

## DEEP NARRATIVES

1. *Deep History*<sup>1</sup> is an intellectual project and the attempt to build a new narration of human history, from the first technological artefacts to the contemporary age. The book has been subject to very little discussion by historians<sup>2</sup>, which is surprising since the aim of the book was to destroy historical periodization and the idea of history conceived in the nineteenth century. Moreover, its conceiver, and in part creator, Daniel Lord Smail, is a medieval historian. *Deep History* was preceded by another book published by Smail in 2007 as a prolegomenon<sup>3</sup>, half of which has a historiographical nature. Also for this reason I discuss both books together.

The way in which Smail explains his idea of history in his curriculum seems very interesting to me:

I work under the assumption that history is not a political science designed to explain the present. It is an anthropological science designed to help us understand humanity. In everything I do, I hope to show how the intellectual projects that drive transnational and global histories work equally well across time, and to offer the deep past as the new intellectual frontier of historical research and historical framing in the twenty-first century<sup>4</sup>.

Smail and Andrew Shryock succeeded in realizing a very consistent book with the contribution of nine experts with different competences, and no essay has only one author. The concerted effort attempts to build a wide narration capable of overriding the fragmentation of history in an open dialogue with archaeology, anthropology and naturalistic disciplines. Fascination and interest are linked to the big questions raised by Colin Renfrew in a book written seventy years after *Man Makes Himself* (1936) by Gordon Childe: «What are we? What does it mean to be human?»<sup>5</sup>. In a review of *Deep History* Harold Fromm noticed that: «the younger generation of novelists, poets, and even academics in the human sciences and the arts are writing more and more about the

implications of our ancient origins and the structures of our brain»<sup>6</sup>. Examples of this are the exhibitions *Neo-Prehistory – 100 Verbs* at the XXI Triennale di Milano International Exhibition<sup>7</sup> and *Ice Age Art*, held at the British Museum in 2013, with Upper Paleolithic sculptures and paintings side by side with Picasso, Gustave Courbet, André Derain, Lucian Freud, Jacob Epstein, George Brassai, and Marc Quinn, taking a deep perspective to represent the human desire to communicate<sup>8</sup>.

2. The ambition of the book is to build a bridge between humanities and scientific disciplines, between prehistory and history, between the Paleolithic and contemporary age. Colin Renfrew has offered an eloquent critique of the book, and quoting Claude Lévi-Strauss defined it as a «robinsonade»<sup>9</sup>. Renfrew is definitely right in pointing out the gaps in narration:

The origins of complex society in Sumer, Egypt, the Indus and China are nowhere discussed. Likewise, the ancient worlds of Athens and Rome and their Chinese equivalent, Chang'an, are not mentioned. More seriously (since they are too often omitted from traditional grand narratives), the great pre-Columbian societies of Mexico and Peru scarcely figure. We meet no Incas or Aztecs. The names of the great cities of their ancestors, such as Teotihuacán or Monte Albán or Chan Chan, are not mentioned in text or index. It is as if History had never been.

His critique is built on two questions:

By stressing the very remote past of the hunter-gatherers of the Paleolithic era and then leaping to the modernity of today's world, without much emphasis on the intervening ancient world of Greece and Rome or the earlier civilizations of Sumer and Egypt (or indeed of the Incas and the Aztecs), do the authors risk recreating the Noble Savage? By underplaying the ancient civilizations, from Shang China to the Olmec of Mesoamerica, are they perhaps jumping from savagery to modernity without having sufficiently considered the mediating effects of barbarism or of early civilization?

Perhaps the background of a part of the critique lies also on the fact that Renfrew was included (for example by Clive Gamble) among the theorists defending the idea of stage development (savagery/barbarism/modernity) according to the Gordon Childe' model<sup>10</sup>. Indeed, in Renfrew the idea of «true written history» is present, and in his opinion:

The most glaring omission from *Deep History* is any discussion of the origins of literacy or of the social contexts in which it emerged in different

parts of the world. For literacy was not only the means to written history but to the whole field of what the psychologist Merlin Donald, in his 1991 book *Origins of the Modern Mind*, termed «external symbolic storage». Only with literacy and then the printing press (and now the computer) could the cognitive revolution that is the most striking feature of human history be accomplished.

However, perhaps one of the tasks of the book is to critique this idea and perspective. The short chronology of writing and that of the Neolithic Revolution (Childe) are absorbed by an increasingly deeper chronology grounded on the dating of early artifacts (Oldowan Chopper, 2.6 million years ago). The evidence of social complexity and cognitive capabilities found in the remains of Mount Albán, Teotihuacán or Chan Chan, three examples mentioned by Renfrew, is possibly akin to that found at the pre-neolithic monumental remains of Göbleki Tepe, 10,000 years earlier.

3. The book has not been subject to much discussion by historians. Yet, one of the main themes of *Deep History*, as well as Smail's other book<sup>11</sup>, is historiography (the narrative forms of modern historiography). Other themes are inspired by the «biological turn» and neurosciences, but also in this case the matter is historiographical. The book's title immediately suggests the theme of chronology. The subtitle clearly states that the structures of human history between past and present are its theme, but also states that one of the book's tasks is to define «a new architecture for human history» and propose a new narration of human history. The keywords, in eight essays, are: *Body, Energy and Ecosystems, Language, Food, Kinship, Migration, Goods, Scale*. In this perspective, history can become the crowning discipline able to form a dialogue with and assimilate other disciplines. It can be the framework of all knowledge or be absorbed by naturalistic disciplines and neurosciences.

