processes mediating structure and practice.\textsuperscript{37} The problematic of structuring was, slowly and piecemeal, being formulated as an alternative to the problematic of action and structure. Yet for years the only self-conscious and sustained attempt to work that problematic lay within Marxism and was accordingly ignored, resisted or at best encapsulated. The most serious and penetrating attempt to develop the problematic of structuring outside Marxism, the work of Norbert Elias, remained largely neglected. Even now that half of Elias's major work is available in English it has been possible to see it as either a quirky theory of social development or a history of manners.\textsuperscript{38} The point of \textit{The Civilizing Process}, the heroic attempt to substitute a conception of a process of mutual formation for the sterile antithesis of individual and society and to ground that conception in a history not of manners as such but of manners as indeed "making man" as part of a general formation of social hierarchies, classes and states, has for the most part simply not been registered. It seems that the emptiness of the old answers had to be appreciated \textit{ad nauseam} before sociologists would seriously consider the possibility of asking different questions.

Perhaps, although it is still too soon to tell, the break came in 1979 when Dawe demonstrated with an unprecedented authority just how exhausted the old programmes were, and when, almost at the same time, Giddens published a manifesto for a new time-centred enterprise — a manifesto which was also quite openly an articulation and synthesis of the subterranean tendencies of sociological work over the pre-

\textsuperscript{34} His best-known statement is "The Uses of History", in C. W. Mills, \textit{The Sociological Imagination} (New York, 1959), pp. 143-64.
\textsuperscript{35} For example, E. A. Shils, \textit{Centre and Periphery} (Chicago, 1975), p. xiii.
\textsuperscript{36} J. A. Barnes, "Time Flies Like an Arrow", \textit{Man}, vi (1971), pp. 537-52.
\textsuperscript{38} N. Elias, \textit{The Civilizing Process}, i, \textit{The History of Manners} (Oxford, 1978), which, pending the translation of the second volume, in which the design of Elias's work as a "sociogenetic investigation" is made overt, should perhaps be read alongside the same author's \textit{What is Sociology?} (London, 1978), esp. pp. 104-33.
vious generation.\textsuperscript{39} \textit{Central Problems in Social Theory} is the first work of mainstream sociology since Weber in which the problematic of action and structure, in all its forms, is directly repudiated and replaced as a basis for general theory by the problematic of structuring — although Giddens himself does not use that term. What he does do is to present the essential terms and relations of a complex formal theory of "structuration", a theory built around the idea of the "fundamentally recursive nature of social life" and designed precisely to express "the mutual dependence of structure and agency" in terms of process in time. Here the necessity of appropriating time as distinct from the past is at last fully seized:

The exclusion of time on the level of the \textit{durée} of human agency has its counterpart in the repression of the temporality of social institutions in social theory — a repression effected largely by means of the division of synchrony from diachrony. On the basis of this division sociologists have been content to leave the succession of events in time to the historians, some of whom as their part of the bargain have been prepared to relinquish the structural properties of social systems to the sociologists. But this kind of separation has no rational justification with the recovery of temporality as integral to social theory; history and sociology become methodologically indistinguishable.\textsuperscript{40}

And again: "What history is, or should be, cannot be analyzed in separation from what the social sciences are or should be . . . . There simply are no logical or even methodological distinctions between the social sciences and history — appropriately conceived".\textsuperscript{41} The appropriate conceptions of course are those provided by the problematic of structuring.

Personally I am not quite so sanguine as Giddens. It is not that I question the general transformation of sociology which he proposes; although the formal theory he outlines is plainly only one of a number of possibilities within the terms of that transformation. Indeed there have been developments in linguistics, anthropology, psychology, philosophy and cultural studies, all of which themselves powerfully impel an opening-up of the problematic of structuring and consolidate the theoretical unification of sociology and history. But theoretical unity and practical identity are two different matters. And in practice it seems to me that historians and sociologists still have a long way to go in cultivating a common rhetoric that will effectively and adequately express what can readily be seen as their common logic of explanation. Just because structuring is both a chain of events and a relationship of abstract conceptions, both narrative and form, finding a mode of discourse appropriate to reveal it, and demonstrate it, remains, as it has long been, a much harder problem than that of working out the terms of the fusion of history and sociology in principle. In each discipline

\textsuperscript{39} Dawe, "Theories of Social Action"; A. Giddens, \textit{Central Problems in Social Theory} (London, 1979).

