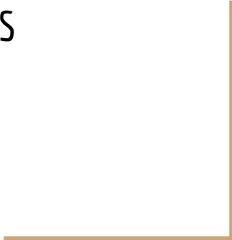




The *Annales* School

Week Four Lectures



Founding of the "School"

Founded at the University of Strasbourg in France in 1929 by Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre.

It was a group of historians that were involved in a journal *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale*. This wasn't so much as "School" as a group of scholars involved in experimentation and breaking from conventional empiricist modes.

They were more often than not against Marxian tendencies, though there were differences between individual members.

One of the key things linking them all was their interest in the *longue durée*.

What was the *Annales* "school" all about?

According to Lynn Hunt "In contrast to these earlier forms of historical analysis, the *Annales* school emphasized serial, functional, and structural approaches to understanding society as a total, inter-related organism." (211)

The *Annales* school (at least of the earlier years) rejected the positivism present in much of the Empiricist writing, especially with regards to political history and biography.

Annales school engaged in debates with the social sciences, particularly geography and economics.

Annales moved beyond biography and the history of events (as well as political history), to instead engage with the history of societies and economies (though they weren't social historians). They also sometimes were interested in the history of "mentalities", i.e. the formation of national identities and national cultures.

The *Longue Durée*

Most of the books published by the French *Annales* writers are/were outrageously long. Like thousands of pages and multiple volumes. This has its roots in the scholars' interest in large time periods, broad subject matters, and agglomerative use of resources. They were about structures (though not necessarily as Marx was).

In Braudel's book *The Mediterranean & the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, he puts forth a "Three Wave Theory" of structures. (Structure, Conjuncture, and Event)

1. Deep Currents: Long term structures, such as environmental change.
2. Surface Currents: Medium term changes, such as demographics, trade patterns, economic cycles, etc.
3. Waves: Short term events, like wars.

Some of the criticisms involve a lack of connection between structures and events. They often neglected short term transformations in favour of the *Longue Durée*.

Fernand Braudel

Between 1956 and 1968, the *Annales* reached its highest levels of popularity under the leadership of Fernand Braudel, who changed *Annales* from the margins to the mainstream in France and abroad.

Even though Braudel was one of the most famous of the *Annales* writers, under his leadership, the journal and the intellectual movement drifted from what the founders, and even Braudel, wanted.

Positivism was creeping back in, as *Annales* scholars in the 1960s and 1970s became obsessed with data collection for the *Longue Durée*, especially prices and trade data. This has been heavily criticized as a form of neo positivism.

This positivism was not the case in the early days of *Annales*. Lucien Febvre argued that “The historian ought to always begin with a problem, not with a set of documents which may or may not turn out to be significant.” (Huppert 859)

Legacies of the *Annales* School

Unlike most other branches of history, these historians were very interested in contemporary issues. The interest in "Mentalities", for example, had roots in their unease with both Nazism and Stalinism.

Annales changed the game in a way by moving "history" away from the state and towards "man", especially in the *Longue Durée*. With that being said, doesn't the state have deep roots in history? (Wesseling, 194) (<--- This was a common criticism)

The *Annales* school focused heavily on rural history, especially prior to the French Revolution. This was unique as well, because they were asking questions about groups of people who are rarely documented (Goldfrank, 162). While they utilized some of the same resources as social historians, they didn't ask the same questions. They were seeking to understand long trends, rather than small scale social worlds.

Arguably the first group of scholars to take seriously the environmental role.