The investigation into narrative forms of modern historiography, which was at the core of *On Deep History and the Brain*<sup>12</sup>, is recalled in the first two chapters of *Deep History*, documenting the nineteenth-century historiographical building of a «short chronology» of history made by the written sources and the origin of the idea of prehistory in the 60s («the time revolution of the 1860s»). The distinction between history and prehistory is built on the short chronology of all the disciplines (history, philosophy, literature) grounded on written texts not older than 5,500 years. At the end of the Nineteenth century, the «deep time» discovered by geologists and naturalists compelled historians to relinquish the short chronology of sacred history, replaced however

by a chronology likewise short through the contrast between history (written sources) and prehistory. The biblical chronology is actually restored with the chronology of the invention of writing. Smail cites the most important late nineteenth-century introductory handbook for the study of history and perhaps its most famous passage: «Faute de documents, l'histoire d'immenses périodes du passé de l'humanité est à jamais inconnaissable. Car rien ne supplée aux documents: pas de documents, pas d'histoire»<sup>13</sup>. If documents are only written sources, ninety-five percent of human history is «inconnaissable»; but in truth in Seignobos traces also include, «quelquefois», the material sources<sup>14</sup>.

The chronology of social sciences became longer or shorter from time to time. Modernity has been dated at post 1750, and metaphors are birth, origins and revolution; but at the same time, according to Shryock and Smail, the conditions for recovering the deepest dimension of human history were put in place<sup>15</sup>.

The historiographical reconstruction is in part the continuation of *On Deep History and the Brain*. In *Deep History* the historiographical essay (*Imagining the Human in Deep Time*) was written by two anthropologists and by a prehistoric archaeologist. It outlines an intellectual project that is able to link the present with the most remote past of human species and of hominids through the use of models and concepts or metaphors: *kinshipping*, exchange, extension, hospitality, genealogy. These are concepts that have been developed and tested for some time, in different forms, by anthropologists and historians. The intellectual project has original features, but includes few references to the twentieth-century historiographical currents: one cannot speak about deep history and ignore Marc Bloch or *Storia notturna*<sup>16</sup>.

4. Shryock and Smail attempt to remove the barriers between «deep history» and «shallow history». But when does history begin? The depth of Shryock and Smail is different from that of Jack Goody, as it is different from that of «Big History», which starts from the Big Bang<sup>17</sup>. The interest in the comparison with Goody, who started from the Bronze Age<sup>18</sup> and agreed with the chronology provided by Childe, lies in the fact that at least four of the central elements of Goody's (and Renfrew's) interpretation – writing, cities, trade, religion – are largely overlooked by all the authors of *Deep History*. In *Deep History* not even art and paleo-art are considered, though constituting, perhaps, the most evident trace of the neurological system's transformations and development into the modern human mind<sup>19</sup>. There are however food and the culture of goods: *Food and Goods* are probably the most engaging essays in the collection.

Preparation, cooking and sharing of food and material goods are traces of the «beginning», which still remains an open question. In Clive Gamble, co-author of the more historiographical essay (*Imagining the Human in Deep Time*) and of the essay *Migration*, the «beginning» is linked to the first traces of artifacts, seen as «material metaphors» or «embodied metaphors», prostheses with symbolic meaning and relational and communicative social tools. Through the critical discussion of the concept of origin and revolution, Gamble goes beyond the distinction/contrast between history and prehistory<sup>20</sup>, in tune with Shryock and Smail<sup>21</sup>. In historiography, chronology and periodization are often predefined, starting from titles of essays and books, more because of the formal separation of disciplines and academic reasons than for scientific reasons. In historical reconstruction the «start date» is always arbitrary. In archeology it is likewise arbitrary but connected to findings and their interpretation, or to the re-interpretation of artifacts and bones by means of new techniques. In this perspective history becomes deeper and deeper.

5. However, the most important thing is perhaps the idea of how to develop a plot and tell a new story, history with a wide and deep breath: «a revamped historical imagination that sees deep and shallow history as analytical contexts that can endlessly reshape each other once they are allowed to speak to each other»<sup>22</sup>. And what theme should be selected as the fulcrum of the narration? In *On Deep History and the Brain*, as we will see, brain and the endocrine system were the narrative focus. If historical imagination seems to echo the idea close to Jules Michelet, perhaps the human condition emerging from *Deep History* includes the idea of the existence of a single culture as in Claude Lévi-Strauss (the deep structures of the «esprit humain», the «structure innée [unconscious] de l'esprit humain»). *La Pensée sauvage* (1962) outlined a general theory of culture from a humanistic and philosophical perspective, without providing, however, scientific evidence<sup>23</sup>. The new perspective is grounded on archaeological data, with the contribution of biology, chemistry, taphonomy and DNA analysis. The new archive of human history includes artifacts, writing, genetic data («the archive contained within us») and digital data (data, and especially connections)<sup>24</sup>.

6. Why should these perspectives be of interest to historians, as well as modern and contemporary historians? The subject matter can be the traditional questions of social history: exchange, trade, gift exchange, hospitality, conspicuous and social consumption of food, ornaments, material culture; migrations; the structuring and delimiting of space,

and material bases of concepts of possession and jurisdiction; energy and technology; control over resources; power and social stratification; the symbolic building of authority; predation and the building of states and empires<sup>25</sup>.

