

Geoff Eley, *A Crooked Line: From Cultural History to the History of Society* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005).

In *A Crooked Line*, Geoff Eley deftly combines intellectual history and memoir to analyze some of the most significant currents that have affected the historical profession during the past four decades. Rather than presenting a comprehensive account of that period, Eley focuses on two major reorientations in scholarship—the rise of social history and turn to the ‘new cultural history’, the former beginning in the 1960s and continuing through the 1980s; the latter emerging in the 1980s and cresting during the 1990s. As he shows, both were affected by interdisciplinary and external influences. The hegemony of the social sciences, and especially modernization theory, initially shaped social history until Marxist theory and Marxist radicalism provided alternative frameworks. Cultural history was stimulated by cultural studies, interactions between anthropology and history, post-modern and postcolonial theories. As a result of these two movements, the historical profession became dramatically pluralized in its composition, practices, and subject matter. In stressing inclusiveness—bringing hidden and suppressed histories to the surface—both aimed to provide disempowered groups with entrée to the academy. Social historians emphasized material life, class, and society while cultural historians refocused attention on meaning, perception, and understanding of forms of production and display.

The turn from one approach to the other was not straightforward, however, as the book’s evocative title suggests. Relating academic history to political transitions that were counterpoints for the changing interests of historians, Eley skilfully traces bitter controversies over goals and theories in his discussion of key works and personalities in American, British, and European scholarship. In honest and self-reflective fashion, he is forthright about the perspectives he brings to his analysis as a British, Marxist scholar from a working-class family, affected by 1968, a specialist in German history who migrated to the United States in 1979. In direct and sometimes more subtle ways, his entire approach reflects the very currents he discusses—a commitment to writing politically engaged history and acute awareness of the complexities involved in historical explanation.

Raymond Williams, the Annales School, Raphael Samuel, Joan Scott, Charles Tilly, and Natalie Davis are among a welter of historians discussed. E.P. Thompson, Tim Mason, and Carolyn Steedman serve as centrepieces in a sophisticatedly conceived structure in which chapters are arrayed around attitudes that, according to Eley, constituted the main registers of the radical historian’s sensibility. Thus, the 1960s was a period of ‘optimism’, characterised by a belief in knowledge—shaped by nineteenth-century aspirations of the pioneering social sciences—that it was possible to make the world knowable through history. The late-1960s’ sense of political possibility was another stimulus to social history. By recounting episodes of popular resistance, Thompson’s *Making of the English*

Working Class regrounded the history of democratic gains; it also attacked narrowly based economic history, overdeterministic Marxism, and static theories of class. The result was a counternarrative to the story of national consensus that opened up the complexities of cultural history by revealing how ordinary people handled large-scale experiences in cultural ways.

To discuss the period of intellectual and political ‘disappointment’ that followed, Eley shifts to Germany. Although social history made some inroads in Britain after 1945, in Germany it was re-established along conservative lines until the political events of the 1960s provoked change. In the 1970s, Tim Mason tackled the issue of working-class resistance against Nazism: rejecting the heroizing approach of Communist historiography, he planned to use a study of the working class for a general history of the Third Reich by revealing the tensions between the regime’s objectives and its ability to enlist the resources of Germany’s class-divided society. In the late 1980s, he abandoned this goal, believing it impossible to move from class relations to full-scale political-social history. Eley explores this as one manifestation of materialist social history running up against its limits—in Mason’s case, a tragedy, because of his suicide.

A period of ‘reflectiveness’ ushered in the turn to ‘culture’, which Eley sees as a common denominator for various discontents—scepticism about the study of ‘society’, unease with existing paradigms, and appeal of studying smaller settings. Beginning in the late 1970s, an array of new ideas, among which Eley views feminism as the most important, provoked additional ferment in the historical discipline. With the ‘linguistic turn’ of the 1980s, rhetoric and practice shifted from ‘social’ to ‘cultural’ modes of analysis. Most significantly, in Eley’s view, it facilitated theoretical understanding of gender whose effects transformed the ground of thinking about history. As the two impulses in the social history accumulated since the 1960s—to grasp the development of whole societies and to study particular locales—came apart, and the materialist paradigm of social totality grounded in the primacy of class eroded, radical and innovative younger people entering the profession gravitated toward cultural history, which was not without its own aggrandizing logic, sometimes subsuming too much.

To highlight these changes and suggest remedies, Eley focuses on Carolyn Steedman. A post-Thompsonian social historian, she became known as a cultural historian with publication of her *Landscape for a Good Woman*, in which she used her mother’s and her own experiences to question the main scenarios of modern British history. For Eley, she is an historian who understands the theoretical and philosophical implications of writing history, combining social and cultural history by exposing the false dichotomies between them, thus showing there is no reason to choose between one and the others—a view he shares.

Neoliberalism’s languages of ‘modernity’, market principles, and rhetoric about good and evil in the world now proclaim ‘the end of history’. In ‘defiance’, Eley urges new histories of society that are pluralistic, use generalization and the-

ory, and reassert confidence in the possibility of grasping society as a whole. He reminds us that Eric Hobsbawm's landmark essay, "From Social History to the History of Society" (1971), demonstrated that the real point of the new approaches was not so much recognition of hidden or marginalized subjects or groups but opportunities presented for writing the history of society as a whole.

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Nadine Hubbs, *The Queer Composition of America's Sound: Gay Modernists, American Music, and National Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

Judith A. Peraino, *Listening to the Sirens: Musical Technologies of Queer Identity from Homer to Hedwig* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

To say that queer people have had a huge impact on music in America pretty much makes most of us say "yea, ok, now tell me something I don't know." Well, that is exactly what Nadine Hubbs and Judith A Peraino did with their respective books, *The Queer Composition of America's Sound: Gay Modernists, American Music, and National Identity* and *Listening to the Sirens: Musical Technologies of Queer Identity from Homer to Hedwig*.

Hubbs's book opens with the story of Aaron Copeland, a beloved American patriotic composer, who had much of his work released by none other than the United States Army. On the informational pages of the album the US Army went into great detail about Copeland's heritage (he was Jewish), his work ethic, his sensitivity toward those of different races—in fact they pretty much covered everything—except for his sexual identity, which was queer. As Hubbs ironically notes in her work "Copeland...who...has been dead for over a decade is treated here to (the US Army's) 'don't ask, don't tell' policy" (ii). In other words, even after death, and even in 2007, history is still being rewritten to exclude queer people, even as the unique and special things they have brought to that history are celebrated and embraced. Thankfully though, we have people like Hubbs to set the record straight—no pun intended.

Thoughtfully produced and meticulously researched, this book is a welcome addition to the field of queer history. Hubbs, an Associate Professor of Music and Women's Studies at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, introduces her readers to the vibrant subculture of twentieth-century queer music in text, pictures, and yes, composition. But it is not just the work of the queer artists that she profiles handily, it is their personal and professional lives as well.

Hubbs's work is nothing in fact if not honest. Just as the title of her book states, her work is as much about national identity as it is about the impact of queers on American music. Thus we learn about such things as Virgil Thomson's