\textsuperscript{40} Giddens, \textit{Central Problems in Social Theory}, pp. 7-8, 69-73, 230-3.

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., p. 230.
one can find a few outstanding studies in which the problem seems to have been mastered, in which narrative and theory, evidence and concept really do maintain a close, fluent dialogue with no bullying. So far as sociology is concerned my own inclination would be, again, to cite the work of Erving Goffman. But for most of us the rules of rhetoric — as distinct from the rules of logic — have still to be made clear and learned. Some familiar pronouncements on the nature of the explanatory task (Weber's "in working out a concrete causal explanation of individual events the procedure of the historian is essentially the same [as that of the sociologist]"); Thompson's "in the last analysis the logic of process can only be described in terms of historical analysis"; Gellner's "the problem of explanation in history is also the problem of the nature of sociology") are from this point of view entirely correct and thoroughly unhelpful. Even more aggravating is the equally correct observation of Engels:

History often proceeds by jumps and zigzags, and if it were followed in this way, not only would much material of minor importance have to be included, but there would be much interruption of the chain of thought . . . the logical method of treatment was therefore the only appropriate one. This however is essentially no different from the historical method.

Within the terms of the problematic of structuring such rulings on the nature of history and sociology as logics of explanation are entirely justified. But they leave the immediate practical work of evolving an appropriate style, a mode of discourse, the actual dialogue, still to be accomplished. The new narrative, which is in fact a narrative actively interrogated by theory, is perhaps best understood as one attempt to do just that.

In so far as a corpus of work can be identified giving substance to the sort of programmes for history and sociology urged by people such as Thompson and Giddens, it needs to be identified as something more than just a revival of narrative, or a revival of theory, however. Theconcerting of a sense of what is to be explained, the diversity of explanatory theories brought to bear on the task, the enormous variation in the empirical scope with which the work is attempted (from the transition from feudalism to capitalism as a whole to an event of a single day or the life of a single individual) are all as much part of the emerging mode as is a renewed recognition of the (vital but limited) strengths

42 Not because he is alone or the acknowledged leader in the sociological move towards a "new ethnography" which so obviously matches the "new narrative" in history but because, in so far as mastering the dialectic of narrative and theory is a matter of style, he is manifestly our best stylist. That there is more to it than just style is nicely pointed out by P. Rock, "Some Problems of Interpretative Historiography", Brit. Jl Sociology, xxvii (1976), pp. 353-69.
of narrative presentation. I am not sure that it is at all sensible or necessary to try to pin any sort of label to a movement of interest and effort that ranges from Perry Anderson to Norbert Elias, from Theda Skocpol on social revolutions to Dorothy Smith on mental illness, that must include not only Clarke, Critcher and Johnson on the making of working-class culture but also Dennis, Henriches and Slaughter as well as Raymond Williams, Edward Thompson and Lee Rainwater, that encompasses almost all of a twenty-year debate on slavery, that is represented by Sennett, Flandrin, Ariès and most of their respective critics, and that in the end often resides not so much in any particular studies in either history or sociology as in the possibility of debate between studies. If one must label the general tendency of this disparate, elusive but just discernible movement, something very inclusive and innocuous is called for: historical sociology perhaps?

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44 Which is perhaps why the irregular progress of the body of work as a whole is often best charted not in particular substantive works themselves but in monitoring critiques such as those of Johnson (“Culture and the Historians” and “Socialist-Humanist History”) and Burke (Sociology and History), and perhaps most constructively in that of Anderson (Arguments within English Marxism, London, 1980).