It is true, as Renfrew remarked, that in *Deep History* there is not much history of great ancient civilizations, but I find it very interesting to compare the *chiefdoms* of Polynesia with those of the Bronze Age in Europe, or those in Mesoamerica between the VI and XVI centuries<sup>26</sup> with an unfinished state such as the Bourgogne dukedom or a failed state such as Libya after Gaddafi. Body ornaments of animal origin, shell necklaces and deer teeth from the upper Paleolithic are forms of individualization and social communication. Necklaces and other portable items were used to build political alliances and economic networks, much like credit cards or smartphones<sup>27</sup>. One can make an analytical comparison between Göbleki Tepe megalithic structures and the Mycenaean palace of Pilo or the Sacred Mount of Varallo. One can study the *henge* monuments in Great Britain or country chapels as reference points for the entire territory, and as forms of «engagement with the material world» or the production of locality<sup>28</sup>. One can also compare the forms of sharing food around a campfire in a Neolithic settlement in the Euphrates Valley, at a Renaissance wedding banquet or having a meal in front of the TV in the United States in the 50s<sup>29</sup>. One can compare the Last Glacial Maximum (23,500-19,000 BP) with the little ice age (XV-XIX centuries) – which perhaps did not leave archaeological traces –, and the very recent global warming. Can one apply the same analysis to the cities of the Indus Valley civilizations and Mesopotamic cities, to pre-Columbian cities in Mesoamerica and 21st century cities? One can write world history by starting from communication tools, from *talking drums* to cell phones. Similarities and not dissimilarities are the most intriguing or, perhaps, especially the relations between different phenomena in time and space, or recombination; forms and variations can constitute historical and anthropological research fields. One of the purposes of *Deep History* is to create new metaphors in order to narrate the past and link the past to the future: maybe the most interesting metaphors are distance and perspective.

According to the editors, in history, as opposed to what happens in anthropology or sociology, dates, short chronology and fragmentation do not allow for singling out the universal features and temporal depth of practices such as gift exchange, hospitality, the sharing of food, decorations. Indeed, one theme of the book concerns building networks of relationships (kinshipping: «moving through time and space by means of relationship and exchange»<sup>30</sup>), through sharing and cooperation, so-

ciality, exchange, solidarity and collaboration, brutality, competition and conflict<sup>31</sup>. Friendship and inequalities, obligations and legal bonds created by the conveyance of goods and things, debt<sup>32</sup> and credit, competition for prestige and status, expenditure, relations with material goods, valuable objects and goods, material realities and institutional facts<sup>33</sup> are also topics for historians and anthropologists. Just as broad for comparison are the Neolithic circulation of jadeite axes and the kula ring or the trade of porcelain and pearls, tulip bulbs, diamonds and relics, shells or smartphones. They are forms and variations around materials and objects that are also the sources of archaeological research, as well as material or transcribed sources of historical research.

The general anthropological and historical theme is the construction of the material world: material realities of power and prestige, the material evidence of ritual and ceremony, or material bases of cognitive systems and symbolic behaviors. The difference between remote past and present is perhaps only in scale<sup>34</sup>. One can work on similarities or analogies between completely different cases; one can rewind the film by starting from far away. Different cases can throw light on one another, and one can search for general principles or questions in minute facts, on a local level<sup>35</sup>. But in *Deep History* this possibility is only suggested perhaps by the idea of entanglement between «shallow history» and «deep history».

7. However, a crucial problem, that the book does not sufficiently tackle and discuss, is above all the social production of sources, from material to digital evidence, from physical traces to archives, from monuments to documents. Shryok and Smail's idea is that «many of the analytical techniques employed by archaeologists, evolutionary ecologists, and paleoanthropologists can in fact be applied to ancient and contemporary societies alike [...] Histories can be written from every type of trace, from the memoir to the bone fragments and the blood type»<sup>36</sup>. However, there is no sign in the book of a critical and philological work on texts, monuments, objects and images. Smail's interest in particular is addressed to information that, like sediment, is accidentally and involuntarily contained in documents. In the prolegomenon to *Deep History* we can read this assertive passage:

This absence of intention or even awareness means that we can trust the facts that emerge from this analysis in just the same way that we can never really trust the facts intentionally conveyed by notaries and their clients. The unintended meanings found in all documents are like sediments that have precipitated out of solution. Gather up that sediment. Add water and stir.

What you have now is something resembling the original solution, what the French might call a *mentalité*, and from this we can write our histories<sup>37</sup>.

Smail associates such research style with that of paleontologists and geneticists. It is not Marc Bloch's idea of searching in documents for something that was not intended by the authors, the idea here is that «ce qu'il a de plus profond en histoire pourrait bien être aussi ce qu'il y a de plus sûr» or the search for «choses profondes»<sup>38</sup>. Bloch confronted psychologists and argued against their skepticism on historical records, and in *The Royal Touch* highlighted the interactions and tension between two interpretations (of religious phenomena) only apparently contradictory, between «l'oeuvre consciente d'une pensée individuelle» and «l'expression de forces sociales, profondes et obscures»<sup>39</sup>. Instead, in Smail's book, sediments and *mentalité* take us directly to the second part of the proposal and to the concept that the essence of historical processes lies in neurochemistry. Smail, in *On Deep History and the Brain*<sup>40</sup>, proposes this method to overcome the separation between history and prehistory, and between «shallow history» and «deep history». In the project sediments and *mentalité* become the grounds of a paradigm borrowed by neurosciences and actually denying intentionality. Here the risk is to hypostasize a number of unconscious and abstract forms. And the new paradigm presents some difficulties, since I believe that all archaeological documents, artifacts before writing, as well as written documents, are direct or indirect traces of intentional and conscious activity.

