

## History of Anthropology Newsletter

### George and Me

James Clifford

I hope you'll indulge a personal reminiscence.

When HAN was founded in 1973, I was a graduate student in History at Harvard, just focusing on my dissertation. George Stocking visited Harvard sometime before that and offered a seminar for the Anthropology Department. I sat in on the course—our first encounter.

I recall virtually nothing from the class, except a distinct impression of its instructor's skeptical openness. He tolerated my half-baked ideas and sweeping critiques, while raising pointed objections. In any event, he didn't derail my growing inclination to pursue the intellectual history of anthropology.

I next encountered George in London a couple of years later. He was working hard on what would become *Victorian Anthropology*. I had a traveling fellowship and was based in Paris, supposedly researching a thesis that compared three national traditions, with sections on Boas, Malinowski, and the heirs of Durkheim.

Crossing the Channel, I dived into the Malinowski papers at LSE. After a week of confusion with Trobriand field-notes written in multiple languages, I paid a call on George in his rented digs. He served me tea and tried to be encouraging. It was clear to him, of course, that my comparative project was hopelessly ambitious.

Whenever I asked for guidance with the Malinowski section he dropped tantalizing hints about archives and sources---but without revealing much. I soon understood that he was far deeper into this than I would ever be, and that he wasn't about to share any hard-earned discoveries. He didn't exactly say "stay out of British Social Anthropology," but I got the message.

When I mentioned what I was beginning to focus on in Paris—20<sup>th</sup> century ethnology in its surrounding artistic and cultural milieu—his interest and encouragement were genuine.

So in negative and positive ways George helped me find my way. I returned to France, ready to unravel the Durkheim-Mauss-Lévi-Strauss lineage that was then all I really knew. I would spend my days in the library at the Musée de l'Homme, learning about Lucien Lévi Bruhl, Marcel Griaule, Denise Paulme, Maurice Leenhardt, Victor Segalen, Roger Caillois, Georges Bataille,... and chatting with Michel Leiris and Jean Jamin over coffee and Calvados in the atmospheric museum restaurant, "Le Totem."

I was never a real historian of anthropology, certainly not in the empirical/archival sense represented by George Stocking. Elsewhere I've distinguished my marginal/genealogical approach from his sustained, historicist project so I won't repeat that here.<sup>1</sup> I would just like to stress that, as something of a "literary"/ "theoretical" outlier, I always felt welcome in the collective endeavor inaugurated by HAN. George made space for me in the *History of Anthropology* editorial group. He welcomed my contributions (and edited them with his signature scrupulousness). The borderlands were open.

Re-launching HAN, at a new moment, means grappling with the constantly re-articulated forms of anthropology/ethnology/ethnography/museology. The territory needs to be clearly, but flexibly, defined--engaged with multiple institutional contexts, cross-cutting discourses, and political agendas. A complex performance.

Looking back, I can see that, in his always deliberate, always ambivalent, always imaginative way, George was showing how it's done.

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<sup>1</sup> Clifford, *On the Edges of Anthropology*, 2003. Chicago: Prckly Paradign Press, pp. 7-10.