8. If from a biological and anatomical viewpoint Upper Paleolithic *Homo sapiens* and Dolní Věstonice men and women (25-30,000 years ago) were exactly the same as we are, and if the hardware (human genome) is at least 60,000 year old, then evolution is violently cultural, without a precise direction. It contains forms and variations, and extraordinary flexibility and versatility, in very diverse ecological environments, from desert to arctic<sup>41</sup>.

Cultural evolution depends on the intensification of social relations and relational «material engagement»<sup>42</sup>, experience, learning, and on upbringing. Instead, Smail's perspective is based on hardware. A central issue in neurosciences is the idea that some biological universals exist<sup>43</sup>, and in an essentially naturalistic conception of mental functions. Smail has taken the «neuro-turn» seriously and tried to go beyond the divisions of disciplines: with what path and proposals? Smail digs up two exceptional essays by Clifford Geertz<sup>44</sup>, and the idea of «reciprocally creative relationship» between biology and culture, between



Pliocene and Pleistocene. Relying on the literature until the Sixties, Geertz claimed that «this type of reciprocally creative relationship between somatic and extrasomatic phenomena seems to have been of crucial significance during the whole of the primate advance [the Ice Age]»<sup>45</sup>. In the first essay, Geertz faced the question of cultural universals and pointed out a number of escape routes from the actualist and naturalist conception of human nature; in the second essay, he critically discussed theories on the evolution of the human mind. The escape routes are in the example of the Chartres cathedral, and in the concept that ideas and emotions are cultural artifacts<sup>46</sup>.

In Smail's works, the central themes are the evolution and dialogue with the interpretive paradigms constructed – also in conflicting forms – by post 1980 neurosciences and neuroculture in between the «biological turn» and the «neuro-turn», and make up the most experimental and constructive part of *On Deep History and the Brain*. The «biological turn» is perhaps the other side of the «cultural turn» or vice versa, and this is the reason why Geertz's essays are methodologically so important. Geertz faced the problem of autonomy of culture and different individual stories, but identified a common element: a set of behavior «control mechanisms» that developed in synchrony with biological evolution during the Ice Age; however, later transformations are dominated by the social and cultural environment<sup>47</sup>. Smail employs hypotheses by neuroscientists to interpret and reinterpret the past and the present, and to link the remote past with the present. He criticizes Geertz's cultural interpretation: «genes are still there, and they make a difference»<sup>48</sup>. Yes, but genetic mechanisms are extremely slow and do not regulate cultural transmission and innovation. Cognitive archaeology claims that the transformations in *homo sapiens* over the last 60,000 years are not attributable to genetic structure. Smail seems to confuse or overlap brain and mind. The concept of mind contains both unconscious brain processes and intelligent action, material reality of symbols, the network of social relations – and the latter are the research fields for historians, anthropologists and archaeologists<sup>49</sup>. Intentional and significant actions – giving rise to the documentary traces historians work on – have a cognitive, a material, a physical and a social component. Neurosciences gave Smail the notion that the brain and endocrine system are plastic, malleable and open to environmental and cultural influences. That is to say, according to Smail's translation, they have a deep history. However, the term plasticity («brain plasticity» or «neural plasticity») – which is central in latest generation of neurosciences – is a very generic term: how can it be adopted by historians for a «neuroscientific approach to the past?»<sup>50</sup>. Smail inquires what contribution

neurosciences can give to go beyond the contrasts between history and prehistory (biology and culture, intentionality and emotions, history and natural sciences), in order to open an interdisciplinary building site, and to expand the repertoire of sources and questions for the historian. I have no doubt about this latter point, but replacing the «human agency» with a «neural agency» can have a high cognitive price. In the «neurohistorical perspective» sketched by Smail the device is the brain, and the brain is the fulcrum of a new historical narration. The – controversial – theory of «modular brain» makes it possible to set out an uninterrupted narration from the Paleolithic to the contemporary age: modules are specialized areas of the brain and are interpreted as fossils (stratigraphic deposit?) of a very long evolutionary process; the architecture of the mind becomes the architecture of the past and the present, the subtitle of *Deep History*. Cultural differences are related to psychotropic regimens. The historical example Smail focuses on is the achievement of a «psychotropic economy» and «autotropic commodities» in the Eighteenth Century: sugar, coffee, chocolate, tobacco, but also novels and erotic literature («addictive substances»). Does culture work as a biological phenomenon? Is culture wired in our brain? Is the chemical language of mind and body a universal language with a deep history? Smail never states that the laws of genetics govern cultural transmission and innovation, but considers «control mechanisms» on par with genes, compares the meme theory of Richard Dawkins and adopts its idea of «extended phenotype»<sup>51</sup>. This seems to be an option for generalizations of natural sciences against the individualism of some human sciences and the idea of action and individual creativity, a form of naturalization of culture and human behaviors, according to David Sepkoski «a kind of biological structuralism»<sup>52</sup>. But what is the historical evidence of a process of neurochemical transformation and manipulation of brain and body, from the Neolithic to global capitalism, supported by a set of «mood-altering practices», from music to rituals, from coffee to cocaine, from gossip to pornography, from shopping to the internet, from sugar to vitamins and psychoactive drugs? Or historical and documentary evidence of the psychotropic effects of substances, practices and institutions<sup>53</sup>? Substances have different effects on neurotransmitters<sup>54</sup>; however, the new forms of sociability are the historical theme as well as the transformation from elite consumption of energizing and stimulating products into mass consumption. Smail's thesis is that the chemical modulation of body and mind has accelerated in the last three hundred years; a new tectonic phase (that would coincide with the Anthropocene?) defined by neurotransmitters, endogenous

and exogenous, and by the evolution of psychotropic mechanisms<sup>55</sup>. The conclusion, in an extreme version, is the following:

To acknowledge the role of psychotropic mechanisms in the development of human societies is to see that what passes for progress in human civilization is often nothing more than new developments in the art of changing body chemistry<sup>56</sup>.

Since the Neolithic (agriculture, livestock farming and stable settlements), for the elites the manipulation of neurochemistry would have been more important than control over resources, trade or accumulation of wealth (precious materials, exotic and rare goods).

When reading these pages I wondered, without finding a convincing answer, whether brain biology can define a broader or more complex cultural context for history; whether it can bring to light a certain number of common intellectual problems and questions; what the relationship is between the hypotheses and empirical approximation of neurosciences and the empirical research of historians; what benefits history can obtain by adopting the terminology of neurosciences<sup>57</sup>. Can one do historical, anthropological or sociological research with the help of mirror neurons? Can one uncritically adopt the hypotheses of neurological research, taken as (objective and universal) scientific evidence<sup>58</sup>?

Only a small part of such themes, which were developed by Smail in other theoretical essays and research experiments<sup>59</sup>, are considered in *Deep History* in the essay entitled *Body*. The body, like the mind, has been modelled by tools, understood as prostheses, and by social relationships and relations with the material world<sup>60</sup>, and genealogy of body is the scaffold of deep history. Body and mind, like material traces, monuments and archives, give physical existence to history<sup>61</sup>. A short paragraph, «The Long Reach of the Nervous System», makes reference to the dialogue with neurosciences from an anthropological perspective (with the contribution of Andrew Shryoch?) that tones down certain biological essentialism traits of *On Deep History and the Brain*. However, the essay is built on the idea of culture as evolutionary adaptation. As a conclusion, it tries to provide in-depth Foucauldian concepts of biopower and biopolitics. The idea/wish is to build «a new approach to political science in which power is interpreted as the adroit manipulation of the nervous systems of others»<sup>62</sup>.

9. The themes and perspectives of deep history are interesting, and fascinating. The fascination led my incursion into a field of research far from my usual sphere of competence. Throughout my reading, some

of which sought after and some just discovered by chance, one of the essays that I appreciated the most grounds a possible generalization on the reinterpretation of an essay by Marcel Mauss. Mauss' essay, *Essai sur les variations saisonnières des sociétés eskimos* (1904-5), concluded with two methodologically clear hypotheses: the seasonal variations in Eskimo social life, characterized by different and conflicting economic, legal and moral forms, perhaps reveal a general organization model for societies («une loi qui est, probablement, d'une très grande généralité»); an in-depth study of a case can be, rather than the accumulation of observations and deductions, sufficient to prove a general law («une loi d'une extrême généralité»)<sup>63</sup>. David Wengrow, an archaeologist, and David Graeber, an anthropologist, took the first hypothesis and reconsidered the issues of social evolution, cultural complexity, authority, ritual and social stratification, equality and inequality between the Paleolithic and Neolithic<sup>64</sup>. In Mauss' essay, seasonal variations, between collective and hierarchical winter aggregation and individualistic summer dispersion, brought to light social forms and power structures, authority and prestige consciously constructed and destroyed. Wengrow and Graeber used the Mauss model to prove that pre-Neolithic hunters and gatherers seasonally swung between egalitarian and hierarchical political forms, and that there is no necessary evolution between the two. The Mauss model can also be used to reinterpret Pierre Clastres, as Wengrow and Graeber do, or to read James Scott<sup>65</sup>, and the double morphology can be used to interpret transhumance and alpine pastures, seasonal migrations and agricultural cycles, the exchange circuit and the market places, the noble elite seasonal estates, the city and the countryside, factory and farm work, office work and summer holidays<sup>66</sup>.

10. The interest in the two books I have discussed lies above all in the proposal of new questions, and the idea of looking into social matters, forms and processes from a different perspective, from a different distance; the experimental capacity to move, also disorderly, in time and space, in order to search for traces and elements; the search for ways, themes and narrative structures to incorporate and package shallow history in deep history or vice versa. In any case, different periodizations are possible, and time and space are not predefined.

The perspective of *Deep History* can be helpful to give a broader view to the contextual study of variations and versatility<sup>67</sup>. The great interpretations offered by prehistorical archaeologists are grounded on research conducted on site, and the site can be understood as the trace of human activity from any age or function<sup>68</sup>. The microscopic research carried out by microhistorians makes sense if it is inspired by questions

of a general nature and in a comprehensive perspective. However, the embrace with the «biological turn» and neurosciences could deprive this exercise of meaning.

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## Notes

1 A. SHRYOCK, D.L. SMAIL, *Deep History. The Architecture of Past and Present*, Berkeley-Los Angeles 2011. Shryock and Smail are editors of the book and co-authors of essays included in it. Other essays were written by three historians, two anthropologists, a linguist, a primatologist, a geneticist and three archaeologists.

2 <http://scholar.harvard.edu/smail/reviews>.

3 D.L. SMAIL, *On Deep History and the Brain*, Berkeley 2007. The book was translated into Italian in 2017 by the publisher Bollati Boringhieri (Torino) under the title *Storia profonda. Il cervello umano e l'origine della storia*.

4 <http://scholar.harvard.edu/smail/biocv>.

5 C. RENFREW, *Prehistory: The Making of the Human Mind*, London 2007, p. ix; ID., *Figuring It Out: The Parallel Visions of Artists and Archaeologists*, London 2003.

6 E. FROMM, *How We Became So Beautiful and Bright: Deep History and Evolutionary Anthropology*, in «Hudson Review», 65 (2012), pp. 19-35.

7 The exhibition was curated by Andrea Branzi and Kenya Hara: Exhibition Catalogue, Lars Müller Publishers, Zürich 2016. One hundred verbs (from «exist» to «regenerate») and one hundred tools, from a stone axe to an endoscopic capsule, from an arrowhead to a drone, from flint to silicon, to certify the uncertainties of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and draw the trajectory of desires of human beings through their incessant relation with tools and objects. A very similar exercise was done by N. MACGREGOR, *A History of the World in 100 Objects*, London 2010.

8 J. COOK, *Ice Age Art. The arrival of the modern mind*, London 2013.

9 C. RENFREW, *Bridging the Millennia*, in «American Scientist», January-February 2012.

10 C. GAMBLE, *The anthropology of deep history*, in «Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute», 21 (2014), pp. 147-64, p. 152: «modernity, or the achievement of modernity, is the hidden grand narrative in works such as Gordon Childe's *Man makes himself* (1936), Grahame Clark's vision of *World prehistory in new perspective* (1961), and Colin Renfrew's *Prehistory: making of the human mind* (2007)».

11 SMAIL, *On Deep History* cit.

12 Which rephrases a previous essay by Smail: D.L. SMAIL, *The Grip of Sacred History*, in «American Historical Review», 110 (2005), pp. 1337-61.

13 C.V. LANGLOIS, C. SEIGNOBOS, *Introduction aux études historiques*, Paris 1898, p. 29, cited by SMAIL, *On Deep History* cit., p. 46.

14 LANGLOIS, SEIGNOBOS, *Introduction* cit., p. 178-9; C. SEIGNOBOS, *La méthode historique appliquée aux sciences sociales*, Paris 1901, p. 4.

15 SHRYOCK, SMAIL, *Deep History* cit, pp. 11-5.

<sup>16</sup> M. BLOCH, *Les rois thaumaturges* (1924) [*The Royal Touch*, London 1973], but also a substantial chapter of *Apologie pour l'histoire* (II. *L'observation historique: «L'observation du passé, même d'un passé très reculé, est-il sûr qu'elle soit toujours à ce point "indirect?"»*), p. 18. [*The Historian's Craft*, Manchester 1992]; C. GINZBURG, *Storia notturna. Una decifrazione del sabba*, Torino 1989 [*Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath*, Chicago 1991].

<sup>17</sup> D. CHRISTIAN, *Maps of Time: An Introduction to Big History*, Berkeley-Los Angeles 2004; F. SPIER, *Big History and the Future of Humanity*, Malden MA, 2010.

<sup>18</sup> The idea of «Bronze Age revolution» is the common thread of Goody's most important works. In SHRYOCK, SMAIL, *Deep History only Cooking, Cuisine and Class* (Cambridge 1982) is quoted.

<sup>19</sup> Cfr. COOK, *Ice Age Art* cit.

<sup>20</sup> C. GAMBLE, *Origins and Revolutions: Human Identity in Early Prehistory*, Cambridge 2007, ID., *The anthropology of deep history* cit.; ID., *The Death of Prehistory*, in «Quaderni storici», 151 (2016), pp. 284-9 (Forum *History and Archaeology*).

<sup>21</sup> See D.L. SMAIL, A. SHRYOCK, *History and the Pre*, in «American Historical Review», 118 (2013), pp. 1-29.

<sup>22</sup> SHRYOCK, SMAIL, *Deep History* cit., p. 20.

<sup>23</sup> *The Savage Mind*, London 1966.

<sup>24</sup> C. GAMBLE, *Settling the Earth. The Archaeology of Deep History*, Cambridge 2014, Box 1.1. *The sources of evidence for deep and shallow history*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>25</sup> Examples are very numerous, starting from iconography (e.g. the Standard of Ur and Lachish reliefs) and ancient texts: the most surprising and concise passage is in Xenophon's *Anabasis*: «From there Cyrus marched five stages, thirty parasangs, to the sources of the Dardas river, the width of which is a plethrum. There was the palace of Belesys, the late ruler of Syria and a very large and beautiful park containing all the products of the seasons. But Cyrus cut down the park and burned the palace» (*Anabasis*, I, 4, 10). The cleverest reflections on the building of states are still those by Charles Tilly, for example *War Making and State Making as Organized Crime*, in *Bringing the State Back*, edited by P. Evans, D. Rueschemeyer, T. Skocpol, Cambridge 1985; cf. also J. SCOTT, *The Art of Not Being Governed*, Yale 2009. The most recent example is ISIS or DAESH: the attempt to build a Sunnite state begins with predation.

<sup>26</sup> See Timothy Earle's works (e.g. *How Chiefs Come to Power*, Princeton 1997). The general theme is perhaps the institutionalization of domination.

<sup>27</sup> See the essay *Goods*, maybe the most engaging because of its broadness and sharpness in making comparisons. Shryock introduces the comparison between «shell beads» and credit cards: «a single genealogy» («The New York Times», Sept. 26, 2011).

<sup>28</sup> C. RENFREW, *Commodification and Institution in Group-Oriented and Individualizing Societies*, in «Proceedings of the British Academy», 110 (2001), pp. 93-117; A. TORRE, *Luoghi. La produzione di località in età moderna e contemporanea*, Rome 2011.

<sup>29</sup> See M. JONES, *Feast. Why Humans Share Food*, Oxford 2007.

<sup>30</sup> SHRYOCK, SMAIL, *Deep History* cit., p. 32.

<sup>31</sup> «As we relate, so we create»: GAMBLE, *The anthropology of deep history* cit.

<sup>32</sup> E.g., D. GRAEBER, *Debt. The First 5,000 Years*, New York 2011.

<sup>33</sup> The idea that Colin Renfrew took from John Searle (J.R. SEARLE, *The Construction of Social Reality*, New York 1995). Renfrew's conclusion is that many realities in the modern world can be viewed as institutional facts, themselves produced by concepts and social relationships developed many millennia ago, in prehistoric times: RENFREW, *Prehistory* cit., chapter 10.

<sup>34</sup> SHRYOCK, SMAIL, *Deep History* cit., cap. 10, *Scale*.

<sup>35</sup> This idea is not new: cf. C. GEERTZ, *Local Knowledge*, New York 1983, pp. 11, 167, and also ID., *The Interpretation of Culture*, New York 1973: «[s]mall facts speak to large issues» (p. 23). Can the Geertz's *thickness* be combined with Smail's *depth*?

<sup>36</sup> SHRYOCK, SMAIL, *Deep History* cit., pp. 12-3; SMAIL, *On Deep History* cit., p. 6: «Like written documents, all these traces encode information about the past». This idea is perhaps not shared and practiced enough among historians.

<sup>37</sup> Ivi, p. 65. In French historiography the concept of *mentalité* actually refers to a psychic entity.

<sup>38</sup> From *Réflexions d'un historien sur les fausses nouvelles de la guerre* (1921) to *Les Rois taumaturghes* (1924) and *Apologie pour l'histoire* (1943).

<sup>39</sup> *Les Rois taumaturghes*, Paris 1961, pp. 85-6 [*The Royal Touch* cit., pp. 46-7].

<sup>40</sup> Chapters 4 and 5: «The New Neurohistory» and «Civilization and Psychotropy».

<sup>41</sup> For an excellent example of «non-progressive flexibility in the face of environmental opportunities and technological change», see P. ROWLEY-CONWY, *Introduction: human occupation of the Arctic*, in «World Archaeology», 30 (1999), pp. 349-53.

<sup>42</sup> See the monograph collection of «Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B», Volume 63/1499 (2008, Jun 12): *The Sapient Mind: archaeology meets neuroscience*.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. S. CASPER, *History and Neuroscience. An Integrative Legacy*, in «Isis», 105 (2014), pp. 123-32.

<sup>44</sup> *The Impact of the Concept of Culture on the Concept of Man* (1966), and *The Growth of Culture and the Evolution of Mind* (1962), in GEERTZ, *The Interpretation of Cultures* cit., pp. 33-83.

<sup>45</sup> Ivi, p. 68.

<sup>46</sup> Ivi, pp. 50-1: «Our ideas, our values, our acts, even our emotions, are, like our nervous system itself, cultural products – products manufactured, indeed, out of tendencies, capacities, and dispositions with which we were born, but manufactured nonetheless. Chartres is made of stone and glass. But it is not just stone and glass; it is a cathedral, and not only a cathedral, but a particular cathedral built at a particular time by certain members of a particular society. To understand what it means, to perceive it for what it is, you need to know rather more than the generic properties of stone and glass and rather more than what is common to all cathedrals. You need to understand also – and, in my opinion, most critically – the specific concepts of the relations among God, man, and architecture that, since they have governed its creation, it consequently embodies. It is no different with men: they, too, every last one of them, are cultural artifacts».

<sup>47</sup> Ivi, p. 45: «The “control mechanism” view of culture begins with the assumption that human thought is basically both social and public – that its natural habitat is the house yard, the marketplace, and the town square».

<sup>48</sup> D.L. SMAIL, *Neurohistory in Action: Hoarding and the Human Past*, in «Isis», 105 (2014), p. 113.

<sup>49</sup> I believe that the conditions for a possible dialogue between history and neurosciences are the same as those of archaeology: cf. *The Sapient Mind* cit. and the methodological essays by Colin Renfrew; in short, RENFREW, *Prehistory* cit., chapter 6: «Toward a prehistory of mind».

<sup>50</sup> «A neurohistorical perspective on human history is built around the plasticity of the synapses that link a universal emotion, such as disgust, to a particular objector stimulus, a plasticity that allows culture to embed itself in physiology»: SMAIL, *On Deep History* cit., p. 115.

<sup>51</sup> Ivi, pp. 94-5, 119. Thereafter, Smail refined the notion in light of epigenetics.

<sup>52</sup> Review in «Isis», 99 (2008), pp. 820-1.

<sup>53</sup> Perhaps Smail is conscious of it: «although we cannot “see” stress hormones in the historical record, we can plausibly infer the presence of stress in situations involving violence, humiliation, and poverty. Stress is interesting as a historical subject because it allows us to write a human history framed in the context of an ongoing dialectic between the stress-response system

on the one hand and human institutions, practices, and patterns of behavior on the other»: D.L. SMAIL, *Neuroscience and the dialectics of history*, in «Analyse Social», XLVII (2012), pp. 894-909, p. 898. Examples of historical research in *Violence and Predation in Late Medieval Mediterranean Europe*, in «Comparative Studies in Society and History», 54 (2012), pp. 7-34; *Debt, Humiliation, and Stress in Fourteenth-Century Lucca and Marseille*, in B. SÈRE, J. WETTFLAUFER (eds), *Shame Between Punishment and Penance: The Social Usages of Shame in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times*, Florence 2012. For a summary see D.L. SMAIL, *Psychotropy and the Patterns of Power in Human History*, in E. RUSSEL (ed.), *Environment, Culture, and the Brain: New Explorations in Neurohistory*, «RCC Perspective», 12 (2012), pp. 43-7.

<sup>54</sup> An example in advertising I stumbled upon is *NeuroMood Pure Pack – Pure Encapsulations*: «support for healthy neurotransmitter function, positive mood and emotional wellness».

<sup>55</sup> «Psychotropy is one of the fundamental conditions of modernity», SMAIL, *On Deep History* cit., p. 164.

<sup>56</sup> Ivi, p. 188. See the critical discussion in W.M. REDDY, *Neuroscience and the Fallacies of Functionalism*, in «History & Theory», 49 (2010), pp. 412-25 and R. LEYS, *The Turn to Affect: A Critique*, in «Critical Inquiry», 37 (2011), pp. 465-6.

<sup>57</sup> An example of fruitful dialogue is that between brain biology and the history of art with regard to the theme of visual perception, starting with Ernst Kris and Ernst Gombrich. See E.R. KANDEL, *The Age of Insight: the quest to understand the unconscious in art, mind, and brain from Vienna 1900 to the present*, New York 2016. In a dialogue with psychologists, in 1924 (the year of publication of *The Royal Touch*), Marcel Mauss emphasized the subordination of the psychological dimension to the sociological one, on the risk of separating collective representations and collective psychology from their concrete material substratum, and the need for a combined investigation of three elements, «le corp, l'esprit et la société [le milieu sociale]»: M. MAUSS, *Rapport réels et pratiques de la psychologie et de la sociologie*, in ID., *Sociologie et anthropologie*, Paris 1980, pp. 281-310 [*Real and practical relations between psychology and sociology*, in ID., *Sociology and Psychology: Essays*, London 1979, pp. 1-33].

<sup>58</sup> The book has been discussed critically, especially by historians of science.

<sup>59</sup> SMAIL, *Neurohistory in Action* cit., pp. 110-22 (in the title there is perhaps an echo of Bruno Latour); ID., *The Rhythms of Vengeance in Late Medieval Marseille*, in C. GAUVARD, A. ZORZI (eds), *La vengeance en Europe, XIIe-XVIIIe siècle*, Paris 2015, pp. 75-99.

<sup>60</sup> On this specific issue, cf. GAMBLE, *The anthropology of deep history* cit.; ID. et al., *The Social Brain and the Shape of the Paleolithic*, in «Cambridge Archaeological Journal», 21 (2011), pp. 115-36; F. COWARD, C. GAMBLE, *Metaphor and Materiality in Earliest Prehistory*, in L. MALAFOURIS, C. RENFREW (eds), *The Cognitive Life of Things*, Cambridge 2010, pp. 47-58.

<sup>61</sup> The idea appears to be partially attributable to LÉVI-STRAUSS, *The Savage Mind* cit., p. 242.

<sup>62</sup> SHRYOCK, SMAIL, *Deep History* cit., p. 65.

<sup>63</sup> M. MAUSS, *Essai sur les variations saisonnières des sociétés eskimos. Étude de morphologie sociale* (1904-5), in ID., *Sociologie et anthropologie* cit., pp. 389-475, quotations from pp. 470 and 475: «l'analyse d'un cas définis peut, mieux que des observations accumulées ou des déductions sans fin, suffir à prouver une lois d'une extrême généralité» [*Seasonal Variations of the Eskimo. A Study in Social Morphology*, London 1979].

<sup>64</sup> D. WENGROW, D. GRAEBER, *Farewell to the «childhood of man»: ritual, seasonality, and the origins of inequality*, in «Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute», 21 (2015), pp. 597-619.

<sup>65</sup> P. CLASTRES, *La Société contre l'État*, Paris 1974; SCOTT, *The Art of Not Being Governed* cit.

<sup>66</sup> MAUSS, *Essai* cit., pp. 472-3: «Il n'y a d'ailleurs qu'à regarder ce qui se passe autour de nous, dans nos sociétés occidentales, pour retrouver les mêmes oscillations».



<sup>67</sup> I share the view of B.C. TRIGGER, *Understanding Early Civilization*, Cambridge 2003, p. x: «I sought therefore to determine empirically what aspects of human behaviour and beliefs were shaped by factors that were common to all human beings and what aspects were shaped by idiosyncratic features of cultural systems by examining seven early civilizations distributed around the world, all but two of which had displayed predominantly independent trajectories of development. In this way, I hoped to provide an ontological basis for a more informed understanding of human behaviour».

<sup>68</sup> L.R. BINFORD, *A Consideration of Archaeological Research Design*, in «American Antiquity», 29 (1964), pp. 425-45.